

**“The Holy Mount Athos – the Unique Spiritual and Cultural Heritage  
of Humanity”**

**International Conference**

**Belgrade, Serbia**

**Speech:**

**“ Heretic Thoughts of an Orthodox Co-operation - A Piece of  
Journalism? “**

**or**

**“ Prospects of an orthodox Co-operation centered around Athos ”**

[DRAFT VERSION – NOT PROOFREAD]

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**Values**

Values have become quantified. How much does it cost and how much am I supposed to win if I do this or that? There is a profitization and quantification of almost every aspect of life. Ironically, such an approach is supposed to be a more neutral and natural one since it is widely held that everything can be measured by the use of scientific numerical criteria. Of course, this scientific de-ideologization of the social life does exhibit some

additional demands: Orthodox Icons are supposed to infringe the freedom of faith even if they do reflect the religious views of the overwhelming majority of the population; the study of national history and expression of warm feelings towards each own nation has been linked to nationalism; atheism is supposed to be connected to a more relaxed and human-rights-friendly stance of life, an attitude supported by the vast majority of medias and the current role-models; when courts come to balance the exercise of the Orthodox faith with other Christian dogmas or the Muslim faith, then it has become synonymous to democracy to render a decision against the Orthodoxy; democracy has become equivalent to privatization and liberalization; science and neutrality have become synonymous to the western realm of values to such an extent that any opposing viewpoints are perceived as heretic, do not get access to the public or they become marginalized. Bearing in mind the aforementioned tendencies it is, however, difficult to perceive how this “de-ideologization” constitutes a more neutral stance towards life.

### **Economic Sovereignty**

The current situation of the Orthodox states as well as of the former members of the Warsaw Pact does have some special features. Those states which are members of the EU do not have sovereignty over their national currency and financial affairs. For instance, Hellas and Romania are under the obligation to implement measures as ordered by the World Bank and to borrow money under the terms dictated by the IMF<sup>1</sup>. These reforms and help

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Benjamin Cohen, Monetary Governance in a Globalized World, in C. Roe Goddard, Patrick Cronin, and Kishore C. Dash (eds.), *International Political Economy*, 2nd edition, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003, 215 (221 *et seq*); C. Roe Goddard, The International Monetary Fund, in *Ibid.*, 241 (255 *et seq*).

packages, however, do feature very questionable results. In fact, they concern the application of the economic theory reflecting free market principles. However, the application of economic theories does miss the point if there is not evidence that the conditions prevailing in those countries could make such reforms successful. Worse, the effects of those measures upon populations are not taken into account. The economic situation in Romania and Hungary is beyond any necessity to comment. In Hellas, the number of those who have committed suicide from 2010 until June 2012 has exceeded 2,500 although the average number of suicides before the crisis amounted to 140 deaths per year.<sup>2</sup> While the media remain silent, one could argue just as Argentina did before the World Bank investment tribunals that the severity of economic crisis amounts to a situation of war or is similar to a military occupation.<sup>3</sup>

Arguably, the loss of economic sovereignty resulting from the measures taken to cope with the economic crisis is almost identical to the loss of political sovereignty. Interestingly, accountability is lacking: Who is to find and judge those very responsible for those “reforms” and “healing” programs that, in the final analysis, do not correspond to the needs of the respective nation? Who is to keep the guards? Russia has had bitter experience too. It is worth saying that the effects of the application of the liberal reforms in Russia were estimated to be worse than the effects of the Second World War. Be that as it may, the result here reads as follows: By having its own currency, by restricting the influence of international

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance,

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/23/us-greece-suicides-idUSBRE8AM08H20121123>;

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/18/greek-woes-suicide-rate-highest> .

<sup>3</sup> August, Reinisch, Necessity in International Arbitration – An Unnecessary Split of Opinions in Recent ICSID Cases? Comments on CMS v. Argentina and LG&E v. Argentina, *Journal of World Investment and Trade* Vol. 8 (2007), 191 (209) and the footnotes therein.

neo-liberal institutions and the West in its national economy, Russia is the only Orthodox as well as former Warsaw Pact state that can taste the fruits of its economic sovereignty. And it does have the weapons and the expertise to defend its interests from outer and inner threats.

### **What does an Orthodox Platform offer ?**

It is not difficult to think of the Orthodoxy as a moral lighthouse vis-a-vis economic development. Today's mainstream economic studies are based on mathematical models, e.g. heavy abstractions of the real world. In the respective economic function the factor "human" as such is not taken into account. The morality of the current economic thought lies in the maximization of the function to be applied after consideration of the given restraints. The human being becomes degraded and it is seen as "labor", e.g. as a factor of production. After several years, these teachings become culture - a human culture bereft of morality. This begs the question: Do economic crises constitute only systemic problems or do they reflect moral ones as well? This question is a rather rhetorical one. In short: The technological and economic development signaled the departure of the spirituality/"duhovnost". The larger the distance between science/mind and heart/soul becomes, the more people will suffer. This is the challenge of the Orthodoxy: Orthodoxy as a faith, as a vision and as an ideal.

Orthodoxy cannot only be seen as a lighthouse concerning the direction of economic development; it can also build the platform for political-economic cooperation. Regional proximity is not enough to guarantee a successful cooperation. Common economic objectives can, in fact, change during the course of time to such an extent that the stronger

party subordinates the less stronger one. Trade is a blessing and can, as *Immanuel Kant* pointed out, make peace. But for how long? Do we forget that free trade has - apart from “winners” - also “losers” ? And how sustainable can be a cooperation based only on economic motives? One should not underestimate the fact that Orthodoxy does constitute a platform for such a cooperation. The Balkan Countries, Russia and Hellas can be seen as a characteristic example in this regard. In fact, it is not about regional or spatial proximity but rather about cultural proximity, about visions and ideas. More important, Orthodoxy touches upon communication between people: The scheme starts from the individual and ends up in the community/society. One could also dare to argue that by strengthening the Orthodoxy, the legitimation of an inter-state cooperation follows a bottom-up course without any recourse to the simplistic construction of the social contract theory. Hence, Orthodoxy can be seen as tube and pipeline for the legitimization of political-economic cooperation.

A special characteristic of the Russian Orthodox culture is that it is tolerant and humane towards poverty and misfortune resulting from economic activities.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to other dogmas, poverty within the Russian culture is not a sign of exclusion or rejection. In fact, the most important duty of the Orthodox-Christian was the support of those who are weak and live in poverty. Material support and welfare was separated from personal success and activities. In the final analysis, the consolidation of distributional practices within the Russian peasant community/society (“*obshchina*”) occurred through the Orthodox-Christianity.

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<sup>4</sup> Нуарева Р.М., Экономические субъекты постсоветской России, 2.2.2., 2001.

Orthodoxy is neither power- nor price- nor result-oriented. It has a real human face. It offers not only a metaphysical direction but a complete system of life-values. And for sure it is not connected to corruption as it is usually “sold” by Western experts. Historically, the Byzantine Empire has survived longer than any other in the Eurasian region. Elements of corruption were not present to this very amalgamation of a civic nation which was based on the ideological basis of Orthodoxy. To its fall, degradation and corruption led, in fact, the loss of control over its own finances as well as trade and resources. Frankly speaking, corruption was brought by the establishment of economic elites based on the pure western economic paradigm, an aristocracy without ideology; an aristocracy serving only the idea of accumulation of wealth.<sup>5</sup>

### **Symbols of a Vision**

The project called “European Constitution” ended as early as 2005 and did stigmatize the course of the European integration. The proposed symbols as well as historical and ethical references to the integrational project of the European Union were rejected. Yet, if you want to unite, you need symbols that summarize identity. Moreover, military forces to defend the territory in reference are needed. In this context, Europe failed again: It allowed a foreign body, NATO, to be the army to defend its territory. Cynically, once you allow foreigners to protect your ground, you have already lost it.

Neither the Orthodox countries nor the former member states of the Warsaw Pact are allergic towards symbols. Geographically and

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/7389.htm>

geopolitically the area of Alexandroupolis in Hellas is a good point: It is located next to Bulgaria and it is, moreover, very close to Constantinople; Russian engineers contributed to the establishment of the city; common military parades including Greek and Russian forces are organized; the city - which is located not that far away from the Black sea - does have a port. Interestingly, neither the Greek nor the Bulgarian population has been properly informed why efforts of geostrategical cooperation in this area have been frozen. Strangely, the voices of the local authorities could not even find a favorable stream within the medias.

In fact, it is all about the idea of a union among the states of the former Warsaw Pact and the Orthodox states of Europe led by Russia under the common symbol of the Byzantine Eagle. For such a project to materialize, silence, abstract wishes, covered intentions and micro-political games concerning the unquestionable status and dominance over Athos do not lead to the correct direction. Vision, faith and people to promote the role and the image of Russia as the natural leader of such a union are needed. The common past is there. But silence strangulates the future.

### **Implementation of a Vision**

For the implementation of this project the focus should be on people, on individuals promoting the role of Russia - the Orthodox Russia - in the current world. This thought is based on the simple principle that every person knows and interacts with about 250 persons and can spread ideas by way of word of mouth. A group of intellectuals and academics entrusted with the duty to talk with people, to present the human, civilized and culturally rich profile of Russia and its role within the modern world through

conferences, exhibitions as well as through school and educational programs. Weapons and wealth alone and by themselves have never won any battle. Wars are won and lost first and foremost at the level of ideology.

Indeed, today's image of Russia is somehow frozen and not promoted even in those states, where the soil is fruitful. Russia is presented either as an enemy image or as an old heavy and fearful giant, a sort of a dreadful shadow. It goes without saying that particular interests do, indeed, benefit from the promotion and the inaction vis-a-vis the negative image of Russia.

For a long time, the role of Russia at the international level was comparable with that of an isolated mountain monastery. Neither the deep Hellenistic roots, nor the Christian continuity of Emperors nor the relatively young socialistic philosophy should be abandoned. Now, there is the opportunity to apply the necessary elements of this pool on the platform of the Orthodox faith in a way that Russia - as a leader of a union of the Christian European states together with the former members of the Warsaw Pact - undertakes its metropolitan role. The stronger a member becomes, the more powerful the whole body gets.