

Church-state relations in Romania: problems and perspectives of inter-denominational cooperation at the level of church-based NGOs

In this paper inter-denominational cooperation is treated as part of the church-state relation because the propensity for inter-denominational cooperation is influenced by the legislative framework that regulates church-state relations. Although inter-denominational cooperation is hard to achieve, the author argues that some policy solutions are accessible to the government to encourage churches to cooperate at the level of church-based NGOs. The model is similar in some aspects to the faith-based and community initiatives developed in the United States. The author also attempts to uncover the possible problems that arise when dealing with the potential for inter-denominational cooperation.

The relation of church and state in Romania is a very hot subject in public debates and the national media in recent years. Among the events that caused this revival of the issue are: the opposition of the Romanian Orthodox Church to public access to the communist secret police (Securitate) archives – especially the files regarding its clergymen; building of a national cathedral in Bucharest; and inter-denominational dialogue concerning the restitution of church properties (especially those of the Uniate Church, but of the Orthodox Church as well) nationalized during the communist regime. Inter-denominational relations in Romania have changed continuously since 1989, mainly due to the general influence of events like the reestablishment of the Uniate Church as a recognized church, the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1999 and the following visit of Patriarch Teoctist to the Vatican in 2002, the governmental change

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after 1996, which promoted bills and decisions to support the solving of property restitution issues, and the decision of the government in 2004 to recognize the right of churches involved in the problem of restitution of worship places to go to court against the Orthodox Church.

Inter-denominational cooperation in Romania exists in a few successful cases of social activities of the churches. The most successful cases are at the level of church-based NGOs. Church-based NGOs are the non-governmental organizations, part of the civil society, which were either established by churches in order to manage the social activity programs previously administered directly by the church, or developed a very close link with a specific church (or more generally, a denomination) so that one can easily consider this relation as a patronage affiliation. After 1989, churches got more involved in social problems, developing new mechanisms for pursuing these aims. Among other means, they developed NGOs that are in close relation with the church (local church, diocese, archdiocese, or metropolitan). The churches developed internal programs for sustaining their social activities: education focused on specializations like social work, strategies for attracting funds from the government or from abroad, and the “traditional” activities of attracting funds from the believers that participate frequently in activities of the church. Apart from these means of supporting their social activities, many churches in Romania receive governmental funds distributed by the State Secretariat for Sects. Based on the legislative framework that regulates denominations in Romania, we could classify the churches as historic churches (ROC, Roman Catholic, Uniate, and protestant denominations); and young or newly established churches (established in Romania especially in the twentieth century: Baptist, Pentecostal, Adventist, Jehovah’s Witnesses, etc.). A third category is

formed by religious movements that have a long tradition in Romania but are strongly ethnically based, representing a symbiosis between religion and the ethnic group (e.g. Jews and Muslims).

In this paper inter-denominational cooperation is treated as part of the church-state relation because the propensity for inter-denominational cooperation is influenced by the legislative framework that regulates church-state relations. If the legislation promotes differentiation in treatment of denominations, then the denominations that are considered by state institutions as being “of lower status” may feel discouraged from engaging in cooperation with denominations that have a higher status. This type of differentiation gives access to important resources only to the recognized denominations, thus frustrating the unrecognized denominations. As a result, cooperation across this status cleavage is achieved only with great difficulty. Throughout Romanian history, even recently, lack of inter-denominational mutual acceptance, lack of cooperation and accommodation, has permitted and even contributed to civil conflicts and intolerant policies and attitudes.

Although inter-denominational cooperation is hard to achieve, in this paper I will argue that some policy solutions are accessible to the government to encourage churches to cooperate at the level of church-based NGOs. The model is similar in some aspects to the faith-based and community initiatives developed in the United States. I will discuss the differences of these two approaches later in this paper.

In this paper I will try to uncover the possible problems that arise when dealing with the potential for inter-denominational cooperation. These problems might raise barriers to inter-denominational cooperation. The argument is based on extensive interviews with experts, high-level clergymen, and

policy-makers, on analysis of legal documents, and on two public opinion polls (a local and a panel national survey) conducted in 2004. From the range of problems underlined later in this paper I will address in detail the issue of church-based NGOs and policies linked to these organizations, which are part of the issue of inter-denominational cooperation.

Areas of inter-denominational relations

Inter-denominational relations in Romania are marked *first* of all by historic problems, manifest even before 1989. Because of space and time limits I do not intend to enter here into the details of these pre-1989 problems. Nonetheless, I want to emphasize that one of the problems of cooperation is linked to the restitution of church property, especially the property of Uniate Greek-Catholic churches that was nationalized in December 1948 by the newly established communist regime. In spite of the negotiations inside the joint Orthodox-Uniate Dialogue Committee, results are not yet visible and the two churches have not reached a mutually acceptable solution. Another important factor that has impeded inter-denominational cooperation ever since the inter-war period is the nationalistic attitude of the Romanian Orthodox Church in issues like religious representation and church-state relations (Gillet 2001). The Romanian Orthodox Church (henceforth ROC) identifies itself with the history of the Romanian people, with the creation of the Romanian national identity, and the subsequent unification into a single state. The relation between ROC and Romanian nationalism was changed after 1945, being captured and used by the communist party for its legitimation. However, the submission of church to the state (the secular power) is

considered to be conditioned by symphony between the state and the church – a “secular custom of submission towards the state” inherited from the Byzantine period and marked by an alliance between the emperor and the patriarch (Gillet 2001, 15).

According to Olivier Gillet (2001) the relationship between the church and the state during the communist period was a full continuation of the “Caesar-pope” model of symbiosis between secular and temporal power existent in the Romanian territories throughout history. The integration of the church (ROC) in the communist regime was underlined in its new theory of “social apostolate” drawn by the first Romanian orthodox patriarch under the communist regime, Justinian. This theory aimed to adapt the church to the reality of the new regime. Inspired by the soviet orthodox discourse, this theory collected a series of directives that the church should follow in the formation of its clergy (Gillet 2001, 37).

The same model was followed by the two patriarchs that followed Justinian. After 1989 ROC faced the loss of internal unity concerning the way it should relation to the state and to other denominations. However, the dominant pattern at the upper levels of ROC as concerns the issue of collaboration with the communist regime remained the same after 1989, although several high-level clergymen (like Metropolitan Nicolae Corneanu of the Banat) recognized their collaboration and presented a “*mea culpa*” soon after the revolution. ROC continued to support and promote the idea that during the communist regime all churches (including ROC) were in danger of being closed and that many high-level clergymen fought against it¹, even though critics and scholars (Gillet 2001) argue that ROC’s clergy pursued accommodation politics with the communist regime and even assisted in anti-Uniate communist policies.

The legislative complex that sets the framework of inter-denominational relations is not limited to a single law, be it the law of cults, but rather is connected to a complex legislative framework that encompasses, for example, the law on religious denominations, the law on foundations and associations, and the law on the possibility to donate to associations and foundations 1% of the income tax that every employee has to pay to the state. Taken into account that churches established their own NGOs for representing them in social problems that cannot be efficiently dealt with by a church as an institution, the legislation on associations and foundations influences the factors involved in inter-denominational relations. The legislative framework on finances influences the inter-denominational relation through the so-called “one percent” campaigns that aim to attract financial support from citizens in order to support the development of the organizations of civil society. As I will discuss in the second part of this paper, these campaigns would be an alternative (full or partial, depending on the radicalism of the proposed reform in the field of church-state relations) to the direct state subsidies given to the recognized churches.

Treating the issue of inter-denominational relations as closely related to church-state relations can also be done from the neo-corporatism perspective: the arrangements between churches and the state copy a “corporatist” framework of interaction between trade unions and the state. As a form of societal configuration, corporatism is largely viewed as a “system of interest and/or attitude representation, a particular modal or ideal-typical institutional arrangement for linking the associational organized interests of civil-society with the decisional structures of the state” (Schmitter 1974). Corporatism’s system of authority and interest intermediation is derived partly from Catholic social thought. From the theoretical point of view one can

distinguish between state corporatism and societal corporatism. The former puts an emphasis on a strong state in a regime based on authoritarian top-down organization. Societal corporatism, the second variant of corporatism, sometimes also labeled neo-corporatism, is based on a bottom-up relation between interest groups, state, and society, characterized by a framework of participatory interest groups (pluralism).

Societal corporatism is a means of providing social solidarity, avoiding class conflict, and discouraging individualism among masses, while at the same time providing opportunities for participation of the populace in local, regional, and functional groups. However, several factors might impede a neo-corporatist arrangement in inter-denominational and church-state relations. If the state does not involve NGOs (inclusive of churches and church-based NGOs) in social issues, stressing a total division between church and state, like in the case of France, neo-corporatism arrangements are harder to be implemented in a society. Other factors that affect societal corporatism are, as Schmitter (1974, 127) underlines: “asymmetric dependence, unauthentic and fragmented representation, weak associational loyalties, suppressed or manipulated conflict, little mutual respect among groups, no effective means of appealing to wider publics and pervasive state bureaucratic control.” Thus, churches and church-based NGOs should organize and act as fully institutionalized organizations – in accordance with Huntington’s (1999) criteria for assessing institutionalization – capable not only of aggregating interests but also of influencing their members’ behavior and of bridging differences through collaboration with other similar groups.

The second area of inter-denominational relations refers to internal, confessional-structural factors. The dogmatic differences between the churches are always an important argument against cooperation or even

dialogue. These differences have endured for centuries, and only in recent years have clear steps been taken toward reciprocal acceptance between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Even if a dialogue is established, the differences raise important barriers to cooperation at the theological level. Thus, a different level of cooperation not necessarily involving dogmatic issues might be a better solution for accommodation. The personal preferences of the leadership and the strategies the leaders adopt towards cooperation are very important, as underlined in the interviews with leaders of the Orthodox Church.²

Negative reaction towards proselytism is another type of structural problem impeding cooperation. The “other” is perceived as a potential competitor on the “religious market”. From this point of view, believers are regarded as a commodity that the church fights to keep for itself. The strategy of strengthening its own believers in their faith and religious orientation is not what is important, but rather the strategy of impeding other “competitors” from having informational access to “your own believers”. Proselytism is currently widely regarded as being promoted in Romania.³ It is considered a negative strategy for attracting new believers, especially by the historic/traditional churches (ROC, Roman Catholic, Uniate, and protestant). The neo-protestant churches, especially the Pentecostal church, view proselytism as a strategy for recruiting believers, not necessarily a strategy for placing blame. According to leaders of the neo-protestant churches, proselytism is currently used by all the churches in Romania.⁴ These opinions of the churches in Romania should be analyzed in the context of the decline in (active) believers within the historical churches, and an increase in the number of believers in neo-protestant churches, especially after 1989. Thus, identifying a possible cause for the decline of believers’ number, historical churches also identified

the mechanisms and the competitors that use them, blaming the strategy as being unfair and immoral. Moreover, the accusations by the historical churches of proselytizing on the part of neo-protestant denominations lead to conflicts between believers and clergymen of the different denominations, many of which are mentioned in the Freedom of Religion reports of the State Department since 1998.

A *third* area is represented by the state financing of the places of worship. As part of the current arrangement of church-state relations, recognized churches are eligible to receive governmental funds not only for paying the clergy but also for renovating and building places of worship. These sources of funding could be considered as a mechanism for differentiating not only between the recognized and the not recognized denominations, but also between the dominant church (ROC) and all other churches, as the study of the association Solidarity for Freedom of Conscience, Bucharest, underlined. This study reveals a high disproportion between the funds received by ROC for building new places of worship and the funds available to the second (Roman Catholic) and third (Uniate) historical church. As concerns the taking into account of their number of believers, the 1992 and 2002 censuses show the statistics indicated on Table 1.

Cooperation is impeded by disproportionate intervention of state agencies in favor of certain churches. The same study indicated that numerous churches were built after 1989 with the help of institutions like penitentiaries (using a cheap, if not free, workforce of prisoners) and the army (a workforce as cheap as that of prisoners). These churches belong to the Orthodox Church, thus inducing the idea that the dominant church can benefit from any kind of help it wants from state institutions. In such a context, cooperation is troublesome since other churches might

feel frustrated, or the Orthodox Church might feel that it does not need to cooperate with other churches in order to achieve certain interests.

Besides the funds received for building new churches (about 2000 new worship places were built in Romania by the ROC between 1990-2004, and 1000 ROC worship places are on the way to being completed), another issue of worship places as a factor that influences inter-denominational relations is represented

	Believers at the 1992 census	Believers at the 2002 census
Orthodox Church	19,802,389	18,817,975
Catholic Church	1,161,942	1,026,429
Uniate Church	223,327	191,556
Old rite Christian church	28,141	38,147
Reformed church	804,454	701,077
Christian Evangelical Church	49,963	44,476
Evangelical Augustinian Church	39,119	8,716
Evangelical Church Synod-Presbyterian	21,221	27,112
Unitarian Church of Romania	76,708	66,944
Baptist Church	109,462	126,639
Apostolic Church of God (Pentecostal Church)	220,824	324,462
Seventh-Day Christian Adventist Church	77,546	93,670
Armenian Church	2,023	687
Jews	9,670	6,075
Muslims	55,928	67,257
Romanian Evangelical Church	Not recognized in 1992	18,178

Sources: State Department, International Religious Freedom Report; Romanian National Institute of Statistics

by the approximately 3000 Uniate, Roman Catholic, and Hungarian worship places that were nationalized by the communist regime. These places were almost all given to the ROC. After 1989, the refusal of ROC to return these places produced a situation of conflict unfavorable to inter-denominational cooperation. As table 2 reveals, there are strong financial ties between the state (executive power) and churches (primarily ROC).

The fourth area is represented by the relations between politics and the clergy. After 1989 many of the clergy had close relations to political life, whether directly, being elected in local councils, as mayors, in county councils or as MPs; or indirectly, agreeing with the usage of religious symbols like worship places and religious services by politicians, especially in electoral campaigns in order to increase their chances of being elected. Mass media reflected many cases of such

	2000	2004
Romanian Orthodox Church	11,000,000 USD	6,900,000 USD
Roman Catholic Church	650,000 USD	400,000 USD
Uniate Church	925,000 USD	127,000 USD
Reformed Church	280,000 USD	98,000 USD

“collaboration” between politics and clergy.⁵ Realizing that in the long term the image of the church will be negatively affected by such “collaborations,” the Synod of ROC decided in 2004 that no orthodox clergy would be allowed to be involved in politics. Very few clergy-politicians decided to stay in politics and accept the penalty of being forever excluded from the orthodox clergy. The relation with politics was no more successful for the clergy that aimed to use their links with politicians in order to solve problems like restitution of nationalized properties. Archbishop Pimen of Suceava and Radauti switched several times between accusing and greeting politicians that had at certain times the power to decide the restitution of forests to the Archbishopric. Archbishop Pimen has yet to reach his goal concerning this restitution.

The fifth area of analysis (civil society issues) is represented by the NGOs established by churches. Currently, there are more than 4,000 registered and active NGOs in Romania, according to the Civil Society Catalogue, published in 2000 and updated yearly by the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society. More than one third of the total number of NGOs has social protection as their declared interest and field of action. About one tenth of all NGOs have religious issues as their declared aim. Half of the religious-based NGOs (about 100) work for social protection. However, there are many social protection NGOs that have not declared any specific affiliation, but only the focus on social protection, and therefore it is difficult to find their link with a specific church, although such links exist. Some of these have developed more intensive and successful programs than have the state institutions. A few examples include, but are not limited to: Caritas, the largest NGO in Romania (from the point of view of funds, employees, and number of projects financed); Vasiliada (an Orthodox NGO); Christiana (Orthodox

NGO); Kida (Reformed NGO), Prison Fellowship Romania (interdenominational NGO).

Efficient results of the civil-society’s involvement in social protection might be reached through subsidiarity, as Charles Glenn argued. The organizations of civil society, churches and their NGOs included, can be involved in activities that public decentralization cannot cope with. In his opinion, subsidiarity has the capacity to promote changes in the nature of policies and social services (Glenn 2000). The explanation for this resides in the fact that through subsidiarity the governmental institutions attract external actors in the policy process, thus enlarging the range of factors that can influence the success of policies. Nonetheless, external institutions, especially civil society institutions, can interact more informally with the direct beneficiaries of social programs. According to Glenn, at least in the educational system, subsidiarity and larger autonomy of decision of civil society institutions brings not only more efficiency, but also related psychological benefits: people tend to be more open in their relations with non-governmental institutions than with procedure-driven and formality-based state bureaucracies. Another important argument presented by Charles Glenn is that in the case of decentralization within the institutional framework, the main actors are the same ones that worked under strict supervision of state institutions and are acquainted with the procedures of a centralized system. Putting the weight on the same actors when promoting changes in systems like social protection means that the accent is placed on the same energies, and thus reform cannot advance. If a system that is not effective is changed through decentralization the results are marked by the same inefficiency of the lower levels, which now can protect themselves from change all the better (Glenn 2000, 24). The commitment of civil society organizations can move reform ahead in the social

protection sector. Sustaining the existence of more than one solution for social protection should be a governmental goal. Peter Berger and Richard John Neuhaus emphasized that a greater range of particularities in the policy sector will give the possibility for people to select the one which is most appropriate for their goals (Berger and Neuhaus 1996, 206). Churches' involvement in social protection has a long tradition in Romania. They established hospitals, asylums, clinics, and orphanages that eventually became integrated into the state social protection system.

However, negative effects can be identified also as concerns the involvement of churches and church-based NGOs in the area of social protection issues, and also community issues in general. It might be possible for church-based NGOs to use their charity activities in order to promote religious beliefs and theological doctrines, even to condition their services upon certain religious beliefs. Of course, state regulations should take sides in similar situations in order to prevent such violation of rights and equality in treatment, especially when state funds are used for social services.

Churches play an important part in the process of involvement of civil society organizations in social protection activities. They can access many resources (capital, material, and human) and direct them towards social issues. As part of civil society, churches have a double mechanism of getting involved actively in this sector: directly, as institutions that coordinate small-scale material aid from their membership directed towards its needy members, and indirectly, through the NGOs that are created under their patronage. The latter is a more complex method of delivering public service, because it requires specialized staff, drafting of strategies for collecting funds, and a closer interaction with the beneficiaries.

The importance of church-based NGOs is not limited to social protection. If people with different beliefs, who do not interact on a day-to-day basis, begin to cooperate in order to solve their community's issues, they will create, unconsciously, the conditions for toleration and acceptance of other individuals' values.

An interesting model of church-state relation with influences on inter-denominational relations is represented by the Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Program (henceforth FBCI) developed and implemented in United States of America by George W. Bush since January 2001. The Office of FBCI at the White House, together with similar offices in the administration's departments, is coordinating the distribution of funds to churches across the United States for a specific purpose: support for existing church programs in social protection or for establishing new projects of this type. In 2004, the FBCI program gave to the churches more than two billion dollars from federal agencies and about 50 billion dollars from state and local governments. This financing framework does not require a church to manage the funds through an NGO, but encourages them to cooperate with other churches in similar programs. Since March 2004 the churches are encouraged to enter in partnerships with governmental agencies in order to implement their faith-based programs. Church-based NGOs do not have access to these funds. The money cannot be used for preaching or promotion of doctrine. According to the FBCI Office, since the program was established, new initiatives for delivering social services were established by the churches.⁶

However, there are many critics of FBCI Program. The Democratic Party does not support the transfer of federal funds to churches, considering this a breach of the separation of church and state as promoted by the

US Constitution.⁷ An important criticism is that the program permits discrimination based on religion when the churches hire the personnel in their faith-based programs. This critique is rejected by the White House on the grounds that it cannot impose on the churches the hiring of people with a different denominational affiliation to work in programs specific to one denomination; e.g. a Roman Catholic charity should have the right to hire only Roman Catholic people. Unfortunately, there is no legislation to regulate this issue. Another criticism raised by the Democrats is that the state is basically making a step back in the issue of its involvement in social issues and it prefers to leave the churches to tackle these difficult problems.

Map of inter-denominational cooperation

The historical experiences of inter-denominational and church-state relations have had an important externality in terms of differentiation between churches, viewed as an informal perception of “the other” recognized churches in Romania. Each church tends to perceive the other churches as competitors for believers and for resources (material, human, and other resources like the weight of trust that individuals put in the churches’ messages). The state of affairs modified after 1989. Beginning with the relative opening of the “religious market” for other denominations than the Orthodox one, the way that churches perceived their denominational competition was changing. A strong weight was given to the proselytism issue, as underlined above. When addressing their general position in society (relationship with the state, historical relationship with the population, contribution to the national formation), churches tend to be either very sensitive and oriented

toward the status-quo (especially the Romanian Orthodox Church), or to be oriented towards future relations with the state based on a zero starting point, on the total freedom of religions and total separation between church and state institutions.

Two main groups of churches, plus one other small and particular group, can be identified according to their position towards proselytism and more generally in terms of their position in society: the traditional churches and the new churches. Traditional churches are more or less the churches that have at least 100 years of activity/existence in Romania in the form of an organized denomination. The Romanian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, the Uniate Church and the Protestant Churches are the denominations that perceive themselves as being the historical-traditional churches. The Neo-Protestant churches (Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Christian Adventist, and the Jehova’s Witnesses) are perceived by the other churches as being newcomers and thus not having “social and national roots” in Romania. The third group of churches is formed by denominations that either have a tiny number of believers, or are non-Christian denominations, thus not being perceived as a potential theological threat (the Armenian denomination, Islam, Judaism, the Old Rite Christian Church, and the Romanian Evangelical Church).⁸

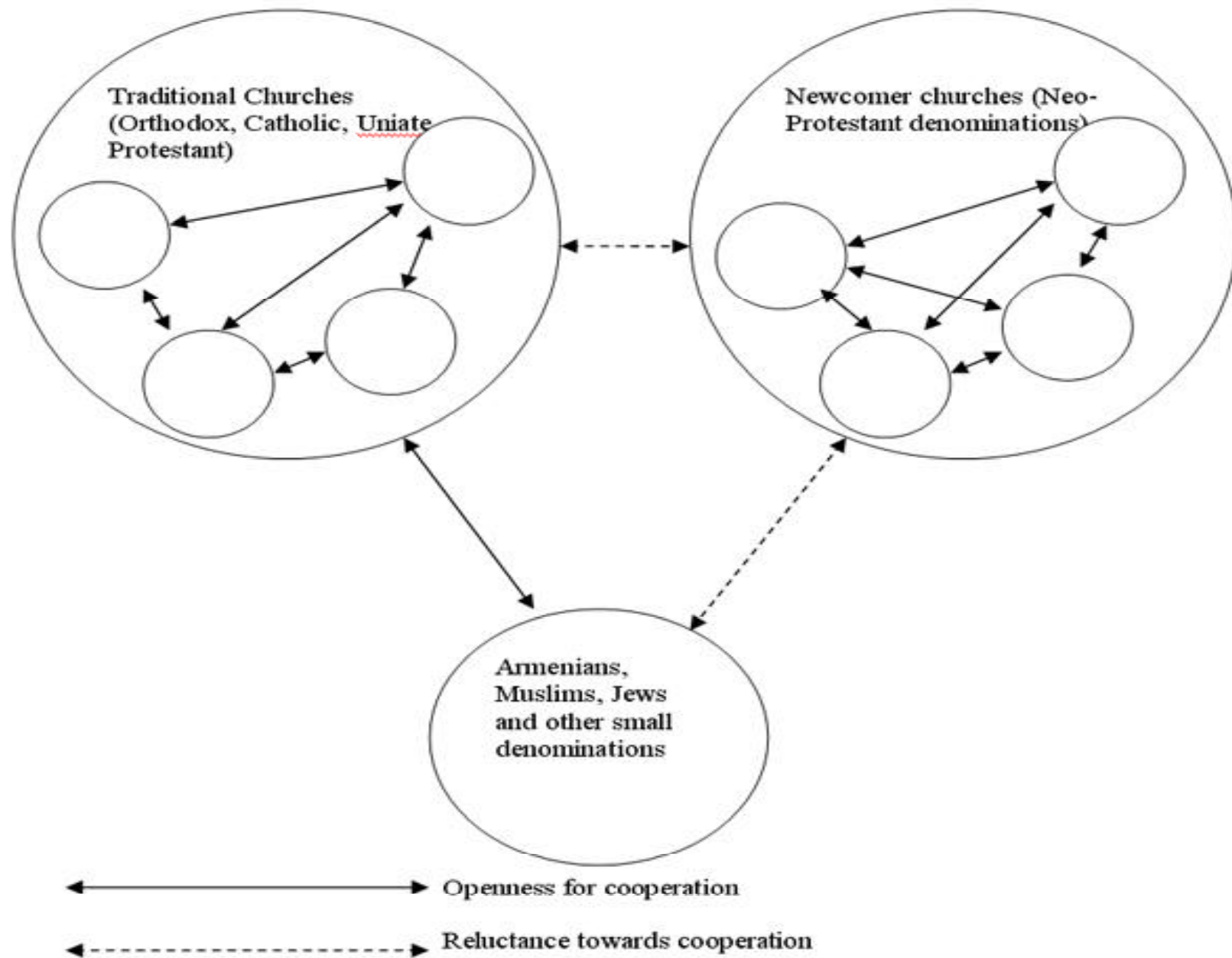


Figure 1. Map of inter-denominational cooperation

Inter-denominational cooperation tends to be more present inside the same “historical group” of churches. Being considered a member of the category with the same general label increases the chances of openness for cooperation with other members of the same group. In the same time, inter-group cooperation tends to be less when considering the traditional vs. new denominational dichotomy. If a certain group of churches is considered to act as a clear competitor in the religious/theological field, then its “members” tend to be regarded as unfit for cooperation, thus affecting the general framework favorable for inter-denominational cooperation. Non-competitive groups will be accepted for cooperation mainly because they are not perceived as a threat to the status-quo. There is an exception to this: mainly because of the historical factors and individual clergy reticence toward solving the dispute between the Orthodox and the Uniate Churches, the propensity for cooperation between these two churches is low event at the level of church-based NGOs.

Public support for cooperation. Attitudes towards church-state relation and inter-denominational relations

In May 2004 I conducted an opinion poll with the help of Bogdan Voicu and the Center for Political Studies and Analysis, the Romanian Society of Political Science. The sample comprised 385 respondents with a margin of error of 5%. A national panel survey was organized in November and December 2004 in collaboration with Marina Popescu from the University of Essex, Gabriel Badescu from Babes-Bolyai University, and Grigore Pop-Eleches from Princeton University. The margin of error

of the sample was 3% with a total of 3310 respondents for the two surveys.

The results of the survey in Bucharest revealed that people consider churches as an important part of the civil society. Almost half of the respondents agreed that churches should collaborate more with NGOs than with political parties. Three quarters of the respondents believe that churches should be involved in social issues, like social protection, more that they have been until now. In the mean time, three quarters emphasized that churches should not get involved in the politics. This is only an example of the strong opinions people have concerning church-state relations. The panel study shows that 67% of respondents believe that churches should increase their cooperation with the NGOs, while 78.1% believe that the Romanian Orthodox Church should become more involved in social protection issues. At the same time, 76.1% of respondents believe that churches should cooperate in order to solve community problems and social protection issues. At the

79.9%	Panel	Trust in church	Accept neighbors with different religion	Panel	75.3%
72.8%	Bucharest				
76.1%	Panel	Churches should get involved in social issues	Individual cooperation in community problems	Panel	49.2%
75.1%	Bucharest				
67%	Panel	Churches should cooperate with NGOs	Support for cooperation between churches	Panel	61.1%
47.2%	Bucharest				
62.2%	Panel	The state should finance churches	Churches should auto-finance	Panel	30.7%
61.9%	Bucharest			Bucharest	34.2%

Tabel 3

level of propensity toward openness towards personal cooperation with individuals of other religious denomination, 49.2% of Romanians would cooperate in community problems without regarding religious differences. This is consistent with the large proportion of respondents (75.3%) that are tolerant towards people from a different religious denomination and would accept them as neighbors.

Currently, inter-denominational cooperation is the exception not the rule. Churches are involved individually in disparate social projects. There is a lack of coordination between government (central or local), churches, and other civil society organizations, for integrating services to the needs of the community in order to maximize efficiency. As concerns public opinion, there is an overwhelming general trust in the churches. 79.9% of respondents in the first wave of the panel study responded that they trust churches in general, while 72.8% of the respondents to the survey in Bucharest trust in churches. No other institution except the army has reached such high levels of trust. Furthermore, public support for interdenominational cooperation is at high levels, as the public opinion polls revealed. There is a lack of mass-media interest towards public involvement of churches in social issues – there is virtually no reflection in mass-media of successful stories (Caritas, Vasiliada, Prison Fellowship, Stavropoleos + Concordia). The churches and their NGOs are often missing a strategy to promote their programs and results.

Almost at two thirds (26%) of the respondents had a successful experience in general cooperation on issues of common interest, while the potential for future cooperation, especially on local community issues, is even higher, reaching almost 50% of the respondents. There are no statistically relevant differences in terms of propensity for cooperation at the level of different

religious groups. Thus, we might conclude that individual openness towards cooperation is not negatively influencing inter-denominational cooperation, and that the reticence at the level of the clergy might be explained not as a pressure from the laity but as a personal choice of the clergy, and/or a top-down non-cooperative influence in churches with strong hints at the level of clergy hierarchy.⁹

Current public policy on inter-denominational relations and policy alternatives to improve cooperation

The current situation concerning the place of churches in civil society is characterized by the lack of a clear legislative framework. The old law on religious denominations dates back to 1948. After 1989 many drafts of a new law were discussed by churches and officials of the State Secretariat of Religious Denominations, but, at best, a draft of the Law on Religious Freedom and the Status of Denominations will be submitted to the parliament in November of this year, as the new Secretary of Religious Denominations stated in March 2005. The draft was strongly criticized by experts and is expected to be highly debated in the parliament.¹⁰ The main criticism revolves around the fact that the law continues to differentiate between recognized and non-recognized churches, thus braking principles of freedom of association and religious ideas stated in the constitution.

Church-based NGOs currently have a great potential of being more involved in “secular issues” like social protection then they have until now. State institutions have developed partnerships with church-based NGOs in social issues, and in many cases have done so effectively.

The principal stakeholders in inter-denominational relations and cooperation at the level of church-based NGOs are:

- The churches
- The central government
- The local government
- Non church-based NGOs.

The current public policy is characterized by scarce (directed without specific aim), random (without clear grant giving rules), and biased (criticized for being directed moreover towards ROC projects) support by the state for churches' social protection projects. Although a current regulation permits citizens to give 1% of their income to NGOs, churches are not eligible to receive such funds because they are not regulated by the law of NGOs, invoked by the legislature when adopting the "1% law".¹¹ The theoretical financial potential available to NGOs by this new regulation is about 20 millions euro, while, based on similar experiences in Hungary and Slovakia, if about 25% of the people donate 1% of their income, NGOs might receive about 5 million euro, taking into account that only half of Romanians have a second job and thus are required to submit a yearly balance fiscal form to the fiscal administration.¹² Until now, churches have not expressed any concern about their exclusion from the 1% law. However, it is very probable that, after the first year of the application of this law, the churches will realize the great potential for receiving money through this program and will push the government to change the regulations in order to allow churches to compete for these funds. Alternatively, they could establish more NGOs in order to receive these donations.

Nonetheless, theoretically it would be an important increase in the churches' sources of funding, and it would support the idea of changing the current regulation concerning state funding for churches. As I

will propose below, this change might be accompanied by new regulation concerning direct funds that the government gives to churches, in the direction that part of these funds should be given in a project proposal-based criteria and involvement in social issues.

As concerns social protection, currently the large majority of social protection problems is managed only by state. As I mentioned above, NGOs, whether church-based or not, are getting involved more and more in social work projects and other activities regarding social protection. However, as proved by post-1989 experience, the government had not succeeded in tackling these social issues. Thus, it is necessary to allow for subsidiarity of social programs. Moreover, it would be more efficient to support partnership between NGOs that are involved in social issues, between churches, and between these and governmental agencies.

Alternative policies

1. Direct involvement of government with more funds on social problems, funds to be delivered to the churches according to the current regulations.

This would increase the funds given by the state to the church, but it would not change the unbalanced criteria for distributing them to the churches, thus creating new ties between the state and the church, not allowing the latter to be independent from the state. This would continue the government control of churches through financial means.

2. Interdenominational cooperation encouraged by the state maintaining the current status of regulation.

Apart from the current situation, this add-on would change very little in church-state relations.

3. Church-based community initiative programs that have access to public funding. The government delivers new criteria for distributing the money to churches by splitting these funds in two parts. The first part would be delivered proportionally, based on the number of believers as recorded by the census. The second part of the funds would be delivered to church-based NGOs that are involved in social issues, based on program projects submitted by the churches and these NGOs. A third part of the financing would be delivered by the government indirectly, allowing individuals to donate 1% to the churches.

This would probably encourage church-based NGO's to cooperate in order to attract more money and to better manage projects. Because of the scarce financial resources, it might not be sustainable. However, the government might combine this policy with a cut in the financial resources delivered to the churches under the current policy, thus balancing direct funds with funds delivered based on programs of cooperation and local development. As well, it would increase the number of NGOs and would strengthen the civil society as a whole.

4. Increase of churches' involvement in social projects with an emphasis on individual non-cooperative projects.

The government would apply the same policy as in the previous strategy, only with a change in focus.

The costs of changing the current status of inter-denominational relations and church-state relations are:

- Reorganization of the financing system. (This is possible because the system is currently changing. This would allow for new organization framework.)

- A potential competition between denominations might arise, but the competition would not become worst than it is now.

The benefits after changing the current system would be:

- Further development of the NGO sector.

- Creation of specialized and diversified social services, even in areas where the government has not succeeded in offering such services in sufficient quantities or to satisfactory standards.

- Inter-denominational cooperation at the local level through NGOs would positively influence inter-church cooperation at higher levels.

Recommendations and proposed measures to be taken:

In order to increase inter-denominational cooperation, the government should take the following measures through the State Secretariat for Sects:

1. Diversify the funding for churches, splitting the current framework in two parts:

- Direct funds on proportional basis, and
- Direct funds based on program projects of delivering social services.

These funds should partially replace the current proportional and discretionary funds that the State Secretariat for Sects delivers to the churches.

2. Encourage the public-private partnership at the level of church-based NGOs (cooperation between church-based NGOs and cooperation between government agencies and church-based NGOs).

- The State Secretariat for Sects should make public the criteria for evaluating the project proposals of the churches. Currently these criteria are not clearly defined in terms of the weight of each criterion towards the final evaluation that a proposal receives. The criterion that regards inter-denominational cooperation at the level of church-based NGOs should receive special attention, and the government should thus encourage churches to

cooperate at the level of NGOs for ad-hoc community problems such as social charity. This cooperation should not be seen as permanent and centralized, but rather as a modular cooperation on common aims and problems in which the churches and their NGOs currently become involved through individual resources.

3. Direct the churches towards the alternative source of funding of 1% regulation.

- organize information meetings at the national and regional levels to give details about the available possibilities to access the 1% financial resources.

Conclusions

In the changing environment of church-state relations in Romania, inter-denominational cooperation is still limited to a formal dialogue between high-level clergymen. Nationalism, unbalanced and not transparent funding of churches by the government, personal interests of the leadership, un-orthodox relations between politics and churches, and the slow development of NGOs related to churches and their access to governmental funds, represent several areas of factors that have influenced, often negatively, inter-denominational cooperation. Although citizens' attitudes are congruent with an increase in the involvement of churches in issues like social work, with cooperation between churches for solving community issues, and with a certain degree of toleration necessary for cooperation, inter-denominational cooperation would need the support of the state through certain regulations that change the current access to governmental funds and encourage the creation of more church-based NGOs and of modular collective action (understood here as ad-hoc cooperation between church-based NGOs for

solving common problems at the level of local community).

In order to increase inter-denominational cooperation, the government should diversify the funding of churches, splitting the current framework in two parts: direct funding on a proportional basis and direct funding based on program projects of delivering social services. With this second framework, the government has the possibility of encouraging public-private partnership at the level of church-based NGOs (inter-church-based NGO cooperation and cooperation between government agencies and church-based NGOs). A third source of funding should be accessible through the 1% regulation.

Theological factors do not favor inter-denominational cooperation: the divide between churches has proved to be very difficult to overcome using the message of tolerance based on dogmatic similarities and historical common roots. However, modular collective action, replacing centralized inter-denominational relations, may offer a feasible solution to the scarce collaborative experiences at the level of churches. Building the framework for inter-denominational cooperation at the level of church-based NGOs might lay a foundation for more tolerance in society, while the collaborative experience, under the form of ad-hoc modular collective action, could offer a solution to current community problems.

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Notes:

¹ Recently, ROC underlined the heroic attitude of Patriarch Justinian (1948-1977) and his opposition to “the oppressive, totalitarian and atheistic regime” (ROC Patriarchy press release no 158 from February 21st 2005).

² Interview of the author with Archbishop Bartolomeu Anania of Cluj, Vad, and Feleac, August 18, 2004; and with Iustin Marchis – priest at Stavropoleos Orthodox Church in Bucharest, August 16, 2004.

³ All the clergymen I interviewed emphasized that proselytising is used currently in Romania for attracting believers even from other churches. Interviews of the author with: Archbishop Bartolomeu Anania of Cluj, Vad, and Feleac, August 18, 2004; Archbishop Jakubiny Gyorgy, Roman-Catholic Archbishop of Alba Iulia, August 19, 2004; Gyero David

– Administrative advisor to the Unitarian Diocese of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, September 8, 2004; Kato Bela

– Vicar Bishop to the Reformed Diocese of Cluj-Napoca, September 8, 2004;

Dorin Moțoc

– Orthodox Priest and Advisor for social assistance issues to the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchy, August 25, 2004; Mircea Marțian

– Greek Catholic Priest and Mass-media advisor to the Greek Catholic Diocese of Cluj and Gherla, September 7, 2004

⁴ Interviews of the author with: Mihai Suci

– Executive Director, Romanian Baptist Union, Bucharest, September 6, 2004; and John Tipei

– Rector, Theological Penthecostal Institute, Bucharest, September 6, 2004.

⁵ A few examples are: Evenimentul Zilei, June 17, 1997; Ziua, March 6, 1998; Ziua, April 12, 1998; Evenimentul Zilei, April 12, 1998; Evenimentul Zilei, April 16, 1998; Evenimentul Zilei, February 5, 1999; Ziua, December 16, 1999; Evenimentul Zilei, January 30 2001; Evenimentul Zilei, December 11, 2002; Evenimentul Zilei,

October 19, 2002; Ziua, September 1, 2004; Evenimentul Zilei, July 11, 1004.

⁶ Interview with Kathy Wills, Assistant to the President of the Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Office at the White House; November 17, 2004.

⁷ Interview with Katie Finn, Deputy Director of Outreach and Religious Issues in the Electoral Staff Washington D.C. Coordination Office of the Democratic Party presidential candidate, Sen. John Kerry; October 14, 2004.

⁸ These groups are based on perceptions expressed by religious leaders interviewed by the author in 2004 and 2005 in the International Policy Fellowship Program.

⁹ In an interview that I conducted with the clergy from various denominations, a widespread opinion was that one of the most influential factors for non-cooperative inter-denominational relations is the clergy themselves. Clergy often behave as if inter-denominational relations offer only a win-lose situation.

¹⁰ Gabriel Andreescu “Spre crearea unui stat ortodox roman?” March 2004, www.humanism.ro.

¹¹ For details concerning the 1% regulation see www.unulasuta.ro. For a detailed comparative legislative framework in Eastern Europe see www.onepercent.hu

¹² www.unulasuta.ro