Review of the Volume "Poveștile hărților. Istorie și geopolitică în țări ale uniunii europene" [The Stories of the Maps. History and Geopolitics in European Union Countries], Author: Cristian Sandache, Lumen Publishing House, 2016

Mihai-Octavian GROZA¹

¹ PhD Student, "Isidor Todoran" Doctoral School of Theology, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Department of Moral Theology, octavian.r.ciorteaa@gmail.com

Abstract: „Poveștile hărților. Istorie și geopolitică în țări ale Uniunii Europene” [The stories of the maps. History and geopolitics in European Union countries], published by Lumen Publishing House from Iași, Romania, in 2016, was born from the desire of the author, the historian Cristian Sandache, to offer the general public a set of essays, meant to clarify some issues related to the historical and geopolitical developments that have been experienced, at least over the last century, by some of the states that make up the European Union today. Having as a central point the map of each analyzed state and the changes it has undergone over time, but also the relations between the different states of Europe, the volume presents the "story", "destiny", but also "hopes / future" of Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Italy, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, France, Spain and Romania, stories that we will try to underline through the lines below.

Keywords: *history, geopolitics, European Union, Cristian Sandache.*

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Before moving on to the actual presentation of the content of this volume (Sandache, 2016), but also of the few personal considerations arising from the careful reading of the 12 chapters, we intend to insist on the personality of the one who offered us this book. Cristian Sandache is a Romanian historian, Professor PhD at “Dunărea de Jos” University of Galați, Romania, Faculty of History, Philosophy and Theology, specialized in contemporary history, history of international relations, history of totalitarian regimes, history of the Romanian state and law, author of some reference works in these fields - see, selectively: *National-Christian Doctrine in Romania* (Sandache, 1997), *National and Nationalism in the Romanian Interwar Political Life (1918-1940)* (Sandache, 2001), *Europe of Dictatorships and Origins of the Romanian-Soviet War* (Sandache, 2007), *The Fallen Angels. A History of the Extreme Right Movement in Romania* (Sandache, 2010). The value of the works signed by the historian Cristian Sandache is given by their inclusion in the general historical bibliographies, but also in thematic bibliographies, by their presence on the shelves of major European libraries, as well as by the fact that they are being cited as reference works in articles, studies and volumes addressing topics close to his area of competence.

As stated in the lines above, the work we set out to present, *The Stories of the Maps. History and Geopolitics in European Union Countries*, is structured in 12 chapters, preceded by a short foreword (Sandache, 2016, p. 9). We confess from the beginning that we would have liked the argumentative part of the paper to provide more details about the author's working process, the sources, methodology and concepts he used (although he confesses that he opted for the essayistic way of presenting given that “[...] the modern reader no longer has the patience to research abstract concepts”) (Sandache, 2016). However, the modern reader, often unsuspecting, needs certain concepts, certain notions or certain terms to be clarified and intelligibly defined, and if we think about it, even the knowledgeable, specialized reader, respectively the historian, needs to be given the definitions of concepts, notions or terms used by the author, in order to understand the vision and definition applied by him.

The first chapter, “A difficult marriage: Belgium” (Sandache, 2016, pp. 11-17), explains how Belgium, a state born out of the need to ensure a balance between the states of North-Western Europe, where the conflict between the Flemish and the Walloon community has always been a constant, even if just latent, that has managed to adhere to the idea of an European construction. Then, some coordinates are drawn regarding the way in which the Belgian nationalism, represented by Leon Degrelle, manifested itself during the interwar period.

The second chapter, "Frustrations of the past: Bulgaria" (Sandache, 2016, pp. 19-32), makes a series of references to how Bulgaria, an entity that has always been on the border between the European and Asian worlds, has reported throughout the modern and contemporary era to its glorious past, a state of affairs expressed by a quote from the work of the Bulgarian prose writer Atanas Mandadjiev, reproduced by the author: "heartbroken women, lights that light up at night in the mountains, heroic legends and heartbreaking sadness, typical of a rather gray present" (Sandache, 2016).

Next, the third chapter, "The other Greece: Cyprus" (Sandache, 2016, pp. 33-39), shows us how the island of Cyprus, which until 1960 was under foreign rule (Ottoman, later British), was divided between two entities, one gravitating towards Greece, the other towards Turkey. In this context, although there have been attempts to annex the island to Greece, this act proves to be almost impossible, both due to the conflict it would generate between Greece and Turkey, and the accession, in 2014, of the Greeks party to the European Union.

The chapter "Heroism and prudence: the Finnish case" (Sandache, 2016, pp. 41-46) reminds us how a relatively small state, Finland, dissatisfied with losing a territory, namely the province of Karelia, in favor of the Soviet Union, pledged allegiance to the alliance with Nazi Germany and to the involvement in a war with the great colossus of the East for the settlement of this territorial problem. Known as the "Winter War", the conflict between Finland and the Soviet Union aroused the interest of the international community, in that the Finnish army, taking advantage of the knowledge of its own land, withstood the Soviet army, numerically and logistically superior. Unfortunately, the Finnish army could not withstand the Soviet invasion for long, which is why this conflict ended in March 1940 with the surrender of Karelia, Lake Ladoga and its extension to the Atlantic Ocean to the Soviet Union. Why is this moment important? Because around it was born a whole national mythology, of resistance to a powerful invader. After this moment, Finland entered a shadow cone, in a state of relative isolation, which allowed it to preserve its national identity and consolidate its democratic political regime.

The fifth chapter, "Difficult integration: Greece" (Sandache, 2016, pp. 47-68), captures the evolution of Greece towards European integration, knowing that this was the first Orthodox country to be received in the European community in 1981, a moment that marked the beginning of financing programs and the start of large-scale investments. In terms of foreign policy, Greece has often spoken out against European Union

partners, but also against its older enemy, Turkey, for owning the Aegean Islands or because the Cyprus issue.

Moving ahead, the chapter “The Splendid Loneliness of the South: Italy” (Sandache, 2016, pp. 69-86), presents the difficulties encountered by the unified Italian state in the process of integrating the southern part of the Italian Peninsula. The major differences between Northern and Southern Italy are presented, as well as those of a political nature (perfectly noticed during the 1946 referendum, organized to consult the population on the future form of government; if Northern Italy voted for the abolition of the monarchy and the transition to a republican regime, the South proved to be still loyal to the idea of monarchy). Although Italy has made considerable efforts to close the gap between the North and the South in the Italian Peninsula, this issue has remained partially unresolved to this day.

The chapter “Tiso's Slovakia-Current Echoes” (Sandache, 2016, pp. 87-100) is largely dedicated to the period when Slovakia was ruled by Jozef Tiso, an atypical political figure, the leader who led Slovakia during the Second World War, a state that, in 1939, proclaimed its independence from Czechoslovakia. Although he was condemned and executed at the end of the Second World War, his political actions are now seen as an example of administrative, economic and social success.

As the title informs us, the chapter “Undying nostalgia: Hungary” (Sandache, 2016, pp. 101-137) refers to the perpetuation of the idea of a “Great Hungary” or the “Hungary of St. Stephen” and to Hungary's attempts to restore the kingdom that once dominated Central Europe during the Middle Ages.

The next chapter, “The Pride of Being Catholic: Croatia” (Sandache, 2016, pp. 139-160), looks at how Croats, in the face of the Serb majority's attempt to control all segments of public life, outlined the idea of an independent state. Yugoslavia, a landmark for shaping Croatian nationalism (the author presented the forms of manifestation for this nationalism, the main forms of political organization of Croats and the most important political leaders who campaigned for Croatian independence). It is worth mentioning that this trend manifested itself even during the communist regime, until 1991, when a referendum led to the proclamation of independence, an episode followed by the start of procedures for Euro-Atlantic integration.

The tenth chapter, entitled “France of Political Incorrectness” (Sandache, 2016, pp. 161-175), presents a situation encountered in the case of Romania during the last decade of the twentieth century: the rise of radical nationalism. Dissatisfied with the performance of democratic political

groups fighting for power, voters radicalized and turned to nationalist groups such as the The Party for a Great Romania (led by Corneliu Vadim Tudor) - in Romania and the National Front (led by Jean-Marie Le Pen, then, and since 2011, by Marie Le Pen) - in France

The chapter "Bullfighting of History: Spain" (Sandache, 2016, pp. 177-185) recalls the evolution of Spain from the position of a great colonial power, that wanted to annex the territory of Portugal, the neighboring state, to the state that was fueled by nostalgia for the glory of maritime power and the idea of rebuilding the colonial empire, which from time to time slipped on the slope of totalitarianism at the end of the first half of the twentieth century. Although Spain experienced a totalitarian regime during General Franco's time, it managed to stay away from the aftermath of World War II and move towards what today's literature calls a "pragmatic dictatorship." After the restoration of the monarchy, Spain turned towards the European community (and after this moment went through a period of economic prosperity), without giving up the nostalgia for a colonial empire, which is proved by "[...] the geopolitical device centered on the European, Arab, North African and Latin American world" (Sandache, 2016).

The last chapter, "At the Gates of the Orient: Romania" (Sandache, 2016, pp. 187-212), dedicated to the contemporary history of Romania, tries to present the way in which the Romanian society has evolved since the moment of the Great Union, with its moments of sorrow, with the differences between the rural and the urban world, with the differences between the Old Kingdom and the provinces annexed during 1918 (it is presented, for example, how the central authorities related to these territories; if Transylvania and Banat were viewed with admiration, Bessarabia became a kind of place of exile for officials and politicians who did not properly perform their duties of service / towards the party in the interwar period), with the effects produced by the establishment of the communist regime. It is also presented how Romania, in its various stages, has positioned itself in relation to its neighbors and the European powers.

In addition to the above, we must specify that all this information is presented in an essayistic manner, as the author warns us in the argument of the paper, in a simple, clear and concise language, which allows an easy reading of the text. We are firmly convinced that the general public will appreciate this feature of the volume and the author's effort to try to address as wide an audience as possible.

The paper is accompanied by a references list (Sandache, 2016, pp. 213-219), whose review proves that its author is connected to what the current academic research in international relations is, to contemporary

European history and geopolitics. To the elements entailed above, we could add those related to the graphics of the cover, the arrangement of the text on the page and its spacing, data that add value and attract the reader's attention.

We notice, however, the lack of an index of names, a working tool absolutely necessary for a work of this kind that does nothing but facilitate the work of an informed reader, interested only in certain aspects of it (we hope that a future revised edition will also includes a name index).

At the end of these considerations, we can emphasize that the work of historian Cristian Sandache (2016), *The stories of maps. History and Geopolitics in European Union Countries*, presents a series of relevant information for understanding some episodes from the past of the states that make up the European Union today, but also for understanding some problems that the European construction is forced to face today (from this point of view, the paper can also be seen as a working tool for a partial understanding of how the European Union works). As a result, we can recommend reading this work, which will certainly prove edifying both for the knowledgeable, specialized audience and for the general public, passionate about history.

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