



THE GEOPOLITICS OF TOURISM IN ROMANIA

Mihai COPETCHI - KOPECKY

Professional trainer / evaluator of professional competence in tourism, Technological Information Center – IRECSON CEDES Research-Development, E-mail mvkopecky@yahoo.com

Abstract

While we can debate about the geopolitics of a country, region, problem or situation, etc., then why not discuss about tourism in a particular country, which is at some point amid internal or external “rivalries”. There are numerous examples, but why not also talking about Romania as a “tourist destination” on the same terms or parameters!? The historical, economic and political features of Romania as well as its positioning in a „ geopolitical tectonically active” area confirms its status of European country with geopolitical and geostrategic importance, but also with an inefficient using of tourism potential. We are in the middle of regional “stakes”, we have internal and external “rivalries” with the neighboring countries, but also lack of good economic or political relations with a negative impact on the increasingly uncertain context!

The concept of “Geopolitics of Tourism”, dated from the 1980’s, is a global geopolitical trend of thought from which we can draw a number of factors that make correct use of tools and methods of the geopolitical analysis in specific cases from a country, for a national or regional issue with impact on tourism as a stake in the future. The subject should be treated as the geopolitics of the “mass tourism of the middle class”, which is fundamentally different from a classical geopolitical analysis. Tourism is no longer just a leisure activity or a dynamic social phenomenon in expansion, but it has become an axis of credibility and also a geopolitical stake, which cannot be underestimated. The used parameters of geopolitical analysis are based on: country, land surface, relief, population, settlements, economy, politics, influence factors and last but not least, national tourism (as a priority economic branch), but generally, they are moved towards internal geopolitical issues, specific to the country.

The ultimate goal of the geopolitical and safety analysis is to identify the vulnerabilities and measures to counter potential risks, actually the development of specific safety standards and also creating new skills in tourism. A safe environment for investments, staff or infrastructure ensures the performance of national tourism, but also a good image of the country. The Geopolitics of Tourism in Romania, as a first approach, aims at the implementation of an analysis of geopolitical situations, adapted and grafted to the existing national tourism heritage, without being considered, necessarily, a “reference work”, but only a start in the field.

Key words:

geopolitical analysis, rivalries, tourism, geopolitics of tourism, middle class, geopolitical stake, tourism heritage, safety analysis, specific safety standards, safety environment, competencies in tourism.

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Tourism as a social and economic phenomenon on a global scale was individualized towards the end of 20th century, becoming an object of interdisciplinary study, including of Geography, a discipline of spatial and chronological correlations and connections,

involving components of the geographical environment and more recently also the geopolitical ones. One of the socio-historical characteristics of today’s world is that tourism has evolved from a quasi-daily activity to an industry and then to a social need. So, tourism is the

first among global economic activities: over 10% of the planet's income and more than 200 million employees, more than 1.2 billion tourists in 2016 and with certain perspectives of dynamic development, Europe being the most wanted destination worldwide.

Geopolitics had a progress which largely has been determined by the development of knowledge in social and human disciplines as well as by the philosophical and political views that dominated at some point the scientific, academic, political, diplomatic world, the public opinion and exceptionally, since the beginning of the 21st century, affecting the tourism industry, leading thus *the links between tourism and geopolitics*. Tourism, as a veritable precursor of globalization, is listed among the most important economic and social phenomena of the 21st century, and is marked by geopolitical influences.

Globalization, the increase of international migration flows (mobility), including the tourist one, has also developed a new type of capitalism. If we can discuss about the geopolitics of a country, region, problem or situation, why not also discussing about the tourism in a particular country, region or why not, on the same terms or parameters, about Romania?!

For over 25 years, geopolitics has prevailed in Western Europe and especially in France, which has not only tradition and a famous school but also ways and means to make it known, enabling access to everybody, regardless of geographical place of residence, nation, age, religion or other reasons, to participate in this new and trendy way of *global and geopolitical* thinking.

The initiative of Yves Lacoste from the 1980s was to create a flow of global geopolitical thinking, which uses the proper tools and methods of the geopolitical analysis, in specific cases, in a country or for a national, regional or local problem. So, the thorough knowledge of the issues allows the effective intervention upon the factors that have created *„rivalries on a territory or a particular problem”*, contributing to conflict resolution and elimination of any risk or vulnerabilities. Now, in the 21st century, the academic traditional geopolitics has become an *applied geopolitics* that relies mainly on geographical reasons, following different levels of analysis, but taking into consideration the conflicting representations upon a territory and its protagonists. Most of geopolitical analysis parameters are identical, only the scale to which they are used being different, depending on the country, area, terrain, population, settlements, economy, politics and other factors, and last but not least on the national tourism potential.

Most experts from any corner of the world are focused on the issues of *internal geopolitics* (which also includes tourism), specific to the country of affiliation or origin. It is therefore necessary a geopolitical analysis of Romania's situation, as discreet „actor” in the global tourist circuit, since the causes of Romanian tourism decline, are to be (re)found in the regional *power rivalries*, existing or potential, not only the internal ones. Tourism, as a vector or victim of the shock of civilizations is already considered a geopolitical theater.

If we do a SWOT analysis of Romania's geopolitical characteristics, we will find that we meet significant classification „criteria” or „standards” among European countries with geopolitical and geostrategic importance. So we have all the advantages to discuss about a SWOT analysis of Romania, (and) from a geopolitical perspective, not only as a tourist destination! We have strengths but also weaknesses, opportunities but also threats that can multiply progressively! We have real internal and external threats, or conjugated, unexpected threats, that we do not acknowledge or we treat them shallowly, according to the jest: *„this cannot happen to us...!”*.

We have an enviable physical geography, an exceptional human and economic geography overlapping with a geography of tourism, but we have also a military geography perfectly overlapped with the traditional geography, which creates not only advantages but also vulnerabilities.

We are in the middle of a regional „stake” from a geopolitical and geostrategic point of view, with an uncertain impact not only on tourism but also on the future of Romania, as a country. It is said maliciously, yet with a hint of truth, that we are surrounded by „unfriendly” neighbors. The geopolitical analysis of tourism in Romania will highlight the internal but also external „rivalries”, with the „friendly” and neighbouring countries with whom we do not have (anymore) commercial or mutual tourist relations, that is normal! How Romanian tourism will evolve in such circumstances and in relation to its surroundings, but also in the new geopolitical and geostrategic conditions?

Romanian tourism depends on the performance of the national economy, including of slandered transnational companies existing in the country. „ *The year 2013 was an excellent year for international tourism, it was one of the few sectors that produced positive news for many economies*”, said Taleb Rifai, the General Secretary of WTO. We can find

methods and tools which allow the intervention of the supposed specialized factors and decision-makers in order to relaunch the national tourism as a priority branch of the national economy, top positioning in European tourism and as a factor of political stability in the region.

The *Geopolitics of Tourism* (in Romania), as a field of study for the first time, is trying to implement different views and visions on tourism in relation with the local / regional geopolitical background. So **how** tourism causes power rivalries on larger or smaller territories, what are the determining or influential factors, thus, we are attempting their explanation for different levels of perception.

Geopolitical and security analyses - contain necessary information about the situations and entities of a strategic, operational and tactics importance that can influence the tourist activity both for individuals and business environment. The advice through the geopolitical analysis includes, but is not limited to information and recommendations about the risks from a particular country or destination (identification of potential risks and their impact on tourism) but also suggestions for crisis management to ensure the business continuity in tourism and new skills for tourism professionals in order to provide the tourists' security. It has also been found in recent years and reality confirms that with increasing risks and terrorist threats on tourism activities, it has decreased the interest in knowledge, prevention and training of personnel hired in this sector, regarding the security and safety of tourists. The ultimate goal would be to identify and present effective measures to detect vulnerabilities and to deal with potential risks, creating new skills in tourism. The resultant of the thorough study of geopolitics of tourism and the implementation of geopolitical analyses will determine the development of *safety standards specific to tourism* (at least minimum to the European level) to help eliminate the inherent vulnerabilities and risks on the progress of tourist activities in countries, regions and tourist destinations (unstable due to various reasons, at a given time) in order to increase the degree of security and safety of the individual - tourism consumer - , hotel operators and professionals accompanying tourists and also of the business environment. A safe environment for investments, personnel or infrastructure ensures the business success in tourism and a good image.

Geopolitical analyses can influence the decisions to expand the tourism activity in new markets, in the context in which tourism is participating for some time also to the world geopolitics of 21st century. Millions of tourists gathered by Internet through: charters, pocket guides,

smartphones, social networks, etc., are making the circuit of the world tourist destinations, setting in motion the whole world. Tourists coming from the middle class are those who support the worldwide tourism - they are considered rich in comparison to the living standard of the visited places - because they have the necessary material means. We are witnessing therefore a massive „provisional migration”, from north to south, organized and facilitated by the tourism industry, while the reverse migration seemed to be ... severely controlled!

These macro-scale phenomena have many repercussions, they allow in a superficial manner to know foreign countries, to meet people, populations, behind the unknown incorrectly viewed, sometimes laughable, to discover other ways of life and other cultures.

Many countries from Africa and East and even from Europe still have civil wars or social unrest, they are out of the opening to the foreign tourists and present unforeseen risks for those who want to travel. And Western Europe has become increasingly uncertain due to terrorism. Beyond other risks pursuing the individual, accidentally caught in a local political „ storm”, where no one pays attention to him, the responsibility of tour operators and of the state should be taken into account. So a lesson of geopolitics is strongly recommended, before choosing your destination!

CONCLUSION

But in fact, ***what is or what should be (re)present truly the geopolitics of tourism?***

The geopolitics of tourism should be understood as a geopolitics of „ *macro-scale tourism of the middle class*”, which is fundamentally different from a classical geopolitical analysis. If we reduce tourism only to international macro-scale tourism of the middle class, we can deprive the rigour of the analysis on the issue of links between tourism and geopolitics, although the models of analysis are envisioned in an incentive way in specialized publications, or on different sites dedicated to this domain. Therefore, tourism is not only a leisure activity or a dynamic social phenomenon, but has become **an axis of credibility and a geopolitical stake** that cannot be underestimated.

Therefore, the analytical approach can be done on a variety of topics covering the most important tourist areas in the world, as a **geopolitical stake** (a term increasingly used), illustrating the importance of geopolitical analysis at all scales, on possible conflicts related to tourism, taking into account all forms of tourism, the types of behaviors and tourists involved in the

phenomenon. If the geographical position of a country is fixed, determined by the forces of nature and expressed in certain natural milestones, the geopolitical position is variable over time, sometimes for a very short-term, depending on the modification of certain socio-economic and political factors, from which tourism has become a priority. The Romanian tourist „industry”, although in decline - the 27th place in the top UE29 - manifests itself, however, as a serious broadcaster, many Romanian citizens traveling around the world. Through a geopolitical analysis of a country, as a tourist destination, in fact we perform a **risk analysis of the country**, resulting in the need to achieve the information framework and necessary measures for the optimal use of the tourism activity in a foreign country. The overall goal is to identify and present effective measures to counter potential risks.

The Geopolitics of Tourism in Romania is a necessity for „resuscitation” of mentality and action at the level of national tourism, conditioned by trends manifesting worldwide in the tourism „industry”.

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