

Europe as Christian Civilization: Romanian Orthodox Media and the Contemporary Discourse on European Integration

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the Romanian Orthodox Church constructs and articulates a discourse on European integration and Europe through its institutional media, focusing on selected episodes of *Europa Christiana*, broadcasted by Trinitas TV between 2016 and 2019. By applying Critical Discourse Analysis, especially Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the study analyzes how meanings of Europe, the European Union, secularism, modernity, Christianity, and Romanian national identity are articulated within Romanian Orthodox public communication. The research is situated within debates on religion and European integration, Orthodox Christianity in post-communist Eastern Europe, multiple modernities theory, and the mediated constructions of European identity. The analysis is based on a corpus of transcribed televised discussions addressing particularly themes regarding the meaning of Europe and Romanian position within the European Union. By examining vocabulary, recurring themes, evaluative language, intertextual references, and discursive strategies, the thesis investigates the Orthodox media discourse and reaches important conclusions. The discourse is not Eurosceptic or anti-modern, neither is Euro-enthusiastic and/or progressive. It combines conservative and Christian values with an acknowledgment of the EU's socio-economical and geopolitical importance. The discourse can be labeled as an ambivalent Orthodox Europeanism.

Keywords: European integration, Romanian Orthodox Church, Critical Discourse Analysis, religion and media, European identity.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Research Problem

European integration is often approached as a processual development characterized by both supranational and intergovernmental institutional cooperation, legal harmonization, market integration, and democratic consolidation. Yet, the meaning of Europe and concepts such as European identity or a European Demos have never been only institutional in a purely political sense, or only economic, focusing on the development of a single market. Discourses on Europeanness have also been constructed through competing narratives about more or less shared history, civilization, identity, values, and collective patterns of belonging.¹ This is particularly visible in debates about religion and European modernity. While the European Union is commonly associated with secular constitutionalism, liberal democracy, and pluralist multi-level governance, religious actors did and continue to participate in the formation of discursive frameworks within, where public interpretations and meanings of Europeanness are produced, debated, consumed, and reproduced. Religious actors – churches, media, educational projects – do not merely respond to European integration as an external socio-political process; they translate it, evaluate it, and attach meanings to it from within specific cultural and theological traditions.²

This master's thesis examines this process analytically through the case of the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) and its institutional communicative networks, focusing on the television channel named 'Trinitas TV'. This particular media contributes vastly to the creation and social spread of discourses on Europe, including Romania's membership in the EU. Trinitas TV constitutes an important actor, affecting collectively shared images of Europe and has a large potential for reaching many Romanian people with particular messages and meanings. From an epistemological perspective, Romania represents an especially relevant case in studies of inter-discursive entanglements where religion, culture, and politics meet in the production and consumption of ideas and images of Europeanness, including the ongoing European integration. That is the case because the Romanian state is simultaneously a member

¹ Gerard Delanty, *Formations of European Modernity: A Historical and Political Sociology of Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 7–18.

² Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change," *Northern Lights* 6 (2008): 9–12.

of the EU and has a society in which Orthodox Christianity remains strongly embedded in public life, national identity, and cultural memory.³ This synchronicity of the political dimension and the culturally theological dimension produces a constructive tension: European integration introduces secular, liberal-democratic and supranational frameworks and patterns, while Romanian Orthodoxy continues to function as a central symbolic resource in social narratives on nationhood, historical continuity as well as collective morality.⁴ The research problem of this thesis emerges from this tension. Although the institutional relationship between churches and European governance has been studied, especially through Article 17 TFEU, religious lobbying, Christian Democratic traditions, and church participation in EU-level governance⁵, very limited scholarly attention has been given to how Orthodox religious media discursively construct messages and meanings on Europe and the European Union within their own communicative spaces. The unstudied problem is therefore not whether the ROC is simply “pro-European” or “anti-European”; such categories are too narrow for the type of discourse analyzed here. The more important question is how European integration is interpreted by an Orthodox media institution that operates within a highly religious national context and addresses an audience for whom Orthodoxy is both a religious affiliation and a marker of collective belonging.

1.2 Religion in Romania and Trinitas TV as Religious Media in Romania

As mentioned previously, Romania represents a particularly interesting case for academic elaborations of relationships between religion, national identity, and European integration. Pew Research Center’s 2017 report on Central and Eastern Europe showed that Romania remains one of the most religiously identified societies in the region: 86% of Romanian adults identify as Orthodox Christian, while 95% say they believe in God. At the same time, conventional religious practice is somewhat more limited, with 21% attending church weekly and 44%

³ Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3–4, 12–16.

⁴ Marco Guglielmi, “The Romanian Orthodox Church, the European Union and the Contention on Human Rights,” *Religions* 12, no. 1 (2021): 1–3, 8–12.

⁵ Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, art. 17, 2012 O.J. C 326/47; François Foret, *Religion and Politics in the European Union: The Secular Canopy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 119–124; Gary Wilton, “Christianity at the Founding: The Legacy of Robert Schuman,” in *God and the EU: Faith in the European Project*, ed. Jonathan Chaplin and Gary Wilton (London: Routledge, 2016), 13–32; Lucian N. Leustean, “The Representation of Religion in the European Union,” in *God and the EU: Faith in the European Project*, ed. Jonathan Chaplin and Gary Wilton (London: Routledge, 2016), 175–190.

praying daily.⁶ This combination suggests that religion in Romania functions not only as personal beliefs and regular practices, but also as a powerful cultural and identity marker in a sociological sense. The same report also shows that 74% of Romanians consider identifying as Orthodox important for being “truly Romanian,” while 51% perceive a conflict between their country’s traditional values and those of the West.⁷ These figures provide further academic legitimacy for analyzing how religious media discursively negotiate and impact understandings of European integration, secular modernity, and national belonging.

Trinitas TV provides a particularly strong empirical object for this study because it is not merely a religious broadcaster in a general sense, but an official television channel of the Romanian Patriarchate. According to the Trinitas TV website, the TV station was founded in October 2007, at the initiative and with the direct involvement of Patriarch Daniel.⁸ The official presentation describes it as a cultural-religious television channel through which the Romanian Patriarchate informs the public about ecclesiastical events and the pastoral-missionary, social, educational and cultural work of the Church, while bringing to public attention the history, culture and treasury of Romanian Christian faith and spirituality “in a European context.”⁹ The officially stated purpose and justification for Trinitas TV also makes clear that the channel was created not only to broadcast liturgical life, but also to represent the cultural, historical and social role of the Church. The website articulates a message that the channel is necessary for reflecting more theologically and spiritually on solemn moments in religious communities and civil life, including national holidays, European events, the life of Romanian communities abroad and transnational cultural exchanges. It also states that one of its purposes is to support human solidarity in a “multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural European context.” These official statements are analytically important because they show that the channel understands its mission as both ecclesial and socio-culturally public, focusing both on national and European levels.

⁶ Pew Research Center, rep., *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2017, 11, 20, 23, 26.

⁷ Pew Research Center, rep., *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2017, 12, 37.

⁸ Patriarch Daniel, born Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, is the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church. He was elected on 12 September 2007 and enthroned on 30 September 2007. See Romanian Patriarchate, “His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of Romania,” Romanian Orthodox Church, January 8, 2026, accessed May 3, 2026, <https://patriarhia.ro/en/the-patriarch/>.

⁹ “Televiziunea Trinitas A Patriarhiei Române,” TRINITAS TV, April 25, 2024, accessed May 3, 2026, <https://www.trinitas.tv/despre-noi/>.

Within multiple programs and projects, the Trinitas TV sends a particular program entitled ‘Europa Christiana’. This program’s description declares a mission that seeks to remind the public of the importance of European civilization, seen as founded on the Greco-Roman inheritance and ennobled by Christian faith. It further states that, more than a geographical space or political construction, Europe’s identity was and is constituted by Christianity, understood as the unifying faith of the countries and cultures of the continent. The program description then asks whether the rediscovery of Europe’s religious dimension may be decisive for the future-oriented well-being of the continent, especially in relation to contemporary socio-political challenges such as demographic decline, migration, general secularization and religious extremism.¹⁰

1.3 Research Question, Aim, and Objectives

Based on the information and perspectives presented in the introductory chapter, the central research questions of this thesis are:

- What is the Romanian Orthodox Church’s discursive content on European integration, as articulated and transmitted through the Trinitas TV?
- Which and how are the discursive practices embodied in the concrete programs and projects of the Trinitas TV during the period 2016-2019?

The aim of the thesis is thus to analyze the what, the which, and the how regarding the institutional media of the Romanian Orthodox Church, focusing on the Trinitas TV and its role in the construction of messages and meaning on European integration through language use, selection of recurring themes, and discursive strategies. The thesis asks how Europe and the European Union are represented; how Christianity, Orthodoxy, national identity and modernity are in the discursive representations; and how the programs and projects negotiate tensions between religious tradition and the secular-liberal vocabulary generally associated with European integration.

The objectives of the thesis are fourfold. Firstly, it situates the Romanian Orthodox media discourse within wider debates on modernity, secularization, (multiple modernities) and religion in the public sphere. Secondly, it examines Trinitas TV as an institutional

¹⁰ “Europa Christiana Archives,” TRINITAS TV, February 10, 2023, accessed May 3, 2026, <https://www.trinitas.tv/category/emisiuni/cultural/europa-christiana/>.

communicative space through which the ROC articulates public meanings about Europe. Thirdly, it identifies recurring discursive patterns across selected episodes of Europa Christiana, especially those concerning Europe as a Christian civilization, the EU as a bureaucratic structure, Romania as peripheral but European, and secularization as both a legal condition and a cultural challenge. Fourthly, it discusses what these patterns reveal about Orthodox engagement with European integration in a post-communist EU member state.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the scholarship most directly relevant to the research questions, focusing on recent debates about religion, Eastern European enlargement of the EU, Orthodox Christianity, institutional religious authority, and the mediated construction of Europe. Rather than offering a broad overview of modernity and secularization from a perspective of historical sociology, the chapter identifies the specific academic gap addressed by this thesis: the limited attention given to how Orthodox institutional media, and Trinitas TV in particular, discursively construct European integration in a context shaped by war in Ukraine, renewed EU enlargement debates, and the continuing public influence of the Church. Chapter 3 develops the theoretical framework, drawing on theories of modernity, the secular state, multiple modernities, tendential modernity and discourse analysis. Chapter 4 explains the methodology and research design. It presents Critical Discourse Analysis, especially professor Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model, and describes the corpus, data selection, analytical procedure, limitations and ethical considerations. Chapter 5 presents the analysis of selected Europa Christiana episodes. It examines how Trinitas TV constructs 'Europe' and 'Europeanness' as a Christian civilizational project, how it frames the meaning of Europe through crisis and uncertainty, how it criticizes bureaucracy and elite detachment, how it positions Romania between inferiority and aspiration, and how it distinguishes between laicity as institutional neutrality and secularism as ideological exclusion of religion.

The thesis also opens a future research trajectory. While the present study focuses on one institutional media channel and selected episodes of Europa Christiana, a future research, for example within a larger doctoral project, could expand this research in several directions: by analyzing a larger corpus of Trinitas TV programs across a longer period; by comparing Romanian Orthodox media discourse with Orthodox media in Ukraine and Moldova; by

examining audience reception; or by studying how Orthodox discourse on Europe changes in relation to crises such as migration, war, nationalism, secularization or debates on family and gender. In this sense, the present thesis should be read as a first stage in a broader research agenda on Orthodoxy, media and European integration.

2. Literature Review

This literature review is organized around the central research question of the thesis: What is the discourse of the Romanian Orthodox Church about European integration as transmitted through Trinitas TV? Instead of offering a broad survey of modernity, secularization, and discourse theory, the chapter focuses on the scholarly debates that directly explain why this question matters and where the thesis contributes. The more conceptual debates on secularization, post-secularity, multiple modernities, and Critical Discourse Analysis are therefore treated mainly as theoretical tools in the following chapter. Here, the priority is to map the literature on religion and European integration, Orthodox Christianity in post-communist Eastern Europe, religious media, and the present geopolitical moment in which European integration has again become a contested symbolic and political project.

The literature points to one central tension: European integration is usually analyzed through institutions, law, economic convergence, and political conditionality, while religious actors are often treated as secondary social actors or as interest groups. Yet in Orthodox-majority societies such as Romania, religion is not simply a private belief system. It is linked to national belonging, moral authority, social hierarchy, and public discourse. This makes Trinitas TV an important empirical site. As the official television channel of the Romanian Orthodox Church, it not only transmits theological or liturgical content; it participates in producing meanings about Europe, modernity, national identity, and the place of Orthodoxy within the European project. The research question therefore, requires a literature review that connects European integration studies with studies of Orthodoxy, religious authority, and mediated discourse.

2.1 Religion and European Integration: From Institutional Presence to Discursive Meaning

The first body of literature relevant to this thesis concerns the relationship between religion and European integration. Earlier scholarship has shown that the European project cannot be understood as entirely separate from religion. Christian Democratic parties, Catholic social

thought, and post-war Christian political networks were important in the early decades of integration. More recent scholarship has also shown that religion remains institutionally present within the European Union, especially through Article 17 TFEU, which establishes an open, transparent, and regular dialogue between EU institutions and churches, religious associations, philosophical organizations, and non-confessional organizations.¹¹

However, this institutional perspective does not fully answer the research question of this thesis. Article 17, lobbying, and church-state relations show that religious institutions can access EU-level structures, but they do not show how religious actors construct Europe for their own publics. François Foret's work remains important because it demonstrates that religion functions in the EU not only as belief but also as a symbolic and political resource.¹² Yet the focus is still largely on Brussels-level governance, religious interest representation, and multilevel politics. This leaves open a different question: how does a religious institution located in an EU member state explain, narrate, evaluate, and morally translate European integration for its audience?

Recent research on European heritage has moved closer to this problem. Tuuli Lähdesmäki argues that the EU's own heritage and history initiatives negotiate Christianity in a careful way: Christianity is recognized as part of Europe's historical background, but it is balanced against secularization, liberal values, pluralism, and contemporary religious diversity.¹³ This debate is important for the present thesis because it shows that Christianity is not absent from EU discourse, but it is incorporated in a controlled and pluralized form. The question raised by this thesis is different but complementary: how does an Orthodox religious medium reinterpret Europe from the other side, not from the viewpoint of EU institutions but from the communicative space of a national church?

¹¹ Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, art. 17, 2012 O.J. C 326/47; François Foret, *Religion and Politics in the European Union: The Secular Canopy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 119–124; Gary Wilton, "Christianity at the Founding: The Legacy of Robert Schuman," in *God and the EU: Faith in the European Project*, ed. Jonathan Chaplin and Gary Wilton (London: Routledge, 2016), 13–32; Lucian N. Leustean, "The Representation of Religion in the European Union," in *God and the EU: Faith in the European Project*, ed. Jonathan Chaplin and Gary Wilton (London: Routledge, 2016), 175–190.

¹² François Foret, *Religion and Politics in the European Union: The Secular Canopy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 124, 133–142.

¹³ Tuuli Lähdesmäki, "The Role of Christianity in the European Union's Heritage and History Initiatives," *Journal of European Studies* 52, no. 3–4 (September 12, 2022): 170–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472441221115571>, 172–175.

Chaplin and Wilton's edited volume *God and the EU: Faith in the European Project* also helps situate the thesis within debates about whether European integration can be understood as a merely secular project.¹⁴ The volume shows that religious ideas have shaped visions of European unity and that Christian political imagination has not disappeared from debates on Europe. Nevertheless, studies of religion and European integration still tend to focus on Catholicism, Christian Democracy, political theology, or EU-level institutional relations. Orthodox perspectives, and especially Orthodox media discourse, remain less visible. This is one of the key gaps addressed by the present thesis.

The literature therefore, suggests a shift from institutional presence to discursive presence. The question is not only whether churches are present in EU structures, but also how they create meanings about Europe. This distinction is central to the contribution of this thesis. The Romanian Orthodox Church is not studied here primarily as a lobby actor, a policy actor, or a theological institution, but as a producer of public discourse through Trinitas TV. The thesis therefore, contributes to the literature by showing how European integration is translated into narratives of Christian civilization, moral crisis, national dignity, bureaucracy, secularism, and spiritual identity.

2.2 Eastern European Enlargement, War, and the Renewed Relevance of Religion

The relevance of this topic has increased significantly in the last five years. European integration has entered a new geopolitical phase after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Enlargement is no longer only a technocratic process of legal approximation and economic reform; it has become a question of security, civilizational orientation, sovereignty, and geopolitical belonging. The EU formally opened accession negotiations with Moldova and Ukraine in June 2024, while the 2024 Enlargement Package described the enlargement process as gaining new momentum after the war and the candidate status of Ukraine and Moldova.¹⁵

¹⁴ Jonathan Chaplin and Gary Wilton, eds., *God and the EU: Faith in the European Project* (London: Routledge, 2016), introduction; Gary Wilton, "Christianity at the Founding: The Legacy of Robert Schuman," in *God and the EU: Faith in the European Project*, ed. Jonathan Chaplin and Gary Wilton (London: Routledge, 2016), 13–32; Peter Petkoff, "New Worlds and New Churches: The Orthodox Church(es) and the European Union," in *God and the EU: Faith in the European Project*, ed. Jonathan Chaplin and Gary Wilton (London: Routledge, 2016), 70–88.

¹⁵ European Commission, "EU Opens Accession Negotiations with Moldova," June 25, 2024, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-opens-accession-negotiations-moldova-2024-06-25_en; European Commission, "EU Opens Accession Negotiations with Ukraine," June 25, 2024,

This new enlargement context makes the study of religious discourse more relevant. In Eastern Europe, European integration is not interpreted only through institutional criteria. It is also understood through competing narratives of East and West, Christianity and secularism, national tradition and liberal values, sovereignty and foreign influence. These narratives are often articulated by religious actors, especially Orthodox institutions. The war in Ukraine has intensified this dynamic by making Orthodoxy itself a contested geopolitical field. Julia Korniichuk's recent research on the Ukrainian Orthodox community shows that Russia's war and Ukraine's European aspirations have transformed attitudes toward political Europe, church identity, and geopolitical belonging.¹⁶ This demonstrates that Orthodox churches do not merely react to political change; they participate in interpreting it.

The Ukrainian case also reveals that religious hierarchy and geopolitical authority are deeply connected. The Russian Orthodox Church has been widely discussed as an actor that contributes to the ideological justification of Russian power and the "Russian world" narrative. Recent work on hybrid warfare argues that the Russian Orthodox Church functions as an ideological actor within broader information and media struggles around Ukraine.¹⁷ For this thesis, this does not mean that the Romanian Orthodox Church should be treated as equivalent to the Russian Orthodox Church. Rather, the point is that Orthodox media cannot be studied as neutral channels of religious communication. They operate within a regional field in which religious authority, geopolitical narratives, and media discourse intersect.

Moldova further illustrates the contemporary relevance of the topic. During the 2024 referendum on EU membership, Reuters reported accusations that priests connected to the Moscow-linked Moldovan Orthodox Church were lobbying against the European vote.¹⁸ This case shows that religious actors can become directly involved in public struggles over European

https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-opens-accession-negotiations-ukraine-2024-06-25_en; European Commission, 2024 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, COM(2024) 690 final, October 30, 2024.

¹⁶ Julia Korniichuk, "Ukrainian Orthodox Community - between Russia's War and European Integration," *Eastern Journal of European Studies* 15, no. Special Issue (2024): 213–31, <https://doi.org/10.47743/ejes-2024-si10>, 214–216.

¹⁷ Oksana Lytvynchuk, Andrii Shevchuk, and Zoriana Hrytsyshena, "Hybrid War: The Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Ukrainian Media," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 45, no. 6 (2025): 22–26, <https://doi.org/10.55221/2693-2229.2665>.

¹⁸ Minority wing of moldovan orthodox church accuses priests of lobbying against Europe vote, Reuters, accessed April 15, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/minority-wing-moldovan-orthodox-church-accuses-priests-lobbying-against-europe-2024-09-26/>.

integration. The Moldovan example also highlights the importance of media and communication, since competing religious institutions and political actors use public discourse to define Europe either as a promise of sovereignty and reform or as a threat to tradition and spiritual identity.

Romania occupies a different but analytically important position. Unlike Moldova and Ukraine, Romania is already an EU member state. This means that the question is not whether the country should join the EU, but how EU membership is interpreted after accession by an institution that holds strong symbolic authority in national life. The Romanian Orthodox Church is therefore a valuable case for examining post-accession discourse. It allows the thesis to ask how a church that belongs to a fully integrated EU member state constructs Europe: as a political opportunity, a moral danger, a bureaucratic structure, a Christian civilizational inheritance, or a field of ambivalence.

2.3 Orthodoxy, National Identity, and Hierarchy in Post-Communist Romania

The second major body of literature concerns Orthodoxy, post-communism, and national identity. Classic studies of religion and politics in Romania have shown that the Romanian Orthodox Church re-emerged after communism as a major public institution, closely connected to national identity, moral authority, and state symbolism.¹⁹ Lucian Leustean's work on Eastern Christianity and politics also shows that in many Orthodox-majority societies, religion is deeply connected to nationhood, state legitimacy, and historical continuity.²⁰ These studies remain essential because they explain why the Church is not simply one civil society actor among others. It is a hierarchical institution with cultural authority and a privileged symbolic position in Romanian public life.

The link between Orthodoxy and national belonging is particularly important. Pew reports that 74 percent of Romanians consider being Orthodox important for being truly Romanian.²¹ This figure is not simply descriptive; it helps explain why European integration becomes a sensitive

¹⁹ Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3–4.

²⁰ Lucian Leustean, *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2014), 12–16.

²¹ Pew Research Center, rep., *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2017, 12–14.

discursive object. If Orthodoxy is strongly associated with national identity, then Europe cannot be discussed only as a set of institutions or laws. It must be interpreted in relation to memory, tradition, moral values, and collective belonging. This is precisely the level at which Trinitas TV operates.

The literature also requires attention to hierarchy. The Romanian Orthodox Church is a hierarchical institution, and its official media belong to a broader institutional ecology through which authority is communicated. Hierarchy matters in at least three ways. First, it shapes who is allowed to speak with authority in religious media: clergy, theologians, invited intellectuals, and figures close to ecclesial institutions. Second, it shapes the relationship between official discourse and lay reception, since institutional media do not represent random opinions but curated forms of public communication. Third, hierarchy appears within the discourse itself, when Christianity is placed above secular values, spiritual identity above technocratic governance, or national belonging above abstract European citizenship.

Kristina Stoeckl's work on Orthodox political theology is relevant here because it shows how Orthodox institutions often position themselves as guardians of moral tradition in relation to liberal frameworks such as human rights, gender equality, and secular democracy.²² More recent work by Marco Guglielmi directly addresses the Romanian Orthodox Church and the European Union, arguing that the Church's relationship to human rights in the context of EU membership is complex and often ambivalent.²³ Guglielmi's article is particularly useful for this thesis because it moves beyond simple categories such as "pro-European" or "anti-European." It shows that the Church may accept aspects of European integration while contesting parts of the liberal moral order associated with it. The present thesis extends this insight from institutional position-taking to media discourse.

2.4 Religion, Modernization, and Multiple Eastern European Trajectories

Recent scholarship on religious change in Orthodox-majority Eastern Europe is more directly useful than a broad survey of classical secularization theory. François Gauthier argues that religion in Orthodox-majority Eastern Europe should not be understood as a simple transition

²² Kristina Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights* (London: Routledge, 2014), 4–8.

²³ Marco Guglielmi, "The Romanian Orthodox Church, the European Union and the Contention on Human Rights," *Religions* 12, no. 1 (2021), 8–12.

from tradition to secular modernity. Rather, the region has experienced a complex reconfiguration of religious authority in relation to the nation-state, communism, post-communist transformation, and global market society.²⁴ This supports the analytical direction of the thesis: the question is not whether Romania is secular or religious, but how religious actors reinterpret modernity and Europeanization through their own public discourses.

The 2022 volume *Metamorphoses of Religion and Spirituality in Central and Eastern Europe* also reflects the newer debate by treating religion in the region as changing, adaptive, and publicly significant after communism.²⁵ This literature is important because it avoids older assumptions that modernization automatically marginalizes religion. Romania's EU membership did not remove Orthodoxy from the public sphere. Instead, Europeanization created new contexts in which Orthodoxy had to reposition itself: in relation to Brussels, liberal values, secular governance, minority rights, family policy, migration, and the idea of Europe itself.

Recent debates on Orthodox Christianity and multiple modernities further strengthen this point. Kratochvíl and Doležal argue that Orthodox churches construct modernity in plural ways, rather than simply rejecting or accepting Western modernity.²⁶ This is directly relevant for interpreting Trinitas TV, where Europe is not simply rejected as secular and Western, but reconstructed as a Christian civilization, a project of peace, a bureaucratic system, and a moral challenge. The literature therefore supports the thesis's main analytical claim: the discourse is ambivalent, not simply Eurosceptic.

2.5 Religious Media as a Site of Public Authority

A third body of literature concerns media, religion, and public discourse. Studies of mediatization show that media are not neutral channels through which religion is simply transmitted; rather, media shape religious authority, public visibility, and the forms in which

²⁴ François Gauthier, "Religious Change in Orthodox-Majority Eastern Europe: From Nation-State to Global-Market", *Theory and Society* 51, no. 2 (2022), 177–180.

²⁵ Sławomir H. Zaręba, Maria Sroczyńska, Roberto Cipriani, Małgorzata Zarzycka, and Rafał Boguszewski, eds., *Metamorphoses of Religion and Spirituality in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2022), 43–44.

²⁶ Petr Kratochvíl and Tomáš Doležal, "Orthodox Christianity and Multiple Modernities: The Case of the Russian-Ukrainian War," *Czech Journal of International Relations* 60, no. 2 (2025), 69–74.

religious meanings circulate.²⁷ Stewart Hoover's work similarly argues that religion in contemporary societies is increasingly mediated, meaning that religious institutions use media to construct legitimacy, identity, and public narratives.²⁸ This is important for the present thesis because Trinitas TV should not be treated only as an archive of religious opinions, but as a structured communicative institution.

The Romanian literature on religion and media is more limited but important. Romina Surugiu shows that religious media in Romania operate within a complex media environment, interacting with secular media and contributing to public discourse.²⁹ However, existing studies do not sufficiently examine how religious media construct European integration as a discursive object. This is a significant gap because Europe is not simply a policy topic. It is a symbolic field where questions of civilization, identity, morality, and national belonging are negotiated.

Recent debates on digital religion make this gap even more visible. Religious actors increasingly participate in public debate through television, online platforms, social media, and hybrid media ecosystems. Studies of Orthodox digital communication and political populism show that Orthodox media can construct moral binaries, sacralize political claims, and shape perceptions of national and European identity.³⁰ While this thesis focuses on television rather than social media, the broader point remains: religious media are active participants in the discursive production of political meaning.

This perspective changes the role of Trinitas TV in the thesis. The channel is not merely a source of data; it is part of the object of analysis. As the official television channel of the Romanian Orthodox Church, it represents a mediated institutional voice. Its programs, guests, topics, and rhetorical patterns reveal how the Church's communicative hierarchy translates Europe for Romanian Orthodox publics. A literature review aligned with the research question therefore, needs to connect media theory with the study of official religious discourse, not only with general theories of secularization.

²⁷ Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change," *Northern Lights* 6 (2008): 9–26.

²⁸ Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1–5.

²⁹ Romina Surugiu, "Media and Religion in Romania: Three Contexts and a Discussion," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 8, no. 4 (2012), 205–206, 211–212.

³⁰ Dmytro Garaschuk and Oleh Sokolovskyi, "Digital Orthodoxy and Political Populism in Eastern Europe: How Orthodox Media Facilitate Political Mobilization," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 45, no. 7 (2025), 74–81.

2.6 Orthodox Europe, Anti-Westernism, and Ambivalent Europeanism

Another relevant debate concerns the relationship between Orthodoxy, Europe, and the West. Older scholarship on Orthodox anti-Westernism remains useful, especially because it shows that Orthodox critiques of “the West” do not necessarily translate into simple opposition to Europe.³¹ In Orthodox discourse, Europe can mean different things: the EU as an institution, Western liberal modernity, Christian civilization, geopolitical alignment, or secular moral order. This distinction is central to the present research.

The analysis of Trinitas TV benefits from this distinction because the discourse often separates Europe from the European Union. Europe can be described as a Christian civilizational inheritance, while the EU can be criticized as bureaucratic, technocratic, or morally uncertain. This separation allows a form of critique that is not necessarily anti-European. It is better described as ambivalent Orthodox Europeanism: a discourse that affirms Romania’s European belonging and the benefits of integration while contesting secular, liberal, or bureaucratic definitions of Europe.

This concept also helps explain why the thesis contributes to debates on Euroscepticism. Much of the literature on Euroscepticism focuses on parties, voters, public opinion, or nationalist movements. Religious media discourse operates differently. It may not call for leaving the EU or rejecting integration, but it can redefine what Europe should mean. It can accept European belonging while insisting that Europe must recover Christian roots, moral order, and respect for national traditions. This type of discourse is politically relevant because it shapes the cultural conditions under which European integration is accepted, criticized, or reinterpreted.

2.7 Research Gap and Contribution of the Thesis

The literature reviewed above reveals a clear gap. First, scholarship on religion and European integration has examined Christian Democracy, Catholicism, Article 17 dialogue, religious lobbying, and EU heritage narratives, but it has paid less attention to how Orthodox institutions

³¹ Vasilios N. Makrides, “Orthodox Anti-Westernism Today: A Hindrance to European Integration?,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9, no. 3 (2009), 209–211, 222–224.

construct Europe within their own media spaces. Second, scholarship on the Romanian Orthodox Church has examined church-state relations, national identity, human rights, and post-communist public influence, but less often the discursive construction of European integration through official religious television. Third, research on media and religion has shown that media shape religious authority, but has not sufficiently explored Trinitas TV as a site where Europe, Orthodoxy, and Romanian identity are negotiated together.

The research question therefore, addresses a specific and relevant problem: What is the discourse of the Romanian Orthodox Church about European integration as transmitted through Trinitas TV? This question is narrower and more effective than a broad inquiry into religion and modernity. It asks how a concrete religious institution, through a concrete media platform, constructs a concrete political and cultural object: European integration. It also allows the thesis to connect micro-level language analysis with macro-level debates about enlargement, post-communist religion, hierarchy, war, and European identity.

The main contribution of the thesis is threefold. First, it contributes empirically by analyzing a corpus of Trinitas TV programs that has not been systematically studied in relation to European integration. Second, it contributes analytically by showing that the Romanian Orthodox discourse on Europe is not reducible to nationalism, Euroscepticism, or religious conservatism. Instead, it is ambivalent: it affirms Europe as civilizational belonging and political opportunity, while criticizing the EU when it appears detached from Christian heritage, national identity, and moral meaning. Third, it contributes theoretically by showing that religious media in post-communist Europe are not passive reflections of institutional positions. They are active sites where Europe is interpreted, contested, moralized, and re-sacralized.

The topic is especially relevant now because the war in Ukraine, the renewed enlargement process, and the politicization of Orthodox actors in Moldova and Ukraine have made the relationship between religion and European integration more visible and more consequential. Romania's case shows what happens after accession: European integration remains discursively open, and religious actors continue to shape its meaning. In this sense, the thesis does not only study Trinitas TV as a Romanian case. It also provides a starting point for broader comparative research on Orthodox media, Europeanisation, and public authority in Eastern Europe.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter develops the theoretical framework used to analyze the discourse of the Romanian Orthodox Church about European integration through its institutional media. The aim of the analysis is to position Romanian religious media within multiple debates about modernity, secularization, religion in the public sphere, and the diversity of modernization paths across Europe. These theoretical perspectives offer the conceptual tools needed to interpret how religious actors frame Europe, modernity, and political authority in contemporary discourse.

European integration represents a wider transformation of political authority, identity, and cultural narratives across the continent, not only an institutional or economic process. The European Union is more than an economic arrangement between states existing on a given territory, it is rather a normative grand project grounded in liberal democracy, constitutionalism, and human rights. At the same time, religion and religious institutions continue to have an impact on shaping cultural identities, collective memories, and moral debates within European societies. The interaction between these two dimensions, modern political institutions and religious traditions, creates an important context for understanding contemporary discussions about Europe.

Romania is a relevant case for examining these dynamics. As a member of the European Union since 2007, Romania participates fully in the political and institutional structures of European integration. Meanwhile, Romanian society has remained strongly influenced by Orthodox Christianity after the fall of communism, and the Church continues to hold a significant role in public life and national identity. The Romanian Orthodox Church is one of the most trusted and influential institutions in Romania and is involved in public debates over social values, cultural heritage, and national identity.³²

Understanding the discourse of ROC about European integration implies a conceptual framework that structures both modern socio-political structures and the persistence of religious traditions within contemporary societies. Three conceptual lenses guide this analysis. First of all, theories of modernity and the secular state provide a context for understanding the institutional framework within which European integration operates. Secondly, the concept of

³² Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3–4.

multiple modernities illustrates the diversity of modernization paths and the ways in which modern institutions interact with cultural traditions. Third, discourse theory gives the tools for analyzing how institutions construct narratives about identity, values, and political developments. Together, these perspectives are the foundation for understanding the Romanian Orthodox Church's engagement with European integration.

3.1 Modernity and the Secular State

Modernity is frequently related to the emergence of new forms of political authority, social organization, and cultural identity, characterized by processes of rationalization, bureaucratic administration, and the differentiation of social spheres.³³ These transformations lead to the gradual separation of religious institutions from political authority and the creation of modern secular states.

The secular state is conceptualized here as a political order where public authority has its foundation in legal-rational legitimacy and keeps neutrality toward competing religious and philosophical worldviews.³⁴ In other words, this means the repositioning of religion in society within a different institutional framework, not the complete absence of it. In this way, religion becomes one sphere among others, rather than the main source of political legitimacy. In a system countered as such, individuals with diverse beliefs participate in public life under a shared constitutional context. The secular state, therefore, establishes the institutional conditions necessary for pluralism in modern societies.³⁵

European integration was marked by the broader historical context of modern political development. This project of European integration started to be developed after the Second World War with the goal of creating new forms of cooperation among the European states, having as a foundation shared democratic values, legal frameworks, and institutional coordination.³⁶

Moreover, the discussions about European identity extend beyond institutional and economic cooperation to capture questions such as culture, history, and shared values. The historical role of Christianity in shaping European civilization is often used as a reference in the debates

³³ Max Weber et al., *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), XCI-XCIII.

³⁴ Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 5–6.

³⁵ Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on a Post-Secular Society," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 7–8.

³⁶ Gerard Delanty, *Formations of European Modernity* (London: Palgrave, 2013), 7–18.

related to the cultural foundations of the continent. Religious traditions remain important elements of Europe's historical and cultural heritage, even within a secular political context.³⁷

Therefore, these debates show that modern European societies continue to negotiate the relationship between institutional secularism and religion. This is the case of Romania, where the Orthodox Church has an influential role in the public life of the state.

3.2 Multiple Modernities

Multiple modernities is a concept that is suitable for providing a framework to understand the diversity of modernization paths across societies, challenging the idea that modernization follows a unique trajectory.³⁸ In other words, religion has not been excluded from modern societies, but has been through a process of transformation and reconfiguration, modernity being shaped by the interaction between institutional structures and cultural traditions.

Moreover, religious actors often re-enter the public sphere and are involved in debates concerning social values, political identity, and moral norms.³⁹ Significant parts of the contemporary world are highly religious, which demonstrates that modernity is not necessarily linked with secularization in an identical way.⁴⁰ The research carried out in European integration indicates that religion is somehow linked with national identity. Religious characteristics are often preserved in symbolic ways and are used to define community boundaries and contribute to the formation of self-understanding.⁴¹

The variety of modernities can also be seen if we compare Western and Eastern European societies. Western Europe is characterized by an advanced process of secularization, whereas Eastern European societies are marked by the close relationship between religion and national identity.⁴² Western European societies have gone through industrialization and secularization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whereas Eastern European societies have taken other

³⁷ Joseph H. Weiler, "A Christian Europe? Europe and Christianity: Rules of Commitment," *European View* 6, no. 1 (December 2007): 143–50, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12290-007-0020-8>, 143-146.

³⁸ Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 1–3.

³⁹ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 211-214.

⁴⁰ Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 2-3.

⁴¹ Willfried Spohn, Matthias Koenig, and Wolfgang Knöbl, *Religion and National Identities in an Enlarged Europe* (Houndmills, Basingstoke Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1-6.

⁴² Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2002), 2-5.

paths due to their colonial and communist legacies.⁴³ These differences do not show deviations from modernity, but an alternative version of it.

3.3 Tential Modernity and the Romanian Case

Romania is a relevant example as it illustrates clearly the coexistence of modern political institutions and enduring religious traditions. The modernization process in Romania has been seen many times as selective and adaptive, where Western models were borrowed but the existing cultural frameworks were not replaced. The concept of tential modernity, developed by Romanian sociological theorists, considers the modernization process to be a transition that may be more developed in some of its dimensions and less developed in others.⁴⁴ In Romania, modern institutions such as constitutional governance, bureaucratic administration, and democratic politics may coexist with religion that continues to shape social identities and public life.

The geopolitical position of Romania between East and West contributed to this different trajectory. During the nineteenth century, Romanian political elites adopted Western constitutional models as an effort to modernize the state and align the society with European political structures. At the same time, Orthodox Christianity stayed closely intertwined with narratives of national identity and cultural continuity.

The fall of communism in 1989 facilitated new conditions for the re-emergence of religion in the public life of Romania. Religious institutions regained social authority and became influential participants, as during the communist regime, they were repressed, their activity being held in secret. The Romanian Orthodox Church emerged as one of the most trusted institutions in society.⁴⁵

Pew Research Center's 2017 report describes this development as a "reassertion" of religion after decades in which communist states repressed religious worship and promoted atheism. In many countries of the region, especially in Orthodox-majority societies, religious belonging became strongly connected to national belonging.

⁴³ Peter Wagner, *Modernity: Understanding the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012), 34-39.

⁴⁴ Constantin Schifirneț, "ORTHODOXY, CHURCH, STATE, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF TENTIAL MODERNITY," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 12, no. 34 (Spring 2013), 184.

⁴⁵ Lucian Leuștean, *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2014), 3-4.

Romania fits this regional pattern, but it also stands out because of the strength and stability of Orthodox identification. According to the same Pew report, 86% of Romanian adults identify as Orthodox Christian, while only 1% identify as religiously unaffiliated. This places Romania among the Orthodox-majority countries of Central and Eastern Europe, alongside Moldova, Greece, Serbia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Belarus and Russia. The relevance of this figure is not only demographic. It shows that Orthodoxy remains a dominant cultural language through which belonging, tradition, and national continuity are articulated.

However, the Romanian case also demonstrates the distinction between religious affiliation, belief, and practice. Pew reports that 95% of Romanians say they believe in God, placing Romania among the countries with the highest levels of belief in the region. Yet religious practice is less intense than religious identification: 21% attend church weekly, and 44% say they pray daily. This distinction is important for the present thesis because it suggests that Romanian Orthodoxy should not be understood only through institutional participation or weekly attendance. Rather, religion also operates as a symbolic and cultural framework that structures identity, moral orientation, and public discourse.

This corresponds to Pew's broader interpretation of religiosity in Central and Eastern Europe as a pattern of "believing and belonging, without behaving." In other words, many people in the region believe in God and identify with a religious tradition, but do not necessarily participate frequently in formal religious practices. In Romania, this pattern is especially relevant because Orthodoxy remains socially powerful even when religious observance is not uniformly high. This helps explain why religious media can still matter politically and culturally: their influence does not depend only on the number of people who attend church weekly, but on the broader symbolic authority of Orthodoxy in public life.

The link between Orthodoxy and national identity is particularly significant. Pew's findings show that 74% of Romanians say that being Orthodox is important for being "truly Romanian." This reflects a wider regional tendency, especially in Orthodox-majority countries, where religious identity and national identity are more closely connected than in Catholic-majority countries. For this thesis, this is central: the discourse of Trinitas TV should not be read simply as religious commentary, but as part of a wider symbolic field in which religion, nation, and Europe are negotiated together.

The Romanian case also illustrates the tension between European integration and traditional value frameworks. Pew reports that 51% of Romanians agree that there is a conflict between their country's traditional values and those of the West. This does not mean that Romanian society is anti-European. Rather, it shows that European belonging is interpreted through a moral and cultural lens.⁴⁶ Romania may be politically and institutionally integrated into the European Union, but the meaning of Europe remains open to negotiation. This is precisely the space in which religious media such as Trinitas TV become relevant: they participate in defining whether Europe is understood as a secular-liberal project, a civilizational Christian space, a bureaucratic institution, or a field of moral crisis.

Indicator of religiosity in Romania	Percentage
Identify as Orthodox Christian	86%
Believe in God	95%
Say being Orthodox is important for being truly Romanian	74%
Pray daily	44%

Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from Pew Research Center, *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe* (2017), 12, 20, 23, 26.

These statistics therefore support the theoretical framework of the thesis. First, they challenge a simple secularization narrative: Romanian modernization and EU membership have not produced the disappearance of religion from public life. Second, they support the theory of multiple modernities, since Romania combines modern institutions, EU integration, and strong Orthodox cultural identification. Third, they justify the use of Critical Discourse Analysis because the meaning of Europe is not fixed but constructed through public language, institutional narratives, and media discourse.

In this context, Trinitas TV is an especially relevant site of analysis. As an official media institution of the Romanian Orthodox Church, it does not simply transmit religious content; it

⁴⁶ Pew Research Center. 2017. *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 12, 37.

participates in the discursive construction of Europe, modernity, national identity, and public religion. The statistical background shows why such discourse matters: in a society where Orthodoxy remains strongly linked to belief and national belonging, religious media have the potential to shape how European integration is interpreted within Romanian public culture.

Romania's integration into the European Union, therefore, is a particularly interesting context where modern political integration intersects with strong religious traditions. The coexistence of these elements reflects the complex trajectory of Romanian modernization and provides an important context for interpreting contemporary religious media discourse about European integration.

3.4 Discourse, Religion, and Media in Romania

Discourse represents an important mechanism through which social realities, identities, and political meanings are built. Discourse not only reflects reality, but it actively constructs the ways in which individuals and institutions interpret social transformation.⁴⁷ In this sense, identity is not conceived as something static, but as the product of constant processes of representation, negotiation, and boundary construction.

The link between discourse and identity is of particular importance in the process of nation-building. National identity can be thought of as a form of discursive construction in which various actors, such as political elites, intellectuals, and religious bodies, are in competition to define the meaning of the nation.⁴⁸ In Romania, religion is an important symbolic tool in this process.

Moreover, the importance of media in this process has been studied by Romanian scholars analyzing the relationship between religion and communication. Research on the Romanian media landscape explains that religious media operate within a complex environment characterized by both cooperation and tension with secular media.⁴⁹ Rather than existing in isolation, religious and secular media interact and contribute to shaping public discourse in overlapping ways

⁴⁷ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 62-64.

⁴⁸ Willfried Spohn, Matthias Koenig, and Wolfgang Knöbl, *Religion and National Identities in an Enlarged Europe* (Houndmills, Basingstoke Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 7-8.

⁴⁹ Romina Surugiu, "Media and Religion in Romania Three Contexts and a Discussion," *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 205-213, Vol.8, no. No.4 (September 2012): 205-13, 205-208.

In Romania, for instance, it may carry implications related to tradition, Orthodoxy, and cultural continuity. The religious narrative surrounding Europe may highlight different issues, including Christian heritage and the relationship between secular and religious values. These issues are not static and depend on specific contexts and strategies of communication.

In this regard, religious media is an important area for understanding the construction and negotiation of the discourse. Through understanding the meanings in this area of study, it is possible to understand the role that religion plays in shaping concepts of Europe and national identity and their relationship.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

In the present thesis, a qualitative research design will be used in order to illustrate and analytically discuss how the Romanian Orthodox Church creates and communicates its discourse about European integration through religious media. Epistemologically, the nature of the research is qualitatively interpretive focusing the analysis of meanings, representations, and discursive framings rather than on quantitative aspects of ROC's discursive practices. This method – its interpretative and hermeneutical character - is suitable since the research aims to understand how particular actors interpret, construct and articulate images, messages and meaning of social realities, in specific contexts.⁵⁰ In the case of this thesis, the study's aim is a deep, qualitative interpretation of the articulated messages and meanings about the European integration, which are framed within institutional Orthodox media discourse.

With the central research question: What is the discourse of the Romanian Orthodox Church about European integration as transmitted through Trinitas TV?, it reflects a scholarly interest in understanding how an important actor in a post-communist European society views the European Union and sees itself in relation to the generally liberal, progressive and secular understanding of European integration and, more generally the European modernity.⁵¹ With some similarity to the perspectives of Francis Fukuyama, the renowned German scholar, professor Jürgen Habermas argues that the consolidation of non-religious governance, liberal democratic pluralism, and institutional differentiation is often included in broad, mainstreamed modernization process, related to general discourses on the ontology of European integration.⁵² At the same time, modernization does not follow a single uniform path, process that led to the theory named multiple modernities.⁵³ In many cases, societies integrate modern institutional structures while conserving cultural and religious traditions. Romania took this path of modernization, which in terms of Constantin Schifirneț can be conceptually labeled as

⁵⁰ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 22.

⁵¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), xi–xii, 45–47, 198–200.

⁵² Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (March 14, 2006): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x>, 5-7.

⁵³ S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities", *Daedalus* 129, no.1 (2000): 1–30.

“tendential”, where the influence of the Church continues to be is strongly embedded in the state.

Before presenting and elaborating the methodology of critical discourse analysis, it may be stated that the qualitative research design, including its analytically interpretative character, constitutes a good fit for this study due to three particular reasons. Firstly, a discourse, as a phenomenon and a concept, is inherently interpretive and contextually bound, and it cannot be reduced to quantitative numerical indicators without losing its deep socio-political dimensions. Secondly, the study has as its main focus institutional discourse rather than individual attitudes. ROC operates as a collective macro-level actor, whose public voice is mostly mediated through institutional channels as for example the Trinitas TV. Thirdly, the research’s aim is to analytically link language use, and patterns of public communication, to wider social structures, including debates about secularism, European identity, and processes of modernization. Therefore, discourse analysis constitutes a valuable methodology when the goal is to understand how language use and communication both reflect and shape social developments, including social continuity and change⁵⁴

The relevant selected episodes from Trinitas TV constitute the main empirical material analyzed in the present thesis. Religious media is a key communicative space and platform where institutional narratives are formulated and disseminated, as media itself does not function just as a channel of general communication, but also as a space where religious authority and identity are created and negotiated.⁵⁵ It leads us to the concept of power, particularly “power over knowledge”, which ought to be acknowledged whole scholarly dealing with the concept of discourse.⁵⁶ Messages and meanings on European values, secularism, cultural heritage, national identity are themes frequently addressed by televised programs and, thus, the study’s purpose is to hermeneutically and interpretatively capture how European integration is discursively defined, debated, and elaborated within ROC’s public communication.

This research design tries to connect micro-level textual analysis with macro-level sociocultural contextualization and interpretation. Individual media texts are analyzed as part of a larger communicative practice embedded in Romanian’s particular path of social, cultural

⁵⁴ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 62-64.

⁵⁵ Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 19-22.

⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 27.

and political modernization related to the country's membership in the European Union. Therefore, the study aims to epistemologically contribute to discussions on religion and modernity in Europe by examining how a concrete religious institution articulates its position within a larger liberal-secular political order.

4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis and Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

According to professor Norman Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which constitutes the methodological approach in the thesis, is grounded in the epistemological assumption that a discourse ought not to be understood as a neutral reflection of reality, but rather as a form of communicative social practice, which shapes and is shaped by socio-political power relations, institutions, and ideological frameworks.⁵⁷ CDA situates texts within wider social structures and historical processes, not treating them as isolated linguistic artifacts. In other words, a discourse can be defined as a system of representations of reality, including various elements within that reality.⁵⁸ Simultaneously, the representations – texts, language uses – are part of communicative processes where messages and meanings are produced, consumed and reproduced, or deconstructed and changed, in time and space.

CDA is an adequate methodology for this research as it has the capacity to link language and communication to broader contexts and questions of power, identity, and legitimacy. The discourse of the ROC on European integration is not merely descriptive, but it contributes to defining cultural boundaries, negotiating the meanings of modernity, and placing the Church within the public sphere. CDA is specifically effective in analyzing such institutional discourse, where language use plays an important role in legitimizing authority and constructing collectively shared identities and meanings.⁵⁹

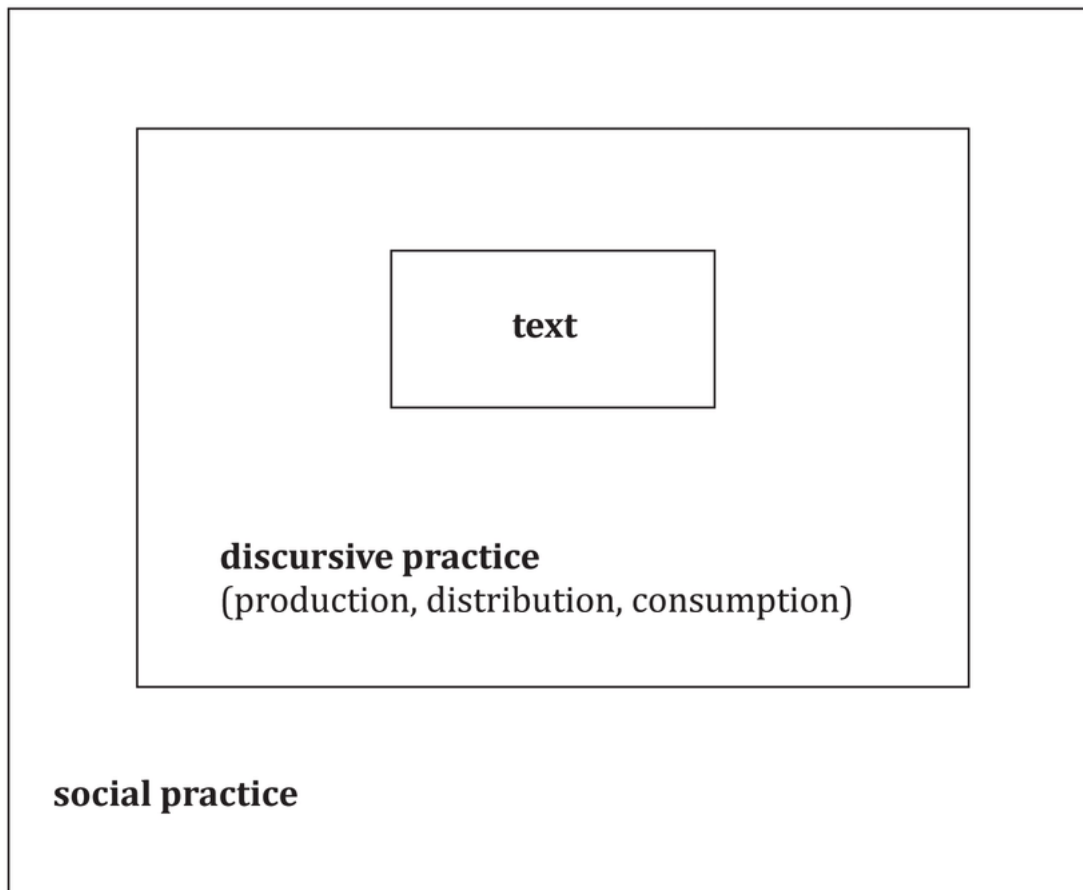
The three-dimensional model of CDA described by Norman Fairclough is applied to this study as the primary analytical model. Discourse as a textual product, a discursive practice, and a sociocultural practice are the three components of the model.⁶⁰ This multidimensional model helps to move beyond surface-level textual interpretation and to connect linguistic features to broader institutional and social structures.

⁵⁷ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 62-64.

⁵⁸ Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: SAGE, 1997), 15–19, 44–46.

⁵⁹ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016), 6.

⁶⁰ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 72-73.



Source: *Discourse and Social Change*, 1993, N. Fairclough, p 73

Textual analysis, the first dimension, has its main focus the internal linguistics of the text that includes vocabulary choice, modality, evaluative language, metaphor, and patterns of argumentation. Textual analysis focuses on how particular lexical and grammatical choices contribute to the construction of meaning and social identity.⁶¹ Applied to this study, textual analysis examines how Europe, the EU, modernity, and secularism are presented by Trinitas TV programs. It will be paid attention to recurring expressions such as “Christian Europe”, “European values”, “tradition”, “identity”, or references to “secularism” and “moral order”. The analysis will explore whether these concepts are framed positively, negatively, or ambivalently, and how modality (“should”, “cannot”) signals degrees of certainty or normative positioning.⁶²

Discursive practice explores the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption, trying to investigate how discourse is shaped by institutional routines, genre conventions, and

⁶¹ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 62-65.

⁶² N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 158-159.

intertextual references.⁶³ This dimension emphasizes that media discourse is produced within structured institutional contexts with an influence on what can be said and how it can be said.⁶⁴ Regarding Trinitas TV, programs are produced within the institutional framework of the ROC, featuring clergy, theologians, and intellectuals. The contribution to constructing institutional legitimacy is created by the format of discussion programs, the choice of guests, references to theological texts, Church Fathers or historical events. Therefore, this dimension allows the analysis to explore how authority is discursively established and how specific narratives about Europe are normalized within Orthodox media.

The sociocultural practice, the third dimension, places discourse within its broader social, political, and historical context. The discourse reflects and contributes at the same time to larger processes of social transformation.⁶⁵ In the context of this study, the sociocultural dimension includes the transformation of Romania after the fall of communism, its accession to the European Union in 2007, and the debates about secularism and modernization. European integration is mostly associated with institutional secularism and liberal democratic norms⁶⁶, but there are scholars who argue that modernization does not necessarily imply the privatization of religion.⁶⁷ By analyzing this dimension, the study connects ROC media discourse to the negotiation of Romania's position within European modernity while keeping a pronounced religious identity.

The strength of this model lies in its integrative capacity. The three-dimensional framework allows interpretation of how textual strategies are embedded in institutional practices and wider ideological structures, without isolating linguistic patterns from their context. In this thesis, the model will be applied systematically to relevant Trinitas TV programs, moving from close textual reading to discursive and sociocultural interpretation in order to uncover patterns of negotiation and boundary-making, and to discover if there is an ambivalence in the Church's discourse on European integration.

⁶³ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 78-79.

⁶⁴ N. Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1995), 36-45.

⁶⁵ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 87-91.

⁶⁶ Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (March 14, 2006): 1-25, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x>, 5-7.

⁶⁷ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5-7.

4.3 Data Selection and Corpus

Selected television programs broadcast by Trinitas TV, the official media channel of the Romanian Orthodox Church, will be the empirical corpus of this study. Trinitas TV was chosen as it is methodologically justified by its institutional status and communicative reach. Religious media function as important arenas in which religious authority, identity, and public positioning are articulated and negotiated.⁶⁸ Thus, media channels operated by religious institutions are facilitating access to structured and authoritative forms of institutional discourse.

The selection of television programs follows a purpose in sampling strategy, often used in qualitative research when the aim is to interpretatively analyze very information-rich cases.⁶⁹ It is not about seeking representativeness in a statistical sense, but purposive sampling has as a goal to identify texts that are particularly relevant to the research questions. The selected programs are implicitly and explicitly addressing themes about Europe, the EU, Christian identity, secularism, cultural heritage, and processes of socio-political modernization.

“Credinta si Cultura”, “Europa Christiana”, and other discussion-based formats are the type of programs that are selected for analyzing their discourse, including their thematic engagement with social and cultural debates. These programs are typically featuring one-hour conversations with clergy, theologians, academics, or public intellectuals, providing a structured setting in which the Church’s perspectives on European integration are articulated. Therefore, these discussion-based forms are suitable for discourse analysis as they contain argumentative sequences, evaluative language, and explicit framing of concepts. In other words, the studied programs communicated and legitimize messages and meanings on and of the European project, including Romania’s place and role within the EU.

The focus is oriented on episodes produced in contexts of intensified public debates on European norms and values, including secularism and/or identity; all of the programs being broadcasted after Romanian’s accession to European Union.

Transcription of the selected programs allows for systematic examination of vocabulary, modality, argumentative patterns, and intertextual references. Close textual reading is

⁶⁸ Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 19-22.

⁶⁹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 185.

important for identifying how meaning is shaped at the linguistic level before taking a step forward to broader contextual interpretation.⁷⁰

The corpus is limited to official Orthodox Church media for maintaining analytical coherence. This thesis does not have as a goal to study all forms of religious discourses in Romania, or to seek to measure public reception of these programs. Thus, the attention remains on institutional discourse as articulated through official media channels. The delimitation offers analytical clarity and allows, at the same time, in-depth exploration of how the ROC discursively negotiates its relation with European integration.

4.4 Analytical Procedure

The analytical procedure followed a structured, multi-stage process consistent with the patterns of Critical Discourse Analysis and the three-dimensional framework introduced by Fairclough. Discourse analysis should proceed systematically from textual description to interpretation and explanation.⁷¹ Therefore, the analysis in this thesis was conducted in four main stages: transcription, thematic coding, textual analysis, and sociocultural interpretation.

The first stage represents the transcription of the chosen Trinitas TV program's episodes. Examination of the linguistic feature is possible through the process of transcription as it allows detailed and systematic examination, otherwise it might remain unnoticed in audiovisual formats. Close textual scrutiny is essential in order to identify patterns of vocabulary, modality, metaphor, and evaluative language.⁷² All quotations from the Romanian-language episodes were translated into English by the author, keeping relevant pauses, emphasis, and rhetorical markers where necessary to retain the integrity of argumentative sequences.

The second stage consists thematic coding of the transcripts. Thematic coding was shaped by both theoretical concerns and by recurring patterns identified during preliminary readings. CDA benefits from deductive and inductive strategies together as theoretical concepts draw attention to important dimensions, while openness to emergent themes offers analytical flexibility.⁷³ Initial coding categories consists of references to "Europe", "European Values", "Christian heritage", "secularism", "modernity", "identity", "tradition". These themes were refined as patterns started to become clear in several episodes.

⁷⁰ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 62-65.

⁷¹ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 231-232.

⁷² N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 62-65.

⁷³ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016), 31-33.

Textual analysis at the micro level, focusing on lexical choices, modality, argumentative strategies, and intertextual references, is part of the third stage. Construction of binaries is in the focus, such as the combination between Christian/secular, tradition/modernity, the use of evaluative adjectives, and normative formulations as “must”, “should”, “cannot”. Modality is relevant in identifying how speakers position themselves in correlation to the truth, obligation, and legitimacy.⁷⁴ Intertextual references to theological authorities, historical events, or European political debates were examined as well, as all of these have a contribution to establishing discursive authority.⁷⁵

The fourth stage shapes the interpretation at the level of discursive and sociocultural practice. Therefore, the analysis is moving beyond individual textual features to examine in which way the discourse operates within Romanian’s post-communist transformation and its EU membership. The goal is not merely to describe discourse but to explain how it connects to processes of modernization, secular governance, and the negotiation of cultural identity.⁷⁶ The interpretive synthesis focused especially on identifying patterns of ambivalence.

Throughout the analytical process, reflexivity is maintained. CDA acknowledges that interpretation is not neutral and that the perspective of the researcher inevitably might shape analytical outcomes.⁷⁷ Thus, interpretive decisions are grounded explicitly in textual evidence, and analytical claims are supported by illustrative excerpts from the corpus.

4.5 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research comes with several limitations. First of all, the findings are not statistically generalizable. The study gives attention on a purposively selected corpus of media texts rather than on a comprehensive sample of all ROC ways of communication.

Second, the analysis focuses just on official media produced by the Romanian Orthodox Church, it does not concentrate on alternative Orthodox voices, independent religious media, or audience reception. This delimitation was chosen in order to maintain analytical coherence and focus on institutional discourse. In contrast, focusing on official media allows for clearer

⁷⁴ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 158-162.

⁷⁵ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 84-85.

⁷⁶ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 87-91.

⁷⁷ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016), 14.

identification of institutional framing, as Fairclough argues, media institutions operate within specific organizational constraints that shape discourse production.⁷⁸

Thirdly, CDA has occasionally been criticized for its interpretive nature and potential normative orientation.⁷⁹ As CDA explicitly covers questions of power and ideology, it might be seen as presupposing asymmetries or tensions within discourse. Therefore, this study avoids imposing predetermined conclusions and instead grounds interpretations in demonstrable textual patterns. Moreover, the analysis does not assume conflict or opposition in advance but remains open to capture negotiation, adaptation, or compatibility within ROC discourse.

Regarding the ethical matter, the study relies exclusively on the public available media content. The analyzed programs from Trinitas TV are accessible to the general public and do not involve private or confidential information. Thus, the research does not require direct interaction with human subjects and does not pose risks in relation to privacy or informed consent. Moreover, decontextualization or misrepresentation are avoided due to the care to represent the analyzed material accurately and fairly.

Finally, the study acknowledges the positionality of the researcher, at the same time, interpretations are shaped by theoretical commitments and contextual knowledge, ensuring transparency and methodological rigor.

⁷⁸ N. Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1995), 56-60.

⁷⁹ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016), 13-14.

5. Analysis: The Discourse of the Romanian Orthodox Church on European Integration

This thesis analyses the construction of meaning about European integration within Romanian Orthodox media discourse, focusing on the television program “Europa Christiana”, broadcast by Trinitas TV between 2016 and 2023. To capture the evolution of this discursive process, the study focuses exclusively on episodes broadcast from 2016 to 2019. The empirical material consists of a vast corpus of transcribed episodes retrieved from the official YouTube account of Trinitas TV, totaling over 200 pages of textual data. Comprising more than fifteen episodes, each running approximately 45 to 60 minutes, the dataset encompasses several hours of recorded talk. The analysis addresses key themes articulated in the transcribed episodes, such as European identity, secularism, religion, modernity, and Romania’s position toward the European Union.

All programs were originally broadcast in Romania. Automated transcription tools produced entire transcripts, which were then carefully checked and corrected manually for the purposes of this study, in order to preserve correctness and fidelity to the original speech. The excerpts quoted in this chapter have been translated by the author from the original language into English, with extraordinary attention to preserving both semantic meanings and discursive nuances. While specific excerpts are highlighted for analytical purposes, they are drawn from a much larger corpus of data and are used to emphasize thematic patterns that recur throughout several episodes.

The analysis is conducted in accordance with the three-dimensional model of Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis, which regards discourse as simultaneously: a textual practice, a discursive practice, and a form of social practice. Meaning is linguistically formed, mediated through media content creation and consumption and anchored within broader socio-political and cultural contexts

5.1 Europe as a Civilization and Historical Project

A central discursive pattern present in the program Europa Christiana is a construction of the meaning of Europe as a historically continuous and civilizational entity, explicitly rooted in Christianity. This construction is not merely descriptive but deeply normative, integrating the history, the present and the future into a unified narrative. Analytically, one can clearly observe

that the conveyed discourse repeatedly transforms institutional, political integration into a broader question of historical heritage and memory. Europe appears as a project that can only be understood, and meaningful, if its religious and cultural roots are taken into serious consideration.

“Throughout its six decades of existence, the European Union has ensured the longest uninterrupted period of peace—aside from the Yugoslav episode. This collective and institutional entity has grown through all kinds of hurdles and zigzags, setbacks and compromises, with a variable geometry. We should begin by remembering. We were not alive then, but six states came together after the war, with Europe in ruins, still smoldering. And they said: stop—we must do what Immanuel Kant envisioned, what Winston Churchill proposed, what various visionaries saw—Catholic or not, but in any case Christian—who asked: why is it that Christian peoples on this continent, which has given the world the most precious gifts of civilization, cannot understand one another and enter into a period of agreed peace? That was the project.”⁸⁰

This textual fragment, quoted from an episode entitled ‘The Uncertain Future of Europe’ constitutes a clear example that European integration is not described primarily through institutional, political language use. In this episode, the Treaty of Rome, the economic cooperation, and/or patterns of supranational governance are pushed into the background, while moral imagination of Christian thinkers and visionary politicians is foregrounded. The beginning of integration is narrated as an act of civilizational self-recognition: Christian peoples, after the catastrophe of war, finally understand that peace is required by their own cultural and spiritual inheritance. The phrase “Christian peoples” does not function only descriptively. It constructs a collective subject. Europe is discursively imagined as a moral, civilizational community before it is depicted as a legal or economic structure. The rhetorical morphology operates as a discursive strategy implying a shared cultural identity, making European integration a moral obligation. Furthermore, in the episode, one can analytically sense a line of reasoning according to which peace is not only a result of modern, liberal, progressive development. The final understanding and acknowledgement of peace in Europe is presented both as a vision of the future, and as an opportunity grounded in moral and ethical resources of the past. Instead of imagining a peaceful, modern Europe in purely progressive terms, one may find an idea on a particular European synchronization of modern, democratic development, and concrete spiritual values and norms. Using Shmuel Eisenstadt conceptual

⁸⁰ Europa Christiana, “The Uncertain Future of Europe,” YouTube, March 17, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/A4V3xpGyHtU?si=ZeOHR7yXBfUqa7mJ>.

apparatus, this synchronization itself constitutes the European ontology of modernity among a larger variety of ‘multiple modernities’⁸¹ around the world.

The same historical logic appears in the comparison between the long duration of Christianity and the relatively recent emergence of the nation-states:

“So what do 2,000 years of European Christianity mean, let’s say, in comparison to 200 years of the nation-state? And yet, the passion with which people are attached to the idea of the nation-state is extraordinary. A political thinker, an author I know you greatly appreciate, Pierre Manent, states this plainly in his latest book. The only political idea that continues to give rise to, to generate genuine energy among the people is the national idea.”⁸²

This comparison reveals a hierarchy of temporal legitimacy. The Christian faith is shown to be the underlying structure of Europe, while nation-state is described as a relatively recent and secondary development. Through this framing, the discourse relativizes modern political structures and re-positions religious continuity as the primary foundation of European identity.

Another statement, made during one of the episodes explores a similar idea: “We want to explore today’s Europe—extremely complex, traversed by many ideas, and highly politically tense—in order to see to what extent it still remains the Europe we know, the one we have learned about from books, and to what extent it has broken away or, on the contrary, continues to draw nourishment from its own roots, from its own origins.”⁸³

The discourse unfolds through a process of neutralizing, which makes the connection between Europe and Christianity self-evident and historically inevitable. Methodologically, from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, this emphasizes a form of ideological work in which particular interpretation of history is presented as universal truth.

Regarding the discursive practice, this construction is shaped by the format of the program, which combines journalistic discussion with theological reflection. The presence of academic and clerical voices contributes to the legitimization of the narrative, allowing metaphysical and spiritual interpretations to be presented in a rational and authoritative manner. The content may be appealing to a variety of people with political and/or cultural and/or theological interests. Using the conceptual apparatus of Norman Fairclough, one may state that the text – the

⁸¹ Eisenstadt, Shmuel Noah. *Multiple Modernities*. New Brunswick, N.J. Transaction Publishers, cop, 2002.

⁸² Europa Christiana, “The Uncertain Future of Europe,” YouTube, March 17, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/A4V3xpGyHtU?si=ZeOHR7yXBfUqa7mJ>.

⁸³ Europa Christiana, “The Historical Identity of Europe,” YouTube, October 13, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/xA2JmhPmvbo?si=mvqP8OulPYr6UVxw>.

messages and meanings uttered by language use – is produced and distributed in a way that may lead to a broad public content consumption.

At the macro-level of social practice, the discourse constitutes a part of a wider effort to publicly reestablish the significance of religion in contemporary Europe. It reflects a response to perceived processes of secularization and cultural fragmentation, identifying Christianity as a unifying and stabilizing force.

Intertextual links to historical individuals and intellectual traditions deepen the meaning of Europe as a civilizational, Christian project. References to Immanuel Kant and Winston Churchill, as well as broader allusions to post-war European reconstruction, situate the discourse within a wider philosophical and historical frameworks. At the same time, the discourse selectively mobilizes these references, emphasizing their compatibility with a Christian understanding of Europe while downplaying alternative interpretations and meanings.

This process is an example of what professor Fairclough conceptualizes as the recontextualization of discourse, in which elements from different historical and ideological contexts are incorporated into a new discursive formation in order to produce meaning and legitimizing authority.⁸⁴

5.2 Europe as Crisis, Reflection, and Uncertainty

Besides the civilizational framing, the discourse has a strong ambivalence toward European integration, characterized by the coexistence of positive and negative evaluations.

On the one hand, European integration is regarded as a source of material and institutional benefits:

“It is clear that it was a blessing and, how should I put it, an exceptional, remarkable moment in Romania’s history—its accession. Without question. And it is evident that, I would say, far more good than harm has come from it over the past ten years. We are a people who, for 150 years, have wanted nothing more than this alone—to be part of Europe. [...] Has a Romanian ever wanted anything else?”⁸⁵

This is one of the most important passages for understanding Romanian Orthodox Europeanism. EU accession is called a “blessing,” a religiously charged term, but it is also

⁸⁴ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 84-85.

⁸⁵ Europa Christiana, “The Uncertain Future of Europe,” YouTube, March 17, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/A4V3xpGyHtU?si=ZeOHR7yXBfUqa7mJ>.

described as an “exceptional” historical moment. The discourse therefore sacralizes, or at least morally elevates, Romania’s European path. At the same time, it embeds this path within Romanian cultural history. European belonging is not presented as an external imposition after 1989. It is presented as a 150-year aspiration shared across social and intellectual classes. This declaration acknowledges the practical advantages of EU membership, in line with dominant narratives of modernization, development, and economic advancement. The emphasis on “good” portraits European Union as beneficial and necessary.

The rhetorical question “Has a Romanian ever wanted anything else?” universalizes the desire for Europe. It turns a political orientation into a national characteristic. This is not anti-European discourse. Rather, it is a discourse that insists Romania belongs to Europe, while remaining anxious about Romania’s subordinate position inside the EU. The tension between belonging and inequality is a key feature of the corpus.

One the other hand, this positive evaluation is most of the time accompanied by expressions of dissatisfaction and loss:

“At this moment, it is said that the European Union is in a period of reflection. Now, moments of reflection are the most dangerous, because in the end you do not know what the outcome of this process of collective thinking will be. On March 1, Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, presented in the European Parliament a White Paper outlining five possible scenarios for Europe’s future development [...] In the end, Europe will become a land of nostalgia. Let us begin this way: recent developments in the European world nevertheless push us toward a sense of regret. We have the feeling that we have lost something, don’t we? We had gained something, and yet we have lost something with the Union.”⁸⁶

The collective “we have the feeling” turns individual opinion into shared experience, signaling that this feeling of loss is shared. The term ‘something’ is imprecise and can be interpreted in a number of ways, for instance as a loss of culture, morality or identity.

This feeling of loss is further developed by means of metaphorical language, in the following way: “Europe will become a land of nostalgia”. This metaphor builds up Europe as a place defined not by progress but by longing for the past times. The term “nostalgia” adds an emotional dimension that contrasts sharply with the rational and technocratic image of the European Union.

⁸⁶ Europa Christiana, “The Uncertain Future of Europe,” YouTube, March 17, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/A4V3xpGyHtU?si=ZeOHR7yXBfUqa7mJ>.

Another relevant dimension of the discourse is the construction of Europe as being in a moment of crisis and uncertainty, often framed through the term “reflection”. The concept of “reflection”, which in ordinary usage has positive connotations, is reinterpreted as dangerous, suggesting indecision, fragility, and unpredictability.

The sense of uncertainty is also perpetuated by references to multiple possible futures: “Five possible scenarios for Europe’s future development.” The plurality of scenarios implies a lack of direction and fragmentation of vision. Europe is not conceived as a stable or unified project, but as an entity whose future is open, contested, and uncertain.

The coexistence of these opposing statements creates a discursive tension that is central to the overall narrative, as it is exposed in the episode ‘European Law: Sources and Meanings’:

“At one point, you said—and I agree with this—that our good fortune is that we are in the European Union, because otherwise who knows what might have happened to the institutions of this state, given this, well, how should I put it, this mental and emotional state of disorder within our society. On the other hand, there are many who say: ‘Sir, that is where our problems come from.’ Because European law, to which we too are now subject as part of the European Union, nevertheless imposes certain things on us that are, how should I put it, unnatural, unfamiliar, or unusual for the particular character of the Romanian people.”⁸⁷

Rather than managing this tension, the discourse maintains it, allowing both perspectives to coexist.

From a CDA angle, this ambivalence can be understood as a strategy that enables critique without rejection. By acknowledging the benefits of integration, the discourse avoids positioning itself as ant-European. Therefore, by emphasizing loss, it opens space for cultural and moral critique.

At the level of social practice, this reflects broader patterns in post-communist societies, where European integration is experienced simultaneously as an opportunity and a challenge.

Regarding discursive practice, this reflects the impact of contemporary political debates (for example Juncker’s White Paper), which are reinterpreted within a wider narrative of crisis.

In the episode ‘Eastern Europe: Weaknesses and Interferences’, the sense of crisis is directly explored: “It is a serious situation. The European Union has been struck down by a wave of crises—because, in fact, it was not just a single crisis. We mentioned the rejection of the European Constitution

⁸⁷ Europa Christiana, “European Law: Sources and Meanings,” YouTube, June 1, 2019, <https://youtu.be/I5WRT5yhBIA?si=3MpPIKJ4OJxXzntx>.

project. That was, so to speak, the first major obstacle where the Union stumbled.”⁸⁸ On the level of social practice, this construction aligns with multiple European discourses about the “crisis of the EU”, including Brexit, economic instability, and political fragmentation. Within this religious media context, the dilemma is not only political but also civilizational and moral.

The discourse of crisis is also built up by the use of modality and evaluative language, which indicate varying degrees of certainty, concern, and judgment. Expressions such as “we have the feeling” or “it seems” gives a subjective dimension to the interpretation, which becomes a shared perception rather than objective facts.

Moreover, stronger modal constructions and evaluative terms as characterization of reflection as “dangerous”, contribute to constructing a sense of urgency and instability. This combination of hedging and strong evaluation allows the discourse to be both cautious and persuasive, balancing analytical reflection with implicit normative positioning. From a CDA perspective, this is a strategic use of language, in which speakers manage their authority and guide listener perception.

5.3 Critique of Bureaucracy and Elite Detachment

A further dimension of the discourse articulated in Europa Christiana, especially in the episode entitled ‘The Uncertain Future of Europe’, constructs the European Union as a bureaucratic and technocratic structure lacking true connection to human experience. This is uttered through explicit critiques of bureaucratic language and institutional practices:

“Nowadays, many people complain that they cannot understand the overly technical bureaucratic language of directives and Commission communications. They say these people live in an artificial bubble of well-paid Eurocrats, moving from one meeting to another, no longer truly connected. Then one might ask: ‘Tell me, who actually follows Euronews systematically?’ A bureaucracy does not produce a discourse that speaks to hearts and minds. Nor has bureaucracy ever been attractive—whether it was Prussian or under any other banner, Russian, Tsarist, or communist. No, it is not appealing. But without it, can you really hold together such a complex, heterogeneous whole, give it direction, and continually find that common denominator?”⁸⁹

Following Norman Fairclough’s model, this passage constitutes an analytically important part of the textual dimension because it contains both critique and concession.⁹⁰ The critique is clear: EU language is technical, distant, and disconnected. The metaphor “artificial bubble”

⁸⁸ Europa Christiana, “Eastern Europe: Weaknesses and Interferences,” YouTube, December 28, 2018, <https://youtu.be/7lwYelWPPF8?si=ozuY3Vkl6-NEOokb>.

⁸⁹ Europa Christiana, “The Uncertain Future of Europe,” YouTube, March 17, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/A4V3xpGyHtU?si=ZeOHR7yXBfUqa7mJ>.

⁹⁰ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993), 62-65.

constructs Brussels as enclosed, self-referential, and socially detached. The term “well-paid Eurocrats” adds moral evaluation, suggesting privilege and distance from ordinary experience. At the same time, the passage does not completely reject bureaucracy, acknowledging its importance for complex and heterogeneous political ensembles.

The phrase “souls and minds” is central as well. It frames the problem of the EU not simply as communication failure but as anthropological failure. The EU speaks in directives, communiqués, and procedures, while people need meaning, recognition, and belonging. The discourse therefore, constructs European integration as administratively successful but existentially weak. This is one of the strongest findings of the analysis: the EU is not condemned because it is ineffective, but because it is incomplete. It can manage, regulate, fund, and coordinate, but it cannot by itself answer questions of identity, meaning, sacrifice, memory, and purpose. This critique is also connected to the program’s media form. *Europa Christiana* generally performs the kind of discourse that it claims bureaucracy cannot produce. It speaks conversationally, morally, historically, and theologically. It addresses viewers not only as citizens, but as humans embedded in religious, national, and civilizational narratives. In this sense, the program does not merely analyze the EU’s communicative deficit. It positions Orthodox media as a possible corrective to that deficit. Trinitas TV does not ask Romania to leave the European Union. It asks Europe to remember what it is. The program’s critique is internal to European belonging: because Romania belongs to Europe, and because Europe is understood as Christian and civilizational, the EU must be criticized when it forgets those foundations.

At the level of social practice, this discourse reflects broader concerns about the democratic deficit of the European Union and the perceived distance between institutions and citizens. However, it does not lead to outright rejection, rather, it functions as a call for a more human-centered and culturally grounded European project. In accordance with the previously mentioned Joseph H. Weiler, European integration may embrace legal rules and commitments as well as normative identity providing influences from history.⁹¹

⁹¹ Joseph H. Weiler, “A Christian Europe? Europe and Christianity: Rules of Commitment,” *European View* 6, no. 1 (December 2007): 143–50, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12290-007-0020-8>, 143-146.

5.4 Romania between Inferiority and Aspiration

The Romanian position is constructed through a complex combination of self-criticism, dependency, and aspiration. Romania is described as economically and structurally inferior:

“That there is an enormous gap in economic and technological terms; that after the years of communism these countries no longer know what democracy means and must be democratically ‘re-educated’; that they lack a civil society capable of producing an alternative elite to that of the totalitarian regime.”⁹²

This discourse points to inequality and supports a hierarchical vision of Europe, which is further reinforced by quantitative comparisons: “Germany is about twenty-five times larger than Romania economically. These are the relations of force.”⁹³ The use of numerical data provides the discourse an appearance of objectivity while further increasing the narrative of disparity and dependency. Moreover, the statement: “We are perceived out there as peripheral”⁹⁴, situates Romania through the term “peripheral” in a hierarchical spatial frame, re-enforcing a European “center” and “periphery” separation. This is part of larger debates of inequality inside the European Union.

The discourse also includes self-criticism features: “Don’t they trust us? They don’t trust us. Why? [...] We have merely pretended to integrate into the European Union. We have mimicked it. Why not say it? Now I can say it.”⁹⁵ This suggests that the integration of Romania has been superficial or incomplete, shifting part of the responsibility onto domestic actors.

The findings strongly support the theoretical framework of multiple modernities. The discourse does not assume that modernization must lead to the privatization or disappearance of religion. Instead, it presents Romania as a case in which modern institutions, EU membership, constitutional order, and public Orthodoxy coexist. This is consistent with the idea that modernity is not a single Western secular path, but a plurality of trajectories shaped by historical and cultural contexts.⁹⁶

⁹² Europa Christiana, “The Uncertain Future of Europe,” YouTube, March 17, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/A4V3xpGyHtU?si=ZeOHR7yXBfUqa7mJ>.

⁹³ Europa Christiana, “The Uncertain Future of Europe,” YouTube, March 17, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/A4V3xpGyHtU?si=ZeOHR7yXBfUqa7mJ>.

⁹⁴ Europa Christiana, “The State of the European Union,” YouTube, September 22, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/2CvAiDIWDn8?si=J5IOgPbqP7HDDz7r>.

⁹⁵ Europa Christiana, “The State of the European Union,” YouTube, September 22, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/2CvAiDIWDn8?si=J5IOgPbqP7HDDz7r>.

⁹⁶ Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities”, *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 1–3.

Romania's position is especially important because the discourse repeatedly acknowledges material and institutional inequality. Romania is economically weaker, technologically delayed, and politically less influential than the Western core. Yet this does not lead to a narrative of civilizational inferiority. The discourse compensates for material periphery with symbolic centrality: Romania's Orthodox identity and historical aspiration toward Europe are presented as sources of meaning.

In this sense, Trinitas TV constructs Romania as a peripheral but meaningful European actor. Romania may need convergence, infrastructure, and institutional maturity, but Europe also needs memory, roots, and Christian meaning. This reverses the usual hierarchy between West and East. The West may be economically stronger, but the East may preserve dimensions of identity that secularized Western Europe risks losing.

5.5 Laicity, Secularism, and the Boundaries of the Secular State

The episode 'Laicity and Secularism' adds a crucial conceptual layer to the analysis because it distinguishes between laicity as institutional neutrality and secularism as an ideology that pushes religion out of society. This distinction directly supports the thesis's theoretical framework, especially the use of Habermas and Casanova.⁹⁷ The program does not reject the secular state as such. Instead, it argues for a particular form of secular state: one that protects religious freedom and neutrality without becoming anti-religious.

"Many people confuse secularism with atheism. Many understand a secular state as a kind of state completely stripped of anything religious. Others, on the contrary, understand a secular state as one that acts as an impartial arbiter among different religions. We will see where these ideas come from. We will also look at how things stand in Romania and try to figure out, as best we can, the most appropriate, best-balanced form of secularism."⁹⁸

The opening framing is important because it presents laicity as a problem of interpretation rather than as an enemy. The program does not begin by condemning laicity. It begins by clarifying it. The phrase "best-balanced form" is significant: the desired model is not the abolition of secular state neutrality, but a balanced arrangement in which religion remains socially visible. The guest then defines laicity in terms of separation, neutrality, religious liberty, and equality:

⁹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on a Post-Secular Society," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 7-8; José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 211-214.

⁹⁸ Europa Christiana, "Laicity and Secularism," YouTube, April 21, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/HDcNaYiPqRs?si=5ITuDemjdLBrx6Gx>.

“In recent years, researchers have argued that separation is not, in fact, an end in itself, nor the teleological goal of secularism. Rather, separation is a means through which the principle of secularism is realized. Alongside separation, there is also the principle of the neutrality of public institutions with regard to any religious belief.”⁹⁹

This passage complicates any simple claim that Trinitas TV rejects secular modernity. On the contrary, the program accepts a version of laicity grounded in religious freedom and non-discrimination. This is very close to the theoretical distinction made in the literature between secular state neutrality and the exclusion of religion from public reason. The problem is not neutrality. The problem is when neutrality becomes a militant project of privatization. The episode makes this distinction explicit by separating laicity from secularism:

“Secularism contains within it the idea of separation, but today it is also interpreted as an ideological philosophical current. It does not want only to separate Church from state or religion from school. It wants to go further on a militant path, to separate religion from society, on the idea that faith is a private option and that we should not manifest our religious ideas or belonging in the public space. Secularism is a kind of radicalized laicity, ideologized and supported by a political and ideological current.”¹⁰⁰

This fragment provides one of the clearest examples of boundary-making in the corpus. The acceptable boundary is between Church and state; the unacceptable boundary is between religion and society. In other words, institutional differentiation is accepted, but social privatization is rejected. This directly supports the thesis’s argument that the ROC discourse operates within modernity rather than outside it. The discourse does not seek a return to pre-modern fusion between throne and altar. It seeks a public role for religion inside a secular democratic framework. Another statement about secularism indicates that this process can be beneficial for the Church: “What you are telling me is interesting—that this phenomenon of secularization may bring significant benefits to the Church.”¹⁰¹

The distinction also helps explain the program’s attitude toward the EU. European institutions are not criticized because they are secular in the sense of neutral. They are criticized when secular neutrality appears to become a cultural reluctance to recognize Christian heritage or a political pressure to privatize religion.

⁹⁹ Europa Christiana, “Laicity and Secularism,” YouTube, April 21, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/HDcNaYiPqRs?si=5ITuDemjdLBrx6Gx>.

¹⁰⁰ Europa Christiana, “Laicity and Secularism,” YouTube, April 21, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/HDcNaYiPqRs?si=5ITuDemjdLBrx6Gx>.

¹⁰¹ Europa Christiana, “Secularization among Romanians,” YouTube, November 10, 2017, https://youtu.be/ghzMWWKL_98?si=OeMpQM2vC4wAAp6y.

The program's position can therefore be summarized as follows: the state may be neutral, but society cannot be spiritually empty; institutions may be secular, but public culture cannot be understood without religion; pluralism is acceptable, but it should not require historical amnesia about Christianity. This is the post-secular logic of the discourse.

5.6 National Attachment and the Limits of European Identity

The corpus repeatedly suggests that European identity is difficult to construct because national identity remains affectively stronger. This argument appears in several episodes and can be developed as one of the central analytical points. In 'The Historical Identity of Europe' episode, the speakers discuss the difficulty of producing a common European historical consciousness. The problem is not only institutional but emotional and pedagogical.

"My sense is that people's attachment to the European Union is an attachment to an instrument of prosperity, whereas attachment to the nation-state, to one's country, is much deeper. It is, I would say, an attachment of the heart—of identity, as you put it. It is like saying, 'I am attached to my car'—and many people are; some even give them names and treat them affectionately. But it is different when you say, 'I am attached to my child and to my father.' And how do we create this identity? Through textbooks—through the history textbook, through the Romanian language textbook, for instance. How did this consciousness emerge, how was it constructed? Because national identity—and identity more generally—is a construct."¹⁰²

This passage is extremely useful because it explicitly theorizes identity as construction, while still defending the emotional depth of national belonging. The EU is described through the metaphor of an "instrument of prosperity," while the nation is compared to family. This contrast builds a hierarchy of attachment: the EU is useful, but the nation is intimate; the EU is functional, but the nation is affective; the EU brings prosperity, but the nation gives identity. The car/family analogy makes the argument accessible to viewers and translates an abstract debate about European identity into ordinary emotional language. It also reveals a limit of European integration: economic benefits alone cannot generate deep belonging. From a CDA perspective, this is a powerful evaluative distinction because it positions European identity as thin and national identity as thick.¹⁰³ It does not deny that European identity can be constructed, but it implies that this construction is far more difficult than the construction of national identity because it lacks the same educational, linguistic, and emotional infrastructure.

¹⁰² Europa Christiana, "The Historical Identity of Europe," YouTube, October 13, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/xA2JmhPmvbo?si=mvqP8OulPYr6UVxw>.

¹⁰³ N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity, 1993).

Another passage from the same episode develops this idea by showing how hard it would be to produce a shared European narrative:

“But in Europe it is very difficult to have a single European history textbook in which everyone can find themselves, because every identity would need to be represented there. It would perhaps end up being dominated by what? By the history of the great nations that essentially shaped Europe, overshadowing the smaller identities, the smaller nations. So it is very difficult to build such a thing. Don’t you think that a Europe like this—homogeneous, linear, as one might wish—cannot really be achieved?”¹⁰⁴

Here, the difficulty of European identity is linked to plurality and hierarchy. A common European history risks becoming the history of the powerful. Smaller nations might be “crushed” by the narratives of larger ones. The language of crushing is strong and reveals a fear that European identity may become homogenizing rather than pluralistic. This is a particularly relevant point for Romania, which often appears in the discourse as both European and peripheral. The fear is not simply that Europe will erase religion. It is also that Europe will erase smaller national histories. Therefore, Trinitas TV’s discourse does not oppose European belonging, but it insists on limits: Europe must not become a mechanism that dissolves national memory, religious inheritance, or small-state identities. This is why the program can support European integration while resisting the idea of a fully homogeneous European identity.

This supports the thesis’s methodological choice to analyze media discourse. The Church’s position toward Europe is not only found in official statements or theological documents. It is constructed through repeated televised conversations in which Europe becomes a topic of moral, historical, and spiritual reflection.

5.7 Orthodoxy, Political Identity, and the East-West Boundary

The episode on the political identity of Orthodoxy and the later discussions of East and West add another layer to the analysis. The discourse positions Orthodoxy not merely as private belief, but as a historical and cultural formation with political implications. However, the program often avoids direct theocratic claims.

This is important for the thesis because the Romanian Orthodox Church’s discourse about Europe is not only about the EU. It is also about Romania’s location between East and West. Romania appears as a country shaped by Orthodox Christianity, post-communist transformation, and EU membership. The discourse must therefore negotiate multiple

¹⁰⁴ Europa Christiana, “The Historical Identity of Europe,” YouTube, October 13, 2017, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/xA2JmhPmvbo?si=mvqP8OulPYr6UVxw>.

boundaries: between religion and secularism, between nation and Europe, between East and West, and between institutional modernity and cultural continuity.

The East-West theme is particularly relevant because it prevents the analysis from treating “Europe” as a single secular space. The corpus repeatedly suggests that Western Europe and Eastern Europe have different historical experiences. Western Europe is linked with secularization, bureaucratic development, and liberal institutions; Eastern Europe is linked with communism, delayed modernization, and the survival or revival of religious identity, as it was sustained by the scholar Grace Davie and presented in the theoretical chapter.¹⁰⁵ The program does not present Eastern Europe simply as backward. Rather, it constructs Eastern Europe as a space whose weakness is material but whose memory may be spiritually significant.

“The East-West differences, the confessional identities, were first built in a polemic way. by the two parties in conflict, so to speak, or who were arguing, and then by a so-called secular historiography, which saw in Christianity a kind of original sin of Europe, and there were quite a few thinkers who even promoted a kind of return to paganism [...] Among the religions of the world, Christianity is distinguished by the fact that it gives the spiritual component priority over the social component.”¹⁰⁶

This finding helps answer the research question: What is the discourse of the Romanian Orthodox Church about European integration as transmitted through Trinitas TV? The answer is that the discourse is one of ambivalent affirmation. It affirms European belonging, but criticizes the EU’s technocratic and secular tendencies. It accepts modern institutions, but rejects ideological secularism. It values national identity, but does not deny European identity. It presents Orthodoxy not as outside Europe, but as one of the resources through which Europe can recover its meaning.

5.8 “A Europe We Can Believe In”: Conservative Reinterpretation without Simple Rejection

The episode “A Europe We Can Believe In” is especially useful for strengthening the analysis because it is organized around the Paris Declaration, a document produced by conservative European intellectuals. The framing of the episode shows that the program is aware of transnational conservative debates and uses them to interpret European crisis. This expands the analysis beyond Romanian nationalism and shows that Trinitas TV participates in a wider European conversation about Christian identity, liberal modernity, and cultural continuity.

¹⁰⁵ Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2002), 2-5.

¹⁰⁶ Europa Christiana, “The Political Identity of Orthodoxy,” YouTube, January 19, 2018, accessed May 15, 2026, <https://youtu.be/vjJmN20jvJk?si=bKdyMTDghlGRyy37>.

“At the beginning of autumn, a large group of European intellectuals published a document called The Paris Declaration. The names and signatures of this document are among the most important. Unfortunately, the mainstream press did not pay much attention to this document. However, it is still on the internet, thanks be to God we have the internet.”¹⁰⁷

The reference to the mainstream press is significant because it constructs a contrast between dominant liberal media and alternative intellectual voices. The program positions itself as a space where ignored or marginalized conservative arguments can be recovered. The phrase “thanks be to God we have the internet” adds an informal religious tone while also pointing to the media ecology through which alternative discourses circulate.

The episode’s title itself is analytically powerful: “A Europe We Can Believe In.” Belief here is double. It can mean political trust, but in this religious media context it also evokes faith. The title implies that the current Europe has become difficult to believe in because it lacks cultural and spiritual depth.

This section can be used to argue that Trinitas TV does not construct a rejectionist Euroscepticism. Instead, it constructs a conservative Europeanism. The discourse wants Europe to continue, but as a Europe that remembers Christianity, respects national identities, avoids ideological secularism, and resists reducing human beings to consumers, labor units, or administrative subjects.

5.9 Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that the discourse of Europa Christiana constructs European integration through a complex and ambivalent framework. Europe is represented as a Christian civilizational space, a historical project of peace, an institutional framework of prosperity, a bureaucratic structure, a site of crisis, and a contested field of identity. These meanings are not separate; they interact and sometimes contradict one another.

The analysis also suggests that Orthodox perspectives deserve more attention in European studies. Much scholarship on religion and European integration focuses on Catholicism, Protestantism, Christian Democracy, or secular-liberal debates in Western Europe. The Romanian Orthodox case shows how Eastern Christianity negotiates EU membership through a combination of aspiration, critique, and civilizational self-understanding. This adds nuance to debates on post-communist Europe and multiple modernities.

¹⁰⁷ Europa Christiana, “A Europe We Can Believe In,” YouTube, January 26, 2018, accessed May, 2026, <https://youtu.be/z2fETG6AAD8?si=KMolk3luEtO70oG7>.

Finally, the discourse reveals that the conflict is not simply between religion and Europe, but between different definitions of Europe. One definition sees Europe primarily as law, market, rights, and institutional governance. The Trinitas discourse does not necessarily reject these elements, but it subordinates them to another definition: Europe as Christian civilization, historical memory, and moral community. The struggle is therefore not over whether Romania belongs to Europe, but over what Europe means.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Main Findings

This thesis examined how the Romanian Orthodox Church constructs its discourse on European integration through its institutional media. In the analytical focus, the author placed the Trinitas TV and especially its program *Europa Christiana*, analyzing a large number of episodes broadcasted between 2016 and 2019. The following research question which guided the thesis: What is the discourse of the Romanian Orthodox Church about European integration as transmitted through Trinitas TV? The study started from the observation that religion and European integration are usually scholarly analyzed with a focus on institutional relations, church-state politics, legal debates, or value conflicts, while less attention is given to religious media as sites where the meaning of Europe and European integration is interpreted, narrated, and symbolically negotiated.

The analysis showed that Trinitas TV does not communicate a simple anti-European or pro-European position. Instead, it constructs and articulates a discourse that can be described as ambivalent Orthodox Europeanism. The European Union is acknowledged as beneficial for Romania in terms of peace, economic development, geopolitical security, and Romania's long-standing aspiration to participate in process of European integration. At the same time, the EU is also represented as bureaucratic, morally uncertain, secularized, and sometimes detached from the deeper Christian foundations of European civilization. This means that the discourse does not reject European project, but seeks to redefine it.

A central finding is the distinction between Europe and the European Union. Europe is represented as a historical, cultural, and civilizational space shaped by Christianity. The EU, by contrast, appears as a political and institutional project that is valuable but incomplete when reduced to administration, regulation, and economic governance. Through this distinction,

Trinitas TV can affirm Romania's European belonging while also criticizing the current direction of European integration. The discourse therefore, produces a conservative and religious form of Europeanism: it accepts integration, but argues that Europe needs spiritual and cultural foundations in order to remain meaningful.

The analysis also identified several recurring discursive patterns. Firstly, Europe is framed as a Christian civilizational project, with Christianity presented not only as a historical legacy but as the source of Europe's deeper identity. Secondly, European Union is portrayed as being in crisis, reflection, or uncertainty, especially when its political and bureaucratic structures appear disconnected from moral and spiritual meaning. Thirdly, the European Union is criticized for technocracy and elite detachment, through contrasts between “bureaucracy and soul”, procedures and meaning, institutions and human experience. Fourthly, Romania is positioned as both peripheral and European: economically weaker and politically less powerful than Western states, but culturally and historically an important part of Europe. Finally, secularism is treated ambivalently. Institutional neutrality and religious freedom can be accepted, but secularism becomes problematic when it is understood as the exclusion of religion from public life.

These findings show that Trinitas TV constructs European integration as a process that must be interpreted through identity, tradition, and religion, not only through institutions and policies. European integration is therefore represented as both necessary and problematic: necessary for Romania's socio-economic development and political security, but problematic when it seems to require cultural self-erasure and the exclusion of religion from public life.

6.2 Theoretical and Empirical Contribution

The thesis contributes to debates on modernity, secularization, multiple modernities, and religion in the public sphere. The findings challenge the idea that modernization and European integration necessarily imply the separation of religion from public institutional sphere. In the case analyzed here, religion remains a public interpretive framework through which European integration is understood. Trinitas TV does not simply preserve religious language in a private space; it uses religious and cultural categories to define what Europe ontologically is, what it has lost, and what it should become.

The study also supports the relevance of multiple modernities theory for understanding the discourse of Trinitas TV. Therefore, Romanian case does not fit in a linear model in which

Europeanization automatically produces secularization. Rather, the discourse analyzed here suggests a negotiated model of modernity: Romania is imagined as European and modern, but also Orthodox, traditional, and historically distinct. This confirms that modern institutions and religious traditions may coexist and interact in complex ways, especially in post-communist societies where religion is strongly connected to national identity.

Empirically, the thesis contributes by analyzing a previously understudied Trinitas TV which constitutes an important institutional media actor in Romania. Religious media are not merely channels for internal religious communication. They are also spaces where broader political and cultural meanings are produced. By analyzing televised religious discourse, the thesis shows how the Romanian Orthodox Church participates in public debates about Europe, modernity, secularism, national identity, and moral order. This is particularly important because institutional Orthodox media remain underexplored in European studies, despite their role in shaping public narratives in Orthodox-majority societies.

Methodologically, Critical Discourse Analysis made it possible to connect textual patterns, discursive practices, and broader sociocultural contexts. The analysis examined both what was said about Europe and European integration, and also how Europe was constructed through metaphors, evaluations, oppositions, historical references, and recurring narratives. This approach helped reveal the deeper logic of the discourse: a critique of the EU that is not a rejection of Europe, but an attempt to reclaim Europe as a Christian and value based civilization.

6.3 Future Research

This thesis can serve as the foundation for future doctoral research. A possible PhD project would expand the analysis comparatively by examining Orthodox religious media in Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine. These three cases are especially relevant because they occupy different positions in relation to the European Union: Romania is already an EU member state, Moldova has candidate status, and Ukraine is also a candidate country whose European aspirations are developing in the context of war and national resistance.

Future research could ask whether the ambivalent Orthodox Europeanism identified in the Romanian case also appears in other Orthodox media contexts, or whether Moldova and Ukraine produce different religious narratives of Europe. In Moldova, Orthodox media may construct Europe through the tension between pro-European and pro-Russian geopolitical

orientations. In Ukraine, religious discourse may link Europe to sovereignty, survival, resistance, and separation from Russian religious-political influence. Comparing these cases would make it possible to understand how Orthodox media adapt their discourse to different political realities: membership, candidacy, geopolitical polarization, and war.

The future project could also broaden the empirical corpus beyond television. It could include radio broadcasts, official Church websites, YouTube channels, Facebook pages, podcasts, and other digital platforms connected to Orthodox institutions. This would allow the analysis to examine how religious messages about Europe change across media formats, from longer intellectual discussions to shorter and more emotional digital communication. Methodologically, the project could continue to use Critical Discourse Analysis, while adding comparative and possibly audience-oriented methods such as interviews, focus groups, or digital reception analysis.

In this sense, the present thesis opens a broader research agenda on religious media and the construction of Europe in Eastern Europe. Such research would contribute to European studies, religious studies, media studies, and discourse studies by showing that European integration is not only a legal or institutional process, but also a symbolic and communicative process shaped by actors with cultural and religious authority.

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