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DOCTORAL SCHOOL HISTORY. CIVILIZATION. CULTURE

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

# THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF DIVORCE IN THE ROMANIAN LEGISLATION OF THE PERIOD 1864-2009

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**KEYWORDS:** divorce, dissolution of marriage, legislation, methods, grounds for divorce, the Communist regime, the interwar period, codes

#### **INTRODUCTION**

I have chosen as a research theme "THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF DI-VORCE IN THE ROMANIAN LEGISLATION OF THE PERIOD 1864-2009" because I considered that my experience as a practitioner, combined with the theoretical perspective, can contribute to the development of this field. According to the material that was available to me, I have structured the thesis into 5 chapters, of unequal length, divided, in their turn, into several subchapters, in which I tried to offer a historical-juridical interpretation of the divorce phenomenon in Romanian space, from the first legislative texts in modern law to the adoption of the new civil Code. Following the classical methodological structure, the text is preceded by an Introduction and a list of abbreviations, and it ends with conclusions and a Bibliography.

The PhD thesis approaches, therefore, a theme of great contemporary relevance: the theme of the dissolution of marriage under the current legislation. It pertains to the category of works that have both a theoretical and a practical importance, highlighting the essential aspects of the dissolution of marriage in the context of the transition from the procedure of marriage dissolution imposed by the Old Code of the family to the procedure of marriage dissolution imposed by the current Civil Code. In today's postmodern society, the traditional form of family organization is undergoing new metamorphoses, which requires the adjustment of the legislation to these challenges, culminating with the provisions of the new Civil Code.

Such a theme, with a particularly complex character, approaches, from a historical perspective, the articles of the Civil Code governing family relations, found in Book II, entitled "On family" (Art. no. 259-534); the theme under consideration here is found in the Civil Code (Art. no. 373-404). The synchronic and diachronic perspective on this subject

starts from the idea of the change in the procedure of marriage dissolution from the Family Code to the Civil Code, the most important aspects being those which refer to the procedure of divorce by a notary, the drawing of a matrimonial convention, establishing the nature of the property, whether it is jointly or individually owned, etc.

The subject of this research consists in a reconsideration of the views of the church and the secular authorities on family and marriage termination during the modern and contemporary periods.

Therefore, in the civil law system, the issue of divorce refers to the first use in the text of the notion of family, as well as to the evolution of divorce throughout time, this aspect representing the objective and real element specific to the importance and contemporary relevance of the theme under consideration here.

I what follows, I shall synthetically present the contents of the chapters, the main findings of the research and the conclusions I arrived at in each chapter.

Chapter 1 entitled "A historical overview of divorce in the Romanian space prior to World War I" comprises aspects referring to marriage under Romanian law, the dissolution of marriage under the Civil Law and the Law of the Orthodox Christian Church, the institution of divorce seen through the lens of the Calimach Code and the Caragea Code, the dissolution of marriage in the legislation prior to the Romanian Civil Code of 1864, an analysis of divorce from the perspective of the Civil Code of 1864, the Constitution of 1866 and aspects of divorce in Transylvania up until World War I.

Marriage was an act of definitive union between the spouses, and divorce was very rarely encountered and condemned. "Who marries gets united for life" was the central idea of an old proverb. Every marriage carried a certain destiny within itself, good or bad, and the relations between the young spouses became the object of the community's keen interest.

Church-sanctioned divorce was the "official and correct way of obtaining the dissolution of a marriage and the possibility of contracting another marriage". It was to be ruled on and approved solely by the eparchial bishop and not by any other administrative body, based on the definitive ruling of the court of law and the two spouses' request.

The dissolution of marriage was the legal means whereby at the request of one of

the spouses, the court put an end to the marriage.

Consequently, throughout time, the family represented the basis of the Romanian society: the head of the family expressed his authority over his life partner, children, slaves and all the goods. Still, after years, the woman gained a respected position in the family.

In popular terms, marriage entailed a vital element in the lives of people, and the most important element for starting a family was the dowry, which, in case of divorce, was returned. The relationship between the spouses was unique and marriage was contracted for life.

The word divorce is derived from the French *divorce*, and a plausible definition is "the burial of a deceased marriage".

Several specific systems of divorce may be identified:

- Divorce as a remedy;
- Divorce as a penalty;
- The mixed conception.

In the current legislation, the main specific concepts of divorce are:

- The concept of divorce through the effect of the partiest, will with its origin in the *repudium*, it signifies the banishment of the wife by the husband;
- The concept of divorce based on the effect of a judicial decision divorce occurs solely by judicial decision and on the basis of concrete grounds for divorce;
- The mixed concept of divorce is based on the dissolution of marriage through the will of the spouses and as an effect of the judicial decision, when the spouses cannot agree on divorce, as well as in special circumstances;
- The concept of divorce based on the analysis of the Romanian Civil Code of 1865
  the most important aspect of this conception refers to the fact that the husband had to have a minimum age of 25 years, while his wife had to have a minimum age of 21 years;
- The conception adopted by the Civil Code. The dissolution of marriage through divorce occurs if: it is done by agreement between the spouses, at the request of both spouses or at the request of one spouse, accepted by the other spouse; it occurs when, due to serious reasons, the relations between spouses are irretrievably broken down and the continuation of the marriage is no longer possible; at the request of the husband or the wife, after more than two years since the separation of the two, divorce is granted at the

request of that spouse whose health condition makes it impossible for the marriage to continue.

In time, conceptions regarding divorce embraced different forms, but it may be concluded that they can be divided into two groups. According to the manner in which the specific legislation embraced certain categories of grounds for divorce, we may distinguish: the Concept of divorce-punishment; the Concept of divorce-remedy and the Mixed Concept of divorce.

Concepts that are based on the legal grounds for divorce: as the effect of the spouses' will; as the effect of a judicial decision; and as the effect of the spouses' will or as the effect of a judicial decision.

In the past of our Church, marriage and family were regulated by codices.

Morally, it may be ascertained that the union of man and woman in marriage is eternal and not even death can dissolve it. However, in the case of divorce, the so-called churchly divorce can be pronounced, and in church an individual can marry only up to three times, while cohabitation is not recognized by the church.

Courts with jurisdiction over matrimonial matters existed in our Church until the entry into force of the Civil Code of 1865, when compulsory civil marriage was introduced, but at present divorce cases are within the jurisdiction of civil courts. After 1864, divorce, while accepted by the Orthodox Church, was difficult to obtain.

The small number of divorces recorded by the authorities in the late 19th-early 20th century was determined by:

- The attitude of the church, which did not accept the dissolution of a marriage blessed by the priest;
  - The high costs of divorce proceedings;
  - Folk mentality.

**Chapter 2** concerns "The problem of divorce during the interwar period" and it comprises an overview of specific aspects of the Constitution of 1923, followed by an analysis of the evolution of the divorce institution from the Constitution of 1923 until 1947, and a case study relating to divorce proceedings during the interwar period.

Most of the theories and orientations in the field of Public Law consider that every constitution represents the fundamental law of the state, consisting of a set of juridical

norms and principles structured as a well-consolidated system and having superior legal force over the other ordinary laws. The 1866 Constitution was inspired by the model of the Belgian Constitution of 1831, considered as one of the most liberal in Europe, but adapted to the realities of Romanian political life.

During the interwar period, in the vision of the Romanian Orthodox Church, not every misunderstanding between the spouses was likely to represents grounds for divorce, but only those of a permanent nature, of particular and irreconcilable gravity, which had to be demonstrated as such based on a series of concrete facts, established on the basis of the evidence administered in the case; the mere fact that a husband had not contributed to the household maintenance could not, in itself, represent sufficient grounds for divorce, as it could be settled in other legal ways than the dissolution of marriage.

Regarding the illness of a spouse as grounds for the dissolution of marriage, the serious ailment of one of the spouses, irrespective of whether the disease was contracted before or during the marriage, could not in itself lead to divorce, in the absence of some liability or the danger of contagion, and in such a situation the "healthy spouse cannot avoid the legal obligation of giving the other spouse the moral and material support he or she needs".

To exemplify the divorce proceedings from the interwar period, I resorted to presenting a case study that shows the manner in whih a divorce lawsuit ocurred in those days.

Chapter 3, "Regulations governing divorce during the communist period" comprises an analysis of the Family Code of 1954 - the types of marriage dissolution and termination, the evolution of divorce during the communist regime and the restrictions imposed by the communist regime on private and family life (the analysis of the grounds for divorce and the restrictions imposed by the communist regime and the analysis of divorce during the communist period), followed by judicial practice, and a case study concerning both-fault divorce proceedings.

The period 1948-1989 was extremely complex in terms of the major role played by the state through its highly active demographic policy, the communist government always intervening in regulating the fertility behavior of the population, the family's life cycle, introducing laws and imposing coercive measures designed to ensure a satisfactory demographic growth. In Romania, the Communist government acted on three levels to enforce

its demographic policy: first, it acted by repression, introducing an intricate legislation against abortion and divorce; then the Bucharest regime promoted pronatalist incentives measures, granting financial aid and other benefits to women and families with many children; not least, it acted by persuasion, changing and directing public opinion through the media for the purposes of ensuring a fecund reproductive behaviour. Thus, the law was rigorously developed to achieve the objectives of the regime.

The year 1966 marked not only the repression against abortion, but also the repression against divorce. Divorce is a social phenomenon, but it has indirect implications on birth rates, which is why it drew the attention of the authorities. In 1948, the Communist regime eliminated from the Civil Code the articles on grounds for divorce established by consensus and tightened, in 1954, the conditions for granting it. This policy was successful in the short term because the raw divorceability rate was quite low in those years, around 0.6‰ in 1950 and 0.5‰ in 1955, but soon afterwards it registered an increasing trend, reaching 1.4‰ in 1960. In the view of the leaders of the Communist Party, the new socialist family represented the ideal of the regime and its dissolution could not be easily accepted by those who assigned "the new-type family" important tasks in terms of the rapid and consistent growth of the Romanian population. Decree 779 of 1966, which amended the Criminal Code, gave divorce an entirely exceptional character, very difficult to achieve in practice.

Divorce proceedings involved a waiting period in which attempts were made to reconcile the couple. Only a few reasons could lead to divorce: if one spouse was diagnosed as insane or if one spouse had abandoned the other by emigration. Reconciliation was required by law when the grounds for divorce invoked were infidelity, spousal beatings, degrading behaviour, incurable diseases, etc. The initiation of divorce was discouraged and complicated by high taxes (often, for the citizens with an average income, the fee was more than the monthly wages) and cumbersome procedures. For a while, the government's intervention seems to have had the desired result, as from 25,804 divorces in 1966, their number was drastically reduced to only 48in 1967, but in the years that followed, this number tended to increase: 4,023 in 1968, 6,991 in 1969, 7,865 in 1970, 14,472 in 1973, 17,951 in 1974, etc., which reflects the failure of the Communist authorities to create a "perfect family" artificially.

In conclusion, in order to delineate the main aspects specific to divorce in the Communist period, I outlined the three systems of regulating the grounds for divorce, which were also taken over by the Romanian legislation. In 1954, the policy of the Romanian Communist regime, with reference to family problems, was materialized for first time.

**Chapter 4** is entitled "Post-communist Romania - the regulations governing divorce during the period 1989-2009" and comprises theoretical aspects related to the regulation of the grounds for divorce, the evolution of the institution of divorce in light of the amendments brought to the Family Code up until 2009, the new provisions in the matter of Family Law introduced under the New Civil Code of 2009 and, in the end, the types of marriage dissolution stipulated by Law no.287/2009 on the Civil Code.

As I show based on Art. 38 Fam. Code, paragraph 1, sufficient grounds for divorce represent one of the conditions necessary for the dissolution of marriage. Consequently, without sufficient grounds, divorce is out of the question. Under such conditions, sufficient grounds are the very substantive elements (the marriage circumstances) that the petitioning spouse invokes through the case he or she has filed, and a natural consequence of the existence of these sufficient grounds is the very impossibility of the marriage continuing.

The concrete causes for the dissolution of marriage are not individualized in our legislation; their nature can be subjective, founded on the wrongful conduct of one or both of the spouses, which has led to the deterioration of family relations, or objective, which cannot be imputed to either spouse. In conclusion, the Civil Code entirely modifies the old conception regarding the dissolution of marriage; it brings into discussion the possibility of divorce via the administrative manner or through notarial procedure, and introduces criteria that are much more relaxed from the perspective of the divorce cases edicted by law.

The concrete causes of the dissolution of marriage are not individualized in our legislation. Under the Romanian legislation, solid grounds for divorce are: the parties' agreement concerning the dissolution of marriage and the request filed by one of the spouses on grounds of illness.

In the literature, solid grounds for divorce are considered to be: the unjustified abandonment of the marital home; infidelity; the failure to fulfil conjugal duties; serious disagreements between the spouses; the existence of a serious, incurable illness; morally

reprehensible conduct. The Code of Civil Procedure provided solutions which referred to the grounds for divorce, with procedural consequences, which were eliminated in time, giving scope to a single procedure.

The Civil Code completely changes the concept on the dissolution of marriage, bringing into focus the realization of divorce by administrative or notarial procedure.

Divorce becomes effective the moment the marriage has been dissolved and concern the relations between the spouses and between the spouses and their minor children. In conclusion, the right to request the dissolution of marriage is strictly personal in nature.

**Chapter 5**, entitled "The grounds for divorce in comparative law", includes an analysis of the grounds for divorce under French, Belgian and Spanish Law. According to the French Constitution of 1791, marriage was considered indissoluble, but later this constitutional provision was amended, divorce being accepted. Two types of divorce were regulated: divorce by mutual consent, which was subject to very rigorous conditions, and divorce at the request of one spouse, which was admitted only for certain cases: adultery, excesses, serious injury and a conviction for a serious crime.

Divorce could be obtained in Belgium: on specific grounds (based on the fault of one of the spouses) and by mutual agreement (accomplished through the desire of one of the spouses to terminate the marriage).

In Spain, marriage did not entail the loss of one spouse's name, so divorce prohibited name changes. The only modification produced by divorce in the spouses' personal state was the civil status, changed from married to divorced.

At the end of the thesis, the main conclusions that are specific of the analysis presented above are rendered, as is the bibliography used as a support basis for writing this thesis. Analysing the comparative study of the older regulations and the new regulation, we can ascertain that certain elements are preserved, such as, for instance, the divorce of the spouses on the grounds of their de facto separation for a period of at least two years, while other provisions are completely changed.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

As shown throughout this thesis, divorce proceedings have been significantly simplified, the legislature seeking to create a simple, clean law, which can provide for and incorporate everything, so that there will be not grounds for disputes. However, the law is interpretable and there will still be discussions, but compared to the old regulatory framework, the new regulations are more accurate and balanced.

The Civil Code regulates family relations in Book II, entitled "On the Family" (Art. 258-534), marking the return, in terms of the legislative technique, to the tradition of incorporating the regulation of family relations in the Civil Code, a solution that, initially, the Civil Code of 1864 also adopted.

The Law for the implementation of the Civil Code of 2012 was achieved by repealing the Family Code, which occurred in 2011.

According to the new regulations, family relations valorize the solutions and the "ferenda law" bills which were drafted, in terms of both doctrine and case law, based on the following main sources of inspiration: the French Civil Code, the Civil Code of Quebec, and the Swiss Civil Code.

The Civil Code incorporates the principles and regulations currently found at the level of special regulations, for example those in the sphere of the protection of children's rights.

Substantial changes are those imposed on matrimonial regimes, by conventions regulating matrimonial conventions, divorce (divorce by administrative or notarial manner), filiation (changing the juridical regime of filiation lawsuits), child protection (a new regulation of parental authority).

Analysing the new legislative changes, we may see that the family has the right to receive protection from the state, the latter being bound to support the family through certain economic and social measures, to conclude it, or to effectively become involved in its development and consolidation.

The solutions imposed by the competent authorities must take into account the parents' desires and interests referring to their underage children, and the proceedings involving the children should be conducted within a reasonable timeframe.

What is to be appreciated is the particular importance of a less formal approach, in the sense of the dissolution of strict deadlines that used to be compulsory as regards the duration of the marriage; currently, one can address the court with a request for the dissolution of marriage by mutual consent, irrespective of the date when the marriage was contracted.

Engagement represents a mutual promise to contract a marriage. Thus, the substantive conditions for the conclusion of a marriage are applicable in an appropriate manner, except for the medical certificate and the approval of the guardianship court. This action is not be subject to any formality and any type of evidence can be adduced to prove it.

The conclusion of a marriage is not inextricably bound to conclusion of an engagement, just like an engagement need not be completed through marriage; however, engagement can produce legal effects in certain situations. Normally, while an underage male does not have full legal capacity, an underage female who marries acquires full legal capacity, but does not become of age.

The new regulation referring to the term marriage is not fundamentally different from the current one, but there has been introduced a possibility of concluding a matrimonial convention, according to which the future spouses may choose the applicable matrimonial regime or may include preciput clauses, no longer being forced to abide by mandatory and unique legal norms in all the aspects of their family life when they enter marriage.

In conclusion, the Civil Code entirely modifies the old concept on the dissolution of marriage, as it brings into discussion the obtaining of divorce by administrative or by notarial procedure and it introduces more relaxed criteria regarding the divorce cases edicted by law.

In matters of divorce, the draft of the New Civil Code has an approach that is contemporaneous, modern and respects the European Convention of Human Rights, as well as the other international regulations. Because no one can be forced to continue in a legal relation if they do not desire, the new regulations provide ample options that can ensure the freedom of the individual and the other personal rights.

This work amounts to a theoretical and practical guide referring to the current possibilities of acquiring knowledge about and explaining the multiple determinations and social consequences of the law and of legislation, but it also represents a manner of reflection on and stimulation of future studies and research on the subject of divorce.

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