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**DOCTORAL THESIS**

**Non-performance of contractual obligations. Legal nature. General rules  
of the forms of attainment of the right of the creditor**

**ABSTRACT**

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1. The choice of the research topic – non-performance of contractual obligations. Legal nature. General rules of the forms of attainment of the right of the creditor – is based on upon the fascination to the vivacity of the obligations' matter and the interest for the complexity of the legal problems generated by the non-performance of the contract in the context of an increasingly denser and more complex network of social relations.

It is useful that the legal doctrine and the case law elaborated under the Civil Code of 1864 be brought out in the new legislative context, insofar as its correctness are preserved.

We mainly resorted to the logical method because the law is an eminently deductive science, as an author stated<sup>1</sup>, and to the explanatory method, to establish the meaning and the interpretation of the legal norms that form the institutions analysed herein. We also applied the comparative method, in the attempt to highlight the similarities and differences between our legal system and the others and between our legal system and international regulations or soft law.

2. This study mainly regards the provisions contained within the Chapter II The specific performance of obligations of the Title V Performance of obligations of the fifth Book Of obligations of the Civil Code. This chapter consists of six sections: 1. General provisions; 2. Mora debitoris; 3. Specific performance; 4. Damages; 5. The termination of the contract and the reduction of the obligations and 6. Justified causes for the non-performance of the obligations.

Starting from the sections of Chapter II The specific performance of obligations and from the provision of art. 1516 Civil Code, we bring together the specific performance, damages, and the termination of the contract, together with the reduction of the obligations under the name of forms of attainment of the right of the creditor.

Mora debitoris shall also be analysed. It is not one of the forms of attainment of the right of the creditor, but the mechanism that conditions it.

The choice of this concept, i.e. forms of attainment of the right of the creditor, starts from the correlation between material and formal aspects, but from another

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<sup>1</sup> N. Popa, *Teoria generală a dreptului*, ediția 3, (București: Ed. C.H. Beck, 2008), p. 15.

perspective that the one encountered, for example, with respect to the legal act, where the distinction is made between the material and formal prerequisites.

In Roman Law, the distinction between the legal operation, on the one hand, and the technical-legal form by which the former is realized, can be observed. The sale, for example, represented the legal operation, which was carried out either by *mancipio*, or by the double *stipulatio*, or by the consensual contract, these being the forms of the sale.

Another example from the Roman law is the assignment agreement, which took the form of novation by substitution of the creditor and further, of the mandate in *rem suam*.

Therefore, the non-performance of the contractual obligations represents the material matter, and the forms of attainment of the rights of the creditor are the actions - material rights to action or other prerogatives from the structure of the right - by which the right of the creditor is sanctioned (protected), by which this right is directly satisfied (the specific performance of the obligation) or, as the case may be, the damage caused by the violation of such right is compensated, following the non-performance (culpable) of the obligation (the damages), or the legal relationship (the contract) breached by the debtor is terminated, at least in part (the termination of the contract, the reduction of the obligation).

In their turn, these forms of attainment of the right of the creditor are components of the violated right, more precisely parts of the sanction with which the right is endowed and take shape in case of non-performance of the obligation incumbent on the debtor.

There is no hierarchy of the forms of attainment of the right of the creditor, meaning that he should choose the specific performance of the obligation and only by exception the damages or the termination of the contract, or vice versa. Subject to the fulfilment of the conditions, the creditor has the full freedom to choose the appropriate form to lead, in his vision, to the attainment of the violated right by the non-performance of the obligation. A possible hierarchy may, eventually, arise from the mechanism of the (un)fulfilment of the conditions of one or the other of the forms of attainment of his right.

To the extent that they are not incompatible, the forms of the attainment may be cumulated, in respect of the full attainment of the right of the creditor. For example, it is not conceivable to resort to both the specific performance of the obligation and the termination of the contract, but it is possible to cumulate the specific performance of the obligation with damages for late performance or to obtain, simultaneously, the termination of the contract and damages.

Within the second title Non-performance of contractual obligations. Legal nature we will analyse the concept and elements of the obligation (Chapter I) – making, mainly, the distinction between the obligation of dare, facere and non facere, respectively the obligations to achieve a specific result and reasonable endeavour obligations - where upon we will present the conclusions over the legal nature of the non-performance of contractual obligations (Chapter II).

Chapter I of the third title Forms of the attainment of the right of the creditor is reserved to mora debitoris in the performance of the contractual obligations, this being the previously condition of the resort to the forms of attainment of the right of the creditor.

Chapter II concerns the unjustified non-performance (culpable) of contractual obligations, and Chapters III, IV and V of the same title concerns the specific performance of the obligation, the damages and the termination of the contract, together with the reduction of the obligation. Chapter VI is dedicated to the clauses and conventions amending the regime of the forms of attainment the right of the creditor.

The last title contains the conclusion drawn following the research embodied herein.

The thesis also contains some procedural matters, since the right must fall within the procedural rigors to be applied, when the conflict of law between the debtor and the creditor arises. By connecting the material law to the procedural law, the rights are sanctioned, when they are violated. Not by chance, Roman Law has evolved procedurally, being an eminently procedural legal system, the mechanism of procedural law giving shape to forms previously unknown to material law.

Although the current content of legal institutions analysed herein is the result of a long evolution, we will limit our incursion, in terms of their history, to the Roman

law, as a common foundation of all legal systems within the Roman-Germanic legal systems. Certainly, where appropriate, we will also analyse other stages of evolution, as it is not always possible to follow a direct route of evolution from the Roman law to current law.

In the process of unravelling the correct way of applying the provisions contained by Civil Code, it is natural to resort to Roman law, because even the sources considered by the legislator when drafting the Civil Code of 2009 are based on Roman law.

Last but not least, the thesis also contains some foreign law elements – Italian Civil Code of 1942, Civil Code of Quebec of 1991 and the French Civil Code of 1804, as amended by Ordinance no. 131 of February 10, 2016, as ratified by Law no. 2018-287 -, but also a few elements extracted from the international and European regulations and soft law - United Nations convention of contract for the international sale of goods; UNIDROIT Principles; Principles of European Contract Law; Draft Common Frame of Reference.

**3.** The outline of the instruments with the help of which the non-performance of contractual obligations is dealt with, as well as of the legal institutions related to them, will demonstrate the unitary perspective of what means the forms of attainment of the right of the creditor.

g Pursuant to article 1516 of the Civil Code: "(1) the creditor has the right to the full, exact and in a timely manner attainment of the obligation. (2) When, without justification, the debtor does not perform its obligation and is in mora, the creditor may, at his own choose and without loosing the right to damages, if owed: 1. to ask or to proceed to specific performance of the obligation; 2. to obtain, whether contractual obligation, the termination of the contract or the reduction of the obligation; 3. to use any other legal form to attain his right."

The first paragraph establishes the right of the creditor to proper or, as it was also named by the legal doctrine , compliant performance of the obligation, and also indicates its fundament, respectively *pacta sunt servanda* principle, provided by article 1270 of the Civil Code: "The valid concluded contract has the force of law between the contracting parties" [para. (1) of article 1270], as the parties freely

expressed their consent in respect of concluding the contract, the debtor undertaking to fully, exactly and in a timely manner purchase to the creditor the undertaken obligation.

Para. 2 of article 1516 contains the two general conditions on the meeting of which the use of one or more forms depends: non-performance, without justification, of the obligation undertaken by the contract and mora.

The same paragraph enunciates one of the forms of attainment of the right of the creditor, namely damages.

Points 1 and 2 contain the enumeration of the other forms of attainment of the right of the creditor, respectively the specific performance of the obligation, the termination of the contract and the reduction of the obligation, and point 3 refers, by any other way of attainment provided by law, to derivative action and action pauliana, which, however, are not (primary) forms of attainment of the right of the creditor, but forms of protection of the rights of the creditor, as indicated by the name of Chapter III, from the same Title V of the same Book V of the Civil Code.

While the forms analysed herein lead to the attainment of the right of the creditor, the derivative action and action pauliana occasion this attainment. They exceed the analysis contained in this thesis.

Once the rights and actions of the debtor have been exercised through the derivative action, the creditor can foreclose the assets subject of them, as, after declaring an act unopposable, as it was concluded in fraud of his rights, the creditor can proceed to the foreclosure of the goods and/or amount of money subject of that act, obviously, in both cases - the derivative action and actio pauliana - after obtaining an enforceable title that establishes either the obligation of the debtor to specific performance of the obligation, or the obligation to pay an amount of money as damages (performance by equivalent).

The possibility of the creditor to use the forms of attainment of his right is limited, if the non-performance of the obligation of the debtor is the result of his own action or omission (article 1517 of the Civil Code).

Articles 1518-1519 of the Civil Code establish two fundamental rules in this matter: the rules of individual liability - at the end of a long evolution of law, the liability acquired a personal character, collective liability being exceptional -, but also



the rule of the liability of the debtor for the damages caused by the fault of the individuals he resorts to in the performance of contractual obligations. These individuals can be simple agents or subcontractors [liability for the (contractual) deed of another].

Finally, article 1520 of the Civil Code opens the way for the creditor to foreclose third-party assets, "(...) if they are encumbered for the payment of the debts of the debtor or were the subject of legal acts that were revoked as having been concluded in fraud of the creditor" (because of the granting of the *actio pauliana*).

In a broad sense, non-performance means both total and partial non-performance, but also improper or delayed performance of the obligation.

The non-performance of the contractual obligations represents that circumstance that intervenes during the performance of the legally binding relationship and which is circumscribed either to the fault of the debtor or to a situation independent of his will, and which has as a consequence the non-achievement of the purpose pursued by the creditor at the conclusion of the contract, by quantitatively, qualitatively or temporally altering the obligation, as determined by law and by the parties agreement.

Unjustified non-performance is usually equivalent to culpable (culpable or intentional) non-performance, because if the debtor cannot defend himself claiming one of the justified reasons for non-performance of the obligation, it means that the respectively non-performance shall be of a culpable nature, being liable of non-performance.

Unless it is possible, the specific performance of the obligation can always be pursued by the creditor.

When he cannot or has no interest in exercising his right in the form of specific performance of the obligation, the creditor can claim damages, if the debtor is in mora, because he did not perform, without justification (culpably) the obligation, and the other conditions are met – there is a loss, a causal link between the non-performance of the obligation and the loss, and no exculpatory cause of liability has intervened.

Finally, without losing his right to damages and subject to the non-performance of the undertaken obligation is significant, thus depriving the creditor of

what he pursued to obtain from the contract, he can obtain the termination of the contract or, for a less significant non-performance, reduction of the obligation.

The fact that the debtor is in mora represents the circumstance that triggers the mechanism of engaging the debtor's liability, materialized through the forms of attainment of the right of the creditor, and which is characterized by the unjustified (culpable) delay in performance of the undertaken obligation.

**4.** Specific performance of obligations is the form of attainment of the right of the creditor, an element of its sanction in the form of a material right to action by whose unfettered exercise the creditor aims, when possible, at obtaining the performance promised by the debtor<sup>2</sup>.

In essence and in relation to this form of attainment of the right of the creditor – specific performance –, leaving aside the possibility to use the others – damages, termination of the contract and the reduction of the obligations – impossibility of specific performance is the only limit imposed to the creditor. The possibility of specific performance is added to the other prerequisites, common to all forms of attainment of the right of the creditor, i.e. unjustified (culpable) non-performance and mora debitoris.

**5.** The obligation to pay damages coincides with the traditional concept of contractual liability, which has been defined under the Civil Code of 1864 as the obligation of the debtor to compensate the creditor for the loss caused to the latter due to the non-performance of obligations engendered by a validly concluded contract<sup>3</sup>.

Since the conception of the legislator of 2009 is not different from that of those who wrote the Civil Code of 1864, which is a proof of the regulations' virtues of the latter, the timelessness of the definition above is undisputed in the context of the new regulation, with the small amendment that has recently been added in the legal doctrine, according to which the contractual liability is the form of civil liability that

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<sup>2</sup> We considered the broad concept of contractual liability. See, in this regard, C. Paziuc, *Răspunderea contractuală. O analiză juridică și economică*, p. 72-73.

<sup>3</sup> M. Eliescu, *Răspunderea civilă delictuală*, (București: Editura Academiei, 1972), p. 7.

consists of compensating the loss caused to the creditor by the unjustified and culpable non-performance of a contractual obligation<sup>4</sup>.

The definition is not incompatible with the concept of form of attainment of the right of the creditor. It is the same institution, viewed in reversed angle. The obligation of the debtor to compensate the loss caused by the non-performance of the obligation is the attainment of the of the violated right of the creditor. In other words, there is a corelation between the obligation to pay a certain amount and the right to damages.

The obligation of the debtor to pay damages is subject to the following prerequisites: the unjustified (culpable) non-performance of the contractual obligation; the loss incurred by the creditor; the causal link between the non-performance and the loss caused by it and mora.

**6.** Taking into consideration its foundation, legal nature, types and the effect it produces, nowadays the termination of the contract can be defined as the retroactive termination or cessation of a bilateral or plurilateral contract, in full or in part, via a decision of the court, unilaterally or de jure, following the unjustified and, in principle, fundamental non-performance of the obligations undertaken by one of the parties.

Unlike specific performance, the obligation to pay damages and unlike the reduction of obligations, the termination of the contract involves a non-performance that is both unjustified and fundamental. In this regard, art. 1551 par. 1 first part of the Civil Code provides that “the creditor is not entitled to terminate the contract if the default of the debtor is of minor importance”. The fundamental character of the fault is required for the cessation of the contract as well, except for a repetitive fault, albeit minor. Also, the fundamental or minor, but repetitive non-performance constitutes a prerequisite for the judicial, unilateral and de jure termination of the contract.

**7.** With respect to conventionally limiting, eliminating, or extending the forms of attainment of the right of the creditor, the parties may, in virtue of the freedom to

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<sup>4</sup> V. Terzea, *Răspunderea civilă contractuală*, p. 65.

conclude a contract (art. 11 and 1169 of the Civil Code) and within the limits of public order provisions<sup>5</sup>, agree on what they do or do not have the right to do in case of unjustified non-performance of obligations. The agreement of the parties may either regard the existence or breadth of the right of the creditor to specific performance, to damages, to terminate the contract or to reduce his own obligation or the conditions that have to be met for the exercise of these rights – the parties attribute an unjustified nature to otherwise justified non-performances or vice versa (situations where the debtor is held liable for both fortuitous case and force majeure or, on the contrary, is not held liable for a fortuitous case, in spite of a contrary legal provision) or agree upon the *mora creditoris* or eliminate it.

A clause or a contract by which all forms of attainment of the right of the creditor are eliminated is obviously null and void, because a potestative condition bears on the obligation of the debtor (art. 1403 of the Civil Code), who did not intend to make an effective a declaration of will<sup>6</sup>.

8. The 11 years that have passed since the entry into force of the Civil Code do not represent, on the time scale of law, more than a moment, even considering the increasingly fast course of social and economic life, which, let it be said in passing, it often negatively influences the performance of the obligation by the subjects of law in the legal stage. Thus, we appreciate that it is premature to make *de lege ferenda* propositions regarding the institutions analysed in this thesis and we are of the opinion that only a lengthy practice can reveal possible flaws of the current regulation.

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<sup>5</sup> In this regard, see C. Stătescu, în C. Stătescu, C. Bîrsan, *Drept civil. Teoria generală a obligațiilor*, p. 16-21; P. Vasilescu, *Relativitatea actului juridic civil. Repere pentru o nouă teorie generală a actului de drept privat*, (București: Editura Rosetti, 2003), p. 25-55; L. Pop, *Tratat de drept civil. Obligațiile*, vol. II. *Contractul*, p. 368-382.

<sup>6</sup> G. Boroi, C. Angheliescu, *Curs de drept civil. Partea generală*, (București: Editura Hamangiu, 2011), p. 133; M. Nicolae, *Drept civil. Teoria generală*, vol. I, *Teoria dreptului civil*, (București: Editura Solomon, 2012), p. 373.

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