

LEGITIMIZING THE POST-SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION IN ROMANIA

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In this article I argue that political decisions in the Romanian post-socialist era have been tacitly accepted by the population mainly because political actors legitimized them through a “breaking up” with the communist past and through the projection of a future Romanian society which has a similar level of development as Western countries. Therefore, an official discourse, in which political decisions that generated major social costs were “necessary and inevitable” for the construction of an advanced capitalist society, was employed. In the first part of the paper, I describe the economic situation of Romania at the beginning of the transition process (1990) and the official strategies proposed for a successful transition. In the second part of the article, I discuss the processes of justification and legitimization of the economic reform and the involvement of international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank (WB). In the last part, the article focuses on the results of political decision-making in the transition period, mainly discussing the primary consequences that affected the population.

Keywords: *post-socialist transformation; economic reforms; social policies anti-communist ideology; Romania.*

ROMANIA’S ECONOMY IN THE 1990S

In order to understand the process of transition towards a Western-type developed society we need to understand the development gap between Romania and the Western countries¹. In 1990, Romania had the lowest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in Europe, except for Albania. The gap between Romania and the other former socialist countries was significant, while the difference between Romania and the EU average was even higher (*Table no. 1*).

Regarding the structure of employment, Romania, together with the Czech Republic, had one of the largest shares of the population employed in industry, more than any other former socialist countries, and above the EU 15 average. Moreover, in 1990, Romania had one of the highest proportion of the population

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¹ In the comparisons with the Western countries, I use the average of the EU 15, considered to be the most developed countries in the EU: Austria, Belgium, Great Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.

employed in agriculture in Europe: approximately 30%. In fact, the only countries in Europe which had more than 20% employment in agriculture were Poland (25%) and Greece (24%). Also, in most of the developed countries, 6 out of 10 persons were employed in the service sector. By contrast, Romania had 27% employees in the service sector, below the EU 15 average and the former socialist countries.

Table no. 1

GDP per capita (constant 2005 US\$) in the 1990

Country	GDP per capita
EU 15 (Luxembourg not included)	15 427
Hungary	6 471
Yugoslavia	5 695
Bulgaria	5 552
Poland	5 115
Romania	3 525
Albania	2 482

Source: World Development Indicators (2016).

Table no. 2

The structure of employment in the 1990 (%)

Country	Agriculture	Industry	Services
Romania	29.1	43.5	27.4
Czech Republic	12.3	45.5	42.2
Estonia	21.0	36.8	41.8
Poland	25.2	37.0	35.8
Hungary	18.2	36.8	45.0
UE 15 (Germany not included)	8.7	30.6	60.5

Source: World Development Indicators (2016).

These indicators are relevant in order to understand that, at the starting point of economic restructuring, Romania had a low level of economic development and a different occupational structure than those in Western countries, with more employees in agriculture and industry, and fewer in the service sector. Therefore, the beginning of post-socialist transition should be understood by taking into account the development gap between Romania and the Western countries, on the one hand, and between Romania and the former socialist countries which implemented a similar set of political reforms, on the other hand.

THE BEGINNING OF THE TRANSITION

This analysis starts from the assumption that the social history of Romania in the last three decades is to a great extent the result of strategic political options, implemented in the transition period, which caused structural transformations.

From a political point of view, the beginning of transition can be understood as one of the most confusing periods. The National Salvation Front Council (NSFC) broadcasted live on National Television that it has taken the state control, and launched a political program whose objective was the structural transformation of the political and economic system. The justification for taking power, in the context of lacking democratic legitimization, was based on the necessity to reestablish order and stability in Romania and to govern provisionally until the first democratic elections². The NSFC has been associated with the former technocracy³, and their objective was to promote structural changes in politics and economy, although the process of switching to a multi-party system was not self-evident (Zamfir, 2004: 118). The technocracy promoted a national consensus idea, but the historical parties⁴, reestablished after the revolution, immediately rejected it.

Even if during the revolution one could speak about a consensus of the population regarding the anti-Ceaușescu attitudes, the following events, such as the reestablishing of the historical political parties, the anti-government protests in Bucharest's University Square, and the miners counter-movements labelled *Mineriade* (in Romanian), divided the population. The public debate primarily became one about political legitimacy and less about which political decisions are appropriate to start the process of building a modern democratic society. After the February *Mineriad*, another governing body, The Provisional National Unity Council (PNUC) which was composed by members of all political parties, but still dominated by NSF⁵ led the country. It was considered a "compromise of the power struggle", a negotiation between the former communist technocracy and the representatives of the historical parties, together with the opponents of the old regime, but still without democratic legitimacy to represent the population (Zamfir, 2004: 57).

The most important objectives, such as the transition to a Western type of democracy and market capitalist society were adopted by all political parties, at least in their official position. But consensus did not last long when the opposition launched allegations of neo-communism against NSF, the party led by Ion Iliescu (Zamfir 2004: 59–60). In fact, the allegations had quickly turned into the primary ideological debate, focusing on the persons who were or were not entitled to govern Romania (Pasti, 1995: 152). In spite of this, the political actors did not think of it as an issue, especially due to the existence of beliefs about "scientific solutions" which could easily be applied in the case of Romanian transition. Therefore, independent of political ideology, these policy solutions were to be

² Based on the official statement of NSFC, published in the Official Monitor, no. 1, December 22, 1989.

³ The label technocracy is a category used by Romanian transitologists (e.g., Vladimir Pasti, Cătălin Zamfir) which include not only the former members of party bureaucracy but also former members of the industrial and financial management.

⁴ National Liberal Party, National Peasants' Party, and Social Democratic Party.

⁵ The National Salvation Front Council (NSFC) was a structure resulted from revolution, which later became a political party: National Salvation Front (NSF).

accepted and implemented by those in power (Pasti, 1995: 153). This theory was supported both by the technocracy and the World Bank or International Monetary Fund experts, actors with essential roles in establishing reform directions. Ultimately, even though the internal or external experts scientifically legitimized the path of the reforms, most political decisions, generally had substantial consequences for the majority of the population (Pop-Elecheș, 2006: 57–59; Pasti, 2006: 66).

If initially NSF had no declared political aspirations, subsequently they decided to transform into a political party, so that it could participate in the following elections. NSF split in 1992 in two sides⁶, but one could argue that it continued under various names (PDSR, PSD) and remained one of the most important political forces in Romania. The institutionalization of political parties was a long process. In the beginning, those who had the support of ad-hoc civic and political organizations such as fronts, unions, and conventions, won the elections (Pasti, 1995: 164–165). Although ideas like democracy and political competition were often limited to the struggle for power and privileges, the primary objective of all governing programs during the first decade of transition was to close the gap between the Romanian and the Western development, through the adoption of Western institutions. The central assumption was that between Eastern and Western Europe there was not only a development gap, but also *backwardness*. Therefore state intervention was considered necessary only to achieve the objective of modernization (Rado, 2001: 11). Perhaps the most important political debate was the pace of change. The political groups ultimately divided between reformists and conservatives – after 1991 the latter have won, that is, those who advocated for the “gradual reforms” at the expense of “shock reform” (Pasti, 1995: 145), while after 1996 the former adopted austerity measures and shock therapy.

THE POLITICAL OPTIONS IN POST-SOCIALIST TRANSITION

One of the recurring themes in the history of the Romanian society since the second half of the 19th century was the local elite fascination for Western Europe (Pasti, 2006). The development and modernization goal was fundamental in all historical periods, and the analysis of the gap between Romania and the Western countries was one of the central concerns for social scientists⁷. For them, the post-socialist transition that followed the fall of the socialist regime was an excellent opportunity to reopen discussions about building a democratic and capitalist society, similar to the Western ones.

The term transition was used both in the daily life and in the political and scientific discourse, to describe all the transformations needed to replace the

⁶ One that renamed itself in the Democratic Party, and the other Romanian Social Democratic Party (PDSR).

⁷ One representative work that follows this logic, analyzes how economic gaps between Romania and Western Europe have increased and deepened over the last 500 years (Murgescu, 2010).

political and economic socialist system with a democratic and capitalist one⁸. The role of political elites was considered essential to generate a top-down social change through political decisions, often informed by “technical expertise,” supported by international organizations, in particular, the IMF and WB (Pasti, 2006). Therefore, at least as a starting point, the transition in Romania can be understood as a declared attempt by the national and international political elites to construct the institutions required for economic, social and political development, in order to close the gap between Romania and Western Europe.

Several key directions have been considered major objectives of the transition: (1) the replacement of the totalitarian political regime with a democratic one; (2) the transformation of the economic system, from a planned state economy to a capitalist market economy; (3) the integration in Euro-Atlantic international alliances. All policy measures have been justified by the necessity to meet these goals, including the “the ideology of transition costs”, which assumes that the success of the transition implies the bearing of social costs in the short run by the population. The construction of a new Western-type society enjoyed broad, widespread support, and the anti-Ceaușescu feelings, later equated with anti-communist ones, offered legitimacy for the decisions made in the post-socialist transition (Pasti, 2006: 5; Zamfir 2004: 29). The broad transition model was unique throughout the Central and Eastern Europe space, and the differences consisted in the rhythm of the political reforms. Similarly, Zamfir (2004) argues that, at the most general level, the transition strategies were the same for all the CEE countries as a result of the strategic options set by the Western nations⁹.

To understand the directions of the change and the outcomes of the transition process over the last 30 years it is essential to understand the critical strategic options during the '90s. Some of the most important are summarized below:

1. Economic recovery through privatization. In the context in which state institutions were considered inefficient, the privatization of industry and agriculture was considered the convenient solution of Romania's economic recovery. Even though in the first years of the transition one political group advocated restructuring, technology upgrading, and limited privatization as solutions, after a short period, the unanimous political decision was quasi-total privatization (Pasti, 2006). As Ban (2016: 66) puts it:

“Policy elites in postcommunist Romania embraced neoliberalism late, but when they did, most went all the way down, giving birth to a policy regime and

⁸ Influential authors such as Szelenyi (2008) tried to distinguish between the type of process employed in each country, concluding that in Central and Eastern Europe there were several transitions, from a neoliberal one in Central Europe to a more neo-patrimonial system in Eastern Europe.

⁹ One could argue that all post-socialist countries could not employ an alternative path to development if wanted to be part of the EU. Therefore, it was not only about the local elite fascination about the EU but also about the EU economic interests in the region. Moreover, TINA (There is no alternative) discourse was very present in the local landscape with the support of the advocates of the Washington Consensus (for a brief review, see Montecinos (2012)).

economic system that leaves few tools to embed markets into progressive societal demands. Indeed, Romania's policy regime went from a synthesis of neoliberalism and the developmental state in the early 1990s to a neoliberalism with marked libertarian tendencies during the 2000s, mainly because this is how the elites du jour understood the conventional economic wisdom of the day".

The justification was mainly related to the lack of efficiency and viability of state institutions, which was also supported by international organizations such as IMF (Zamfir, 2012). In the public discourse, the only condition for economic development was privatization, the critical decision for a successful transition.

2. Economic development was considered the natural result of integrating the Romanian economy into the global economy. Therefore, the state's lack of intervention in the economy was the "correct solution." All political parties considered that it is the primary way to ensure the necessary economic growth needed to improve the standard of living of the population. It was a process of radical change of a system in which political coordination was essential for the economy, with one in which the state has limited attributions, even by comparison with Western countries.

3. The wage policy was constantly detrimental to employees. The justification was linked to the need to attract private investors. The "low wage policy" as Zamfir (2004, 2012, 2017) calls it was considered the central mechanism to generate economic development. The result was keeping the minimum wages below a decent threshold, without a substantial change until the present day. Almost three decades after the revolution, Romania is known to be one of the countries in Europe where labor force cost is meager.

4. In the context of the state withdrawal, there was a lack of responsibility for job creation, in the context of collective layoffs. The Romanian state was not considered responsible for other job creation, but only to provide facilities to attract investors. In this context, the population had to find solutions for ensuring a decent living, most clearly illustrated by the phenomena of family assistance and intergenerational support (including help for raising children), unpaid work in the household, especially in the agriculture, economic migration in the Western countries, etc.

5. Although restructuring the economy during the transition had significant social costs, the dominant policy was to limit the attributions of the state in the social sphere. The tendency has been towards a residual social policy and a low degree of government social spending. The ideas about the welfare state retrenchment had a major influence in all countries, but even more so in the former socialist ones. Therefore, most social functions have been underfunded and underdeveloped. The share of government spending was small, while the share of social protection expenditures in GDP was consistently low. Taking this into account, together with the economic underdevelopment, Romania experienced increasing inequalities, poverty and social exclusion, increasing international labor migration, and degradation of public health services, education, and social assistance.

The concept of transition is not new, as it is being used in the literature to describe politically coordinated social change attempts. There are several meanings used by various authors. For example, in papers such as those of Rustow (1970) or O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), the transition concept is discussed in the light of conditions that make possible to move from an authoritarian political regime to a democratic one. Another approach is that of Rostow (1971), who proposes five stages of economic growth to explain how underdeveloped countries can reduce the development gap by building similar institutions with those in developed countries.

But the transition from socialism to capitalism was a new process in history. For this reason, it was difficult to determine what should be the characteristics of a systematic program to replace the complex institutional systems on which the socialist system was built (Zamfir, 2004: 18–25). There are at least two theories that have influenced how transition should be understood: modernization theory and transition theory. Both were instruments for the analysis of social change determined by shifts in the political regimes. None had empirical evidence in the post-socialist space, but even so, they were regularly mentioned in the Romanian public and scientific discourse.

The theory of modernization, which emerged in the middle of the 20th century, argued that the history of societies should be regarded as an evolutionary process¹⁰. The evolution of the dominant mode of production is the central factor determining the social change (industrialization, changes in the division of labor, urbanization, advances in the educational attainment, and the emergence of new forms of communication). These changes are prerequisites for the development of democratic institutions (Lipset, 1960 *apud*. Gans-Morse, 2004: 325). According to Rostow (1971: 54), the developing countries can learn from the history of developed democracies in order to reach a high degree of stability and development. Transition theory emerged as a reaction to the theory of modernization, stating that there are no preconditions for the emergence of democracy, only smaller or larger probabilities for democracy to bloom, determined by specific structural contexts. The most important explanatory variable for the direction of change, according to this approach, is the negotiation between elites, especially the interaction between representatives of the former regime and those of the opposition (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986 *apud*. Gans-Morse, 2004: 326).

Both theoretical approaches assume the existence of a final point of transition and modernization, both results being desirable because of the progress generated at the level of society. For example, concerning the post-socialist context, there was an assumption that liberal democracy is desirable, or even that there is a global tendency towards liberal democracy (Gans-Morse, 2004). Therefore, the literature on the post-socialist transition in Central and Eastern Europe was dominated by the analysis of institutional changes in the economic and political system whose

¹⁰ For example, the change from feudalism to capitalism and democracy has taken place as a result of the evolution in the economic sphere that led to changes in both political and social institutions.

“ultimate goal” is the creation of a capitalist and a democratic society (Voicu, 2005: 43–45). However, other perspectives exist in the literature, such as the transformations described and analyzed with an anthropological eye. These studies do not follow the changes in relation to the ultimate goal (capitalism), but instead, they look either at social and cultural shifts, or analyze the social order as a *sui-generis* reality¹¹ (ibid.: 45).

One of the political discourse in transition argued that the reforms involve major social costs, but once completed, will produce progress and development. In the public discourse, progress was constituted by the delimitation of everything associated with the old regime and finally the transformation of the former post-socialist countries into developed capitalist economies. Thus, in the post-socialist context, the strategy of offering the former socialist countries the chance to become member states in the European Union meant the necessity to meet the rules for integration. With the completion of this process and the inclusion in the European Union, the transition was considered to have come to an end. In the beginning of the '90s, at the level of public opinion, there was a high degree of optimism, but in the next years turned into pessimism and even resignation. According to survey data, in the first years after the revolution, subjective evaluations of directions of change were somewhat positive, but as time went on, the attitudes became predominantly negative (for example, in 2010 a majority of the population was unsatisfied with life in the last twenty years) (Zamfir, 2015). Moreover, future prospects were also pessimistic. According to a Quality of Life Diagnosis survey, in Romania, 9 out of 10 citizens thought in 2010 that Romania's direction is wrong (ibid.), and this situation continues to be the same today.

MECHANISMS TO JUSTIFY REFORMS

With the end of the Cold War, the transition strategy and post-socialist reforms have been particularly influenced by Western institutions, such as the IMF, the World Bank, the European Commission, the International Labor Organization, UNICEF, UNDP, etc. These institutions took advantage of the broad consensus at the level of society on the direction of change and started to offer consultancy to national governments. The external support was legitimized through a discourse of “superior competence” in the elaboration and implementation of reforms. The main reforms, with the deepest impact, took place in politics and economy.

The fundamental principles were the following (Zamfir, 2004: 94–98):

- The creation of a democratic multi-party political system;
- The withdrawal of the state from the economic and social planning functions;
- The introduction of market economy mechanisms, such as price liberalization; privatization of enterprises;

¹¹ See for example: Burawoy and Verdery (1999), Chelcea and Mateescu (2004), Kideckel (2010).

- Opening up to international trade; integration into the North-Atlantic military system;
- The attempt to reform the entire public sector with the support of international institutions.

The most important players that have shaped the economic policy since 1989 were the IMF, which promoted strict and rigid measures, and the WB, which has adopted a more flexible position (ibid.: 97–98). Stănescu (2014: 173) argues that the IMF, WB, and US Treasury intervention programs for countries in crisis (e.g. Latin America in the 1980s, Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s) were based on neoliberal economic theories. They promoted measures such as “price liberalization, stabilization policy, and privatization” alongside “restrictive monetary and budgetary policies to keep prices under control, high positive interest rates, lower public deficits, liberalization of foreign trade policy, and the convertibility of the national currency”, known as the Washington Consensus (Williamson, 1989 *apud*. Stănescu, 2014: 173).

To legitimize the reforms, the topic of “prosperity” played a dominant role, being used as a justification when implementing policies that on the short term negatively affected the population, such as the restructuring of public enterprises. Thus, the majority of the population had no choice but to accept the social costs of these reforms¹². The idea that social change can be planned using specialist expertise to set the direction of reforms was also one of the myths promoted in the public discourse. In fact, the restructuring of the economy also meant a change in the social structure, some authors discussing two major categories of citizens: winners and losers of the transition (Preotesi, 2006). Therefore, economic change and restructuring policy have generated a process of social differentiation or stratification (Poenaru, 2017: 9–10; Stănescu, 2014: 172), while “prosperity for all” was retained at a strictly discursive level. One of the factors that influenced the process of social differentiation was the minimum wage policy. The minimum wage had a significant decrease in the first ten years of transition: 35% of the 1990 value (Preotesi, 2006: 216). Even though, after 2006, the minimum wage exceeded the 1990 threshold, the problem persists in the present days, as Romania has one of the smallest minimum wages in the European Union.

Another reason for accepting the costs of reforms was the lack of criticism against the dominant ideology of transition, which did not exist in the politics, media and public intellectual discourses or editorials, or universities (Ban, 2016). Only recently, several authors assume the metaphor of the “great post-communist robbery” to question how political decisions never had the objective of public good in mind, even if the majority of these decisions were rhetorically justified by it (Copilaş, 2017). The attempt to de-legitimize the communist past by withdrawing

¹² Even though during 1990 there were large protests against the reforms in most of the sectors: transport, industry, education and medical systems, public administration, etc., their effect was not significant. For an overview of the protests during 1990 see Kiel and Kiel (2002).

the state from all the spheres of society describes post-communism in Romania. Two results are representative:

- The collapse of social policy, and more generally, of the public sector;
- Chaotic privatization at any price (even for one dollar to those willing to cover the companies' debts).

Also, the myth that the EU or other international organizations will assume the responsibility for the direction of reforms and for the integration into its economic and political structures, and ultimately, for the prosperity of the population, was widely used (Copilaș, 2017: 6–9).

Anti-communist ideology as primary mechanism to legitimize the reforms

Perhaps the most used tool to justify difficult reforms was the one of breaking-up with the communist past. Those who opposed the reforms were labeled as communists, and the debate was quickly redirected to who should be the legitimate participants in these kind of debates. Two significant political groups evolved during the transition period:

1. The group formed around Ion Iliescu, with former or current managers and professionals in the former socialist institutions (in the academic literature they were also called technocrats, although they identified themselves as social democrats until the present day);
2. The group formed around the National Peasants' Party to which the other historical parties joined, together with a part of the group of revolutionaries and some well-known public intellectuals.

Members of the second group all defined themselves as anti-communists, benefiting from the symbolic support of Western Europe, and the right-wing think-tanks. Anti-communist groups have become active in politics, especially those reunited under former historical parties banners, which were prohibited by law during the communist regime (the dissidents of the former regime have been unable to organize themselves into a political force, in contrast to other former socialist countries). The discourse about communists and anticommunist has quickly transformed into one of the most important political cleavages, regularly used in political debates, but also in academia, mass-media and everyday life discussions.

In fact, the anti-communist ideology can be considered an essential principle of political reform, the main purpose being the denouncement and punishment of the former activists or former Securitate¹³ collaborationists (especially those politically involved in the transition period). The latter was considered the representative of the old communist nomenclature, and for this reason, it was argued that it should not have the legitimacy to govern in the new political regime. The main arguments were related to the "communist mentality" which was considered inadequate in a

¹³ Romania's secret police during the Communist regime.

democratic system, but also because it was considered to be primarily responsible for the horrors committed by the communist regime. Western countries supported the struggle against the former Communists and especially the Securitate former informers. The way in which the problem was raised focused on individual guilt, instead of an institutional problem of Securitate. The result was that of explaining almost everything, including the social costs of transition, in this anti-communist paradigm. For example, the “communist mentality” of the population and the former communists and Securitate collaborators involved in politics and economy, who opposed the radical change, was the primary explanation for the failure of transition.

Another perspective was illustrated by Poenaru (2017) who analyzes anti-communism as the dominant ideology of transition. The anti-communist ideology also had an active political role, being against those who had any connection with the communist regime and culminated in the formal condemnation of communism by Romania through the Presidential Commission Report for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania, known as the Tismăneanu Report (2007). The assumption made by the adherents of anticommunist ideology was that the communist system was inherently evil, and therefore should not be investigated from a sociological point of view, but from the perspective of the regime’s horrors (Poenaru, 2017: 147–148). This scientific literature relies heavily on the victims of the regime (politically persecuted people as dissident or those whose properties had been nationalized are some examples) and the need to compensate them to restore justice (ibid.: 152). Several groups can be categorized as anticommunist during the transition period. The most well-known is the Păltiniș group and its followers, but also the groups formed around former dissidents or politically persecuted people, the intellectual diaspora, and ultimately the far-right sympathizers who have tried to rehabilitate personalities associated with the interwar legionary movement, most of them persecuted by the communist regime. The adherents of the Păltiniș group, formed mainly from conservative intellectuals, had an important role in legitimizing the ideology of transition (Ciobanu, 2009). They used violent discourses against the people associated with the former regime. Also, as self-proclaimed representatives of the civil society, they often promoted cultural elitism, by blaming the population for not having the competencies required to understand how a democratic society function (Zamfir, 2004: 113). The anti-communist intellectuals, who obtained their legitimacy by “demonstrating their attachment to everything that was right-wing, capitalist, and neoliberal” adhered quickly to the neoconservative ideology of the Washington Consensus, promoting the fundamentalism of unregulated free market and becoming the defenders of these ideas, without any kind of critical analysis, in the absence of any competence in the social and economic sphere (Iliescu, 2017: 80–84).

Another result of the anti-communist struggle was an antagonization of the population labeled as “nostalgic”. Nostalgia for the Communist period has become the object of study for researchers in social science, especially in the West. These

studies were using the concept of *nostalgia* to explain the inadaptability of the population to the new conditions of post-communist capitalism. Also, the concept was used to explain the incompatibility between “collectivist values,” specific for the socialist regime, and “individualist values”, desirable in a democratic political regime and in a capitalist economic system (Poenaru, 2017: 191–192).

The industrial working class is most often associated with nostalgia both in the ideological discourse, and scientific studies, such as Kideckel's (2010) ethnographic analysis of the uncertainties faced by dismissed workers in Valea Jiului and Făgăraș. By defining this group as *nostalgic*, inadequate for the new post-socialist reality, the processes of restructuring and privatization were easier to be legitimized (Poenaru, 2017: 194–196). Positive evaluations of the communist past could be better understood not in terms of a passive nostalgia, but rather as a critical discourse on the present state of Romanian society (ibid.). Although the uncertainties could be analyzed from a structural point of view, the issue was presented, especially in the public space, by the failure of individuals to adapt to the new realities.

The anti-communist discourse was dominant in the political arena, mass-media, or universities, while the sociological studies of the former socialist system were rare and rarely mentioned. Pejorative labeling by the term “communist” is suggestive in this respect, the common meaning being “Securitate collaborator, or snitch” while the more nuanced meaning was “backward thinking”, “resistant to change,” etc.

DISCUSSION

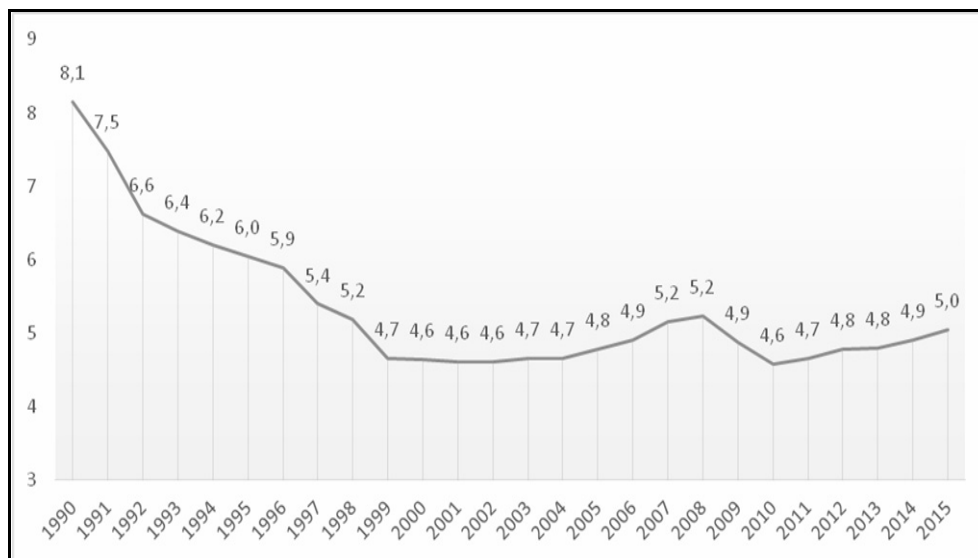
Romania's EU accession was considered by some analysts to be the end of the transition. However, the development gap between Romania and the Western countries continues to be significant, with a substantial part of the Romanian population living below the poverty threshold. The lack of trust in the state institutions is almost generalized, and in the context of state withdrawal from most of the social spheres, individuals are turning to alternative ways to “cope” so that they can handle with everyday life difficulties. A suggestive example is the in-depth analysis of Guțu (2018) who describes how football supporters act as support networks for accessing resources. Unlike trust in state institutions, interpersonal trust within organizations of football supporters is high. The members of the *ultras* groups “use football as a pretext” and spend time together creating both horizontal networks that are activated when needed to solve everyday problems, and vertical networks, with the group leader usually being an influential person (including political ties) that can facilitate access to different kind of resources, including providing stable jobs for group members.

Recent data on the economic and social situation in Romania show that poverty remains a major issue. One of the causes is related to the fact that the

Romanian economy could not recover after the transition restructuring, so that it could offer jobs to a large part of the workforce (Stănescu and Dumitru, 2017). Even if the economy recovered (in 2003 GDP reached 1989 level), the number of paid jobs in the economy has fallen by more than 50% (see chart below).

Chart 1

Number of employees (million): 1990–2015



Source: National Institute of Statistics, online database, indicator FOM105A.

One of the conclusions of the Research Institute for Quality of Life's Social Report (2017) is suggestive from this point of view. After 27 years, Romania is “an underdeveloped, impoverished country with a de-industrialized economy and a disorganized agriculture, an economy incapable of providing jobs for the entire population, with low value-added jobs and a demoralized community” (Zamfir et al., 2017). Poverty and social inequalities are reproduced and become permanent. The social protection system has a low impact on reducing poverty after transfers (Domnişoru, 2014; Dragolea, 2017). Poverty is first among the issues that have a substantial impact on access and participation in education (Neagu, 2012; Țoc, 2016), on access to health services (Precupețu and Pop, 2017), on access to quality housing (Briciu, 2016). Also, in spite of the numerous strategies and projects to improve the situation of historically marginalized Roma, the largest part of the Roma population face discrimination in all aspects of their lives, poverty, segregation, and marginalization (Anghel, 2015).

The rhythm in which social and economic inequalities have increased explains the triumph of neoliberalism in Eastern Europe, simply because of the

“attention”¹⁴ that local elites (political, economic, and cultural) received from the promoters of neoliberal ideas (Ban 2014: 158). Later, these elites either implemented or ideologically defended policies to limit government interventionism and to reduce government spending on the welfare state, (including in areas that traditionally are not considered part of the welfare state: education, healthcare, and housing). The social costs of transition policies were significant, and the population was increasingly reluctant to reforms. In fact, survey data shows several stages in the subjective perception of changes in the transition period: enthusiasm and high hopes immediately after the revolution, followed by an attempt to adapt to new realities, a period of resignation and dissatisfaction, followed by a new period of optimism generated by the economic growth (Precupețu, 2010). The results of neoliberal policies justified by the necessity of breaking up with the communist past meant creating a peripheral state within the global economy, with small chances of catching up the development of Western countries, which was the primary objective of the transition.

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¹⁴ Expressed through funded programs.

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*** Eurostat Database.

*** National Institute of Statistics, TEMPO Database.

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În acest articol argumentez că deciziile politice din perioada post-socialistă în România au fost acceptate tacit de către populație, în principal pentru că actorii politici le-au legitimat prin „ruperea” de trecutul comunist și prin proiecția unei viitoare societăți românești cu un nivel de dezvoltare similar celor occidentale. Prin urmare, a fost utilizat discursul oficial conform căruia deciziile politice care au generat costuri sociale majore au fost „necesare și inevitabile” pentru construirea unei societăți capitaliste avansate. În prima parte a lucrării descriu situația economică a României la începutul procesului de tranziție (1990) și strategiile oficiale pentru o tranziție reușită. În a doua parte a lucrării, discut procesele de justificare și legitimare a reformelor economice, accentuând pe prezentarea lor ca inevitabilă și pe implicarea organizațiilor internaționale precum Fondul Monetar Internațional sau Banca Mondială. În ultima parte, articolul prezintă o parte dintre rezultatele deciziilor politice din tranziție, discutând principalele consecințe care au afectat populația.

Cuvinte-cheie: transformarea post-socialistă; reforme economice; politici sociale; ideologia anti-comunistă; România.

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