

*SCIENTIFIC LIFE/VIAȚĂ ȘTIINȚIFICĂ*

***SOCIAL POLICIES IN ROMANIA AFTER 30 YEARS,  
BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND FACTS***

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*Speech given at the book launch of the volume: “Social Policies in Romania after 30 Years, between Expectations and Facts”, issued by the Romanian Institute for Quality of Life, fall 2020.*

Distinguished participants,

Allow me to begin by thanking the authors for their confidence to invite an **economist** to take part in this event.

The book we are releasing today, has the challenging title “***Social Policies in Romania after 30 Years, between Expectations and Facts***”, and has been printed this year by the Romanian Academy’s Publishing House, under the coordination of the distinguished researchers Elena Zamfir, Mălina Voicu, and Simona Maria Stănescu. It is, in the first place, a testimony of the concerns and apprehensions of the past thirty years, and the fruit of the relentless and strenuous effort of the Romanian scientific community of the Academy, to highlight a very sensitive area of interest.

In the foreword of the volume, the authors stress the idea that the revenue gap between various classes in Romania is high and, on the rise, not to mention, along the same line, the last or the last but one place held by Romania in the EU classification of individual household revenues for each and every year of the past three decades, all of which showing why such a study was so strongly needed and is so much welcomed.

Keeping the pace with the latest concepts and theories specific to this area of research, to which we must add the deep understanding of paradigm shifts and their effects upon public policies, a detailed critical observation of everyday life, new ideas put forward in surveys, analyses and studies for the benefit of the authorities, are all proofs of the professionalism of the book’s authors and of the consistency of their approach, and part of a research collective portrait that is aptly made by Professor Elena Zamfir in the first chapter. There we also have a clear evidence of

the recurring discrepancies between expectations and reality in the reference time period, viewed from the angle of an integrated social policy in Romania.

The complex array of problems in regards with social policies in Romania, and the possible answers to them is tackled from a variety of perspectives, all of them inviting the reader to ponder on the issue from the angle of the philosophy of reforms, of the convergence or divergence of short-, medium-, and long-term effects on a diversity of public policy measures. The authors have undertaken sectoral and trans-sectoral analyses, have examined the matter by target group, vulnerable group, and source of finance, have scrutinised the efficiency of public policy measures and of the increasingly fine tuning of its measurement techniques.

A first contribution, by Mălina Voicu and Simona Maria Stănescu, deals with the phase of reparatory social policies, when the utmost urgency was to put in place a legal and institutional framework, then with the reactive phase, which meant the effective transition during the first decade, and with the blend of welfare solutions found after the year 2000. Adding to the picture is Sebastian Fitzek's detailed and critical analysis of the welfare models brought into effect by the successive government programmes after 1989; the same does Bogdan Voicu's daring incursion into the transition from traditionalism to postmodernism in providing welfare.

The volume also offers an analysis carried by Sebastian Țoc and Bianca Buligescu on the minimum income schemes and of the profile of the beneficiaries, in close connection with the curve of relative poverty and pauperism. The two authors' subject leads the way to the topic tackled by Adina Mihăilescu: the time has come to use relevant methods of assessment of the people's real needs, with the aid of standardised tools, for the entire period of reference.

The strategic planning of welfare, which cannot be attained without the professionalisation of the public service staff and adequate financing, yet to be pursued, and other causes of repeated failures of welfare policies so far are examined by Daniel Arpinte. Coming as a complement are evaluations by Mihnea Preotesi of the public policies regarding taxation and revenues, viewed from the perspective of the social inequities they have generated.

Manuela Sofia Stănculescu and Monica Marin have made a survey of the reference moments in the evolution of child protection systems in the world, and propose the means for the subsequent analysis of the child protection system in Romania. The general picture emerging from the survey finds an adequate follow-up in the description given by Ștefan Cojocaru to what a Romanian national policy for encouraging parenting should look like. This is followed by analyses of the place and role social services should play in the life of single-parent families, provided by Luminița Ionescu.

Public policies regarding education, labour, health and housing, as well as the strategy for the inclusion of the Romanian population belonging to the Roma ethnic

group, are examined by Ionuț Marian Anghel, who helps us become more aware of the latest swinging trends between Europeanisation and disempowerment.

Population aging, the elderly's living conditions, the social policies addressing these issues, and the accompanying budget expenses are approached by Mariana Stanciu. Dan Banciu and Lucian Rotariu have focused their attention on bullying, the risks involved, the description of its various components, the social issues arising therefrom, with proposals for social policies to diminish its risks. Daniel Popa and Sorin Cace bring their analysis of added social value in a social economy, the main road stops in its evolution in Romania, and they suggest that appraisals should focus on the direct recipients and on the groups and communities that have been included in social economy programs.

At the end of this journey through the mainstays of social policies, Mr. Cătălin Zamfir, member of the Romanian Academy, invites us to join him in finding an answer to the question: What model of society will Romania need?

Transition as a projected social change is analysed from the perspective of the existing strategic alternatives that make it possible, of the decisions carried out by the authorities in various stages of the time span under scrutiny, of the diligence undertaken by the Research Institute for the Quality of Life, an institution born at the onset of the transition period, to inspire the authorities' decisions, based on scientific arguments.

The high economic and social costs of the transition period, the impoverishment of a large segment of the country's population, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the social anxiety, the consequences of the reform of the social state, are as many sources of concern for the current social policies. However, the author, with a final touch of optimism, finds that all these hurdles can be surmounted, if the centrepiece of all the effort will be the national interest, and if the social policy currently focused on vulnerable groups is reoriented towards an active policy for the social development of the entire society.

As Elena Zamfir pointed out, and as most of the contributors to this volume have argued, the recent developments require a change of paradigm, and there are signs that the time is ripe for it. Let us remember the moment when the European Commission launched the Country Report for Romania in 2016. Then, the Head of the General Directorate for Labour said about what he called 'the Romanian paradox', i.e. that Romania has recorded one of the highest economic growth rates, but this goes along with another facet: this growth is not equally distributed to all.

On the same occasion, the Head of the Commission's Representative Office in Bucharest pointed at the fact that Romania was at the top of the poverty scale in the EU, and that this was proof that the country's growth model did not serve the common citizen, who keeps going down the poverty grid, and that this is not a model that the Commission encourages.

Besides the direct references to costs, benefits, economic efficiency, convergence criteria, budgetary balance, etc., economics, by definitions, is the

science that must find solutions to optimise the use of limited resources for the purpose of satisfying people's growing need for diverse and complex services.

In view of the above, the cooperation between economics researchers and social researchers, in order to redefine the demands of human societies in terms of welfare in its broadest sense, can only be beneficial. Therefore, I conclude my introduction, with congratulations for the authors and coordinators of this volume, and invite everybody to close ranks around our common research purposes.

We demonstrated, on previous occasions, that we can unite our expertise, with prodigious results.

Thank you!

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