

## ROMANIA. WHAT A COUNTRY, WHAT A DESTINY...

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**Abstract:** In a country with remarkable resources taking account of its surface, population, and climatic conditions, contradictions shock any observer. Romania has all necessary conditions – even seashore and a long natural frontier marked by Danube river – to be an economic power horse. In this context, I take a look to Switzerland, country with 7 months of winter per year and a harsh mountain landscape, but with a unique economic position in the world. But Romania's potential is only that, nothing more. Reality makes it only a pipedream. First part of the paper gravitates around Romania's economic and social situation after 1990. There is shortly presented the situation peculiar to Romanian economy prior to 1989, December. Renowned schools, engineers, activities and an industrial and energetic base were to be met in Romania; while with the "wind of change" which blow communist regimes from European continent, there came a quite strange situation in this country. Romania's education and research systems have been steady eroded, seeming that actions taken in these fields were aimed only at this base's destruction. Industry faced a dramatic downturn (over 75% of prior to 1990 industry had been practically wiped out from the Romania's industrial and economic map). Markets which had been gained through sustained work and efforts during over three decades were abandoned for nothing, while the greatest part of ex-employees in Romanian industry headed to countryside – or worse – chose the emigration path. Romanian researches and education bases almost disappeared, with the incoming inevitable negative consequences: Romania's turn to archaic values and a society characterized by living in myths and prejudices. But this pessimistic tone is changed in second part of the paper. South Korea is mentioned as a successful example which could inspire Romania, while there are brought two examples which Romanian's ancestors passed through, bringing optimism for this country's foggy short-past and precarious present. Solutions aiming at measures to be taken in agriculture, forest, industry, touristic areas are shortly presented. While the last paragraph focuses upon the role of education in changing mentality, in order to improve Romania's geopolitical position on the regional and world stage.

**Key words:** agriculture, education, forests, industry, tourism

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For an uninformed society such a Romanian one during communism, the events which took place in December 1989 came as a shock. Even if few years before, in the middle of the 9-th decade of the last century Moscow and Washington started to work together for a calm downturn for one of them (ex-USSR), and the year 1989 was characterized by sudden changes in ex communist European countries, events in December 1989 came as a thunder over Romanian society; even for the regime's leader it was the same. And he found death that month...

Unbelievable was then for great part of Romanians what happened. Euphoria came with that event. And hope came, too. It was like a siege around a fortress for a long period, and conquering it brought overreacting, and irrational behaviour. As Romanian character is characterized by enthusiasm facing waited events, but it is possibly to be followed by sudden abandon, those events came to look like a misleading *shadow*, as time has passed.

In 1989 Romania didn't have external debts at the end of 1989, having a unique position among countries with similar level of development from this point of view, while other countries were indebted to Romania (ex-USSR, Iraq, Libya, which together had to pay over USD 3 billion) and had a quite diverse industrial sector, producing from airplanes to ship-tankers of 150000 tonnes, and agricultural tools and machines, locomotives and house equipment, and turbines for hydroelectric power plants. Furthermore, it had good and renowned refineries and a developed steel and aluminium industry.

It can be mentioned that in Oradea (a town in the North-Western part of the country) there was produced tabular aluminium, a key-element used in aerospace industry; in Tirgoviste (close to Bucharest) there was an installation unique in the world: it could produce very different pipes from very different material composition with the highest frequency (used in oil, gas, and military industry). Cimpia Turzii industrial complex (in Transylvania) produced materials using iron and steel. Guban factory (in Timisoara, located in the Western part of the country), when exporting en-gross Milanese shoes distributors, they put "Made in Italy" on them. It was built and finished Danube-Black Sea Canal. Romania had a developed tourist sector, exploiting for the good of the country, the natural potential, and there existed an infrastructure which put Romania on European and Middle Eastern countries touristic map. People from Germany and Israel came regularly in Baile Felix (close to Oradea) and Borsec (in Eastern Carpathian Mountains) for medical care and treatment. As a matter of fact, Borsec mineral water gained twice Gold Medal at international competition: Wien in 1873 and Paris in 1878).

There were present developed oil and mining industries, which, had they been modernized they would have covered the necessary for a modern Romanian economy, export-oriented especially to third world countries; a market gained during three decades of sacrifice.

And – what I consider the most important thing – there had existed institutes, laboratories, and a research base, and universities with a high professional human base.

This is a synthetic framework of what Romania had had.

And after euphoria and optimism, came the strong hand of reality, shocking Romanian society in a manner giving way not only to disoriented people, but pushing them to collective depression, Romanian morale being steady low; words such as we cannot do it, we cannot work in an organized

manner, are common in post 1989 Romanian vocabulary. In the moment of Romania's accession to the European Union, it had an external debt of USD 30 billion! Over three quarters of its 1989 industrial capacity was completely destroyed, being whipped out from the map. In this point can be brought to reader's attention the fact that steel and aluminium industry were the main focus of foreign investment and privatisation. *Russian* interests manifested strongly in these areas: Tirgoviste, Cimpia Turzii and Oradea became "familiar" with these investors: they bought and after that closed them, curtailing a strong competitor for Russian similar industries. It was a hardly identifiable trait, and while Romanian society was oriented only to West, it forgot its Eastern interests and competition – looking through these lenses, after 1989 Russian influence in Romania was far greater than before! Furthermore, all plans aiming at energy's sector development, in order to curtail dependence on more and more expensive imports hit a very strong *opposition*, both internal and *external* (Malita and Georgescu, 2010: 190), the expansion of Cernavoda Nuclear power plant and the hydropower plants' modernization were postponed with negative consequences. Parts of Romanian extractive oil and gas industry were privatized in an opaque and dubiously manner, bringing Romania in a position of *total dependence on external decision elements*, which is for the first time in its entire modern history! As a consequence of chaos specific to post-1989 year education has paid, too; quality of education is lower than 45 years before, while technical and scientific research has been almost abandoned.

The Romanian economy's destruction, social chaos, cultural stagnation, downturn in education system, losing national wealth are direct consequences of Romanian society's misses, together with a paralyzed attitude from the part of political leadership.

First part of the post-communist period was witness to a more or less planned chaos, and because of it, *a part of ex-communist apparatchiks* metamorphosed in the new Romanian big and medium bourgeoisie (Malita and Georgescu, 2010: 191). During this time, Romanian industry started to enter a steady downturn trend, while unemployment affected in 1993 over one 1 million employees, and the Romanian GDP reduced with 36%. *Agriculture* was directly hit by a "sector" reform, absorbing some 40% Romanian active population. And migration from towns towards villages became a sustained peculiarity of '90s, a unique situation in Europe since the year 1800. Informal economy became part of Romanian normal life.

*The worst (and synthetic) result of this situation was and still is the massive emigration of Romanian professionals.*

In 1990 only, left the country (with no intention to return) over 96000 persons; if we add to this definitive migration the "temporary" emigration, which transformed in a definitive one, there results over 3 million people for the period 1990-2005. After 2007 another great part of Romanian fled to the West, Italy and Spain becoming the biggest absorbing countries. In Italy Romanians are the biggest foreign community, and it would be not a surprise at all if one walks on Italian streets and hear people speaking Romanian language. No one of the ex-communist countries faced such a dramatic shift of population! And the best professionals educated in the period 1960-1980, when graduates from Romanian schools were internationally recognized, preferred to emigrate, a mass social phenomena. Human degradation is the direct result of these combined factors, archaic spirit gaining an upper hand upon a possible solution aiming at

Romanian society's modernization; the period is characterized by the lowest cohesion degree in its entire modern history.

External factors came to push Romanian society in this desperate position, too. In 1980 neoliberal thinkers started to promote a smaller role for the state, preaching the great benefits of free market, while starting with 1990 Romanian thinkers fully embraced the idea of unhindered market activities. It is a fraudulent doctrine (Malita, 2012; 128), resulting in a prone crisis system. Philosophical trend of this neoliberal inspiration came together with its administrative arms: International Monetary Fund and World Bank pressed in an aggressive manner for the privatisation of Romanian big state enterprises, with disastrous consequences on long term. For example, one of the biggest industrial enterprises from Romania, located in its capital city, was sold for USD 500 thousands. Short time after that, the new owners (Kverner from Norway), would close the enterprise, selling it for, piece by piece for an enormously profit. Only one building belonging to the ex-IMGB built in the '80s was sold for USD 2.5 million (Malita and Georgescu, 2010: 196). Romanian National Bank reserves have risen because Romanian national wealth was sold at the lowest imaginable prices (both because of incompetence, incoherence and foreign influences). When nothing was left to be sold by Romania, other ex-communist countries – which didn't obey to foreign consultancy and influence – gained from selling their national wealth, a value close to the real one.

Furthermore, Romanian education system – which produced geniuses such as Haret (his education system is implemented in Japan!) or Oberth (which invented the rocket, which was perfected by his fellow von Braun, helping USA in conquering the space) – has steady lost its capacity. In 1997 there were initiated two new directions, foreign to Romanian soul: niche specialization, and informative learning. The result is already fully felt all over Romanian society: *lower quality of teachers, pupils and students.*

Scholar abandon in first 8 years of study doubled between 1996 and 2006, and for the twelve years of study it is 24%. The percentage of Romanian pupils with lowest standards is 41%. Researches institutes were closed and their assets were sold for almost nothing.

All these are direct effects of post-communist reforms, which constantly eroded Romanian society, due to a trend aimed at industry's *destruction*, instead of its *modernization*. Instead of economic recovery programs, the Romanian political leadership agenda between 1990 and 2006 missed any coherent plan for a national industrial plan.

Thin and short views of party's interests or group interests, coupled with political leadership which was looking only for votes in electoral years, overlapping elite's muteness, and mass-media exclusive interests for rating and sensational news, made Romanian national interests in the best case only a pipedream. Important problems for national interests were replaced by action aimed only at a very short term effects, all "tailors" being experts in cutting national interest's clothes.

Here we can note a comparison between South Correa and Romania. In the 60s South Correa Gross Domestic Product was 10 smaller than Romanian one. In 1972 the ratio it jumped from 1:10 to 1:6; in 1972 it was 1:2. In 1981 South Correa for the first time outmatched Romania. In 1989 the ratio become 4:1, while in 90s it was more than 10 times bigger than the Romanian one. In 2007 the Asiatic state left the developing countries ranks, entering the developed

countries branches. It is the 11-th economy of the world, but has the 4-th place in the area of patents and inventions (after Japan, USA, and China). What a proof of good and healthy policies; a country which experienced wars and occupations, bounced from underdevelopment to the table of world economic leadership.

For a country which has been striving for over a millennium to leave the stage of subsistence agriculture and archaic mentality, there is only one sustainable solution centered upon Romanians mentality's changing.

It could seem strange, but it is a country which can overcome encumbrances in short notice time. It happened two times in its history, and both times it come as a surprise for neighbors and not only for them. During ancient times, a folk from Dacian plains characterized by lecherousness and dwindling was metamorphosed through the new gospel of moderation and fortitude. *In a matter of only few years* king Burebista established a *strong state* on both sides of Danube (Mommsen, 1988: 164). In the short time of Cuza's leadership (1859-1866) there were established all main directions for Romania's future. Entire framework of reforms aiming at taking out Romania from the Middle Ages into modernity were taken in those 7 years of Cuza governance; while Hohenzollern dynasty only put them into details and followed them with sagacity.

Sustainable solutions could be found even Romanian seems to be a country purposely kept in underdeveloped position precisely in order to be exploited.

Moral renaissance should be the key-point around all should details concentrate. Self-confidence in their destiny is not only a fiction but a potential which could be exploited in the real world, with benefits. *Education* is vital subject to consider. As Haret and Mehedinti in the past developed the concept of labor's school and discipline, with remarkable effects, this could be again a viable solution for Romania's modernization, both social and economic. Industry and discipline are the two inseparable parts of the development's coin. And with discipline, comes other type of organization, where time becomes a very valuable resource. If in the traditional society – in Romanian society is the same – time is an unlimited resource, with industry, comes organization, the *watch*, time becoming important and limited resource.

Over time, the education should overlap Romanian culture and traditions. And as Romanians belong both to East and West, in the same time, having Orthodox and Eastern peculiarities, while French Revolution connecting them to Western values, they share both worlds' peculiarities. From this point of they have a quite unique situation in Europe, which they could exploit – should they be conscious of it – for their advantage, and Europe's, at large.

Around two other fields should Romania's interests gravitate: forests and land (agricultural land).

In context of climate changes and rising world population's, soil and forests would provide strength for Romania national security. Romania's agricultural potential puts it on the 7-th place at European level. Romania has almost 9.5 million hectares of arable land, while land used for hay cultivation and domestic animals "industry" is about 4,8 million hectares. Furthermore, 27% of Romanian soil is fertile or highly fertile (world average is only 11%), and 21% have a medium fertility. Romanian territory is covered by forests and associated vegetation in a proportion of 27% (Hera in Malița and Georgescu,

2010: 85) while optimal surface should be around 45% (Giurgiu in Malița and Georgescu, 2010: 93); if we speak only about functional ecological forests, Romania's territory is covered only in proportion of 22% (Giurgiu in Malița and Georgescu, 2010: 93).

As a consequence, in order to create the preconditions for Romania's sustainable development, there should be urgently taken measures regarding soils protection and forestation from place to place in agricultural areas. This measures aimed at forestation are vitally necessary for a superior use of agriculture soils, for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions sequestration, and for rising soils' fertility. Due to social and technological factors, Romania is a net importing country in food industry. In order to change this past situation for the better, there should be taken measures aimed at agriculture's revitalization: funding for research in biotechnological field should be one direction. During the last 26 years Romanian research in agricultural area has registered a de-capitalization process, while the quality and number of researchers constantly reduced. *Rebirth of Romanian agricultural researches* is a sensitive point on national security agenda, being extremely vulnerable in face of external influences and manipulations. And bio-food is a long term solution not only for Romania's economy, but for its social system, too: good and organic food reduces diseases impact, cutting medical spending and rising life standard and expectancy.

In the field of forests, we should regard South Korea's path: from a country without almost any forests, in a matter of decades, it succeeded in covering 65% of its territory with forests. Some parts of Romanian territory (especially in Southern and Eastern parts) are prone to droughts due to climate changes, forestation being a key-action for sustainable development; forests will have an eco-protective function, providing shield for water, soils, climate and ecological equilibrium, biodiversity, and landscape. Only in that moment Romanian forests will speak for and about Romanian society's moral and material credibility.

But these major points which are provided by Romania's peculiar potential should overlap with Romania's industrial rebuilding, but with environmental protection as a cornerstone; rural areas' development using rising agricultural production, rebirth of national skills and abilities; bigger founding for research and development activities in a knowledge-based society; education system's modernization in order to prepare Romanian society for the 3-rd millennium requirements; rebuilding/modernization Romania's national infrastructure (both energetic and for transportation); tourism development; environmental protection; medical care and social protection systems' revitalization.

But each this potential element can become reality only if they are preceded by a "*reform*" in *mentality* and in this point one can easy observe the importance and role of a fitted *education* system. Third millennium asks for a different education system where man will switch during his active life several times from learning to work and back. Uneducated population is a heavy burden on the state, while an educated population is a geopolitical vector which could push forward Romania's favorable geographical position to an important geopolitical position, it deserves. A mentality open to this necessity becomes a key to survival and development in global society.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

In order to better act in future it is important to know and understand present and past. Guiding the future implicates knowing the past; it is a

prerequisite to avoid future failures. Romanians' soul has passed through hardship and a fire during the last quarter of the century... Economic chaos and social dissolution are main traits of Romania's this period. Even paper starts with missing and failures peculiar to this period, some examples are brought to the reader's attention, in order to bring an optimistic attitude. In context of climate changes, Romania could successfully play its strong points: tourism, agriculture, water. *But* there is strongly needed a "revolution" in mentality, which could be brought by a well directed educational reform. A reform which should take place discretely, but in a sustained manner, in order to prepare peoples to cope with global changes and trends, and to prepare Romanian society for future challenges, is a cornerstone. Only in this way the Romania's great potential will be transformed in geopolitical reality.

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