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THE LEFT AND ROMANIA'S SOCIAL AGENDA,
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MIHAI CARADAICA AND VICTORIA STOICIU (COORDINATORS)

Șerban-Costin Crețu

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Șerban-Costin Crețu¹

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation Romania and the Democratic Left Foundation, in a gesture of normality that deserves to be reiterated, have jointly published the collective volume *The Left and Romania's Social Agenda (Stânga și agenda socială a României)*, whose coordinators are Mihai Caradaica and Victoria Stoiciu. In a period of impetus of the laissez-faire theories on the internal and international scene, one in which, although the left governed more, public policies were shaped by the right, the volume's authors give expression to their left commitment and to their own research interests, in a collection of articles that includes a wide, but not complete, range of studies on public policies in Romania from the perspective of the left. The authors come mainly from two research centers, the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (Școala Națională de Studii Politice și Administrative – SNSPA) and the Romanian's Academy Research Institute for the Quality of Life (Institutul de Cercetare a Calității Vieții – ICCV).

The book opens with a study by Professor Vladimir Pasti of SNSPA, *Problems and Social Policies of Romania's Governments (Probleme și politici sociale ale guvernărilor României)*, which puts into context the issues of the entire volume, dealing with what is a social problem, how it is born, how does a society become aware of it and how it generates an overall social and long-term project to address it. For Pasti, the social problem involves an important cleavage between society and the state, between, on the one hand, the need for change and the bearers of change and, on the other hand, the establishment. The author judiciously notes that society always wins. It is not indifferent, however, how society wins: if it does it optimally, by raising awareness and treating the problem through a social project, or suboptimal, through conflict, by the absence or the failing of a social project. Working with this conceptual framework, Pasti makes a brief review of how the power in the Romanian state reacted to social change from the second half of the nineteenth century until today. The investigation is not encouraging, because the author discovers that, if before World War I, in the interwar period, respectively in communism, social projects were proposed but not completed, in the post-revolutionary period, such a project is utterly lacking. The implication

¹ National University of Political Studies and Public Administration

is natural, such a project must be formulated and realized. In its absence, data on Romania's social development will continue to be, as it results from the volume, completely unsatisfactory.

Iulian Stănescu, researcher at ICCV, deals with *The Social Agenda and Public Policies (Agenda socială și politicile publice)*, and offers an overview of Romania's social issues in 2018, based precisely on the data referred to in the previous article. The same plastic and worrying expressions – left-wing government, right-wing policies; growth without development – are the leitmotiv of Stănescu's contribution, as are reiterated throughout the book. He shows that the data from both domestic and European statistics are more than concerning: the emigration of at least 15% of Romania's population in 25 years; one of the highest risks of poverty and the highest level of income inequality in the European Union; one of the lowest percentages in the EU of social spending in the GDP and the national budget; poorly developed and unevenly distributed public services in urban and rural areas; economic growth not accompanied by social benefits obtained through redistribution under the auspices of the flat tax system, and, basically, the non-taxation of wealth; the absolute "primitive" distribution of income between labor and capital, to the detriment of the former (similar to that in the developed countries before 1900) and, in particular, the underfinancing of essential services, such as health and education; all reflected in the data regarding the Romanians pessimism, who find, in a crushing majority, that the country is going in the wrong direction. In describing the Romanian realities, the author observes that our integration in the Western institutions dose not provide the expected optimization.

The article of SNSPA's doctoral student Matteo Zanellato logically follows after the historical and present descriptions of Romania's social state made in the first two studies as a theoretical reformulation of the cleavage between the left and the right, so that what is the left and what are the left policies should be clear to the reader. The author presents the changes induced by the technological progress to the relationship between the left and the right in the last 20-30 years at the European and global level. This progress has encouraged the globalization and the market to the point that, according to the author – which I do not share – the state would lose its role in regulating social policies, and the left would be in the position to further assert its values – the dignity of the person, redistribution, equal opportunities, etc. – by adapting to technological change and globalization. Thus, the left could maintain its values, but it should change its way of acting. However, the author does not describe how this might happen, the references to political parties, the Internet and Kant putting man and public happiness in the center, are far from enough to outline institutions, rules, mechanisms of action in accordance with values. One thing is clear, the left has to be rethought and reaffirmed, not abolished.

The article written by Mihai Vasile and Adi Dohotaru (the former being a consultant in social and educational policies and latter being a researcher, social activist and independent MP), *Social Aid in Romania - Between Myth and Reality*

(*Ajutoarele sociale în România – între mit și realitate*), is struggling with one of propaganda's favorite myths: too much social spending in Romania, the same propaganda who complains that education and health are of poor quality, the same propaganda that does not go beyond the level of the mother who urges her daughter to graduate from a University, in order not to work hard and earn a lot. Their article is almost entirely a suite of comparative statistical data between Romania and the other countries of the European Union. This data show that in all areas, ranging from the total social spending compared to GDP, to the budgetary allocations for health, education, etc., Romania is in a worse position than most of the EU's member states, when it is not outright in the last place. The merit of the article is to show with blunt figures that you cannot get a good level of education and health without spending. You cannot endlessly pay miserable wages and wait for performance, as long as any goods and services, including the public ones, cost. The unstated but present idea is that you cannot ensure social development with an economic growth assured by the suboptimal pay of labor that generates the highest income inequalities in Europe between the special pensions and salaries and the huge rest of population. It is not a social model, let alone one of the left.

From an entrepreneur position, Lucian Sârbu, who specializes in philosophy and marketing, studies the situation of Romanian entrepreneurship –*Beyond glossy magazines: The Entrepreneur in Romania (Dincolo de revistele glossy: antreprenor în România)*– as he sees in it the possible engine of economic development, the basic condition for redistribution through social policies. The myth of the entrepreneur's privileged situation perpetuates in Romanian mass-media. Reality, as shown by Sârbu's research, is totally different. Most firms with domestic capital struggle at the limit of survival, and the most viable ones are mostly in a few privileged areas. The main tool used by the author to explain this difficult situation is one of a strictly economic nature: there exists a need for money in order to have a solvent demand. Or, as the author points out, the liquid monetary mass per capita in Romania is the smallest in the European Union. Under these conditions, the demand being restricted, the supply cannot grow, and the situation of the Romanian companies becomes a difficult one, in the long run. This explains why most of the Romanians still prefer to work in the public sector, and why a substantial part of the entrepreneurs would always give up their business for such a job. The unformulated conclusion of the author is that the facilities offered, paradoxically, by a left-wing government actually favor the great foreign capital at the expense of social policies, while it holds the most cost-effective half of the Romanian economy, employs only a third of the work in the private sector, and pays taxes 4-5 times lower than the Romanian capital.

Sebastian Țoc, researcher at ICCV and Lecturer at SNSPA, writes about *The Manifestation of Social Inequalities in the Romanian Education System (Manifestarea inegalităților sociale în sistemul de învățământ din România)*. The author's description of the Romanian education system is realistic and not at all encouraging: a high rate of out-of-school children, especially in rural areas and

disadvantaged social groups; an even higher rate of early school leaving, and only about 60% of high school graduates pass the Bacalaureate Exam. To all this, one can add some of the weakest results in the EU at the PISA tests. In short, illiteracy, and in particular, the functional one, is alarmingly growing in a system which, despite all the shortcomings, in the 1980s produced a more skilled labor force than the one in the West. And the author's explanation is correct: if the entire social system functions badly, a part of it cannot function well. Chronic sub-financing is not the only cause of the negative state of affairs, an entire range of causes, from the low income of the population – especially in rural areas, in the case of the Roma minority, etc. – to the employment and wage prospects of those choosing a career in education, contribute to reduced performance. The idea that the present situation will have catastrophic consequences for at least 20-30 years from now on is consistent with the citizens' view that salvation can only be individual or by leaving the country.

Alina Dragolea, Assistant Professor at SNSPA studies in the article *Naming Is Important: Anti-Poverty Strategies and the Gender Dimension (A numi e important: strategiile anti-sărăcie și dimensiunea de gen)* the impact of poverty on Romania's female population. Assuming that technological and social developments have an impact on various public policies issues, the author presents the statistics on poverty and social exclusion in general in Romania, then highlights that these problems are present in greater proportion among women than among men, and in particular among mothers, those disabled, and the elderly ones. Citing and analyzing briefly the different strategies to fight poverty which include a gender component, Dragolea finds that they are incomplete, that their implementation is poor, and that, generally, they do not produce the expected effects, as shown by the chronic problems of poverty and greater social exclusion of women. Women in Romania suffer twice: first, like all citizens living in a state whose social functions leave much to be desired, then, despite a correct legal framework, gender discrimination is perpetuated, women being more exposed to poverty and social exclusion.

Adi Dohotaru also wrote an article about *Autochthonous Participatory Budget: Between Embezzlement and Emancipation (Bugetarea participativă autohtonă: între deturnare și emancipare)* inspired by his attachment to Marxism and its various incarnations from the Commune of Paris and the Soviets to the recent left-wing experiments in Brazil. Participatory budget is a formula whereby part of the local budget is made available to the community so that it not only decides the purpose of its use, but it also tracks the way it is used. This is one of the many attempts to respond to alleged failures of democracy to tackle the social problems. The author rightly notes that attempts made in Cluj with the participatory budget are rather a propaganda misappropriation than a real implementation of the mechanism. The author does not notice that the participatory budget instrument is only possible in the democratic case, to the extent that power allows it; in other words; it cannot be a correct solution to the problems of democracy.

Victor Negrescu, Lecturer at SNSPA and left-wing politician, studies in the article *Fair Trade, A New Form of Social Consumption (Comerțul echitabil, o nouă formă de consum social)* the openness of the Romanian consumer to fair trade, by which he understands not only a trade for the benefit of consumers through information and high-quality products, but, more importantly, also a social trade, through which the production and sale of goods from disadvantaged areas should be encouraged. This compensation phenomenon of the negative effects of free trade for the areas with less productivity, present at the global scale, is, according to the author, appropriate in Romania; the consumers would be willing to pay for fair trade. Regrettably, the author emphasizes less that this form of commerce could be used primarily to privilege Romanian products – with the three implications: social, information and quality wise – removed from the main internal market by the few invading large retail chains.

Octavia Moise, an Associate Professor at SNSPA and an official of the Romanian Banking Institute, deals – in *The Need for a Real Post-accession Project. 100 Years Since the Great Union and 10 years Since Joining the EU: Progressive Reflections in the Field of International Relations (Necesitatea unui proiect real post aderare. La 100 de ani de la Marea Unire și 10 ani de la aderarea în UE: direcții de reflecție progresiste în domeniul relațiilor internaționale)* – with the necessity of a country project, especially in this conjunction of anniversaries of the Romanian nation. The author's proposal is somewhat surprising, but not meaningless, wanting by way of this country project for Romania to have a capacity for resilience in different areas. In the common language, the author points out that it would be desirable for Romania to have a greater capacity to adapt to the phenomena it faces in the different areas of social and economic life. From the article, it should be understood that this country project would be an optimization of the functioning of the various public and societal sectors in a collaborative way, so that they could withstand external pressures in an everchanging geo-political environment, and in order to reverse the domestic pessimism regarding the direction of the country.

Matei Ghigiu – recently departed – a long-time activist for the right of people with disabilities (he had himself such a condition), writes about *Marginalization and Social Exclusion. Public Policies on Disability. Reform, Consolidation and Expertise (Marginalizare și excluziune socială. Politici publice în domeniul dizabilității. Reformă, consolidare și expertiză)*. The author points out that, despite the existence of an acceptable legal framework, the protection of persons with disabilities leaves a lot to be desired, especially in terms of securing an independent life, a job, and on ensuring the personnel need for support. These problems are mainly due to under-funding and to the lack of expertise in the field. The author also proposes a plan of concrete measures to remedy the situation, which obviously means, first of all, solving these main issues.

Mihail Caradaică, Lecturer at SNSPA writes about *The Left and Technology's Challenges: Blockchain (Stânga și provocările tehnologiei: Blockchain)*. The author briefly describes the blockchain technology that originally represented the

instrumental background for cryptocurrencies, but it was later found that, because it requires a network of information nodes that can control each other, it provides greater confidence for data users. Regrettably, the author does not refer to the real potential of blockchain technology not only to limit fake news, but also to optimize the state of democracy. Instead, he refers to the opportunities the left has by participating in this global network of information blocks, thus optimizing its political activity.

The Left and Romania's Social Agenda is undoubtedly a necessary but insufficient response to the need for real knowledge regarding the social situation in Romania and, moreover, to the need of presenting concurrent ideological solutions to this situation. It is important to bring to the attention of the readers that budgetary allocations for social policies are among the lowest in the EU, but it is not enough to describe this fact. The volume has the merit of stating in several contributions, although not sufficiently strong, that there can be no redistribution without income; and nowhere income, redistribution, social equity, the reduction of inequalities and of poverty exists without progressive taxation of revenues, differentiated taxation of consumption and wealth taxes. The Romanian tax system resembles that of an oligarchic state, rather than that of the Nordic or Western Europe. The articles in the volume suggest that this must change and this is the task of the left. The Romanian social model must evolve from favoring the capital (particularly the foreign one) to protecting the internal workforce, i.e. to protecting its own citizens. This is a difficult task. As it is well observed in the volume, as a nation and as a state we must understand and defend our rights and interests. The volume, written from a leftist perspective, makes such a statement, even if not as plainly as it should.