THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND MORAL CONSEQUENCES OF EMIGRATION. ROMANIA AND HER JEOPARDISED ELDERLY

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Abstract:

Romania’s transition from a communist to a capitalist economy, paved the way for an unexpected number of Romanians to emigrate to western Europe, after the fall of the Iron Curtain: either as legal or illegal labour migrants, or as victims of trafficking networks.

The present paper analyses this soaring flow of migration starting with the very early 1990s. Consequently, an alarming number of social, political, economic and moral issues have immediately occurred within contemporary Romania, such as: political tensions between Romania and west European host countries, stigmatisation, racism and chauvinism, lack of labour force at home, export of intelligence through scholarships.

The present paper also analyses a highly topical moral aspect of the phenomenon of emigration: the responsibility towards the deserted elderly, who remain at home in Romania. Who takes care of the elderly, left behind in (almost) empty Romanian villages? Whose moral and financial ‘burden’ are they becoming? Does Romania have the necessary institutional and legislative framework to aid and protect the ‘left-behind’ elderly?

Key words: emigration, elderly, Romania

Legal (labour) migration

Romania’s slow and difficult transition of from a communist to a capitalist economy, corroborated with the notorious corruption of the 1990s Romanian (neo-socialist) authorities, paved the way for Romania to become a primary country of origin of labour migration in the 1990s, mainly in a legal form. This flow of labour migration naturally soared after the fall of the Iron Curtain, as passport administration and international travel were liberalized. Consequently an alarming number of Romanian migrant workers migrated to Western Europe legally. 170,000 persons emigrated...
legally, only in the first 3 years after the fall of Communism in Romania. Most of them did not return to Romania, deciding to choose their host country as their country of future residence, tempted by the much higher living standards in Western Europe.

This phenomenon naturally triggered a considerable crisis on the economic markets of these West European countries during the 1990s, due to the unexpectedly massive number of immigrants ready to accept any (un)skilled job openings, for less wages than the local residents of the host countries. This consequently led on the one hand to an increase of unemployment among the nationals of the host countries, while on the other hand, to an upsurge of negative feelings towards to influx of CEE immigrants. Consequently, during the 1990s the host country authorities were forced to impose certain sanctions in order to curb and maintain Romanian westwards migration within a restricted legal framework: for example, taxes were imposed on border crossings or migrants had to prove that they were in possession of a certain amount of money.

The very same phenomenon led to serious economic issues in the source country, Romania, as well. In the first half of the decade, the unprecedented labour force emigration caused a serious deficit of skilled and unskilled work force in the Romanian society: from 1990 to 2002 employment declined alarmingly by 44%, causing 3.5 million jobs to vanish. Most of the heavy industry and infrastructure/construction industry work force vanished, these industries being vended to foreign investors, as late as the end of the decade. It is important to mention that it is not only labour migration per se which caused this serious deficit. Naturally, the vast majority of the work migrants left to other countries for better earning possibilities, such as Israel, Turkey and Hungary (1990-1995), Germany, Italy, Spain and Western Europe in general (1996-2002) and at present since 2002, UK, Portugal, Switzerland, Ireland, Spain and Italy being assaulted.

Nevertheless it is paramount to mention that Romania suffered since the beginning, especially middle of the 1990s an alarming emigration of highly qualified specialists. The most usual trajectory has been full/partial study scholarships offered to the top ranking Romanian students by universities in the USA, UK, Ireland, France and Germany, followed by secure and well paid employment possibilities on these host countries’ markets. Large salaries and a by far more prestigious social status constantly encourage Romanian
intelligence emigration. The most notable areas of emigration study and employment in this sector are Sciences and Human Rights: Computer Sciences, Political Studies, and International Law-Human Rights. In 2006 alone, the United States provided through private job placement companies 14,742 jobs, involving summer work for Romanian students.

Moreover it is not only top-ranking student who are emigrating to West Europe and the USA, but the top-ranking skilled professionals, especially academia and research specialists from all domains. This outflow commenced immediately after the fall of the Iron Curtain in the very early 1990s (this a few years earlier than the top students’ emigration flow) and mostly stopped at the end of the same decade, while the students outpour is still a paramount issue.

Thus the Romanian academia and society lost its very best and skilled specialists in all fields at the very start of its troublesome transition. This may be considered as one of the very causes due to which Romania suffered such a weary and controversial socio-economic and political transition after 1989: the top, skilled specialists and thinkers left, or had fled even during the Communist regime seeking political asylum in the West and in the USA.

Thus vacuum emerged in the post 1989 years in precisely those paramount fields, which would have been indispensable for a quick transition in Romania: political elite and specialists in international relations, economy, banking, tourism, academia, public relations, agriculture and infrastructure/constructions. The above-mentioned vacuum was and is being filled up with fast trained, BA, MA or even PhD often under trained ‘specialists’, due to the decrease of the level of the Romanian academia and higher education standards. In addition to the easier-to-graduate diplomas, these fast trained specialists are rarely motivated professionally, due to the still low salaries and low social status.

An exception is the thin social layer of Romanian successful private entrepreneurs, with a considerably incorrupt/honest hard work-attained background, and a high economic turnover and business quota.

Returning to our topic of soaring labour migration, at the very end of the 1990s (legal and illegal), Romanian authorities have implemented certain acts, meant to curb the mobility of the labour force. The first major step the Romanian government took was the creation of a specialized public institution to oversee this activity (Labour Force Migration Office) in 2002, within the Ministry of
Labour, Social Solidarity and Family. The Office keeps the evidence for migration in- and outflows and monitors, together with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Interpol and the Border Police, the lawful application of the conventions concluded by the Romanian Government and other states’ governments. It also administers the inflows of foreign workers as well as providing a database to Romanians wishing to work abroad.

The Office is also in charge of the majority of job placements abroad.

2004 was the year of Romania’s NATO accession and the Romanian authorities were forced by the “top-down-policy” to take further legislative steps. Romania adopted a new policy in the field of immigration: the National Strategy on Migration. The major goal of the initiative is to provide a coherent legal framework for labour migration, asylum cases and naturalization. In addition, it is meant to promote institutional coherence by coordinating the activities of institutions active in the field of immigration, asylum and integration. Its mission statement is to control and manage inflows, to prevent and combat illegal immigration, to improve protection for vulnerable migrants, to assist the social integration of alien residents.

As far as the acceptance, culturalisation and integration of vulnerable immigrants, Romania still faces very serious issues. There is not even reliable documentation on these psychosocial and legal aspects, let alone any official effective programs of integration of any of the immigrants. The Romanian authorities and the Romanian society are not yet prepared to effectively integrate, accept and live in harmony with their own ethnic minorities such as the Roma community or sexual minorities, let alone the mainstream mentalities regarding alien immigrants: either work force, political asylum seekers (most often African) or students. A too high level xenophobia, anti-Semitism and generally, discomfort with ‘the Other/the Different’ is still sensed in the Romanian society and mass-media, having in view the fact that we have become a Schengen and EU society a nearly year ago. Nevertheless the legal procedures difficulties in the process of naturalization and in Romania, meant to discourage applications, has contributed to the decrease in the number of asylum applications and may be attributed to the relatively low rate of acceptance of claims in Romania.

Romania is likely to become an attractive destination for migrants from outside the European Union, having become an EU
IOM’s research indicates that migration from Romania will breed further migration, both regular and irregular. Romanian authorities may expect and prepare for a considerable increase in immigration. It is estimated that between 2007 and 2010, 15,000 to 18,000 immigrants will arrive in Romania annually: the total stock of foreign residents in Romania increased from 45,900 at the end of 2005 to 48,200 in 2006.

**Trafficking: Improvements in the framework of Romania.**

Romania, and its western part in particular, play the role of the end of the ‘colander’, through which the regional/international trafficking networks (CEE and Balkans) recruit their victims (from Europe and Asia) and gather them in West Romania for further vending and exporting. According to one of the most prestigious Romanian daily papers, Jurnalul National, (The Daily Dairy), once the victims are flocked to the western cities of Romania, they are handed over to the Serbian underworld leaders (reminiscences of the paramilitary groups and organizations, which shortly after and during the Yugoslav War took the law into their hands). At this stage, the trafficked victims are either submitted to forced massive prostitution within the former Yugoslavian space or they are sold further on, in any direction worldwide, depending on the ‘demand’ on the sex-market: Western Europe, Latin America or the Asia Minor.

Due to its location, Romania is a major crossroad for international economic exchange in Europe. However, because of insufficient investment, maintenance and repair, the transport infrastructure does not meet the current needs of a market economy and lags behind Western Europe. Nevertheless, these conditions are rapidly improving and catching up with the standards of Trans-European transport networks. Also, the Government is actively pursuing new external financing or public-private partnerships to further upgrade the main roads, and especially the country's motorway network.

**Tourism – often sex tourism**

Tourism is one of the most dynamic and fastest developing sectors of the economy of Romania. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council Romania is the fourth fastest growing country in the world in terms of travel and tourism total demand with a
yearly potential growth of 8% from 2007-2016. As far as trafficking is concerned, the Romanian Black Sea shore is a highly popular tourist destination for many Europeans. More than 60% of the foreign visitors are from EU countries, thus triggering the upsurge of sex work and trafficking also due to the excellent geographic position: the intersection of three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. Destinations such as Mangalia, Saturn, Venus, Neptun, Olimp, Constanta and Mamaia (sometimes called the Romanian Riviera) and are among the most popular attraction during summer, when trafficking, sex work also soar, due to the foreign tourist investment.

Moreover, geopolitically speaking, the Romanian Black Sea coast is a strategic point for the N.A.T.O. and for the United States Army of contact and surveillance. Due to this reason, after Romania swiftly joined N.A.T.O. in 2004, a number of U.S. army bases are being now constructed in the country and on the Romanian Black Sea coast, especially. It only took a short period of time for the Romanian hotel owners to realize that this can be a serious input of foreign hard currency. It is a fact that in the last ten years, many hotels on the Romanian Black Sea shore have developed into an ‘industry’ for prostitution and for trafficking. On the other hand, N.A.T.O. surveillance cannot be effective unless there is social and legal stability in the new member countries, in our case Romania. That is why, N.A.T.O. bases also represent an additional guarantee factor that the uprooting of organised crime cells will be completed from top-down (international bodies), as well as from bottom-up (local states coerced by the international umbrella organisations).

Since joining the N.A.T.O. in 2004 and the E.U. and Schengen Zone in 2007, Romania has been coerced by international umbrella bodies, to adopt a top-down policy of combating trafficking in women. Special NGOs were founded, they were allotted grants and technical aid, other women’s rights NGOs were given considerable increased aid as compared to the pre-joining moment (for example, The Association for the Promotion of Women in Romania, ApoWeR, Timisoara).

Most importantly, the Romanian government was forced to take a further concrete step and to found a National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons, within the Ministry of Administration and Interior (http://anitp.mira.gov.ro/en/), with a clear-cut National Action Plan for each year, starting 2006-2007. The Romanian National Agency Against Trafficking operates in a well-articulated
collaboration with the Romanian Police, the Secret Services, as well as with different Romanian private and public organisations. Furthermore, it does not function as an insular body, but in tight cooperation with all eligible institutional partners of the neighbouring countries, international NGOs, the Interpol, the I.O.M.—Romania Mission and with international human rights organisations specialised on human trafficking, such as the International Centre for Migration Policy Development in Vienna (ICMPD).

Furthermore, both the Ministry’s and the Agency’s effectiveness is closely monitored by international bodies and NGOs, as well as by the Romanian government. Their semestrial Reports on Trafficking in Persons in Romania have become not only a reliable database on international trafficking in South-Eastern Europe and in the Balkans, but they also mirror certain positive facts regarding this type of organised crime in Romania: a constant downward trend of the phenomenon, a 1.45% increase in the number of persons who had known about trafficking, a drop by 6.92% in the number of persons who couldn’t differentiate trafficking in persons from prostitution, an increased level of information, evaluated through a changed perception on victimization by trafficking, the total number of convictions for the first 6 months in 2007 was 131 compared to 187 convicted persons in the whole year of 2006.

The number of investigations conducted during the reporting period was 316. Moreover, the prosecutors with the Directorate for the Investigation of Organized Crime and Terrorism related Offences developed exchanges of information with counterpart agencies in destination countries in 13 cases involving trafficking in persons. According to the Report, “they also received 44 requests of international assistance in criminal matters; 18 requests were dealt with in cooperation with the police service, while the rest of 26 are under investigation. At the same time Romania made 26 such requests to judicial authorities in other countries; as of today, 4 of them have been solved”.

What is more, the Report mentions clearly, that for the very first time, the Romanian State takes over the “protection, assistance and social reintegration of victims of trafficking”, which in itself represent a huge development as the victim alone was expected to notify about his/her situation. This in most cases represented a ‘mission impossible’, as all victims were deprived of their official
documents to identify themselves with, secondly hardly could they ever escape from the trafficking networks and they were completely destroyed physically and psychologically. The Agency has also developed a project to set up national standards for specialized victim assistance services, a set of norms based on which protection of and assistance to victims shall be carried out as a complex and ongoing process accommodated to the needs and characteristics of each individual victim.

Conclusions:

The Romanian society and administration is dealing as we have seen, with a series of paramount issues regarding the consequences of the present phenomenon of emigration to Western Europe.

Not only are we creating an unfavourable image connected to sex tourism, trafficking as well as to illegal migration and document forging, but the Romanian social work system and the Romanian society is facing a new topical issue: if all the reliable working force, that is the majority of the young and middle generation emigrate, who remains at home to take care of the elderly?

There have recently occurred certain regions of Romania, poorer counties in the South and East of the country, where the young and middle-aged population have (almost) completely disappeared, thus hamlets and villages are left behind almost entirely empty. The elderly are the only, usually 2-3 couples, or even none, who constitute the so-called ‘population’ of such locations. This situation is comparable only with the quite similar condition in southern Albania, where villages are empty, due to the massive (labour) emigration to Greece. Worse even, what happens at the point when those poor or sick elderly cannot be self-sufficient any longer and they become definitely dependent on somebody younger? And that somebody younger is absent, having emigrated?

Certain open-ended questions have become topical issues for the Romanian parliament as well as for the Romanian civil society: who takes care of the left-behind elderly? Do the Romanian government, the civil society or the society itself have the necessary funds to support them financially? Should the elderly be placed in care centres, and then again, who supports them in these centres?
Should new laws be implemented for the emigrating generations to shoulder certain responsibilities (moral and financial) towards their elderly relatives, deserted at home? What happens to the empty, desolate villages? To the empty houses: should they be demolished and the land be used for different purposes? Should they be demolished and the construction materials recycled?

Which is Romania’s more important economic as well as moral gain: the foreign currency with which the emigrated Romanian Diaspora (supposedly) aids the Romanian economy, or the issue of the elderly left behind in the social care of …who?

**APPENDIX:** As shocking, nevertheless unnervingly solid evidence about the thesis of the present article, I would like to suggest the readers the following short documentaries, on the topics of:

- East to West Europe migration
- Romanian emigrants, prostitution and trafficking
- The vast array of ‘reactions’ of the West towards East European (Romania) migration and its jeopardies.

**Bibliography**

- "A trip to Romania "- about UK's reticence and fear of Romanian immigrant workers after joining the EU: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxuUC9DZXy8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxuUC9DZXy8)
- "Italian immigrant backlash draws Romanian ire - 06 Nov 07"--- about Romanians living in prehistoric miserable conditions in the outskirts of Rome: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWHkuZdDzKw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWHkuZdDzKw)
- “Britain shouldn't fear Bulgarian and Romanian immigration” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBLzHbpA98s&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBLzHbpA98s&feature=related)
- “Immigration in the UK”- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mBUNpdYuhQ&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mBUNpdYuhQ&feature=related)

Highly recommended:

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i In the current social policy system also considered Health care policy, Family-related policy, Housing policy, Employment policy and Education policy.

ii The Ministry established co-operation with British experts within a so called “British-Czech” project.