



"Ovidiu Șincai" European School

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Report regarding the Third Seminar of the European School of Transylvania Odorheiu Secuiesc, 23-26 February 2006

The Third Seminar of the European School of Transylvania was organized by the "Ovidiu Șincai" Institute in the interval 23-26 February 2006, at the *Târnava Hotel* from Odorheiu Secuiesc town. The seminar was unfolded around the theme of *The Transition Process in Romania*. The lectures were presented by **Aurora Liiceanu**, Senior Researcher at the Institute of Psychology of the Romanian Academy – "**Transition – Paradoxes and Hopes**"; **Ilie Șerbănescu**, Minister of Reform (December 1997 – April 1998) – "**The Economic Dimension of Transition in Romania**"; **Vladimir Pasti**, Professor, State University for Political Studies and Administration, Bucharest – "**The Role of Civil Society in Transition**"; **Emil Constantinescu**, President of Romania (1996-2000), "**The Role of Leaders in the Transition Period from Romania**".

1. Aurora Liiceanu, "Transition – Paradoxes and Hopes"

During the first part of the course a general vision on the psychological profile of Romanians in transition was presented.

Romania is a society of paradoxes. In Bucharest there is the greatest number of casinos in the country, but at the same time the greatest number of churches. Most Romanians continue to declare themselves as believers (97,6%, compared to only 70% of Bulgarians, 57% of Hungarians or 27% of Estonians). At the same time, there is also a great opening towards the west, a fact proved by, for example, the easy



adoption of some western holidays, such as *Valentine's Day*.

During the second part of the course there were some debates around present psychosocial issues in four groups: (a) migration; (b) violence in schools; (c) witches; (d) respect of the law. The debate groups had the task to identify the reasons for occurrence of these issues, if they are specific to the transition period, if other states were and are still confronted with them, as well as to propose means for eliminating their negative trends.

2. Ilie Șerbănescu, “The Economic Dimension of Transition in Romania”

There are elements, such as the situation in agriculture, that lead us to the idea that the economic transition in Romania has not finished yet. Thus, the phenomenon of migration from the rural to urban areas, presently occurring, is an important element of change of a largely agrarian economy. However, we have still some problems in the rural area; that is why the funds from the European Union can contribute to development of agriculture in Romania.

Romanian economy is dominated by the foreign capital. For the population it is positive element, because foreign management is better.

Economic development was done through a policy of sterilization, as the fight



against inflation is done by monetary means. More specifically, the National Bank of Romania has blocked 10 billion euros under the form of national currency.

The introduction of the flat tax in January 2005 has led to an increase of consume, but without a corresponding increase of the domestic offer. In spite of that, the flat tax is a good thing, as it encourages labour

productivity. However, this is a measure applicable only on the short term, as after the EU integration taxes will have to be increased (through VAT or flat tax). At the same time, the flat tax should be applied not only to wages, but also to fortunes, cash, estates and other activities.

3. Vladimir Pasti, “The Role of Civil Society in Transition”

During the first part of the course participants were asked to express opinions about what they think is transition. Thus, transition was defined as passing from a historical moment to another, a period of structural and legislative changes, a grey area through which we are trying to achieve economic stability, an evolutionary cycle having both an internal and an external feature, a bio-psycho-social transformation, a stereotype, a change in the life of each individual, an excuse of the political class in order to avoid a

long term projection or passing from an economic system to another. Two tendencies were thus identified: a description of a natural change or a pretext.

In Romania, transition has taken place in the sense of modernization, from the political change and adaptation of decision-makers to the new realities to the cultural revolution bringing new perception even on taboo subjects. In some cases change is coming from above. In 1989, capitalism was desired only by a political elite. Therefore, changes were applied by politicians on society, mainly through reform. The shift was achieved, first through the rules of functioning of institutions.

Changes in transition come from two sources: (a) politicians; (b) society, which tries to bring changes to the reform imposed by politicians. In Romania's case, the relation between the state and the economic production has altered, and the society should have adapted to that. Instead, society has adopted an evasion attitude. The main source of capitalisation was the debts. Transition is finished when the society and the politicians reach a consensus concerning the path to be followed.

During the second part of the seminar there were opinions regarding the resemblances and differences between the Romanian and the European societies. Among the resemblances there were identified: resistance to change, banking system, the important role of services, the family structure, values and principles. Among the differences there were emphasized: the rate of individual involvement in the community (lower in Romania), the degree of information (higher in the EU), attachment to norms (less developed in Romania), political culture, the capacity to adapt to changes on labour market (higher among Romanians).

These differences are mainly cultural, but there are also structural differences, such as: (a) the capacity of sustainable economic growth (lower in Romania); (b) the rate of labour force occupation (higher in the EU); (c) concentration of property and (d) distribution of wealth (a higher social polarisation in Romania). The solutions in order to eliminate these differences would be: (1) creating more jobs; (2) eliminating black market jobs; (3) increasing wages and (4) introducing the western working patterns.

In what concerns civil society, it can be conceived in a restrained sense, as being composed by NGOs and foundations, or in a broader sense, as the entirety of institutions making the connection between state and citizens (churches, trade-unions, business associations, press, groups of influence). The institutional perspective identifies four types of entities: (a) administrative institutions; (b) commercial firms; (c) non-profit citizens associations; (d) family associations. From a philosophical perspective there is only the state and the society.

Romanian civil society does not have, at present, a well-defined legal framework. Ultimately, it is the political sphere that determines the good functioning of civil society. Nevertheless, it must acknowledge the general interest of the citizens. Civil society is not obliged, however, to be objective, it can also be partisan. From this point a free debate followed concerning the role of the civil society.

4. Emil Constantinescu, "The Role of Leaders in the Transition Period from Romania"

Political leaders must have a vision and certain qualities according to the context in which they act (revolution, war, peace, etc.). Leaders from the periods of transition

must be the inspirers and decision-makers of some fundamental changes. Great historical changes imply a series of high social costs, on the short term, but benefits are never easy to obtain and, usually, those producing them don't benefit from them. All that is happening in this periods, good or bad, is the responsibility of the heads of state.

The qualities necessary to a leader are, in the order of importance: (1) historical vision; (2) belief; (3) charisma; (4) decision; (5) acceptance for the political price; (6) freedom from constraints; (7) capacity of physical and intellectual effort. Historical vision is a coherent conception that cannot be built without a comprehensive culture. Belief is necessary for putting in practice the leader's vision. He must have faith in his destiny.

Charisma cannot be built but in exceptional cases. It must set in motion whole masses of people. Often its effect is seen *a posteriori* and is based on honesty, because masses know how to chose the original. Decision is the capacity to take major measures according to the historical vision, no matter of the preferences of the public opinion. It is very important for a leader to lose in life. Acceptance of the political price means assuming decisions that might negatively affect the future electoral chances

Freedom from constraints is closely linked with the personal past. There are very few cases in which political leaders are really free. Most of the time they are the products of complex organisational structures. When they are free, political leaders can retire at any time. At the same time, political leaders must have a good health condition and the capacity of working 16 hours a day. Physical indispositions can create difficulties in taking decisions. That's why leaders should undergo complete medical examinations (psychological, too).



Politicians are exposed to the public and to other less orthodox means. That is why they must be surrounded by trustworthy people. It must not be forgotten, though, that any calumny produces truths in the public perception. At the same time, though, image is not a shield in case of breaking the law. Politicians must pay politically in the first

instance. An authentic leader must know what is important from the point of view of political priorities.

Leaders wishing that secret services had the right to investigate are encouraging a totalitarian system. Only someone from outside the system could fight these

tendencies in the Romanian transition. Unfortunately, the Romanian civil society functions as an annex of the political sphere. It is necessary to create a network of professionals in all fields in order to resist against the authoritarianism of the bad taste promoted at present time. This network, made up of young people, having no links with the structures of the past, can make analyses of the state of the nation and can make up a better product of Romanian politics.

5. Evaluation of questionnaires

The appreciations of the participants concerning the organization of the second seminar compared to the first seminar were generally “as good as last time”, “very good” or “good”. In what concerns the evaluation of the relations established between participants and lecturers, the good communication from the last module was preserved both among participants and between participants and lecturers.

Recommendations of the participants aim at following aspects: extending the programme of the seminar with one more day, organisation of activities in the spare time and more interactive courses.

