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**The Family Policies and their Impact
on the Evolution of Fertility in Post-
Communist Romania**

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Abstract

The issue of female fertility may and should be extended to the level of family policies, although these ones are increasingly more difficult to implement in the context of current circumstances, which are completely disadvantageous both economically and socially. It's a fact that this indicator had a somewhat slower decrease in Romania after the abrupt fall in 1990 in comparison with other Eastern European countries, but the very low level remained constant with no clear sign of recovery, warning sign which had no answer at the level of political actions (in the last years Romania was ranked among the last countries in Europe from this perspective). In the last two decades, Romania had a faltering and incoherent family policy that determined extreme disparities in the female population fertility: while some communities still have a very high birth rate, in most areas of the country this indicator collapses at an unstoppable pace. A spectacular recovery of female population fertility is hardly possible and is not even recommendable on the short term; however the society should find solutions to the issues deriving from the structural changes determined by the evolution of this indicator.

Keywords: Family Policy, Low Fertility, Post-Transitional Demographic Regime

Introduction

There are clues according to which the very low fertility is generally contrary to the preferences of the individuals which possess it (van Peer, 2002). When they express their opinion on the “ideal family”, women say that, within a different institutional framework, they think they would have had several children (Hărăguș, 2006, Rotariu, 2010). Despite the social and economic changes, the family is maintained as a central element in the life of most of the people and the quality of family relationships is strongly associated with the quality of life on the whole. In the case of many people, the emotional benefits brought by children represent an important aspect of life. In a study on the number of children desired by women at a fertile age (Rotariu, 2009), we can clearly notice that the desire to have children is widely spread in Romania, even in the case of the young population to the same extent in the case of women from the urban and the rural area or according to the acquired level of instruction. Nevertheless, in Romania, fertility is situated around 1.3 children/woman, the real situation being placed, however, behind the image created on the ideal family. The experience of other countries points out that the efficiency of stimulating measures is manifested better when the mere financial component (taking various forms) is combined with services and provisions addressed to the child and the families who have children, these being meant to diminish the economic loss which the active woman and the couple undergo by bringing the child into the world and by bringing him up.

An efficient demographic policy must take into account ensuring the compatibility between the status of mother of the woman and that of active person from the economical point of view (Băluță, Dragolea, Iancu, 2007). The flexibility at the workplace – in Romania, only 10.4% of employed women have a part-time job (in comparison with the European average of 31.2%) and only 1.5% of them have a temporary contract, in comparison with 15.2% of women in the EU-27 countries. Therefore, the flexible forms of employment are only marginal on the formal labour market although they are regulated by law.

The society scales are tipped towards the later attainment of economic safety, investing in its own human capital (education and experience on the labour market) representing a wish for most of the young people, both men and women. Consequently, making up a family is postponed while human capital is building up. Modernisation offers to individuals the freedom to follow their personal targets. Family requires altruism, time and money willingly given to others. As childbirth affects to a greater extent women rather than men, women tend to accept less this risk than they used to do twenty years ago (Caldwell, 2002, McDonald, 2006, Coleman, 2007). In the cases where the allowances during the maternity leave are related to salaries, couples have one more reason to put off bringing a child into the world until they have a greater salary, until they have the necessary capacity to buy services for childcare and other needs related to them, capacity which comes at the same time with attaining welfare.

Which is the role of the state? To ensure faith in building up a family and to incur a part of the direct and indirect costs related to bringing up a child (Bjorklund, 2006). A way of increasing fertility rate is that of ensuring that if young people get married and have children, they will be supported, to a certain extent, by the society in taking this important decision both from the individual and the social point of view. If, on the other hand, they have nothing ahead but social security schemes which affect those who have children, they will put off making a family until they have a rather safe position so that they can take on all the responsibilities (McDonald, 2006). The state must play an important role in reconciling and finding a balance between professional and family life (Barthelemy, Granier, Robert, 2009). The direct financial incentives support covering expenses determined by childbirth and bringing up of children, but policies which allow women to combine work with family life are also very efficient. We should not forget that as the salary level increases, women will be more attracted by combining work with childcare than by the prospect of staying home and receiving a direct aid for children.

Objectives and Methodological Approach

The main objective of this work is to create a diagnosis on the evolution of population policies and their effects on population dynamics and structure. Subsequently, we analyzed the features of the demographic policies during two distinct periods: the totalitarian and the post-totalitarian periods; simultaneously, we pointed the major territorial disparities, with significant impact on the labor market in medium term. The final purpose of this approach is to identify the trends within the last decades, with significant potential to influence the future demographic evolution as a basis of correct future predictions in the context of fertility decline and of accelerating the definitive emigration of population.

The used information was taken from the INS databases (Tempo-Online), freely accessible, and from the official reports (Statistical Yearbooks, Demographical Yearbook, Newsletter on the population natural movement etc.). This data have been processed for calculating different indices. The derived statistical database was correlated with the cartographic database necessary to visualize the results, especially those on the spatial distribution and the existing disparities of the general fertility of population. The methodological framework for information processing is suitable for a crono-spatial analysis of population geography, using the next indicators:

- synthetic fertility index (TFR), taking as a basis the fertility of the female population. The necessary information has been taken from the aforementioned sources. Choosing a longer period (1956-2013) allows emphasizing the effects of the demographic policies that have been developed within this interval.

- the general fertility of the population (15-49), calculated for three distinct years: 1990, 2000, 2010, for the basis territorial units NUTS3, used to assess spatial disparities and regional models of evolution. Thus, we processed data for each of the indicated periods, creating databases with four series with multiannual averages for distinct time spreads; 1991-1995, with fast decline of fertility indicators; 1996-2000, defined by stabilizing the regressive trend; 2001-2004, marked by the revival of decline, as an effect of amplifying the labor migration abroad; 2004-2012, marked by implementing some declared natalist policies, but wavering and without significant impact, if we refer to other post-communist countries. The inequality of the four periods can be explained especially through their specificity, the objective being to capture the existence of strong regional disparities, often subsequent to the general economic development or to some social and cultural features etc.

Besides the statistical data processing, this approach required a profound insight into the bibliographic literature concerning this theme of wide interest, using as many as possible sources, both in the Romanian and the international literature.

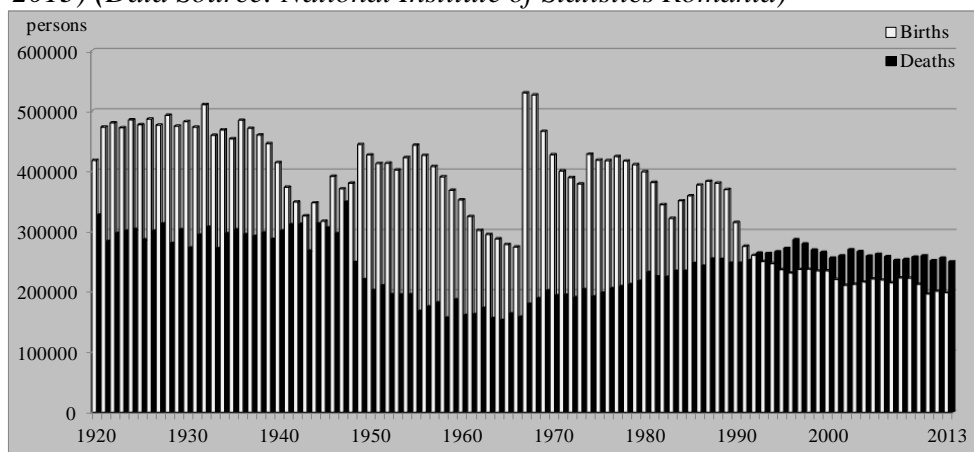
Results and Discussion

The Lessons of History. Demographic Policies before 1989

We considered necessary extending the analysis outside the period of study in order to set out the premises for the present evolution of the demographic indicators. In this way, the period after the Second World War can fall into four phases according to the type of policy which characterized the system at a certain moment (Covaci, 2007):

- 1) 1948 – 1957, a period when we cannot talk about a demographic policy of the state but, following the soviet model, some measures were taken which should have had as a consequence the increase in the rate of fertility: the divorce was a difficult, heavy process and the abortion was allowed in exceptional cases. This period is characterized by a high natality and a falling mortality, signs of a social and economic modernisation at a beginning phase.
- 2) 1957 – 1966, a period of relative liberalisation, also inspired by the soviet model, when performing an abortion upon request was permitted.
- 3) 1966 – 1989, a period when Nicolae Ceaușescu led the Romanian state and the demographic pro-natal policy stated its objective to increase the population of Romania.

Figure 1. *The Evolution of the Number of Births and Deaths in Romania (1920 – 2013) (Data Source: National Institute of Statistics Romania)*



The Period before 1989. The Childbirth Allowance, the Maternity Leave and the Allowance for Children.

This pro-natal policy represents a Romanian characteristic often mentioned in the specialty papers (Doboş, 2010, Mureşan, 2012, Păunescu, 2012). “The well-known” decree 770/1966 completely forbade abortion and laid down measures with a view to punishing women who would have tried to put an end to the evolution of pregnancy. The contraceptive methods were completely lacking or they were only accessible on the black market, thus becoming a luxury good. “Improvements” were subsequently brought to the existent legislation (1973, 1974, 1984), the doctors who also did not show enough interest in applying the pro-natal policy being also concerned. The decree 770/1966 was to bring the beginning of a black period in the history of Romania: 10,000 women who died as a consequence of the medical complications which appeared after the illegal and primitive pregnancy interruptions, tens or hundreds of women remained with physical or psychical sequelae as a result of using some medieval methods and instruments for abortion.

In the communist Romania, the woman became „*both a production and a reproduction force*”. The specialists’ advice who recommended extending the maternity leave was systematically ignored and the alternative of bringing up children in childcare institutions even from the first months of life not only proved unpractical, but it also suggests a quantitative, bureaucratic vision on maternity.

Childbirth Allowance

Sole aid, it is granted to women on every childbirth, beginning with the third one, regardless of the fact that the mother was or was not employed, of her civil status or of the family’s income. From 1985 on, this allowance was granted beginning with the second childbirth. The amount of this allowance

varied from 85% from the average monthly net salary (in 1966) to 70% (1977) and 50% in 1985 according to the child's rank.

Maternity Leave

Employees were entitled to a paid maternity leave of 112 days, 52 days before childbirth and 60 days after childbirth (these periods could be compensated between them). The amount of the salary paid during the maternity leave represented between 50 and 85% for the 1st or 2nd child and 90% of the mother's average monthly salary beginning with the third child born. The job was ensured during the maternity leave. Despite the serious problems brought up and the strong reasons in favour of extending *the postnatal leave* to 120 days, these provisions remained in force until 1989.

State Allowance for Children

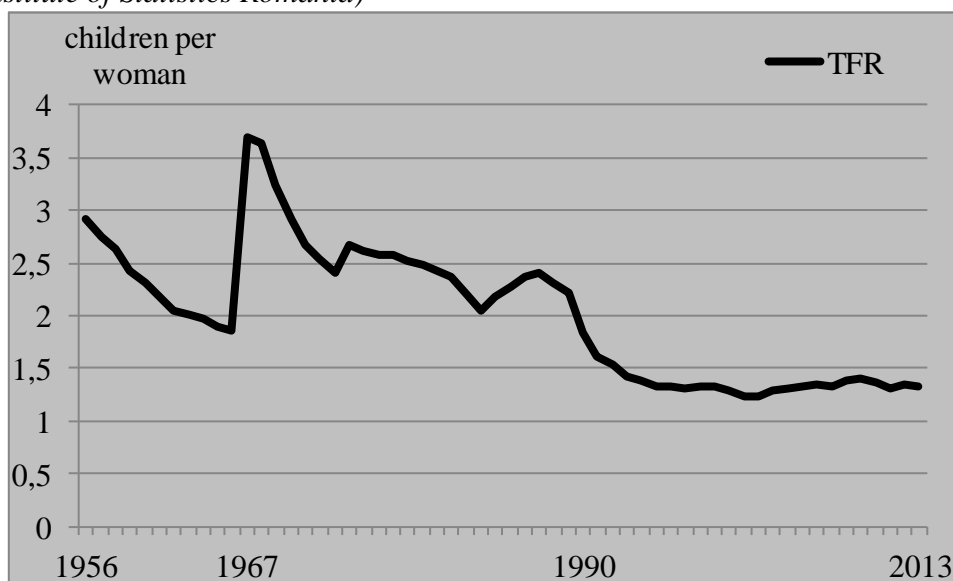
The beneficiaries of the state allowance were all the employees under open-ended work contract. The amount of the allowance varied according to the rank of the children, the parents' salaries and the place of residence of the beneficiary of the allowance (the urban or the rural area, children living in towns being clearly favoured). The allowance was granted up to the age of 14 (consequently, up to the age of 16). Families having more than 3 children were encouraged, the 4th child being granted an allowance which was 20 – 30% higher than the one granted to the 1st child. If in the 70's a large family having at least 5 children was promoted, the amount of the allowance rising progressively up to the 9th child, in the mid 80's, the amounts rose progressively up to the 4th child. One of the paradoxes of the pro-natal policy in this period was that it supported the building of a large, peasant family, with 4-5 children, in the urban and industrialised area (Kligman, 2000).

On the whole, we can estimate that women in the communist period in Romania become the direct victims of the pro-natal policy, this situation occurring under in the context in which all these measures were not duplicated by a corresponding improvement in the social and economic conditions and by ensuring a minimum standard of living. The pro-natal demographic policy in the communist period represented in an eloquent way the legitimisation of the interference of the state in the personal life of citizens and the birth of children is imposed as an obligation taken by the women towards the state.

Post-Communist Romania - the General Context

After more than two decades from changing the political system in Romania (two decades marked by a rather indifferent policy, with a series of recently taken pro-natal measures) the total fertility rate continues to be below the value which would ensure the mere replacement of generations in time (figure 2).

Figure 2. Total Fertility Rates between 1956 – 2013 (Data Source: National Institute of Statistics Romania)

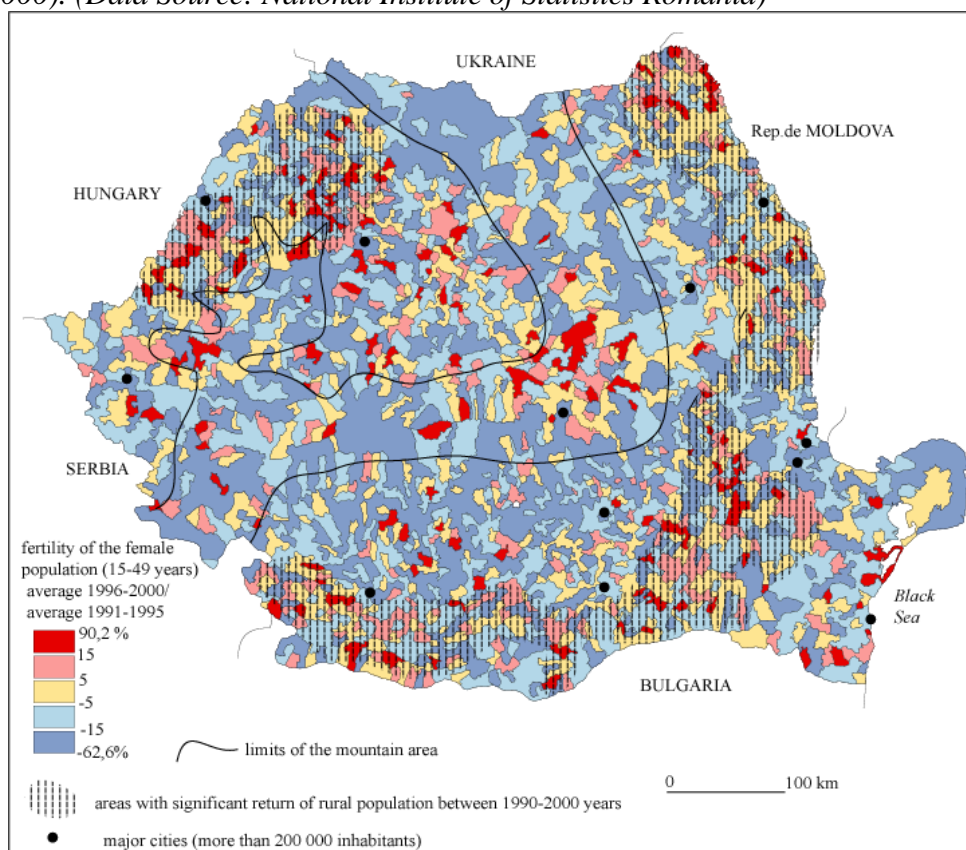


However, it will be difficult to overcome this phase of natural decline, in the context of involving in international migration an important contingent of young population, vital for keeping the level of fertility high enough in order to diminish the foreseen dramatic fall in the population in preparation for the following decades (Ghețău, 2004, Mureșan, 2007).

We must highlight the fact that, normally, in the post-war period, the number of childbirths could have been kept at a constant level, even under the conditions of the evolution of the demographic transition due to an exceptional situation: between 1960 and 1996, the number of female persons at a fertile age was continuously increasing. Only after 1996, we notice, however, an evident decrease in this hoard, situation which is expected to worsen, diminishing the chances of some governmental measures meant for recovering fertility.

Legalising abortions in 1990 had a general, quick and brutal effect, especially on the 2nd and 3rd childbirth. Nevertheless, a stabilisation of the tendency is immediately reached against the background of some controversial effects of transition: in the areas of rural return, there was an increase in the number of childbirths, in the industrialised areas there was a decrease, in this way a balance being struck (a specific element for Romania).

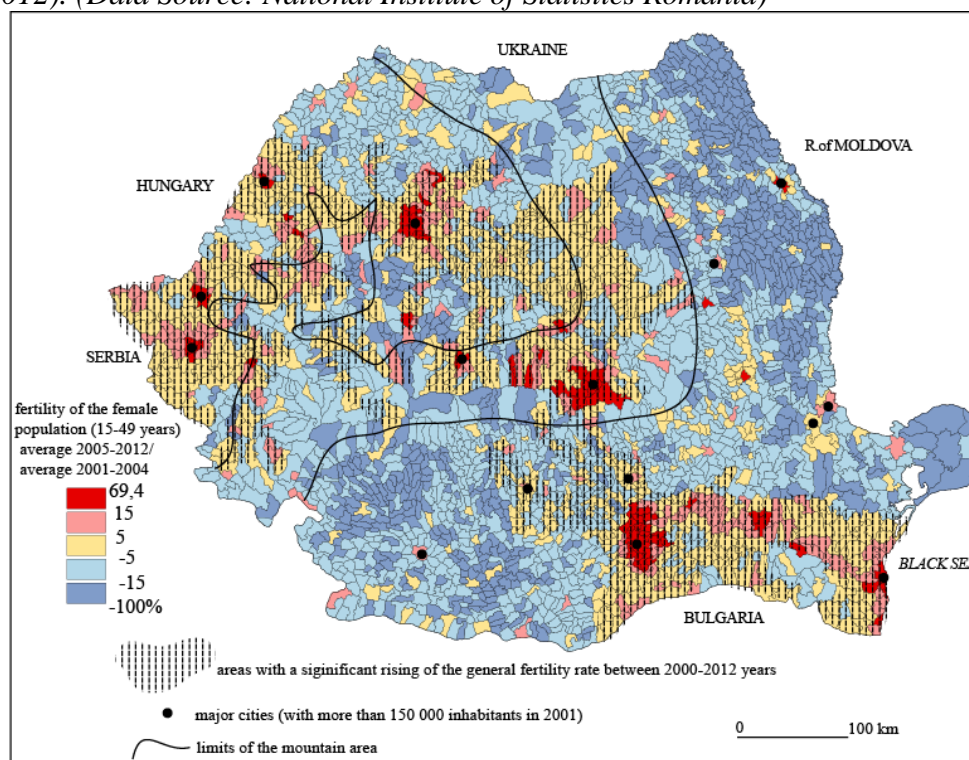
Figure 3. *The Evolution of the General Fertility of the Population (1991 – 2000).* (Data Source: National Institute of Statistics Romania)



At a local level, in the 90's, the evolution of general fertility of the population (figure 3) was tightly connected with the major changes attributed to the transition to the market economy: the deindustrialisation triggered a complex decrease in this indicator in areas and cities with more varied economic activities (especially mountainous areas); on the contrary, de-structuring the agricultural systems in the communist period led to the maintenance of an important demographic vitality in the prevailing agricultural areas towards which a massive returning migrant flow headed for.

During 2000 – 2010, the situation changes radically (figure 4): the areas which adapted more quickly to market economy (the large cities, the south-eastern part of the country, the central and western parts of the country) witnessed a gradual improvement in fertility indicators in connection with the measures for encouraging birth; the rural areas in the north-eastern and south-western parts of the country were marked by a steep fall against the background of a very strong emigration of the young workforce and of the absence of investments. In the last years, an important return is noticed in the central and eastern part of Transylvania.

Figure 4. *The Evolution of the General Fertility of the Population (2001 – 2012).* (Data Source: National Institute of Statistics Romania)



These areas witnessed the most spectacular return of birth after 2005, existing clues according to which this phenomenon is not determined by circumstances, being tightly related to their attractiveness and to a series of demographic phenomena, first of all the postponing of childbirths. We can state that the central and western regions of the country are more developed, already recording that return specific to the new demographic transition (Van der Kaa, 2002), a natural evolution if we refer to the century-old tendencies. In other words, in the near future "the centre of gravity" of the demographic vitality is expected to be transferred to the central and western part of the country. This new tendency also requires another interpretation related to the degree of urbanization, the recent recovery of fertility indicators being felt primarily in the urban area. These recent evolutions can lead to accepting the entering of the country into a new demographic paradigm in which the role played by "the engine" of the development (in our country we could rather say of keeping the balance) is attributed to the conurbations, the predominantly rural regions being like spaces with a residual, old population which is subject to depopulation as it has occurred in the case of western countries for a long time.

Post-Communist Romania. The Allowance for Parental Leave, the Maternity Leave, the Allowance for Children

In the 90's, the legislation concerning mothers and children did not change too much in comparison with the previous period: the women who paid the social security contributions were entitled to 126 calendar days of pregnancy and confinement leave, period in which they benefited from the maternity leave allowance (its amount was 85% of the average net monthly salary in the last six months before childbirth). As far as the present system of family provision is concerned, it includes a varied range of benefits awarded both directly (allowances for children, goods and specific services) and indirectly, by supporting family in general and the child in an implicit way (social aid, family-related services). However, all this system of aid has a recent history, it became functional beginning with 2002 and significantly enhanced in 2004. On the other hand, we must not ignore the side effects of these benefits: the vague support of the whole family to the detriment of the child's needs; for many of the poor families, the allowances for children represent the main source of income (Pescaru - Urse, 2009).

The Allowance for Parental Leave

The legislation is very instable especially in respect of the way in which the amount of the allowance for the parental leave is calculated. We can notice the numerous variations between a fixed amount for all categories of parents and a share of the average gross salary in economy (table 1).

Therefore, on the whole, the financial efforts of the Romanian state meant to encourage the fertility of employed women cannot be underestimated. Unfortunately, the lack of continuity and the frequent change of the legislation in the field is not in favour of the concerned categories (the employees).

The Allowance for Children, an Economic Measure with Unpredictable Results

The state allowance represents a benefit which is granted to children under 18 years old irrespective of the parents' salaries as well as to young people who are over 18 years old until they graduate high school or vocational school. From 2007 on, it is not conditioned by school attendance any longer, situation which could have negative effects on pursuing studies, especially among children who come from families with low incomes. The amount of the allowance in real terms has fluctuated lately about 3 – 4% from the average net salary, reaching at present 42 ron (approximately 10 Euro).

The State Allowance for the Children under 2 Years Old

A special and rather controversial situation was created by awarding, as of 1 January 2007, a monthly sum of 200 ron (almost 50 euro) to all the children up to 2 years old without discriminating against the rank of childbirth.

Table 1. Laws on the Allowance for Parental Leave. (Source: <http://www.romleas.ro/legi/juridic.html>)

Date of entry into force of the law	Period for the parental leave	The amount of the allowance	Comments
1 January 2003	24 months	85% of the average of mother's salaries in the last 10 months prior to childbirth	The amount of the allowance was differentiated according to mother's salary
1 January 2004	24 months	85% of the average gross salary in economy	A rise in the average gross salary (which was expected, also took place) also involved an automatic increase in the amount of the allowance
1 January 2006	24 months	800 lei monthly	The level of the allowance is set up at a fixed amount, irrespective of mother's salary. Women who have an average or high salary level are clearly disadvantaged.
1 January 2009	24 months	85% of mother's gross salary in the last 12 months prior to childbirth, but not less than 600 lei and no more than 4000 lei	Employed women with an average or high salary are advantaged.
1 January 2011	12 months	75% of mother's net salary in the last 12 months, not less than 600 lei and no more than 3,400 lei	Due to the difficulties for supporting the measures of social protection paid from the state budget (the economic activity in Romania being further marked by recession), the allowance for parental leave and the period of maternity leave are modified once again, women having at their disposal two variants of leave.
	24 months	75% of the average net salaries in the last 12 months, not less than 600 lei and no more than 1, 200 lei.	
1 January 2013	12 months	85% of parents' net salary in the last 12 months no more than 3,400 lei	The employability incentive: 500 lei monthly for the persons who return to work before the child is one or two years old in order to encourage parents' employability on the labour market
	24 months	85% of parents' net salary in the last 12 months no more than 1,200 lei	

The amount is considerable if we refer to the average net income in Romania. Which part of the population would be encouraged by the new allowance? It is likely that the fertility of women without salaries will be encouraged, of the women with the lowest incomes and with a low level of instruction. Does Romania need an increase in the number of newborn

regardless of their rank? A situation with undesirable manifestations and consequences can be shaped, especially in the case of poor families in which after 2 or 4 years a considerably lower income is reached again. There is the risk of witnessing the abandon and/or the over-stressing of the institutions providing childcare. Would it not be better if the amount of the allowance favoured the 2nd and 3rd child in the context in which 79% of the newborn of rank 4 had mothers without studies or with primary and middle school studies? The critiques brought to the state allowance for the child up to 2 years old: it aims rather at immediate effects without an exact assessment of the possible side effects and it hinders encouraging a structurally balanced fertility.

Conclusions

After the year 2000, raising awareness on the necessity for a new stimulating demographic policy brought about the enactment of several successive measures whose effect was limited due to the fall in the population at a fertile age and to the massive emigration. Nevertheless, we can notice a considerable recovery, in the first place due to the large cities and to the instructed active population. On the contrary, the measures restricting some rights granted to the mother and the child beginning with 2010 recently led to a worrying fall in the number of childbirths (which was evident beginning with October 2009, with the exception of the capital and the large cities). The opposition between the regions with a typical post-transitional regime became current (with the recovery of fertility indicators), partially adapted to the model specific to developed countries (the capital in the first place) and the regions in which the last phase of the classical transition is consumed (some counties in the North East of the country). A careful analysis of the recent demographic evolutions in the Romanian space highlights the presence of a tendency of homogenising the behaviours in this direction. The extreme aspects tend to be aligned according to the national average and new evolutions appear in sight. The most spectacular tendency is the tendency towards a more rapid increase in fertility (but it seems also in the life expectancy at childbirth) in the most dynamic areas of the country in parallel with its decrease in the north-eastern counties, the areas which still show reminiscences of some rebellious behaviours hostile to modernity which are reduced until dissolution. This new tendency also requires another interpretation related to the degree of urbanization, the recent recovery of fertility indicators being felt primarily in the urban area.

The demographic decline which Romania is witnessing today can be stopped by applying a real family policy. Romania needs a family policy drawn up carefully and in a responsible way, a clear, stable, future-oriented policy, not oriented towards producing immediate effects (uncontrollable effects in some developments and implications). Nowadays, the low fertility in Romania can be ascribed to the lack of support awarded to women both within family and outside it. We cannot talk about achieving an optimum demographic level,

but we can talk about the recovery from a severe situation and about avoiding an unbalanced demographic situation which involves all the resulting risks. Postponing taking some political decisions only deepens the demographic crisis, makes the prospect of a possible recovery more difficult and increases exponentially the costs of some possible future interventions.

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