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**Effects of Romanians' Migration
Abroad: Poisoned Apple or Fulfilled
Desire**

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Effects of Romanians' Migration Abroad: Poisoned Apple or Fulfilled Desire

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Abstract

The change of the political regime in Romania in the year 1989 represented a breaking off moment in the general evolution of the country, triggering profound mutations at all levels: political, social, economic and demographic. Mainly because of the incompatibility of the mechanisms of the dirigiste economic system to those of the market economy, the Romanian labour market has been subject to repeated restructurings and destructurings, which completely altered its structure and dynamics.

Originating in the artificiality of the way of inserting industrial units in the communist period (according to the logic of the industrialization at any price) as well as in the difficulties of adjusting them to the functioning manner typical of a capitalist economy, unemployment experienced an alert dynamics during the first two post-communist decades.

The present paper aims at assessing the main repercussions of Romanians' emigration, trying to emphasize not only the positive effects (large remittances, mentality changed for the better, development of entrepreneurial spirit) but also the negative ones (demographic decline, decreased labour potential, rising rate of family dissolution, increasing number of "Euro-orphans"), which many times come to counterbalance benefits, nearly annihilating them.

Keywords: Emigration, Remittances, Demographic Decline, Family Dissolution, Euro-orphans.

Introduction

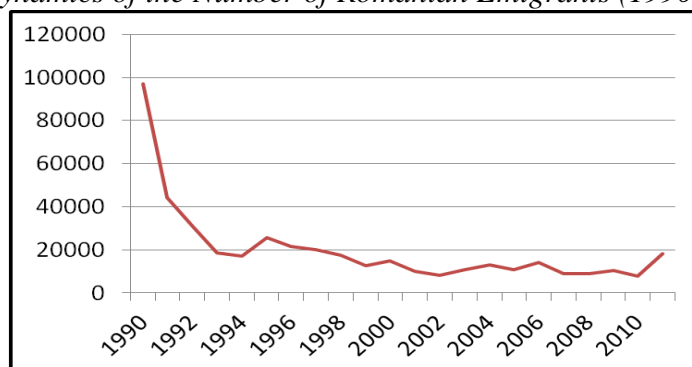
Absent from the public discourse of the communist authorities (for which the socialist society was a perfect and not a perfectible one), the leaving to work abroad has become a genuine social phenomenon in the post-communist period (after December 1989), taking the form of an individual life strategy and rapidly spreading throughout the whole Romanian space.

The most important cause that triggered this phenomenon was the industrial recession resulting in the massive and forced dismissal of significant contingents of people who, most of the time, perceived the temporary working emigration as a subsistence alternative to a drifting economic system, once the repressive means of stopping extra national mobility were removed.

Amplitude of Romanian Emigration

Although trammelled in the legislative restrictions imposed by western countries to the Romanian citizens, the emigration phenomenon has taken remarkable scale beginning with the year 1990, being however difficult to quantify from the statistical point of view due to its mainly clandestine character. In this context, there is a huge gap between official documents and unofficial estimations. The legal statistics reveal the contradictory dynamics of the emigration process, with a strongly decreasing trend after the sharp peak of 1990 (when nearly 97,000 inhabitants left Romania), the yearly average number of people emigrating from Romania between 1992 and 2011 being of about 14,986 (see Figure 1). But these data are far from illustrating the real dimension of this phenomenon and official statistical records clearly show it: for 1992-2002 intercensitary period there is a gap of 520,068 people in the general population balance that can be explained only through emigration (*Dimitriu, R., Muntele, I., Marcu, S., Dimitriu, A. (2013).*

Figure 1. *Dynamics of the Number of Romanian Emigrants (1990-2011)*



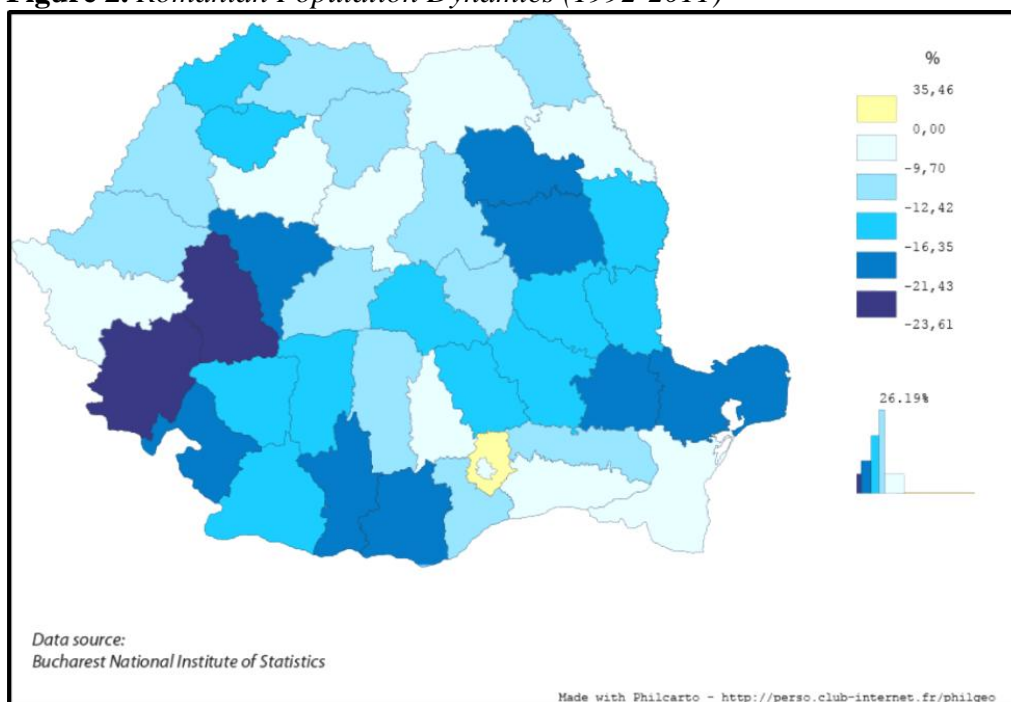
However, the numerous surveys conveyed by different associations reveal the real amplitude of the Romanian emigration flows. They talk about a number of 3,250,000 Romanians living abroad, out of which 2,000,000 in Italy

and Spain, their main motivation on leaving the country being the economic one¹.

2011 Census – Measure of Romanians’ Emigration Amplitude

The map of the population dynamics between 1992 and 2011 (see Figure 2) highlights the general decline of the Romanian population during the last two decades in all counties², except for one: Ilfov, benefiting from the advantage of its proximity to Bucharest, the capital city of the country, a fact which has largely contributed to the development of its residential function. The south-western part of the country clearly stands out due to its strong population deficit. Of course, we cannot ignore the negative role played on the general balance by a “modern” demographic behaviour, characterized by a strong tendency of efficiently controlling one’s own descent, these areas being among the first in the country to rally to a western demographic mentality based on low birth rates.

Figure 2. Romanian Population Dynamics (1992-2011)



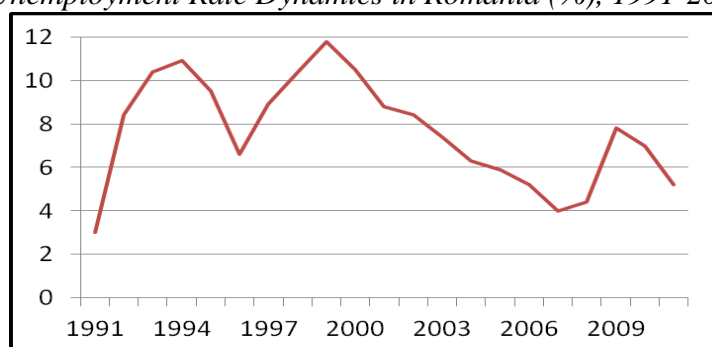
¹In 2002, the year when Romanians were permitted to travel freely in the Schengen space and emigration exploded, the minimum average wages (according to Eurostat) was of 1,140 Euros in Belgium, 1,127 Euros in France, 1,008 Euros in Ireland, 571 Euros in Greece, 515 Euros in Spain; with 50.33 Euros Romania ranked last, even after Bulgaria (51.38 Euros).

²As revealed by the post-communist census data, the population of Romania decreased from 22.8 million in 1992, to 21.7 million in 2002 and 20.7 million inhabitants in 2011, respectively.

Emerging Unemployment – A Priming Factor for Romanians’ Emigration Movement

Originating in the artificiality of the way of inserting industrial units in the communist period (according to the logic of the industrialization at any price) as well as in the difficulties of adjusting them to the functioning manner typical of a capitalist economy, unemployment first appeared in 1991, experiencing an alert dynamics during the first post communist decade under the action of a whole complex of social, economic and political factors, partly overlapping the political changes Romania underwent during that period (Iațu, C., 2006). (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Unemployment Rate Dynamics in Romania (%), 1991-2011*



The graphical expression of the statistical data indicates a strong increase up to 10.9% in 1994, which reveals the downfall of the Romanian economic environment and the brutality of the economic mutations triggered by the change of the political regime. During the next period, the indicator's value decreases to 6.6% (in 1996), as a consequence of the attempt at creating new jobs under the impulse of the nearing elections, as a consequence of the measures taken at the last moment by the government at that time. This trend cannot be kept for a long time and the period between 1999 and 2000 deals with the maximum values of this indicator throughout the whole analyzed period (11.8%, 10.5% respectively).

After this year, the unemployment rate experiences a diminishing tendency, down to a minimum of 4% in 2007. The factors that lie behind this positive dynamics are not strictly related to the revitalization of the economic system (which we do not deny), there also existing at least two other elements that favour the decrease of the volume of unemployed active population: on the one hand, the significant percentage of the population employed in activities of the primary sector¹ (which, although not remunerated, obtains material results from the work performed); on the other hand, the change of the temporary labour migration abroad into a mass phenomenon, which decongested the pressure on the job market.

¹28.3% in 2002, 29.2% in 2011

Samples of Industrial Restructuring

In order to draw up a framework of the dimension of the post-communist Romanian industrial restructuring process, we provide two such examples.

The first refers to the biggest steel plant in Romania, situated in Galați Municipality, which before 1989 used to have 45,000 employees, while nowadays their number decreased to 8,000, causing the demographic decline of the city population (which diminished by 24% between 1992 and 2011).

The second one focuses on the Heavy Equipment Industrial Plant in Iași Municipality (see Figure 4), whose labour force collapsed from 15,000 people in 1989 to only 1,000 at present.

Figure 4. *Remnants of the Heavy Equipment Industrial Plant in Iași*



Source: www.ziarelive.ro

Romanians' Migration Abroad – Fulfilled Desire or Poisoned Apple?

The consequences of the change of emigration into a genuine social phenomenon after 1989 are manifold, but they largely fall into two categories: positive and negative.

Emigration – Fulfilled Desire

The Financial Factor

The main positive consequence of the Romanian emigration is undoubtedly represented by remittances, whose volume increase from 1.5 billion Euros in 2005 to 8.7 billion Euros in 2008 proves once again the large extent of the last decade's emigration flows. Although the world economic crisis that started in 2008 has laid its marks on the dimension of the amount of money sent by the Romanians working abroad, remittances still represent a significant source of finances for their relatives at home¹.

Much of this money has been generously invested in the estate market, huge houses and villas appearing all over the country, both in the rural and urban environment (see Figures 5 and 6).

¹3.8 billion Euros in 2010, 5 billion Euros in 2013

No matter beneficial to the local communities this development of the estate field may seem, sometimes this apparently fulfilled desire may change into a poisoned apple, triggering negative, harmful features.

Figures 5 and 6. Villas Built from Remittances



Source: <http://sportjournal.wordpress.com/>

One of the best illustrations of this situation is represented by Maramureş, a historical province lying in the northern part of Romania. This region represents an extremely famous tourist destination, very much appreciated both by national and international tourists, who are attracted by its splendid landscapes, by the traditional occupations that the local population still preserves and practises (the art of processing wood, of making pots and traditional masks), the popular costumes that people still wear nowadays (See Figures 7, 8 and 9).

Figures 7 and 8. Samples of Maramureş Authenticity



Sources: www.romaniatourism.com/maramures

traditiimaramures.blogspot.ro

Figure 9. Sample of Maramureş Authenticity



Source: www.maracosa.ro

Suffice it to say that even Prince Charles, the heir of the British crown, was enchanted by the charm and authenticity of this part of Romania, having bought four traditional wooden houses in a Maramureş commune called Bred. The Prince even set up the “Mihai Eminescu” Foundation, meant to preserve the Romanian cultural patrimony, including the traditional wooden houses in Maramureş (see Figure 10), which unfortunately record a disappearance rate of 3-4 per week.

Just like them, traditional wooden gates (see Figure 11) are endangered by the local people’s appetite for “modern” things. All over Maramures, old houses and gates are being replaced by huge villas endowed with imposing iron gates, built by means of the money sent by the Romanian emigrants.

Figure 10. *Traditional Wooden House*



Source: tudorphotoblog.blogspot.com

Figure 11. *Traditional Wooden Gate*



www.romanianmonasteries.org

These luxurious buildings are many times built in the same yard with the ancient house, quite often not even being inhabited because their owners are still working and living abroad, being only looked after by the elderly in the family and villages (see Figures 12 and 13).

Figures 12 and 13. *Old and New in the Same Yard...*



Source: mandriesibeton.ro

Of course, one may wonder why Romanian emigrants would make such massive investments...Are they really worth being built? Well, the answer is that these houses are the obvious symbol of the emigrants’ diligence and success. If you fail to build a big house, the community may think that you are not a hardworking man abroad...Why not making them of wood?!? Because

wood is the poor's material...while bricks and concrete exhale wealth¹ (see Figure 14).

Figure 14. *Modernity and Tradition Living Together*



Source: mandriesibeton.ro

The Behavioural Aspect

Special surveys conveyed on emigrants show that another positive aspect is related to the change for the better of their behaviour and mentality on labour, friends, spare time and politics, as well as to an increased entrepreneurial spirit, which is explainable, on the one hand, through the fact that they have the financial resources to set up a business and, on the other, through the spirit of initiative and experienced acquired in the West. Many former emigrants who have returned at home have opened from green houses and farms to restaurants and even Italian cheese factories.

Emigration – A Poisoned Apple

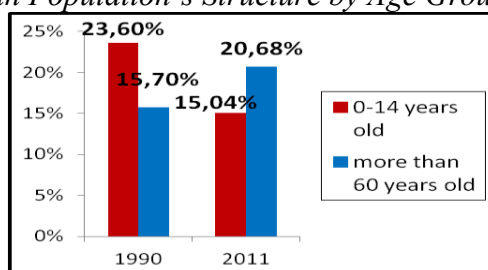
However beneficial to the population's living standard, these positive facts are sadly rivalled by obviously negative effects, such as the most serious ageing process that more and more Romanian areas have to face, the deficit of active population, an increasing incidence of divorce, dangerous psychological mutations. Of course, the most delicate issue is related to the large number of "Euro-orphans" who, beside an indisputable increase in their daily living standard, find themselves forced to experience a whole series of negative consequences that may leave deep marks on their psychic.

Demographic Ageing

During the last two decades, Romania has faced a fast process of demographic ageing speeded up by the decline of the birth rate (from 13.6% in 1990 to 9.9% in 2010) and natural balance (from 3% in 1990 to -2.2% in 2010). The dynamics of the structure by age groups of the Romanian population clearly shows the amplitude of the demographic ageing process, illustrated by the reversal of the extreme age groups (see Figure 15).

¹<http://teofil-ivanciuc.weebly.com/>

Figure 15. Romanian Population's Structure by Age Groups



Deficit of Active Population

As the highest incidence of emigration is among youth and young adults, many areas in Romania have been facing a strong deficit of active population. Although the urban environment experiences the same negative phenomenon, rural regions are the most affected, in certain cases reaching extreme forms of manifestation.

A very good illustrating example is Bătrâna commune¹, which at present has only 127 inhabitants, its population drastically decreasing by nearly one third during the last decade. It is made up of four villages, out of which one has 69 people, the second 30 people, the third 19 people and the fourth 9 inhabitants belonging to two families. In order to understand what demographic and economic decline means, it is enough to mention the fact that it has got only 6 employees and in 2008 it recorded just one born alive. And, paradoxically enough, three of the four villages do not have access to electric current, although they are connected to the internet, in spite of the fact that the demand for this service is more than insignificant (see Figures 16-19).

Figures 16 and 17. Old Age without Youth...Deserted Romanian Villages



Source: badorgood.com



simonagollent.blogspot.com

¹Paradoxically enough, “bătrâna” means “old woman” in the Romanian language

Figures 18 and 19. *Old Age without Youth...Deserted Romanian Villages*



Source: www.replicahunedoara.ro



www.evz.ro

After the year 2007, when Romania entered the European Union, one of the most delicate issues has been related to the growing brain drain Romania has been subject to. Official statistics show that between 2007 and 2012 Romania formed 8,600 new doctors, while 11,200 doctors left the country. Moreover, only in 2013 about 3,000 doctors went abroad to practice their jobs, the main motivation of their decision being linked to the much more generous wages they get in the West. Of course, the negative effects are hard to be compensated for. They mainly refer to the degradation of the medical density rate and particularly to the financial losses of the Romanian state, whose formation and specialization costs for a doctor are of about 20,000 Euros (for a period ranging between 6 and 11 years).

Psycho-Social Effects

For Romanian emigrants, working and living abroad does not mean only a positive, financially fruitful experience; it often brings about mental disorders triggered by stress, an isolation syndrome that induces an increased addressability for the services provided by the psychiatric hospitals in Romania, especially in summer, which is generally the holiday season for emigrants.

The negative social consequences are just as dangerous and harmful, mainly referring to the phenomenon of family relationship destructing, on the one hand between spouses, and on the other between brothers, children and parents.

“Euro-orphans”

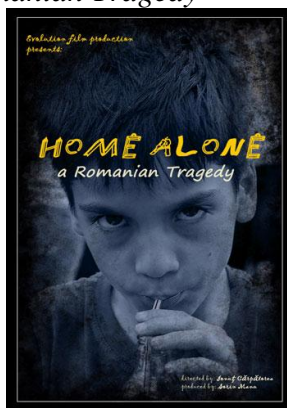
One of the most sensitive problems in respect of emigration is related to the large number of “Euro-orphans” – the name often used to describe those Romanian children whose parents have left abroad. Once again, official statistics is far from illustrating the real dimension of this process. Although the National Authority for Children’s Protection speaks about the existence of about 80,000 such children, a survey conveyed by the Open Society Foundation revealed that their number is of nearly 350,000.

In this respect, too, we can once again wonder...What does emigration mean? A fulfilled desire or a poisoned apple?...Because there are, of course, undoubtedly positive aspects about this issue (such as an indisputable increase in the children's living standard or higher chances of travelling abroad)) but they are by far outweighed by the negative ones, among which we can mention: the deterioration of the relationship with the parent at home, an increased consumption of forbidden substances and, most sadly, frequent depressive symptoms, in extreme cases leading to attempts at committing suicide (see Figure 20).

Instead of conclusions...

Emigration...functioning like a double-edged sword, easily changing from an apparently providence gift into a harmful, poisoned apple.

Figure 20. *Home Alone. A Romanian Tragedy*¹



Source:www.evolutionfilm.ro

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¹A documentary film produced in 2010, directed by Ionuț Carpatorea

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