

POPULATION POLICY OR SOCIAL POLICY?

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Abstract

After 1989, the demographic situation of Romania population experienced a dramatic, very concerning and dangerous evolution trend. One of the first measures of the new political power was to abolish the very restrictive, anti-human and abusive legal regulation adopted in 1966 by the communist regime concerning abortion and the whole old demographic policy. As a result of this measure and of the worsening economic and social situation of the great majority of Romanian population, the birth rate declined sharply and, from 1992, the natural demographic growth rate became a negative one. The absolute number of Romanian population decreased more and more and, if nothing changes, in the next few decades it will be no bigger than 15 million people.

At the same time, the process of demographic ageing of population will accentuate, generating serious problems from demographic and social-economic point of view,

Taking into account the present demographic situation and, especially, the foreseen trend of evolution, it is more than clear that there should be taken some urgent, coherent and consistent measures in order to stop this dangerous demographic evolution, until it is not too late, and to avoid, as much as possible, a potential demographic disaster.

The problem is: what kind of measures should be taken and what kind of policy should be adopted? Some social scientists believe that a new population policy should be adopted; some others believe that rather a social policy should be adopted.

The purpose of my paper is to analyze this different opinions and to show that, behind the dispute on the terminology, should be taken consistent measures, at governmental level, in order to assure a substantial improvement of demographic situation, not only from a quantitative, but from a qualitative point of view as well, and to identify some of these kind of measures.

Keywords: *demographic transition, demographic increase, social policy, population policy, ageing process*

Introduction

The trend of demographic evolution of Romania population after the Second World War proved that our country entered, even if later, the process of demographic transition from high and oscillating levels of birth and death rates to a more and more lower ones. But, due to the specific social-economic and political situation of Romania, this process was very oscillating and contradictory. It was significantly influenced by social-economic, political, demographic and legislative factors (the rhythm of changes in social-economic structures, the demographic effects of the First and Second World War and the legislative measures taken in 1957, 1966 and 1984, especially regarding abortion).

Demographic policy promoted by Communist Party after 1966 intended to increase the birth rate in order to sustain such a rapid demographic growth as the Romania population to number at least 25 million people in 1990 and about 30 million people in 2000. This goal was intended to be achieved almost exclusively by very hard and anti-human legal measures. The results were very far from what was expected and, at the end of 1989, the birth rate was only about 16‰ and the population number – about 22 million people.

The failure of this policy proved that, in order for a demographic policy to be a successful one, it should be based on a scientific analysis of all factors (objective and subjective) that influence

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the demographic evolution of population and to use a large variety of measures, especially stimulator and not punitive.

In this paper I intend to review the main changes that took place in Romania demographic situation (a high contribution in this field had demographer and social scientists like Vladimir Trebici in "Is it Necessary a New Demographic Policy in Romania?", Vasile Ghetau in "Population Number Decrease and Demographic Ageing – one of the Biggest Challenges of Romania at the Beginning of 21st Century", Traian Rotariu in "Demography and Sociology of Population", Catalin Zamfir in "Demographic Transition and Associated Social Problems" and so on), to analyze the actual and potential effects of these changes and to propose some measures that could stop the negative evolution of demographic situation in our country.

I. Demographic Changes After 1989 and Their Effects

December 1989's events were the beginning of a very profound, difficult and painful process of transition from a highly centralized economy to a free market one, from an authoritarian, dictatorial to a democratic political regime that implied great changes in social-economic and political structure, in the family life, in its structures and functions, in the field of human behavior and human relationships and in the whole social life.

Some of the most significant and dramatic changes took place in the field of reproduction behavior of the population. These changes and their long term consequences were analyzed by some outstanding demographer and social scientists, as already mentioned in the Introduction above. They also tried to answer the following question: what could and should be done in order to improve the present and foreseeable demographic situation?

The problem is very complex and an adequate answer is very difficult to be found. As a matter of fact, there are some different possible answers, but nobody can say for sure which one is right and which is wrong. The problem is also very important and very concerning because, after 1990, the result of Romania population's evolution trend was a continuous worsening of demographic situation.

The most important phenomenon was the sharply decrease of birth rate from 16‰ in 1989 to 11.4‰ in 1992, with a tendency to remain relatively constant (around the value of 10.5‰) until now. If, during the last years of Communist regime, the number of children born every year in Romania was between 370.000 and 380.000, in the recent period this number was only about 210.000, that means less than 60% from the previous level.

This evolution was determined by different factors, like: abolishment, by the new political power, of very restrictive anti-human and abusive legal regulations adopted by the Communist regime concerning abortion; giving the population unlimited access to contraception and abortion; the decreasing number and the worsening age structure of fertile feminine population; the worsening economic and social situation of the great majority of Romania population, especially of the young people and so on.

As Traian Rotariu said, the birth rate seems to stabilize at the level of about 11% and the mortality, measured by crude death rate, is not expected to reduce too soon because of population ageing process, "so it is expected that demographic decrease of our country to continue, even if the possible measures of demographic policy could determine a rise in fertility rate"¹. He also considered that "the possible measures of fertility reestablishment will have a small influence on population evolution in the next years, but they could have important consequences on medium and long term (if

¹ Rotariu, Traian, "Demography and Sociology of Population. Demographic Structures and Processes", "Polirom" Publishing House, 2006, pag. 211

they determine durable effects)². There is also a sign of abandonment of traditional Romanian reproductive behavior and adoption of western reproductive behavior.

At the same time, mortality rate tended to slowly rise, mainly because of the worsening economic situation and medical assistance and also because of the process of population ageing (specific mortality rates for older people being naturally higher).

The mortality rate level became in 1992 higher than the birth rate and the situation hasn't change by now. As a consequence, natural demographic increase became permanently negative, its level being between 1-2%.

The most important effects of this birth and death rates' evolution are:

a) The continuous decrease in absolute population number from about 22 million people in 1990 to 21.6 million in 2005 and 21.4 million in 2010. If nothing significantly changes, the decrease will continue so that the Romania population will have, according to different projections, the following values³:

Year	V. Ghetau (million people)	United Nations Organization (million people)	EUROSTAT (million people)
2025	20.2	19.9	19.7
2050	16.7	16.8	17.1

The tendency of decreasing in population number is clear, but nobody could say for sure how much will be this decrease. This demographic evolution trend is also influenced in a significant way by external migration. It is important not only the migration increase rate, which was permanently negative (out-migration being higher than in-migration), but also the age structure of out-migrants. According to Vasile Ghetau⁴, in 2002, the percentage of Romanian out-migrants between 20 and 40 years old reported to the total number of Romanian out-migrants is two times higher than the percentage of stable Romanian population in the same range of 20 – 40 years old reported to the total number of Romanian stable population.

It is probable that the tendency of decrease in population number will be reversed if birth rate begins to rise (which is highly improbable) and if the trend of external migration changes, so that Romania to become more and more an in-migration area, the in-migration level becoming higher than the out-migration level. But such evolution of external migration, even if possible, will certainly have very serious effects on social and cultural life, on population's lifestyle. It is possible to appear serious difficulties in social integration of in-migrants, ethnical and racial tensions, some social turbulence and so on. By now, it is almost impossible to estimate the nature and the magnitude of these effects.

b) The accelerated process of population ageing, of growing proportion of older people in total population. It is estimated, for example, that the average age of population will be 40.8 years in 2025, the proportion of all old population will be about 21% and of young population only 15%. This process has a lot of demographic and social-economic consequences.

First of all, fertility rate has small chances to recover or, at least, to remain constant. This is because this process affects not only the number and proportion of fertile females in total population, but the age structure of this category of population too. Under these circumstances, not only crude

² Idem, pag 212

³ Ghetau, Vasile, "Our Necessary Children and the Future of Romania Population. A 2007 Perspective of Romania Population in 21st Century", "Romanian Sociology" magazine, 2007, tome 5, No. 2, page 74

⁴ Ghetau, Vasile, "Population Number Decrease and Demographic Ageing – one of the Biggest Challenges of Romania at the Beginning of 21st Century", "Population and Society" Magazine, Supplement No. 1/2001

birth rate will tend to go down, but also the crude fertility rate (the age specific fertility rates being lower as women age increase). In order to maintain at least the present level of birth and fertility rates, a highly improbable substantial increase in specific fertility rates at all ages would be necessary.

Secondly, the crude death rate will tend to increase or at least to remain relatively high despite of the fact that life expectancy at birth has a moderate tendency to increase. One can expect, in the best case, a somehow lower age specific death rates and a higher life expectancy in the next years, as a result of improvement in social-economic life standards and in medical assistance quality. But this is not enough to compensate the effects of ageing process on the crude death rate, which will tend to remain at the current level or to slowly increase.

But this ageing process will probably have very serious effects on the whole social and economic life. With respect to these effects, there are different points of view.

For many demographers, there is no doubt that the mentioned effects of demographic evolution after 1990 are mainly negative and that this trend should be stopped. As Vasile Ghetau said, "the negative potential of demographic evolution after 1990, dominated by decreasing natality, will materialize its negative effects on long and very long term and maintaining present parameters and characteristics of demographic situation will only aggravate this potential"⁵, but "the natality decrease had on short and medium term incontestable beneficial effects like an important reduction of some high costs that individual, couple and society support for pregnancy, motherhood, child arising and taking care of, education"⁶.

Maybe he was right in what he said, but the trend of natality decrease is very difficult or even impossible to be reversed if there are not taken measures to stop it in a reasonable period of time the temporary benefits could generate very high costs later.

Some of the most important social-economic consequences of the population ageing process mainly determined by natality decrease could be considered:

- Continuous decrease of the number and proportion of economical active population in the total population and growth of old economical inactive population;
- The bigger pressure on state retirement system. More and more retired people will have to be economically sustained by a fewer and fewer economically active people;
- The bigger pressure on assurance and medical system;
- Serious consequences on the social and cultural life, on the population's state of mind, on the inter-generations relationship and the life pattern and so on.

Some authors⁷ consider that the consequences are not so severe and some of them could be counteracted if the productivity of social work will grow significantly, if the retiring age increases up to 70 – 75 years or more, if the quality of life shows a very significant improvement, if the population health (especially of the older people) is continuously improving and so on.

From theoretical point of view, these opinions could be right, but in Romania it is almost impossible for these conditions to be fulfilled in a reasonable horizon of time.

With respect to the decreasing number of Romania population, different opinions are also expressed. If some social scientists consider that this process is really concerning and dangerous because of demographic and social economic consequences it implies, some others have different opinions. For example, Traian Rotariu said that: "Personally, I don't see arguments for big anxiety with respect to the evolution of the country's population number by itself. At the contrary, I strongly believe that it is more important for governmental policies to focus on the quality of state's <<subjects>> rather than on their quantity"⁸. More than that, if there is a small chance for natural

⁵ V. Ghetau, op cit, pag 2

⁶ Idem

⁷ Rotariu, Traian, op cit

⁸ Rotariu, Traian, op cit, pag 214

increase to have a significant contribution to a positive evolution of country's population, the solution for stopping the decrease of population number would be a positive migration increase in the next years. But, as the above mentioned author said, "Replacing migration could be an acceptable solutions for the country who receives migrants, if 1. It satisfies in the first place the economic requirements and 2. If the number of yearly in-migrants is small enough to make possible their social and cultural integration"⁹.

Unfortunately, nobody can say for sure what evolution will have the external migration on long and very long term and what consequences it will have.

II. What could be done to stop this trend of demographic evolution?

Even if, as I already mentioned, there are differences between opinions expressed about the demographic evolution of Romania population, almost all demographers and sociologists agree that these evolutions are concerning and dangerous enough and some measures are needed to stop this evolution and to reestablish as much and as soon as possible the demographic situation.

Some social scientists and demographers¹⁰ think that the only solution is to adopt a new demographic policy adapted to the new social-economic and political conditions existing in Romania. Some others consider that, even if a new population policy seems to be necessary, it is neither opportune nor suitable in the actual conditions, but a social policy focused on children and friendly from a demographic point of view is urgently needed¹¹. The main argument is that "a policy of natality direct stimulation cannot have rapid results without a massive material support and it is not possible to be applied because of severe shortage in economic resources. And, even if a special effort is made in order to assure important economic resources for this purpose, the result will be rather modest and counterproductive. Instead of this, the negative effects will immediately appear: the increase of social dependency of families with many children from marginalized environments. In these conditions, the only possible demographic policy is an indirect one: a policy of family and children support"¹².

V. Ghetau has almost the same opinion: "Reestablishing fertility at a level which makes possible to stop demographic decline and to assure population number stabilizing or even a moderate growth couldn't come only from a different economic and social context [...]. Only a well projected, efficiently applied and carefully monitored in its effects demographic policy will be able to lead to the established goal. But, until then, from a strictly demographic perspective, nothing can be done. Any measure taken in the actual social-economic context for natality stimulation will have undesirable consequences. This doesn't mean that social protection measures focused on families with children wouldn't be welcome"¹³.

It is difficult to make a clear distinction between demographic and social policy and to choose between them. If a demographic policy has mainly quantitative goals (to influence the population number and the rhythm of population growth, especially by trying to influence natality), a social policy focused on family and children, demographic friendly, has mainly qualitative goals (to assure a better quality of population, with a higher life standard, a better health and higher education level and so on).

⁹ Idem

¹⁰ For example Vladimir Trebici in his remarkable study "Is it Necessary a New Demographic Policy in Romania?", "Social Research" Magazine, no. 2 / 1991

¹¹ Zamfir, Catalin, "Demographic Transition and Associated Social Problems", in „Social Policies in Romania. 1990-1998”, „Expert” Publishing House, 1999, pag 658

¹² Zamfir, Elena, "Social Policies Regarding Family and Child Protection in Romania", in "Social Policy Dictionary" coordinated by Luana Pop, „Expert” Publishing House, 2002

¹³ Ghetau, Vasile, "Population Number Decrease and Demographic Ageing – one of the Biggest Challenges of Romania at the Beginning of 21st Century", "Population and Society" Magazine, Supplement No. 1/2001

Both goals are equally important, so an acceptable demographic policy should be integrated into a larger social development policy and considered as an important part of this policy. Consequently, this demographic policy should aim not only to assure a desired population number and a well-balanced age structure, but also to create such social-economic, cultural, educational circumstances necessary to guarantee an adequate quality and well-being of population.

The question is: what kind of measures should be taken in order to achieve these goals? It is very difficult to answer this question because a demographic policy should meet some important conditions in order to be a successful one.

First of all, it should have a scientific ground. One of the most important impediments in promoting a successful population policy is a cognitive one. In order for someone to take measures able to significantly influence natality, it is necessary to know the different factors which determine fertility, which are the motivating factors of different population categories' reproductive behavior. Until now, it is difficult for someone to say that these factors are known, that it is clearly identified what their role and importance are in influencing the fertility level. It is probable that these factors differ from one specific population group to another, so the measures taken should be adapted to the specificity of each group. At the same time, should be clearly established the target population of these measures, especially the population which should be encouraged and sustained to increase its fertility and the efforts and resources should be focused on this population. For example, if families with enough resources to arise children and to assure them an adequate level of education, professional qualification, health and so on have only few children (1-2 children like in Romania), these families should be primarily the target of these measures, adapted to their specific.

Secondly, because the population policy is usually quite expensive, society should have enough financial and material resources to promote it. Of course, a population policy could be promoted not only by economic means, but in any case the costs of such policy are relatively high. If the demographic situation is so deteriorated that taking measures to improve it cannot be postponed too much and the society doesn't have necessary resources for this (and this is the case in our country), the governmental decision makers, if they are responsible enough, should consider solving the population problem as a high priority and act accordingly, if they want to avoid very dangerous future demographic evolution.

Finally, in promoting a population policy, ethical impediments should be also taken into account. That means the measures taken shouldn't affect in any case human dignity and the freedom of marital couples or women to decide the number of children they want to have. As Kingsley Davis wrote, the main difference between family planning and population policy is that, if in the first case parents or women have the right to take any measures they want in order to achieve proposed goals, in the second society doesn't have the right to take any measures considered necessary to obtain the number of the population desired.

Conclusions

The demographic situation of our country and the established trend of its evolution are very concerning and require urgent, coherent and well sustained measures in order to significantly improve this situation. Consequently, a new well designed and scientific based population policy should be adopted, as a part of a larger social-economic policy. The objectives of this policy should be not only to assure the desired number of population and a well balanced age structure of it, but also an adequate quality of population (a higher life standard, a better state of health, education, professional qualification and so on). Further researches would be necessary in order to clearly identify the specificity of the new reproductive behavior and the factors which influence it, in order to determine the measures that should be taken on short, medium and long term. At the same time, all governmental and political decision makers should understand how dangerous and concerning the present demographic situation is and prove more responsibility in taking measures in order to improve this situation until it is too late.

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