

## ROMANIA AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. THE STATE OF FACT AND THE DANUBE RIVER AS A KEY-ELEMENT

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*This paper is focused on the evolution of economic and social situation in Romania in 1990-2007, and after that it is focalized upon possible paths to follow in order to provide a sustainable development in this geographical area, taking account of the way Romanian society and the political leadership could use the huge potential given by Danube river in order to attain this objective.*

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Put shortly, the period 1990-2007 could be labeled as a chaotic period in Romania's modern history; it is characterized by the absence of a coherent economic, social, and professional policies. The effect could be identified even starting with '90s, and it can be felt very strong today. When the Communism fall down in Europe at the end of '80s, Romania had a unique position among the countries with similar level of economic development, having none external debts, and much more, being international a net creditor, with a global claim of 3 billions USD in relation with USSR, Iraq, and Libya, due to the Romanian investments made in those countries during 1980-1989;<sup>1</sup> in 2007 Romania had an external debt of 30 billions USD, being on 29-th place in the world from this point of view.<sup>2</sup> In the same time, Romania had a very strong industry before 1989. In 2007, the situation was like this: 75% from the industrial capacity of 1989 was totally eliminated, being erased from the economical map of Romania;<sup>3</sup> the agriculture, and the administration of existing forests and of touristic potential have entered a total collapse. The maintenance and the improvement of *transport and communication networks* – **the cornerstone of economic and social development** – was in 2000 far behind the situation registered in 1970; the strategic industries and factories in steel industry, the aviation, automobiles, and ship's building and the competitive units in the food, leather, furniture, or pharmaceutical industries were shut down, privatized in a fraudulent way, or sold for a penny.<sup>4</sup>

In order to highlight the negative effect of this state of fact, it could be mentioned that a state which intends to have a *position* which can promote its foreign policy and its interests, must have a good *transport policy* (and communication policy), while the energy policy following nearby; this areas must be regarded with the greatest attention and interests by political leadership in each state which intends to have a good position in international affairs, because the *independence* in this areas mean a greater mobility in the foreign policy of that state, the state of fact in Romania being the *best example* for this and for the absence of coherence in these vital areas, with extremely negative impact in the long run. It could be mentioned that the construction and the modernization of roads and railways is made in the most slowly possible way, while the plans

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<sup>1</sup> Călin Georgescu and Mircea Malița, *Back to Basics. Reshaping Professional Worth in Romania. A Report of the IIDP – Romania*, Bucharest, IIDP – Romania, 2008, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 55.

regarding the development in energy sector, having as their aim the reduction Romania's dependency of costly energy imports faced in 1990-2007 the most terrible opposition at domestic level, and international level, too, especially regarding the nuclear power plant at Cernavoda, and regarding the modernization of some hydropower plants, being included here the Iron Gate System I, too.<sup>5</sup> Great parts of Romanian oil and gas industries were privatized in suspect and strange conditions, reducing in this way the *ability* of Romanian state to take *independent* energy policies, which is a ***unique phenomenon in the Romania's modern history***. The economical and social costs have become evident: during last years, the trend was due especially to consume, and not due to production, Romania becoming again importer of finished products, and exporter of raw materials and timber, as during the medieval times. Romania was found in a unique position among European nations: she turned around to a subsistence economy, the percentage of population working in agriculture being 39,7% in 1997, while in 1989 it was only 27,5%,<sup>6</sup> and this gave predominance to family farms and to migrations from urban areas to rural areas, facts which have never met in Europe since 1800.<sup>7</sup> During 1990-1996 Romania went back to economic conditions peculiar to Soviet occupation (1945-1958), and there could be identified in this period the most reduced level of *social cohesion* in Romania's entire modern history.<sup>8</sup> The conclusion in this: after 1990 in Romania there was registered the destruction of the most important part of its economic potential, the setting of social chaos, cultural stagnation, and the scattering on national wealth, all being due to some deficiencies peculiar to Romanian society, well protected by the hesitation or incapacity of Romanian political leadership, which hasn't had the capacity to understand the aims of changes which it had to face.<sup>9</sup>

To these negative peculiarities there have been added the consequences of global financial crises starting with the fall of 2007, when evidence of this state of facts could be identified in USA. It could be mentioned that in the past there were economic crises, too, and their effects could be felt in the political area, too. In 2007 USA have been involved in two wars which she carried very far from her territory (for six years in Afghanistan and for four years in Iraq), their economic and political costs being considerable; on the one side, the economic crises in USA is direct connected to these "adventures", as in the past, when the wars determined a radical change in humans' perceptions and behavior.<sup>10</sup> The effects of this crises started to be felt in Romania beginning with the second part of the year 2008, bringing with them a general confusion in economic and social areas, although there could be identified beginning with 2007 some coherence due to Romania's integration with EU.

We are today in the first part of the year 2010 and we can question what we have to do in order to have some coherence in the action realized at national level in Romania. One important and wise answer should take account of national interest, and this must comprise the *Danube river*, which together with Black Sea and Carpathian Mountains, are those elements which influence in a crucial manner the life of Romanian state.

Nobody reckoned better this great importance of Danube – and of Romania, where are situated the Mouths of Danube – than King Carol I, when, as an answer to the counsel regarding "its refuse to accept the crown of a country without any future", he looked at the map and showed that here passed the most *straight line* between Europe and Indies, this country having to play a special role in global trade.<sup>11</sup> Even then the geographical peculiarities were crucial for the

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> EBRD, *Transition Reports*, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Călin Georgescu and Mircea Malița, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>10</sup> Charles P. Kindleberger and Robert Aliber, *Manias, Panics, and Crashes. A History of Financial Crises*, 5-th edition, New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005, p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> Grigore Antipa, *Dunărea și problemele ei științifice, economice și politice*, București, Librăria "Cartea Românească" și Pavel Suru, 1921, p. 10.

direction taken by that great man and organizer of our modern state.

And we should never forget that since the opening of the Suez Canal the Danube has become the shortest way for transporting to the big economic and industrial centers in Central and Western Europe the food and raw materials brought from Asia, and for the export of industrial products from Europe to Asia.<sup>12</sup> And from economic point of view, although Romania belongs to European family, the geographical space centered on Levant represents Romania's economic *vital space*,<sup>13</sup> due to Danube and its direction of flow.

A strategy adopted at national level having as focal point the Danube river should be the main focal point in Romania, because the role of this river is so great, that in case such a strategy would be crowned with success, it would generate great benefits for Romania on multiple layers, both at domestic level, and in her foreign policy, too. One part of the territory which is the most valuable part given to Romania and which asks from Romanians the greatest dues and skills, in order to provide favorable conditions for development among the other nations on the Earth, is **Danube river**.<sup>14</sup> Danube guarantees us the great future and the prosperity in the great struggle for existence among the nations on the Earth, and the same Danube is the element which dictates the Romania's *special interests*, and guides her policy.<sup>15</sup>

From *economic* point of view, Danube river could be used for multiple ends: it has a huge potential for fishing; for reed production; for irrigation systems; for energy (hydro and nuclear); for shipping industry; it is an important „tank” of water, being from this point of view a key-element with geostrategic connotations because it facilitates the human concentration in urban centers situated along its course – creating in this way the social base for economic activities, which are not possible without water; it could be used as a transport artery in European transport system, where there could navigate Romanian cruise ships, promoting the touristic potential in south-western part of Romania, bringing in these ways the greatest benefits for Romanian state and for Romanian people. Only the man's ignorance and silliness make from this natural spring of wealth not to produce the wealth at its potential, toward which we have the right look with confidence.<sup>16</sup>

The initiation of projects for fisheries' construction taking account of hydro-biological peculiarities, could create for Romania one of the greatest source of wealth and incomes.<sup>17</sup> The material needs for projects like these wouldn't be a too great obstacle, because they generate incomes which would cover very fast the expenses generated by their construction; they are only necessary much more *seriousness, well intentions and good faith, and fewer petty politics and bureaucracy*. A bad administrated fishery is a forerunner of its bankruptcy, and although on Romanian Danube and in Danube Delta there are very good natural conditions for fish production – which are unique in Europe – the incoherence of Romanian politics sets the stage for scattering of this important natural gift. And as the fishes can't develop in a polluted environment, we could observe the direct connection between the fishing potential of Danube and *sustainable development*.

In the same time, a plethora of plants and animals find a welcome habitat along Danube – especially in Danube Delta – being another source of wealth. Let alone pasture lands and hay places, the reed due to enormous space occupied by them, have a special importance. If there could be identified a beneficial use for reed from Danube Delta, Romania could cover with reed supply all needs in entire Europe, without fearing of any competition.<sup>18</sup> Together with reed, there

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Dobrescu și Alina Bârgăoanu, *Geopolitica*, București, SNSPA, 2001, p. 73.

<sup>14</sup> Grigore Antipa, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ciprian – Benjamin Benea, *Dunărea. Geopolitică și negociere*, Iași, Institutul European, 2009, p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> Grigore Antipa, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 91.

could be found huge amounts of rush, and big poplars, willow and alder forests. The profitableness of these forests is very big; even the wood has not the best quality, the forests could be cut at each 8-10 years, and through this short rotation, their exploitation would generate substantial incomes.

But the Danube influences in an overwhelmingly way the life of Romanian people, because this river has the most complex connection with all national and industrial activities. The Romanian Plain is one of the most fertile lands in Europe. The major disadvantage is due to the reduced quantities of water falling in this area (between 300 and 400 mm/year), the droughts generating great damages, especially in case there are consecutive drought years. It could be seen that the improvement of agricultural potential could be obtained through a vast system of *irrigations*. And the necessary amounts of water could be taken directly from the Danube, which in spring time could reach 35000 cubic meters/s.; the amount of water in excess could be stored in special pools, while during summer droughts the water could be used through canals and irrigation systems to agricultural areas, transforming significant areas in Romanian Plain in the wealthiest plains in Europe, reducing in the same time the Romania's dependency by food imports – another key-element with deep implications for foreign policy of the state – transforming Romania from a net food importer in a big cereals and food exporter, as a consequence of light industry development. The cornerstone for attaining this aim is the *association* among people living in this area, having at its base the *trust*. This is the only way for attaining a sustainable solution which could facilitate the reaching of this important aim.

From energy point of view, Danube has exceptional parameters, being the *biggest in Europe*;<sup>19</sup> the medium potential in Iron Gate Defile which has a length of 107 km. is 8050 KW/km, in Gura Vaii-Sip being 81800 KW/km.<sup>20</sup> While the construction of these hydro power plants was conditioned by river's peculiarities and its shores in common sector near Iron Gate Defile, the water of Danube river is an inexhaustible source for nuclear generated energy. In this way, in Units I and II at Cernavoda there is obtained 18% of necessary energy at national level; the installed capacity in for each one reactor 706 MW. And when the project was launched 30 years before, there were foreseen five units of electricity generation at Cernavoda.

Linked to the importance of creating at national level an *independence* in energy sector, this giving birth to a greater mobility in foreign policy, Danube could be regarded as the key-element which could provide that mobility for Romanian foreign policy, rising the specter of choices and its foreign policy's flexibility, with all advantages involved by these aspects. In this way, there could be obtained with inexhaustible Danube's water the needed energy in nuclear and hydro power plants – *the water becoming more and more expensive taking account of climate changes consequences* – providing a strong shield against the negative influences which could come from Middle Eastern affairs, OPEC, and Russia, or from non-state actors (as powerful oil and gas companies, companies involved in the supply of oil and gas along routes on sea and pipelines, or pirates,<sup>21</sup> as happens near the Somali coasts).

The climate change, far away from international media coverage, is a real fact, with extremely negative consequences, and which could hardly be estimated and quantified. If we look at images taken by satellites, we could observe that in September 2007 the area of ice cap in Arctic zone is much little in comparison with the existing situation in 2001.<sup>22</sup> The reserves of fresh water become, in a climate where temperature's risings would be a common thing, much rare and more

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 70.

<sup>21</sup> Max Boot, „Pirates, Then and Now. How Piracy Was Defeated in the Past and Can Be Again”, in *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2009, vol. 88, no. 4, p. 103.

<sup>22</sup> Scott G. Borgerson, “Arctic Meltdown. The Economic and Security Implications of Global Warming”, in *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2008, vol. 87, no. 2, pp. 64-65.

expensive,<sup>23</sup> which made a famous international affairs think-tank to finance a study analyzing the impact of hydro-politics upon international relations.<sup>24</sup> The Danube becomes in this context the source of fresh water, so necessary to survive, and the element which could generate the necessary energy for the multiplication of weak human being's power, providing rising of the potential which could be used by Romanians in the great struggle they have to carry among the other Earth's nations. Danube is that important fresh water "reservoir", playing as such a role with strong *geostrategic* connotations.

Taking account of climate changes, nuclear energy becomes a viable alternative; although France hasn't any natural uranium reserves, in 2005 she had 59 nuclear reactors, which covered 78% of its electricity demand.<sup>25</sup> And if we look at this example, Romania could learn and use – taking account of her obligations assumed by NPT – the Danube's water to create nuclear energy on a greater scale in comparison with present situation, reducing in the same time the share of energy produced in coal power plants (which create a lot of pollution), oil and gas power plants (which emit gases which hurt the environment, and which create great dependence upon countries where those resources are located). Furthermore, this is in the context of European Union's desire to reduce the emissions which generate greenhouse gases.<sup>26</sup>

The shipbuilding is another economic activity which is stimulated by Danube's existence, the whole production being export oriented, Romania having the 2-nd position, after Italy in Europe. In order to develop the navigation, it is necessary to develop the activities connected to deposit and transit business in Danube's ports, and to intensify the transit of goods in river and maritime-rivers ports, and the development of cruise navigation on Danube, in the same time with the modernization and development of the fleet for passengers' and goods' transport. Furthermore, Danube is the seventh European Pan-European Transport corridor, having a great importance for EU; the negotiations carried on before the establishing of this route had taken place under the auspices offered by a multilateral institution – UNECE – and they had been carried in parallel with the negotiations regarding the AGTC (1991), and with the negotiations finalized with the AGN (1996). And this is a strong proof for presenting the importance of Danube in Europe, this river being mentioned in all these accords.

Danube has benefitted by international focus, but to fulfill its role and purpose for Romanians, they have to construct a coherent and strong *national strategy* aiming at providing permanent conditions for navigation for ships with draught greater than 2.5 m all over the year, the take over of an important part of the road traffic – which pose great challenges due to its risks and pollution – and heading that part of traffic toward river navigation; and the development of deposits and expedition facilities, the reduction of the fees paid at the passage through Sulina and Danube-Black Sea canals; in the same time, there must be created access on rail and road infrastructures which are direct connected to Danube ports in order to stimulate the river transport; the development of reliable services in Romanian ports; stimulating Romanian ship-owners to develop a strong fleet well adapted to competition which they would face due to European integration process. These things correlated with better facilities regarding combined transport in Danube ports for loading or unloading of goods – and especially containers – could rise the role of Romania, transforming it in a real trade plate in Nord-South, and East-West trade. It could be noted that Danube's water represents in this case *union, energy, food, industry, transport, trade, but man must fight for the creation and development of these achievements*.

From politic point of view Danube line is the key-element which connects Romania to Western European countries; during history Danube played a "polarizing role for Romanian state",

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 65.

<sup>24</sup> Arun P. Elhance, *Hydropolitics in the 3-rd World. Conflict and Cooperation in International River Basins*, Washington DC, USIP Press, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Sharon Squassoni, *Nuclear Energy. Rebirth or Resuscitation?*, Washington DC, CEIP, 2009, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Mehdi Abbas, "L'Europe face au changement climatique" in *Futuribles*, Fevrier 2009, No. 349, p. 53.

because a free navigation at the mouths of Danube could be provided only when Romania was strong, the only one county direct interested that navigation on Danube to be free.<sup>27</sup> And if we think about the role of communications networks which facilitate not only the movement of persons (and as a consequence, of ideas) and of goods, they are in the same time those elements which create *political bridges* among different nations; and we can observe the great importance on Danube for a healthy Romanian integration with EU. Taking account of Danube flow's direction from West to East, through the middle of European continent, her importance lays in facilitation of economic, social and political cooperation at European level. And the harmonization of the regime specific to Rhine with the Danube regime would remove the legal and administrative barriers which hinder the traffic between North and Black Seas.

During history, there have been were "two" Danube rivers: one *peaceful* regarded as such by riparian states; and one strategic, regarded as such by European powers. And if the first one is dictated by *economic interests* and by welfare, the second would have as cornerstone *geopolitical* aspects, the mouths of Danube being one of the global red points on military maps.<sup>28</sup>

Danube, together the Black Sea and Carpathian Mountains are those elements on which depend the Romanian state's life; and if we want to analyze the way the Romans, Turks, or Austrians, and even the migratory people used Danube as a strategic communication line, being in the same time a way for military, political, and economical penetration, we could remember always how important is this geographical element for Romania and for Romanians.

And we can remember that only through a coherent policy created at national level – but taking account of European interests – a policy emptied by any populist elements in regarding Danube, the Romanian state and nation could play the geopolitical role which it so much desire to have in this part of Europe, with great benefits for Romania, at regional level, but at European, and global stage, too.

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Dobrescu și Alina Bârgăoanu, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>28</sup> Mircea Malița, *Între război și pace*, București, C.H. Beck, 2007, p. 325.