

The Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the European Policies.

Outlook 2020 – 2024

The Social Democratic Party (PSD) in Romania defines itself as follows: "We are the ones who, over time, have contributed to Romania's development and its European and Euro-Atlantic integration." So there is a passive and non-prospective approach. The relationship with European policies, the process of integration and the European construction can only be understood and possibly deduced from the contamination of the internal policies with certain sequences of the EU policy statements.

Romania is the country with the most pronounced socio-economic inequities in the European Union. These are visible in the daily life of the Romanian society. Following the initiative of the Party of European Socialists (PSE), the basic strategic project of the PSD is based on last year's speech relating to the need for a new *Social Contract* in Romania. The announcements of the main social-democratic leaders, at the beginning of 2020, suggest that in the next period of time, the same programmatic conception will be pursued, and the reform of the party will be intensely discussed.

The 2016 election campaign was carried out on the general concept of the redistribution of the incomes from salaries and pensions, with an emphasis on increasing their level as a result of reconfiguring the budgetary priorities. During the last years of government (2017-2019), however, the contractual meaning of the initiative, namely the productivity, modernization and

efficiency of the institutions, policies and activity of civil servants and public companies, has been lost. This has been dropped from political priorities, being interpreted as belonging only to the momentary electoral goals of the PSD. This perception was also reinforced by the inappropriate behavior of its party leaders, at central and local level, which was outside normal conduct of a social contract of the European social-democracy. This is why, during the 2019 election campaign, the PSD was severely sanctioned by voters, including those from its core political heart.

The discrepancy between the strategic-programmatic statement, the political discourse of the main leaders and the actual political governmental act during the last three years, has been registered in other important areas of social policies (eg education, health, etc.). This further diminished the credibility of operating on the platform of a true *Social Contract*, of which only very few citizens/voters have heard and even less that it would be part of a European policy projection. It was obvious to the majority of Romanian citizens that the PSD took over the slogan of the "social contract", due to the seriousness of the socio-economic situation in Romania, autochthonous in a populist and electoral sense. In fact, this attitude was also reflected in the uninspired initiative of the family referendum (October 2018), rejected by the citizens because it came from a non-European background and it did not address the real social problems families in Romania are facing.

In 2018-2019, the PSD government has launched some very important strategies and programs for the process of European integration of Romania. Starting at the Congress in March 2018, the PSD has announced that it will propose a program for the adoption of the Euro. This initiative, taken over from the Accession Treaty, was preceded by a *Convergence Program 2019-2024* and the elaboration/approval of the *National Strategy for sustainable*

development of Romania 2030, both being responses to the strategic steps of the European Union. Finally, at the beginning of 2019, the *National Plan for the adoption of the Euro* was launched, which was well-received by specialists who believe the document has an "ambitious perspective and practical inapplicability" (*Economistul*, 20/06/2019). Obviously, these strategic proposals related to the European policies of sustainable development, to the Economic and Monetary Union, etc., to the obligations of relationship with the European Commission, wanted to give the signal that the PSD governance was serious and responsible in relation to the mission which it was coming back from being the presidency of the EU Council (1st sem. 2019). At the same time, PSD wished to underline the commitment to achieve the political objective "Development for well-being", recognizing that this could only become reality in the context of correctly applying European development policies in Romania. On the same level the PSD's rhetorical focus on cohesion and regional development policies can be found, but the argument was supported only by the desire to have access to European funds, as the effect of applying these policies some regions of Romania still remain under development. The PSD, from the end of 2018 and from 2019, has shown little concern for the implementation of such strategies/programs (see GEO no.114/2018), and has shown the intention to transform such objectives also for short-term electoral purposes, which aggravated the country's macroeconomic problems, disturbed the business environment and even disrupted the social and political relations in the country. Therefore, this was another example of divergence between the political/partisan discourse and the concrete activity of application in Romania of European development politicians. This severely altered the public perception of the credibility of the PSD's political strategies and programs, with medium-term consequences (taking into consideration the general political environment in Romania).

The PSD's reporting towards other European policies has been and will probably remain the same, at least until a real party reform is underway. Although Romania has obtained, through the Accession Treaty, the longest transitional periods, the application in Romania of the European environmental policy is sub-modest, which is why the European Commission has issued penalties on several occasions. Moreover, other policies than the environmental infrastructure were not properly approached by the PSD and its government, and poor results were also obtained regarding the transport and energy infrastructure. However, the Green Pact was received with optimism, benchmarked at 2050, with the amendment of the financial support from the European Union. The European industrial policy, the energy policy, and the Common Agricultural Policy are seen by the PSD through the circumstances of the European policies, but the interdependence between the national and European policies was not noticed, only observing the support of narrow interests, sometimes even by the group. At the level of political discourse the impression was left that the extraordinary transformation that is announced through AI, R&D, digitization, etc. is very well understood, but the PSD government kept Romania at the last place in the EU when it comes to financing research, innovation, and creativity. The labor market continues to be quite rigid and unpredictable, which is why, with all the promising speeches of the PSD, the Romanian labor force has continued to look for other opportunities, especially in developed EU countries, jeopardizing the country's future progress. Likewise, the wait-and-see attitude towards the educational process made one of Romania's competitive advantages disappear, namely the qualification and skills of its workforce.

Regarding the European defense policy and the foreign policy of the European Union, the PSD's speech was in line with the "traditional" Romanian post-accession line: we are in the European Union to achieve our national economic-social development goals; we are in NATO and we have a strategic partnership with the US for defense and security interests. Although the PSD's expertise in foreign policy, defense and security has diminished quantitatively and qualitatively, probably due to the specificity of the national decision-making process in these areas, the PSD government has advocated the need for complementarity between EU-NATO/US policies on defense and security, and in foreign policies it seems that the PSD and its previous governments have had rather short-term comportment (see the cases of China, Russia, Israel), sometimes signaling a departure from European policies. Regarding Brexit and the future relationship with the UK, the only wish that was expressed is that Romania's "national interests" (especially for Romanian citizens in the UK) should be taken into account. There are no major changes in conception and political attitudes towards these European policies in the near future.

We have not analyzed the relation of the PSD MEPs regarding the activity of the S&D group in the European Parliament. Instead, we researched how the PSD participated and contributed to the development and support of European policies by the PSE. The documents from the last years of this European political formation, however, show us an almost quasi-total absence of PSD representatives in the working groups organized by the PSE, which were meant to formulate some social-democratic options regarding proposals for new elements or amendments for improvement. And this lack of participation of the PSD was found even at the level of the ministerial groups, during the period when the PSD was in government in Romania (we only noticed the presence of a Secretary of State in a discussion on the labor

market in the European Union). This tells us a lot about the way in which the PSD also conceives European affairs and policies - namely as foreign policy! The PSD's public communication about the internal transposition of European policies is almost completely lacking, and a PSE-Activist type structure has a rather pale NGO-level behavior, promoting only internal elitism and seeking for a position in the PSD leadership.

After the two electoral rounds in 2019, PSD has promised a serious reform of the party. But it is not just about the electoral impulse for reform, because in 2020 there will be local and general elections in Romania. Some leaders of the PSD also promise to pay attention to the reform of the European social-democracy, which is in a deep crisis as well. Moreover, a reform of the PSD must take into account the specificity of the political competition in Romania that takes place in the form of a permanent struggle for power, both within the party and within the party system of the country. It is obvious that a reform of the PSD cannot happen in a very short time, which means that by 2024 the electoral cycle will have to achieve a credible internal transformation, but at the same time, the potential supporters and voters need to be convinced that they have a voice in the PSD and an involvement in the internal political process to propose public policies expressing their interests in the short, medium and even long term. The PSD needs, for the period 2020-2024, to rebuild its potential for transnational action in order to contribute to PES' options in terms of European policy formulation. At the same time, there will be expectations that the PSD will correlate its policy proposals addressed to the citizens of Romania and their own electorate with the European development policies, creating a prospective analytical, organizational and expert capacity to demonstrate the ability of efficient implementation of the European policies in the Romanian space. The Romanian social environment and the European social-democratic partners

will have to wait, in the coming years, for the PSD to understand that the European Union, of which Romania is a member, is a regional/inter-governmental organization for European integration, being permanently open to transformation. Last but not least, the PSD will have to find ways of doctrinal modernization, communication and political action that will make it attractive to new socio-professional categories that are already noticeable in the socio-political spectrum of this era. And it will have to keep up with the tendencies of political expression of the indigenous and European democratic processes, with the forms of communication required by international technological, informational and cultural progress.

NOTE - This analysis was made based on political speech documents, strategies and programs of the PSD, over the period 2015-2019. The research of the attitude towards the European policies had as substance the governmental strategies and programs of the PSD, the legislative activity, the political and administrative/governmental decisions, and the public perceptions on their effects. Of course, the documents made public by the PSE were analyzed as well.

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