



Balkan Public Agenda

A Focus Group Study
in Bucharest, Cluj and Valea Mare, Dâmbovița

February, 2000



Romania

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Introduction

Objectives of the research

The qualitative approach was designed to deliver information needed for developing a questionnaire inquiry to be implemented in all SouthEast European countries. The goal of the qualitative research is to monitor the public agenda in the Balkan area.

The results of the focus group-based research are not to be considered representative for the entire population of a country. They have an intrinsic value and provide an understanding on how people motivate their stand with respect to the situation of the country.

The group interviews were conducted according to the interview guide designed by IMAS in collaboration with IDEA International and with the network or research institutes in all the countries involved in the project. IMAS' senior researcher Elena Nica has moderated the groups.

Recruiting and group composition

Persons belonging to the majority ethnic group and people belonging to minority groups were invited to attend the focus group sessions.

Respondents were selected using the usual methods in qualitative research. Recruiting questionnaires were developed and implemented to filter respondents according to the selection criteria established (see: group composition). There are no kinship relation between any of the participants, and none of the attendants works for IMAS or for any publication issued in Romania.

32 persons have participated in the research. The table below lists the attendants' demographics:

Sex:		Occupation:	
Male	16	Salesman	1
Female	16	Jeweller	1
Age:		Economist	1
20-35	16	Kindergarten trainer	1
36-45	8	Electrician	1
46+	8	Clerk	1
Education:		Engineer	1
Complete medium education	21	Entrepreneur	1
Incomplete higher education	4	Teacher	1
Complete high education	7	Jurist	1
		Labourer	1
		Mechanic auto	1
		Medicine	1
		Worker	2
		PC operator	1
		Pensioner	3
		Professor	1
		Referent	1
		Printer	1
		Secretary	1
		Driver	1
		Unemployed	2
		Student	5
		Technician	1

The table below presents the criteria considered in recruiting participants for the 4 groups.

	Date	Place	No. subjects	Group composition
Group 1	10.02	Bucharest	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- higher education- age 22-39- Romanian nationality- M&F- incomes higher than average income
Group 2	10.02	Bucharest	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- average education- Romanian nationality- age 40–55- M&F- married with children
Group 3	11.02	Valea Mare, Dâmbovița	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- people from rural environment- Romanian nationality
Group 4	12.02	Cluj Napoca	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- average and higher education- Hungarians- age 40-55- M&F- average incomes- married with children

1. Main findings of the research

- The most important problems, people in Romania face nowadays are poverty, corruption and communist mentality.
- In the opinion of most respondents, authorities should have the solutions to these problems. The intellectual group partly relies on private initiative; however, such initiative requires some stimulating legislation (therefore some intervention of the authorities).
- In most respondents' opinion, the problems that are most difficult to solve are: changing mentalities; uprooting; corruption generalised at all levels of the state structures.
- Problems of economic nature (chaotic privatisation driven by domestic or foreign political or financial interests, lack of investments, lack of support for agriculture, lack of opportunities for private business) are perpetuated as a result of the lack of interest of politicians, poor training of managers, lack of constructive attitude of information channels.
- The solution to economic problems seems to be the change of mentalities. Respondents appreciate that a very long period of time is required for such a change. They all wish a better economic future for Romania, but they are no longer used to expect concrete results in short periods of time. People's present hopes are directed towards the new government, as it should start proving its capability to achieve such results.
- Romania is on its path to a market economy, which is a rather distant goal in the respondents' opinion. Respondents define market economy by free competition, absence of state monopolies, loans that stimulate free initiative, guaranteed property, no "collective welfare" mentality.
- In most attendants' opinion, the citizens exert their role in decision-making by voting. Respondents of Hungarian nationality seem to have found other solutions as well: calls in live shows on local radio and TV stations, results of public opinion polls.
- Respondents have low confidence in the institutions / elite of the country. People state that they trust themselves and the church. Mass media has a great impact on their daily lives. Some respondents state their admiration for some incisive journalists (Cristian Tudor Popescu, Mircea Dinescu), and at the same time their disapproval for the image, Romanian journalism has achieved lately (scandalous news, violence and leisure).
- Entering politics means to almost all respondents accepting different compromises and interests. Entering politics doesn't entail the idea of generating a change for the better in the society; it is rather the idea of being willing to "lie" for one's own benefit.

- The rural group seems more involved in the community life; structures of community life in this environment are less deteriorated by communism.
- Sources of information that are available to most respondents are radio, television and press. Respondents of Hungarian nationality carefully watch Hungarian television or local television channels that broadcast in Hungarian, as they consider these sources to be neutral and supply detailed information about the life of their community.
- Non-government organisations are almost invisible to the attendants of group discussions. Most respondents associate such organisations with shell organisations whose only purpose for existing is fraud.
- Religious organisations are quasi-unknown and meaningless in the majority's opinion. Hungarians are aware of some organisations of this kind for which they have a positive appreciation.
- Professional organisations about which most respondents have an opinion are trade unions. The general impression about trade unions is negative – they either act to carry out the requirements of the employment, or serve as a spring-board to political careers.
- Public services have scored between 2 and 8. Social services, health and education have scored lowest. Heating, electricity and water have scored highest.
- The influence of international institutions on our country's agenda is obvious, whether some respondents admit it or not. The more educated people are, the more positive their attitude towards the activity of these institutions is. Highly educated respondents outline the advantages of international institutions' involvement in Romania's life; people with high school education list the disadvantages, the presence of such institutions in Romania entails.
- Most subjects expect Romania joining the European Union to solve the problem of visas, increase border security, oblige Romania to performance to western standards.
- In the respondents' opinion, joining NATO entails rebuilding the army infrastructure in order to make it NATO-compatible. In exchange for such terms, NATO might act as an efficient moderator in conflicts within the area, guarantee political and economic stability in Balkan states.
- A significant majority of the attendants are unaware of the sense of the Stability Pact.
- The main fears of the respondents are related to safety of jobs, lack of values of new generations, and even a new world war.
- Most attendants hope that the economic status would change as a result of new policies of the new government, which would inherently lead to increasing the standards of living of the population.

2. Aspirations, fears and concerns regarding the situation in Romania

2.1. What is the most important problem, people in our country are facing nowadays?

As resulted from the group discussions, the most important problems, Romanians face nowadays are the following:

- Poverty
- Corruption – political abuse
- Economic disaster – chaotic privatisation of industrial enterprises has generated, in the participants’ opinion, unemployment, poverty, lack of chances for the youth;
- The education system – lack of resources to equip and modernise schools, insufficiently trained teaching staff, the issue of alternative textbooks, incoherent measures within the educational reforms;
- Mass media lacking objectivity and presenting scandalous news, violence of news bulletins;
- Uprooting – in the opinion of highly educated people, it seems to be the cause of all the other problems;
- People’s mentality – residues of communism;
- Personal insecurity – robbery, abuse, street dogs;
- Legislative problems – undefined legislative framework leaves room to interpretation and leads to abuse.

Illustrative statements

When you have no job, that’s where everything comes from: you can’t go abroad and get in contact with other cultures, other people, see what they nurture and what you don’t; you can’t go to a museum or buy a book. [F7, G1]

Respect for everything. Maybe it will only change with a change a generation; I am not sure people can adapt themselves on the way. [M3, G1]

The economic problem, because, as he said earlier, it includes everything: if the economy works, everything works. [M6, G2]

All problems are serious at this moment – even very serious. The most serious one is that the youth has no perspective for the future, no chance whatsoever. University graduates don’t stand a chance. Young graduates have to face ridiculously low standards of living, at the limits of poverty; therefore, they have two choices: either leave the country and go to some place where they can use their knowledge, or stay and start stealing or doing

other bad things. Another problem is the health status of this nation, and I mean here the quality of healthcare services. [M8, G3]

These problems may be somehow put together. For example, the ethnic problems may be cumulated into the cultural ones, in terms of who might benefit from the existence of such problems. The ethnical problems are closely related to the lack of culture. The social problems are closely related to the industrial problems, as well as to the agricultural problems... [M4, G4]

I was to Pitești some time ago, and I saw the streets had no holes and people were smiling. I noticed something happened there after 1990. I noticed the first ones to lose their jobs were the rural people who weren't living in Pitesti. So, Pitești is free from that mass of people; only the double ones are left – those who are neither peasants, nor town people. They don't know exactly what they are, and they live with this pain. Less population, happier people. [M1, G1]

2.2. Problems that have the greatest chance to be solved in the near future

- Personal insecurity – in the respondents' opinion, the solution seems to be in the government stimulating fair actions of the police force (modernisation, increasing the number of staff, better salaries in order to prevent corruption).
- The problem of the mass media being preponderantly focused on scandal and violence could be solved by strengthening the role of the National Council for Audio-Visual.
- Unemployment. The higher educated group sees the problem solved in a short time by private initiative. The solutions implemented by the government have proved to be inefficient and bear no results. The other groups consider that the authorities should solve the problem by stopping or controlling privatisation of large industrial companies.
- The legislative problems could be solved by accelerating the legislative process in the two parliament chambers.

Illustrative statements

A decision of the CNA (National Commission of Audio-Visual Media) could make the mass media give up violent movies; as far as newspapers are concerned, all you can read is articles about rapes and scandal. [M8, G3]

Personal insecurity can be managed. Police shouldn't be corrupt anymore; it should be incorruptible. [M6, G3]

We should start over; ordinary people would do something, if they had the proper legislation. [F2, G1]

A lot of problems would solve with proper local administration. [M1, G1]

2.3. Problems that are most difficult to solve

In the participants' opinion, the problems that have the least chance to be solved are:

- Changing mentalities – the respondents replicate the estimations of the media with respect to the time needed for such a change to occur, namely 2-3 generations.
- Uprooting – a result of the communist policy of relocating people from the rural to the urban environment. Participants have included in the same field the lack of involvement of citizens in the community life; deterioration of people's feeling of belonging to some entity; the fact that people feel like strangers to themselves and the others.
- In the respondents' opinion, the corruption problem can't be solved in a short period of time. In a poor country, with a flawed juridical system, it is unlikely to have such a phenomenon disappear overnight.

Illustrative statements

We should start over; ordinary people would do something, if they had the proper legislation. [F2, G1]

From our point of view, all is wrong comes from Bucharest and is due to the political leadership. We could go round these matters until the end of time...What would be the use...just got dizzy. [M4, G4]

This (thinking of earning money without any effort in this respect) is typically Romanian. Americans say they make money, Germans say they work for money, and Romanians say they earn money. This is a typically Romanian problem, and it's not new. [M1, G1]

We were used to go to work, do our job, and have a salary – good or bad... Have a house from the State, and... We were rather used to go to work, pretend we work, take the money, go home... [M6, G2]

Mentality? Maybe it will only change with a change a generation; I am not sure people can adapt themselves on the way. Uprooting, because that includes everything that was said. The young generation has no grounds, they only try to ape what they see others doing. [M1, G1]

3. Economic issues

3.1. Economic problems. Causes of economic problems

- Chaotic privatisation, governed by external or domestic political and financial interests
- Improper management of resources
- Lack of determination of government
- Lack of opportunities for young people to develop private businesses
- Extremely poor support of agriculture (no effective state subsidies in this field)

- No investments in the Romanian economy, due to excessive bureaucracy and absence of a stimulating, steady legislative framework.

The causes of these problems are most often attributed to leaders, most of the participants accusing them for lack of interest or incompetence.

Many of the attendants consider that the solutions to these economic problems need to be identified by the leaders. People with average education and people from rural areas believe that the state should have a more significant role (groups 2, 3). In these participants' opinion, the economy could recover by own forces (even without external help), by hiring professional management. In the other groups, the optimal solution seems to be to involve all citizens in solving economic problems. Namely, everything should start from the bottom, while the authorities' role is to stimulate free initiative and control excess.

Illustrative statements

Because there are no more contracts. Plane engines had no utilisation in Romania any longer. There were no programmes designed for people, and then it's normal that they got out in the streets. How could they live? The unemployment allowance was acceptable in 1990, but what about now? How can anybody live on 600,000 de lei? [F7, G1]

Managers who know how to find contracts only came in the last few years; until some years ago they didn't even know what a contract was. It's now that we start training people for this. [F2, G1]

I wonder, why isn't it at least as good as it was before 1990? There is some interest to destroy things, somewhere. [F2, G2]

A lot of wrong people in the economy, a lot of bad managers. [M6, G2]

As far as agriculture is concerned, a lot of land is not worked because there is no money, no equipment, no organisation. I think a good solution would be to establish farms, and hire and pay skilled staff that would do their job properly. [M7, G3]

You know, if somebody from outside comes and helps us, they take more than what they give. We did it wrong, we have to make it well again. [M8, G3]

Leaders should solve these problems. Compared to the United States, we have twice more politicians. [F2, G3]

The privatization process is very slow. Happily for me, I work in a private company...where things are better. I work with people I know. But, aside our friendship relation, there's the other employer – employee relationship, which is different. Although there's no clear border between them, it is something you can feel that exists. When it comes to a private company, the one who does not feel to work hard has to work hard if that one wants to keep the job. How should I say it, it is like in nature...it is the time that solves and finds solutions. [M4, G4]

3.2. Obstacles to solving economic problems

- Lack of interest of leaders concerned with their personal enrichment;
- Lack of vocation of politicians – politics is made by “*ungifted people*”;
- Shortage of specialists – they prefer working abroad after graduating management training;
- Corruption;
- Poor image of Romania abroad – created by Romanian politicians;
- Non-constructive, non-educating mass media;
- Lack of funds, absence of foreign investments and modern technology;
- The problem of guaranteeing property.

Illustrative statements

If I hold some high position and somebody comes and bribes me, I have a lack of interest towards a certain situation. My interest is the bribe. [M6, G1]

I just wonder, how rich we are, if it is possible to steal for 11 years with no break and there are still resources... [M3, G1]

It will be better when the State Property Fund will disappear, and it will disappear when there will be nothing left to steal and when the current politicians will be gone. [M4, G2]

Bureaucracy should be diminished. There are 5-6 people working in offices, while only 2 or 3 actually produce something. The manager who made it bankrupt buys a bankrupted company, and the workers are fired. [M6, G3]

Assuming investors existed and intended to do something ...they had been refused and sent somewhere else. They needed to go for approvals from door to door, from person to person for weeks... [F2, G4]

It is also interesting that we have what to produce and the necessary resources to produce. Let's try to compare Romania and Hungary. Compared to Hungary, Romania is richer, as far as the natural resources are concerned, but it is not able to exploit it. They always complain on their fail to properly use this opportunity nature provided them with. [M2, G4]

3.3. Factors that could help solving economic problems sooner

- Change of mentalities – with the change of two-three generations;
- Steady legal framework – “*tougher laws*”;
- People's respect towards work.

Illustrative statements

Tougher laws implemented firmly. Implemented by somebody people listen to. For instance Băsescu – he did it with the kiosks. He was the first to knock them down, and then they started knocking them down themselves. Did he manage? [F4, G1]

I would say, we should break the relations with the exterior for a few years. Stay and do our job. When we'll stop listening to foreigners, I think things will start going better. [M5, G2]

Young intelligence should be encouraged and stimulated, so they don't leave the country anymore. [F4, G3]

3.4. Role of the international community and institutions in our economy

The international institutions that are best known to the participants are the World Bank; the International Monetary Fund; the European Union.

Their role is important. Most interviewed people have doubts about the support, these institutions could provide to the Romanian economy. In their opinion, international help is usually conditioned in terms that most people consider difficult to accept or disadvantageous for Romania.

The Hungarian group considers the terms imposed by international organisms to be legitimate and normal. In their opinion, not accepting these terms generates a vicious circle with no visible exit.

The group of people with high-school education (Bucharest, G2), the above-mentioned international organisations are suspected for espionage or interest in destroying the Romanian economy.

Illustrative statements

I think the international community does have a role after all. We do need them, no matter if we want to admit it or not. They actually impose you something: if we need them, we need to make contracts and keep the deadlines. [F2, G1]

Lady, let's be honest: nobody gives you anything without asking for something in exchange. It's a law of the nature, I think. Nobody gives you anything without asking for something in exchange. And even more than what they gave you. [F4, G2]

You know, if somebody from outside comes and helps us, they take more than what they give. We did it wrong, we have to make it well again. [M8, G3]

3.5. Forecast for the economy in year 2001

In general, respondents expect things to evolve for the better. There is a great difference though, between their expectations and what they've seen until now in terms of results. For this reason most respondents are sceptical about the future. Their considerations are limited to assessing their individual needs, which the new government should solve at least in part: recalculating allowances for people in need, unemployment benefits and pensions.

Illustrative statements

It will matter psychologically. It will be better, because the power changed, and I hope the ruling power will do something. Psychologically it will be better. [F7, G1]

It's normal for any society to see some progress and some regress; however, after 10 years we should be seeing some progress too, not only regress. [M8, G3]

It will be better when the State Property Fund will disappear, and it will disappear when there will be nothing left to steal and when the current politicians will be gone. [M4, G2]

3.6. What does people understand by market economy?

For most respondents market economy means:

- Free competition
- No monopolies – privatised public services
- Credits and subsidies that would stimulate free initiative
- Guaranteed property
- Change of communist mentalities –

Relying on this definition, most respondents consider the Romanian market economy to be at the beginning. The structures inherited from the communist regime are difficult to change, and it's even more difficult with the mentalities.

Romania has taken the way of South-American countries. [M8, G1]

Those who run their own business should understand that this implies assuming the losses, in order to gain more in the future. [F4, G1]

I consider it quite explainable. It is almost impossible to pass to a market economy after so many years of communism... [M2, G4]

These key (national) economic companies lack in competition. For example, RENEL, does whatever it considers proper and you have to pay the bills because you can't live in the dark. With the gas company, it is the same. If you do not pay, they cut off the gas supply. [M4, G4]

4. Political institutions

4.1. What do you understand by democracy?

For most attendants the discussion about democracy is merely reproducing the media discourse on this issue. Terms frequently used by Romanian journalists, such as *"democracy that has got out of control"*, *"misunderstood democracy"*, were used to describe the state of the Romanian democracy.

In the opinion of the respondents, democratic life presumes in general:

- existence of certain freedoms and rights;
- observance of rules, norms, limits.

In Valea Mare, Dâmbovița, some participants have identified a link between democracy and the equity of waging. In other words, they are dissatisfied with a democracy in which people's wages don't match their needs.

In the opinion of the Hungarians interviewed, democracy also includes a “*fair attitude towards interethnic relationships*”. In their opinion, one of the most important values of democracy is respect for people’s nationality. They support the opinion that there is democracy in Romania.

Illustrative statements

There are freedoms and rights on paper, but few of them are implemented; it’s absolute relativity, anything can happen at any time. [F7, G1]

I don’t know. I suppose democracy has some rules, somehow. Except for us, the older ones – I’d say we are older. Younger ones understand that you can do whatever you want if it’s democracy. Have no respect for your peers, for elders... I think America has the worst democracy of all. [M4, G2]

In fact, our democracy fails to meet nationality and the inter-ethnic relationship requirements. [M4, G4]

Differences shouldn’t be so great between leaders and us, the ordinary people – in terms of earnings, I mean.[F5, G3]

4.2. What part do ordinary people play in decision-making?

Most respondents consider that their role in making decisions that are significant for the country is limited to voting, electing the candidates that would represent their interests in the government. Some respondents declare that they use interactive radio or TV shows to let the public know about some of their problems. However, the vote remains the most important opportunity to participate in the public life.

Besides live shows, some Hungarians have mentioned public opinion polls, as these should have a greater influence on the government’s attitude towards the current problems of the country.

In Valea Mare village, Dâmbovița, people feel they play a role in making decisions with respect to their community. Without the support of local authorities, they have managed to build the road, connect the gas supply infrastructure and establish a guard service paid by the village inhabitants.

Illustrative statements

What role? Not even in my building – the superintendent doesn’t ask for my opinion. [M8, G1]

As far as I am concerned, we got involved with this village – we built roads, we connected the village to the gas and water supply networks, without any help from the town hall. We can’t do more than that.[F7, G3]

We are not taken into account. [M1, G2]

4.3. Confidence towards institutions / elite

The confidence of respondents towards local, national and international authorities is very low. The general opinion is that elected people are more concerned with their personal interests than with those of people who voted for them. Voters usually get a pile of unfulfilled promises after the beginning of every mandate. Romanian politicians are perceived as skilled speakers (speeches able to attract votes), often entering politics with a view to pursuing personal advantages and establishing contacts for their future and for that of their families.

Confidence of the rural respondents towards government, presidency, parliament is slightly higher than in case of urban respondents. In their opinion, they give the newly appointed authorities their vote of confidence until the opposite is proved. As the time passed from the elections is very short, the results that could inform their opinion are not visible so far. In their opinion, the international community could be of some help to Romanians; however, not without asking for something in exchange.

Most respondents state that they have the greatest confidence in themselves, in the family and Church. Most of them consider that the mass media has a great influence on how people perceive the reality. Some respondents have stated their admiration for journalists such as Mircea Dinescu and Cristian Tudor Popescu, but also their disapproval for the general tone in mass media productions, which they describe as aggressive, often scandalous and non-educational in general.

Rural respondents consider that western values have greater impact on people's life every day – a negative impact: hip-hop music, MTV fashion, St. Valentine's Day.

Illustrative statements

As a person, yes, but not as a president, as long as around him there are those counsellors...[M5, G2]

Honestly? I trust the government, I don't trust the parliament. They hate each other too much; the parliament is too heterogeneous. [M8, G3]

You'll see how they'll start showing their teeth when things will calm down a little. [M6, G3]

In my opinion, it is ever since the communist times when people got used to steal and to think only about themselves. While now, the one who gets into a higher powerful position, thinks only how to put money into his own pocket, or where to build a new villa... This is why I expect no one or no politician to help people or to step in for people. [F3, G4]

It is Dinescu: everybody laughs at him, but what he says is essentially good. He may be exaggerating a little bit. Then there are those who after elections as well.... The bold one...the one with the beard...[M4, G4]

Mass media. Most people watch TV a lot, and maybe not all of them read as much as they should. Many are impressed by what they see on TV. [F4, G3]

What do you mean, trust the City Hall? If I go there ask for a house... I only go to the City Hall to pay taxes. [M6, G1]

4.4. Performance of political institutions/administrative institutions/judiciary

Respondents assess the performance of the above mentioned institutions as being far below their expectations.

The judiciary seems to collect most of the negative judgements. Most respondents mention cases unsolved for a long time, abuse, unfair rulings of certain courts, discrimination against citizens of Hungarian origin.

The performance of political institutions is less disappointing than the judiciary, probably because people have given up expecting such institutions to solve their problems. In general, everything that is linked to politics has a part of “dirt” and corruption, in the respondents’ opinion.

Illustrative statements

To some extent it’s clear there are many group interests there as well.[M8, G1]

Lady, let’s be honest: nobody gives you anything without asking for something in exchange. It’s a law of the nature, I think. Nobody gives you anything without asking for something in exchange. And even more than what they gave you. [M4, G2]

From what I understood, the current minister of education said that there would be maximally three alternative textbooks per year group, and those three would be the best ones. I tend to believe that. [F2, G3]

I have an objection. If you look at interviews of various foreign key personalities or organizations, published in the written press, you see that they always said that they helped us, or they would do that and that, but when it came to keep their promises, nothing happened. When visiting us, they make a lot of promises and praises, but when they go back to their country forget their promises and speak critically about us. [M2, G4]

4.5. Participation in the public life with a hope to change the society?

Participation of respondents in the political life otherwise than by voting is extremely low. Those who were tempted to join a party were disappointed by the games of interests they have seen followed from inside parties, or by the incoherence of the programmes developed by the respective parties.

Those who have never intended to join a party motivate their lack of interest with the absence of appealing political doctrines, or by the fact that they associate politics with “certain compromises” they are not ready to settle for. Such compromises don’t lead to any changes in the society, but are rather meant to feed the politicians’ wish for rapid enrichment.

Rural respondents are better anchored in the life of the community. They participate in the life of the rural community without being aware of their involvement and

without having any institutional framework, through voluntary work, financial support to carry out objectives of local interest.

Illustrative statements

I used to think – I don't think so anymore. I wanted to participate in the political life somehow, at the level of the youth organisation – help, conduct polls... But you need much too much power to get to even open your mouth in there. [M8, G1]

Maybe if there was a new party set up now, and all the others disappeared. I wouldn't join any of these ones. [M5, G2]

If you join a party, you need to play the game of those who are the mass in front of you, and if you come up with an idea you turn the entire party upside down. There is always some intrigue involved: if you don't do what they do, you don't live well. If you start with them, you need to work with them like a mole does. There are many tough people from here who hold high positions and who haven't done anything for this village. [M6, G3]

5. Civil society

5.1. Sources of information

The participants in the group discussions use all the sources of information available: television, press, radio. Romanian television channels are most frequently watched: Antena 1, ProTV, TVR, Prima TV. Hungarians also watch Hungarian television channels (Duna TV), which tackle their problems with a neutral attitude and bring new information about Ardeal – things that the national channels don't present.

People buy newspapers (national daily papers) less frequently, as they are expensive and frequently suspected for political affiliation.

Hungarian respondents buy local press in Hungarian language: “Szabadság”, “Kronika”, as well as local press in Romanian language: “Clujeanul”, “Transilvania Jurnal”.

The press reaches Valea Mare village (Dâmbovița) more rarely; respondents mostly watch the national television (TVR). Their main complaint is directed towards the limited access to fresh information.

Illustrative statements

I use to watch Duna TV (*Hungarian Television channel*), first of all because I can understand the language, then because they deal with the problems of Ardeal and because they say the truth. [F4, G4]

I am a great fan of newspapers. I read a paper now – it's not very good, but it's not very bad either. I don't like it, but there is no better. "National", for instance. [M6, G2]

5.2. Performance of non-government organisations. Role of NGOs

In most respondents' opinion, the activity of non-government organisations is associated with fraud. Most of the attendants express their lack of confidence with respect to what non-government organisations can do to solve the problems of needy people, even though they admit some organisations – very few of them – being efficient in their field. The media echoes of fraud identified in the activity of some shell NGOs play a major part in how people perceive the non-government sector and its activity (i.e. cars introduced in the country on behalf of foundations, in order to avoid paying custom fees).

NGO activity should complement governmental action. If the government worked better, NGOs would be efficient as well, and have some visible results. This is the opinion of the Hungarian group, which seems to be best informed on the activity of such organisations. One impediment for these organisations is, in their opinion, the fact that people abuse the services, this sector provides (people can benefit from these services without actually being entitled to).

Awareness on non-government organisations is almost absent in the other groups.

Illustrative statements

We shouldn't have any street children, considering how many foundations we have in this country. [F1, G2]

LADO has dissolved itself. If a human rights organisation dissolves itself in a democratic country, it means it can't carry out its mission. So, you see...[F7, G1]

There aren't any in this area, actually. There are a lot of such organisations in Bucharest, and a lot of dirty things hide behind them. They bring cheap cars from abroad and sell them for huge prices here. [F2, G3]

They do a great job. There are NGOs offering free food to the poor, or organizing nice events on Christmas or on some other occasions.

But what I am trying to say, is that despite all this they can't represent that solution we need. What they do is similar with what I did yesterday when I saw a poor lady asking for charity in a shop and I gave her some money. I am not sure I really helped by doing this. Maybe she bought herself some bread...but it wasn't like solving her poverty problems...[M4, G4]

5.3. Performance of professional organisations. Role of professional organisations

Most respondents identify professional organisations with trade unions. Attendants perceive the theoretic role of unions – to protect the rights of employees – to be far

from the reality. In their opinion, unions either carry out the orders of the employment, or act as “*spring-boards to a political career*”.

Illustrative statements

On trade unions I have a very bad opinion. As long as a leader goes and fights with the government today, and tomorrow he's on the other side and hurts the ones he was protecting yesterday, what can you say about unions? [M5, G2]

They raise false problems – take Miron Mitrea and all the others who made it to the parliament now. They made all that noise only to get there. Ordinary people, those who pay the shares, they are only good to get out on the streets and demonstrate in front of the Government building. [M8, G1]

Wherever unions have tried to resist – like in the Iasi case – they were repressed, and in some cases even by killing the leader. Unions should have an important role, but they can't impose their views because of the circumstances. Unions have shaken hands with the employment and that's how things are now. [M8, G3]

5.4. Performance of religious organisations. Role of religious organisations

Many respondents associate the activity of religious organisations with the activity of sects or various Protestant denominations that have lately attracted many adepts in Romania. For this reason, most of them don't see any reason why such organisations should exist.

The Hungarian group positively appreciates the activity of the 'Bonus Pastor' organisation from Cluj. Besides support for deprived persons, the activity in such an organisation entails sharing spare-time and learning with other members.

Illustrative statements

What I know is that in my parish a lot of supplies are coming, food and clothes, etc. They are distributed to the poor people. But to those people who can afford to pay their annual taxes. What about the old who can not provide herself with the daily bread, where shall she take the money from to pay the taxes? This is exactly why she does not receive what she is entitled to...On the other hand, I remember that in the '90s, parishes used to receive huge quantities of clothes. What did they do? They opened 'second-hand' shops and sold them. Those poor received nothing. [F3, G4]

There are no such organisations here. [F2, G3]

6. Public services

6.1. Assessment of the activity of public services¹

	Score Group 1	Score Group 2	Score Group 3	Score Group 4	General score
Health	6.3	6.5	4.0	2.9	4.9
Education	5.8	4.4	4.9	4.9	5.0
Social assistance	4.1	3.6	4.5	2.0	3.6
Transportation	6.9	6.0	5.4	5.8	6.0
Heating	6.6	7.0	6.1	4.9	6.2
Electricity	8.3	7.1	6.4	6.6	7.1
Water	7.5	6.5	4.9	6.6	6.4
Military service	7.9	7.9	4.9	4.3	6.3

Social assistance, education and health are the services that score lowest in this assessment. The reasons are listed below.

- Social assistance – in most respondents’ mind, it represents the amount of money received by deprived categories. These amounts are often ridiculous (unemployment benefits, child allowances). The pension system is perceived as inequitable to the same extent, due to great differences in the quantum of pensions within the same category of retired persons. Pensions are much smaller than what they would need to be in order to cover a decent living.
- Health – the problem identified by the majority in this field is corruption and poor quality of medical services.
- Education – low scores granted because of how educational reforms are carried out in the country and, especially in the rural area, following a perceived acute lack of access to information. The funds allocated for education development from the state budget prove to be insufficient for the modernisation – actually equipping – of schools.

Solutions are mainly expected to come from the government. Some of the attendants have suggested that in education solutions could also come from the bottom, from individual families.

¹ Each respondent has granted individual scores on a 1-to-10 scale to each of the public services listed. The figures in the table represent the average of these scores in each group.

Privatisation of the sectors mentioned above seems to be a good solution for the higher educated and Hungarian groups. The other respondents have never thought of it and deny such a solution from the beginning.

Medical staff improperly paid...or skilled, in many places...[M1, G4]

What about unemployed people? It's difficult. If I did something all my life and now I am 40, it's hard to learn to do something else. Reflexes are different at this age... Some specialisation, so I can qualify for something else, make things easier. [M4, G3]

Private pensions are to be included in social assistance as well, and nothing was done about this in 10 years. They say they will do something. Taking into account that the number of retired persons is bigger than the number of working people, a private pension system should have been introduced, so pensions can be paid from people's personal contribution...[M8, G1]

7. International relations

7.1. Influence of international institutions (WorldBank, IMF, UN, EU, NATO) on our country's agenda

International institutions have a great influence on our country's agenda. Almost all respondents in group discussions consider the support, Romania is or will be receiving from such institutions can't be unconditional, and some respondents consider the terms to be unacceptable and humiliating.

The group of intellectuals considers this to be for the benefit of the Romanians, to the extent to which there would be a balance between "*what is required, what we can do and what we are given*".

The medium educated and rural groups agree with respect to non-interference of these international institutions in our economy. In these respondents' opinion, Romania should decline international support and try to solve the problems by its own forces.

Most respondents are dissatisfied that the government most often too easily accepts the requirements imposed by international forums.

Illustrative statements

They do it for themselves, not for us, but we are the main beneficiaries. [M8, G1]

It's a negative support. I give you this money to bury you. [M5, G2]

7.2. The role of the international community

The respondents don't seem to be aware of the role of these organisations.

7.3. The role of the EU in solving the problems of our country

The Bucharest group of intellectuals and the Hungarian group express their confidence for the support, the European Union grants to Romania. In their perception, the advantages for the Romanians are the following:

- no visas – free movement in the Schengen area
- border security
- the obligation to bring economic performance to European standards.

The others believe the European Union can't help Romania; more over, the "support" is negative (enterprises closed down, unemployment, poverty).

Illustrative statements

First of all, there is no aid. It's organised as a federal state that has imposed a currency – the Euro, and this is super-state thinking. The same bullshit we do. You don't think of concrete realities. You can't have Italians eat German sausages, when they've eaten pasta all their lives. [M8, G2]

The EU will receive us when Romania will improve its situation; this seems absurd to me. I don't think we'll need them anymore when our situation will improve; if they don't help us when we need help, it's useless to help us when we don't need it. I don't trust the EU. [M8, G3]

7.4. Significance of the Stability Pact

The Stability Pact is almost unknown to the majority of respondents. Those who have heard about it see this programme as mainly guaranteeing peace in the region, and indirectly the security of economic exchange between South-Eastern European countries.

Illustrative statements

It could stimulate economic relations, so we Romanians could give some petrol, fertilisers or whatever. It can be done if it's peace; if it's war – you saw what happened with the Danube! [M1, G3]

Security, in terms of present territories; war is no longer an issue. [F7, G1]

7.5. NATO's role in solving the problems of our country

People show a little bit more confidence to what NATO could do for Romania. In their opinion, NATO support consists of helping Romania rebuild its army up to western standards. NATO can only have an indirect influence in other fields, by guaranteeing the security of the country.

Illustrative statements

NATO concerns a different aspect. It refers to strategy. Being a NATO member and if you are attacked by another country, which is not a NATO member, you may ask for NATO's support and you get it. Therefore, it confers security, but economically it is a burden. [M4, G4]

We would have to do everything they don't like doing. We end up doing what they want us to. The term "servant" is no longer in use, but that's what we are. [M4, G3]

I am not sure the Americans have anything to offer at this point. The tragedy is that we now have a president who is pro-American, and not pro-European, and I was terrified to see this, because he goes against the wind, and people at his age don't change. Europe will raise and America slowly goes somewhere else. We are already less interested in America; we should be more interested in Germany – we are in Europe, and there will be no NATO when we will be ready to join the European army. [M1, G1]

7.6. Advantages / disadvantages of joining NATO

In the respondents' opinion, one of the prices for joining NATO is Romania's obligation to rebuild the army structure in order to be compatible with NATO. In exchange, NATO could efficiently moderate conflicts within the region, and guarantee political and economical stability in Balkan states.

Illustrative statements

NATO requires adequate military equipment. [M4, G4]

I'd prefer Romania to join NATO than the EU. If we join NATO, nobody will touch us any longer. NATO is a very strong organisation, and as we are here in the East... But it's very expensive for us to join NATO as well. [M8, G3]

Bigger markets, some support, exemption from some taxes and fees... [M3, G2]

7.7. The key to security in the region

For most respondents, the key to security in the region is Russia and its policy to ally with former members of the communist space in the future.

The only different opinion comes from the group of people with high-school education, considering that stability in the region can be obtained by non-interference of international organisms with domestic affairs of South-East European countries.

Illustrative statements

The entire West to withdraw their underground interests. There was no war between the Balkan countries until now. There was real stability. [M6, G2]

The key to security is Russia coming and coming – as it permanently creates problems here on the Balkans. When Europe will be willing to hold Russia's hand, things will be OK. [M1, G1]

Russians again, especially now that they have this young guy...[M6, G3]

8. Individualities

8.1. People's lives in South-East Europe within the next years

The attendants of the group discussions hope that the life of people in Balkan countries would improve within the next years; however, they don't expect any spectacular changes. The communist period can't be simply erased. Most respondents consider that it takes time and seriousness of governments and nations to overcome economic recession. At the same time, there will be differences from country to country, as the starting levels are different.

In the opinion of the Hungarian respondents, economic development in the our country doesn't necessarily depend on foreign support, but to a greater extent on consistency between statements of Romanian politicians in the country and abroad.

Illustrative statements

They benefit from international support because they are trustworthy...Any way, their international support is much stronger, compared to Romania...[F4, G4]

I don't think there will be any war soon, because Americans don't have any great interests in the area anymore. [M1, G1]

It depends on each of them and on what they d. Why should I think about Albanians and how they will be, when they have other things in mind: kill each other and things like that? [M5, G2]

8.2. Belonging to a community

Participation in the community life is very low following the communist years. Most of the urban respondents (ethnic majority) state they don't belong to a specific community.

The respondents from Valea Mare have deeper connections with their community, proved by what they have built together (road, gas supply network).

Hungarian respondents mention belonging to the Hungarian community in Cluj, to their religious community, and to a number of scientific student organisations (self-knowledge communities).

Illustrative statements

Here (*Bucharest*) you have your own piece of concrete and that's all. [M8, G1]

In my case, the church is a like a community...it is the only place where I can speak Hungarian. It is the place where I meet the other families and members of the community. [M1, G4]

8.3. Geographic mobility?

Most urban respondents have been tempted to leave the country (not the city). Rural respondents would not leave their village because they would lose their roots.

Most of those who would leave the country would do it for a limited lapse of time. The purposes are "*material success*" and "*education*".

Hungarian respondents state that "*their place is here*" and the only thing that could determine them to leave the country is "*the future of their children, because there are no perspectives here*".

Illustrative statements

In general, I see that all young people who leave stay for a while, make some money and then come back.[F7, G1]

We are talking about leaving the city for good. It's foreseen that those who live in cities, in blocks of flats, will escape somewhere at the outskirts of Bucharest, 18-20Km away, so if you don't have a car, you can come by bus. And if you have a car, you don't need more than 30 minutes to get to the city. You can have a little house, some yard, peace, a feeling of independence. This is where you should see the difference: I want to move near Bucharest or to Buzău. [M8, G2]

I considered leaving the country...for example, for the States...but I am sure I'll miss this city after, let's say 10 years. This is something I wouldn't like it to happen, even if my life were much better there. [F3, G4]

Another country wouldn't offer us anything. [M7, G3]

8.4. Attributes associated to the perception of Balkan countries

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Serbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - War - Sarajevo 1914 - Olympic Games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflicts - Our friends - Vegeta - In trouble just like us 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bankrupting - Hopes - Stability in the future - “Where they were, and what they are now” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Miloshevic - War - Blood - Nationalism - Poverty
Bosnia and Herzegovina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Muslim - Padishah 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religious conflict - Victims of the II millennium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Military conflicts - Restless - Romanians in Herzegovina - Political instability - Rapid economic recovery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Independence - Seaside - Ethnic conflicts - Blood
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potential for tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exacerbated nationalist - Dubrovnik - Semi-finals of the World Soccer Championship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Warriors - Sportsmen - Dignity - Instability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vukovar - Development - Mountains - Historical monuments - Seaside
Kosovo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflict - War 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The cradle of the Serbian nation - War 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ruins - Refugees - Misery - Acute poverty
Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poorer than Romania 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brandy - Tool - “too poor and dumb to do anything” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finished - Poverty - Tirana, beautiful city - Helpless - Adriatica shore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wine - Communists - Poverty - Cigarettes - Isolated country
Macedonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Money - Greek sadness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hagi (Gheorghe) - Tzintzari - Good managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beautiful country - Stability - Disagreement with Greece - Beautiful music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alexandru Macedon - Hagi (Gheorghe)

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Romania	- Poverty	- "A rough diamond" - "A big bone for some people" - "Europe's dumpster"	- "The country of all possibilities" - Tolerant nation - Beautiful images	- Corruption - Lie - Deception - Robbery - Theft - Beautiful landscapes - Hospitality - Good interpersonal relationships
Bulgaria	- Schengen visas - Thick neck - Levas - Cucumbers	- BT - Golden sands - Wise leaders - Suspect neighbours	- Varna - Seaside - Programme - Stability - Perfumes - Smart, practical, honest leaders	- Rapid development - Sport shoes - Corruption - Beautiful seaside - Hristo Stoichkov (soccer player) - Light wines - Agronomists - Agriculture - Gardening
Slovenia	- Mittel Europa - NATO	- Richness and beauty - The golden caprice of Europe	- Good - Successful country	- Economic development - Money - Inflation
Moldavia	- Mafia - Sad reality - Forgotten Romanians - Czarist province	- Poverty - "God move it farther away" - Errant brother	- Big Romania - Disaster - No luck - No culture - Romanian territory without Romanians	- Disaster - Very serious poverty - Lazy - Prostitutes - They sell everything
Montenegro	- Tourism - Yugoslavia - Handsome shepherds	- Unknown - Meaningless - Result of a secessionist policy	- Soldiers - Subordinated to Serbia - No dignity	- Servants - Rocky place - Stone

			- Instability	- Serbia's satellite state - Muslims
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8.5. How would you describe current inter-ethnic relationships in our country?

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Relationships between Romanians and Hungarians	- Good - Conflicts amplified by politicians	- Good; - Conflicts amplified by foreigners	- Hungarians are intolerant - Romanians are too tolerant with respect to allowing this minority to use Hungarian language	- Romanians have some prejudices about foreigners and they can be manipulated when they are not aware of the reality; - Good relations, if there would be no interference of external interests; - Good relations in surface
Relationships between Romanians and Jews	- Admiration for Jews	- Not too many Jews left	- Good relations	- There is no Jewish problem
Relationships between Romanians and Romany	- Good in surface - Deep rejection (difficult to express) - "Calea Griviței"	- Romany are thieves	- Romany are uneducated, thieves, savages - "Rich from not working"	- "they are human when they are not around" - Romanians see Romany as undesirable
Relationships between Romanians and Russians			- Good relations	- Can't tell
Relationships between Romanians and Germans	- Good - Romanians admire their civilisation	- Respondents value their civilisation and work	- Admiration for their common sense - Harmonious relationship	- Most of them have left

9. Final comments

9.1. Most significant fears and hopes with respect to our country

	Fears	Hopes
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New generations would have no values - Security of jobs - Low chances to settle a family, have a home and a decent living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A little bit of peace - A better life
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unsafe tomorrow - New world war 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better standards of living - What the new government will do
Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unsafe tomorrow - Corruption - Lack of jobs - Economic regress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What the new government will do - Economic stability as a result of new governmental strategies
Group 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comments of the press exaggerating the reality on minority issues - Unsafe tomorrow - A possible war on the Balkans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People's mentality will change - Legislation will improve

Illustrative statements

I am afraid in some years I won't be able to help these generations any longer, and that I will never see the moment when I will have my own house, a wife... [M1, G1]

World war. I think a world war is very close, and the first attempt was Yugoslavia, but it wasn't successful. They'll probably keep trying. [M5, G2]

I am afraid that young people won't be able to do anything when they complete their education; corruption won't disappear. [F2, G3]

I hope that in time, little by little, people's mentality will change to a positive direction. It must happen some day. [M2, G4]

10. Appendix

10.1. Brief presentation of group attendants

Group 1 Bucharest, 10.02.2001

Code	Age	Occupation	Education
M1	25	Student	Incomplete higher education
F2	32	Sales agent	Higher education
M3	25	Physician on probation	Higher education
F4	30	Economist	Higher education
F5	26	Teacher	Higher education
M6	23	Student	Incomplete higher education
F7	33	Secretary	Higher education
M8	24	Student	Incomplete higher education

Group 2 Bucharest, 10.02.2001

Code	Age	Occupation	Education
F1	48	Computer operator	High school education
F2	40	Print house, film retouching	High school education
F3	42	referent	High school education
M4	38	Driver	High school education
M5	47	Technician	High school education
M6	54	Retired	High school education
F7	42	Laboratory assistant	High school education
M8	51	Retired	High school education

Group 3 Valea Mare, Dâmbovița county, 11.02.2001

Code	Age	Occupation	Education
M1	50	Retired	High school education
F2	51	Primary school teacher	High school education
F3	21	Unemployed	High school education
F4	34	Engineer	Higher education
F5	32	Clerk	High school education
M6	40	Unemployed	High school education
M7	55	Worker	High school education
M8	56	Private entrepreneur	High school education

Group 4
Cluj Napoca, Cluj county, 12.02.2001

Code	Age	Occupation	Education
F1	43	Jeweller	High school education
M1	43	Auto mechanic	High school education
M2	23	Student	High school education
M3	34	Worker	High school education
M4	39	Electrician	High school education
F2	23	Lawyer	Higher education
F3	21	Student	High school education
F4	35	Kindergarten teacher	High school education