



Balkan Public Agenda

Synthesis of the In Depth Interviews with Elite

February-March, 2001

Romania



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 whole research is to monitor the public agendas in the Balkan area. Beside the focus groups carried out on ordinary people, a set of indepths interviews were carried out with people forming the elite.

The results of such an approach are to be considered with caution, not being representative for the entire population of a country. They have an intrinsic value and provide an understanding on how the interviewed 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. All the interviews were conducted by specialised interviewers supervised by Elena Nica, Director of the Qualitative Research Department, IMAS.

Recruiting and group composition

Respondents were selected using a random procedure, the only condition was their belonging to a certain domain (out of 10 fixed domains) of the top social, political, economical life of Romania. 22 persons have participated in the research, according to the standardised procedures accepted by all the participant countries in the project.

The participants (top persons) were selected from the domains below.

<u>Domain</u>	<u>Number of interviews conducted</u>
Parliament	1
Government	2
Judiciary	2
Police	1
Military	1
Media	2
Intelligentsia	3
Private Sector – enterprises and services	2
Public Sector	2
Civil Society	2
International Community	2

1. Main aspirations, fears and concerns of people relative to their country

Most important problems, people in our country deal with nowadays are the following (as perceived by the elite):

1. Economic problems:
 - Economic status;
 - Unsafe jobs and unemployment, correlated with weak work ethics;
 - Inhibited entrepreneur initiative;
 - Privatisation of public sector;
2. Social problems:
 - Poverty;
 - Standards of living, incomes;
3. Problems pertaining to personal and national security:
 - Insecurity of citizens correlated with overall insecurity of Romania;
4. Institutional and legislative problems:
 - Deteriorated public health and education systems;
 - Lack of trust for fundamental institutions of the State;
 - Legislative and political instability;
 - European Union and NATO integration;
 - Bureaucracy and corruption;

The problems that can be solved within the next few years and the solutions suggested by respondents were:

- Insecurity of citizens and country – by strengthening protection measures, adopting and abiding by laws, reducing corruption, observing security pacts and agreements;
- Economic status – through infusion of foreign capital, privatisation of state-owned enterprises that show potential for recovery, dissolution of large state-owned enterprises that have significant debts to the public budget;
- Euro-Atlantic integration – through viable economic development, by lining up with standards imposed by these organisations;
- Unemployment and poverty are related to each other. Poverty and low standards of living are the result of unemployment. Unemployment rates and unsafe jobs can only be reduced through economic re-launching and development, by granting facilities to small and medium-sized enterprises capable of absorbing the available labour force, and stimulating the development of the tertiary sector;
- Public health and education systems, on one hand through major investments co-ordinated by the government in these fields, and on the other hand through privatising those sectors for which privatisation is the best solution;

- Legislative and political framework can be improved by developing, passing and properly implementing appropriate laws, by increasing the level of credibility of relevant institutions that impose the law;

Below are presented *the problems that are seen as most difficult to solve*, as well as the solutions suggested by respondents:

- people's incomes – by increasing productivity and competitiveness of companies; by efficiently managing public resources;
- standards of living, through economic growth and economic and monetary stabilisation;
- unemployment, through economic re-launching of industrial branches by granting facilities to investors;
- lack of confidence towards institutions of the State, by eliminating corruption and bureaucracy;
- privatisation of large enterprises in the public sector – the government should deal with this process, while the parliament should monitor its actions;

In the opinion of the respondents the government and parliament should firstly deal with this problems. The role of the ordinary citizens is not neglected in their view.

2. Economic aspects

Our respondents mentioned a list of economical problems our country is facing at this moment, and the causes that have generated each of the problems in their view.

- Absence of governmental strategies and policies compatible with a market economy, due to insufficient interaction of the government with the Romanian business environment and incapacity to understand the real problems, this sector is dealing with;
- Lack of managerial skills at the level of economic companies, mainly due to inadequate training on basic principles of the market economy;
- Insufficient development of small and medium-sized enterprises correlated with lack of legislative support for this sector;
- Lack of funds required for viable economic development, and absence of foreign investments as a result of programmes and economic strategies that do not stimulate foreign investments;
- Corruption and bureaucracy, combined with an overwhelmed legislative framework leading to incoherent implementation of individual laws;
- Large state-owned enterprises and their debts to the state budget, correlated with inappropriate privatisation and exaggerated spending from state resources;
- Financial blocking, no liquidity;
- Dropping of internal production and GDP;

- Low market competitiveness of Romanian products;
- Banking system not matching the needs of the private sector;
- Rapidly increasing inflation and instability of the national currency in relation with hard currency (USD, DM, EURO);
- Insufficiently developed infrastructure and tertiary sector;

A lot of obstacles impede solving economical problems of the country. Subjects mentioned the main as follows:

- Flaws of the privatisation process;
- Poor management of the labour force and the absence of skilled labour forced in some significant fields;
- Inconsistency of decision-makers and politicians in carrying out economic programmes, legislative inconsistency, even chaotic actions due to lack of economic knowledge of politicians, populism and group and personal interests;
- Bureaucracy and corruption at all levels;
- Financial blockage and no financing due to impossibility to contract loans (very high interest rates, tough terms);
- People's mentality;
- Mistrust from an external perspective;

Main factors that could help solving these problems sooner are the following in their opinion:

- Development of the managerial class;
- Improving human resources policies;
- Social and political cohesion;
- Legislative facilities for foreign and Romanian investors in order to attract considerable foreign investments; profitable external loans or non-reimbursable credits;
- Privatisation of state-owned enterprises;

Role of international institutions in our country's economy

Most of the respondents admit the international institutions have a positive role. Although the majority is concerned about the manner, often inefficient, in which the international institutions interfere with the local Romanian authorities.

Generally speaking, the views related to this issue gravitated among the following statements:

- International institutions should support Romania in solving its economic and institutional problems through the programmes and funds they make available. They should also have very good knowledge of the problems, Romania is dealing with, in order to be able to provide programmes that match the actual reality.
- The recommendations, these institutions make with respect to Romania's economic, social and political situation, are seen as references by other foreign institutions and investors when investing in Romania.
- Romania's relationship with international institutions should rely on true, open partnership.

Respondents consider that the most significant international institutions operating in Romania are the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Union, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, NATO. The role of these institutions in the Romanian economy is perceived as not relevant for ordinary citizens.

Expectations with respect to economy in the next year

Negative expectations:

- Unemployment will remain at the same level;
- Privatisation of public services and state-owned enterprises will be delayed, which will have a disastrous impact on prices and standards of living;
- Economic stagnation will continue;
- The present government will not take any radical economic measures, in order not to accentuate the already deteriorated social situation and standards of living;

Positive expectations:

- Stabilisation of the national currency and increase of the purchasing power.
- Economic growth should continue, relying on the last year's promising results; export should be stimulated, with a focus on highly processed products instead of raw products;
- Discussions with the IMF could result in a new agreement signed, which would result in the expected infusion of foreign capital.

3. Political institutions

Self-perceived roles, the interviewed elite play in decision-making in Romania seem to be the following:

1. Non-governmental organisations:

Influence in the field strictly related to concrete surveys and projects these organisations conduct, and through which they support people in need and homeless and abandoned children.

2. Ministries:

By the nature of their function, these persons declare they participate in the decision-making within certain limits, together with the other members of the Cabinet and in line with the governing programme.

3. Army:

They play an important part, namely they have to manage the respective ministry and implicitly the respective field and the responsibilities entailed. They can also contribute to collective decision-making, together with other colleagues from the Cabinet, at the meetings of the Supreme Council for Defence.

4. Interior/police:

The present government works with teams, and therefore horizontal co-operation is considerably improved at this level between correlated factors in ministries and departments, even though at the level of secretaries of state and ministries certain specific attributions are established. The direct role is to act as an interface between the political leadership and the professional body of the ministry of interior; relying on the mandate entrusted by voters, as well as on the governing programme, the requirements of the political factors need to be conveyed and achieved at the level of the existing professional body.

5. Justice:

Together with other persons involved, they can directly impact on the major lines followed by the rule of law, and indirectly influence the functioning of the market economy according to the norms established by the constitution. The judiciary field is the framework in which specific measures are checked against the law, laws are checked against the constitution, and government decisions are checked against the law. Therefore, to the extent to which these actions interconnect with the legality and constitutionality control field, the judiciary may have some contribution in ensuring conformity of such actions with the law and constitution.

6. Public sector:

At a microeconomic level, the role is to implement the general policy of the government, specifically, privatisation and reduction of debts to the public budget. There is no direct involvement in decision-making at a macroeconomic level.

7. Private sector:

They declare they have no major influence in decision-making.

8. International institutions:

Their role is considered rather important, especially in what concerns investments. When a decision is made, regardless its nature, the decision-making process very much depends on the information on which the decision itself relies. Their role is to advise, and especially to show, to provide technical assistance and, to some extent, to put pressure on the state institutions in terms of observance of specific commitments.

9. Journalism:

They are not invested with a specific and significant role in decision-making; however, through their profession, they can serve as personal examples for citizens and influence the public opinion through their writing.

10. Elite/intellectuals:

Education institutions have a privileged statute, as they are benchmarks in the scientific field and in developing or substantiating social policies and programmes from a scientific perspective. In addition, the circumstances are favourable as well, considering that many professors hold important decision-making positions in the parliament and government. The elite feels optimistic, therefore agreeing on a possibility to influence political decision in a positive sense. There are cases in which political parties in the electoral campaign have adopted social policy programmes developed by education institutions.

Institutions invested with the highest level of confidence:

Interviewed people trust in international community and in national authorities the most. Some of the respondents can't draw a clear hierarchy because confidence is something that depends on each organisation and institution individually. Moreover almost all respondents declared they trust in the activity of a certain person invested with authority than in a whole organisational body.

A relative hierarchy is presented below:

1. *International community* –in general, the opinions of these institutions rely on concrete, incontestable data, as their perception comes from the perspective of a functional market economy.
2. *National authorities* –they are elected by the people or by the government and parliament, relying on professional and moral criteria; at least until now, they try to carry out the programmes proposed by the governing strategy.
3. *Elite/intellectuals* – considering certain persons that work in such institutions more reliable than the whole institutions.
4. *Local authorities* – voted only by those who are in direct contact with these authorities (subjects from the public sector).

Institutions invested with the lowest level of confidence:

1. *Local authorities* – it is firstly mentioned due to corruption and bureaucracy that are seen as the main features of the activity and persons involved; personal interests interfere to a great extent with the activity of these institutions, and staff is poorly trained.
2. *Elite/intellectuals* – respondents' belief is that there is no organised elite that could have a decisive influence on the course of facts.
3. *National authorities* – due to their perceived lack of projects for long-term governing, and economic and legislative consistency.
4. *International community* – due to participants' confidence in the idea of solving the problems by ourselves (“*we shouldn't wait for the others to help us*”).

Actors that impact on people's daily life:

Professional and work environment is the most important, followed by mass-media (through manipulation, rather than trust). The economic environment also impact on people's daily life. Respondents consider that citizens are more and more frequently under the influence of the economic and social environment: poverty, unemployment, wages, standards of living, exchange rates are the reflection of economic environment.

Local and national administration – Local administration represents the closest connection between ordinary people and institutions of the state while national administration has indirect influence through decisions at macroeconomic level.

Family is considered important because it represents the frame of reference at individual level and it also reflects the standard living.

The security and safety of the living environment.

Personal decisions and the quality of these decisions are considered as indicators of responsibility and involvement. The lack of ethics and true values that characterised Romanian society determined a decrease of personal responsibility at individual level, as viewed by the attendees.

Only one respondent mentioned civil society. Nowadays Romanians do not feel as belonging to any community. The individualism, the egoistic approach of reality explain why civil society does not impact on people's daily life.

Assessment on the performance/results of the following institutions and organisms:

1. Political institutions

Political institutions fail in the respondents' view, to be modern and efficient due to the lack of expertise regarding democratic functioning of market institutions and economy. The main task of the politicians is to manage change in Romania in this fundamental direction.

Their activity is appreciated as rather modest, as they show no efficiency on a short term, lack of vision, coherence and cohesion, and fail to properly carry out their activities. These institutions showed no interest for the concerns of the constituents, which has created an abyss between the power and the population.

Some of the respondents feel positively on the prospective activity of the political institutions. Compared to the beginning of the democracy, the quality of political institutions has improved to some extent. They consider that our society is still searching for its way and trying to adapt to economic, social, political and living conditions of transition and democracy.

Some improvements are possible as viewed by the elite. Concretely they suggested the following:

- The number of political parties should be reduced, in order to increase their efficiency, even though it might seem as a limitation to democracy. The ideological differentiation between these parties is hardly visible, as their strategies are dictated by short- and medium-term interests rather than by some specific ideology. The electoral system rather encourages mediocrity.
- International organisms should be more active as far as political institutions are concerned, and through specific programmes assist political parties in their attempt to strengthen organisational structures, promote true values and develop strategies.
- Media sometimes brings great prejudice to these institutions by exclusively presenting the bad things without mentioning the good ones.

2. Administrative institutions

The administration is characterised by incoherent programmes, inefficient methodologies and unmotivated staff. It doesn't carry out the programmes recommended, while bureaucracy, nepotism and corruption have reached unimaginable levels. The administration is still driven by hidden, subversive interests, while the administrative reforms fail in showing its beneficial effects. These institutions should prove their determination in achieving the goals established.

The main suggested improvements were:

- The political character of these institutions should be minimised on the benefit of professionalism, professional training of civil servants and observance of the statute of civil servants.
- An adjustment of media policies that should present an image of the positive changes in these institutions.

3. Judiciary

As a general rule, the judiciary is seen as working still in a sort of mediocrity; cases are solved slowly and unfairly, and people end up turning to God for justice. However, the poor image of the judiciary is also due to the fact that it is the core of all controversies in any state, and its mechanisms don't always coincide with polls or majority votes. Bureaucracy and corruption affect too, the Romanian judiciary's image in the last years.

From the point of view of those involved in the judiciary domain, there are still improper conditions; the management of courts is obsolete; there is no decision-making capacity to solve the problems occurred (issues related to property, such as land property, are still unsolved). Nevertheless, they believe that legislatively, the judiciary framework is well organised, even though in some fields laws are too numerous, which leads to confusion with implementation.

4. President

Subjects believe that the president should be more involved; however, it seems that the prerogatives established in the Constitution don't allow any involvement (as the president doesn't have the necessary instruments and authority). His involvement should focus, in elite's opinion, on the parliament and governmental activity, with a view to speeding up promulgation and implementation of laws, ordinances and decisions. His role should be that of a mediator; however, the general opinion is that none of the presidents has succeeded in playing that role.

Moreover, the Romanian image abroad should be, as respondents declared, promoted on a large scale through presidential bodies.

5. Central bodies

The opinion of the participants is that Parliament has a representative role; its powers are greatly limited by the incapacity of parliamentarians to understand concrete administrative problems, and by lack of control over the executive. The parliament operates as a voting machine of the executive, as it legitimates, rather than supervises the executive's decisions. The new internal regulations attempt to make the activity of the legislative more efficient, while eliminating the parallelism between the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. The technical apparatus of these institutions needs to be improved with valuable professionals.

Considering that the present parliament and government are mono-party and have the experience of power, the respondents are optimistic regarding the future better activity of Parliament and Government.

6. Local bodies

Some of the interviewed consider that overall, these structures should be assessed on a case-by-case basis, as some good examples could be identified as well. In their opinion, the municipality is probably the only democratic institution that operates similar to corresponding institutions in democratic countries; however, the quality of the human resources and management is poor.

Other people see these structures as continuing to function inappropriately in the near future, as there are no real chances to improve the situation as long as bureaucracy, nepotism and corruption are not totally or at least partially eliminated.

4. **Civil society**

Sources of information

The majority of the respondents are well informed, their sources of information are diverse and numerous.

- Mass media represents one of the most important sources of information: local and international written press; Romanian and foreign TV channels; radio; press agencies.
- reports and documents of internal and international institutions (official documentation of ministries, parliament, presidency);
- internet;
- discussions with people one comes in contact with, acquaintances, friends, network;
- workshops, events, round tables, conferences.

Which of these sources gives the most accurate reflection of the country's reality?

Respondents consider the most accurate and impartial sources of information are the following:

- International written press;
- TV;
- Reports and documents of international institutions;
- Institutional channels: official documentation of ministries, parliament, presidency;
- Discussions with people one comes in contact with.

The general opinion is that all mass media should be consulted in order to distinguish viable, accurate information from false or biased presentations.

Criteria used by subjects in selecting the most credible and reliable source of information:

- The quality of the events presented;
- The quality of persons who present these events; their professionalism and education;
- Education and experience built in time influence the selection of sources of information;
- Personal criteria – the way in which people relate to the reality presented by these sources; personal subjectivity;
- Objectivity and freshness of the information.

Assessment of performance and role of non-government organisations in our country:

Their activity is perceived by respondents as insufficient on all plans. There are too many organisations, and their activity is not distinguishable in terms of efficiency. Many of these organisations are supposed to have deviated from their original purpose and chosen the way of illegal profits and activities.

Their major role, in the opinion of the interviewed people is covering what the authorities can't and act in fields in which human suffering is present.

- They should relieve the state and the state administration from some concerns and problems in the social field, and provide an alternative to public healthcare, social and environment services.
- They should also act as “watch dogs” and warn on problems occurred in the community.
- The civil society should act as a partner in discussions with politicians and government.
- Non-government organisations should be able to make use of the existing legislation and gain their financial independence.

Respondents are aware of the following non-government organisations operating in Romania:

- The Soros Centre for Health Policies;
- The Helsinki Committee;
- The IRIS Foundation (to support small entrepreneurs);
- ASTRA Association of Young Romany;
- Romani-Cris;
- The Soros Centre for Juridical Resources;
- The Soros Centre for Public Policies;
- The Soros Euro-regional Centre for Democracy;
- The Romanian Academic Society – SAR;

- The Pro Democrația Association;
- Eurisc;
- Centras;
- Salvați Copiii [Save the Children];
- The SOROS Foundation;
- The Intellectual Women Association;
- The Women in Diplomacy Foundation;
- The Civic Alliance;
- The Group for Social Dialogue;
- AIESEC;
- FDSC;
- The Foundation for Pluralism;
- LADO;
- S.O.S. Satele Copiilor [SOS Children's Villages];

Assessment of performance and role of professional organisations in our country:

Trade unions are perceived by interviewed persons as the most active professional organisations. Unions should be concerned with the working and living conditions of employees, be good partners in negotiations and promote reforms instead of blocking them. Their experience in a wide range of actions, such as protests and negotiations, is decisive, as thought by elite. Their main weakness is that they generally represent the public sector, as the private sector is insufficiently or not at all organised.

A special characteristic pointed by respondents is that in the last 11 years Unions have become a spring-board to high positions in the government and parliament. They are a mass to manipulate during the pre-electoral period. Union leaders are first following their personal interests, and afterwards or never the interest of the group they represent.

General employment organisations (not those of specific branches) and professional organisations don't succeed in getting the public's attention. Elite believes that their contact with the members is scarce, which further on diminishes the impact of their activity. The most frequent news regarding their activity cover changes of management and various workshops and debates with usually no finality.

The definite role of professional organisations is to raise the standards and elaborate regulations pertaining to their profession. Branch employment organisations mostly negotiate with the Government in the respective field, as they have not developed any services or other forms of joint initiative towards their members.

Employment organisations are not sufficiently developed and composed of people with no experience. Such organisations have a considerable role in well-developed economies and societies.

Religious organisations and their role:

Recent research points out that the church as an institution is invested with considerable trust. Most of the respondents believe that the church should play a significant part in building people's morality and free individual expression.

Unfortunately Orthodox Church is seen as not playing such a role except for what is related to religious practice and some small range initiatives. The government initiative of involving Church in solving the problems of orphan children is given for an example by the respondents. Some priests have had laudable initiatives and established local parishioners' committees (such committees are required by the regulations of the church).

In exchange, the Catholic church draws on a very powerful network of religious organisations in western countries (Caritas, Malta Support Service) that have extended their operation in Romania as well – initially in areas populated by Catholics and later in the rest of the country as well.

Neo-Protestant religious organisations are seen as being aggressive and unfair for coming into a country where people have had no religious education over the last 50 years. The Orthodox Church has difficulties in defining its co-existence with other denominations.

5. Public services

Assessment of the performance of public services¹:

	N=22	Average
Health		4.6
Education		6.2
Social assistance		3.5
Transportation		5.8
Heating		5.5
Electricity		6.5
Water		6.3
Military service		5.2

Social assistance and health have scored the lowest. These services are seen as dissatisfactory by the respondents due to the following reasons:

- Social assistance – a phenomenon with no immediate solution, as its short-term results are imperceptible. Institutions do not co-ordinate their action, and the funds are insufficient

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.

and improperly used. Financial support for those in need is very small (unemployment benefits, child allowances, handicap allowances).

- Health – the problems identified by most respondents in this field are corruption, de-professionalisation of medical staff and physicians, lack of professional ethics and poor quality of medical services as a result of poor endowment and lack of medication. A lack of managerial and administrative skills is also perceived in medical managers. The institutional reform in healthcare services has not had the expected results.

The government and other institutions involved in the respective fields are expected to solve these problems. Privatisation of the above-mentioned sectors seems to be a good solution; for those sectors, in which the State has the monopoly, privatisation is the only viable solution. Some of the fields – such as social assistance and education – should deliver both private and public services, as these are aimed at different social categories. The exclusive presence of one or the other form of services could not ensure the desired quality of services. Competition could nurture greater efficiency.

6. International relationships

Influence of international institutions (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United Nations, NATO) in policy/decision-making in our country:

The general opinion is Romania can't afford to disregard the opinion of such institutions, as they provide certain funds and programmes and write reports covering the standards, Romania has reached in different fields, such reports being taken as reference by other foreign investors – an element of credibility.

Independently from international institutions, governments of western countries that pay a significant share in these institutions attempt to influence policy/decision-making through conditional assistance programmes they provide.

The elite pointed on a certain discontent toward the concrete way the relationship between the country and the international institutions carry on. In their opinion such a relationship entails partnership and negotiations in which each party is able to substantiate its views and strike a compromise with the other party.

Role of the international community in decision-making in Romania:

The common view is international community is not a community, but rather a range of various entities or institutions. The role they play best is the educator's role, through policy, planning and programming. Beside these, the international institutions should have, in respondents' opinions, an accurate picture of our country's reality and provide specific help according to needs and local specificity.

Such institutions can impact on prioritisation, while they have a very small role in decision-making. As a result of the lack of co-ordination and different priorities of such institutions, they frequently complicate the policy making process of the central administration – government, which is unfortunately not mature enough to resist to multiple influence (would require special negotiation skills).

The role of the European Union in solving the problems in our country:

Most of the respondents consider joining the EU is not only an option for Romania, but a condition for safe economic and social development and security in the future.

The role (as perceived by subjects) of the European Union can be summarised as follows:

- The European Union should provide financial support and technical assistance, consulting in various fields in which Romania is deficient; to the same extent, however, these institutions should monitor the manner in which such funds are used.
- This institution could support us in having a modern, viable legislative and regulating framework. The support of this organisation is also important in funding the transition and reaching to the final stage.
- The EU should combine exactingness with accurate perception of the Romanian reality, which implies greater flexibility of each party.
- Many countries in Romania's situation have solved a number of their problems by joining the European Union. Romania can't find solutions by itself to all its problems, which is why EU integration would be the fastest way to increasing economy and labour force competitiveness.

Stability Pact:

The main positive attitude towards Stability Pact is understanding the settlement as an attempt of Europe to stabilise the Balkan area and by this means 'cure' the vulnerability coming from this area. Concretely, subjects pointed on the following issues:

- The Stability Pact is generated for two reasons: one humanitarian-diplomatic reason to repair what was destroyed in Yugoslavia and Kosovo and financially support reconstruction or construction in the area, with a hope that solving economic and social problems would lead to solving religious and ethnic conflicts as well; and a more general diplomatic reason relying on a long history of political instability in the area – the pact being a modality to prevent conflicts in other potential conflict-generating areas.
- The Stability Pact ensures that South-Eastern Europe would be anchored to Europe. The Stability Pact as such is not meant for Romania, but aims primarily the former Yugoslav space; Romania is included as a neighbouring area. The Stability Pact needs to show concrete results; however, as an initiative, it is the word of Europe that the South-East will be an integrating part of the continent.
- The Stability Pact could support Southern and Eastern European countries with highly skilled and responsible staff that could provide assistance in key fields;
- Within this pact Romania could benefit from infrastructure programmes.

NATO's role in solving our country's problems:

The main belief of the respondents is that Romania needs to be part of an alliance in order to ensure its security; NATO is the alliance that would promote Romania towards the western world. Being part of this alliance would mean that Romania too has something to offer.

Almost all subjects think that some of the future advantages of joining NATO are the following:

- NATO is at this point the only military alliance offering security to its members. All NATO has to do is extend the collective security guarantee – the ‘nuclear umbrella’.
- Joining NATO would generate a guarantee to foreign investors, as foreign investments are maybe one of the most important means of solving Romania's economic problems.
- Joining the European Union and the NATO are two inseparable and inter-dependent processes, because EU integration would ensure the economic conditions necessary for joining NATO.

What Romania has to do after joining NATO (as a result of joining NATO);

- Romania should respect certain commitments such as improving military endowment and staff quality, take part in joint military action. There is still a long way to joining the Alliance, and the economic issue is the one stopping us from going further. We should also observe certain commitments once we join a partnership.
- Joining NATO also entails considerable financial effort for Romania, as it would need to allocate a greater budget to modernise and professionalise the army.
- Romania needs to strive to get closer to the standards of other countries that have been admitted in the NATO. The process is not concluded once the country is admitted, as things are evolving continuously.

The key to security on the Balkans:

The major majority believes the main elements of security in the region are co-operation among nations, responsibility of these nations for their own actions. A sine-qua-non condition of security in this region is economic progress.

International organisations should have a smaller intervention in the internal affairs of these countries; more over, the countries in the region should be more active in solving persisting conflicts, one element being unconventional transfer of diplomatic know-how in these countries.

Romania and Bulgaria's integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures could secure the area and move it away from the so-called “buffer zone” between Russia and the West.

7. Individual Characteristics and Feelings

A projective technique (spontaneous association), was used in order to get deeper insights on neighbouring countries' perceived image. Respondents were asked to tell all the associations that come to their mind when thinking of each country. All associations are listed below:

Albania:

- Poverty, talent, small country, mountains, ecological paradise;
- Unknown;
- A very courageous nation;
- A country that needs to be supported.
- Under-developed;
- Mountains;
- Very poor, almost non-existing;
- Absent government;
- Nebula;
- The last country in Europe;
- Undeveloped Muslim country seeking to expand its territory;
- Poorer than we are;
- Example of the final stage of desegregation of a country following dissolution of authority;
- Insecurity;
- Institutionalised disorder;

Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- It needs to pass the text of self-management;
- Conflicts apparently solved;
- Very serious and complex problems, not likely to be solved in the foreseeable future;
- A country looking to identify its place.
- No culture;
- A miniature of Yugoslavia;
- Serious doubts concerning their medium-term viability;
- Nationalism;
- Things have settled down;
- A country strongly supported by the West;

- A country with multiple internal conflicts, looking for its identity;
- Dormant hotbed of interethnic conflicts;
- Conflict;
- Confusion;
- Dynamite states; a balance threatening to break at any moment;
- Separation;
- Skilfulness;

Bulgaria:

- Ambitious, western in appearance, good infrastructure;
- A country that has made progress;
- People who know what they want;
- A country that has seriously and immediately committed to recover the gaps with a view to joining international structures;
- Partner;
- Gardeners;
- No problem;
- Economic underdevelopment;
- Peace and solved economic problems;
- They outran us and we didn't notice them;
- On the good way towards European integration;
- Why are they rated better than we are?
- Controversies;
- Favoured by Germany;
- Hope;
- Surprising diplomatic capacity;

Croatia:

- As they accepted Tudjman, they are not far from Miloshevic or Lukashenko – intolerant and with no respect for minorities;
- It still hasn't solved its national problems;
- A well-governed state.
- A country seeking for its place.

- A lot of infatuation;
- It will rapidly evolve closer to Austria and Germany;
- Nationalism;
- Good status;
- Nice country, nice future;
- A province separated from Yugoslavia and seeking for its identity;
- Forgotten war, development through tourism;
- German system;
- Image is better than the reality; problems in the future;
- Extraordinary perspectives;
- Success;
- Burning hotbed.

Kosovo:

- What future can they have?
- Major problem;
- A problem, western people don't understand.
- A country that can't get its identity together.
- Experimental area or country;
- Problems;
- A problem for the next 10 years;
- Nationalism;
- Dormant self-pride and ethnic problems;
- Barrel full of gunpowder;
- Manipulation;
- Disaster, problem with no solution;
- Conflict point;
- Laboratory;
- The bomb of Europe;

Macedonia:

- Small country; Macedonians are very similar to Romanians.
- Young democracy.
- A former Yugoslav country seeking for self-assertion.
- In course of revealing its identity;

- The key to Balkan stability;
- Linked to Kosovo;
- No economic development, nationalism;
- It doesn't happen.
- Special status. Even though it's a small country, it knows what it wants.
- Former Yugoslav province;
- Peace;
- Poverty;
- A risk factor, troubled and distorted by surrounding influences;
- Forgetfulness;
- A possible new bomb;

Moldavia:

- Capable elite; better prepared for market economy than Romanians.
- Surprise.
- A great problem for Romania and Moldavia.
- A part of Romania.
- A country with no political orientation;
- Author of hope or lack of hope;
- The identity and even the power of this country are debatable.
- Persisting in the USSR field of influence;
- Dangerously moving away from Romania; political instability;
- Slow collaboration;
- Romanian territory occupied by Russians;
- They were Romanians once;
- Unification;
- Tragic case; poverty; it shouldn't exist;
- Our only joy; consolation that things can be worse than in Romania;
- Stone Age;
- The place where nothing happens;

Montenegro:

- I think they could save themselves by moving away from Serbia.
- Wish for independence.
- A country led by an intelligent leader.
- Just like the others.
- A pawn opening the way;
- Beautiful area;
- Associative forms of organising after decomposition;
- Nationalism;
- Potential source of conflict in case it separates from Serbia;
- Next war scene;
- Yugoslavia;
- A vassal duchy;
- Separation from Serbia;
- Independence;
- Dangerous game;

Romania:

- A big, confuse country incapable of solving its problems.
- Good potential, poor results.
- A country that walks rather slowly, but it is on the good way.
- A country competing with itself to achieve the goals defined after 1989.
- A barefoot girl;
- Our country;
- The change we have been waiting for, for 10-11 years;
- Temperate, necessary optimism;
- Great confidence due to its location, richness, people, situation.
- Nebulae;
- Disappointment;
- Pain;
- Errant;
- Fatigue;
- Contradictory country.

Serbia:

- It will recover sooner than we think, and it will probably outrun Romania – provided that foreign intervention doesn't nurture domestic conflicts.
- Searching its identity.
- A country that used to be developed and has lost a lot subsequent to the war.
- A country searching for its political identity.
- The proud poor;
- God and ourselves;
- It reaches the lower threshold and starts raising;
- Nationalism;
- Seeking its place;
- It will get where it wants;
- Whatever is left of the former Yugoslavia;
- Military operations;
- On the good way and with great potential;
- Paranoia;
- The most difficult partner.

Slovenia:

- It will join the EU; it will be the first Slavic EU-member.
- It goes well.
- An extraordinarily lucky country with diligent people.
- A country that has seen great progress, waiting to join the EU.
- A rich girl waiting to get married;
- Absent as a problem;
- Good example of integration;
- The best economic situation;
- Privileged location and culture.
- Rapid growth;
- The most developed country in the region;
- High standards of living;
- Heading full speed west;
- On the other side of the curtain;
- Western people;
- A country in eclipse;

People's life in South-East Europe in the next few years

There is agreement on a moderate optimism regarding the future of the area. Almost all the respondents believe that people's life in the Balkans won't improve miraculously. Nations in the area will probably get to understand that they need to help themselves. The arguments of their reserved attitude in what regards the future are:

- The ethnic issue and the poorly developed economies of these countries.
- Political and economical international context.
- Noticeable differences among the nations of the area as a matter of economic development and individual interests.

Perceived image of the minorities in Romania

A projective technique (spontaneous association), was used in order to get deeper insights on minorities perceived image. Respondents were asked to tell all the associations that come to their mind when thinking of the relations between the majority and the minorities' groups. All associations are listed below:

Romanians – Hungarians:

- Precaution;
- The reality is better than the politics and media present it.
- The relationship between ordinary people is absolutely normal; the one between politicians is rather tensed.
- Better every day.
- There are no problems at the level of ordinary people. Wind blows the same for all of us, and we have the same customs. The problem occurs at leader level.
- Tensions have been attenuated to some extent, which doesn't mean that Hungarians have given up their language.
- 'Love and hate' relationship;
- Acceptable;
- Artificial conflict tendency instigated by politicians;
- Artificial tensions;
- No tension and conflicts between ordinary people;
- Chauvinistic, exclusive, best organised;
- Problems at leader level only;
- Tensed;
- History.

Romanians – Jews:

- A sort of curiosity mixed with lack of trust;
- Overestimated.
- There are no problems.
- Good.
- Jews are not numerous enough to allow for conflicts to appear;
- There is no anti-Semitism in Romania; there are maybe momentary outbursts;
- Romanian Jews come here for tourism.
- Very good;
- Potential investors;
- Normal, natural relationship;
- Peace;
- Absent;
- We should import Jews in order to have a relationship;

Romanians – Romany:

- Fear;
- Bad, tensed relationship.
- Travelling people; tensed relationship; Romany need to change their mentality.
- Problematic, because some people might have different perceptions.
- Complex.
- Good;
- A stand should be taken towards Romany who are not socially integrated in a normal life.
- Finding solutions to calm down tensions;
- They do a lot of damage through their behaviour and nature;
- The plague;
- Local conflicts generated by lack of knowledge of the community's specificity;
- Disdain and tension;
- Unstructured as a minority;
- Structuring;

Romanians – Russians:

- Neutral;
- Nothing is very clear.

- No problems
- They are too few. They live very well in the northern area.
- There are not enough Russians.
- Very good;
- Danube Delta;
- No conflicts;
- Normal, warm, even co-operating;
- Sceptical;

Romanians – Germans:

- Respect;
- Quasi-absent.
- Good.
- Fair.
- The Germans are seen as examples, aspiration, examples of how to be in a society.
- Very good;
- It's regrettable that they are not so numerous in Romania any longer, because relationships are very good.
- Friendship;
- Emigration;
- No conflicts;
- Admiration.

Belonging to a community

The majority of the interviewed people are members of active professional, local, religious communities (the Hungarian member of the Parliament). They are open to change, communication, and world global issues. In a sense many of them feel they belong to "European community", to a large world community.

This feeling hasn't been nurtured at all over the last years in Romania. Social relationships are deteriorating, while poverty, no acceptable standards of living, as well as massive dislocation of population from one area of the country to another have led to a loss of the community feeling. [Intelligentsia]

Have you ever thought to move to another country or part of Romania?

The majority of the attendants wouldn't move abroad. They are aware a lot of Romanian youngsters would rather leave than stay and cope with the various difficulties in the country.

Disappointment with the political status in Romania, incapacity to solve key problems and delay compared to other countries are the reasons why the possibility of moving to another country is considered. The general ethos in Bucharest – dirt, poverty, architectural anarchy, pollution, absence of green areas induce discomfort.

Some of the subjects consider moving in other areas of the country after retirement.

8. Final comments

Greatest concerns regarding Romania, as stated in interviews:

- Populism, demagogy and irresponsibility of politicians;
- Poor quality of leaders.
- Goals of the public agenda not achieved;
- European Union and NATO integration failed.
- Precarious economic situation, in which restructuring and adjustments could result in uncontrollable conflicts.
- Romania excluded from the European area of interest by the international community.
- Romania involved or attracted in Balkan conflicts.
- “Bulgarisation” of Romania – the Bulgarian crisis has led to failure of banking and economic mechanisms.
- Children's future is uncertain, which could lead to massive immigration and depopulation of the country.
- Possibility to maintain peace between all interethnic groups.
- Romania losing its autonomy and national entity;
- Increase of criminality; Romania could become a country like Latin American countries, having a very poor majority and a very rich minority.
- Growing nationalism, because it is a serious problem to outline one's affiliation with a specific ethnic or social group as long the entire country deals with the same economic, social and political problems.
- Return of the communism;

- Laziness, stupidity, computer illiteracy, chronic fatigue.

Greatest hopes related to Romania:

- The young generation and what it could do.
- The economy will recover.
- Joining NATO;
- Growth of foreign investments in Romania;
- Professionalisation of the mass media;
- Development of services;
- Preservation of the environment, as it is the most valuable heritage of the next generation;
- Change of mentality;
- A new social system relying on equity.