



ROMANIA

Civic space in Romania is rated "narrowed" on the CiViCUS Monitor

In Romania, the presence of CSOs on the territory is unevenly distributed with most of the active organisations and the total income of the sector concentrated in urban areas. 75% of NGOs is in urban areas¹ while 62% of the incomes and 54% of the staff of the sector are located in the Bucharest, Northwest and Centre regions². Most CSOs struggle to have a stable income in order to secure their organisational capacity and, in particular, their ability to maintain permanent paid staff. 65% of organisations operates with an income which is less than 9,000 euros per year, and nearly 50% is below 2,500 euros. Since 2017, the situation of the CSO sector has further deteriorated due to worsening relationship with the government. Nevertheless, one of the biggest developments of recent years is the increase of civic participation in more informal ways, with a strong focus on community development, social issues and environmental protection.

¹ FDSC, Infografice „Romania 2017. Sectorul neguvernamental – profil, tendinte, provocari” (en), 2017

² USAID, CSO Sustainability Index, 2017

THE SECTOR IN NUMBERS

Population:
19.64 million

SOURCE: EUORSTAT, 2017

Number of NGOs:
107.774 (2018)

50% of these being active

Number of employees:
99 800 approx.

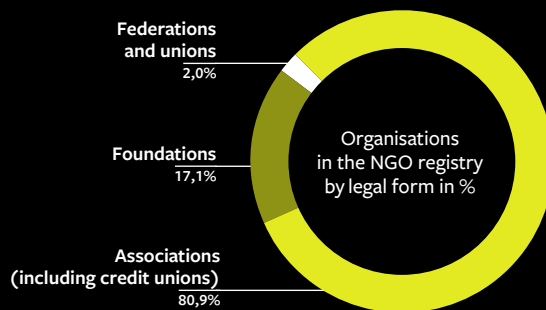
Only **32%** of organisations have employees

30% of the employees of the whole sector work in social-charitable NGOs

SOURCE: EUROSTAT, NATIONAL NGO REGISTRY, MINISTRY OF JUSTICE, 2016, PROCESSED BY CSDF, FDSC

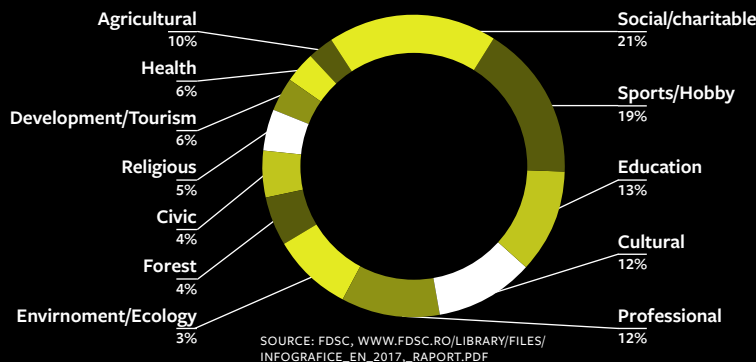
6% of citizens involved in volunteering in 2017 (-3% compared to 2016)

SOURCE: WORLD GIVING INDEX 2018



SOURCE: NATIONAL NGO REGISTRY, MINISTRY OF JUSTICE VIA THE 2018 CSO SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

DISTRIBUTION OF NGOS BY FIELDS OF ACTIVITY (2015)



SOURCE: FDSC, WWW.FDSC.RO/LIBRARY/FILES/INFOGRAFICE_EN_2017,_RAPORT.PDF

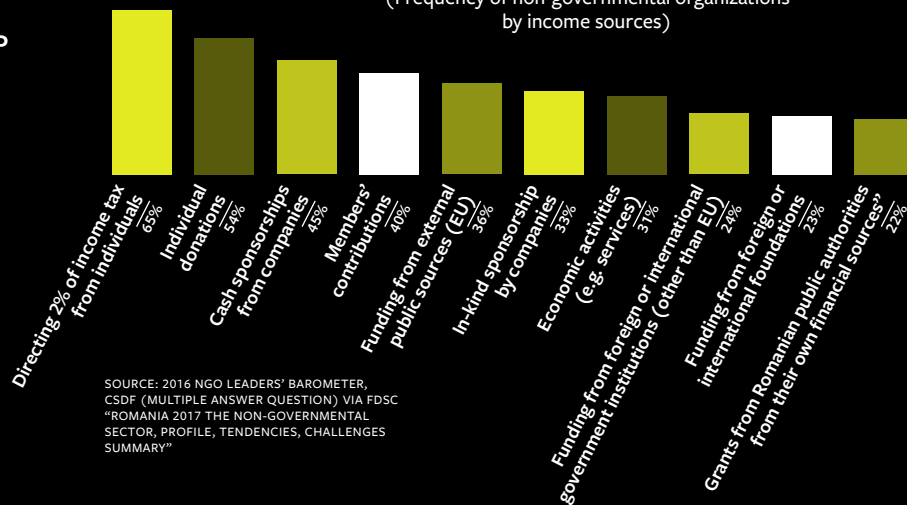
THE ECONOMIC WEIGHT OF THE SECTOR

Budget of the NGO sector:
2 539 million euros

It represents **1.6%** of national GDP

SOURCE: FDSC, HTTP://WWW.FDSC.RO/LIBRARY/FILES/INFOGRAFICE_EN_2017,_RAPORT.PDF

10 Most common sources of income for NGOs
(Frequency of non-governmental organizations by income sources)



SOURCE: 2016 NGO LEADERS' BAROMETER, CSDF (MULTIPLE ANSWER QUESTION) VIA FDSC "ROMANIA 2017 THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL SECTOR, PROFILE, TENDENCIES, CHALLENGES SUMMARY"

NAVIGATING A FRAIL POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Civil society reaches new peaks of civic engagement

By Andrei Pop, Civil Society Development Foundation

During the last few years, civil society reached new peaks in terms of civic engagement and public visibility. The most visible actions concerned the fight against corruption and the defence of minority rights. Hundreds of thousands of concerned citizens took to the streets to peacefully protest governmental actions. But small civic groups have started to develop and change successfully public agenda all across the country, especially concerning community development and social issues, often-times assisted by formalised organisations. Overall though, civil society has been operating in a very frail environment, looking at the 2018-2019 time-frame. During 2018 especially, despite a very large and diverse civic involvement, the government discouraged NGO activities as well as individual civic engagement. Since mid-2019 however, because of political turmoil in the main

governing coalition and of the governmental defeat in the European elections, civil society has been largely ignored by the establishment.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

In terms of legislation directly affecting the civil society sector, this period was certainly dominated by the clear gold plating attempted by the government in the transposition of the 4th EU Anti Money Laundering Directive. The government's proposal was also approved by Parliament, placing civil society in the same category of financial risk as providers of gambling services and banking institutions. With no legitimate cause and no risks assessment, the Romanian lawmakers expanded the EU directive and created reporting obligations that could not be fulfilled in real life, thus setting the legal basis for further discretionary control and sanctions. The draft law interfered with the right to protection of personal data, requiring NGOs

to report on the recipients of their services and assistance by including them, beyond the scope of the directive, in the sphere of beneficial owners. In case of non-compliance the extreme sanction was the dissolution of the organisation. Finally, in June 2019, after serious and repeated criticism expressed by civil society, as well as after an unfavourable verdict by the Constitutional Court, the draft law was amended. However, in this final version, while associations and foundations are no longer qualified as obliged entities and despite the definition of the beneficial owner was changed, there are still some other provisions likely to generate problems in implementation. As an example, foundations still need to report a large amount of personal data on the beneficiaries of their activities.

Civil society cooperation with the government has also been seriously impeded by the government's policy on anti-corruption, one of the most sensitive and

important topics for civil society in the past two decades. As part of an extensive reform of the judiciary and criminal code, the government and parliament used very opaque procedures to conduct drastic changes to the legislation in this field. Most of these changes were understood by the public as alleviating corruption-related offences, as well as weakening the independence of the judiciary only to increase governmental control over the justice system. The fact that the governing coalition disregarded significant civic protests as well as international criticism and hardly backed down on this reform was a strong message that cooperation with civil society is not on the government's agenda.

Civil society operation has also been impeded by the government's discouragement of private sponsorships for NGOs. At the beginning of 2018, new tax policies entered into force reducing the pool of companies allowed to deduct their sponsorships from the taxes owed. The measures, amended in the spring, temporarily favoured authorised social service providers, in a way that has been found discriminatory by many. In terms of individual philanthropy, the government also attempted to stimulate the tax redirection mechanism benefiting only those NGOs which are likely to be less critical towards authorities, since the services

THE DRAFT LAW INTERFERED WITH THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION OF PERSONAL DATA, REQUIRING NGOS TO REPORT ON THE RECIPIENTS OF THEIR SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE

they provide depend on regular approval by state agencies.

In August 2018, a governmental ordinance gave the Economic and Financial Inspection Department, directly reporting to the Minister of Finance, the role of monitoring the use of funds that CSOs collect through sponsorships, instead of the independent National Agency of Fiscal Administration. Critics fear that this could be used as a political instrument by the government¹.

On a positive note, civil society registered very significant success in terms of LGBT rights. Late 2018, with the support of most of the parliamentary parties, a referendum was held to narrow the constitutional definition of family and exclude LGBT couples. Following an intense no-vote campaign by civil society, the referendum failed to reach the validation threshold of 30% turnout.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Freedom of expression has also been under threat². While several media outlets, most operating as NGOs, have stirred more and more of the public attention with their political investigations, the government has started reacting with impromptu fiscal inspections or GDPR fines against such outlets. Rise Project, a non-profit journalism organisation whose investigations have untangled a number of cases of organised crime and corruption,

¹ USAID CSO, Sustainability Index, Romania 2018, published October 2019, http://www.fdsc.ro/library/files/index_usaid_2018_romania_ro.pdf, 2019.

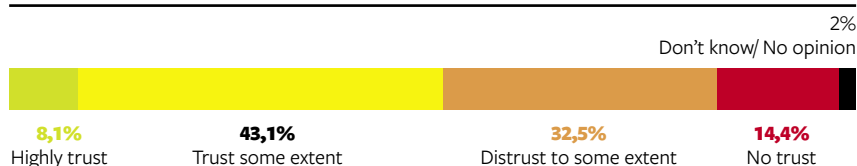
² Note of the editor: According to the RSF World Press Freedom Index Romania scores 47 out of 180 in 2019 (-3 as per 2018, +8 as per 2015).

THE PROTEST IN BUCHAREST STARTED PEACEFULLY BUT WAS MARKED BY THE VIOLENT REACTION OF THE POLICE. CIVIC SPACE WATCH REPORTED THAT 440 PEOPLE, OUT OF WHOM TWENTY-FOUR GENDARMES, RECEIVED MEDICAL ATTENTION ON SITE

has been threatened with a 20 million EUR fine for not disclosing its sources in a deep investigation impacting Liviu Dragnea, president of the Social Democratic Party. The same RISE Project had also been subjected to an impromptu fiscal inspection the very day it had announced to release a similar political investigation.

In spring 2019, independent journalist Emilia Sercan from the local news website PressOne has received a death threat from none other than a young police academy officer, following her contribution in disclosing the extended plagiarism tolerated within said Police Academy. The message urged her to refrain from investigating further, hinting at the fact that the harassment was linked with the content of her work. An investigation found that

Citizen's trust in NGOs (2016)



SOURCE: FDSC, [HTTP://WWW.FDSC.RO/LIBRARY/FILES/INFOGRAFICE_EN_2017_RAPORT.PDF](http://www.fdsc.ro/library/files/infografice_en_2017_raport.pdf)

the rector of the Police Academy, Adrian Iacob, and pro-rector Mihail Marcoci were behind the message.

As noted by the Civicus Monitor:³ “On 10th May 2019, *Reporters Without Borders* (RSF) and its Romanian partner, *Active Watch*, urged Romanian authorities to “combat the impunity and climate of violence against the media” and to take similar prompt measures to address other cases of serious abuse against journalists, as they did in the case of *Sercan*. They also encouraged the authorities to ensure that police officers are trained and made aware of the role of journalists and press freedom.”

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

On 10 August 2018, a massive protest was organised and promoted by Romanians living abroad, who returned home calling the government to resign over corruption allegations. Up to 100,000 people gathered in front of the government headquarters in Bucharest, but major mobilisations took place also in other cities across the country. The protest in Bucharest started peacefully but was marked by the violent reaction of the police. Civic Space Watch reported that 440 people, out of whom twenty-four gendarmes, received medical attention on site. Sixty-five people, out of

³ CIVICUS Monitor, Anti-corruption activists targeted with death threats and judicial persecution in Romania, <https://monitor.civicus.org/newsfeed/2019/07/10/Anti-corruption-activists-targeted-with-death-threats-and-judicial-persecution-in-Romania/>, 10 July 2019.

MULTIPLE ACCOUNTS POINT TO HOW GENDARMES TARGETED MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES WHO WERE TAKING VIDEO RECORDINGS OF THEIR ACTIONS

FOLLOWING THE HIGHLY DISPROPORTIONATE AND VIOLENT REACTION OF THE RIOT POLICE, THROUGHOUT THE SECOND HALF OF 2018 AND THE FIRST HALF OF 2019, PEOPLE HAVE BEEN DRASTICALLY DISCOURAGED FROM EXERCISING FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

which nine gendarmes, had to be taken to the hospital. At least one person was severely injured by a tear gas grenade in his leg⁴. Water cannons, tear gas in huge quantities and varied shapes, as well as the traditional sticks, were the weapons used by the gendarmes. Pepper spray was used directly on people’s faces, from a distance of a few centimetres. The violence was unprecedented and indiscriminately used on innocuous people or even people holding their hands up as it emerges on footage made public. Multiple accounts point to how gendarmes targeted media representatives who were taking video recordings of their actions, including a camera operator from the Austrian public broadcast, ORF.

Civil society organisations have urged the Romanian Gendarmerie to investigate the events in full transparency and disclosure to the public. While the General Attorney opened a criminal investigation on the violence on August 10th, political

⁴ European Civic Forum, ROMANIA: police indiscriminate violence against anti-government protests, <http://civicspacewatch.eu/romania-police-indiscriminate-violence-against-anti-government-protests/>, 13 August 2018.

leaders close to the government refused to condemn the violence by the police. The political statements made by prominent governmental leaders, including Liviu Dragnea and Carmen Dan, the Minister for the Interior, are very concerning since they take no blame for any of the Gendarmerie’s violence, they consider it justified: a *coup d’état* had allegedly been set up, without providing any evidence. Civic protesters were called rats by the leader of the governing Social Democratic Party, while various fake news was systematically distributed by dozens of official Facebook accounts of this party. Liviu Dragnea announced that the legal investigation demanded by Romania’s President Iohannis to be an unfair pressure on the Gendarmerie. On the contrary, the ruling party called for investigation on the possible external financing of August 10 protest.



THE AUTHOR

Andrei Pop is a civil society expert who has been constantly mainstreaming efforts towards democracy strengthening and citizen involvement in the decision-making process. Programme Director at the Civil Society Development Foundation, the largest and oldest private NGO grant manager in Romania, he constantly advocates for more sustainability in the civil society sector, at local and European level.

Following the highly disproportionate and violent reaction of the riot police, throughout the second half of 2018 and the first half of 2019, people have been drastically discouraged from exercising freedom of assembly. With a very long history of peaceful anti-corruption protests in recent years, the sudden decision to stifle this protest was shocking to all civic minded Romanians that used to take to the streets in demand of better public service from their elected officials. Even more, it throws very dark clouds of popular doubt and discontent with anything related to civic activism. Moreover, Civil Society Europe⁵ even noted that the Minister of Interior had announced late 2018 upcoming modifications to the Law on public assembly that would limit and censor public gatherings based on subjective evaluations of the purpose of the protests, though such threats have not been enacted up until the current day.

CONCLUSION

In the medium and long term, the only path towards sustainability for the Romanian civil society sector is given by increasing constituencies, which would make the fragrant attacks on the civil society environment a very unpopular gesture for any politician. There is need for a more progressive political agenda to raise trust amongst the voters: progressive in both a mature understanding of the critical role civil society plays in a functional democracy, and in terms of support for the major civil society topics, such as strengthening anti-corruption, ensuring effective minority rights and truly integrating people at risk of social exclusion and poverty. ■

⁵ Civic Society Europe, Fact sheet: NGOs restrictions in Romania, 2018.

*“Romania has one of the highest figures of private ownership of houses in the world: more than 98%. Because social housing in Romania is less than 1%, there is a constant risk of forced evictions, especially of Roma people. Hundreds of thousands of people were evicted from their homes in Romania in the last thirty years. **Linda Greta Zsiga** is one of these people. She was pushed at the margins of society, nearby the landfills of Cluj, the second-largest in Romania, in what the City Hall called a social housing project for the “integration” of a Roma community. Pata Rat is a ghetto that has at this point more than 1.500 hundred people. Through protests, petitions and grassroots activism, but also connected to international activism, Linda Greta Zsiga, mother of four and a seller of flowers, she moved out of the ghetto with a tenth of the community. But still she fights for human rights and affordable housing until the ghetto is destroyed and the Roma community desegregated.*”

Adrian-Octavian Dohotaru, Member of the Chamber of Deputies
of Romania

FROM PATA RAT TO BRUSSELS: FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHT TO HOUSING FOR ALL

Linda Greta Zsiga, the first Roma running for European elections in Romania

Interview with Linda Greta Zsiga

107

Can you tell us your story and the story of Pata Rat?

On 17 December 2010, 76 families were evicted from the Costei street in Cluj-Napoca to Pata Rat. When we arrived there, we saw that only 40 families received a small room of 16 mt² and the other 36 families were left outside under the sky. The families who received the small room invited the other families to live together until the spring, when it would have been possible to build something, a house. My fight started then, on 17 December 2010.

So who was affected by these evictions?

Mostly Roma people. One family of Romanians and one family of Hungarians. For the rest, only Roma people. We were a community integrated into the society, but the society pushed us five steps backwards. My whole family was all born and raised in Cluj and we paid our rent, our

utilities. We had social houses, we did not have troubles with our neighbours, they were very good. The municipality decided [to change] our lives in two days. Why? Because the Mayor at that time, Sorin Apostu, was disturbed by our presence. He was living in a street near us and our kids were playing with the ball in the street or going with the bicycle. And he was disturbed by this because he was racist.

On 15 December, they came to us to say we had to pack our things and on 17 December, two days later, around 200 policemen came at 5 in the morning with people from the municipality and told us we had to move. We did not know the location until the bus took us and transported us to Pata Rat. We were evicted and moved near the garbage dump, the chemical factory. Pata Rat is 200 meters from the garbage dump which collects all the garbage from Cluj-Napoca. It is a toxic area.

When did you become an activist?

When the eviction happened, my life changed and I suffered a lot. I was crying all day. I would look outside my window and see a big mountain of garbage, and I felt my dignity, my whole life would end there. I was thinking “*Oh my God, what did I do to deserve to live here together with my kids? How can the municipality think that people can live in this area?*”. There was a horrible smell. Imagine: after Bucharest, Cluj is the [second] biggest city in Romania. And all the garbage from the city was there. I suffered a lot. It took me a few months to think “*Okay, I need some change. It is time to do something, it is time to change something*”. These forced evictions only happen to Roma people, especially in Romania. In Tulcea, Baia Mare, in many other places there were evictions. So together with my friends we said “*Okay, we have to do something*”.

We started to organise, also with the support of other people. A lot of people came from Cluj-Napoca, a lot of activists, people from the academia, from NGOs came to support us and advise us on what we should do. Together all the community started a court [case] against the municipality. We did many actions: meetings, protests in front of the municipality. Many people supported us.

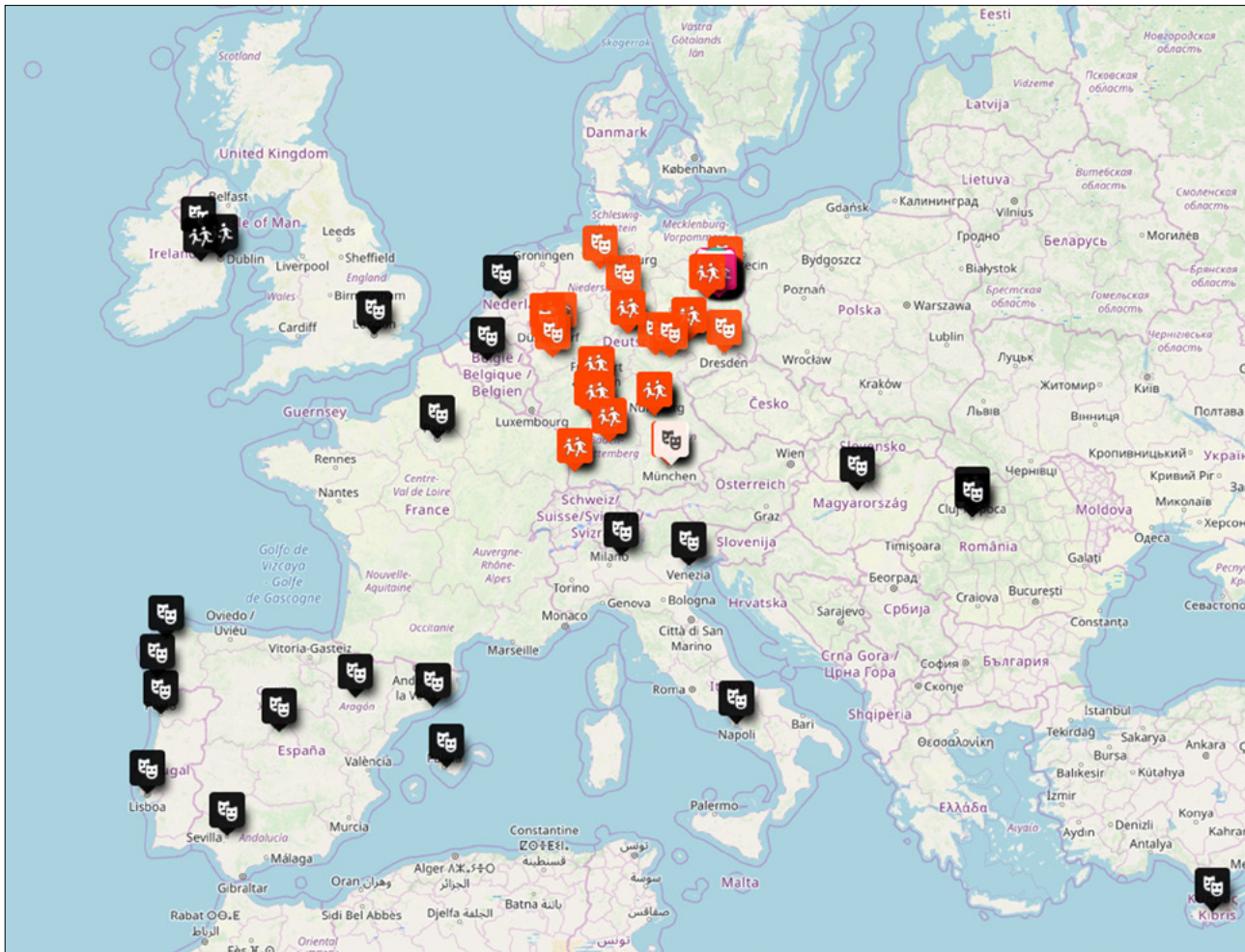
[In Pata Rat,] we only had electricity, we made fire with wood, we had to buy the wood. And then we only had water. We did not have access to internet, [nor] to cables, we did not have access to busses

because the station was really far away – 2 or 3 kilometers. So we started to organise. We created an association “Community Association of Roma from Coastei Street” and then we went to the municipality and we asked for a bus for the kids to go to school. And the municipality did it: it put a bus to bring the kids to school.

What was the response of the authorities?

Let’s say that it was positive because they saw that we were organised, we had the support of many people, including professors at the University. They opened us

WE STARTED TO ORGANISE. WE CREATED AN ASSOCIATION “COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION OF ROMA FROM COASTEI STREET” AND THEN WE WENT TO THE MUNICIPALITY



Pan-European action day against “rent madness”

Housing movements are emerging all over Europe. An example of the dimension of the movement is the action day “Together against repression and rent madness”. On 6 April 2019 and the week leading to it, they mobilised in major European cities as well as small towns.

SOURCE: [HTTPS://UMAP.OPENSTREETMAP.FR/DE/MAP/DEMONSTRATION-AM-642019-GEMEINSAM-GEGEN-VERDRANGUN_299281#5/46.905/17.227](https://umap.openstreetmap.fr/de/map/demonstration-am-642019-gemeinsam-gegen-verdrangung_299281#5/46.905/17.227)

the door, they received us for meetings, but they did not change much: there are still people living in Pata Rat. Every year, we make many many protests. Four years ago, we made a big protest bringing 400 Roma teenagers from all over Europe.

Have you had troubles with the police?

No, we have a good relationship. They only follow us. They recognise us because we do this every year. Only once or twice it happened that someone was fined. But they never pushed us or beat us. Because they know the truth: we were evicted, now we live near the garbage dump. You do not have access to facilities of the town, you do not have access to hospitals. In general, [it is] during the evictions [that] policemen can be a bit aggressive.

IN GENERAL, [IT IS] DURING THE EVICTIONS [THAT] POLICEMEN CAN BE A BIT AGGRESSIVE.

Last year, a family with nine kids, two kids with disabilities, was evicted from Mesterul Manole Street and I was there together with others. I stood in front of the door and I told the policemen *“I won't move from here. You cannot take the family and move them out because they don't have where to go. This is their home”*. And the policeman pushed me and almost broke my hand. Another eviction [happened] this year again, I was there with my colleagues and the same happened. Sometimes there are people hurt or injured because they go in with force and if the people who oppose resist, then the police assaults them. Sometimes mothers [who resist] are threatened. But not by the police, by the social assistance. They say that they will take away their children.



Linda Greta Zsiga

Was this violence always there or did it increase over time?

The violence was always there. You have to think that for centuries Roma people were slaves. They opposed and resisted. [Even] in Auschwitz, they resisted, they clashed with the police with rocks, without weapons or guns. They resisted with their hands.

Are you and other activists from Pata Rat connected with other groups fighting for the same cause in other cities in Romania? Are these groups also led by Roma activists?

Yes! Now it is almost nine years that I am involved as an activist in all the evictions happening here in Cluj-Napoca and in other cities. The people contact me and I am there. In every city where there is an eviction there is a group of activists resisting, fighting for their rights. They are always Roma, but they are supported by non Roma people who have another vision. They think all people have the same right. It does not matter if you are black or white or gypsy or Romanian, you know?

Do you think that is becoming easier to be an activist as a Roma now compared to the past?

Mmm.. yes, I think it is thanks to the support of people that are not Roma. It is much easier because in the past people

thought that Roma were stealing, were dirty, and things like that. But now this is changing. For example, now in our communities we have the first generation from Pata Rat going to school. Their parents did not go to school; their grandparents did not go to school. Why? Because they did not have access to school. If you live in these houses, “houses” made of some wood and some nylon, without water, without electricity, without heating... How can you go to school? You go to school but you are smelling, you are dirty, because you do not have water to wash yourself and your clothes. But this is the first generation to go to school. We facilitate them to go to school. We provide clothes, transport, we [learn] to do the homework, and then we do afterschool. All the kids from our community go to school, to kindergarten, to middle school, to high school. Now we also have three kids in college. We have two kids that are champions in boxing, we have kids who play football. We are very proud! We did marches, we asked for our right to have a decent house, a decent life. The municipality stole our life and we want our life back.

IN EVERY CITY WHERE THERE IS AN EVICTION THERE IS A GROUP OF ACTIVISTS RESISTING, FIGHTING FOR THEIR RIGHTS. THEY ARE ALWAYS ROMA, BUT THEY ARE SUPPORTED BY NON ROMA PEOPLE WHO HAVE ANOTHER VISION.

Your story resonated nationally and internationally. Why so?

Yes, because my friends and many many people supported me. Amnesty, for example, facilitated the access to Brussels. Two years after the eviction, we had a forced eviction in miniature in front of the European Parliament together with Amnesty International. A flashmob. Then, we had breakfast in front of the European Parliament and we invited the members of the Parliament, to talk with them and to share our story about what is happening in Romania.

I have been to Brussels, to the European Parliament five times and this year, I was to the EU Roma Week. I spoke and all the people know the story. A few years ago, priests from England wrote to the Mayor to change the situation of Pata Rat. And I think that this is good pressure and it is working. The municipality is changing

its actions, its attitude a bit: they always receive us, to talk, to have meetings, to ask what the community needs. For example, to make the road, to put lights outside. To make the life in Pata Rat a little better.

But there is no discussion about bringing them back to the city?

No, the municipality always says that there is not enough money to build houses. But this year, the Council approved 2 Million Euro and the municipality will buy houses from big corporations and give social houses to the people. You have to bring papers to the municipality and depending on your score, you receive a house or not.

Affordable housing is increasingly becoming an issue also for a part of the Romanian middle class, although to a different extent and with different challenges. Do you think there is an opportunity to fight together for a change in housing policies?

Yes! We have a movement for social housing now and there we are [also] fighting [for people] living with rent. The rent is very very very expensive in Cluj: you pay your rent and you do not have money left to pay [for] your food. So, yes, we are together with the people who have a rent, with the people who do not have a house, with the people who do the paperwork to obtain social housing.

You are the first Roma running for European elections. Why did you choose to run?

I chose to run for the European elections because I think we need the political power to change the abusive law of Romania. I was not always involved in politics, because I always thought that politics are very big and my place is not there. I am an activist. But I saw that as activists, we [do] change some things, with small steps. But if I am an activist

with political power I can change many many things, with big steps not with small ones. Because when you are there, you can speak up for the problems in Romania, and not only in Romania, in all Europe.

Do you think that the European Union could be an ally in your fight and, more broadly, for the fight of the housing movement emerging all across Europe? How?

Yes, I think that the European Union has to put pressure on Romania and other countries with problems with housing. When we go to Brussels, we go with all the people: Roma people, non Roma people, and in my mind the European Union means protection. It means that someone can ask Romania to change things. ■

i WAS NOT ALWAYS INVOLVED IN POLITICS, BECAUSE i ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT POLITICS ARE VERY BIG AND MY PLACE IS NOT THERE. i AM AN ACTIVIST. BUT i SAW THAT AS ACTIVISTS, WE [DO] CHANGE SOME THINGS, WITH SMALL STEPS. BUT IF i AM AN ACTIVIST WITH POLITICAL POWER i CAN CHANGE MANY MANY THINGS, WITH BIG STEPS NOT WITH SMALL ONES

TRANSFORMATIONS OF HOUSING PROVISION IN ROMANIA:

Organizations of subtle violence

By Ioana Florea and Mihail Dumitriu, Common Front for Housing Rights (FCDL)

This article is based on empirical data and is a small part of an ongoing research project on housing struggles and transformations in housing policies in Romania. We look at these transformations within the wider historical and economic context, outlining some of the links between privatisation and austerity measures, individualisation and privatisation of housing provision, and the role of NGOs as subtle facilitators of such (often violent) processes.

WAVES OF HOUSING POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF “TRANSITION”

In Romania, as in other ECE countries, “the implementation of housing reform became one of the first acts” of the post-89 governments, with “privatisation, deregulation, and cuts in state funding” as

its main principles.¹ Scholars of post-socialism have shown that these policies were cemented by the influence of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF overseeing the entire “transition” process.² In 1990, 30% of the housing stock was state owned³ – including buildings constructed during socialism (especially blocks of flats) but also buildings nationalised in the 1950s from the richer strata (especially villas, mansions, and small apartment blocks). After 1990, the housing reform followed three main paths:

1. The rapid and continuous sale of the state owned stock, which today stands at less than two percent of the country’s housing stock.

2. The deregulation and persisting lack of regulations with regard to urban development, working as a form of support for the private real-estate sector. In the mid 2000s, the retreating state informally shifted the responsibility for drafting urban regulations to the private sector (a process sometimes legitimised as participatory working group practice). This opened new legal doors for private accumulation through dispossession.
3. Re-privatization through restitutions (to former pre-1950 owners, their heirs, or their legal rights-buyers) of the nationalized housing stock, at first through financial compensation (for inhabited buildings) and in-kind (for unused buildings), and then through in-kind complete restitutions of buildings (despite the fact the state tenants were still living

¹ Stanilov, Kiril (ed.), *The Post-socialist City*, Springer, 2007, p. 177

² *Ibidem*, p. 176

³ Vincze, Enikő, *The Ideology Of Economic Liberalism And The Politics Of Housing In Romania*, *Studia Ubb. Europaea*, LXII, 3, 2017, pp. 29-54

there and no relocation solution was envisaged).

The restitution law (10/2001) – although appearing to have only localised effects – has been actually very destructive, producing waves of evictions, gentrification, rent increases, transformations in the function of buildings (from housing into profit making functions). This law was backed by the dominant anti-communist discourse which claims that the socialist regime wronged the interwar landlords when it nationalised their properties, and that these landlords and their heirs are rightfully entitled to these properties regardless of what may happen to



THE AUTHOR

Ioanna Florea is a social researcher and project coordinator at Asociatia Quantic, in Bucharest. She is also a post-doc researcher at the University of Gothenburg, Department of Sociology and Work Science, involved in the project “Housing, Social Mobilisations and Urban Governance in Central and Eastern Europe”, together with colleagues from Sweden, Hungary and Lithuania. She is involved in the Common Front for Housing Rights (FCDL), a platform for housing activism created in Bucharest by a group of evicted persons, persons living under the constant threat of forced eviction, together with relatives, friends, activists and artists.

the tenants of the state who currently inhabit them. Such tenants of the state who are affected by evictions from restituted buildings very often belong to vulnerable social groups. These evictions get almost no media attention and the evictees get almost no support from authorities and public opinion, because the right to property prevails over tenants’ rights, and because people belonging to vulnerable social groups are subjected to social stigma (invisibilized and marginalized).

In addition, for more than a decade, most of the national housing programs work to benefit the emerging/aspiring middle classes. Since 2009, “The First Home” (Prima casa) mortgage program and Bauspar program have been developed by the state in partnership with ERSTE financial group and Raiffeisen Bank, backed with about 4.5 billion euro in public funds. ANL (Agentia Nationala pentru Locuinte, The National Housing Agency) receives funds from the Ministry of Development – more than 1 billion euro since 2007 – to build flats, which are then sold to young families who can afford private mortgages. Another program supporting homeowners for the thermo-rehabilitation of blocks of flats has consumed billions of Euros (funds from the local and national authorities, plus EU funds) since 2009. In comparison, since 2007, less than 200 million euro were allocated for all kinds of social housing in total.

During the “transition”, the amounts spent on public housing declined, while overall housing construction rose. In 2015, 20% of Romania’s population was affected by severe housing deprivation. In urban areas, in 2014, there were over 67.000 applications for around 28.000 remaining, but already inhabited, social housing units. Moreover, following the liberalization of utility prices and their alignment with Western Europe since 1996, in response to the increasing cost of living, informal forms of housing amplified as ways of resistance and survival. It is



THE AUTHOR

Mihail Dumitriu is an architect with some studies in urban planning, and an activist for education and housing rights. He has worked with children and youth from different social backgrounds, in various alternative education programmes. He is co-coordinator of IDEE magazine and co-founder of Quantic Group, a platform for projects centered on emancipatory education, housing rights, gender equality, environmental and social justice. He is involved in the Common Front for Housing Rights (FCDL), a platform for housing activism created in Bucharest by a group of evicted persons, persons living under the constant threat of forced eviction, together with relatives, friends, activists and artists.

estimated that almost half a million persons live without documents in informal types of housing.

Looking at housing provision within wider economic processes, we can say that since 1990, the IMF, World Bank and EU-imposed privatisation policies have also meant a constant drop in wages and a constant attack on labour rights. These culminated in 2011 with changes in the Labour Code and Social Dialogue

Code in the aftermath of the crisis, with severe impact on workers' lives and housing options. Since then, unionizing has become almost impossible, 44% of employees earn below the minimum wage, 25.4% of the population has fallen below the poverty line, over 40% of the population is at risk of poverty, and 42.6% of those employed spend more than 40% of their income on housing costs (2014-2016 data according to Eurostat).

After 2009, austerity measures brought cuts in most social benefits, legitimised by a rising discourse simultaneously for the “efficiency of the state” and against the poor. At the same time, most of the post-89 governments implemented tax-cuts for large companies, with recent tax-cuts for real-estate-developers enacted since 2017, and most of the post-89 governments deregulated the banking sector, paving the way for expensive and risky loans, which led to increased household debt. All these processes are part of Romania's integration into the highly financialised global economy. The transformation of housing from public provision into private real-estate investment is a key aspect in these structural processes. ■

Source: This article is an excerpt from *Transformations of housing provision in Romania: Organizations of subtle violence*, and it is published here with the permission of Left East, on which it was published 24 October 2018: <https://www.criticatac.ro/lefeast/transformations-of-housing-provision-in-romania-organizations-of-subtle-violence/>.