
POVERTY IN ROMANIA DURING 1945-1989

Mariana STANCIU¹
Adina MIHĂILESCU²

Abstract: *This study aims to identify the manifestation of poverty in Romania during the socialist period. We used various relevant data, even though often indirect (not referring explicitly to the phenomenon of poverty), information and indicators published by the national and international statistics of the time, as well as studies and papers by contemporary Romanian economists and sociologists (as Axenciuc, Pasti, etc.). In pursuing our objective of surveying the phenomenon of poverty during the socialist period, we monitored three large periods, in which the dominant causes of the phenomenon were somehow different: period 1945-1972, dominated by the efforts of paying the debts of war and of national implementation of a policy of nationalization and of change of the forms of property; period 1973-1979, dominated by the massive social effort for industrialization; the cooperativization of agriculture, concluded in 1962 and the total servitude of the intensive work in the rural, were used massively to generate the resources needed for the technical support of the process of industrialization; period 1980-1989, when the access of the bulk of population to consumer goods and services became extremely precarious, on the background of the effort of paying the debts Romania contracted for industrialization; the establishment of a political-economical quasi-élite, with privileged access to consumer goods and services stressed further the polarization of the access to basic foods.*

Keywords: *poverty, war debts, nationalization, industrialization, restricted consumption, privileges.*

Introduction

One can identify the phenomenon of poverty during the socialist period by observing three large periods, in which the prevailing causes of the phenomenon were different:

¹ Senior Researcher, the Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy, e-mail: mariana3stanciu@gmail.com

² Senior Researcher, the Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy, e-mail: adina.mihailescu@yahoo.com

- 1945-1972 period – dominated by the efforts of paying the debts of war (preponderantly by the share of agricultural products imposed by the state to the peasants); after this stage, it followed the national implementation of policies of nationalization and change of the forms of ownership on the means of production. The implementation of such policies impoverished massively the peasants (by cooperativization), and other categories of owners from the urban;
- 1973-1979 period – dominated by the massive social effort for industrialization; the cooperativization of agriculture, completed during the previous stage (in 1962) and the total servitude of the intensive work in the rural were used massively to generate the resources necessary for the technical support of the process of industrialization; the modernization of agriculture, much as it was done, was rather a consequence of the industrial development and of its need to sell its products, less an objective per se.
- 1980-1989 period – when the access of the population to consume goods and services became extremely precarious, on the background of the continuous effort to pay the debts taken by Romania for industrialization; the establishment of a political-economical quasi-elite, with privileged access to consumer goods and services stressed further the polarization of the access to food.

Period 1945-1972

Payment of the war debts and passing the national wealth into state property

After the war, the country was experiencing a state of social decomposition. The year 1945 was dominated by the worsened national poverty, due to the massive destructions caused by the war, of the lower agricultural production for several years in a row, and by the need to pay the war compensations. After assuming power, in 1945, the new political regime had to solve, in the first instance, several social problems that could not be postponed. The Communist Party, taken by surprise by its fast assumption of the political power, displayed a first reflex of adaptation to the situation, by the initiation of the agrarian reform, on March 23, 1945, by the government of Petru Groza, with the purpose to enhance the social cohesion and general support for the party. By the expropriation of the last estates that remained after the 1921 land reform (1.5 million hectares of agricultural land), 1.1 million hectares of agricultural land were distributed to the peasants, and 400.000 hectares remained in the state reserve. Along with the land, some 9,000 agricultural machineries were also confiscated, and this practically abolished the class of big land-owners, but also stroke a blow to the wealthier people.

On the 8th of May 1945, the government established sovromuri, by which the national wealth was to be exploited to the benefit of the USSR.¹ According to the contract, for six years, these sovromuri transferred to the USSR various raw materials, other materials, and agricultural products from Romania. This happened on the background of the dramatic decrease of the agricultural and industrial production, after the war, due

¹ Sovrompetrol, Societatea Sovromlemn, Sovrommetal, Sovromtransport the Soviet – Romanian bank, etc.

to the loss of production capacities and labour force, and also because Romania already had in 1945 a smaller territory (80.5%) than in 1938, and the total population decreased from almost 20 million in 1938, to 15 million inhabitants in 1945. The decrease of the agricultural and industrial production per capita was large – the grain cereals production decreased to 303.4 kg/inhabitant, from 549.3 kg/inhabitant. In other domains, particularly in industry, the decrease was less dramatic. The steel production was in 1947 of 11.5 kg/inhabitant compared to 14 kg/inhabitant in 1938, the paper production decreased from 2.9 kg/inhabitant in 1938 to 1.9 kg/inhabitant in 1947, and the sugar production, from 5.5 kg/inhabitant (average of 1933/34-1937/38) to 4.6 kg/inhabitant (average of 1945/46-1949/50).

The economic situation of Romania was disastrous in 1947. Broad categories of population suffered chronically of hunger. Because of the wild exploitation of the Romanian economy by the USSR, the price of the consumer goods sky-rocketed. About 40-50% of the exporting capacities of Romania was delivered for free to the USSR. In consequence, in 1946-1947, the price of the staples had increased by up to 1,000% (the meat by 400%, the potatoes by 800% and the bread by 1,000%).¹

The average consumption per capita reflected the austere standard of living. In 1947, the average annual per capita consumption was in Romania of just 2,350 calories/day, compared to 2,760 calories/day in 1938; the average annual meat consumption decreased from 18 kg to 14 kg, for milk and dairy products, from 103 kg to 96 kg, while it remained unchanged for sugar, 5 kg annually), the non-food consumption also decreased (for instance, average annual consumption of textile decreased from 2.6 kg to 1.9 kg, of cotton, from 1.8 kg to 1.2 kg, of wool from 0.7 kg to 0.4 kg). The scale of the decrease is probably better seen if we consider the gross domestic product per capita: in comparable prices (1938), it decreased from 76 USD in 1938 to 54 USD in 1947 (Alexandrescu 1986, p. 236-238, p. 240-241, Murgescu, 2010, p.334).

After World War Two, the agriculture was still the main economic branch in Romania. In 1948, the peasants still accounted for about 75% of the total population. The Petru Groza government, which assumed power on March 23, 1945, enlarged the mass of agricultural land owners, achieving a new land reform, whose main purpose was the disintegration of the large estates. This reform gave 1,057,674 hectares of agricultural land in the property of 796,129 peasant families. At that moment, the peasants were classified in to five categories: peasants with no land in property, poor peasants, middle peasants, wealthy peasants (also labeled as *chiaburi*) and estate owners (Gheorghiu-Dej, 1953)

By the 1948 Constitution, several concepts have been introduced into the mental of the Romanian society, whose purpose was to generate a different social context for the expression of the standard of living of the population. Work had become the “basic factor of the economic life”, being a “duty of every citizen”. The State assumed thus the duty of improving the standard of life of the population.

¹ *** *Economia României după al Doilea Război Mondial 1945-1965*

By the October 1947-11 June 1948 nationalization and by the subsequent nationalizations (continuing until 1953), the movement and functions of the private property were narrowed significantly, aiming thus to decrease the social and economic inequalities existing before 1947.

In March 1949, the government nationalized the agricultural land larger than 50 ha, including the machinery and tools of the agricultural exploitations given in private property by the Land Reform of 1945, taking the first steps towards the collectivisation of agriculture. Gradually, the monopoly on the largest part of the economic patrimony and on its mechanism of functioning has been introduced, with both positive and negative consequences for the economy and population.

The public property ultimately succeeded to remove the free market and the private economic initiative, everything being now dominated by the public sector developed based on centralized and planned economy and market. The main sources of benefits and accumulation have been monopolized, the state becoming the main administrator of the national wealth, which it oriented towards the general development and industrialization. The population active in the nationalized domains, became employed in urban, and employed or cooperatist in the rural, being thus integrated within a structure that was fully dependent on the state, on finding a job and on the discretionary repartition of the welfare by the representatives of the state power.

For many years, using the system of quotas (established for the payment of the war debts), the peasants were compelled to deliver to the state a consistent part of the agricultural production of their households, the amount of which varied with the region. Many times, the peasants remained only with the wheat for the next year seeding, sometimes even with less. The system of quota ruined many large rural agricultural households and impoverished the Romanian villages.

The years 1949-1950 were the resumption, with great difficulties, of the activities from industry and agriculture, given the great losses of economic and human resources and of production capacities, endured during the war. In industry, the production of 1949 was just 85% of 1938, with great decreases in the food industry (-38%) and in the oil industry (-25%), etc. (Constantinescu, 2000, p. 140).

The accelerated industrialization of the economy started after 1950, aiming to take out the country from the state of underdevelopment. To support it, additional labour force was needed, taken from the rural areas, much more than in the inter-bellum period. The newcomers to towns needed lodging, which is why the towns turned, almost overnight, into vast construction sites. The dwellings were assigned discretionary by the people in power, preferably to the party activists, security forces and the obedient workers that integrated and were collaborating with the declared intentions of the regime. Thus, in some two decades, real forests of blocks emerged in towns, and countless worker districts.

By the 1952 Constitution, the Popular Republic of Romania was declared a state of the working people from towns and villages, implicitly declaring thus the hostility of the communist regime towards the people aiming to live without working. It acknowledges thus the existence of three types of economic and social formations: the socialist one,

the small production of goods (cooperatives) and the private one. In 1956, echoing to the worry of the communist leadership toward the potential social effects of the Hungarian revolution, the Bucharest regime eased slightly the nationalisation measures. The wages of workers increased, the compulsory quotas for the peasants have been abolished, the wages of teachers and the school grants increased.

Influences of the centralization of agriculture on poverty.

In 1959, the process of collectivization of the agriculture officially started. The agrarian reforms of 1921 and 1945, despite their limits, allowed, nevertheless, the establishment of a consistent social stratum of small landowners. Hence, land confiscation by the communists (which had started in 1949) was not without incidents determined by the opposition of the landowners. Collectivization was done by imposing the state power until 1962. About 80,000 peasants were arrested because they did not agree to enter the agricultural cooperatives. The process of collectivization that run, with syncope, during 1949-1962, consisted in the confiscation of most agricultural properties in the country and their merging into agricultural farms (CAP) administered by the state. The government often used violent methods of persuasion, imprisonment and confiscation of the entire wealth of the opponents. Some areas that escaped cooperativization remained only in the mountain areas. The cooperativisation of agriculture in Romania was quasi-total, according to the Stalinist pattern, being averted only in the mountain areas. The Romanian peasants could keep only their dwelling, and had to work for the CAP, for a pay much lower than in industry or services, that could not even cover the subsistence level.

A collectivization such as that from Romania, which brought the peasants into a state of extreme poverty, had been done only in Albania. Other Central and East-European states gave up such idea of collectivisation, granting the peasants higher land ownership rights (in Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary). Other states, such as the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, although assumed the idea of collectivisation, offered the peasants more reasonable payments, like those in industry, which prevented the decay of the rural households. The Romanian cooperatist system, thus formed, would soon enter crisis, and its effects were felt by the dramatic decrease of the standard of living of the peasants. In the 80s, the animals from the peasant households, reared on about 15% of the total agricultural area that remained outside the cooperatives, accounted for some 50% of the total livestock. Nevertheless, the food crisis of the 80s made even the collectivised peasants to endure hunger. Therefore, although the Romanian village experienced a long period of turmoil due to the centralization of the agriculture, the standard of living of the peasant household, did not exceed too much its medieval condition.

On the background of the more or less open opposition of the peasants (many times the peasants were sabotaging the work in cooperatives, lacking the consciousness of making an immoral or illegitimate act when they were destroying or stealing from the common wealth), a process of agricultural modernization was initiated, nevertheless. Agricultural farms, animal production farms rearing pigs, poultry and cattle were established. Irrigation systems were constructed, the cooperatives received tractors and agricultural machinery from the domestic production. The 1965 Constitution declared

Romania a Socialist Republic. The capitalist enterprises had vanished from the social and economic landscape, while in the rural, the peasants had been turned into a rather obedient social class.

Period 1973-1979

Quasi-general employment

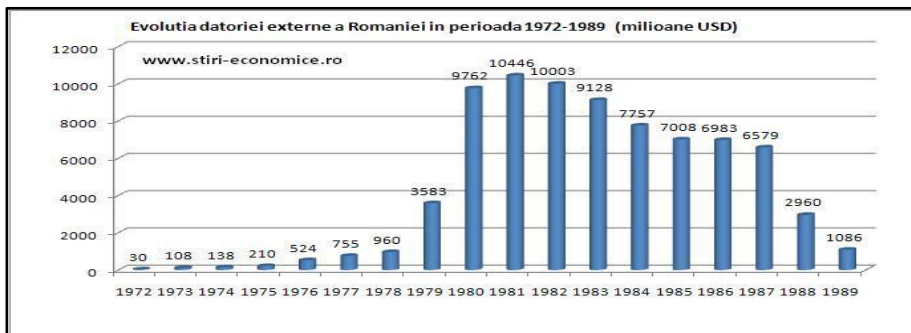
The process of socialist transition was neither short, nor simple. The regime holding the power proved to be tenacious in accomplishing its objectives. Many other measures with broad social impact were introduced, among which free education, free public health care services, electrification of the urban and rural localities, building new districts in towns, development of public transportation networks, etc. New programs of development have been initiated after 1950, with increasingly substantial investments in industry. All these generated new jobs. After the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965, the Romanian socialism entered the era of Ceausescu, and Romania started a process of leaving behind the economic subordination and the ideological domination of the USSR.

The development of a basal level of the public education and health care services, reduced drastically the general mortality from an average of 19.5‰ in 1930-39, to an average of 9.5‰ in the decade 1967-76, and of infant mortality, from 59.5‰ in 1968 to 31.1‰ in 1976 (Trebeci, 1979, p. 128, p. 465-467).

After 1972, Romania took several foreign loans to develop its economy, thus becoming a country producing tractors, chemical products, locomotives, household appliances, electronic devices, etc.

The industrial production multiplied 31 times, the real per capita income – de 4.5 times, and the retail sales – 15 times (Pasti, 2006, p.85). Although such statistical evaluations were not made at that time, one may infer that, at least the provision of a subsistence living, in the 60s-70s, was no longer a problem for the people having their dwelling and working for the state, in cooperation or even as self-employed.

Chart 1. *The evolution of Romania's foreign debt in the period 1972-1989 (million USD)*



Source: *** *Economia României după al Doilea Război Mondial 1945-1965*

Of course, poverty as social phenomenon did not completely vanish along three decades of socialism, but on the background of the quasi-general legal duty to be employed, the phenomenon became rather seldom, and somehow shadowed there, where it persisted. Poverty continued to affect, though, many of the former poor, who did not manage to exceed their own condition, on the background of unfavourable socio-economic factors, such as the inertia of illiteracy, peripheral or rural residence, poor health state, old age, lack of a minimal capital of relations (relatives, friends, acquaintances, etc.), being a Roma etc.

However, a new category of poor people appeared which was usually out of the spotlight and, on the contrary, was trying to stay out of the attention of the security and repression organs of the regime – the representatives of the old regime elite, people whose properties and goods have been confiscated, the people with “improper file” – former landowners, bourgeois, former legionaries or other categories of potential opponents of the regime, representatives of the clergy, or simple intellectuals who refused to collaborate with the communist regime, etc. All these people had no success (or where even obstructed, in various forms, due to their improper personal file) in their attempts to integrate within the general trend of promoting the so-called “*new values of the socialism*”, and to get a job.

The absolute priority given by the communist regime to industrialization, caused the agriculture to be used intensively to that purpose. Hence, the Romanian rural, what was left after the depopulation of villages by drawing the people to towns, maintained continuously a clump of social problems, many of which also existed during the interbellum period: poverty at the level of subsistence, deficit of education, deficit of access to services, deficit of community development.

Level of wages and attempt to reduce poverty

In the interval 1950- October 2015, according to INS data, the average net national wage increased from 371 lei to 1871 lei.¹ Two monetary reforms were performed during that interval – in 1952, and in 2005. Between 1950-1970 the inflation rate was 8.3%, although in 1950-1960 it was 16.5% (Ciumara, Ciutacu, 2004). Therefore, in 1969-1979 – a period when the average net wage of the employees increased throughout the national economy – the national economy experienced a deflationist process, which actually meant a general increase of the purchasing power of the employees in Romania, therefore, a trend of sustained decrease of the social incidence of poverty.

In the interval 1960-1989, the largest categories of employees migrated gradually from poorer salaries (80.3% of the employees were paid less than 1000 lei in March 1960) towards better wages (68.1% of the employees were paid 2501 to over 4000 lei in September 1989) (Table 1). The data show, however, that this trend was lower after 1980, because of the increase of the consumer price index by 38.4% in 1985, and by

¹ *** *Cu cât au crescut salariile de la Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej la Klaus Iohannis, 12 ianuarie 2016*

48.1% in 1989, compared to 1970. Thus, the purchasing power decreased by 32.5% in 1970-1989.¹

Table 1. Alleviation of employee poverty. Distribution of the employees by groups of net wages, consumer price index and evolution of the purchasing power – interval 1960-1989 (%)

	March 1960	March 1965	June 1970	March 1974	March 1980	March 1985	Sept.1989
Total number of employees	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Up to 1000	80,3	83,8	24,4	48,9	-		
1001-1300	13,8		38,1		3,8		
1301-1500	3,3	8,0	14,1	17,7	8,2	3,8	
1501-1700	1,3	3,6	8,8	11,3	13,1	4,5	
1701-2000	0,8	2,5	7,3	10,1	23,5	12,1	6,8
2001-2500	0,5	1,6	5,4	7,7	28,8	30,8	25,1
2501-3000		0,5	1,7	4,3	12,1	22,3	25,7
3001-3500			0,7		5,4	13,6	19,4
3501-4000			0,3		2,6	6,7	11,5
Over 4000			0,2		2,5	6,2	11,5
Consumer price index	Index of the year%		100%	102,6 (in 1975)	109,4	138,4	148,1
	Increase from one period to another%		100	102,6(in 1975)	106,9	126,5	107,0
Purchasing power	Index of the year %		100%	97,4(in 1975)	91,4	72,2	67,5
	Cumulated decrease%			-2,6(in 1975)	-8,6	-27,8	-32,5
Trend of employee poverty	Decreasing employee poverty		Decreasing employee poverty	The trend is changing	Decreasing employee welfare	Strong decrease of employee welfare	Decreasing employee welfare

*Source: data centralised and interpreted by Mariana Stanciu; data from the Statistic Yearbook of RSR 1985, DCS, RSR, p.68, Statistic Yearbook of RSR 1990, CNS, Romania, p.124; *** International Financial Statistics, Yearbook, 1997, p.700-701*

Table 1. shows the trend of decreasing employee poverty up to 1974, which changed direction in March 1974 and remained so until 1989. The strongest erosion of employee welfare was in 1985. A large disproportion appeared, after 1975, between the volume of goods and the affordable demand of the population, which led to a surplus of monetary mass in circulation by the increase of the inflation rate.

¹ *** *International...*, 1997

Period 1980-1989

Precarious access to consume goods and services.

Disappearance of the market

The beginning of paying back the foreign debt of Romania marked the massive sacrificing of population access to several consumer goods (meat products, dairy products, furniture, footwear, electric power, fuels, etc.) and services. Therefore, several myths circulated, during the socialist period, both within the collective consciences, and among the theoreticians. One of that of market disappearance. However, the market of consumer goods and services did not disappear; it functioned during the first 2-3 decades within the limits allowed by the communist regime (outstandingly well until 1970-75), after which it went underground and acquired the characteristics of an arena. Another myth was the disappearance of the wealthy. Nonetheless, the wealthy did not disappear, only the former rich people (from the interbellum period) remained behind the public attention. New ones appeared, probably, less rich, but properly dissimulated; good evidence for this are the people who turned rich overnight after December 1989. Of course, unlike the interbellum period, in socialism, there was a process of flattening the economic and social differences, but this was just for the majority of population which, one way or another, lived from working. There was simultaneously, however, a phenomenon of disguised welfare polarization, whose dimensions became obvious immediately after 1989. The two poles were, on the one hand, the broad mass of employees in industry, agriculture and services and, on the other hand, the people favoured by the communist regime (leadership, security employees, party activists, etc.). They not only had much higher incomes, but also preferential access to consumer goods and services – resorts, special shops with limited access, pubs with exclusivist regime, etc.

The polarization of welfare during the socialist era was achieved not only regulated levels of the income, but also by the preferential facilitation, of the favourites, to the access to consumer goods and services. The rest of population, most of it, had to survive on the black market of consumer goods and services. During the last decade of socialism, the Romanian society was confronted with the phenomenon of the black market for consumer goods and services, at a level comparable, maybe, with the war times. This actually was a field of tough competition between the potential consumers “with connections” and those “without connections”. Ultimately, that competition was between the “consumers with much money who could pay the demanded price” and those who had to consume what they could buy with tickets. Nobody considered the potential consumers with less money and who could not venture on the risky land of the black market.

The black market of consumer goods and services peaked towards the end of the period, when only the empty shelves remained from the socialist market. The measures to limit consumption, taken by the regime, also affected other aspects of life, such as the purchase of fuel and the right to use the private cars on Sundays. Particularly adverse effects were produced by the cut of the power supply – completely aberrant under the conditions in which the industry accounted for 72-74% of the national

consumption, the rest being consumed by the population (Antal, 1992, p 367). Therefore, during that period there was a massive phenomenon of pauperization of the population without access to the consumption opportunities of the people in power and of their privileged ones, via the black market. Specific foods, but not only (especially the ones imported officially or underground) became exchange coin for the acquisition of other goods and services. For instance, the payment of the “free” health care services was done with imported goods (coffee, cigarettes, chocolate, etc.). Such practices contributed massively to the pauperization of the people who, not having alternatives to meet their consumption requirements, had to spend all their incomes in this way, to acquire staples or the access specific services.

The 80s were the most difficult for most of the Romanian population. The chronic hunger endured by the majority of the population results from the average consumption per capita of basic items, from the cold homes and from the daily cut of electricity, such sufferance were imposed systematically to the population for over a decade – transforming the regime of Ceausescu into a profoundly detested regime by the affected population. At the same time, the representatives of the power were living in conditions of absurd luxury even compared to a reasonable notion of luxury, ignoring and despising most of the population.

In 1982, the communist authorities approved the well-known program of “scientific feeding” of the population, which recommended a specific ration of the height and weight of a person. The old people remembered that in the 50s, after the war, the staples were procured with tickets, in minimal amounts. This state of things improved, somehow, in the 60s and early 70s. By early 80s, the price of food and household appliances and services started to increase, and the food shortage was increasingly frequent. The former food tickets were used again, which spoke of the failure of the socialist regime. Food consumption was limited, and the free circulation of the products was hindered by the authorities. Each country had to deliver to the centralised state fund, at fixed prices, the so-called, surplus of food. The tickets for sugar and oil discriminated the population: higher amounts for the urban and lower amounts for the rural. The bread is sold in limited amounts. To discourage the tendency of depositing specific products, a decree from October 1981 was punishing with imprisonment from 6 months to 5 years “the purchase from state or cooperative shops, with the purpose of stockpiling, amounts exceeding the monthly requirements of a family” products such as the flour, sugar, oil, rice flour and rice. In 1982, the “specialists” determined that the Romanian people had excessive consumptions – 3,300 calories per day and reduced the ration of calories to 2700 – 2800 units.

Thus, in 1982, the annual consumption of foods per person was regulated to the following amounts: meat and meat products: 60 – 70 kg; fish and fish products: 8 – 10 kg; milk and dairy (without butter): 210 -230 litres; eggs: 260 – 280 pcs; fats (butter, margarine, oil, lard): 16 – 18 kg; vegetables and vegetable products: 170 – 180 kg; grain leguminous: 3 – 4 kg; fruits and fruit products: 65 – 95 kg; sugar and sugar products: 22 – 26 kg; potatoes: 70 – 90 kg; cereal grain products (flour, corn flour, rice): 120 – 140 kg. This did not mean that such amounts were available on the market. This „offer” was considered too generous, even though it existed only in theory, which is why it was drastically reduced in 1984: meat – 39.12 kg; milk and dairy – 78.73 kg; vegetables –

66.08 kg etc. Of course, when these products were available, the people had to stay in lines for hours, always frightened that “they might not but this time either”. In the rural, in exchange for the right to ratios, the peasants were forced to sell eggs and milk to the cooperative, at the price set by the state. If they wanted to slaughter a pig, they had to give another to the state (Mihai, 2016).

Table 2. Average yearly consumption/capita of basal products, Romania 1970-1989

Products	1970	1980	1985	1988	1989
Meat and meat products (equivalent fresh meat) (kg)	31,2	62,0	55,1	52, 4	50,2
Fat (total) (kg)	14,1	17,8	17,6	16,6	16, 7
Milk and dairy (no butter) (litres)	110,7	162,9	170,6	149,8	135,9
Eggs (pcs.)	142	232	254	260	229
Sugar and sugar products, in equivalent sugar (kg)	19,3	28,2	6,3	25,0	24,7
Cereal grains products (equivalent flour) (kg)	196,0	172,7	143,0	152,9	157,3
Potatoes (kg)	62,3	70,6	78, 4	58, 3	71,7
Vegetables and vegetable products, equivalent vegetables (kg)	86,7	121,4	169,8	138,9	135,6
Fruits and fruit products (in equivalent fruits) (kg)	34,6	45,8	71,0	52,9	53,9
Textiles (garments included) (m2)	19,3	28,6	28,1	28,3	27,9
Footwear (pairs)	2,62	3,50	3,75	3,58	3,62

Source: *** *Statistic Yearbook of Romania, 1990, CNS*

A consequence of this program, in 1989, was that, the production of basic foods decreased strongly compared to 1985 and even 1989. The meat exports exceeded much the meat imports, reaching 203,000 de tons in 1980, 211,100 tons in 1985, 237,300 tons in 1986, 187,900 tons in 1987, 153,520 tons in 1988 and 93,700 tons in 1989. From 1980 to 1989 the annual meat consumption of the Romanian population decreased by more than 200,000 tons, the priority given to exports being, next to the decreasing production of meat, a major factor for the decreasing standard of living.

Table 3. Production of basic foods in Romania, in 1989

	MU	Production in 1989	% of	
			1988	1985
Meat from slaughtered animals	Thousands tons	685,8	84,7	69,5
Fish	Thousands tons	216,0	81,6	83,0
Consumer milk	Thousands hl	5.687	101,7	98,6
Edible oil	Thousands tons	247,7	76,2	75,4
Meat preparations	Thousands tons	275,6	97,6	98,8
Butter	Thousands tons	45,6	115,4	97,0
Cheese	Thousands tons	81,6	112,4	93,4

Source: *Constantinescu, 2000, p. 257*

On the other hand, although the leadership of the country claimed, in every possible way, that during the socialist period the income of the employees increased (and they did so, in nominal value) the purchasing power of the employees decreased substantially and continuously.

The list of deprivations endured by the population during the final years of the socialist age should be completed with other chapters of consumption, such as the serious deterioration of the public transportation services. This was so, because the production of buses for the public transportation decreased continuously, after 1980, from 3,702 items, to 1,404 in 1989, that of trolleybuses, from 350 to 164 items, and that of vans, from 4,469 to 1,906, while the production of trucks and hauling machines, from 31,711 to 13.515.219. The consequence was the decrease of the stock of vehicles for public transportation, both urban and interurban, the drastic reduction of the offer of services. Meanwhile, the total population of the towns increased from 10.3 million inhabitants in 1980, to more than 11.3 million in 1989, and the total length of the public transportation routes decreased from 18,168 km in 1980 to 16,647 km in 1985, and the stock of vehicles, from 15,434 to 11,526, the strongest decreases being in the stock of busses. Severe reductions also existed in the interurban public transportation, both in terms of the stock of vehicles, and in the total length of the transportation routes, average daily travelled distance and number of passengers (Constantinescu, 2000, p. 225, apud Murgescu, 2010). Very serious problems also appeared due to the chronic and severe underfinancing of the public health services, of the educational and cultural services, by the reduction and total ideologization of the public TV station.

Much of the rural population has been dislocated from their own households, being relocated unwillingly in blocks of flats (most of them deprived of a minimal access to utilities), in order to obtain more agricultural land. Thus, several rural localities decreased overnight, becoming semi-urban settlements, lacking, however, the facilities and advantages of a life in the urban (common transportation, sewage, tap water, etc.). The peasants have been forced out of their homes and moved to blocks, the villages destroyed and their houses, even new, were flattened. Thus, some 6,000 rural settlements disappeared from the map of Romania.¹ Together with those households, much of the souls of the unrooted people must have certainly be shattered, their identity of peasants, their capacity of generation and regeneration of the values that they nurtured for decades in their mind and heart. The urban areas were also affected of overnight demolition and transformations. Until 1989, about 25% of the buildings from Bucharest were demolished to make space for projects of the Ceausescu family. Thus, hundreds of culture and art places and eight churches, plus other monuments were moved from the foreground to the background, hidden from sight.

By far, Romania of the 1980-'89 became in the public consciousness, the country with the least liberties and the lowest standard of living in Europe, not after Bulgaria, as nowadays, but after Albania. The Romanians were longing after Bulgarian, Russian and Hungarian goods, for any foreign good. Anything foreign was better than the rare thing that could be purchased from Romania. The Romanians were humiliated in any way

¹ *** Generația revoluției. Uniformizarea României, planul faraonic, 2013

possible by a political regime completely lacking horizon, extremely primitive and aggressive.

Therefore, the discourse about poverty during the socialist period is somehow off the typical patterns for the discourse on poverty. Poverty was almost omnipresent, diffuse, felt at personal level. It was not only the frustration of life in poverty, or on the brink of economic poverty; it was a mountain of humiliation that shadowed any domain of life. The Romanians were humiliated both at home and abroad, when they were managing to escape to the free world. They were seen there, as having escaped from prison, sometimes with suspicion, other times with mercy, by the citizens of the free world. But even more serious than this humility lived at any moment – on the street, at the desk of public institutions, in shops, in own home (the poor people had, in the best case, crammed apartments, where you could hear the neighbour coughing or flushing the toilet water), in the bus (or over hanged), within the family or household, was the fact that all these had become a sort of dangerous normality. The people had become almost immune to humility, became used to a bad living standard, particularly those born during the communist regime. Communism seemed everlasting, nobody believed in a change.

Conclusions

In the four and a half decades of socialism, the employment of the population in agriculture, 80% in 1918, decreased to about 50% of the population occupied in agriculture and services, the rest being employed in industry. Certainly, such massive social mutations, influenced the social and economic status of all the categories of population. In 1989, Romania produced 25 times more electric power per capita – 3,276 kWh, compared to 130 kWh in 1950; 18 times more steel - 623 kg per capita, compared to 34 kg in 1950; 2.5 times more cereal grains – 794 kg per capita, compared to 316 kg per capita, in 1950; the number of dwellings was substantially higher, and infant mortality had decreased 4.3 times – from 116.7 children ‰ inhabitants. However, the relative position of Romania, within the European context, at the end of the communist period, put it on one of the bottom ranks, behind not just the developed capitalist states, but also behind most of the former Central and South-Eastern Europe socialist countries.

Table 4. GDP/capita - Post-war Romania within the European context (GDP/capita, PPP, USD Geary-Khamis 1990)

Year	Romania	Average of 7 East European countries	Average of 36 European countries	Romania in relation with the European average
1938	1,242	1,764	3,226	0,38
1950	1,182	2,111	3,655	0,32
1960	1,844	3,070	5,316	0,35
1970	2,853	4,315	7,697	0,37
1980	4,135	5,786	9,643	0,43
1989	3,941	5,915	11,113	0,35

Source: Maddison, 2003, p. 44-45, 56-57, 68-69, 96-101, from Murgescu, 2010, p. 331

The lags, in absolute values, between Romania and the European countries increased throughout the post-war period, despite the forced industrialization and the regime of austerity imposed by the communist leadership. In relative terms, Romania maintained throughout that period its rank below half of the European average, and below the average of the other East European countries.

Romania suffered more than other European states the effects of World War Two, particularly the effects of the Soviet occupation. It experienced thereafter some three decades of economic growth above the European average, followed by a last catastrophic decade of communism from the economic point of view (Murgescu, 2010, p. 332). Despite the communist rhetoric and the appearances, Romania – most of its population – was poorer and more kept under repression during the socialist period than the population of other socialist countries. During the socialist age, many of the deficiencies of the interbellum age were eliminated or alleviated – such as illiteracy, the lack of jobs, the lack of education, the lack of access to health care, etc.

Table 5. Economic level of Romania within the European context (1989)

Country	Added value – processing industry USD/capita)	Cereal grains output (kg/ha)	Average daily intake of calories (kcal)	Average daily intake of animal protein (gr)	Cars /1000 inhabitants
Albania	258	2.914	3.049	20,2	
Austria	3.793	5.407	3.496	64,8	366
Bulgaria		3.991	3.683	52,2	137
Czechoslovakia		4.951	3.609	63,3	138
Denmark	3.935	5.646	3.622	66,2	309
Switzerland	6.736	4.541	3.565	63,8	424
FRG	6.690	5.715	3.464	63,8	420
Greece	923	3.306	3.793	57,3	143
Ireland	3.537	6.169	3.779	66,9	208
Italy	2.297	3.816	3.508	57,3	303
Poland	836	3.136	3.464	56,1	119
Portugal	839	1.659	3.414	49,9	202
UK	4.048	5.792	3.181	53,9	349
Spain	1.857	2.669	3.567	59,1	276
Hungary		4.772	3.668	55,5	169
USSR		1.925	3.380	56,1	45
European average	2.642	2.807	3.423	58,0	197
Romania	778	3.109	3.252	38,3	50
Ranking of Romania	22/24	19/24	19/24	22(23)/24	23/24

Sources: Grigorescu, 1993, p. 64, 71-72, 175, 176, 187

But the political regime in power generated different types of realities regarding the complexity of the poverty phenomenon, which usually affected the ordinary people (less favoured by the system). Those realities were maybe even more serious than the poverty before the war (by their long-term consequences on the general mentality and on the development of the social resources after 1989) – fear or losing liberty due to the resistance against the forced political indoctrination, fear of the criminal repression in the communist prisons, humiliation of being Romanian among other Europeans, humiliation of the sensation of chronic hunger, humiliation of buying the daily necessities by making compromise, by spending long hours in line, extra charge, traffic of influence, by favouring the speculators and discretionary agents of the administrative services, the feeling of total loss on own life by the aggressive pronatalist policies, feelings of deep collective dehumanization in the hospital homes or from the social work institutions – some brought in light only after 1989, etc. These and many other are, maybe, harder to understand and believe by the generations after 1990. But this doesn't make them less true. For those who lived such realities, poverty was not a mere economic fact easy to put up with, or easy to go past.

Year 1989 was the end of an era and the prelude of a social explosion. Egalitarian rhetoric from the socialism and awareness of the social problem of poverty. The egalitarian rhetoric of the communist regime – rather persuasive for over four decades – certainly had a decisive role in formatting the collective conscious and subconscious. This made many people believe that although there was poverty in socialism, particularly in the 50s-60s, life entered, however, its normal path after 1975-80. Indeed, there have been several years of hope. The society seemed to rebirth, illiteracy was lower, the high rate of construction of dwellings generated credibility and hope towards the regime, it was rather easy to find a job, and the young generations (those born in families with no “problems of social origin”) looked confident towards the future. In towns, most of the population able to work was employed in industry or in services administered by the state. The rural population, although still facing serious economic difficulties, and was dissatisfied, was reconciled, somehow, defeated, if not convinced by the tenacity of the system. The communist regime had succeeded to reduce the private property in almost all spheres of the social life, making most of the population dependent on the system, through their jobs, all their life being organised around the job (phenomenon exacerbated after 1980). The place of work was the basic point of distribution of the economic resources, which allowed access, if needed, to training courses, dwelling, health services and other services – all these and many other being conditioned by having a job. This was also the way to get some benefits (treatment tickets in resorts) and not few times – through the administrative system or repartition – even some consumer goods (food, clothing, household appliances, etc.).

The place of work was also the main centre of recruiting and communist indoctrination of the masses, although this was done starting from the preschool level of the educational system. At least in the urban, Romania had become an almost compact nation of employees, even in the rural being jobs for the people with various skills and trainings. But the gradual destruction, by the communist regime, of any elements of economic autonomy of the population households, initially by limiting the area of the private property, then by the complete dependence on the work of the able ones, led

towards a situation of extreme social vulnerability of most of the population. This risk materialized in December 1989, when the situation of any state employee had become endangered overnight, because of the so-called necessity of reforming the Romanian economy, which disturbed so much many interests of expansion of the western prosperity.

The social categories most affected by poverty in socialism could be: the rural population deprived of land, which could guarantee their survival – such rural families were living from what they received from the CAP; the urban population with low incomes, which had difficulties in accessing the black market of goods and services (whose prices were regulated by the – very high – demand and the – very low – offer), most of the people reprimanded politically and their families (provided they had not been eliminated physically, or didn't leave the country, they continued to subsist economically, nobody knows how), the population affected by the masked unemployment (increasing sacking, particularly after 1985), some people with disabilities, much of the Roma population, etc.

As in the interbellum period, but at a larger scale, in the years of socialism, much of the rural poverty – the extreme poverty or the severe/absolute poverty – which could not be solved by remaining in the rural, migrated towards the urban. Part of this population managed, maybe, to enrol in the educational system, some of them becoming career militaries, firefighters, security people or militia men, other engineers, or party activists, obtaining thus better paid jobs. Most of them, however, didn't succeed, or succeeded more modestly to integrate within the urban life, working for minimal or medium wages, getting qualified on the job, or getting employed as clerks in various services. Anyhow, getting more than they had before in the rural, they had a life at the limit of survival or economic precariousness.

Thus, after 1989, together with the change of the political regime and massive reorganisation of the state enterprises, the former dependence on a job at the state unexpectedly showed its risk potential. Many categories of employees were sacked in great numbers, and the people had to learn how to live by themselves, in an environment that had suddenly turned, theoretically, into the “free world”. They no longer depended on the system which, not everybody, but many were detesting, although they resisted heroically in it for decades. But how they had no source of income, even precarious. The promised social protection of the transition period, it contributed, paradoxically, to making Romania the poorest country of the European Union, for several decades.

After 1945, much of the rural population migrated towards the urban, so that the proportion of the urban population increased from 37 million, in 1948, to 12 million, in 1989. This was some 20-25% of the total population – most probably the poor people who didn't find a viable solution of living in the rural, came to the urban, adding to the already existing poverty. Of course, over more than four decades, the movement of the population and the demographic dynamics were sufficiently fluid to complicate the evolution of poverty in socialism. After 1990, the population of Romania still had the highest rate of poor people in the European space. Therefore, from this comparative perspective, we are discussing about a situation that is slightly similar with that from the

interbellum period. Although, according to some social analysts, the socialist period pulled up Romania in matter of economic development, it didn't eliminate the gap of development to the West. Thus, Romania had to solve, in the early 90s, not just a simple problem of economic growth, but a serious chronic state of structural underdevelopment.

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