

# DRUG CONSUMPTION AND THE EFFICACY OF THE PUBLIC POLICIES

Drd. jurist Adrian Marcel IANCU\*

*Abstract: The connection between drug consumption, as social phenomenon with important consequences on the community and the public policies which address this phenomenon is reflected in the legislation which must be adapted and modified so that the drug addicts are not excluded socially may have equal access to the social services, to education and job opportunities. Although the public opinion often expressed its support for the hard repression, of drug addicts' isolation, most of the specialists consider that the social reaction towards this category of people is fuelled by repressive conceptions totally disproportional in relation with the manifested social danger. The social stigma is reflected equally in the policies which treat these people as irrecoverable offenders; in any penal legislative system there is a need for balance between punishment and treatment, control and care, shame and rehabilitation, the main purpose of a penal code being the social control. The success or failure of the penal policy is due to the "socialisation" of the offender rather than to its "moralization". This new manner of sanctioning and social reintegration of the delinquents, represented mainly by the European models of probation and by the alternatives to imprisonment for the drug addict delinquents, achieves a real transfer not just of the possibility of action, but also of the responsibility towards the civil society which thus becomes the main actor in ensuring its security.*

*Keywords: penal policy, drug addiction, bodies, crime, treatment, probation.*

Drug consumption is one of the most dramatic social problems confronting the contemporary societies. Considered by most manuals of criminology and sociology of deviancy as a "crime without victims", which brings no prejudice to the society, in its whole, rather to the addicted individuals, drug consumption is an acute social

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\* He is PhD student in public order and national security – Police Academy "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", Bucharest. He is working with National Agency against Drugs, Ministry of Administration and Interior, email: ady\_iancu62@yahoo.com.

problem which affects the health of a nation, increasing the costs with social and medical assistance and contributing to the amplification of other social problems.

Drug consumption is therefore a great social problem which has, on the long-term, economic, legal, criminological and medical consequences. Medico-psychologically, drug consumption determines the dependency of the individual on the substances used to obtain disinhibiting effects on the central nervous system or to avoid the pain due to the withdrawal syndrome (stopping drug consumption).

Socially, drug consumption has adverse consequences on the productive and reproductive potential of the society members, as well as on their health state.

The distance between the individual sufferance cause by the drug addiction and the social environment of the drug addict increases in time and usually, the individual is deprived of all social support. It appears because of the losses he/she might be confronted with, such as the loss of a close family member, because of the poor school performance, of being excluded from the circle of friends, due to the loss of the job and due to the deterioration conditions of living. After drug addiction develops as a reaction to the sustained losses, the individual continues to lose as the social support of the parents or of the family members vanishes. All these major losses of social support prevent the individual from making an effort to give up addiction and, implicitly, social exclusion.

The individuals exposed to social exclusion, which can be considered a disadvantaged social group, can be classified in several sub-groups function of their origin (poor families living next to drug addicts or drug dealers, homeless people, immigrants, unemployed, children and adult people in conflict with the law, children who dropped out of school or who ran away from home, children whose parent are working abroad etc.). The activities for drug addiction prevention and social exclusion prevention targeting the drug addicts and their social rehabilitation and reintegration must hold a special place within the efforts of prevention and intervention.

Social exclusion, as well as the exclusion from the family and from the circle of friends, is a vicious circle of addiction for the addicted people. Irrespective whether it is an individual with problems, a homeless person or a street child, the society must recognise that each individual is an important person for the society and that it has the right to assistance and services for education, employment and social benefits, in order to go beyond/solve his/her problems. The public conscience must have a strong position on this issue.

It is important that the legislation is adapted so that the drug addicts are not socially excluded, have equal access to the social services, to education and to job opportunities.

## ***1. Society protection – the main objective of the correctional system***

The exponential increase, during the recent years, of the crime phenomenon, despite the sustained efforts of the state and civil society, is a real danger to the social development and affects the right of the citizens to live in security.

Worldwide, the official statistics show important increases of the crime rate, as well as increasing efforts to cope with it, both at the state level and particularly at the community level. Although the police structure continue to be essential in the control and prevention of crime, the citizens and communities should become increasingly visible in the complex field of social order and increasing the quality of life.

Punishment is nothing but a measure to reject violence, crime, so that the harmful action causing damage is followed by another action which reprimands that evil, and this is done by what we call punishment. Thus, there is an indissoluble relation between crime and punishment, the punishment being the main and immediate means to fight the crime. Because the penal law makes explicitly such a connection between crime and punishment, it means that we are in the presence of binding legal dispositions and, therefore, any time crimes are done, the punishment stipulated by the law must be applied. Thus, the punishment being linked to the crime, is the main and compulsory means of preventing and defence against crimes and criminals, reason why the punishment is not considered a mere “reaction” or a manner of “control” related to crime and criminals, manifested by the society.

Generally, the philosophy of the penal right didn't contest the right of the society, of the state, to punish the culprits, this right being denied by some thinkers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The research on the grounds of the right to punish yielded several conceptions which, in time, tried to answer one of the most important problems of the penal right science.

This road, taken by the concept of the right to punish, from the primitive form of punishment, which was the revenge, to the most advanced form of punishment applied in state institutions, based on the principles of legality, individuality etc., are the history of the notion. The character of the punishment or of the right to punish in each epoch reflected the physiognomy of that particular period. If the society, the state, has the right to punish the delinquent, the problem is to determine the philosophical-legal and moral grounds for this right.

## ***2. Case studies regarding the public policies for crime prevention and to ensure citizen safety***

The state, as emanation of the human society, in its quality of social-political organisation, has the duty “by its *consistency and authority* to achieve the maximum

of social order”<sup>1</sup>, „the supremacy of the *fundamental principle of order*” being found in all the harmony of the universal world order<sup>2</sup>.

The functioning of the democratic state of the right cannot be conceived without an adequate normative framework, but with the frequent disturbance of the public order and peace; the prevention of the internal risk factors is one of the sides of the public order system which differentiates a democratic state from a totalitarian state. In the democratic state, the prevention and control of the actions “disturbing” the public order must become a kind of political right of the responsible citizens, able to understand and commit themselves, by free will, to the protection of their fundamental values; in the totalitarian state, the domestic safety and the public order do not protect the interests of the bulk of population, rather those of a leading minority, which has no interest to get involved in defending societal objectives which are strange to it.

The state power has a social character, it manifests between people and is achieved in relation with the people, character which explains its establishment, content and functions. It appeared as a power of some social forces and it was used to consecrate and protect the interests of these social forces, including by coercion (even state coercion) against those who don't obey – defining element for the state power.

Hence, the state, as guarantor of the right and liberties of its citizens, must take all measures necessary to ensure their public peace and safety. These measures differ from one state to another and even according to the threats to which its citizens are exposed. It is unanimously accepted that drug traffic and consumption is a component of crime and a real danger to the citizen.

The states develop more or less efficient strategies to control or reduce the crime, but most time the efficiency of these policies is poor. The cases of these failures are varied, starting from the elaboration of policies which are not correlated with reality and ending with the lack of financial means needed to enforce these laws.

In general, the states are deficient in this matter because of the incoherent policies which don't rely on the everyday realities, on citizen requirements, which don't take into consideration all the existing variables.

At the opposite end, as example of good practice, we can speak of Canada.

Canada elaborated a national strategy for the prevention of crime (SNPC),<sup>1</sup> strategy which is part of the governmental plan of action to control the crime and ensure the safety of the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Lienhard, W. (1935), *Le rôle et la valeur de l'ordre public*, Paris.

<sup>2</sup> Idem.

Managed by a National Centre for the Prevention of Crime (CNPC),<sup>2</sup> from the department of population security, and by partners of the Canadian Public security, and administered in collaboration with the Canadian provinces and territories, SNPC is a strategic framework for the development of interventions for crime prevention in Canada.

CNPC is designated to transpose the strategy (SNCP) into practice and it has activities of leadership, at the national level, in matters of efficient practices for the prevention and reduction of crime, acting on the known risk factors. This structure supports the implementation of efficient crime prevention procedures both within the small communities, and at the national level.

It works in close collaboration with the partners and actors from the Canadian provinces and territories, to develop and implement programs focused on the specific problems of the crime. CNPC supplies instruments and support for the development of initiatives to prevent crime offences at the local level.

One of the directions of action of CNPC,<sup>3</sup> according to the relevant national strategy, is the prevention and reduction of the crime offences associated to the drugs at the level of the risk groups.

The correlation between the addiction on alcohol and other drugs and delinquency is well established, the role of the early consumption of alcohol or of other drugs for the delinquent behaviour substantiating the need for early prevention and intervention measures among the young people. To solve this problem, CNPC focused on projects relying on experiences related to the prevention and reduction of the crime offences among the people from groups exposed to risk, such as:

- *Children aged 7-12 who started to consume illicit substances and to display an antisocial behaviour.* Individualised and integrated interventions will be developed together with the schools and with the participation of the families, with the purpose to prevent the risks of abusive consumption and to reduce the associated antisocial behaviour;
- *Teenagers aged 13-17 who consume alcohol or other drugs and who are at risk of displaying delinquent behaviour.* CNPC, in partnership with the schools, the Canadian Republican Guard and the local police stations, as well as in partnership with the social services, acts to identify the young people exposed to the risk and to refer them to proper services, to develop and implement individualised and integrated interventions intended to alleviate their impulse to commit offences, to consume alcohol or other drugs.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.securitepublique.gc.ca/prg/cp/ncps-fra.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.securitepublique.gc.ca/prg/cp/index-fra.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.strategienationaleantidroque.gc.ca/fin-fund/sp-ps.html>.

- *Ex-delinquents, the young and adult drug addicts who are no longer the responsibility of the correctional services.* CNPC works together with its partners in order to develop and implement interventions aiming to reduce the risk of relapsing and to offer aid to the individuals from these groups of risk by measures of social reinsertion.
- *Indigenous people, drug addicts with problematic behaviour.* CNPC invites the autochthonous collectivities to conceive and apply interventions adapted to the cultural particularities, which to respond the particular needs of their indigenous people (both inside and outside the reservations) who have serious problems of consumption and behaviour.

Another example of public policies ensuring citizen safety is, at a much larger scale, the European Union which, by its treaties, aims to ensure the safety of its citizens, including by particularized means such as removal of the causes of danger for human health, drug consumption being one of them.

Thus, the Public Health Program (PHP) for period 2003-2007 aimed to complete the measures of protection and improvement of the public health taken by the member states. The program was structured around three components: *“information on health”, “swift reaction to the “threats to health” and “health promotion by approaching the “determining health factors”.*

Article 152 from CE Treaty<sup>1</sup> establishes the role of the Communities in the field of public health, stating that the community activities aim to *“improve the public health and to prevent human diseases and disturbances, and the causes of hazard to human health”.* These community actions must complete the measures taken at the national level and must observe the responsibilities of the member states for the organisation and supply of health care services and medical care.

The first Public Health Program was adopted for the period 2003-2008, by Decision no. 1786/2002/CE of the European Parliament and European Council,<sup>2</sup> replacing eight programs of action on narrower health care sectors.<sup>3</sup> PHP had three general objectives:

- (a) Improve the information and knowledge with the aim to develop the public health (“information on health” component)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://europa.eu/>.

<sup>2</sup> JO L 271, 9.10.2002, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> The programs of community action regarding: cancer; rare diseases; diseases due to pollution AIDS and other catching diseases; wounding prevention; prevent drug addiction; health state monitoring; health promotion; health information, education and formation in this field.

- (b) Improve the capacity of swift, coordinated reaction to the hazards to human health (“threats to health” component);
- (c) Health promotion and disease prevention by approaching the determining health factors in all the policies and activities (“determining health factors” component”).

Regarding the total community contribution (engagements in million euro, as percent of the total budget) and the total number of projects for each of the program components, we must say that the financing agreements of PHP are concluded with the project coordinators, who receive a co-financing of up to 60% (in exceptional situation up to 80%) for the costs generated by the project activities. Besides the subsidies for projects, a small part (about 3%) of PHP operational budget will be used for service contracts.

### 3. Conclusions

In conclusion, in terms of the national antidrug strategies, of the doctrine and of the interpretation of the laws and directives, we may observe that in several EU member states the public action against the consumption and/or possession of drugs for personal use seems to rely on:

- a) A stated will to give privilege to the treatment in front of the penal sanctions;
- b) A feeling of disproportion between the convictions to imprisonment and drug consumption;
- c) The perception according to which cannabis is less dangerous to human health than other drugs.

Drug consumption is a pest which spreads through borders and it has to be approached in a complementary manner both at the level of the prevention and control structures, and at the level of the treatment structures which provide services of care and rehabilitation to the drug addicts.

The connection between crime and drug consumption is biunivocal, the drug addicts entering in conflict with the normative system and vice versa.

The *social reaction* to this category of people is fuelled by repressive conceptions which are totally disproportional with the social danger manifested by these people. The public opinion has often pronounced in favour of the hard repression, to isolate these people, but this attitude is probably just the reflex of the false beliefs that these individuals can no longer be recovered socially and that there are no prospects for reintegration. The change of mentalities and attitudes depends, largely, on the force of underlying beliefs, which are function of the collected and accepted information and, of course, of the own actual experience, or prejudices. This is why, a correct

information of the public opinion and of the authorities about the real causes of this type of crime, as well as about the fact that most of these people are in no way different from other people, considered to be socially normal, might certainly transform the wrong behaviour orientations into a perception of the phenomenon which fits the truth and the good sense. For these reasons, making the public opinion aware to evaluate in a correct manner this phenomenon and its consequences, to value all human beings and to observe the inalienable human rights is of great importance.

If criminological, the assertion that there is no prevention without repression is fundamental for the entire problem of crime offences within a society; its enforcement to the delinquent drug addicts is not justified. The schemes describing and interpreting the process of passing to crime acts, in their case, on the one hand, and the general context of the criminality, on the other hand, are different.

The criminal path of the drug addict differs both as scope and as social mechanisms which can limit the probability to commit a crime offense. In the attempt to explain the process of getting to commit a delinquency, we need to highlight two important differences. The first one refers to the inequality of the social offers as elements preventing crime. The drug addicts are the least disputed category, at least in the media, within the entire efforts of the society to prevent social insecurity. The social alternatives (social protection services, special institutions for recovery etc.) either are improper to the context, or completely insufficient, while the low preoccupation of the authorities to decrease their number defies the seriousness of the phenomenon.

The second difference regards the segment which defines the criminal context: the drug addicts are not only exposed to criminal situations, but their life takes them exclusively to criminal areas which permanently stimulate the various motivations (organic, subjective, and objective) to commit offences sanctioned by the society.

Considering all these differences, the single social reaction to a crime committed by this category of persons is totally surprising and unjust: *repression*. Unfortunately, the general mentality is, as shown above, to exclude this category by isolating it, because in the eyes of the public opinion it appears socially unrecoverable. Although completely exaggerated, the absolute irrecoverableness of the drug addicts, which is increasingly mentioned, becomes the perfect justification of the repressive attitude towards them. The experience of the social workers is the only way to prove that we cannot speak of socially unintegrable drug addicts; the only correct and efficient response to this problem is the *development and diversification of the social mechanisms of prevention and protection*. *When a drug addict commits a criminal offence this means that his/her protection was absent or insufficient and it must not be the opportunity for a repressive reaction.*

The social stigma is equally reflected in the policies which treat these people as unrecoverable offenders. Because the commit delinquencies, being often involved in illegal activities, their life is not considered by the public opinion as a viable alternative to make a living and they are perceived as a continuous threat to the social order.

We must not forget that, in any penal legislative system, there must be a balance between crime and punishment, control and care, disgrace and rehabilitation, and the main purpose of a penal code is the social control. The success or failure of the penal policy depend rather on the “socialization” of the culprit than his/her “moralization”.

Within this context, the collective mentality (of the society) towards the victims and delinquents must be reformed in order to evaluate at their true value the efficient alternatives to the punishment by imprisonment, alternatives which allow preserving the self-respect, treat the causes of delinquency and, not least, allow the rehabilitation and social reintegration of the offenders. It all pertains to the reform in justice and to obtaining positive results of the juridical, of the social assistance interventions, in the police activity, in prison and during probation to the benefit of the society. The experience of the states proves not only the value of the new mentalities of humanising justice, but also the efficiency and pragmatism of justice administration in the community.

This syntagma – justice administration in the community – raised fierce discussion among the specialists, whether justice is the exclusive prerogative of the state, administered through its specialised institutions, or it can also be administered with the participation of the community. The discussions and the argument for and against are far from being finalised, but the practice proved that the participation of the community to justice administration makes it more efficient because, actually, community is the final beneficiary of it.

Globally, there are no data allowing to conclude that the sanction with imprisonment is more efficient than a “community” sanction. The “success” of the incarceration – as element of intimidation – for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of the offenders is irrelevant, the penitentiary regime being supported despite the very high rate of recidivism<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, we also need to consider the costs of detention in relation with the lower costs of probation or of community sanctions.

The European models of probation are the key to the individualised sentence as an important means to evaluate the culpability of an offender and as professional agency for the confrontation of the actual causes of the crime, which may lead to a

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<sup>1</sup> Jordan, W. (1987), *Invitation to Social Work*, Basil Blackwell, p. 128.

possible similar behaviour, if they are not identified, understood and solved.<sup>1</sup> Probation also has the role of minimizing the negative impact of the system of penal justice on the individual.

Therefore, crime prevention among the drug addicts becomes an imperative of this period for Romania. The main goals are the social order, the consolidation of the mechanisms of observance and enforcement of the laws, the formation and solidarization of the public to the preventive actions, risk monitoring and evaluation in time and space. *“Prevention is not only the work of a specialist; it requires efforts from everybody. Beyond the limited recommendations, it involves an appeal to the change of mentality... A society where communication is resumed, where the constraints remain lax, where man is constantly considered, will refuse violence. Refusing this defiance, a world will be born, not violence-free, but more peaceful”<sup>2</sup>.*

Within this context, a national crime prevention strategy must be developed, focused on social development, in which the public powers play the main part in the coordination of the programs at the national, county and local plan. The strategy must take in consideration the following aspects:

1. Delinquency prevention includes collective soft power actions on the causes of infractions, in order to decrease their probability or seriousness. Lately, two modalities are increasingly used worldwide: social prevention which, using education provided by individuals and in institutions prevents the evolution of the individuals towards inadaptation and antisociality. The second one, situational prevention, aims people and goods protection with police force and experts in the field, who decide efficient measures in the field, train the citizens, mount devices etc.
2. The feeling of personal security is the basic condition for the quality of life and it is most altered by criminality. Often, the tabloids play an important role in the perception of dangers by the citizens. The state coordinates the whole activity and ensures the situational prevention by norms of security, laws, regulations and other measures.
3. Only social prevention is efficient on the long-term, because it acts on the individuals who are not adapted to the social contexts in which they live: family, school, group of friends, neighbourhood, and locality. The preventive actions have two purposes: on the one hand towards the factors which anticipate an inadequate development of the person and his/her family and, on the other hand, towards the community where they live; the higher is the social vulnerability of

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<sup>1</sup> Giles, Graham W. (2001), *Justice administration in society, international standards and regulations*, Bucharest, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Response to violence* (1977), tome 1, Presses Pocket, Paris, p. 222.

the people, the higher is the risk of appearance and persistence of the antisocial behaviours. When you are convinced that you have no value or future, the moral behaviour is a worthless luxury.

Under these circumstances, the collective security became a good of every community, a fundamental right, an aspect of the quality of life of the highest importance, and crime prevention must be seen as a permanent concern of the local communities, indispensable to good governance. It involves a correct diagnosis of the state of security, the analysis of the profound causes of criminality and victimization, the development of the local plans of action, the mobilization of partners for intervention and, finally, project evaluation. This leads to a real agenda with concrete activities whose purpose is safer places, thus simulating the civic spirit of the people who will be involved on the long term in community changes with direct influence on their lives.

Criminality is born in community, it acts within and against it and, implicitly, it must be controlled also at its level. The involvement of the community in the process of justice administration has as consequence, first of all, the access to the huge available resources, providing an active role in the accomplishment of own security and the improvement of the state-community relation, without affecting state authority.

The concept of justice administration in the community is a complex concept which integrates sociological, psychological and penological aspects and which aims a new way of ensuring the public order and citizen safety. The institutions enforcing the law are in the service of the community which they have to protect, while the community has to assist them, thus helping itself.

Justice administration in the community involves the fact that the sanctioning of an offender is not done by isolation from the community, by imprisonment, rather by maintaining him/her, when possible, within the community and auctioning through other levers. The offender is a member of the society and his/her correction with the highest efficiency can be done only within the community where he/she belongs.

In all situations, the mayor can play a central role in everything that concerns the collective security and he/she may be helped by a special council which must be defined by a broader vision on the concept of prevention. The councils must not orient their activities only function of the criminal activity: their clients must be the citizens, not the offenders. If these basic premises are not considered by the intervening authorities, the activities will always be evaluated function of the extremes of the criminal statistics. This evaluation of the objectives doesn't reflect the engagement of the population, the corner stone which guides their actions being community mobilization, therefore, the long-term efforts and engagements that will bear an effect on the criminality.

Although the aspect of justice administration in the community at the country level are something new and has lapses, they are in agreement with the European regulations in the field, particularly with the dispositions of Recommendation R(92)16 of the European Council regarding the sanctions and the measures applied in the community.

Actually, the use of “community sanctions”, of systems of social assistance and treatment rather than punishment with imprisonment must be considered as part of the legal measures regarding drug consumption (within the context in which the question is whether the drug addict is an offender or a sick person needing adequate treatment). The democratic human values can be undermined if the obsession of order destroys the moral thinking. The justice system must not be seen only as a weapon against criminality; it must also be seen as a means to rehabilitate the offenders, a restoring modality and a means to ensure the public safety.

The use of alternatives to imprisonment for the drug addicted offenders, in response to the increase of the imprisoned population<sup>1</sup> (a large part being “drug related”) and to the general frustration to the relative insufficiency of the conventional sanctions applied to stop drug consumption and the related offenses is, currently, supported actively both by the UN and by the EU.

This new manner of approaching the problem of sanctioning and social reintegration of the offenders achieves a real transfer not only of the possibility of action, but of the responsibility too, towards the civil society, which thus becomes a major actor in ensuring own security.

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<sup>1</sup> According to EMCDDA, the routine information at the national level regarding the types and patterns of drug consumption among the inmates are limited and inconsistent. Much of the EU data come from *ad hoc* studies on samples of variable size and their results (and trends) are difficult to extrapolate.

Drug addicts are clearly overrepresented within the inmate’s population compared to the general situation. Most EU studies show that the prevalence of drug consumption throughout the life of imprisonment exceeds 50%, varying, however, from 22% to 86%, depending on the population of inmates, prison or country. The prevalence of regular drug consumption or drug addiction before imprisonment varies from 8% to 73% in the European Union.

Most drug addicts reduce or cease drug consumption upon imprisonment. However, many inmates continue to consume drugs after incarceration, and some even start taking drugs (and/or inject drugs) in prison. The studies show that 8% to 60% of the inmates declared to have consumed drugs during detention, and 10-52% declared that they consumed drugs on a constant basis.

The prevalence of injectable drug consumption throughout their life among the inmates ranges between 15-50%; however, some studies reported values between 1-69%. In the cases where there are comparable data (Austria, 1999; England and Wales, 1997-1998), these show that there is a small probability that the young delinquents inject drugs compared to the adult ones and that the female inmates have a higher probability to inject drugs than the male inmates.

It is obvious that justice cannot be administered efficiently outside the community, the state institutions cannot always solve the needs of the offenders; the community and the specialised non-governmental organisations must also be involved.

A democratic society is built in a long time. A first step for a functional democracy is represented by the democratic institutions and mechanisms, and the civil society, within this context, acts as a regulatory mechanism for the democratic societies.

The civil society institutions are necessary in the countries with a strong democratic tradition too, but they are particularly necessary in the countries building democracy. Often, the politicians and the businessmen put party interests or the business before community interests. In such situations, who is called on to “make justice” and to correct the dysfunctional ties?

The civil society has the right and the duty to influence the political, economic or public interest decisions. The civil society reactions to the administrative or economic policies which come in contradiction with its interests are varied: manifestations, press campaigns, protest messages etc. As such actions are difficult to organise and as they often have a short-term impact, it is necessary to establish parallel structures with the state structures: non-governmental organisations, professional associations, labour unions, employer unions etc, which to monitor the activity of state institutions and the manner in which the claims are solved, while maintaining a constant pressure on the decision factors. They must cooperate with the structures involved in society administration in order to find the adequate solutions and to improve continuously the quality of life.

The civil society must get involved in a wide range of problems such as county governance, the international relations, the economic development, environmental protection or even safety of the society members. To this purpose, it is important to establish as many as possible “specialised” organisations, in as many as possible fields which concern the organisation and administration of the human society. These institutions must know the current policies and the proposal of policies in order to monitor the way in which the political or economic factors observe the interests of the majority of population in those fields.

In Romania, the role of the civil society is still little significant in influencing the political, economic and/or public interest decisions. In the developed countries, the civil society organisations participate in the public debates on issues such as: immigration policy, protection measures for the disfavoured people, going all the way to rather abstract issues pertaining to the “moral” state of the society. In the totalitarian regimes, we cannot speak of a civil society, because it is inconceivable that the citizens influence the political or economic decisions. Therefore, the role of the civil society is very important in the democratic states; while in the states who

took the first steps towards democracy, its role is particularly important, because the influencing of the political and economic decisions is a basic democratic exercise.

The long period of transition of Romania was accompanied by the inertia or underdevelopment of the civil society. Within this context, the consolidation of the civil society by the establishment of many NGOs with clear purposes which to cover the entire range of social activities, is the way towards refreshing the Romanian society. There are two ways to strengthen and diversify the civil society institutions. First, joining institutions of the international civil societies (for instance, the Red Cross, Amnesty International, Greenpeace etc.), whose power and area of action are much wider. Second, the establishment of a virtual civil society, via the Internet, which might increase the social cohesion, would facilitate the access to information and the participation of the population to various actions.

"Due to its specificity, the civil society strengthens the legitimacy of democracy, multiplies the means of expressing the interests, strengthens the awareness and trust of the people in their power, and allows the recruitment and formation of new leaders. (...) The people active within the civil society, in their position of company owners, union workers, specialists, artists grouped in professional associations etc., can be found as agents of the political society, performing political functions. Other people, however, remain mere agents of the civil society<sup>1</sup>".

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<sup>1</sup> Tamaș, Sergiu (1993), *Political dictionary. The institutions of democracy and the civic culture*, Ed. Academiei Române.