

Strategies for reducing regional disparities in Romania

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Abstract: The disparities in the development of a country's regions could threat the social and political equilibrium of a nation. In general, the reduction of such disparities is a complex task for the governments, involving substantial resources and long periods of time. This paper approaches the strategies of Romanian public authorities to deal with the spatially uneven development between 1924 and 2021. The transformations that occurred in the Romanian society during that period led to significant changes in the purposes and instruments of such strategies.

Keywords: Regional development; territorial disparities; Romanian provinces

JEL: O10, P25, R58

1. INTRODUCTION

Quite often, the process of a country economic development is characterized by regional inequalities (e.g. Myrdal, 1957; Williamson, 1965; Bonin, 1981; Plummer and Taylor, 2001; Barrios and Strobl, 2009). The assessment of these regional disparities involves various indicators: Gross Domestic Product per capita, labor productivity, unemployment rate, personal consumption expenditures, life expectancy at birth, adult literacy, school enrollment, pollution etc. (e.g. Sen, 1989; Ray, 1998; Villaverde and Maza, 2011; Gennaioli et al., 2013).

The unequal development among a country's regions could have various consequences. Usually, consistent migrations occur from poor to rich regions (e.g. Pissarides and McMaster, 1990; Greenwood et al., 1991; Barro and Sala-i-Martin, 1992). Sometimes, the regional disparities led to tensions between provinces and the central governments (e.g. Cameron, 1981; Théret, 1999). In time, the spatially uneven development among a country's provinces could lead to secessionist movements (e.g. Castells, 2014; Färber, 2015).

Empirical studies found different directions of the regional inequalities' evolutions: from convergence to divergence (e.g. Barro and Sala-i-Martin, 1991; Petrakos, 2001; de la Fuente, 2002; Rey and Janikas, 2005; Bartkowska and Riedl, 2012). Such evolutions could be influenced by the local and central governments' efforts to solve the problems associated to the spatially uneven development. The tasks assignment between the local and central governments depends on the particularities of country administrative division (e.g. Balisacan et al., 2008; Biela et al., 2012). There are employed several instruments: investment in infrastructure, programs of industrialization, fiscal incentives, programs of education etc.

(e.g. Amin et al., 1994; Lall and Yilmaz, 2001; Deichmann et al., 2008). Usually, such policies imply long terms and have to be integrated in strategies for reducing the regional disparities (e.g. Easterlin, 1958; Pike et al, 2006; Farole et al., 2018; Iammarino et al., 2019). In building these strategies, the governments have to take into consideration some characteristics of the regions: demography, the predominant economic activity (industry or agriculture), history and ethnic composition etc. (e.g. Satterthwaite and Tacoli, 2003; Cornet, 2009; Hasmath, 2009; Higgins and Savoie, 2017).

This paper explores the governments' attempts to reduce the regional disparities in Romania for the interval of during three periods:

- interwar Romania (1924 – 1938);
- communist regime (1948 – 1989);
- transition and post-transition (1990 – 2021).

2. PLANS TO DEAL WITH THE REGIONAL INEQUALITIES WITHIN INTERWAR ROMANIA

At the beginning of 20th century, the so-called "Romanian Old Kingdom" consisted in three historical provinces: Moldavia, Wallachia and Northern Dobruja. A favourable context allowed a substantial territorial enlargement and the creation of "Greater Romania". In 1913, Romania intervened in the Second Balkan War attacking Bulgaria and, by the Treaty of Bucharest, annexed Southern Dobruja. The World War I offered opportunities for other territorial acquisitions. In 1917, Bessarabia, a territory that belonged in the past to Moldavia, separated from the defunct Russian Empire and joined Romania. At the end of the war, the dissolution of other Empire, Austria-Hungary, led to the acquisition of other territories: Transylvania, Bukovina and parts of other provinces: Banat, Crişana and Maramureş. For the Romanian authorities, the integration of the new provinces and the development of the country represented a great challenge involving three main directions:

- the administrative division;
- the industrialization;
- the quality of life.

2.1. The administrative division in the interwar Romania

In Greater Romania, the surface and population of the new provinces surpassed, as regarding the surface and population, the Old Kingdom (Table 1). The minorities represented about 28% of the entire population. In these circumstances, among the representants of the new provinces there were strong demands for building of a new public administration that allow for a significant autonomy of the regions. However, the point of view of politicians from the Old Kingdom prevailed and the 1923 Constitution and an administrative unification law from 1925 established a centralized administration (Boilă, 1927; Bajtalan, 2014).

Tab. 1. The distribution of surface and population among Romanian historical regions in 1923

Province	Surface	Population
Romanian Old Kingdom	41.54%	42.04%
Bessarabia	14.18%	16.33%
Bukovina	3.33%	4.48%
Banat	5.87%	5.25%
Transylvania (including Crișana and Maramureș)	32.61%	30.31%
Southern Dobruja	2.47%	1.58%

Source of data: Anuarul Statistic al României pe anul 1925, Institutul de Arte Grafice „Eminescu” S. A., București, 1926, p. 10.

The Greater Romania's territory was divided in 71 counties (județe). This administrative reform generated significant frustrations in the new provinces, especially in Transylvania and Bessarabia (Suveica, 2010; Dumitru, 2012; Sienerth, 2017). In some areas, there were substantial aversions regarding the so-called “regățeni” (citizens coming from the Old Kingdom in the new provinces) especially for the public servants who couldn't understand the local customs.

In 1938, King Carol II of Romania established a royal dictatorship and introduced a new Constitution. Another administrative division was implemented, being established ten regions (“ținuturi”), many of them included parts from the Old Kingdom along with parts from the new provinces (Table 2).

Tab. 2. Composition of the ten regions established in 1938

Region (“ținut”)	Composition
Olt	Western Wallachia
Bucegi	A part of Eastern Wallachia and a part from South-East of Transylvania
Marea	Southern Dobruja, a part of Eastern Wallachia, and a part of Northern Dobruja
Dunărea de Jos	South of Moldavia, a part of Eastern Wallachia, a part of Northern Dobruja, and a part from South of Bessarabia
Nistru	Central part of Bessarabia
Prut	North of Bessarabia and North of Moldavia
Suceava	Whole Bukovina
Mureș	A central and a Western part of Transylvania
Someș	Maramureș, a Western part of Transylvania and the main part of Crișana
Timiș	Whole Banat, a part of South-West of Transylvania and a part of Crișana

Source of data: Anuarul Statistic al României 1939 și 1940, Imprimeria Națională, București, 1940, pp. 14-18.

One of the main purposes of new administrative reform was to solve the problems generated by territorial disparities. However, there was not enough time to prove its viability. In June 1940, Romania accepted an ultimatum formulated by Soviet Union and it withdrew from Bessarabia and from a Northern part of Bukovina (Soviet Union annexed also a small territory from Moldavia). Two months later, by the Second Vienna Award, Hungary occupied the so-called Northern Transylvania (in fact, a territory that included Maramureș, a part of

Crișana and some parts from North, West and East of Transylvania). Finally, in September 1940, by the Treaty of Craiova, Romania agreed to return to Bulgaria the Southern Dobruja.

In 1941, Romania joined Germany in the war against Soviet Union and regained Bessarabia and the North of Bukovina. Between 1941 and 1944, Romanian Army occupied large territories in the Eastern Ukraine, including the strategic port of Odessa. The occupied area was organized in the so-called "Transnistria Governorate". After the Third Reich's strategic losses on the Eastern Front, the Red Army occupied Transnistria, Bessarabia and the North of Bukovina. In August 1944, after a coup d'état, Romania declared war on Germany. By 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, Hungary was forced to return to Romania the Northern Transylvania.

2.2. Efforts to industrialize the interwar Romania

There were significant differences among the economic systems among Romanian historical regions (Table 3). The main sector of Romanian Old Kingdom's economy, the agriculture, had a low efficiency as the modern practices (the use of machinery or of chemical fertilizers etc.) were not systematically applied. The most important industrial entities were oriented towards exploiting natural resources such as the oil or the woods (e.g. Madgearu, 1940; Murgescu, 2010; Aldcroft, 2016; Basciani, 2020). Comparing to the Romanian Old Kingdom, the provinces that belonged to the former Austro-Hungarian Empire were more industrialized. The economies of Bessarabia and Southern Dobruja were mainly agrarian.

Tab. 3. The distribution of industrial entities among Romanian historical regions in 1924

Province	Number of enterprises	Capital invested	Number of workers	Value of production
Romanian Old Kingdom	46.54%	43.88%	48.06%	56.06%
Bessarabia	3.46%	1.89%	2.67%	1.84%
Bukovina	7.73%	4.71%	5.13%	5.52%
Banat	8.20%	9.74%	15.70%	12.16%
Transylvania (including Crișana and Maramureș)	34.06%	39.78%	28.44%	24.43%

Source of data: Anuarul Statistic al României pe anul 1925, Institutul de Arte Grafice „Eminescu” S. A., București, 1926, pp. 155.

The necessity of a consistent industrialization was admitted by the main political actors from Greater Romania. However, there were different points of view about the ways to accelerate this process: by stimulating domestic firms or by attracting foreign investors. There were substantial efforts to industrialize Romania, but a difficult context (political instability, the impact of the Great Depression, the threat of war etc.) hampered them (Jackson, 1986; Turnock, 2005; Kopsidis, 2012).

Tab. 4. The distribution of industrial entities among the ten regions of the Greater Romania

Region ("ținut")	Number of enterprises	Capital invested	Number of workers	Value of production
Olt	2.63%	1.34%	2.05%	1.53%
Bucegi	28.19%	51.46%	37.51%	45.51%
Marea	1.62%	1.21%	0.95%	0.99%
Dunărea de Jos	5.81%	4.61%	4.17%	4.80%
Nistru	3.03%	0.69%	0.67%	0.90%
Prut	8.55%	8.94%	9.28%	8.56%
Suceava	8.92%	4.10%	6.10%	4.56%
Mureș	11.92%	8.45%	11.47%	8.46%
Someș	13.38%	5.34%	9.91%	6.52%
Timiș	15.95%	13.86%	17.89%	18.18%

Source of data: Anuarul Statistic al României 1939 și 1940, Imprimeria Națională, București, 1940, pp. 346-355.

Many investments occurred in areas that were already industrialized (Reșița in Banat, Brașov in Transylvania, Bucharest, the country's capital etc.), where an educated labor force existed. There were also substantial investments located near natural resources (oil wells near Ploiești, mineral resources from Transylvania etc.). In these circumstances, at the end of Greater Romania there were still substantial disparities among the industries from the country's regions (Table 4). The territories from Dobruja, Oltenia (the Western Wallachia), Bessarabia and Moldavia remained much less industrialized comparing to those from Banat, Transylvania and some areas from Bucegi region (cities of Bucharest, Ploiești etc.).

2.3. Quality of life in the interwar Romania

The evolution of life quality was significantly linked to the process of urbanization. At the time of the Greater Romania creation, in each of its provinces, more than three quarters of the population were living in rural areas (Table 5). In many towns from the Old Kingdom, Southern Dobruja or Bessarabia, the living conditions were, in fact, not very different from those in the rural areas. An important aspect for the politicians was the fact that in many of the major cities from the new provinces (Cluj, Brașov, Sibiu and Târgu Mureș in Transylvania, Cernăuți in Bukovina, Chișinău in Bessarabia, Baia Mare in Maramureș, Oradea in Crișana, Silistra in Southern Dobruja etc.) Romanians represented less than a half of the total population.

Tab. 5. The distribution of urban and rural areas among Romanian historical regions in 1923

Province	Urban area	Rural area
Romanian Old Kingdom including Southern Dobruja in 1915	18.60%	81.40%
Bukovina in 1919	21.62%	78.38%
Bessarabia in 1922	14.51%	85.49%
Transylvania including Banat, Crișana and Maramureș in 1923	18.44%	81.56%

Source of data: Anuarul Statistic al României pe anul 1925, Institutul de Arte Grafice „Eminescu” S. A., București, 1926, pp. 5-8.

The 1930 census revealed significant differences among Greater Romania's provinces regarding the distribution of population in urban and rural areas (Table 6). The lowest proportions of population from urban areas were in Oltenia and Bessarabia. The industrialization and the problems from agriculture led to a substantial migration from rural to urban areas. The industrialized big cities attracted not only people from villages but also from smaller cities. The population of Bucharest, the capital of Romania, increased with more than 80 percent between 1912 and 1930. While in the urban areas there was a substantial improvement of public services, in rural areas the progress was, in general, rather slow.

Tab. 6. The distribution of population in urban and rural areas among Romanian historical regions in 1930

Province	Urban area	Rural area
Oltenia	13.1%	86.9%
Muntenia	27.4%	72.7%
Dobruja	24.1%	75.9%
Moldavia	24.4%	75.7%
Bessarabia	12.9%	87.0%
Bukovina	26.7%	73.3%
Transylvania	16.1%	83.9%
Banat	17.8%	82.2%
Crișana and Maramureș	19.9%	80.1%

Source of data: Anuarul Statistic al României 1939 și 1940, Imprimeria Națională, București, 1940, pp. 44.

The sector of transports experienced considerable changes. The central authorities invested substantial public funds in roads and railways that linked the Old Kingdom with the new provinces. Many airports were opened. The facilities of Port of Constanța, especially those specialised for the export of oil products, were extended (Calcan, 2012; Kontogeorgis, 2016; Stefanescu & Dumitriu, 2019). Between 1934 and 1939 it was built "Transalpina" road that passed the Carpathian Mountains connecting Oltenia (Western Wallachia) to Transylvania. There were modernized and extended several railways. Considerable public investments were directed to the railways from Bessarabia where the broad-gauges, inherited from the Russian Empire, were replaced by narrow-gauges (Turnock, 2004; Dumitrescu, 2018; Petencu, 2018).

The strategies for building a modern state must approach the problems of education. At the creation of Greater Romania there were significant differences between the education systems from the Old Kingdom and the new provinces. In the Old Kingdom, despite some progress at the beginning of 20th century, the proportion of adults unable to read or write was significant, especially in the rural area. In the provinces that belonged to the former Austria-Hungary, the literacy rate was superior to those from the Old Kingdom. However, the education, especially the higher one, in Hungarian or German language prevailed over those in Romanian language (Năstasă, 2014; Sigmirean, 2014). The lowest literacy rate was in Bessarabia, a province that experienced the Russian Empire education system (Ciobanu,

1923, Scurtu, 2012; Crețu, 2018). Among the ethnic minorities from the new provinces, an important proportion of adults was unable to understand Romanian language.

Tab. 7. The literacy rate in the Greater Romania's provinces in 1930
(percentage of the population aged 7 years and over who can both read and write)

Province	The literacy rate
Oltenia	49.34%
Muntenia	57.29%
Dobruja	52.71%
Moldavia	56.74%
Bessarabia	37.92%
Bukovina	65.39%
Transylvania	68.07%
Banat	71.79%
Crișana and Maramureș	61.17%

Source of data: Anuarul Statistic al României 1939 și 1940, Imprimeria Națională, București, 1940, pp. 92-95.

The improvement of education was a real concern for the Romanian authorities. However, despite their efforts, the results of 1930 census indicated that, among the provinces, the significant differences, regarding the literacy rate, persisted (Table 7). In the rural areas, the poverty was responsible for a substantial dropping out.

3. SOLVING THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED TO THE UNEVEN SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE COMMUNIST REGIME

3.1. The context of the plans for reducing territorial disparities between 1948 and 1989

In 1944, Red Army occupied Romania's territory. As it happened in other countries from the Eastern Europe, Soviet Union took advantage by this situation and imposed, gradually, a communist regime. In December 1947 the Kingdom of Romania was replaced by Romanian People's Republic and, next year, a new Constitution, inspired by the Soviet Constitution, was adopted. Until Stalin's death, in 1953, the Romanian communist leaders had to unconditionally obey the directives that came from Moscow. The public administration and the economic system were transformed following Soviet models.

Substantial changes occurred in Romania's administrative division. In 1950 the country's territory was divided in 28 regions. Two years later, a new territorial organization led to 18 regions, including one (The Magyar Autonomous Region) that gave a lot of administrative autonomy to the members of the Magyar community from the area.

In the economy, where most of the enterprises were nationalized, it was introduced a Soviet type centralized planning (Wilhelm, 1985; Hill, 1989; Bideleux and Jeffries, 2007; Vonyó, 2017). The ideological considerations played a major role in building the new economic strategies. In the countries where the agricultural sectors were predominant, the accelerated industrialization was viewed as a way to strengthen the working class. During Stalin's life, the heavy industries were preferred to the light ones (Jowitt, 1971; Straus, 1997;

Davies, 1998; Cheremukhin et al., 2013). In agriculture, in 1945, a govern dominated by communists applied a reform which distributed land to peasants. However, in the next years, they were subjects to hard measures such as compulsory quotas of products, punitive policies against the relative wealthy peasants or forced collectivisation. As a result, many of them left their villages to become industrial workers (Abraham, 2009; Levy, 2009; Kligman and Verdery, 2011; Lakatos, 2014).

The accelerated industrialization led to a rapid urbanization of the country (Ronnås, 1982; Dumitrache et al., 2016; Stoica et al., 2020). At beginning, in the less industrialized regions, substantial migrations occurred from rural areas to urban centres in the same regions but also in more industrialised centres (Kupiszewski et al., 1997; Sandu, 2018). In some cities, such as Braşov, in Transylvania, or Timișoara, in Banat, the citizens arrived from the Old Kingdom represented significant proportions. The social life from many urban centres experienced significant changes as for the former peasants the adaptation to the cities' rules proved to be very difficult.

A new education system, influenced by the one from the Soviet Union, was introduced. The teachers had to conform to the ideological requirements. The authorities made substantial efforts to eradicate the illiteracy.

The communist authorities announced significant efforts to reduce differences regarding the quality of life between rural and urban areas and, also, between small towns and big cities. Important investments were made to introduce electrification in almost entire Romania's territory. Teachers and medical personnel were directed to the rural areas.

Stalin's death brought substantial changes to economic and social policies. The new leaders from Kremlin had different visions regarding the economic development of Soviet Union and of its satellites (Volin, 1954; Taborsky, 1956; Zyzniewski, 1958; Wegs, 1984; Swain and Swain, 2018). In the next years, their disputes and their difficulties in solving the 1956 crises in Poland and Hungary allowed Romanian communist leaders to gain a significant autonomy.

At beginning of the 1960s, Gheorghe Gheorghiu – Dej, the head of the Romanian Workers' Party (the official name of the Romanian Communist Party between 1948 and 1965) was able to resist to a Soviet initiative of strengthening the planning coordination within Comecon. In April 1964, the leaders of Romanian Workers' Party defied Soviet Union by affirming that they had the right to choose themselves the ways of country's development (Skrzypek, 1961; Montias, 1964; Taranu, 2007; Dragomir, 2015). In these years, Romanian Government searched for an improvement of diplomatic and economic relations with United States and Western European countries.

After the death of Gheorghiu – Dej, in 1965, the Romanian communist leaders continued the policy of preserving their autonomy in relations with Soviet Union. In order to prove their achievements in building a "socialist society" they changed, in the same year, the official names of the country (Socialist Republic of Romania replaced Romanian People's Republic) and of the party (Romanian Communist Party replaced Romanian Workers' Party). A new Constitution was adopted and the country's territory was then divided not in regions but in counties.

In the late 1960s, Nicolae Ceaușescu, who had succeeded Gheorghiu – Dej as head of the Romanian communists, managed to consolidate his position. The Western countries, that appreciated his distancing from Soviet Union, offered him substantial loans. These funds were used to finance large projects of public investments. The industrialization and the urbanization continued at high speeds. At the middle of 1980s, in Romania, the populations from rural and urban areas became equals. A controversial project of “rural systematization” was announced; more than ten thousand villages were to be transformed in “agro-industrial centres”. However, this project, which caused international protests wasn’t finalised (Țiu, 2014). In the 1980s, the efforts to repay the external debt included hard austerity measures that made Nicolae Ceaușescu very unpopular. In December 1989, the communist regime was overthrown by a bloody revolt.

3.2. Public investments directed to the underdeveloped regions

From its first years, the communist regime announced plans to deal with the problem of territorial disparities for the regions viewed as underdeveloped: Moldavia (including the Southern Bukovina), Oltenia (the Western part of Wallachia), Northern Dobruja, The Magyar Autonomous Region and an area from the North-West of country (Gheorghiu-Dej, 1955). The main solution taken into consideration was the accelerated industrialization (Gheorghiu-Dej, 1958; Gheorghiu-Dej, 1960; Marin, 2000; Cojoc, 2001; Dumitriu and Stefanescu, 2016; Lascu, 2016). In those times, the mystification of results regarding the development was largely practiced by authorities, so the official statistics must be used with cautions. Nevertheless, the fact that communist authorities directed substantial funds for the industrialization of underdeveloped regions could be hardly contested. In 1955, at the Second Congress of Romanian Workers’ Party, Gheorghiu-Dej presented the industrial projects initiated in underdeveloped regions on the first five-year plan: 9 power plants, 52 factories of heavy industries (24 of them were considered as having a strategic role for the national economy), 15 enterprises of mining and 33 factories of light industries (Gheorghiu-Dej, 1955).

In Moldavia it began the building of big hydro power plant “V. I. Lenin”, on Bicz River, a steel tubes factory, in the city of Roman, and an important petrochemical plant at Borzești (the construction of this plant involved the transformation in a town of Onești village). Important factories were also erected in Oltenia, especially in the chemical industry (the biggest soda plant from Romania, at Govora) and in the electric industry domain (a big plant specialized in heavy electrotechnical equipment, at Craiova). In Northern Dobruja there were allocated substantial resources for developing the port and the shipyard of Constanța. Several investments in light industries and mining were made in the Magyar Autonomous Region and in the North-West of country.

In his report, Gheorghiu-Dej didn’t mention a big failure of the first five-year plan: the Danube–Black Sea Canal. In the decision about this gigantic project there counted not only economic criteria but also considerations regarding the military strategies of Soviet Union. The construction began in 1949 and it involved, along with regular workers, the use of army and the forced labour of persons perceived as hostile by the communist regime. Soon, it became obvious that plans of this investment proved to be too optimistic for Romania’s

resources. In 1952, in order to justify the failure, authorities organized a trial of the so-called “saboteurs”. Next year, after Stalin’s death, the more relaxed position of his successors allowed the abandon of this too much expensive project (Spulber, 1954; Chirițoiu, 1999; König, 2004).

The industrialization of underdeveloped regions continued during the second and the third five-year plans. At Târgu-Mureș, in the Magyar Autonomous Region, it began the construction of Azomureș, a big mineral fertilizer plant. Other factories of chemical industry were built in Oltenia (*Doljchim Craiova*) and Moldavia (*Platforma chimică Săvinești*). Important resources were allocated for tourism. The biggest investment, in these years, was Galați Steel Works, in Moldavia. In the last years of Gheorghiu-Dej, the new tendency of Romania’s foreign policy facilitated, for many of the new industrial objectives, the use of modern technologies, obtained from Western countries.

Under the leadership of Nicolae Ceaușescu the industrialization continued. In October 1967, the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party adopted a project of the “improvement of territorial administration” in which there were proposed “new efforts for the regions left behind in the process of industrialization”. The group of areas considered as being in need of substantial investments in industrialization included Northern Dobruja, Oltenia, two regions from Moldavia (Bacău and Iași) and two regions from the Eastern part of Wallachia (Argeș and București). In that project it was assumed the objective that, until 1970, over 26 percent of Romania’s industrial production to come from the six regions.

Between 1965 and 1989, substantial resources were allocated to these territories. In Northern Dobruja, the public investments were directed to an oil refinery at Năvodari, to a nuclear plant in Cernavodă, and to the resuming of Danube–Black Sea Canal construction. In 1968, at Colibași (today, Mioveni), on the territory of former region Argeș, it started the building of plant that produced cars in a joint venture with the French company Renault. In the territory of former region Bacău, the oil refineries from Onești and Dărmănești were modernized. The important industrial platform of Fortus, that included machine building and metallurgical plants, were built at Iași. In Oltenia, there were developed coal mines and factories from chemical industry. In the same region, at Craiova, it began, in 1977, the building of second factory that produced cars: a joint venture between Romanian government and the French company Citroën. In București, there were built and modernized several factories from heavy and light industries.

At the end of communist regime, many regions, that in the past had been predominantly agrarian, were industrialized. However, the process of industrialization had some shortcomings. In many cases, the personal involved in planning or execution hadn’t the necessary qualification. Sometimes, the criteria of rentability were neglected and some factories had to be subsidized. The ecological aspects were also sometimes neglected and plants from metallurgical and chemical industries were major sources of pollution. As it often happened in a dictatorship, the decision-making regarding industrialization was, in some cases, discretionary or characterized by subjectivism. There were speculations that affinities of Gheorghiu-Dej to the city of Galați played a major role in the decision to locate there a big metallurgical factory. During the leadership of Nicolae Ceaușescu, his native village, Scornicești, was transformed in a town.

Important public investments were directed not only for industrialization but also for education and public health system. Higher education institutions and hospitals were established in the regions viewed as underdeveloped (Florian, 2014; Voicu & Deliu, 2018). The official statistics of communist regime indicated a constant decrease of the regional disparities regarding quality of life.

4. DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM OF TERRITORIAL DISPARITIES DURING TRANSITION AND POST-TRANSITION

4.1. Plans for regional development in transition

After the communist regimes falling, the former satellites of Soviet Union had to pass a complex period of transition. The process was painful, especially in the countries where the economies were, before the communist regimes, predominantly agrarian. In Romania, the building of a democratic regime was marked by violent convulsions. The old administrative system replacement, based on coercion, proved to be very difficult (e.g. Pasti, 1995; Zamfir, 2004). A significant decline of the national economy occurred; many investment programs were abandoned.

The public administration was weakened by an inconsistent legislation and by corruption. In most of the 1990s, the acceleration of inflation led to erosion of the households' wealth and the poverty caused significant internal and external migrations. The ethnic tensions, that were somehow suppressed during communist regime, now escalated. During transition, the disparities between rural and urban areas aggravated. Many employees from education and medical services that, in the years of the communist regime, had been kept by coercion in villages and small towns, chose to go to big cities. In these circumstances, in many segments of the Romanian society, there was a substantial nostalgia for the communist regime or for the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu (e.g. Marin, 2013; Light and Young, 2015). Such sentiments were exploited by some political parties.

The regional disparities have deepened during transition. Some areas were in critical situations, mainly because of difficulties experienced by the industrial enterprises located there. The circumstances were complex. Many firms were unprepared for the disappearance of old system of products commercializing. In many cases, managers named to administrate factories simply plundered them. An important factor in the survival of many enterprises was represented by the local authorities ability to obtain subsidies from the central authorities. All provinces experienced severe declines of the economy but, in general, the regions from Old Kingdom (except the capital, București) were more affected than those from Transylvania and Banat.

In this context it occurred the proliferation of so-called "local barons" (political leaders at local levels) who played a major role in the regions development. They had the ability to bring votes for the Central Government obtaining, instead, substantial public funds for their area of influence. The local barons preserved their popularity by interventions for the industrial entities' rescuing or for investments in infrastructure. Quite often, they used their influence to collect money for political parties or for their own interests (e.g. Nicolescu, 2013; Vaida, 2021).

At the end of 1990s and beginning of the 2000s Romanian authorities affirmed their commitment to accelerate reforms of public administration and of economy and to strengthen the relations with the Western countries. The European Union offered consistent financing (by ISPA, PHARE and SAPARD funds) to make the public administration and the national economy more efficient. Instead, Romanian Government had to build strategies in various domains, including the regional development.

In 1997, to fulfil obligations assumed in a PHARE program, Romanian authorities elaborated a document called “Cartea Verde a Dezvoltării Regionale” (CVDR) with the announced objective to provide an institutional framework for the future strategies of reducing the regional disparities. CVDR identified six counties with a worrying level of poverty: two in Moldavia (Botoșani and Vaslui) and four in the Western Wallachia (Teleorman, Giurgiu, Călărași and Ialomița). There were also specified two areas with difficult conditions: Danube Delta (in Northern Dobruja) and mountain zones in Western Carpathian (in Transylvania).

Tab. 8. Composition of the eight development regions

Region	Composition
Nord-Est	The central and Northern parts of Moldavia (including Southern Bukovina)
Sud-Est	The South of Moldavia, a part of Eastern Wallachia, and Northern Dobruja
Sud-Muntenia	The main part of Eastern Wallachia
Sud-Vest Oltenia	Western Wallachia
Vest	Banat, a part of the Southern Crișana and a part from South-West of Transylvania
Nord-Vest	Maramureș, a Western part of Transylvania and the main part of Crișana
Centru	The Central, South and Eastern parts of Transylvania
București-Ilfov	București, the capital of Romania, and Ilfov county (a territory that surrounds București)

Source of data: Legea nr. 315 din 28 iunie 2004

To deal with territorial disparities, CVDR proposed the aggregation of Romania's counties in eight development regions corresponding to the NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) system from European Union. However, the effectiveness of these entities was affected by the fact they didn't have an administrative status. Later, in 2004, the development regions were established by law (Table 8). For each of the eight development regions there were created a council and an agency which had as attributions the resources analysis and allocation for strategies and programmes of development.

The policies of regional development during the transition period had various results. There were local communities that used efficiently the resources allocated. However, in many cases, the incompetency or the corruption affected the outcomes. In fact, quite often, the jobs in the councils and agencies for regional development were simple sinecures. The governments still preferred political criteria to social or economic ones when they allocated resources to regions. The local communities ruled by their sympathizers were favoured in detriment of those ruled by opposition.

The distribution of Gross Domestic Product for the eight development regions (euro per inhabitant in percentage of Romania's average) suggests that, in the period 2000 –

2006, it occurred not a convergence but an aggravation of the territorial disparities (Table 9). Poor regions such Nord-Est, Sud-Est, Sud-Muntenia, and Sud-Vest Oltenia developed with speeds that were inferior to the average of country. The disproportion in economic power of the region was reflected by the substantial concentration in Bucharest. However, the statistics couldn't reflect the massive, unregistered migration from other regions that substantially increased the population of Romania's capital.

Tab. 9. Distribution of Gross Domestic Product for the eight development regions (euro per inhabitant in percentage of Romania's average) in the period 2000 – 2006

Region	Year						
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Nord-Est	72.22	70.00	72.73	66.67	67.86	62.16	60.87
Sud-Est	88.89	90.00	90.91	87.50	89.29	86.49	82.61
Sud-Muntenia	83.33	85.00	81.82	79.17	82.14	81.08	80.43
Sud-Vest Oltenia	83.33	85.00	77.27	79.17	82.14	75.68	76.09
Vest	105.56	105.00	109.09	108.33	110.71	108.11	110.87
Nord-Vest	88.89	90.00	95.45	91.67	92.86	91.89	91.30
Centru	105.56	105.00	104.55	100.00	100.00	94.59	95.65
București-Ilfov	222.22	210.00	213.64	204.17	210.71	232.43	223.91

Source of data: Eurostat

The uneven development acted like a catalysator for the regional tensions. In Transylvania and Banat there were significant frustrations for the reduce power of local entities, while in some poor regions from the Old Kingdom there were requests for a more consistent support from the central authorities (e.g. Fati, 2002; Dobre, 2010; Pop, 2013). Politicians of the Hungarian minority advocated for the territorial autonomy of an area inhabited mainly by Szeklers (a Hungarian subgroup). The circumstances were very complex since an important part of the Romanian public opinion perceived this demand as a first stage for a de facto secession (e.g. Cobianu-Băcanu, 1998; Bakk, 2013; Salat, 2014; Szilágyi, 2017; Dragoman et al., 2020; Kovács, 2020). In fact, this situation was used as an argument by the politicians who opposed decentralization.

4.2. Strategies to reduce territorial disparities after Romania's adhesion to European Union

In January 2007, Romania adhered to European Union (EU). This event generated significant opportunities for achieving substantial funds that could be used in reducing the regional disparities (e.g. Farole et al., 2011; Ferry and McMaster, 2013; Baun and Marek, 2014; Vedrine & Le Gallo, 2021). However, significant regional inequalities persisted (Table 10).

Tab. 10. Distribution of Gross Domestic Product for the eight development regions (euro per inhabitant in percentage of Romania's average) after adhesion to EU

Region	Year						
	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019
Nord-Est	60.66	59.02	55.38	62.50	60.49	62.50	62.61
Sud-Est	80.33	77.05	80.00	88.89	85.19	82.29	83.48
Sud-Muntenia	78.69	81.97	81.54	79.17	79.01	77.08	77.39
Sud-Vest Oltenia	73.77	72.13	69.23	73.61	72.84	73.96	77.39
Vest	108.20	104.92	104.62	104.17	103.70	103.13	101.74
Nord-Vest	91.80	86.89	81.54	86.11	87.65	92.71	91.30
Centru	98.36	91.80	89.23	93.06	92.59	94.79	94.78
București-Ilfov	226.23	224.59	236.92	234.72	239.51	231.25	229.57

Source of data: Eurostat

In many cases, the strategies built by the regional development agencies were ineffective. In fact, some practices from the period of transition, such as corruption, sinecures, the lack of responsibility, incompetency, or the allocation of the public resources by political criteria didn't disappear. The role of the local barons remained important. The attempts to give an administrative status to the eight development regions failed since they were not explained properly to public opinion (they were sabotaged by local politicians that feared they would lose their power).

In some regions, the poverty of some rural areas coexists with a consistent development of big cities. Such disequilibrium was accompanied by substantial internal and external migrations causing drastic decreases of population in some localities.

The impact of foreign direct investment on the development of a region became obvious after the adhesion to EU. In the decisions about investing in Romania the situation of infrastructure was an important factor (Dumitriu, & Stefanescu, 2008). In this context, there were complains from some poor regions that the government didn't invest enough in their infrastructure. A special request came from Moldavia's counties where no highway was built yet. Government replied with an ambitious plan to link by highways Romania's historical provinces.

Nowadays, other strategies with implications for the regional disparities were announced. In the autumn of 2021, in the framework of "The Recovery and Resilience Facility" provided by the European Union, Romania asks for funds that represent about 29 billion euro. A part of these funds is destined to the infrastructure from poor regions. In the same period, the major party of coalition government announced another program of about 10 billion euro destined to develop local communities. However, another partner of the coalition accused that, as it happened in the past, the resources would be allocated by political criteria.

5. CONCLUSIONS

After many strategies proposed to reduce them, in Romania the territorial disparities are still significant. There were many plans, with various objectives and instruments. Overall, the most consistent results were obtained by the communist regime. However, many of the

industrial entities created in that period couldn't survive in the market economy context. There were also many ecological problems generated by the accelerated industrialization. In a way, the room for manoeuvre for the strategies during democratic regimes was restrained comparing to those from dictatorship.

The regional tensions are still a threat for the social equilibrium from Romania. In most of the electoral processes, the results proved that preferences of voters from Banat or Transylvania differed significantly from those from the Old Kingdom. There are different mentalities and different visions about the central authorities role. The ethnic tensions weren't eliminated although, in the last years, UDMR (a political party that represents the Hungarian minority) was part of coalition governments.

Nowadays, Romania could still fructify the opportunities of using substantial funds to reduce the regional disparities. However, the new plans efficacy depends on the renouncement to some old practices such as the sinecures, corruption or the resources' allocation on political criteria. A new establishment of attributions and responsibilities of the regional development agencies could also be useful.

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