

Cristina Otovescu, *Social Realities and Public Policies in România*, Romanian Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 2021

The book written by Cristina Otovescu, *Social Realities and Public Policies in Romania*, published by the Romanian Academy Publishing House in 2021, presents the medical and social problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with major economic and political effects on the population worldwide.

Even if the title does not explicitly mention the word *pandemic*, the information presented in the 280 pages of the book focuses on the SARS-CoV-2 flu virus, with the author concentrating particularly on the medical effects, linked to the social and political ones, manifested in societies around the world as a result of the rapid spread of the virus in the population, leading the World Health Organization to establish a general pandemic state and therefore a major public health emergency. Six of the book's seven chapters make explicit reference to this situation, presenting the economic, political-administrative, social and cultural framework with reference to the general health situation and the ability of the world's countries to mobilise to deal with the situations that have arisen and to find appropriate, widely applicable solutions to the problem.

In the introduction Cristina Otovescu (2021) brings the reader into the atmosphere of the book by presenting an analysis of the public policies applied in Romania after 1990. The author divides the period of their elaboration and implementation into two stages: the first, between 1990 and 2006, and the second, after 2007 until now, corresponding to the period of integration into the European community.

In order to understand the importance of public policies, the social problems of our country in the last 30 years are also presented, highlighting the fact that they have been linked to poverty, unemployment, crime, violence in the family and in schools, discrimination against the Roma population, emigration of Romanians to various countries of the world and, more recently, the study of the social-economic and educational consequences of the pandemic phenomenon. The presentation of all this information is made by quoting, by the author, works belonging to several contemporary authors and various materials produced by public institutions with legislative role in Romania.

The first chapter, entitled *The General State of Romanian Society*, presents a journey through the history of our country, starting from the 20th century to the present, with the emphasis on the political changes that occurred with the fall of the communist regime in 1989. Like a didactic course, we are presented with the

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main areas of social activity, the defining periods and the radical changes that have occurred over time, more specifically the historical events generated by the course of our becoming a state and the political, economic, social and cultural influences, the regulatory framework for the organisation and functioning of social life, the restructuring of the political framework and the extent of the privatisation process with political and economic effects, the legislative reform and administrative-territorial reorganisation of Romania, detailing here the 8 developmental regions, nominated on geographical and ethnographic grounds, used as a benchmark for allocating the resources needed for territorial development, and how they are grouped into 4 macro-regions, the new variant of administrative-territorial reorganisation (pp. 39-40). The text of the chapter is interspersed with maps, helping the reader to integrate the information presented more easily.

Chapter two, *National processes and benchmarks in the context of global developments*, begins with a diagnosis of the economic process and living standards in Romania, outlining wage, pension and child benefit policy in the period 1990-2020 (p. 43). Here it is specified that there is a suggestive correlation between the political factor in government and the state of the national economy, specifying that Romania has had both periods of economic growth and therefore an improvement in national social life, especially in the periods 1993-1996, 2000-2008, 2011-2019 and periods of negative economic development between 1990 and 1992, 1997 and 1999, 2009 and 2010. Since 2020, the negative growth of the Romanian economy has manifested itself as a result of the crisis caused by the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, with the government having to take out a series of loans, thus increasing public debt, while at the same time a large part of industry has been paralysed by the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. However, the population has seen an increase in living standards, with wages, pensions and child allowances doubling between March 2020 and March 2021. Thus, even though there has been an increase in the construction sector, the automotive industry, agriculture and tourism, an increase in income through higher wages, pensions and child allowances, Romania continues to have a low standard of living compared to the other EU-27 countries, ahead of only Bulgaria.

Chapter two also talks about political governance and the quality of the human condition, referring to the life expectancy of Romanians established by the World Health Organization and based on a synthetic indicator: *life expectancy at birth*. The graphical images and statistical data mentioned by the author are taken from the National Institute of Statistics, while also presenting a comparative analysis with other countries on the European continent or other continents. The major impact of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on Romanians is also specified here: the increase in the number of illnesses related to the virus and the number of deaths among the population, the overcrowding of hospitals and, above all, of intensive care units, the restrictions imposed by the authorities on the general population, the difficulties encountered in the purchase of specific and strictly necessary equipment for medical institutions and medical staff who were at the forefront of the fight against the pandemic.

Chapter two also specifies Romania's place in the European hierarchy and in the world ranking from an economic and social point of view (pp. 61-66), the top of the countries most affected by the pandemic, more specifically statistical data on infection rates and mortality rates.

Chapter three: *Population structure and dynamics. Types of demographic policies*, comprises five sub-chapters which present, following a fluid course, the structure of the Romanian population and its territorial organisation over the last 160 years, while also specifying the changes that have occurred over time and the events that have contributed to these changes, an analysis of the population of the European Union, starting in 2019, with a demographic projection up to 2050, the distribution of the population by gender and age group and details of the specific elements of the school population, with information on the national strategy for education. Chapter three concludes with the presentation of the Romanian state's demographic policy, mentioning the importance of human capital for any society. Indicators such as birth rate/mortality, illness, marriage, divorce, internal and external migration are benchmarks for societies around the world, including Romania, when they wish to analyse the evolution of the population in a given territory.

Cristina Otovescu details, in chapter four of her book, entitled *Public Health and Health Systems Diagnosis in Romania and the European Union: Health Protection Policy for Citizens*, the public health policies that European countries, including Romania, are adopting, taking into account the economic situation and especially the pandemic crisis. The specific legislative framework and the actors directly involved in the development of research on the basis of which concrete steps for the implementation of measures to protect the population against harmful environmental factors are established are captured here. Of course, any solutions found will have to respect citizens' rights and the principle of responsibility for the solutions applied. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has led some countries to adopt restrictive measures, some of which are in conflict with the principles of ethics and morality. The chapter presents a *top 10 of the healthiest nations in the world*, a *top 10 of the unhealthiest countries in the world*, a *world happiness ranking*, conducted and published under the auspices of the UN in 2019, based on research conducted in 156 countries around the world over 3 years, starting in 2016. It also mentions the health policy that the European Union envisages for its citizens, highlighting, in sub-chapter 5, the objectives of the health promotion policy in Romania, with statistical data resulting from the implementation of studies in the period 2018-2020, the negative influence of the COVID-19 pandemic that has extremely vulnerable health systems around the world, with major effects especially on countries that were already facing problems at this level, here also referring to the Romanian health system. (pp. 99-135)

Chapter five entitled *Public Policies in Crisis Situations* defines the notion of *emergency* and *crisis situations* by reference to both the legislative and administrative framework and exemplifies the types of crisis situations that have required emergency and that Romania has faced from 1977 to 2021. The pandemic

crisis is presented at length and continued in the next chapter entitled: *The manifestation of the pandemic in various countries around the world and the reactions of public authorities*. Here, China's strategy to combat the virus is illustrated with statistical data and photographs, South Korea's strategy is also illustrated with graphs and photographs, the humanitarian catastrophe in Italy and Spain, Germany and Israel's strategy to combat the new coronavirus, the pandemic situation in the USA and, at the end of the book, in the last chapter entitled: *Recurrence of SARS-CoV-2 infections and mobilisation of the international community*, the author Cristina Otovescu summarises the responses of the European Union and the World Health Organisation to the major challenges generated by the pandemic crisis. Here, the economic measures to support European states, the medical solutions, i.e. testing the population and implicitly the emergence of a concrete solution, i.e. immunisation of the population with a specific serum produced in record time by several pharmaceutical companies in the world, thus increasing resilience to the virus, are highlighted.

In the end, the book refers to a substantial bibliography, mentioning books and specialized articles as well as online resources, legislation and annexes with development strategies and public policies of the ministries under the Romanian Government.