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The Modernization of Romania —A Success or A Failure?

GHEORGHE IACOB

AFTER A relatively long period we revisit this topic starting from the conclusions of the recent work by Bogdan Murgescu.¹ On the question of modernization many a historian have written in the past decades, including Gh. Platon, Ion Bulei, Victor Axenciuc, Ioan Scurtu, and others, plus sociologists, psychologists and writers such as Liviu Antonesei. The approaches vary greatly in terms of method and interpretation, from positive attitudes that tacitly assume a success in the process of modernization of Romania – if we think of the period between the rule of Alexandru Ioan Cuza and World War II, to a negative view, as we suggest in the title. Here are just a few examples.

As a result of such an intense study that we expected to lead to a positive outcome, Victor Axenciuc concludes: “In all the modern period, Romania’s growth complemented that of industrial countries, like any agrarian nation, with very slim chances of ever drawing near the former; it was a dependent and peripheral manner of growing, with reduced possibilities of structural change even within the century to follow. Consequently, despite all certain progress in development and modernization and in making up for its century-long stagnation, Romanian economy between the Wars was still ranking very low in Europe, the same place it had been at the end of the 19th century and the very same it would be at the end of the 20th.”²

In the same book, Bogdan Murgescu argues the same conclusion in several tens of pages, emphasizing the idea of economic discrepancies: “Both the Old Kingdom, and the territories under Russian or Austro-Hungarian administration had done some progress in the sense of modernization, but had not become genuine modern societies, they had not assumed a sustained economic growth and had still lost field as compared to the European average of economic growth.”³ As for the interwar period, the title Great Romania and its economic failure for chapter III.2 is illustrative.⁴

In the same vein, Liviu Antonesei revisits an older analysis and points out the failed modernizations from the beginning of the 19th century to the post-communist period.⁵

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In our opinion, modernization ought to be approached in a balanced manner and with an adequate methodology. As a matter of fact, it is very important to select the contexts of reference for the process of modernization in Romania's case. Do we look on ourselves at different times in the evolution of Romanian society *during modernization*? Do we put Romania against other states of comparable size? Or against the developed countries in the Western world? Is it a quantitative and/or qualitative comparison? Do we try to eliminate any would-be ideological pressure, past or present? Do we only highlight achievements, or only setbacks? And such questions could go on. We therefore revisit an older inquiry where we wanted to find some of the answers. On this basis I believe that we can build a *balanced view* on the modernization of Romania between 1859-1939. The considerations here refer especially to the first stage of the process, although some assessments may include the interwar period.

BEFORE DISCUSSING the features of modernization in Romania during these decades, admittedly, we cannot rule out of a possible definition industrialization, rationalization, secularization, and bureaucratization. From the same viewpoint of research methodology we can also admit to a sequence of stages in the process of modernization in Romania as established by the German historian Lothar Maier: 1829-1853, 1856-1875, 1878-1907, and 1918-1938.⁶ In this sequence he places particular emphasis on some internal and external events including the Adrianopolis peace treaty, the Crimean war, the Independence War, the 1907 uprising, and the First World War. A special note is needed on the 1907 uprising, which the author considers to be the radical momentum for the liberal reforms programme.

An essential issue is the way in which Romania's political elite perceived and conducted the process of modernization and integration in the European environment of the time. The proclamation of the modern Romanian state and then the state independence forced politicians to analyse the context for the integration among the other European states as modernization involved an adaptation to the requirements and rhythm of developed Europe. Besides, more than three out of four politicians had gone to university in Western countries and, consequently, had become familiar with what was referred to as "European civilization." The people in charge of modernization of the country had understood early on that the only way for the Romanians was progress 'in step with' Europe, as it were. This was reflected, for example, in I. C. Bratianu's declaration at January 10, 1861, in the Deputy Assembly: "Gentlemen, I traveled abroad, spoke with capitalists, even had negotiations with them, and they told me that as long as we did not have institutions to guarantee their business transactions, they would not come and place their capital here..."⁷ We find the same idea reformulated in the Report on the *Act on the Development of Industry* of 1887: "... no one will come from abroad to help us start businesses in industry unless purposely encouraged by the state system in our country."⁸ Conservative leader P. P. Carp admitted to this reality himself during the debates on the *Mining Act* in the Deputy Assembly of April 14, 1895: "Modern

standards are in order, it is no use trying to keep on a past however glorious it may be. The past is gone. It is no use shutting the door on modern visions, for the future will make itself seen and becomes present.”⁹⁹

In the same context, an essential problem is whether the governing coalition had a concrete strategy for the modernization of the country. The experts’ views – be they historians, economists, sociologists, political analysts and so on – can be seen in two categories even though they are not always explicit.

A first category of authors believe that it is not possible to clearly outline a conscious construct, an articulated vision with precise goals in the social, political and economic life. Instead, it is more reasonable to see a gradual development depending on the political dynamics of the parties in power especially since, among other things, there were no political and economic doctrines to support such a theory, apart from the compromise between the liberals and conservatives that resulted in what was seen as a governmental reel with opposite parties coming to power in alternative succession.

Other authors – especially historians – argue that it is possible to outline a strategy behind Romania’s modernization between 1878 and 1914. The two ideological sides – liberal and conservative – now show signs of transformation in the sense that they formulate clear-cut liberal and, respectively, conservative doctrines. Even in the absence of theoretical support, the positions of the two parties on the direction, means, and pace of modernization are clearly explained in Parliament and in various political speeches, in the legislation of the time, booklets and party publications.

There was no political compromise or any kind of agreement behind the “governmental reel.” There was a permanent contest between the two political parties, stemming in the political vision and doctrine, and its variable intensity depended on a series of internal and external factors.

Both parties favoured the idea of modernization. But they could not agree on the methods and especially the pace of achieving it. We can say that the co-participation of the Conservative Party in the process of modernization indicated an attempt to adapt the party to the new demands of the Romanian society in full emergence.

This suggests that modern *development* took place in a context of *perpetual tension*; there was only continuity in what concerned the administrative aspects – for example, the fact that the Conservatives maintained some laws passed by the Liberals indicates the inability to change them because these laws covered some development necessities.

The *alternative succession to power* under the circumstances represented a modus operandi of the political machine, as a result of a series of social, economic, and political factors, and *not an assumed identity of strategy* on the direction, means, and pace of modernization.

EVEN AT that time, but also in the following period, there were certain opinions on what we could call the motto of modernization. Also, there has been a critical vein concerning the progress at the turn of the 20th century.

The Liberal motto – “by ourselves”, was a symbol of the programme that the emerging bourgeoisie formulated in full awareness of the fact that its political strength

depended on the consolidation of the entire economy, which was a goal attainable through domestic effort. This motto resulted in a protectionist customs policy from 1886, in measures meant to encourage the national industry especially the 1887 Act, in a series of restrictive terms for foreign investors, in establishing the National Bank and other banks, the Rural Office, buying back the railway company and some monopoly businesses from foreign capitalists, and so on. I. G. Duca defined the motto “by ourselves” as a national economic policy “which is not exclusivist or chauvinistic, which is not meant to put off foreign investors, but which aims primarily to develop the country’s own economic force by domestic means.”¹⁰ The motto had been expressed before 1877, too. After obtaining the state independence, it became the hallmark of the Liberal doctrine and a political weapon against the Conservatives.

In the process of consolidating the Conservative doctrine, the traditional core of these ideas was supported and completed by the members of the Junimea group. The relationships between the traditional wing of the party and the Junimea group were rather uneven, winding between merges and divergences. But from the point of view of the doctrine, both sides shared the same ground, with the Junimea group playing an important role in defining some principles and concepts on the main aspects of social, economic, and political life, depending on the recent developments in the country’s priorities.

As supporters of evolution, the Conservatives favoured a slow growth of economic, social, and political structures so as to avoid social quakes. In Al. Marghiloman’s view,¹¹ conserving a society translated as “no tampering with the Constitution,” “no expansion of suffrage,” and “respect for property,” while for N. Filipescu it meant “wise and slow evolution.”¹² We could say that the essence of the Conservative doctrine is accurately reflected in Lascar Catargiu’s motto: “If it is possible, then yes, but only if it is possible.”¹³

In this confrontation, the power balance changed slowly but constantly in favour of the National Liberal Party, which will push forward the new reforms at the same time with the new economic and political strongholds of the bourgeoisie and the changes in the party’s dominance positions – favouring the young Liberal wing lead by I. I. C. Bratianu. The official announcement of these reforms in the fall of 1914 and the call for the Constituent Assembly represented the Liberals’ victory.

And yet, modernization means more than the Liberal momentum. For example, the way the state participated in the process of institutionalization of modernization and in running and providing it with financial support is, to a great extent, the result of a combined effort of both parties. Also, the motto “by ourselves” could not be put into practice as far as the investment strategy was concerned because of the uneven competition with the foreign capital.

Thus, if we try to make a synthesis of Romania’s modernization from the Independence to the First World War, an apt description for it is on *at full speed and by state intervention*. The following salient features of modernization will support this formula.

As it is commonly known, this process has been widely criticised.

The first detractors were the Junimea group and, of course, the conservative Party. As supporters of the slow pace of development, the latter accused the Liberals of leading the country astray on a revolutionary path, and of adopting reforms and measures that did not meet the country's needs in an attempt to force modernization after the Western model, thus borrowing "forms" only to graft them onto an underdeveloped essence. Consequently, the hybrid society that resulted could only be brought back to normal, back to tradition, by the Conservatives alone.

This familiar theory of form without essence was the Conservative weapon in its political dispute with the Liberals over Romania's direction, ways and rhythm of development. P. P. Carp briefly summarized this in the Deputy Assembly of September 28, 1879, on the occasion of the debates regarding Article 7 of the Constitution: "When Romania, a country rather devoid of any culture, suddenly came face to face with the Western civilization, it naturally was unable to understand the fine detail in the latter's entire mechanism. Naturally, it was bound to confuse the cause for its effect and believe that mere imitation of the forms the Western civilization had taken would automatically bring the same results as in the rest of Europe..."¹⁴

As L. Maier remarks, the "form without essence" theory matches John Kenneth Galbraith's formula of "symbolic modernization" to a tee.¹⁵

Of course, in the development of modern Romania there have emerged contradictions and discrepancies of all sorts, obviously due to the racy activity triggered by sheer necessity. However, they did not go against the "forms" or "essence", but were a natural phenomenon for a society in full process of modernization that still kept quite a few elements from the old order, that did not have a strong bourgeoisie and had to face the economic and political pressure coming from the great powers; it was a society where it was impossible to strike a permanent balance between demands and resources.

C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea was the representative critic from the left wing. He believed that Romania, in the underdeveloped part of Europe at the time, had come under the influence of developed countries and its historical course was decisively determined by this connection to Western capitalism. Consequently, the social and economic relations were reshaped once Western capitalist system had come into place. To a certain extent, Dobrogeanu-Gherea's theory comes close to the Junimea group. He believes that the economic and social evolution will inevitably lead to the development of the "essence," industry included, and to an alignment of the so-called Western "forms" – especially those represented by institutions – with the "essence" of economic life. To him, therefore, modernization meant to have industrialisation or not to have Romania.

We must mention two authors who wrote between the Wars and criticised modernization: Stefan Zeletin and Eugen Lovinescu.

In the following works with the titles literally translated as *The Romanian Bourgeoisie. Its Origins and Historical Role* (Bucharest, 1925) and, to a certain extent, *New Liberalism* (Bucharest, 1927), Stefan Zeletin tries to argue that Romanian economy

has walked the road the Western states had walked. There was a chronological difference of about a century or a century and a half between Western and Eastern Europe. After the Adrianopoles Treaty (1829), the economy of the Romanian Principalities got wired to the Western one, which virtually triggered the process of modernization. Although the external component is essential, the author considers that the emerging Romanian bourgeoisie played a vital role. With Eugen Lovinescu, the main factor in the process of modernization is the influence of the Western thought. Therefore, the way to interpret modernization should be a “revolution from top to bottom.”

Another issue is the methodology of presentation and interpretation of the data on the process of modernization. It is necessary to keep a balanced and nuanced view so as not to exaggerate the achievements or the drawbacks. For example, there are a number of achievements from 1878-1914: over 3,000km railway; a national industry mainly around oil extraction; the National Bank and a loan system; the Maritime and River Service; numerous public buildings in the main cities, and so on. But at the same time there were some problems: the alarming situation of the rural population with over 300,000 peasants lacking land; illiteracy; the birth rate; mortality ranking among the highest in Europe; health care in villages, etc.

Apart from a healthy sense of balance in either direction of assessment, we need comparisons to other European states, including those in the same geographical area. Only thus can we offer a credible picture on the modernization of Romania in these decades around the turn of the 20th century.

Again, methodwise, we have to explicate the problem of costs, beneficiaries, and losers (or the sacrificed parties) in modernization. Even if the data are used as arguments in other subchapters, we can suggest some general considerations.

The costs of modernization were covered by exports. We will only give two examples of such sources. In 1890 the value structure of exports was as follows: total worth – 276 mill. Lei, out of which live stock – 2.7, grains, seeds, and related products – 226.1, food of animal origin – 3.8, other animal products – 2.2, food of vegetal origin – 29.1, timber and related products – 2.9, oil products – 1.2, others – 8.0.¹⁶ The same export structure, but in 1912, was as follows: total worth – 642.1 mill. Lei, out of which, by the same division: - 4.0, - 486.5, - 13.8, - 6.7, -29.3, - 24.4, - 66.2, - 11.2.¹⁷ In other words, agriculture contributed to the country's exports a share that grew to somewhere between 85 % - 95%. Consequently, it is a safe assumption that modernization in this period relied on agriculture.

Although the peasants did their fair share in supporting the costs of modernization, the main beneficiaries were the urban communities, especially the ruling class, followed by the middle-class citizens. The villages did not see a significant impact in the 19th century. Although railways, railway stations, warehouses, and roads were built, the peasants' life in 1914 was not dramatically different from their ancestors. To them, modernization meant a better life for the “city gentlemen” and for the few who could move to the city.

A last issue that demands attention is the end of the modernization. In a book dedicated to this particular period, I. Bulei argued: “Modernization, painful but

necessary, gradually became reality.”¹⁸ Indeed, statistics, as well as accounts of Romanian and foreign observers, show that 1914 Romania had undergone dramatic, sometimes spectacular, transformations in all domains. The century-old synchronization with European civilization is accelerated in these decades and spreads to all areas of the social, economic and political life. Romania is now a European country connected to civilization through all communication channels.

The effects of modernization were understood and assimilated in a different manner for each social class, group or even individual. Lastly, we must address the question whether the group or individual mentality represented an incentive or a hindrance in the process of modernization in all the zones of political, economic, social, or cultural activity.

Referring to the turn of the century European society, N. Filipescu said: “What characterizes our times is an unabated faith in progress. A hundred years back, people used to see happiness somewhere behind them, in a biblical paradise, or in a Golden Age... But in the past century, people have seen progress ahead of them, and all the nations seek to embrace it and rise to a higher state of civilization.”¹⁹ It is hard to establish to what extent this opinion describes the Romanians. In the Western world, the social and economic changes specific to modernity – which in fact took a few centuries – were accompanied by a gradual change in mentality that sometimes forewarned and begot genuine revolutions in science and technology.

In Eastern Europe – as well as in other underdeveloped parts of the world – mentality is usually the last to keep up with progress. The rhythm of progress in the Western world has increased permanently, which makes it impossible to adapt at the same speed especially if we talk about society as a whole. Because, as V. Alexiuc points out, “between the demands of work, type of behaviour, mentality and modern industrialized economic life, on the one hand, and working the land and the mentality that goes with it on the other hand, there are not only essential differences, but also inherent, if not incompatible.”²⁰

Harsh and exaggerated as it may seem, this opinion is accurate to a great extent for the way the Romanian society looked at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Because to the salient features of “agrarian societies” we have to add the legacy from the vicinity and co-habitation alongside Oriental communities; what has recently been nicknamed ‘Balkanisms’ was then found in all social strata, which made it even more difficult to adapt to the requirements of Western civilization. The political business had quite an influence here. Unlike the Western countries such as the Great Britain, Germany, the U.S.A., where the laws were strict and immediately put into practice, in Romania political speculation, improvisation, political protection, nepotism, and so on were the preferred practice in order to meet the demands of progress and force the citizens to adapt if necessary; many such solutions came directly from, or were supported by, the government itself. This is not to say that the other countries were exempt from such practices, but their impact on the economic mechanism and social behaviour was very weak by comparison.

And yet there were branches of society that were quicker to adapt: the economic and political elite – minus the nostalgic and the losers, as well as a part of the middle-class which ranked among the beneficiaries of modernization and so wanted and acted in view of speeding up the process.

In conclusion, we can say that, on the whole, during these decades, the mentality across social classes and individuals in general was more of a hindrance than an incentive in the process of modernization and alignment with the civilization standards of the Western world. Not until the First World War had finished would mentality catch up with the achievements of modernization, namely when education was more widespread among the population. At the same time with the agrarian and electoral reforms, in the new framework of the Romanian national and unitary state, we would see those seminal “forces, endowed with all the moral qualities that can ensure stability and energy for a nation’s life, as well as faith in a future erected on a solid foundation.”²¹

From an economic point of view, 1914 Romania was very different from 1866 Romania, or that of 1878. An illustrative point of reference is the national wealth (according to statistics, it includes the material assets acquired or produced by man, as well as the natural resources that can be capitalized upon²²), with the following evolution in the outlined period:²³

Sectors	1860-1864	1880-1884	1900-1914	1912-1914	1912-14/1860-64
Agriculture, forests, food and seeds stock	1,848.0	3,681.9	6,585.0	10,522.9	569%
Buildings, homes and long-term consumer goods	235.4	388.6	1,471.9	2,386.8	1,014%
Transports and communications	20.6	525.2	1,417.0	2,543.4	12,347%
industry	60.9	68.9	415.2	1,171.2	1,923%
trade	192.0	582.4	659.8	1,075.3	560%
Urban planning	xxx	xxx	xxx	250.4	Xxx
Coin metal stock	37.0	85.3	177.0	381.0	1,030%
Gross assets	2,393.9	5,332.3	10,725.9	18,331.0	766%
External financial obligations	50.1	547.0	1,577.3	3,065.6	6,119%
Net assets	2,343.8	4,785.3	9,148.6	15,265.4	651%

Even if we compare the situation to the period 1880-1884, we see dramatic growth in transports and communications, industry, coin metal stock, and external financial obligations, which all indicate an intense modernization activity.

We can also get a relevant insight from the evolution of the ratio between different sectors in the national wealth:²⁴ %

Sector	1860-1864	1880-1884	1900-1904	1912-1914
Agriculture, forests, food and seeds stock	77.2	69.0	61.4	57.4
Buildings, homes and long-term consumer goods	9.8	7.3	13.7	13.0
Transports and communications	0.9	9.8	13.2	13.9
industry	2.5	1.3	3.9	6.4
trade	8.0	10.9	6.2	5.9
Urban planning	xxx	xxx	xxx	1.4
Coin metal stock	1.5	1.6	1.7	2.1
Gross assets	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
External financial obligations	2.1	10.3	14.7	16.7

After half a century, the agricultural sector dropped by about 20%, the same percentage that appears in other sectors, especially transports and industry. External financial obligations rose eight times and are found in the investments made in transports, industry, urban development and so on.

As for the distribution of national wealth, we find interesting data in N. Xenopol's work published in 1916.²⁵ In rural areas, a number of 2,228 landowners with incomes higher than 10,000 lei had a total amount of 102,131,897 lei together, whereas 1,240,376 peasants with incomes under 600 lei had only 117,490,169 lei taken together.²⁶ In cities, a number of 528 landowners with incomes higher than 10,000 lei had earnings worth 13,229,800 lei, whereas 103,305 citizens with incomes under 600 lei had a total amount of 18,396,047 lei.²⁷ Based on these data, the author concludes that Romanian society appears "from the point of view of wealth and income distribution rather discouraging, with quite a small group of very wealthy citizens who own large pieces of land or woods, banks and powerful commercial or industrial businesses, with huge earnings, and a thin middle class; in the countryside, next to a class of well-off peasants in an ever growing number from one year to the next, a large mass of agricultural workers with a precarious condition; finally, all across the country, a numerous group of underpaid clerks."²⁸

In comparison to other countries, Romania's national wealth – estimated at some \$3,351 between 1912-1914, or some \$476 per capita – was larger than that of Norway or Russia and 2.2 larger than that of Japan.²⁹

At the beginning of the 20th century the national income per capita was approximately \$68, much lower than in the developed countries (the U.S.A – 228, Great Britain – 181, France – 160, Germany – 125), but higher than in Portugal (61.5), Serbia (62), Greece (60), Bulgaria (57), or Russia (50).³⁰

In conclusion, we can say that by the debut of the First World War "Romania's economic and social body, by its partial contents, by the trends and perspectives of

its development in the capitalist European context, was generally emerging as a capitalist unit with an irreversible evolution with its entire set of factors and mechanisms of market economy, with its specific structures, with its advantages and disadvantages, with its problems and contradictions.²³¹

The premises of Romania's development at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century will manifest themselves anew between the Wars in a fresh social, economic and political context. There is an organic continuity between the two periods.

To return to the question in the title – success or failure – we believe that the modernization of Romania is a significant and undeniable reality because the direction of Romania's social dynamics was clearly ascendant, both in quality, and in quantity. The level of modernization must be analysed with a finely nuanced contextualisation for each and every domain, both internally and externally.



Notes

1. Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500-2010)*, Iași, 2010.
2. Romanian Academy, *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VIII, *România întregită (1918-1940)*, Ioan Scurtu (coord.), Bucharest, 2003, p. 122, 124.
3. Bogdan Murgescu, *op.cit.*, p. 150-151.
4. *Ibidem*, p. 212.
5. Liviu Antonesei, "Modernizările românești, populismul și demagogia," in Sorin Antohi (coord.), *Modernism și antimodernism. Noi perspective interdisciplinare*, Bucharest, 2008.
6. L. Maier, "Studii de modernizare a României. Între pacea de la Adrianopole și urcarea pe tron a lui Carol II (1829-1930)," in *România în obiectiv. Limbă și politică. Identitate și ideologie în transformare*, ed. by Krista Zach, München, 1998, p. 16 and the next.
7. *Naționalismul economic și doctrina partidelor în România. Rezultatele politicii de la 1859 până la 1939*, Bucharest, 1930, p. 34.
8. *Studii. Revistă de Istorie*, no. 1/1972, p. 194.
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10. I.G. Duca, "Consecințele războiului și dezvoltarea internă în urma lui," in *Războiul ne-atărnării. 1877-1878*, Bucharest, 1927, p. 150.
11. Al. Marghiloman, *Doctrină conservatoare*, Speech before the Chamber, 12 December 1908, Bucharest, 1909, p. 115.
12. N. Filipescu, "Discurs rostit la Craiova, 21 October 1901," in *Discursuri politice*, II, Bucharest, 1915, p. 29.
13. I. Bulei, *Sistemul politic al României moderne. Partidul conservator*, Bucharest, 1987 p. 495.
14. P.P. Carp, *Era nouă. Discursuri parlamentare*, Bucharest, 1888, p. 21.
15. L. Maier, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
16. V. Axenciuc, *Evoluția economică a României. Cercetări statistico-istorice. 1859-1947*, vol. III. *Monedă-Credit-Comerț-Finanțe Publice*, Bucharest, 2000, p. 364.
17. *Ibidem*.

18. I. Bulei, *Lumea românească la 1900*, Bucharest, 1984, p. 48.
19. N. Filipescu, *Discursuri politice*, II, Bucharest, 1915, p. 45.
20. V. Axenciuc, *Introducere în Istoria economică a României. Epoca Modernă*, Bucharest, 1997, p. 75.
21. N. Iorga, *O viață de Om așa cum a fost*, Valeriu and Sanda Râpeanu, coord., Bucharest, 1972, p. XL.
22. V. Axenciuc, *Avuția națională a României. Cercetări istorice comparate. 1860-1939*, Bucharest, 2000, p. 12.
23. *Ibidem*, p. 159.
24. *Ibidem*, p. 161.
25. N. Xenopol, *La Richesse de la Roumanie*, Bucharest, 1916.
26. *Ibidem*, p. 106.
27. *Ibidem*, p. 107.
28. *Ibidem*, p. 111.
29. V. Axenciuc, *Avuția națională a României. Cercetări istorice-comparate. 1860-1939*, Bucharest, 2000, p. 297.
30. *Ibidem*, p. 294.
31. Idem, *Introducere în Istoria economică...*, p. 214.

Abstract

The Modernization Of Romania – A Success Or A Failure?

On the question of modernization many a historian have written in the past decades, including Gh. Platon, Ion Bulei, Victor Axenciuc, Ioan Scurtu, and others, plus sociologists, psychologists and writers such as Liviu Antonesei. The approaches vary greatly in terms of method and interpretation, from positive attitudes that tacitly assume a success in the process of modernization of Romania – if we think of the period between the rule of Alexandru Ioan Cuza and World War II, to a negative view, as we suggest in the title.

In conclusion, we can say that by the debut of the First World War “Romania’s economic and social body, by its partial contents, by the trends and perspectives of its development in the capitalist European context, was generally emerging as a capitalist unit with an irreversible evolution with its entire set of factors and mechanisms of market economy, with its specific structures, with its advantages and disadvantages, with its problems and contradictions” (Axenciuc, 2000, 214). The premises of Romania’s development at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century will manifest themselves anew between the Wars in a fresh social, economic and political context. There is an organic continuity between the two periods. To return to the question in the title – success or failure – we believe that the modernization of Romania is a significant and undeniable reality because the direction of Romania’s social dynamics was clearly ascendant, both in quality, and in quantity. The level of modernization must be analysed with a finely nuanced contextualisation for each and every domain, both internally and externally.

Keywords

modernisation, capitalist European context, contradictions, a succes or a failure

