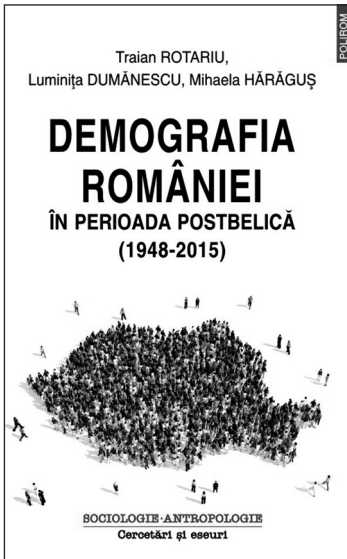

EDITORIAL EVENTS

Politics and Population in Romania (1948–2015)

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TRAIAN ROTARIU, LUMINIȚA DUMĂNESCU, and MIHAELA HĂRĂGUȘ, *Demografia României în perioada postbelică (1948–2015)* (Romania's demography in the post-war period, 1948–2015)(Iași: Polirom, 2017).

THE SIZE and the structure of a country's population during a certain period of time are essential for the understanding of historical evolutions. The demographic research on contemporary Romania, especially after World War II, is still quite modest. Among the few approaches, it is worth mentioning the works of Vladimir Trebici, Vasile Ghețau, Dumitru Sandu, Cornelia Mureșan, and others. Consequently, any professional contribution is not only necessary but welcomed as well. In this context, the book written by Professor Traian Rotariu, Ph.D., and by two young researchers (Luminița Dumănescu, Ph.D., and Mihaela Hărăguș, Ph.D.), both of them trained at the Center for Population Studies of Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, an elite scientific entity set up more than a quarter of a century ago and run until recently by the competent Traian Rotariu, represents an elaborated scientific approach which fills a gap in the specialised literature in Romania. Not only Professor Traian Rotariu but also the other two authors are consecrated

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specialists in demography and population history. Traian Rotariu's name is tied not only to the fundamental instruments published during a period of two decades (some massive volumes related to the censuses in Transylvania during 1850 and 1941), but also to a number of books that have been included lately in the mandatory list of bibliographic resources for students studying sociology, history, etc. Luminița Dumănescu and Mihaela Hărăguș have also published several books pertaining to the field of history and family demography, so that the expertise of the publishing authors in the field of demography and population studies is beyond any doubt.

The book is comprised of two parts dedicated to the two chronological—and historical—segments making up the period of time ranging from 1948 to 2015: the first part—"Population and Demographic Policies during the Communist Regime (1948–1989)"—approaches, in roughly 100 pages, the history of the population from the first census carried out by the communist authorities in Romania until the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorial regime in December 1989. Even though the upper limit of this first part is not delineated by a new census (the last one being carried out in 1977), it is justified by the repeal—immediately after 22 December 1989—of the anti-abortion law introduced by the Bucharest authorities after 1966.

As the authors pertinently underline in the first part, especially in chapters 2 and 3—"Death Rate and Health Policies" and "Family and Population Reproduction: Family Policies"—, the period of the communist regime in Romania (1948–1989) was a very interesting one from the point of view of the major role played by the state through its extremely active demographic policies. The communist state always interfered in the reduction of the death rate, even more so in what concerns the adjustment of the reproductive behaviour of the population by introducing laws, some of which seemed modern at that time, but the same totalitarian state also imposed, by coercion, measures to ensure a satisfactory demographic increase. As such, the demographic policy of the communist regime legitimated the state's intervention in the "internal affairs" of its citizens, serving as a mechanism through which the state was able to control the Romanian population. Just like in the case of other totalitarian states, in Romania too the communist government acted at three levels to materialise its demographic policy. First, it took measures through repression, introducing a law against abortion and divorce; then, the communist regime in Bucharest stimulated pro-birth measures, granting financial aid and other advantages to women and families with many children; last but not least, it acted through persuasion, modifying and directing the public opinion—through the mass media—towards a reproductive behaviour as fruitful as possible. As such, for four decades, the

focal point was the policy regarding general and child death rates, fertility, the family and the woman, all in a wider cultural, economic and social framework.

Chapter 4 of the first part concentrates on “The Evolution of the Population Number and Some of Its Structural Modifications” between 1948 and 1989: dynamics, ethnical modifications, internal mobility, and population ageing. First of all, mention has to be made that the Romanian communist regime had the absurd obsession of increasing the country’s population at an alert pace, granting to the human potential an important role in the mission of building an ideal society. By presenting the figures pointing out the dynamics of the Romanian population between 1948 and 1989, one has to understand that the demographic policy of the communist regime reached its purpose only apparently. As such, Table 4.1 on page 83 shows that, in almost four decades of existence of the communist state, Romania’s population increased by more than 7 million inhabitants, which was one of the fastest growth rates in Europe. If, however, one refers to the ambitions of the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, included, in 1974, in *The Programme of the Romanian Communist Party for the Creation of a Multilaterally Developed Socialist Society and for Romania’s Advancement Towards Communism* (Bucharest, 1975), one shall see that the size of the Romanian population upon the fall of the communist regime was not really the one forecast 15 years earlier. *The Programme of the Romanian Communist Party* stipulated: “Appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure a normal demographic increase, to ensure a correct age distribution of the population, to maintain the youth of our people. A policy to increase the birth rate, and to help children and families with many children shall be consistently applied so that by 1990 Romania’s population should reach at least 25 million inhabitants, and by the year 2000 around 30 million inhabitants” (p. 92). His megalomania generated in Ceaușescu the desire of having as many subjects as possible; this made him implement an obsessive and abusive birth rate increase policy, which caused a lot of pain and suffering to the Romanian population in 1966–1989. His pro-birth efforts were connected to a nationalist rhetoric through which he claimed that “a great nation needs a large population.” Following the authors’ footsteps, it is worth mentioning at this point that through emigration Romania lost more than 600,000 inhabitants, a fact that has greatly affected especially the ethnical structure of the country (the Jewish and German communities drastically decreased). The evaluation of the 1948–1989 period is made sine ira et studio, the remarks are balanced and take into consideration both the strengths and the weaknesses of the era, while the authors’ conclusion is one that leaves no doubt on what really matters in an analysis carried out by professionals: “The demographic heritage of the communist regime was one that did not create

any concern for the post-communist governments and also one that cannot be invoked to answer to the social problems that appeared afterwards” (p. 113).

The second part of the book—“Demographic Phenomena and Processes during the Post-communist Era (1990–2015)” —focuses upon an extremely complex period, that of Romania’s transition from dictatorship back to democracy, a chronological stage defined by a series of structural transformations of powerful demographic impact. From this perspective, this book represents a pioneering work in the specialised literature in our country since it provides an overview of the main demographic phenomena in post-communist Romania. The scientific corpus of the past few years (studies and articles published by a few specialists in national or foreign reviews or volumes) made possible and at the same time necessary the transition from analysis to synthesis in order to bring out the researchers’ findings. Mention has to be made from the very start that the authors of this book have favoured this period in Romania’s recent history, this second part being more consistent than the 1948–1989 period, and that is why this section also has a larger number of chapters (six). The first topic approached in the second part looks at the size and structure of Romania’s population after 1990, highlighting first the data resulted from the censuses carried out in 1992, 2002, and 2011, as well as from the official statistics of the National Institute of Statistics.

After having investigated the trends and determinants of the death rates, the authors allocate a large number of pages to marriage and divorce, but mostly to the issue of fertility that became responsible for Romania’s demographic collapse at the middle of the last decade of the 20th century. The Romanian family suffered significant changes after 1989, and the main elements determining these changes in the transformations suffered by the family were the major restructurings of the post-communist Romanian society which deepened the erosion of the existing traditional family that existed even before 1989 (we refer here to the “deindustrialization” process, the international exodus of the workforce after the removal of visas for most of the European countries at the beginning of the 2000s, etc.). Certainly, women emancipation has significantly progressed after 1989 not only due to the loosening of the divorce law, but also due to the cultural contacts and the access to information, and this has considerably impacted the fertility rate in Romania. And since bad things come in threes, the general reduction of the fertility rate brought another negative aspect to light. A large number of the children born in Romania in the last decades have been born to single mothers or to a family where only the father is employed; as such “at least half of the children born in Romania live in precarious conditions, which puts a strain on their future development chances” (p. 295). At the end of this chapter (as well as in other parts of the book), the authors don’t stop at diagnosing the

problem, but they also come up with solutions that could provide a remedy to the negative aspects brought out by their research. Thus, to ensure a brighter future for the children born to underprivileged families, the authors think it would be more profitable for the Romanian state if it invested in the improvement of living standards for the born ones in order to increase their chances of a decent life than to give large amounts of money to increase fertility. Although the book does not insist upon the foreign mobility of the Romanian population both after 1989 and during the communist regime, migration played an important role in the change of the ethnical structure of the country's population (the massive emigration especially of Jews and Transylvanian Saxons) and in the population ageing after 1990, in a context in which most of the emigrants fall into the young age groups.

Once they have finished reading the book, the readers will be able to grasp the considerable effort made by the three authors who took up the challenge of offering an overview of Romania's demographic potential in the past 70 years. The usefulness of this approach is complex as this work is addressed not only to specialists, students, political and administrative decision-makers, but also to the large educated audience that is in search of answers to the numerous (and most of the time negative) phenomena the Romanian society has been facing in the post-communist period. The tables and the graphs inherent to a book on population studies suggestively accompany the description, while the apparently plain and sober style associated with demographic research is adorned with historical, sociological and anthropological introspections that contribute to the readability of this book.

