

ROMANIA'S CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract: *The theory of sustainable development shows an international dynamic evolution and more and more countries develop socio-economic development methods and techniques, whose main objective is to ensure a balance between economic, social and environmental aspects. Romania is working to ensure a sustainable future, implementing various strategies that aim to transform our society into a truly sustainable and modern one. The analysis of sustainable development indicators can be a solid basis for periodic monitoring progress in achieving the strategic sustainable development goals. The present paper aims to analyze the steps that Romania takes in this process of transforming the economy into a sustainable one and its challenges according to the trends of sustainable development indicators. From the economic point of view, for Romania the economic growth does not have to be a purpose itself, because the economy must work for people and the planet. Therefore, sustainable development and the well-being of citizens must be at the center of the actions, and to achieve these goals the great challenge of our country is the combination of dimensions such as environmental sustainability, increased productivity, equity and macroeconomic stability. The long-term economic challenges related to climate change, digitization and demographic developments must be addressed through a growth model, which will allow to maintain economic competitiveness and achieve the goal of climate neutrality.*

Keywords: sustainable development, goals, economy

1. Introduction

For Romania, as for all EU Member States, sustainable development is proving to be a bold and lasting challenge. We are going through a period marked by globalization, which has meant new challenges for humanity, bringing benefits and opportunities, but also negative side effects in social, economic, political and environmental terms. Starting with the twentieth century is proposed a transition to a sustainable society towards people, planet and economic prosperity. Sustainable development is dependent on the role and capacity to develop, implement and research of three policies. Environmental

policy, social policy and regional development policy have been included in discussions, tasks and decisions taken for environmental protection and technological development, over half a century since 1972 through the United Nations Conference in Stockholm and continuing through other globally and regionally meetings. All the meetings and strategies that followed, aim to establish some principles, objectives and targets that the states should take into account in the process of transforming the society into a sustainable one. Currently, Romania is taking important steps to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Although based on the same three pillars defined since 1987 by the Brundtland Report: social equity, growth and the environment, this strategy is a modified version of the conceptual framework for sustainable development. It is a strategy structured on a package of 17 objectives, supported by 169 underlying targets.

The **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** are as follows:

Goal 1: No Poverty

Goal 2: Zero Hunger

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being

Goal 4: Quality Education

Goal 5: Gender Equality

Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Goal 10: Reduced Inequality

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

Goal 13: Climate Action

Goal 14: Life Below Water

Goal 15: Life on Land

Goal 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions

Goal 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal

2. Romania's Perspective on Sustainable Development

The responsibility and role of young generations in creating sustainable development is essential, by imposing a new way of thinking regarding care for the others, moral values, protection of the environment and natural resources. The transformation of the economy into a sustainable one, requires a new course of action focused on innovation, optimism and resilience of the citizens. Sustainable development provides a framework for thinking that, once acquired by the citizen, will help create a more equitable society defined by solidarity and able to cope with

the changes brought by the current global, regional and national challenges. [1]

Romania has obvious regional disparities. These inequalities can be covered by sustainable development. The state could serve the needs of the citizen in a fair, efficient way and with strong concerns for a clean environment. As a member of the international community, but especially as a member of the European Union, Romania has the interest to implement the principles of sustainable development at national level, by achieving the objectives and targets of the 2030 Agenda, both economically, socially and environmentally.

Data published by Eurostat show that Romania's gross domestic product based on purchasing power parity increased from 52% of the EU average in 2010 to 66% in 2018, which indicates economic growth. At first glance, it can be said that this positive evolution demonstrates Romania's ability to successfully implement the objectives of the national strategy for sustainable development 2030. But, despite this positive evolution, Romania remains one of the poorest countries in the EU. For the well-being of the citizens and the protection of the planet, the GDP / capita indicator must be analyzed in correlation with other indicators, and the realistic perspective is that for Romania this project means a real challenge.

On the one hand, despite the difficulties encountered, Romania has had positive developments, demonstrating the sustainability of Romanian society's strategic options and its membership in the EU, maintaining an optimistic attitude regarding the implementation of sustainable development goals and the transition to a modern economy. On the other hand, there are shortcomings and weaknesses, in which additional efforts are needed to achieve the convergence objectives and closer to European Union limits and averages.

3. Sustainable development objectives - implementation and monitoring

As a member of the international community, but especially as a member of the European Union, Romania has an interest in implementing the principles of sustainable development at the national level.

One of the objectives of the current national strategy for sustainable development is related to industry, innovation and infrastructure. We can become competitive at European and even international level only if we encourage innovation, in addition to a quality and reliable infrastructure and a sustainable industry, which uses resources efficiently, by adopting clean and environmentally friendly technologies. Romania is positioned in the category of modest innovators in the European Union, its innovation performance being well below the European average. Innovation Union

Scoreboard 2019 qualifies Romania with one of the weakest results in Europe as shown in figure no.1.

In the period 2011-2019, many countries have improved their innovation system, registering increases, but Romania remains on the last place in the group of modest innovators, along with Bulgaria. However, it must be taken into account that over time Romania's performance has declined relative to that of the EU in 2011, but after a strong decline between 2011 and 2015, performance has started to increase after 2015. This situation is mainly caused by the low share of expenditure on research - development - innovation (RDI).

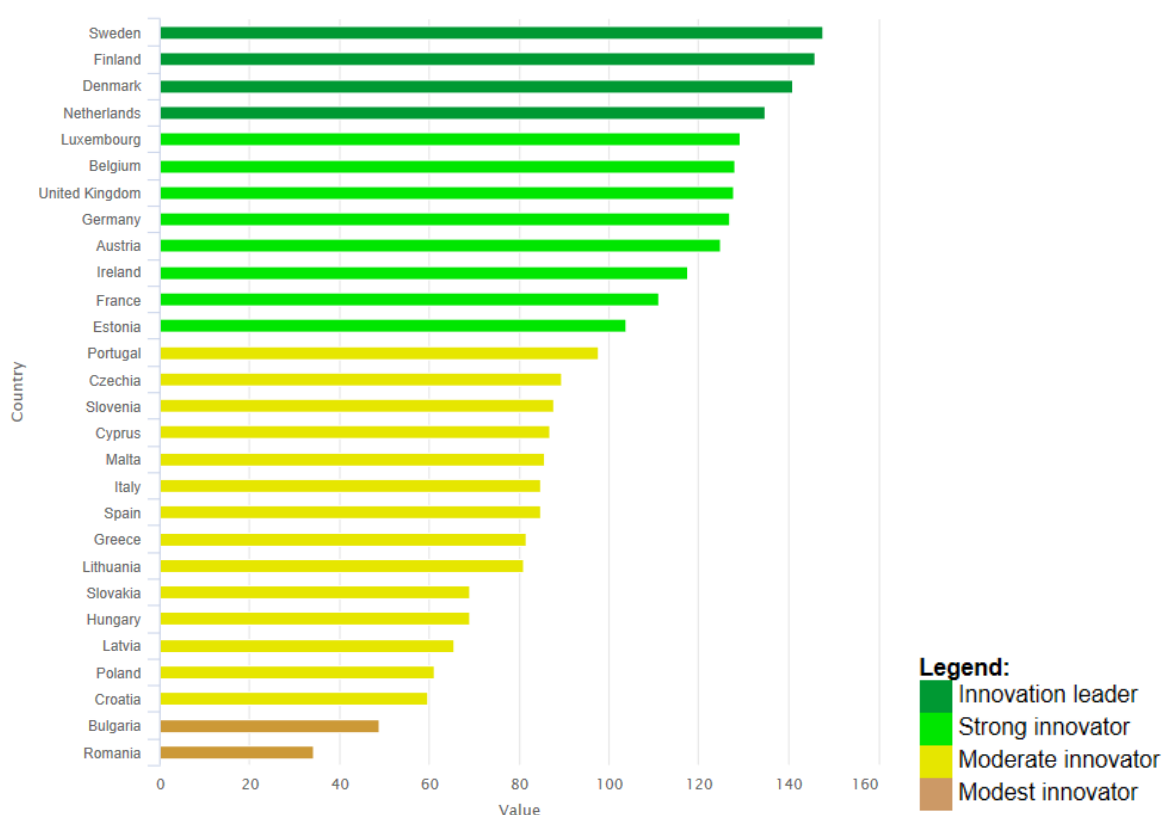


Figure 1: Performance of EU Member States' innovation systems
Source: European Innovation Scoreboard 2019, ec.europa.eu

According to the National Institute of Statistics INS, in the period 2007-2018 the level was constantly below 0.51% of GDP. In the public sector, investments in research do not exceed 0.21%, the percentage decreasing considerably from the level recorded in 2008. The duration and depth of these developments have led researchers in

Romania to move to more developed countries where the economic interest in research, development and innovation activities is higher. In the business sector, investments in research have increased slightly due to the granting of fiscal facilities to companies and financing through various National Programs.

Table no.1 R&D expenditure as GDP percentage/ GDP share of public and business sector
R&D expenditure

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
R&D expenditure as GDP percentage	0.52	0.57	0.46	0.45	0.49	0.48	0.39	0.38	0.49	0.48	0.50	0.51
GDP share of public sector R&D expenditure	0.30	0.40	0.27	0.28	0.31	0.29	0.27	0.22	0.27	0.21	0.21	0.21
GDP share of business sector R&D expenditure	0.22	0.17	0.19	0.17	0.18	0.19	0.12	0.16	0.22	0.27	0.29	0.30

It is very important for Romania to resist budgetary pressures and does not reduce its spending on research, both in the public and private sectors, which are essential for sustainable, future growth. It is also necessary to further encourage entrepreneurship, innovative startups and the significant increase of employees in research and development. This will create a favorable environment for research that will favorably influence the country's ability to retain talent.

Romania should also make additional efforts regarding the development of cities and human settlements in order to achieve the convergence objectives. According to World Bank statistics, the share of the urban population increased to 54% in 2018, from 34% in 1960, while the EU average was 74.5% in 2018 [3]. This process of urbanization is constantly growing, forcing cities to become resilient and sustainable in order to cope with socio-economic and environmental changes. The national strategy on sustainable development aims to

improve living conditions for the urban population, consisting in accessing safe housing and affordable prices, efficient public transport and reducing negative impact on the environment, by paying special attention to air quality.

Poor air quality has a negative impact on human health and all EU Member States are working to ensure and meet air quality standards. According to the conclusions of the Council of the European Union regarding the improvement of air quality, from 2020, it was established that the main sources of air pollution in the EU are: transport; commercial, institutional and household sectors, including home heating; energy production and distribution; energy consumption in industry; industrial processes and product use; agriculture and waste.

Air quality in urban areas has received repeated warnings from the EU institutions due to the increased risk of mortality caused by respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Although there is a positive trend in

reducing the main air pollutants in the EU (shown in figure no. 2), all member states

still face major problems in exceeding air quality limit values.

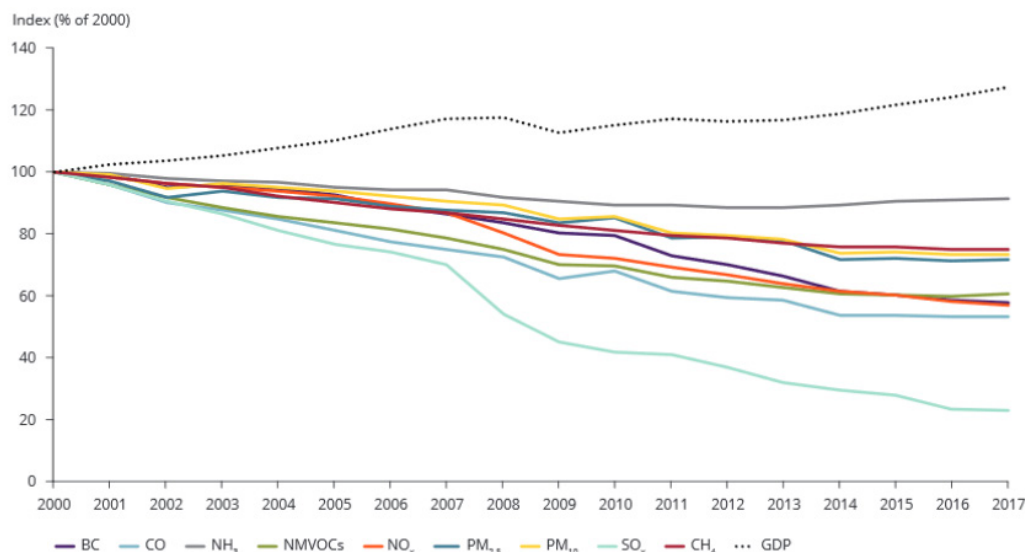


Figure 2: Trends in EU-28 emissions, 2000-2017 (% of 2000 levels)

In 2018, was opened a procedure for non-fulfillment of state obligations regarding the exceeding of limit values for air pollutants against 16 EU member states. In Romania, the major problem was that the limit imposed for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), for 2010 was not reached. Although according to World Bank statistics, in Romania, in 2012 the share of nitrogen dioxide emissions compared to 1990 decreased considerably with 62.86% [4], the standard quality limit has been constantly exceeded. Also in 2018, the European Commission reported that problems regarding exceeding the limit values for more air pollutants existed in 23 of the 28 Member States, in total, in over 130 cities in Europe [5].

According to EEA's Air quality in Europe — 2019 report, the annual EU limit value for nitrogen dioxide NO₂ — one of the main air quality pollutants of concern, which is typically associated with vehicle emissions — was widely exceeded across Europe in 2017. But the situation has changed from January 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic has caused industrial activity shut down, flights and road transport cancelation. Measurements from

the European Space Agency's Sentinel-5P satellite show that during late January and early February 2020, levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) over cities and industrial areas in Europe were lower than in the same period in 2019, by as much as 40% [6]. The pandemic could show us how the future might look with less air pollution. At the very least, it should challenge governments and businesses to consider how things can be done differently after the pandemic, to hold on to temporary improvements in air quality. To slash the emission of air pollutants such as NO₂, an idea should be electrifying transport, with expanded train lines and more electric cars. This could make air quality improvements permanent. Romania's action plan to combat air pollution and the quality standards imposed by the European Commission must be respected because the lack of an improvement in air quality has an impact in human health and economy, leading to increased medical costs, reduced worker productivity and can cause damage soil, crops, forests, lakes and rivers.

4. Conclusions

Through the Sustainable Development Goals, an ambitious agenda is set for the next 15 years in order to end poverty, economic growth, focus on social needs, including education, health, social protection and employment, while addressing the issues of combating climate change and protecting the environment. It also supports the fight against inequality, infrastructure development, ensuring everyone's access to energy, biodiversity conservation.

Romania must focus on long-term economic growth, based on innovation, a determinant of competitiveness, along with a reliable infrastructure and an industry based on well-thought-out technologies and processes. The state's care for the citizen is essential in increasing the confidence of the

Romanian population in achieving themselves by their own forces, leading to the development of entrepreneurship. Educating the civic sense among the population is an important social factor for the sustainable development of communities. Citizens need to benefit from the improvement of the education and health system, from the reduction of inequalities between men and women, between urban and rural areas. In terms of environment, protecting nature is everyone's responsibility. Although awareness of the importance of the environment has increased significantly in recent years, we must continue this process of educating the population in protecting the natural resources, because this has both an impact on human health and on economy.

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