

ECONOMIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ROMANIA'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Key words: growth, development, environment, strategy, economic requirements.

Abstract. Starting from the drawbacks of traditional economic growth, the article highlights the current problems of sustainable development in the European area. The author considers that EU environmental requirements must be balanced against our country's potential to apply the principle of ecological responsibility. Furthermore, the European character of sustainable development does not cancel out the national dimensions of this process. In this context, we identify the main economic requirements for Romania's sustainable development, and we analyse the possibility of meeting the objectives assumed through the National Strategy for Sustainable Development

Introduction

In the traditional approach, issues of economic development are not correlated with environmental issues, as natural resources have long been considered *free goods* (available for free, in unlimited quantities). Later, when industrial and technological development, population increase, etc. started requiring increasingly higher quantities of resources, there emerged the *theory of the limited character of production factors* that has led to the theory of *optimal resource allocation*. The latter suggests the efficient use of production resources and the substitution of scarce resources with non-scarce ones on the basis of marginal (differential) calculation. Lately, given the complex requirements of environmental protection, these approaches have proven insufficient. This is how the *concept of sustainable development* has emerged, a concept that proposes a *fundamental change of the type of development promoted by industrial society*.

Sustainable development is considered *that type of development that meets contemporary needs without compromising the capacity of future generations to satisfy their own needs*. This definition, formulated through the Brundtland Report in 1987, although controversial, is considered official and it serves as a reporting

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standard for objectives, requirements and achievements of sustainable development.

The foregrounding idea of sustainable development is to find the optimal interaction of three systems – economic, social and environmental – in a dynamic and flexible operational process. The achievement, at global level, of this ambitious objective, implies the fulfillment of major requirements, such as:

- ensuring sustainability of economic growth over time for all countries, without exception;
- placing humans and their various needs in the centre of attention;
- observing national specificity in the sustainable development of each country;
- ensuring simultaneity of progress, on all dimensions of the process of sustainable development. One has to keep in mind that the health of the population and of the environment are sources of productivity gains, and that only productivity excess can support funds necessary in the fight against pollution and poverty.

The essential condition of sustainable development is *economic growth*, i.e. the increase, in real terms, of the total gross domestic product (*GDP*) per inhabitant. So, the economy needs to have an ascending evolution, on medium and long term, which does not exclude the presence of contextual oscillations and even of temporary economic regressions. It is estimated that a national economy, or a super-system, registers economic growth when it is based on the existence of the tendency of real positive growth, within an appropriate time frame.

1. European strategy for sustainable development

Since they live in a densely populated geographical space, European citizens are very sensitive to issues of natural environment. This is why the European Union drew, as early as 1972, a strict environmental policy that was subsequently developed as one of the most important community policies. Its importance is not due to the amount of allocated funds but to the fact that the environmental policy has become a horizontal policy of the European Union, and aspects of environmental protection are considered compulsory for the other community policies.

Sustainable development is a basic strategy of environmental policies. It has become a political objective of the European Union beginning with 1997, though its inclusion in the Maastricht Treaty. In 2001, the European Council from Gothenburg adopted the *European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development*, to which an external dimension was added in Barcelona, in 2002.

In 2005, European Commission started a process to revise the Strategy, and it published in February a critical evaluation of progress registered after 2001, which points out a series of directions for action and highlights some unsustainable

tendencies (climatic changes, public health threats, poverty and social exclusion, exhaustion of natural resources and erosion of biodiversity). As a result of the identification of these issues, in June 2005, heads of States and governments of Member States adopted a Declaration on the guiding lines of sustainable development, which incorporates the Lisbon Agenda, revised for economic growth and the creation of new jobs as an essential component of the comprehensive objective of sustainable development. After prolonged consultation, the European Commission presented, on the 13th of December 2005, a proposal to revise the Gothenburg Strategy from 2001.

As a result of this process, on the 9th of June 2006, the EU Council adopted the ***Renewed Strategy for Sustainable Development*** for an extended Europe. The document's general objective is the continuous improvement of the quality of life for the current and future generations by creating sustainable communities, capable to manage and use resource efficiently and capitalise on the potential for ecological and social innovation of the economy with a view to ensuring prosperity, environmental protection and social cohesion.

The achievement of this general objective implies the fulfillment of the following ***key-objectives***:

- environmental protection, through measures that would allow the dissociation of economic growth from the negative impact on the environment;
- social equality and cohesion, by observing fundamental rights, cultural diversity, equality of chances, and by fighting any type of discrimination;
- economic prosperity, by promoting knowledge, innovation and competitiveness so as to ensure high living standards and an abundance of well paid jobs;
- the fulfillment of EU international responsibilities by promoting democratic institutions in the service of peace, security and liberty, of principles and practices of sustainable development everywhere in the world.

The European Union's strategy states the following ***guiding principles***:

- promotion and protection of fundamental human rights;
- solidarity within generations and among generations;
- cultivation of an open and democratic society;
- information and active involvement of citizens in the decision-making process;
- involvement of businesses and social partners;
- policy coherence and quality of governance at local, regional, national and global level;
- integration of economic, social and environmental policies by impact evaluations and consultation of interested bodies;
- use of modern knowledge to ensure economic and investment efficiency;

- application of the caution principle in the case of uncertain scientific information;
- applying the principle “the polluter pays”.

The EU strategy also establishes precise implementation, monitoring and follow-up procedures, and the obligation that both the European Commission and Member States report every other year on their assumed engagements. The next term for the analysis of registered progress and revision of the priorities of the EU Strategy by the European Council is September 2009, and Member States have to report on the implementation of National Strategies until June 2009 at the latest. Since Romania has committed itself to finalise its own revised National Strategy for Sustainable Development by the end of 2008, and to present it then to the European Commission, the first term to report on implementation is June 2011.

For Romania, as an EU Member State, sustainable development is not one of the possible options, but the only rational perspective to ensure the confluence of economic, social and environmental factors. Through the Adhesion Treaty, our country committed itself to apply the whole *acquis communautaire* for the environment. At the same time, considering the environmental requirements in the European area against our country’s possibilities, there are some lags in the implementation terms for certain obligations (by 2015 for industrial installations of high and complex pollution degree, 2017 for municipal refuse dumps, 2018 for the extension of urban drinking water systems and waste water treatment systems). At the same time, joining the European model of sustainable development implies supplementary efforts for Romania to cover substantial lags at several levels of the national system

The European character of Romania’s sustainable development does not cancel out the national dimensions of this process. Starting from the general objectives and principles of the European strategy for sustainable development, our country has elaborated its own sustainable development strategy that faithfully represents the endogenous dimensions and requirements for sustainable development. The **National Strategy for Romania’ Sustainable Development**² aims to achieve objectives that transcend the length of electoral cycles and contingent political preferences. These strategic objectives are:

- horizon 2013: organic incorporation of sustainable development principles and practices in Romania’s public programmes and policies, as a EU member state;
- horizon 2020: reaching the current average level of EU countries’ main indicators of sustainable development;

² http://www.mmediu.ro/dezvoltare_durabila/sndd.htm

- horizon 2030: Romania's significant approach to the average level in EU member states of that year's sustainable development indicators.

The fulfillment of these objectives implies compliance with several economic requirements. Some of these requirements are no longer present in the European Union's Strategy for Sustainable Development, as the respective problems have been overcome by the countries that formed the EU core many decades ago. However, in the case of Romania, such requirements must be solved in parallel with the effort to achieve full conformity with EU norms and standards.

2. Continuing economic growth

Growth is a basic condition of any type of economic development. There is no economic development without a long-term increase of macroeconomic results.

Yet, for Romania, this general requirement of sustainable development has a much broader importance, as our country's current level of development is rather low.

There are numerous explanations for the low level of economic development. They are mainly connected to late transition to functioning market economy, against the background of difficult historical legacy and of severe structural malfunctions. In the aftermath of the 1989 revolution, as an effect of various difficulties that it was confronted with, Romanian economy registered a strong decrease of GDP. It was only in 2000 that this indicator reached the 1990 level, after which it started to grow.

Lately, Romania has registered strong increase of its gross domestic product. The annual growth rate, in real terms, of this indicator in Romania was one of the highest in the whole European Union (Table 1). In 2007, Romania reached a total GDP of approx. 121.3 billion euros, which was triple the amount of 2000. However, the main problem is that in the context of the current economic crisis, it is unlikely that we shall have such a spectacular GDP increase again. The effect of the crisis, which is already obvious in the other EU member states (in 2008, real DGP in eight of the 27 countries fell down), is likely to significantly affect Romanian economy, and GDP growth could become negative.

Despite all progress that Romania has lately registered in economic growth, its level of economic development, expressed in the amount of GDP per capita, is currently much reduced as compared to the average level in developed European countries, as well as in comparison with the UE-27 average level. Thus, according to EUROSTAT³ data, in 2006 Romania registered a GDP per capita, expressed in current prices, of only 4,500 euros, while EU-27 registered 23,500 euros, Luxemburg 71,600 euros, Ireland 41,100 euros, Denmark 40,500 euros.

³ L'Europe en chiffres - Annuaire Eurostat 2008 (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>)

Tab. 1 Average annual rhythm of real GDP increase (in percentage)

Specification	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
UE -27	3.0	3.9	2.0	1.2	1.3	2.5	2.0	3.1	2.9	0.9
Belgium	3.4	3.7	0.8	1.5	1.0	3.0	1.8	3.0	2.8	1.2
Bulgaria	2.3	5.4	4.1	4.5	5.0	6.6	6.2	6.3	6.2	6.0
Czech Rep.	1.3	3.6	2.5	1.9	3.6	4.5	6.3	6.8	6.0	4.4
Denmark	2.6	3.5	0.7	0.5	0.4	2.3	2.4	3.3	1.6	-1.1
Germany	2.0	3.2	1.2	0.0	-0.2	1.2	0.8	3.0	2.5	1.3
Estonia	-0.1	9.6	7.7	7.8	7.1	7.5	9.2	10.4	6.3	-3.6
Ireland	10.7	9.2	5.8	6.4	4.5	4.7	6.4	5.7	6.0	-2.3
Greece	3.4	4.5	4.2	3.4	5.6	4.9	2.9	4.5	4.0	2.9
Spain	4.7	5.0	3.6	2.7	3.1	3.3	3.6	3.9	3.7	1.2
France	3.3	3.9	1.8	1.0	1.1	2.5	1.9	2.2	2.2	:
Italy	1.5	3.7	1.8	0.5	-0.0	1.5	0.7	2.0	1.6	-1.0
Cyprus	4.8	5.0	4.0	2.1	1.9	4.2	3.9	4.1	4.4	3.7
Latvia	3.3	6.9	8.0	6.5	7.2	8.7	10.6	12.2	10.0	-4.6
Lithuania	-1.5	4.2	6.7	6.9	10.2	7.4	7.8	7.8	8.9	3.0
Luxemburg	8.4	8.4	2.5	4.1	1.5	4.5	5.2	6.4	5.2	-0.9
Hungary	4.2	5.2	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.8	4.0	4.1	1.1	0.5
Malta	:	:	-1.6	2.6	-0.3	1.3	3.7	3.2	3.6	1.6
Netherlands	4.7	3.9	1.9	0.1	0.3	2.2	2.0	3.4	3.5	2.1
Austria	3.3	3.7	0.5	1.6	0.8	2.5	2.9	3.4	3.1	1.8
Poland	4.5	4.3	1.2	1.4	3.9	5.3	3.6	6.2	6.6	4.8
Portugal	3.8	3.9	2.0	0.8	-0.8	1.5	0.9	1.4	1.9	-0.0
Romania	-1.2	2.1	5.7	5.1	5.2	8.5	4.2	7.9	6.2	7.1
Slovenia	5.4	4.4	2.8	4.0	2.8	4.3	4.3	5.9	6.8	3.5
Slovakia	0.0	1.4	3.4	4.8	4.7	5.2	6.5	8.5	10.4	6.4
Finland	3.9	5.1	2.7	1.6	1.8	3.7	2.8	4.9	4.2	0.9
Sweden	4.6	4.4	1.1	2.4	1.9	4.1	3.3	4.2	2.6	-0.2
UK	3.5	3.9	2.5	2.1	2.8	2.8	2.1	2.8	3.0	0.7

Source: Eurostat

Sweden 33,700 euros etc. The only country of the 27 that lagged behind Romania in this top is Bulgaria, whose DGP/capita was of only 3,300 euros.

Thus, Gross Domestic Product per capita, the most suggestive indicator of the level of economic development, shows that Romania has a degree of development that is 5.2 times smaller than the average degree of development of the EU, 15.9 times smaller than the one of Luxemburg, 9.2 times smaller than Ireland's etc. This proves the need for real and long-term growth of Romanian economy; otherwise, there is the risk that Romania increases its lag not only behind

developed countries but also behind certain Central and East European countries that have been recently admitted to the European Union (in 2006, Slovenia had 15,200 euros GRD/capita, the Czech Republic – 11,100 euros, Hungary – 8,900 euros, Poland - 7,100 euros).

Tab. 2 - GDP per capita, expressed in PPS (in percentage against the EU-27 average)

Specification	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Belgium	123.5	125.0	122.9	120.7 ^(b)	119.4	118.4	118.0	117.5 ^(t)
Bulgaria	29.3	31.0	32.5	33.7	34.5	36.5	37.2	39.7 ^(t)
Czech Rep.	70.2	70.4	73.4	75.1	75.8	77.4	80.2	83.0 ^(t)
Denmark	127.8	128.4	124.1	125.7	123.6	122.9	120.0	118.1 ^(t)
Germany	116.6	115.2	116.5	116.4	116.9	115.7	114.7	115.8 ^(t)
Estonia	46.1	49.8	54.4	57.2	61.1	65.3	67.9	64.2 ^(t)
Ireland	132.6	137.9	140.5	142.0	144.1	147.3	150.2	143.6 ^(t)
Greece	86.5	90.2	92.1	94.0	92.8	94.1	94.8	96.5 ^(t)
Spain	98.1	100.5	101.0	101.0	102.0	104.0	105.4	104.1 ^(t)
France	115.7	116.0	111.8	110.1 ^(b)	110.8	109.4	109.1	:
Italy	117.8	111.9	110.7	106.7	104.8	103.8	101.9	98.9 ^(t)
Cyprus	90.9	89.2	88.9	90.3	90.9	90.2	90.8	92.9 ^(t)
Latvia	38.7	41.2	43.3	45.7	48.6	52.5	57.9	55.2 ^(t)
Lithuania	41.5	44.1	49.1	50.5	52.9	55.5	59.5	60.5 ^(t)
Luxemburg	234.1	240.3	247.7	253.4	254.0	267.0	267.2	261.3 ^(t)
Hungary	58.8	61.3	63.2	63.1	63.2	63.5	62.6	61.6 ^(t)
Malta	77.9	79.5	78.4	77.2	78.2	76.6	77.4	77.8 ^(t)
Netherlands	133.7	133.4	129.3	129.2	130.8	130.8	130.8	133.8 ^(t)
Austria	125.1	126.2	126.8	126.8	124.7	124.3	123.8	124.3 ^(t)
Poland	47.6	48.3	48.9	50.6	51.3	52.3	53.7	55.1 ^(t)
Portugal	77.3	77.0	76.7	74.6	76.9	76.3	76.1 ^(e)	75.3 ^(t)
Romania	27.8	29.4	31.3	34.1	35.0	38.3	42.1 ^(t)	44.8 ^(t)
Slovenia	79.7	82.3	83.4	86.4	87.4	87.6	89.2	90.6 ^(t)
Slovakia	52.4	54.1	55.5	57.1	60.2	63.5	67.0	70.2 ^(t)
Finland	115.7	115.1	112.9	116.2	114.1	114.8	115.8	114.8 ^(t)
Sweden	121.4	121.1	122.6	124.8	120.3	121.4	122.2	122.9 ^(t)
UK	119.8	120.6	121.8	123.5	121.8	120.3	118.9	117.4 ^(t)

Source: Eurostat (f = forecast, e = estimated value, b = series break)

As an indicator of the level of economic development, gross domestic product per capita offers a somehow more optimistic image for us, if we express it in relation with purchasing power parity. Specialists consider that the expression of the GDP in euros does not provide a sufficiently precise imagine, as this currency's

purchasing power differs from one country to another: it is higher in poorer countries than in rich countries. This is why it is common practice to resort to its expression in terms of purchasing power parity. The latter implies the conversion of the respective sums, while considering purchasing power differences, from euros into a conventional currency called “purchasing power standard” (PPS).

The data supplied by Eurostat show that, when expressed in terms of purchasing power parity, gross domestic product per capita registers, in EU countries, a more reduced dispersion than when it is expressed in euros. Thus, as compared to the EU-27 average of 2006 of 23,500 PPS, Romania had a GDP of 8,800 PPS/capita (only 2.6 smaller), Luxemburg – 65,400 PPS, Ireland – 33,500 PPS etc. However, even in this methodological variant of expressing the gross domestic product, Romania’s economic development lag is still quite obvious (Table 2). Gross domestic product per capita in Romania comes gradually close to the average level of the European Union, and the lag is still very big, which implies intensive effort to catch up with the other countries. Under the circumstances when currently, our country does not produce at least half of the average GDP per capita in the European Union, it is rather unlikely that our strategic objective to reach, by 2020, the real average EU level for the main sustainable development indicators could be met.

3. Increase of work productivity and of workforce occupation rate

Work productivity is one of the most important indicators of the efficiency of economic activity. It measures the efficiency or fruitfulness of the use of human labour in various fields of activity, and its increase represents a main requirement of economic and social progress. As a rule, economically developed countries are characterised by a high level of work productivity, and less developed countries have lower work productivity rates.

Judged in the context of the whole national economy, the level of work productivity is still quite low, due to multiple causes. They are connected with the relatively low level of salaries in Romania (insufficient motivation to work), and they are also justified by poor technical work equipment, economic agents’ insufficient managerial capacity etc.

Eurostat data show that the level of work productivity per employed person, calculated according to the gross domestic product (expressed in PPS) and occupied population, is much lower in Romania in comparison with the average EU level (Table 3). In time, this productivity gap shows an obvious tendency to decrease, but it is still quite significant. This means that our country must strongly intensify its effort to increase work productivity.

Tab. 3 Work productivity per occupied person
(in percentage against EU-27 average level)

Specification	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Belgium	136.2	134.4	131.9 ^(b)	130.2	129.8	129.8	127.9 ^(f)
Bulgaria	33.0	33.4	33.7	33.5	34.7	34.9	36.2 ^(f)
Czech Rep.	62.9	66.4	68.0	68.5	69.8	71.8	74.1 ^(f)
Denmark	108.3	106.1	108.6	106.6	105.5	102.1	100.7 ^(f)
Germany	106.2	108.5	108.1	109.2	108.6	107.2	107.2 ^(f)
Estonia	50.8	54.3	57.2	60.0	61.4	64.2	61.0 ^(f)
Ireland	133.1	135.0	135.0	134.4	136.7	139.8	138.3 ^(f)
Greece	99.4	100.7	101.2	99.8	100.7	102.0	103.4 ^(f)
Spain	104.7	103.6	102.0	101.1	102.0	103.6	105.2 ^(f)
France	125.3	121.4	120.6 ^(b)	122.1	121.6	121.6	:
Italy	117.5	115.4	112.1	110.9	109.6	108.5	106.6 ^(f)
Cyprus	84.4	82.4	82.8	82.8	83.4	83.6	84.7 ^(f)
Latvia	43.0	44.1	45.9	48.0	49.9	53.5	50.8 ^(f)
Lithuania	48.0	51.9	53.3	54.4	56.4	59.4	60.8 ^(f)
Luxemburg	163.0	167.0	170.0	169.0	176.2	173.9	166.4 ^(f)
Hungary	70.6	71.6	72.0	72.3	73.0	72.9	72.9 ^(f)
Malta	91.9	90.1	90.1	91.1	90.1	90.2	89.4 ^(f)
Netherlands	113.1	110.7	112.2	113.8	113.4	112.4	114.4 ^(f)
Austria	117.0	118.0	117.5	115.4	115.4	115.0	114.5 ^(f)
Poland	53.9	60.0	61.5	61.3 ^(b)	61.2	60.9	61.2 ^(f)
Portugal	67.8	68.3	67.1	70.1	70.2	71.2 ^(e)	70.7 ^(f)
Romania	29.3	31.1	34.4	35.9	39.5	43.7 ^(f)	46.1 ^(f)
Slovenia	77.7	79.1	81.9	83.5	83.9	84.6	84.9 ^(f)
Slovakia	62.5	63.3	65.5	68.6	71.6	75.0	77.1 ^(f)
Finland	111.2	109.1	112.4	109.9	110.4	111.0	109.6 ^(f)
Sweden	107.5	109.9	113.3	109.9	111.1	111.8	113.0 ^(f)
UK	112.0	112.4	113.6	112.2	111.9	111.8	112.3 ^(f)

Source: Eurostat (f = forecast, e = estimated value, b = series break)

At the same time, in order to meet its sustainable development strategic objectives, our country must persistently act to increase the degree of potentially active work-force occupation that, between 2002 and 2006, was of only 57.9% in Romania, as compared to the EU average of 63.1%.

4. Other requirements

4.1. Growth of investment effort. Romania's specific development needs require a higher investment rate than in the other EU countries. Investment effort is

needed to modernise energy, transportation and urban (running water and sewage) infrastructure, to modernise education and public health, develop rural areas and reduce technological and informational gap.

In order to increase medium and long term investment rate, it is mandatory to continue policies to attract foreign direct investment, especially investment that can contribute substantially to export growth, as well as to the gradual increase of domestic saving rate from 15.3% in 2007 to over 20% in the future, as a result of moderating consumption tendencies. Also, it is necessary to use - completely and efficiently - funds allocated through EU programmes that can substantially contribute to both the growth of the investment rate and to the reduction of current account deficit.

4.2. Modernisation of economic structure. Before 1989, Romanian economy was characterised by a high proportion of energy-intensive industries and poor concern for energy efficiency. The restructuring of the industrial sector, done more by reducing activities than by increasing efficiency, has led to a 40% reduction of energy intensity between 1990 and 2000. Yet Romania remains even now an inefficient energy user, and it has the last position in the European Union in a top made according to this indicator.

The gradual modernisation of economic macrostructure so as to meet social and environmental requirements aims, first of all, to *increase the percentage of services* in GDP from 48,8% in 2006 to approximately 55% in 2013 and 60-65% in 2020 (close to the real average EU level). The development of research, consulting, expertise, IT, financial and managerial training services can directly contribute to the increase of productivity of total resources consumed in the whole economy, given that in the service sector, the ratio between gross added value and intermediary consumption is higher than in agriculture, industry and constructions.

The adjustment of intersectorial structures aims mainly to stimulate the priority development of substructures that achieve high added value with a lower resource consumption, with an emphasis on the use of renewable or recyclable resources.

For this purpose, it is mandatory to equip industry with complex technologies that would allow the increase of export volume and efficiency. In agriculture, on the other hand, it is necessary to replace archaic production structures and to develop the production of organic produce.

4.3. Preserving macroeconomic balances. The achievement of sustainable economic growth is conditioned by the implementation of a coherent system of economic policies that would insure the decrease of inflation, at a cautious level of budget deficit and a reduced unemployment rate. Unfortunately, the latest

developments are not in the least encouraging and the balances anticipated in our country's sustainable development strategy seem to be increasingly difficult to meet. Thus, inflation rate, after a decreasing trend until 2007, when it had a minimal level of only 4.9%, was expected to fall within 3,8-4,8% in 2008. Yet, in 2008, the inflation rate was actually of 7,9%, and for 2009 there are no prospects of decrease. Budget deficit comes close to 3% of the GDP, and unemployment rate is also increasing.

4.4. Balanced regional development. Current economic growth, strongly stimulated by direct foreign investment, is focused around Bucharest and there is the tendency to congest the capital. The Bucharest-Ilfov region, the most developed of the eight development regions of the country, produces a GDP per capita that is more than 2,1 times higher than this indicator's national average and more than 3,1 times higher than the average of the North-East Region – the region whose level of economic development is the lowest. At the same time, there is a significant historical imbalance between the eastern and western half of the country, which proves the need to speed up real measures to stimulate underprivileged areas.

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