

## On the doorstep of European integration

Civil Society Development Foundation

***Although the prerequisites for accession to the European Union and the financial support the EU provides to this end may encourage the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals, the costs of incorporation should also be taken into account at the time of reviewing these commitments, especially when it comes to increases in prices, the disappearance of small and medium enterprises and rural poverty.***

### Millennium Development Goals in Romania

In February 2004 the Romanian Government, with strong support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published the national Millennium Development Goals Report (MDGR). While the MDGR certainly represents a step forward towards fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there are some areas of concern.

The most important issue is that there is no clear implementation authority for the MDGs. While eight ministries were engaged in the formulation of the MDGR, there is no indication that there is a genuine coordination effort by the Government and a centralized mechanism through which the implementation of MDGs is supervised. UNDP Romania had a decisive role in mobilizing resources and information from the state ministries and agencies for the report. Another aspect worth noting concerns the participation of national civil society organizations (CSOs) in the overall strategy for achieving the MDGs.

Although the foreword of the MDGR states that over 20 national NGOs took part in the publication, there is little trace of their participation. We were only able to find one concrete example of NGO involvement in MDG-related activities. The National Campaign "Leave No Child Out" run by the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations active in child protection in collaboration with UNICEF is cited in the English version of the Report<sup>[1]</sup> and is an example of activities aimed at meeting national Target 7 - "Increase the literacy rate of the Roma population". However this very example is missing from the Romanian language version of the MDGR.

#### *Health and environmental sustainability*

The national MDGR clearly shows a series of positive trends towards achieving the MDGs on a national level. An important number of new policies have been established particularly in order to curb negative poverty and social exclusion trends. However it is also true that most of the commitments made in the MDGR were either national policies already in place, or are part of other international agreements and commitments. The specific targets were chosen so that the Government would not have to risk designing new programmes and measures. Just like other candidate countries to the European Union (EU), as part of the accession process Romania has had to prepare programmes to address issues such as social inclusion, access to services, protection of vulnerable groups, and development cooperation. The Millennium Declaration responds to concerns similar to those within the EU's Social Charter. Both documents seek to promote human development by expanding people's choices and opportunities.<sup>[2]</sup> In this way many of the commitments made to the EU can be regarded as vows that the corresponding MDGs will be carried out and that they will eventually be achieved.

Despite the work being done as part of the EU integration process, there continue to be areas of concern. The incidence of tuberculosis (TB) in the country is one of the highest in Europe. Although 2003 reported the lowest level of TB cases in 20 years, Romania continues to rank 4<sup>th</sup> among European countries in the number of people living with TB. The health system is struggling with serious problems (among them warnings that the system is on the brink of collapse[3]) and people living with TB tend to live in poverty. It is unlikely that the necessary progress will be made to curb this trend and to meet Goal 6 which aims to reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS, TB and other diseases.

The social dimension of environmental sustainability is one of the weakest points in the MDGR. Access to safe drinking water continues to be a problem for the majority of the population living in rural areas. Authorities have set as an objective doubling the proportion of people with sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015, in order to meet National Target 19 of MDG 7 and ensure environmental sustainability. While this goal can easily be achieved for the population in urban areas where 92% of the population have access to drinking water provided by centralized water supply systems, the situation in rural communities is totally different. According to the MDGR, only 34% of the rural population have access to such services. Limited access to drinking water is one of the causes of poor health levels.

Additionally a 2003 World Bank poverty analysis revealed that almost the entire rural population lacks access to sanitation services.[4] Several government bodies have already shown genuine interest in evaluating and finding solutions to this problem.[5] Integration to the EU may provide a solution since it is already providing substantial support through pre-accession financing programmes. Given the scale of the problem and the fact that investment in infrastructure in other sectors is regarded as more urgent, it is unlikely that this target will be achieved.

### *Corruption*

Corruption and a lack of administrative capability are two of the most serious problems affecting development and are considered serious obstacles to achieving the MDGs.[6] Throughout the 2000-2004 period a number of international institutions and watchdog organizations warned about administrative capability and corruption problems among public authorities, and how these problems affect all sectors of society.[7]

Several of the social programmes developed by the Government throughout this period have been criticized for being populist electoral tools of the ruling party, rather than sustainable social policy initiatives.[8]

### *Gender prejudices*

While interest in improving the situation of women has increased thanks to the activities of CSOs working in this field, there are still many obstacles to improving the status of women. Although various policies and measures have already been initiated by the Government, one of the most important obstacles is the traditional attitude within Romanian society which relegates women to positions of low status in public life.

Issues faced by women today range from a lack of access to quality health care services, which continues to endanger women's lives, to political under-representation. A May 2004 report by Amnesty International estimates that one in every five women is abused by her spouse or partner.[9] The report also stated that in general society regards these attitudes as normal.

Women's access to health care services is a large problem. Reproductive health indicators rank the country among the worst in Europe even when compared to neighbouring countries. The problems are even more serious in rural areas.

Women continue to have poor political representation despite some attention paid to women by certain political parties during the latest national elections in 2004. In statistics released by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Romania ranks 75<sup>th</sup> out of 191 states with a modest percentage of women occupying top political positions. Only 11% of parliamentarians are women.[10]

### **Military presence in Iraq and the new National Security Strategy**

Romania is allied with the United States in the military operations in Iraq. While other countries participating in the Coalition have started to think about gradually withdrawing their troops from Iraq, Romania has decided to reinforce its military presence and there are no plans to recall the troops.

In an interview on television in 1995, President Traian Basescu - then member of Parliament - admitted that Romania's presence in Iraq is equivalent to the occupation of another state.[11] Consequently the President tried to obtain legal justification for the country's military presence in Iraq by supporting the adoption of a pre-emptive strike security strategy which will allow national troops to attack a perceived aggressor without the UN's specific permission.

A poll taken in March 2005 shows that 55% of citizens disapprove of the presence of Romanian soldiers in Iraq, while only 36% support it.[12] However until now there have been no meaningful initiatives on the part of national CSOs questioning the country's involvement in Iraq.

In August 2002 Romania went against its commitments to the International Criminal Court (ICC) by becoming the first country to sign a bilateral agreement with the United States exempting American nationals from ICC jurisdiction.[13] While the decision was widely criticized abroad by foreign governments and international NGOs, there was little reaction within civil society.

Public opinion appears to accept official claims that national interest is at stake, and completely ignores international law and UN principles. As supporters and promoters of human security goals, CSOs must manifest their opposition of this political agenda based on practical rather than moral or ideological considerations.

### **Integration into the EU and its prospects for the MDGs' achievement**

As already mentioned, future membership in the EU constitutes an important vow that the MDGs will eventually be met by Romania. The EU structural and cohesion funds will allow for the development and improvement of infrastructure as well as for regional development. Also once within the EU there will be new pressures on the Government to work for environmental sustainability. There are also signals that EU membership will contribute to economic growth through direct investments by foreign companies.

These macroeconomic and medium to long term projections form the main group of arguments presented by advocates of EU integration. Nevertheless there are key elements missing from the mainstream debate which would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of EU integration. The immediate social costs of EU membership are usually only presented indirectly but they are relevant to the MDGs agenda.

The MDGR based its predictions on the possibility of achieving National Target 1 of Goal 1 (halve the severe poverty rate by 2009, as compared to 2002 as the point of departure) on the World Bank's forecast of constant economic growth for the country[14] if other important indicators suffer no substantial modifications. The same report identifies "the possible outbreak of social crisis due to rising prices for certain basic goods and services and the adverse economic impact among those sectors already badly hit"[15] among the possible threats to achieving this target. According to the latest estimations of the National Bank of Romania, at the time of accession to the EU the prices for several crucial utilities will suffer substantial changes: the price of electricity will rise by 30%, while the price for heating will double.

Other economic agencies have already warned of increases in prices for foodstuff. In order to meet EU consumer and environmental standards private companies will need to invest. These integration costs will not only be felt by the private sector but will also be passed along to the consumer in the form of higher prices.

These price modifications will unlikely be matched by a corresponding increase in wages. These short-term negative transformations are likely to affect the part of the population already identified in the MDGR as being vulnerable. Moreover, there are also estimates that the cost of the changes necessary to become competitive in the EU market will lead to the disappearance of at least 25% of small and medium enterprises which, in turn, will lead to unemployment. Some industries will be harder hit than others. For example the textile industry, on which several regions are dependent, might shrink substantially after EU integration. This is of particular concern since most of the sector is highly feminized and women are more susceptible to unemployment and poverty.

Another vulnerable sector is the population working in agriculture. The severe poverty[16] rate in rural areas is at least twice as high as the severe poverty rate in urban areas for each year analyzed, with the distance between these values remaining constant. Although only 47% of the population live in rural areas, 73% of the people affected by severe poverty come from these areas.[17] The first years after European integration may prove to be a very difficult period for poor residents in rural areas.

CSOs at the same time argue that EU membership represents an opportunity for them to more effectively and globally engage in MDG initiatives.

The basis for cooperation has already been established and is likely to develop as integration within the EU occurs. However a Eurobarometer survey from February 2005 (Attitudes towards Development Aid)[18] showed that 88% of EU citizens had never heard of the MDGs. The situation is even worse in new member states, where the percentage is generally over 90%. It is very likely that a similar phenomenon is also taking place in Romania and it is for this reason that CSOs must take action.

## **Conclusions**

This has been the first attempt by a Romanian organization to write a national report within the Social Watch framework. The evidence produced by this report provides justification for the need for more proactive engagement on the part of CSOs to promote, support and contribute to the fulfilment of the MDGs. We therefore commit ourselves to work for the creation of a national platform of CSOs to support the agenda set forth by the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Millennium Summit as well as various human rights conventions.

## Notes:

- [1] Government of Romania - UN System in Romania. *Millennium Development Goals Report*. Bucharest, 2003. [www.undg.org/documents/3654-Romania\\_MDG\\_Report\\_-\\_English.pdf](http://www.undg.org/documents/3654-Romania_MDG_Report_-_English.pdf).
- [2] UNDP. MDG Report Central Europe, Sub-regional Chapter, 2004.
- [3] Institutul Pentru Politici Publice (IPP). *Criza în domeniul sănătății*, 16 April 2003.
- [4] World Bank. *Romania: Raport de Evaluare a Saraciei*. Vol. I. Main Report, October 2003.
- [5] Comisia Anit-Sarasie si Promovare a Incluziunii Sociale (CASPIIS). *Raport de monitorizare CASPIS. Volumul I : Monitorizarea la nivel national. Implementarea Planului National Anti-Saracie si Promovarea a incluziunii soiale* - PNAinc, December 2003.
- [6] World Bank - International Monetary Fund, *Achieving the MDGs and Related Outcomes: a Framework for Monitoring Policies and Actions*, 26 March 2003.
- [7] Reports by the European Commission, Transparency International, Amnesty International, the Romanian Academic Society (SAR).
- [8] Romanian Academic Society (SAR), *Romania in 2005. Raport de analiza si prognoza*, January 2005.
- [9] Amnesty International, 26 May 2004.
- [10] "Deputatele PSD cer egalitate cu barbatii pe listele de parlament", *Adevarul*, 8 March 2005.
- [11] Andrea Dinescu. "Axa Washington-Londra, anulata de SUA si Uniunea Europeana, atunci cand interesele comune o cer. Dr. Derrin Smith: Romania trebuie sa mentina bunele relatii atat cu NATO, cat si cu UE", *Gardianul*, 19 April 2005.
- [12] Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS), "Sondaj de opinie reprezentativ la nivel national", 28 March 2005. [www.curs.ro/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=index&catid=&topic=3&allstories=1](http://www.curs.ro/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=index&catid=&topic=3&allstories=1)
- [13] Coalition for the International Criminal Court. "ISA manoeuvre to weaken International Criminal Court". October 2002, <http://web.amnesty.org/web/wire.nsf/October2002/ICC>
- [14] World Bank. *Romania: Raport de Evaluare a Saraciei, op cit.*
- [15] *Ibid.*
- [16] Romanian MDG Report, *op cit.*
- [17] *Ibid.*
- [18] European Commission, *Attitudes towards Development Aid*. Special Eurobarometer, February 2005.