

**REFLECTIONS ABOUT SOME IDEAS FROM ONE OF  
PROFESSOR VICTOR TUFESCU'S WORKS**  
**REFLEXII PE MARGINEA UNOR IDEI DINTR-UN MATERIAL  
ELABORAT DE PROF. VICTOR TUFESCU**

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**Abstract:** The paper presents some thoughts that came to our mind when reading the presentation of Professor Tufescu from 1942, which defined him not only as a geographer, but as an exquisite realistic analyst. His intervention stands out as a pragmatic synthesis of Romania's social and economic situation, during the second world war. The Professor envisaged realistic directions for the evolution of the continent's peoples and not only. We aim at presenting only some of these ideas, demonstrated for some economic functions, which proved to be quite accurate in the following years.

**Key-words:** economic function, economic solutions, Romania  
**Cuvinte cheie:** funcție economică, soluții economice, România

As a result of Professor Victor Tufescu's contribution to science, he is highly appreciated: he militated for Geography as a unitary science, with integrated components into a functional and well organized system. He was a geographer that pointed out that the present reality is part of a temporal, spatial and causal evolution with a particular origin and future consequences. Elements of the Romanian reality are found throughout the entire written work of the professor, as well as in the memories of all the persons that knew him better. In this direction, we will discuss some ideas from a material that was broadcasted at Radio Romania on August the 10<sup>th</sup>, 1942 under the generic title of *Universitatea radio*; unfortunately, this is the only show for which the text can be found in the archive. The talk show of about 15 minutes was entitled *Romania's economic functions*. Although the title might suggest a single direction, its intervention stands out as a pragmatic synthesis of Romania's social and economic situation, in an Europe trapped in the great war, the end of which was still unpredictable; however, the Professor envisaged realistic directions for the evolution of the continent's peoples and not only. Here are only some of these ideas, demonstrated for some economic functions, which proved to be quite accurate in the following years.

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The first function that he mentioned referred to *Romania as raw material producer*. The analysis began from the idea that a lot of people had embraced at that time and is still vivid today that Romania can ensure its economic development by itself, or as the Professor put it: 'can live through itself' since it had varied natural resources. It is worth mentioning that even today, there are a lot of credulous persons that are convinced that this is true, that 'we have a rich and beautiful country right that can stand on its own'. The Professor's demonstration against this idea was simple and concrete. Although in 1942, Romania was ranked third for the corn production and fourth for the wheat production, it was the most important oil and timber producer, the country could not isolate itself because these resources were not enough and sure for the needs of a nation: 'we live a world, and moreover, we dream to a future world of elastic economic relationships between countries' that 'we cannot afford to be isolated'. To support this statement, he gave various significant examples from the long history of the Romanian people, arguing that no matter the needs, isolation was never the appropriate solution. The hard times that the generations of the last five-six decades speak louder than words, when the spirit 'by ourselves' put into slogans such as 'to create and produce everything', 'no matter the cost, as long as it is in lei and not US \$', 'we are not selling our country' etc. led to autoisolation rather than progress or prosperity, and an economic bankruptcy masked by populist tirades, overproduction of poor quality freight that were difficult to sell, forced impoverishment of some resources (petrol, natural gas) although it was claimed that there was a planned sustainable exploitation, to the creation of some large economic units (most of them energy-consuming) followed by massive displacements of the labour force and finally to a continuously degrading life standard.

This function is correlated to the *importing country* function. As the Professor pointed out, 'we should not be embarrassed by it' since it is very useful for 'coping with the world'. In his discourse, he emphasized that 'Romania, with its 20 million inhabitants, has an agriculture that requires machinery, needs modern roads (including railways) and must develop its towns'. Consequently, 'it is tributary to the countries in Central Europe', and mainly Germany which 'has resources that favoured the development of the heavy industry', unlike Romania 'which has little iron resources and lower quality coal'. To get these resources, Romania could offer (in 1942) its products, i.e. food, timber, oil etc.

In other words, we should have done what we were able to do and develop opportune relationships with those countries from where we could get what we did not have and we needed. These are very realistic ideas and with a lot of anticipating sense. The economic and social evolution of the last six decades is definitely a proof for this.

During the communist period, for instance, the thesis of the need for achieving as soon as possible heavy industry units was carried to the extreme; there were built large ironworks factories (Resita, Hunedoara, Galati, Calarasi etc.) without any important autochthonous resources, followed by ever poor economic

relationships for these resources with the socialist countries after 1965. The country bought iron ore from India and Brazil and quality coal from USA or Canada. The same is true for aluminium: the bauxite ore in the Padurea Craiului Mountains are insignificant from the quantitative and qualitative point of view, the state being forced to import heavily from the African states.

Similar situations were found in the machinery building industry, chemical industry and other directions from the economic domains, when the agriculture, infrastructure and tourism should have been compulsory.

After 1990, the Professor's product exchange principle – offer some products that we can advantageously manufacture and which are of interest to the European countries and not only, and buy those that we need – is largely neglected today. Behind some slogans that unfortunately have lured the public, such as 'we are not selling our country', 'we have an industry and fleet of old iron', 'we work, we do not think', 'Baragan is not Sahara', the companies that went bankrupt and those that could have stood at the basis of the long wanted progress were systematically eliminated. All the agricultural activities are almost bankrupt, the irrigation systems are largely abandoned to the thieves' mercy, the road network was neglected, privatization was carried out depending on the economic interests of some major players, the commercial fleet disappeared. Now we can only wonder: what can Romania still offer to the European countries for the products that are penetrating the market and the economy. It is not difficult to find the answer to this question. We give primary timber products (mainly coniferous timber), cheap labour force for agricultural activities, constructions and various activities in Germany, Spain, Italy etc., not to mention the scientific potential that is carefully selected during college and even high school time.

What has Romania gained in 20 years after the Revolution?

We can refer to various good things for life democratization, as well as joining the European Union and NATO; however, there are a lot of negative things that weight heavily in the economic situation and life standard of most of the population. It is worth mentioning here an ecologic agriculture, with quality products that could deal with the foreign concurrence; unfortunately, most of the rural population has subsistence agriculture, the areas that are not used or degraded extending every year. The populist demagogy of the discourses (especially during the election campaigns) speaks about the necessity of achieving as soon as possible a road and railway network similar to the ones in Central and Western Europe, but what has been done so far are only insignificant steps, full of unjust obstacles. Towns and systematized villages were planned, with modern buildings; instead, we got suffocated by crowing buildings inside towns, diminishing the green spaces, giving place to mansions of newly rich people, to large casualties and damages following floods and mass movements as a result of the abusive, uncontrolled deforestation. The idea was for a country with a prosperous and competitive economy, but unfortunately the result was a market for foreign products.

Due to its *geographical position*, Romania had a particular role – *transit country* between the west, east, north and south of Europe. It is a geo-economic function and, at the same time, geo-political function, which was of utmost importance as the professor acknowledged. But as he pointed out, it was more or less capitalized, depending on the regional and international strategic and political interests.

‘The isthmus between the Black and Baltic Seas, formed by the stated stretching from Estonia to the ones south of Romania has functioned as a truly *Chinese wall* between two different parts of Europe. First, there is an eastern part, that kept a quasi-Asiatic mentality, with a dull relief of gray steppes of thousands square miles which generate a barren landscape, where only some small hills where leaders were buried stand out, where there are people having no notion of property. The other Europe – the western part – presents a varied relief with mountains, low plateaus and plains, with landscapes that greatly vary from one place to another and with extremely varied resources (woods, vineyards, crop fields, mines etc.) that pinned people down to their land, transformed them into sedentary persons that bear the nostalgia of the native place wherever they may travel, and gave the meaning of individual property and country’ for which ‘they fought for centuries’. But ‘Central-Eastern Europe is stressed by the pressure of overpopulation and diminishing resources’, being ‘directly interested in turning this part of the continent towards the west, to change the Asiatic mentalities from there’ by ‘opening some immense transit possibilities’. Due to this interest, there were a lot of military conflicts, the second world war being the most important of all.

Consequently, Professor’s statement is not in vain: ‘for us, the Nistru has been a real end of the world for years’. This location, at the crossing point between two Europes, ‘has set us back from the economic point of view, limiting our possibilities of great transit that nature offers’.

If until the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, exchanges were carried out on two traditional axes (from Western Europe towards India and from the Baltic to the Mediterranean Sea), once the big empires (The Ottoman Empire and later on the Russian one) emerged they ceased. They began again only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, first by allowing the navigation on the Danube and then on the Black Sea, which would eventually become the main routes for economic exchanges between the European countries and those from other continents. The Danube, said the Professor, ‘is an admirable transport way that will be connected with the North Sea through the Main and the Rhine, with the Baltic Sea through the Oder and even with the Adriatic Sea through the Savo’. ‘When we will be the greatest power on the shore of this sea due to our position at the Danube’s mouth and to the extended area of our country, and when we will have once again the function of transit towards the Orient, we will have to know to react properly by giving the right importance to the Romanian shoreline’ where ‘great works are required for developing harbours’.

Most of his predictions have become true.

Harbours on the seaside and on the banks of the rivers appeared, there was built a network of roads and railways that connects the settlements within the country and those abroad, there was created a fleet which had a variety of activities, the labour force acquired new skills.

Following the 1989 revolution, when the soviet monopole in the region between the Black and Caspic seas disappeared, Professor's dream was very close to become a reality soon. But, due to inner causes (the disappearance or gradual weakening of the basic economic levers, creation of some arbitrary tense situations and some sentimental orientations), and especially external ones (present geopolitical interests), the real sense of an economic and political evolution between the two parts of Europe got a very sinuous trajectory due to conflicts and economic blackmail, that affected politics as well.

These were only some thoughts that came to our mind when reading the presentation of the professor in 1942, which defined him not only as a geographer, but as an exquisite realistic analyst.