opinion

The European project in times of crisis: the EU's response to the outbreak of COVID-19

At the time of writing, the evolution of the pandemic is difficult to predict. The different approaches of the Member States regarding this challenge have led to misunderstandings, the restriction of rights and liberties, all of which may give an outsider the impression of an abstract mosaic of measures that create confusions rather than provide a feeling of security.

In this context, we have witnessed in the last weeks an increase in criticism against the European Union and its institutions, perceived as being not very efficient in this period of crisis. In reality, the situation is not as dramatic regarding the common response, if we take into consideration the legislative limitations in which the EU must uphold its activity.

First of the all, the responsibility for the health systems and for the protection of the public health is an attribute of the Member States, thus not a shared responsibility with the European Union.

However, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union stipulates in article 168 Public Health that the Union action complements national policies and „shall be directed towards improving public health, preventing physical and mental illness and diseases (…). Such action shall cover the fight against the major health scourges, by promoting research into their causes, their transmission and their prevention, as well as health information and education, and monitoring, early warning of and combating serious cross-border threats to health" respectively encourages cooperation between Member States.

Another important document meant to fundament the European actions is represented by Decision No 1082/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2013 on serious cross-border threats to health and repealing Decision No 2119/98/EC which lays down rules on epidemiological surveillance, supports cooperation and

event

Five workshops organized by the EIR together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The European Institute of Romania (IER) is implementing the project "Consolidating and promoting Romania's position as a relevant actor in the decision-making process at the European level" code SIPOCA 400 / code SMIS2014+ 115759, carried out in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (project leader), the Secretariat-General of the Government and École Nationale d'Administration from France.

EIR's role is to coordinate the research process for five thematic analyses, meant to be used in drafting the public policy proposal focused on improving Romania's participation in the decision-making process at EU level. Thus, five teams of expert-researchers were selected in autumn 2019 to start the research process and carry out the thematic analyses envisaged. The research process also includes the organisation of thematic workshops with representatives of ministries and other competent institutions/entities with a view to drawing preliminary conclusions and testing scenarios prepared by research

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[…] coordination between the Member States in order to improve the prevention and control of the spread of severe human diseases across the borders of the member states, while also clarifying the methods of cooperation and coordination between the various actors at Union level.

As the coronavirus started spreading on the European continent (with Italy being the hardest hit) we have witnessed a series of national reactions, such as shutting down borders, forbidding the export of medicines and medical equipment, etc. These legit national reactions have been rapidly speculated by third parties who have started a disinformation campaign concerning the current situation, in order to aggravate the impact of the coronavirus and to generate panic and mistrust, thus creating a true infodemic.

In this sense, the European institutions have been mobilised, each of them adopting a series of specific measures in accordance with their particular qualifications and competences. The already adopted, or under negotiation, measures aim to protect the European citizens from the spread of the virus, while maintaining the flux of goods and ensuring that the necessary decisions are being taken in order to reprise the economic and social activity after the crisis. Thus it is intended to:

• Ensure the adequate supply of protective equipment and medical supplies across Europe;

• Alleviate the impact for people's livelihoods and the economy by applying full flexibility of EU fiscal rules;

• Establish an Investment Initiative to provide liquidity to small businesses and the health care sector;

• Provide a coherent set of guidelines to member states on border measures to protect citizens' health while allowing the free flow of essential goods;

• Restrict temporarily non-essential travel to the European Union, etc.

These measures and the ones that are to be taken aim to generate a climate of trust and understanding between the citizens and the Member States. This crisis can and must represent an opportunity for the European Union, in order to advance the European project and strengthen the common capacity to manage crises. The pandemic will test the resilience of public health systems, of the labour market relations and the inter- and intra- Union solidarity mechanisms.

The need for coordinated actions and developing institutions and mechanisms required for an efficient action is given also by the current geopolitical climate marked by the perturbation of global fluxes and a rise of isolationism. The European Union also has an important moral duty toward its citizens to guarantee that it will act in a concerted and responsible manner in order to better respond to the challenge generated by the pandemic.

For further details concerning the EU's response to the new coronavirus, please access https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en.

Mihai Sebe
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Five workshops organized by the EIR together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

[…] teams.

Between 29 January and 13 February, the five thematic workshops were organised as follows:

• 29-30 January 2020 – *The role and relevance of impact studies in defining national positions at the EU level*;
• 3-4 February 2020 – *The simplification of the cohesion policy for the post-2020 period: possible solutions for streamlining the implementation*;
• 5-6 February – *Ways of deepening the Eastern Partnership for 2020 and beyond*;
• 10-11 February 2020 – *Artificial intelligence – the impact at the EU level on the productivity of the companies and on the labour market (Case-study: Romania)*;

- 12-13 February 2020 – *The impact of digitisation on the architecture and implementation of the European policies designed to strengthening the internal market.*

With regard to the first workshop organised (*The role and relevance of impact studies in defining the national positions at the EU level*), the research team, coordinated by prof. **Iordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu**, aimed to identify ways of structuring national positions at EU level among the ministries represented at the workshop, to analyse the appropriateness and feasibility of carrying out impact studies at various stages of the negotiation process on European legislation and to collect feedback on the situation in other Member States and the training systems used by their representatives in working groups or other negotiating formats.

The second workshop (*The simplification of the cohesion policy for the post-2020 period: possible solutions for streamlining the implementation*), facilitated by the research team coordinated by prof. **Dumitru Miron**, aimed to identify a set of measures/options to streamline the implementation of the cohesion policy in the period 2021-2027, applicable in Romania. The debates were grouped around three themes: quality of programming – objectives and priorities, linking interventions to multi-fund programmes, understanding the typology of eligible projects and beneficiaries; capacity and administrative efficiency – ability of the institutions that are part of the implementation system to carry out their tasks in an efficient manner; simplification and conditions for ensuring administrative efficiency – perspective of the management and control system, with a focus on Romania.

The third workshop (*Ways of deepening the Eastern Partnership for 2020 and beyond*), facilitated by the research team coordinated by prof. **Mircea Brie**, focused on the following objectives: discussing the first stages of the study, including data related to the Eastern Partnership Index, and testing the five scenarios for the evolution of the EaP, formulated by the researchers; validation of recommendations for the reform of EU instruments under the post-2020 EaP initiative; completing an individual questionnaire regarding Romania's interests within the EaP as well as inter-institutional coordination in the EaP management by the Romanian institutions.

The fourth workshop (*Artificial intelligence – the impact at EU level on productivity of the companies and on the labour market (Case-study: Romania)*) was facilitated by the research team coordinated by prof. **Adina Magda Florea**, and focused on topics such as: policies in the field of artificial intelligence in the EU and the world; improving public policies in Romania for the implementation of artificial intelligence in economy and society; change of the labour market as an impact of artificial intelligence, ethical principles in the development and use of artificial intelligence-based systems. One of the conclusions was that, in order to have an impact on labour market productivity, education for a society in which AI will be ubiquitous is necessary for all, starting even from secondary school.

The fifth workshop (*The impact of digitisation on the architecture and implementation of the European policies designed to strengthening the internal market*) was facilitated by the research team coordinated by prof. **Adrian Curaj**, and aimed at identifying and debating with representatives of the relevant ministries the national positioning elements on the policies related to the Digital Single Market. Therefore, the main elements discussed regarded: mapping of initiatives related to the Digital Single Market (conditionalities, favourable elements, risk elements); Romania's position on Digital Single Market initiatives: strengths, systemic vulnerabilities and potential risks alongside hedging measures, potential negotiating margins on the relevant files.

Eliza Vaș
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EU Public Diplomacy and its relevance in time of pandemic

Public diplomacy is an ever more important component of the European Union's (EU) external action, in an international context marked by increased volatility, complexity and unpredictability. But, before delving into the EU's public diplomacy activity and its current relevance in a time of pandemic, it may be useful to explore the public diplomacy concept, in general. Because, at first glance, it may seem tempting to consider public diplomacy as an old wine put up in new bottles, while trying to keep the pace (and its attractiveness) with the latest developments in human societies and their ever-changing perceptions and world views. After all, official communications targeting foreign audiences, sponsored by states or other political-administrative units that preceded these socially constructed modern entities, are by no means a new phenomenon in international affairs. Even in ancient times, the crowned heads of the day that cherished their prestige and status, and their representatives, never fully ignored the opportunities associated with the

seduction and co-opting of alien publics (friends and foes alike).

As such, public diplomacy, under its various descriptive or actional iterations, mainly refers to "the means by which a sovereign country communicates with publics in other countries aimed at informing and influencing audiences overseas for the purpose of promoting the national interest and advancing its foreign policy goals."[1] As coined against the background of the Cold War by former United States (US) diplomat Edmund Gullion, public diplomacy was developed partly to break away from the term propaganda, gradually instilled with pejorative connotations. Nevertheless, the earliest known use of the phrase 'public diplomacy' dates back to January 1856 and it was traced in a leader piece from the London Times, in England[2]. Nowadays, in most countries, the practice of public diplomacy does not resume itself to a solely unidirectional communication, but also includes the promotion of inter-cultural, educational and citizen exchanges. And, without surprise, the current information and communication technology revolution has exponentially expanded the scope and range of public diplomacy strategies and placed them in an organic relationship with the development of digital democracy.

As previously mentioned, the public diplomacy of the European Union is one of the components of its external action, together with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the economic cooperation or the Official Development Assistance (ODA) and others. It is managed and deployed mainly by the European External Action Service (EEAS), whose role is to ensure the coherence and the visibility of the EU's external action efforts. Back in 2007, the European Commission published an anniversary brochure dedicated to the EU's public diplomacy, marking the 50th celebration of the Treaty of Rome that laid the foundations of the modern European project. From its pages, we learn that (EU) "public diplomacy deals with the influence of public attitudes and it seeks to promote EU interests by understanding, informing and influencing."[3] Also, it aims to clearly explain the EU's goals, policies and activities and to foster understanding of these goals through dialogue with individual citizens, groups, institutions and the media[4]. This definition concentrates the essence of EU public diplomacy, touching on both its internal and external dimensions.

The European Union's Global Strategy (EUGS), launched just 48 hours after the fatidic and perennial Brexit process, set out the interests, guiding principles and the priority areas of the EU and translated them into a series of ambitious objectives, in a more connected, contested and complex world setting[5]. One of the advanced premises was that a Union coherent internally and consistent in its external action may effectively and efficiently manage both emerging and old challenges and threats. And, also, fully capitalize on the opportunities provided by a world characterized by dynamic flows and complex interdependencies. Towards this end, the EU's diplomatic network, which "runs wide and deep in all corners of the globe", was bound to play a defining role, especially by consolidating relations with third countries, in the spirit of multilateralism and of a rules-based global order[6].

However, as is the case with classic diplomacy as well, the EU's public diplomacy has suffered because of the Union's lack of a common voice on various external issues, coupled with the still existing confusion regarding the type of role (and power) it wants to play (and be) in the international arena. The most recent example, to which I will come back later on, is related to a transnational public health emergency, namely the current COVID-19 pandemic. Under EU treaties, Brussels still has limited powers to act in such cases of a high emotional impact, when national governments are to bear the burden of response. And the main associated risk is that of a growing unilateralism among EU Member States in crisis situations, even when dealing with cross-border threats like pandemics, terrorism or pollution, which require joint action.

A more recent action document of the European Union, dedicated to public and cultural diplomacy, envisions an indicative budget of over EUR 18 million for 36 months starting from January 2020, in order to finance actions meant "to globally develop EU's soft power."[7] The text outlines a series of initiatives seeking to promote European norms and values in the larger framework of the EU foreign policy, under the umbrella of the Partnership Instrument, which has a budget of EUR 960 million over the period 2014-2020[8]. Under the Partnership Instrument and in line with the EUGS, "public diplomacy aims at enhancing the EU strategic communications, investing in and joining-up across different fields, in order to

1   Center on Public Diplomacy, *Defining Public Diplomacy*, available at https://www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org/page/what-is-pd.
2   *Idem*, Nicholas J. Cull, "'Public Diplomacy' Before Gullion: The Evolution of a Phrase", 2006, available at https://www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/public-diplomacy-gullion-evolution-phrase.
3   European Commission, "A Glance at EU Public Diplomacy at Work, The EU's 50th Anniversary Celebrations around the World", available at http://europa.eu/50/around_world/images/2007_50th_anniv_broch_en.pdf.
4   *Ibidem*.
5   European Union's Global Strategy, "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe", available at http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf.
6   *Ibidem*.
7   European Commission, "Action Document for Public and Cultural Diplomacy", available at https://ec.europa.eu/fpi/sites/fpi/files/annexe_8_public_and_cultural_diplomacy_part1_v2.pdf.
8   European Commission, The Partnership Instrument, available at https://ec.europa.eu/fpi/what-we-do/partnership-instrument-advancing-eus-core-interests_en.

connect EU foreign policy with citizens and better communicate it to our partners."[9]

As the previous document referred to the soft power of the European Union, it may be suitable to make a few conceptual clarifications about the term made popular by Joseph Nye. Conventional wisdom has come to perceive power as the ability of A to get B to do what he would otherwise not do, referring to both actors and outcomes. According to Nye, there are three ways to affect the behaviour of others in order to obtain preferred outcomes: coercion, payment and attraction. Hard power encompasses coercion (military power) and payment (economic sanctions), whereas soft power rests on a country's (or polity's) resources of culture, values and policies and resorts to attraction and seduction. Smart power is a mix of the two and is an ideal type. What is more, soft power is considered a mark of democratic societies and politics, and public diplomacy is an important tool in the arsenal of soft power[10].

A global ranking of soft power published in 2019 took three European states on an (imaginary) podium: France, the United Kingdom and Germany[11], all of them outperforming the United States (positioned only on the 5th position behind Sweden), with further erosion of American soft power under the banner of Donald Trump's trademark "America First" foreign policy approach[12]. As such, we could reasonably expect in the following period for the Franco-German connection to consolidate its hold on the EU's soft power, including over its public diplomacy component. Both countries have an extensive experience in this field, as both were arch enemies whose military rivalry has between 1870 and 1945 ravaged Europe. The ample reconciliation process that followed was driven, among others, by public diplomacy. Why will public diplomacy and strategic communications become ever more relevant and important in the next period? Mainly because a white swan, under the form of a ruthless pandemic originating, most likely, from China is currently putting to great distress the whole world, including the transatlantic relationship, but also testing the internal cohesion and solidarity of the European Union.

Henceforth, the public diplomacy of the Union, aiming to safeguard the internal unity of the Member States, but also to upkeep the global actor ambitions of the sui generis polity in gloomy times, will be more relevant than ever. In an unprecedented escalation of the response to the new coronavirus pandemic, the European Commission announced on 17 March 2020 a 30-day restriction on non-essential travel from third countries to its territory, though movement within the bloc will still be allowed[13]. The move came after American President Donald Trump ordered a shut-down of all travel from Europe to the United States, without consulting his European allies and criticizing them for their initial slow response to the new viral threat. But that should come as no surprise from the commander in chief that openly minimized the importance of the very international institutions and alliances America helped create and develop, opting instead for protectionism and transactionalism.

Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors of this year's Munich Security Report focused their attention on the so-called "Westlessness" – a widespread feeling of uneasiness and restlessness in the face of increasing uncertainty about the enduring purpose of the West. And, according to the report, some of the more pressing threats for the West's resilience are represented by the centrifugal forces of nationalism and illiberalism. Without a doubt, these pre-existing tendencies were further amplified by the current crisis and will continue to undermine the liberal world order and to impinge on the forces of globalization in the following period, which will be characterized by economic recession, financial hardship and heightened social tensions. In Italy, for example, the EU Member State worst hit by the pandemic, opposition leader Matteo Salvini leveraged the initial absence of support from fellow European Union countries to rally the public opinion's revolt against Brussels.

Many Europeans wish, at least rhetorically and in programmatic documents, for the EU to act as a genuine global actor, with more strategic autonomy, ambition and vision. And presently, maybe even more than during the great depression of 2008-2009, the shock of the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus calls for a real, not just nominal, convergence between the national and the supranational, EU-wide, interests of Member States. Such unity is required in order to provide a coordinated and concerted response to the current crisis and others to come. And, if this common response does come in due time, it will undoubtedly end up by consolidating the EU's normative power, its status in the world and, at the same time, greatly improve the external perception of the Union.

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9   *Idem*, "Action Document for Public and Cultural Diplomacy".

10   The term *soft power* was introduced and made popular by American political scientist Joseph Nye. For a detailed discussion, please see: Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, Basic Books, New York, 1990 or Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs Press, New York, 2004.

11   The withdrawal agreement entered into force upon the UK's exit from the EU, on 31 January 2020. From that time on, the UK is no longer an EU Member State and is considered as a third country.

12   Portland, "The Soft Power 30", available at https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2019-1.pdf.

13   The measure applies to the Schengen border-free travel region.

Bilateral cooperation protocol agreed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and EIR

In February 2020, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Institute of Romania signed a bilateral cooperation protocol in order to carry out joint projects resulting from the fulfilment of obligations undertaken by the Romanian state as a member of the United Nations (UN) and as party to the fundamental conventional instruments adopted within it.

These conventional instruments create human rights monitoring mechanisms that adopt recommendations and general comments on their interpretation and application.

Romania submits initial and regular reports on legislative, administrative or other measures to implement human rights standards and provisions in these conventional instruments.

Under its representation and cooperation functions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensures the direct coordination or support, as appropriate, for the other institutions and national ministries, in finalising initial or regular national reports and in submitting them to the competent monitoring mechanisms at UN level.

The experience of the European Institute of Romania in translating into Romanian, in the legal and linguistic revision of documents of European law and of the European Court of Human Rights case-law, will be used by translating and revising the conclusions, recommendations, general comments and practices regarding individual communications adopted by UN human rights monitoring mechanisms established by conventional instruments to which Romania is party or through the UN documents, as well as other documents relating to the monitoring activity.

The Translation Coordination Unit within the European Institute of Romania will carry out the translation, linguistic and legal review of documents selected by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, after consultation with other relevant national institutions.

All those concerned will be able to access free of charge the translated and revised documents on the Institute's website: http://ier.gov.ro/traduceri/drepturile-omului/drepturile-omului/.

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Translation Coordination Unit

Towards a Common European Data Space in the Zettabyte Era

According to Cisco Annual Internet Report (2018–2023) White Paper, it is estimated that by 2023 almost **two-thirds of the global population will have access to the Internet**, with a total of approximately 5.3 billion users, and the number of internet-connected devices will be three times the number of citizens in the world. More than 70% of the population will also have a mobile connection by 2023, and the number of 5G devices and connections will account for more than 10% of the total[1].

The forecasted data for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) projects **an increase by 13 percentage points in internet users (78% in 2023 compared to 65% in 2018)**, while for Western Europe the estimated growth is less impressive, only 5 percentage points (87% in 2023 compared to 82% in 2018), given that the percentage is already quite high and that exceeds CEE at the moment.

Considering the data volume has increased quite a lot in recent years and the trend of exponential growth will continue for the period ahead. If in 2018, according to the information communicated by the European Commission[2], the overall data volume amounted to around 33 zettabytes (ZB), it is expected that by 2025 **we will generate a volume of 175 ZB, thus an increase of 530%.**

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1   Cisco Annual Internet Report (2018–2023) White Paper, updated on 9 March 2020, available at https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/solutions/collateral/executive-perspectives/annual-internet-report/white-paper-c11-741490.html.
2   Data forecasted for 2025, European Commission available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-data-strategy_ro.

A ZB is a multiple of the byte, a digital storage unit, equivalent to 10^{21} bytes (i.e. 1 000 000 000 Terabytes), and the change to Zettabyte Era is connected to the moment when international internet traffic exceeded one ZB (in 2016)[3]. In comparative terms, in 2004 global internet traffic exceeded an Exabyte, the equivalent of 0.001 ZB.

To better understand how much and what kind of data goes on the internet, I took into account the statistics gathered by Raconteur[4]. **In a single day in 2019, the following metrics were recorded**: 294 billion emails sent, 350 million pictures and 100 million hours of video content uploaded to Facebook (summing up a volume of 4 Petabytes), 500 million tweets published, 65 billion messages sent on WhatsApp, and of the 5 billion internet searches approximately 3.5 billion were made through Google.

Of course, this is just some of the data that is generated every day in the world, and that is part of what we call the data economy. At European Union level, **the value of the data economy for 2018 was 301 billion euros, or 2.4% of EU GDP**. By contrast, internationally, the data economy is dominated by several platform companies (Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet and Amazon) which generate together a profit of approx. $55 billion and have a market capitalization of 5.2642 trillion of dollars. By comparison, European globally competitive platforms (SAP SE and Spotify) have a combined market capitalisation of 186.1 billion dollars[5].

The European Union, through its institutions and mechanisms, has analysed the opportunities arising from the data economy and has developed several strategic documents and policy recommendations on this subject. An example is the B2G Expert Group Report: *Towards a European strategy on business-to-government data sharing for the public interest*[6].

The report was drafted by national data experts and proposes a set of legislative and investment measures in three key areas: **governance of B2G data sharing across the EU** that would entail national governance structures, having a recognised function ('data stewards') in public and private organisations, and exploring the creation of a cross-EU regulatory framework; **transparency, citizen engagement and ethics** that would lead to making B2G data sharing more citizen-centric, developing ethical guidelines, and investing in training and education; **operational models, structures and technical tools** that could be achieved by creating incentives for companies to share data, and providing support to develop the technical infrastructure through the Horizon Europe and Digital Europe programmes.

The implementation of these measures should lead to better public policy decisions, given the amount of data available, but also to improved cooperation between the business and public administrations considering the access to data that could solve problems related to health systems, transport, education and so on.

The above-mentioned report was launched at the same time as the **European Data Strategy**[7], which aims to establish a framework within which the data economy should develop in and the design of the leadership role that the European Union should play in this context. Thus, it mentions the need to identify a European model, with a balance between extensive data use and ensuring confidentiality, security, safety and ethical standards.

Consequently, one of the objectives would be to create an attractive environment for the development of entrepreneurial initiatives and those coming from public entities so that by 2030 the EU's share of the data economy – data stored, processed and put to valuable use in Europe - at least corresponds to its economic weight. The aim is to create a **European single market for data** that will be open to data from around the world, obviously in compliance with the rules to be adopted. The strategy notes that the European Union should combine specific legislation and governance to ensure the availability of data together with investments in standards, tools and infrastructures, i.e. competences for to work with the data in question.

Towards that end, the Commission will also support the establishment of the following nine common European data spaces: a **Common European industrial (manufacturing) data space**, to support the competitiveness and performance of the EU's industry, allowing to capture the potential value of use of non-personal data in manufacturing (estimated at 1,5 trillion euros by 2027); a **Common European Green Deal data space**, to use the major potential of data in support of the Green Deal priority actions on climate change, circular economy; a **Common European mobility data space**, to position Europe at the forefront of the development of an intelligent transport system, including connected cars as well

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3   The Zettabyte Era Officially Begins (How Much is That?), Cisco, 9 September 2016, available at https://blogs.cisco.com/sp/the-zettabyte-era-officially-begins-how-much-is-that.

4   A day in data 2019, Raconteur, infographic available at https://res.cloudinary.com/yumyoshojin/image/upload/v1/pdf/future-data-2019.pdf.

5   Who will benefit most from the data economy?, The Economist, 20 February 2020, available at https://www.economist.com/special-report/2020/02/20/who-will-benefit-most-from-the-data-economy.

6   Experts say privately held data available in the European Union should be used better and more, 19 February 2020, available at https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/experts-say-privately-held-data-available-european-union-should-be-used-better-and-more.

7   A European strategy for data, 19 February 2020, available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-european-strategy-data-19feb2020_en.pdf.

as other modes of transport; a **Common European health data space**, which is essential for advances in preventing, detecting and curing diseases as well as evidence-based decisions to improve the accessibility of the healthcare systems; a **Common European financial data space**, to stimulate the innovation, market transparency, as well as access to finance for European businesses and a more integrated market; a **Common European energy data space**, to promote a stronger availability and cross-sector sharing of data, as this would support the decarbonisation of the energy system; a **Common European agriculture data space**, to enhance the sustainability performance and competitiveness of the agricultural sector through the processing and analysis of production and other data; a **Common European data space for public administration**, to improve transparency and accountability of public spending and spending quality, fighting corruption, both at EU and national level; a **Common European skills data space**, to reduce the skills mismatches between the education and training system on the one hand and the labour market needs on the other.

The measures announced by the European Commission are indeed intended to contribute to advance the cooperation between Member States, and the data will be the manner by which this will happen. It is just that given the experience of certain countries, including Romania, in terms of ensuring interoperability, it is to be seen how quickly the announced objectives can be implemented.

The implementation of the European Data Strategy will also need to ensure a fairer distribution of resources and competences at European level, so as to avoid the concentration of infrastructure only in certain regions (e.g. data centres). The success of this strategy will also be given by the way in which the European Union will manage to export its rules and regulations so as to become a role model for other countries in the world.

Last but not least, crises such as the pandemic with the new type of coronavirus can also bring opportunities for the development of collaboration between health systems and the exchange of data between businesses and public administrations. Only by working together will Member States be able to overcome the challenges they face and to project a secure future for their citizens. And citizens are invited to express their views on the new Strategy by participating in the online consultation, which is open until the end of May: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/online-consultation-european-strategy-data.

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projects

Eurofound debate: New challenges regarding the quality of jobs

This February, the European Institute of Romania, in partnership with Euractiv Network, organised a debate on the "New challenges regarding the quality of jobs". The event is part of the *Eurofound correspondents network project*, funded by the *European Foundation for the Improvement of Work and Living Conditions (Eurofound)* and implemented by EIR between 2018 and 2022.

Aiming at presenting the most recent studies conducted under the aegis of Eurofound, several presentations on the latest developments in the quality of jobs in Romania and job precariousness were delivered by national Eurofound researchers and correspondents, as well as Government, trade unions and business representatives. The event was moderated by **Livia Mirescu**, Eurofound Project Manager, European Institute of Romania.

In the opening session, **Valentina Vasile**, Scientific Director at the Institute of National Economy and Eurofound researcher, underlined the need and opportunity of such debates, taking into account the current living context, the current European political circumstances and the European Commission's activities in view of defining citizens' expectations from EU institutions. The importance and relevance of the methods used to reconcile private life and professional activity were outlined, as well as the need for new working formats: flexible working hours, floating work schedule, part time and workplace sharing in order to facilitate everyone's access to the labour market.

Starting from the above-mentioned study, an atypical Romanian labour market was revealed from the following perspectives:

• 442 thousand people worked less than the regular total week hours,
• 195 thousand worked more than the regular total week hours,

- 656 thousand employees worked part-time,
- 28.3% employees worked in shifts.

Legislative documents were also discussed, such as: Law 89/2019 amending and supplementing the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 111/2010 on parental leave and monthly child allowance, Law 210/1999 on paternal leave and Law 81/2018 on remote work. Particular attention was paid to collective labour contracts and their relevance in ensuring the quality of the Romanian labour market. The Romanian strategy for promoting active aging and elderly protection for 2015-2020 was also discussed and the following issues were brought to attention:

- introduction of pre-retirement counselling and obligation not to discriminate elderly employees,
- offering IT&C learning opportunities for older people,
- development of entrepreneurial culture and promoting volunteering among the elderly.

The "Cartel Alfa" National Trade Union Confederation was represented in the debate by **Cecilia Gostin**, coordinator of the Education and Programmes Department. Mrs. Gostin brought to the participants' attention several concepts such as atypical occupation, precarious occupation, precarity and the difference between precarious employment and precarious jobs, as follows:

- defining the concept of precarious work as being characterised by instability, lack of individual or collective control on work conditions, salary and work schedule; insufficient protection against abuses in the workplace; precarity of social protection; the feeling of insecurity due to inadequate work remuneration;
- the presence pf precarious employment in Romania in fields such as agriculture, with poorly paid jobs which do not provide for a decent living (work poverty);
- the trend is to create a new definition of the employee/employer concepts and of European workplace flexibility policies;
- the importance of examining the situation of independent workers and their inclusion in social protection schemes.

Nicolae-Cristian Pârvan from the Romanian Businessmen Association underlined that the added value of work is reflected in the increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and, in this respect, Hungary and its commercial surplus were offered as an example. Moreover, he emphasised the following aspects:

- In order to facilitate the GDP increase, jobs have to be based on high qualifications;
- The increase in the minimum wage led to the decrease in the number of jobs in various Romanian industries;
- A decreasing share of industry in the GDP during the last years can be seen as a result of the public policies implemented.

Ioan-Cristinel Răileanu, expert with the Ministry of Labour and Social Care, pointed out that digitalisation, globalisation and mobility shared an increased impact on jobs quality both at a national and at the European level. In what concerns people involved in working on online platforms, Romania ranks third in Europe regarding the number of digitally active people.

The *Q&A* session was a very vivid one and involved all the speakers. It shed light on a social policy-making meant to protect both the employee and the employer in such a way that the profit of multinational companies could be reinvested in their host country. Last but not least, all presentations and materials discussed upon during the debate are published on the EIR website at http://ier.gov.ro/event/noi-provocari-privind-calitatea-locurilor-de-munca/.

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