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## The Economic Forum – the 27<sup>th</sup> edition



For 27 years, the Economic Forum, known as the “*Eastern Davos*”, has been held in Krynica-Zdroj (Małopolska Region, Republic of Poland). Every year, the Forum’s editions have brought into the spotlight top-level issues at European and global level. Structured on thematic sections, the debates covered a wide range of topics such as regional policy, health, investment, security, infrastructure, energy, culture and creative industries and so on.

Each edition had a defining motto. And for this year’s edition, this motto could only be linked to the future of the European project: “*Project: Europe. What recipe for the next decades?*” ... **p. 2**

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## Debate on 2017 European Semester: Country-specific recommendations and national policy decisions

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented by the Minister Delegate for European Affairs, together with the European Institute of Romania organized the debate “*2017 European Semester: Country-specific recommendations and national policy decisions*”, on 21 September 2017. On this occasion, there were presented the way of functioning of the European Semester (ES) ... **p. 8**



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The 27<sup>th</sup> edition took place between 5-7 September and was attended by approx. 4,000 guests from Europe, Asia and the US, with more than 200 debates being covered by over 650 journalists present at the Forum.

“*Unfinished integration and the aspirations of European countries*” was the topic of the inaugural session of the Economic Forum, honoured by the presence of Andrzej Duda, President of the Republic of Poland, Gjorge Ivanov, President of the Republic of Macedonia, and Giorgios Margvelashvili, President of Georgia. *The main ideas presented during the discussions* were: the European integration must be maintained for the sake of building a strong position of Europe and ensuring the competitiveness of its economy when compared to other powerful countries in the world; the integration process cannot be divided into various stages because the founding fathers of the European Community perceived the EU as a Union of equal states; despite the numerous critical moments, the European Union is now working effectively to deal with the existing problems; EU’s success rests in its model of state’s management, the fundamental rights, economic freedom and security; maintaining the European perspective for the countries neighbouring the EU is the key to the Union’s continued success that will allow it to efficiently deal with the most crucial challenges ahead.

The second day of the event started with the plenary session dedicated to the *politics and the way in which this could serve the interest and the public welfare*. In brief, the panel participants pointed to the key elements necessary to maintain harmony between politics, interests and values. They stressed the importance of traditional rules and Christian ideas in shaping a political strategy and also the sense of determining a common set of values for the European countries (Beata Szydło, Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland) - values that should always be placed above national interests. At the same time, politicians should do their best to make the European spirit prevail (Viktor Yushchenko, former President of Ukraine).

Top debates also featured in the “*Europe and the World*” section. Among the topics discussed: Eastern Partnership, Brexit, EU today and tomorrow, EU reform scenarios, the Balkans and Eastern Europe, Euroscepticism etc.

The final session of the Economic Forum was dedicated to the project *Europe: what recipe can be identified for the future of this project?* The main issues during the debate

were: the European crises (integration crisis, identity crisis, migration crisis, crisis of crisis, vision crisis, leadership crisis, crisis resources, the terrorist crisis, the Schengen crisis) are discussed, but not settled; lack of integration - deeper integration is the solution; different interpretations of the expression “European Union with different rhythms and intensities”; a debate on the future of the European Union must be pragmatic, not to minimize the real problems facing the EU, and the approach must address the whole EU, not the interest of one or more Member States.

Professor Alina Bârgăoanu, President of the Administration Board of the European Institute of Romania, participated in the panel discussion with the topic *Lobbying - A Fair Play Game?* (6 September), within the “Regions Forum” section. We also note the participation in the Economic Forum of a large delegation of officials and experts from Romania.



### European Institute of Romania (EIR) - partner of the Economic Forum

For a sixth year in a row the European Institute of Romania (EIR) was partner of the Institute for Eastern Studies in Warsaw in organizing a panel within the Economic Forum.

*Roma Locuta - Causa Finita? What is the Importance of Small and Medium-Sized States in the International Game of Great Powers?* was the topic proposed for the debate within this year’s edition.

The debate took place on the first day of the Forum, on 5 September. Within the panel moderated by Professor Gabriela Drăgan, PhD, Director General of the EIR, have contributed H.E. Lazăr Comănescu, former Minister of Foreign Affairs (Romania), Zanda Kalnina-Lukasevica, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Latvia), Christoph Zöpel, Special Advisor on Central and Eastern Europe to the Chairman, Party of European Socialists (Germany), Piotr Apel, Member, Sejm, (Poland), Rasha Al Joundy, Senior Researcher, Orient Research Centre (United Arab Emirates), Rostyslav Tomenchuk, Chairman, Ukrainian Institute for International Politics (Ukraine), Hans Mouritzen, Senior Researcher, Research Unit on Foreign Policy and EU Studies, Danish Institute for International Studies (Denmark).

The debate started from the three questions put forth by the moderator, respectively:

- What does a small and a medium state mean/represent in the EU and in international politics?
- Which are the main challenges the small and medium states are presently facing in the EU and in the international politics?
- How can a small and/or a medium state influence the EU and international politics?

*The main aspects highlighted in the debate:*

- For a state, being part of the EU is not being "small or big"; the discussion is more about being "fast or slow", or whether it is a "leader or a follower";
- The small countries are followers in international politics;
- The cooperation between countries is important and justice is a major factor; this means firstly the need for restoring justice, and not derogating from international norms and the rule of law on the aggressive attitude demonstrated by Russia, and secondly the economic and social justice, seeking to reduce inequalities both within societies and between the European Union Member States;
- At least in Europe, the only way that smaller states can maintain an influence is to be members of the EU;
- It is important to define the superpowers (population, economic power, military power); depend on these criteria, the answer could be different;
- In a more globalized world there is no chance for the small or medium countries other than getting integrated into a larger structure; the approach must also take into consideration all circumstances, and in this case, for the small states the EU is the best solution;
- In the EU, the chance for small and medium sized states is to promote and to act for a stronger EU;
- The small and medium countries have to be active in promoting an inclusive approach to the values and practices specific to the EU institutions;
- Within the European Union, a country is more successful in promoting its national interests if these are not contradictory to the specific interests of the other Member States;
- It is important to define small states (how small?), large states (how large?), because young people/workers choose to study/work in a state not because it is large or small, but for the living, working and education conditions that it offers;
- Small states must be integrated into an organization; How? In what way? and How big or different is this integration? depend on each state.
- EU = Integration = Together!

**Florentina Costache**  
Communication and Marketing Unit

## **Under the motto "United We Stand Strong", Bulgaria looks forward to its first-ever Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

### **Yasen Georgiev**

Ten years after Bulgaria (together with Romania) joined the European Union in 2007, the country is heading towards its first-ever Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2018.

The presidency, which was supposed to take place from July until December 2018, had to adjust to the result of the *Brexit* referendum - the initial trio (UK, Estonia and

Bulgaria) was modified, with Austria replacing the UK and altering the rotative Presidency schedule. Thus, the other countries in the trio had to prepare for taking their presidencies six months earlier, in the case of Bulgaria - from 1 January 2018 until 30 June 2018. This coincided with some major domestic issues - early elections in March 2017 preceded by government resignation after the major



party within the ruling government coalition lost the presidential election in November 2016. The caretaker government appointed by the new president in January stayed in power until early May 2017. All these unforeseen developments, arguably put a significant pressure on the official team(s) preparing for the presidency, which even included three personal changes at the highest political level reflecting the different settings on the domestic political landscape from 2016 and 2017.

Despite the increasing public interest in the upcoming presidency, the internal talk so far has been heavily dominated by technical and organizational issues, disputable or cancelled public tendering procedures and estimations on its financial dimensions. Saturating public attention with organizational issues, however, may considerably damage the EU's public image in Bulgaria - one of the countries where the image of the EU (according to Eurobarometer polls) and trust of Bulgarians in EU institutions (Open Society Institute, Sofia) are reported to be among the highest.

Nevertheless, the substance of the presidency started gaining more consideration when Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria outlined their "presidency trio" priorities in June 2017. Under the motto "United We Stand Strong", the rotating Bulgarian presidency envisages to stress on the so-called 3Cs (consensus, competitiveness and cohesion), or as most recently announced on the 4Cs embedding "culture" in line with the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018. "Consensus" will be aspired in areas such as migration, under "competitiveness" further steps before the Digital Single Market will be promoted and "cohesion" comes from the country's position in favour of keeping the main patterns of the EU cohesion policy. Additionally, during its rotating presidency Bulgaria plans to contribute to refreshing the EU perspectives for the Western Balkan countries by proposing some tangible solutions featuring extending the benefits from lifting the roaming towards citizens in these countries.

All in all, Bulgaria will be the first country to take over the presidency in the following setting - under the "cooperation and verification mechanism", a tailor-made scheme for Bulgaria and Romania to monitor the progress of both countries in the field of judicial reform, corruption and organised crime, outside the Schengen Agreement, and being not part of the euro area. Therefore, the current Bulgarian government is expected to try to take advantage of the presidency in order to register some progress on these issues or at least to put them on the agenda. While certain steps forward regarding the membership in the Schengen area and entering the Exchange Rate Mechanism (that precedes the adoption of the euro) might be expected because of interplay of the presidency and the internal dynamics in the EU, the third issue is less likely to be positively impacted.

On an EU level, the most pressing topics that Bulgaria is about to inherit during the first half of 2018 include the



*Brexit* negotiations and the launch of the preliminary talks within the multiannual financial framework after 2021, along with the migrants relocation debate where the country accepted to take part in the scheme as opposed to other "new" Member States (like the Visegrad group), which, on the other hand, are natural partners in preserving the EU Cohesion Policy.

A most recent file on the EU agenda that will remain open and of a paramount importance for Bulgaria is arising from the tension between some major EU capitals and Ankara. In September, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for an end of EU-Turkey's membership negotiations by the end of 2017 - a decision the European Union is not expected to make during the Estonian presidency. This may put the government to the test, since the Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov has many times officially declared his good personal relations with the German chancellor, but most recently positioned himself close to the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The 259 km-long frontier with Turkey makes the country vulnerable towards any change in Turkey's refugee policy. What is more, one should take into account the Turkish minority living in the country because of its political representation for forming almost every government since 1989.

Last but not least, since experience shows that presidencies always have to tackle a number of issues that have been not previously planned, we have to assume that the Bulgarian presidency will not be an exception, at least when considering the wide array of other open topics the European Union is about to face sooner or later.

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**Yasen Georgiev** is Executive Director of the Economic Policy Institute, Sofia (EPI). He is also Coordinator for Bulgaria of the Marshall Memorial Fellowship, a leadership program of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Yasen has been with the EPI since 2006 where he was appointed research fellow and then head of the International Projects and Programmes unit. Before joining EPI, Yasen worked at the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Bulgaria and Beiersdorf Bulgaria. In 2010-2011, he was selected to participate in the Carl Friedrich Goerdeler-Kolleg for Good Governance, a nine-month fellowship programme of the Robert Bosch Foundation (Germany) for young executives working in the public sector in Central and South-Eastern Europe. Within this fellowship he worked as a visiting fellow at the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry - DIHK and at the European Policy DG of the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology of Germany (Berlin).

Yasen graduated in International Relations from the University of National and World Economy, Sofia and in Strategic Management from the Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. During his studies, he took extracurricular courses at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich and the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin.



## EIR projects

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### **EIR takes part in EPIN project - Towards a Citizens' Union**

The European Institute of Romania has applied in the first quarter of 2017, within a consortium coordinated by CEPS Brussels, for European funding in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme (Jean Monnet Networks - policy debate with the academic world). The project, entitled *Towards a Citizens' Union (2CU)*, was declared successful in July and will be implemented during September 2017 - August 2020, bringing together a total of 20 think-tanks out of 18 European countries.

Within the project, a series of research papers will be elaborated and delivered, on topics such as participatory democracy, representative democracy and democratic accountability, all from a national perspective. The project also implies participation to a series of academic events in different EU Member States in order to disseminate the preliminary and final outputs of the research. Given the subject matter of this proposal, which is decidedly geared to enhance the knowledge about the European integration project and the role of citizens in particular, the partners will do their best to actively involve civil society organisations and parliamentary representatives in all activities.



The European Policy Institute Network (EPIN) was set up in 2002, as a network of the most dynamic policy institutes and think-tanks focused on debates on European policies and EU's future. The European Institute of Romania has been, even from the start, a full member of EPIN.

For the project *Towards a Citizens' Union*, the team proposed by EIR includes the experts of the Studies and Analyses Unit: Mihai Sebe (senior researcher and coordinator of the project), Bogdan Mureşan and Eliza Vaş (junior researchers). We wish them good luck in their research activity and in disseminating the results of the project.

**Oana Mocanu**  
Studies and Analyses Unit

## event

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### Europa - Connecting Cultures: cultural diversity from trend-setter to a sensitive issue?

On 9 September 2017, the ESCU Association organized in partnership with the European Institute of Romania the debate on *"Europe - Linking Cultures: Cultural Diversity from trend setter to an European issue"*. The debate was part of the Embassies Festival, an event created and organized by the ESCU Association together with institutional partners such as the National Commission of Romania for UNESCO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The debate, organised at Grand Hotel du Boulevard, was moderated by Ms Gabriela Drăgan, Director General of the European Institute of Romania.

Opening the event, Ms **Gabriela Drăgan** stressed the necessity and opportunity of such a debate, taking into account the context in which we live, the political events that have affected Europe and the activities carried out by the European Commission in order to involve the European citizens in the process of defining the priorities of the EU. The difference between multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue was underlined while at the same time the need to create links between cultures was put into context as a positive signal for the long term.

The first intervention of the opening session belonged to Mr **Cristian Preda**, an independent MEP, who presented the issue of "the foreigner" in the European political discourse, the realities of the relocation mechanism at European level and the political response to it. Another point of discussion was centered on the description of the "foreigner" as a Muslim on the political level - thus activating societal fears in European countries. Mr Preda concluded that Europe is about to discover that the existing situation is happening at the same time with a religious dispute in the Near East - the conflict between the Sunnis and the Shiites. In that area, the political ambitions of Iran, Turkey and the Arab countries grouped around Saudi Arabia - are facing each other.



From the Department for Interethnic Relations, Mrs **Christiane Gertrud Cosmatu**, Undersecretary of State continued the debate. Mrs Cosmatu presented some aspects regarding the Romanian context of intercultural relations, pointing out that Romania can be and is considered an example of best practice regarding the integration of ethnic groups.

On behalf of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs **Gabriela Leu**, communications specialist, continued the ideas mentioned by the previous speaker and reminded the audience that exposure to other cultures can lead to a change of perception at the individual level. Mrs. Leu believes that a dialogue between cultures is possible as long as we find the resources to create these bridges, to discern between what is false and true and to keep our humanity intact.

Mr **Mircea Vasilescu**, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest continued the debate by discussing the fact that the migration phenomenon is inevitable and we can not oppose it if people decide to travel. The professor pointed out that politicians oppose a



21<sup>st</sup> century mechanism, *the network society* by employing a 19th-century mechanism, *the border*.

Mr Vasilescu continued by supporting the idea that we can fight the fear of the "foreigner" by rediscovering what it means. He gave Italy as an example, where the country was ethnically compact at the 1992 census while at the census in 2011 8% of the Italian population had another origin. A major difference that appeared in a short time led to the appearance of the issue of the "foreigner" in the public space, facilitating the emergence of populist parties. In Romania there is a multicultural tradition and a rich historical legacy that would allow awareness of the differences and what would bring us near to the "Other".

Mr **Dan Cărbunaru**, journalist at the Caleaeuropeana.ro online news portal, concluded the debate by mentioning that Romania is a paradoxical country that originally opposed the resettlement mechanism and then accepted it.

Mr Cărbunaru ended his speech by emphasizing the responsibility of media in this refugee situation - what kind of messages are delivered, when they are delivered and what is the responsibility of the media in this discussion.

In the *Questions and Answers* session, the questions were addressed to all the guests asking for clarification on: how real is the migration phenomenon, how do we support the development of the countries where migrants and refugees come from and to what extent the EU is going to restrict the fundamental rights of people. The invitees responded that generalization does not help and that the images show that the migration/refugee phenomenon is real, it was also mentioned that stopping migration would presume stopping the wars and when we offer legal ways for the refugees to come, we will also diminish the illegal migration.

**Tiberiu Nica**  
Projects Unit

## EIR round table: The Transatlantic Relation. The 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United States-Romania Strategic Partnership

On **19 September 2017**, the European Institute of Romania (EIR) organized a round table with the general theme of **Transatlantic Relation. 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United States-Romania Strategic Partnership**, an event which took place in the framework of a broader public debates campaign aimed at stimulating a process of collective social reflection with regards to Romania's preparation for the presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first semester of 2019. The conference also included a short presentation of the main conclusions of a strategy and policy study (**SPOS 2016**) dedicated to the *future of the strategic partnership between Romania and the US in the context of TTIP negotiations*. Representatives of the central public administration, academic milieu, experts in relevant fields and media took part in the event.



In opening the discussion, Ms **Gabriela Drăgan**, Director General of EIR, has outlined the importance and timeliness of a debate on these two seemingly different but nevertheless intertwined topics, with national, regional and international reach and implications. On this occasion, Ms. Drăgan has welcomed the participation at the event of a diverse and consistent group of experts.

In his official address, Mr **Victor Negrescu**, Minister Delegate for European Affairs, said that Romania has a well-balanced positioning in the EU-US relations. "We can play the role of an active mediator between the two sides, by building upon our own vision and contribution, and by using our geostrategic status in order to advance concrete measures aimed at bringing us closer together in a time when others try to set us apart".

During the debates session, moderated by Mr **Bogdan Mureșan**, Expert, Studies and Analyses Unit, EIR, many interesting points have been raised and various aspects highlighted by the distinguished speakers. Among these **aspects** were: the partnership relation between Romania and the US should be understood in all its complexity, with its various dimensions - strategic, economic, cultural and, last but not least, in the field of *intelligence* sharing; in spite of the various political statements and ambivalent public positioning, the US remains the main pillar of Romanian foreign policy orientation;



Romania is closely following the evolution of *Brexit* and its impact on the Transatlantic relationship and the European collective defence; the American troops present on Romanian territory represent an element of dissuasion for any virtual aggressor and a symbolic security guarantee.

As a corollary, the participants at the debate have expressed the idea that the Transatlantic Relation may very well be a priority in view of Romania’s presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2019, with everything that involves the consolidation and the recalibration of this cognitive link.

The full Event Report may be accessed on EIR’s website, [here](#).

**Bogdan Mureşan**  
Studies and Analyses Unit

## Debate on 2017 European Semester: Country-specific recommendations and national policy decisions

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented by the Minister Delegate for European Affairs, together with the European Institute of Romania organized the debate “2017 European Semester: Country-specific recommendations and national policy decisions”, on 21 September 2017. On this occasion, there were presented the way of functioning of the European Semester (ES), the country-specific recommendations (CSR) 2017, and the methods of implementing the national objectives undertaken through the *National Reform Programme (NRP)*. Representatives of the central public administration, social partners, civil society, academia and mass-media took part in the event.

In the opening speech, addressed by Mr **Victor Negrescu**, Minister Delegate for European Affairs, the highlighted aspects were the following:

- ❖ The purpose of the debate related to the European Semester is, on one hand, to present the National Reform Programme (approved by the Romanian Government in August) and, on the other hand, to bring into discussion the new way of working regarding the ES and especially the CSR; **the model looked-for by the Ministry for the new stage is being used by other Member States and refers to drafting the analysis of a EU state by using dialogue/a series of specific consultations between the European Commission representatives and the Government members;**
- ❖ Regarding the National Reform Programme from 2017, this was signed by the entire Cabinet of ministers with the purpose of conveying a strong message towards the European partners - the Government assumes these measures and intends to bring them to conclusion, **Romania having a different attitude towards reform**, which involves more seriousness, more preparation and a great amount of technical approach;
- ❖ The Romanian state recognizes the importance of the ES and especially CSR, and the proposal of the European Commission’s President outlined in the “State of the Union” speech, which concerns the need to enhance the consciousness of this process; Romania is regarding this with great interest, **the decision makers wanting to address the ES topic in a proactive and coherent manner.**





In the second panel, Mrs **Gabriela Drăgan**, PhD. Professor, Director General of the European Institute of Romania, made a review of the most important aspects regarding the understanding of the European Semester framework, as well as of the economic situation, by mentioning specificities such as:

- ❖ **The economic growth must be sustainable**, to reach those levels which will not determine shortfalls (inflation, decrease of investments etc.), the Country-specific recommendations being issued towards supporting such a type of growth;
- ❖ **Romania has to manage throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of 2019**, when it will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, an **extremely complicated period**: the European Parliament elections, and then the establishment of a new European Commission, the negotiation of the next multiannual financial framework etc.; from this perspective, Romania could organize a debate related to the future priorities of the European Union;
- ❖ **The European and national priorities can be interconnected in multiple domains**, as can be the case with the re-industrialization, the digital agenda, demography and migration, security and a safer Europe.

For more details, the full event report is available online on the EIR website, [here](#).



**Eliza Vaș**  
Studies and Analyses Unit

## EIR debate on consumer protection



During the public debate campaign dedicated to the preparation of the Romanian Presidency at the Council of the European Union, on 22 September 2017, the European Institute of Romania (EIR) organized in partnership with InfoCons Association the debate on *“Consumer protection - an essential element in the creation of a deeper and fairer internal market”*. The event was attended by representatives of the central public administration, academia, experts in fields relevant to the topic and representative of the media.

The debate was structured in two sections, the first (moderated by Mrs **Gabriela Drăgan**, Director General of the European Institute of Romania), which targeted the official interventions of Mr **Victor Negrescu**, the Minister Delegate for European Affairs, Mr **Sorin Mierlea**, President, InfoCons Association, and Mr **Traian Constantin Petcu**, Deputy State Secretary, Vice-President, National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority, respectively the second section (moderated by Ms **Eliza Vaș**, Expert at the Studies and Analyses Unit, EIR) on Consumer Protection - an essential element in achieving a more internal market deeper and more equitable. In the second section representatives of the National Authority for Administration and Regulation in Communications, of the academic and research environment took the floor.

The interventions concerned issues related to national and European legislation and priorities related to consumer protection. Among the aspects highlighted in the event, we mention the following:

- We cannot have an efficient Internal Market without having effective consumer rights legislation in all key sectors defined by the European Commission;
- There is a need for consumers to be equal throughout the European Union, it is not normal for a product bought in a country to be of a lower quality than the similar product sold with the same label in another Member State;



- The theme of consumer protection will also be found on the agenda of the Romanian Presidency at the Council of the European Union;
- Products manufactured in Romania are supervised throughout the production chain;
- Romania is part of the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed - SRAAF, an instrument for exchanging information between the Member States' Central

Competent Authorities for Food and Feed in cases where a risk has been identified at EU level for public health, and appropriate measures such as the detention, withdrawal, confiscation or rejection of the products concerned have been taken;

- Existence of rights without exercising them cannot cause changes or an improvement in the consumer's situation;
- Fines related to food safety should be public;
- The publication of petitions registered with the Financial Supervisory Authority helps to improve non-banking services in the insurance sector.

The *questions and answers* section focused on the influence of the digital revolution on services and products delivered to consumers as well as on how they are integrated with suppliers.

For more details, please access the full event report available on EIR website, [here](#).

**Tiberiu Nica**  
Projects Unit

## **Eurofound National Network of Correspondents Project Debate: Minimum wage in Romania - between necessity and restriction. A socio-economic approach**

In the framework of the Eurofound project, the European Institute of Romania and its partners organized a new quarterly debate on a very hot topic of interest and research for Eurofound and for the Romanian labour market: minimum wage in the current social and economic context. Regarding the evolution of the minimum wage at the level of Member States, we would like to refer to one of the Eurofound's report on the topic, *Statutory minimum wages in the EU 2017*<sup>1</sup>.

The report published by Eurofound is underlining that the level of the minimum wage varies from one country to another. For example, starting with 1 January 2017, the lowest level of the minimum wage is in Bulgaria, 235 euro, followed by Romania, 322 euro. On the opposite site is Luxembourg with the highest amount of the monthly minimum wage, 1,999 euro.

At European level, there is an intense debate about the setting of a statutory minimum wage at the level of each Member State. In January 2017, President Juncker pleaded for a minimum salary in each country of the European



<sup>1</sup> The report published by Eurofound, *Statutory minimum wages in the EU 2017* can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef1703en.pdf>.

Union, “There is a level of dignity we have to respect.”<sup>2</sup> Also, Juncker encouraged companies to adopt a minimum wage to prevent “social dumping”. The necessity regarding the minimum wage is very well defined in the **European Pillar of Social Rights**<sup>3</sup>, adequate minimum wages shall be ensured, in a way that provides for the fulfilment of the needs of the worker and his/her family in the light of national economic and social conditions.

Taking into consideration the debates at the European level, researchers involved in the Eurofound project and from other research institutes, the social partners were invited to give their views on the topic of the meeting. The speakers focused their presentations on several aspects regarding the impact of the minimum wage on the living standard of employees, on public policies in general and on social, economic and fiscal policies in particular.

At the end, we would like to mention some conclusions of the debate, as follows: 13.5% of the households in Romania have a minimum salary employee; raising the minimum wage leads to the reduction of social inequalities; according to the European Social Charter, the minimum wage should be 60% of the gross average salary, in Romania in the first quarter of 2016 the minimum wage is 41.3% of the gross average salary; there are economic sectors such as trade, manufacturing, construction where 15% of employees are paid with minimum wages; tax policies should be more equitable, the need for progressive taxation should be introduced; the criteria for collective agreements in the social dialogue law must be eliminated; a real need for the renewal of proximity talks on the existence of a transparent minimum wage setting mechanism and the need to introduce regional retraining strategies for people who remain unemployed.

**Nicoleta Voicu**  
Projects Unit

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<sup>2</sup> More information about the declaration of the President Juncker can be found at: <http://www.euractiv.com/section/social-europe-jobs/news/juncker-reiterates-support-for-minimum-salary-in-each-eu-nation/>.

<sup>3</sup> European Pillar of Social Rights, in Chapter II: Fair working conditions: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en).

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