



Weekly Briefing

Romania Social briefing:
The think tank situation in Romania
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The think tank situation in Romania

In Romania, think tanks are perceived as expertise or research centres specialized on a certain area, providing public policy solutions and acting independently of political interests. There are two laws governing the establishment of think tanks, but there are not effective statistics on the situation and evolution of such organisations in Romania. Moreover, their impact in the design of public policies is hard to be assessed, as the authorities' openness to the scientific production of research and expertise centres is at low levels.

The think tank is subsumed to an expertise or research centre that is formed either under the form of a research institute in a certain area, either in a non-governmental organization (NGO). In fact, the Romanian legislation has two normative acts regulating these situations. The first one is the Law 179/2005 with subsequent modifications and completions on the establishment, organization and functioning of the institutes of political theory and democratic education, while Government Ordinance 26/2000 on associations and foundations regulates the establishment by individuals of these forms of organization, which have the status of legal persons without patrimonial purpose and do not fulfil the political functions or serve the political purposes.

In the first case, there are the political parties who establish such institutions, but after that, the institutes of political theory are professionally autonomous in relation to the parties that have set them up and do not carry out organizational or political propaganda activities. These institutes have the status of a foundation of public utility. The establishment of political theoretical institutes shall be made by a court decision in whose territorial jurisdiction the institutes are located. The institutes are functioning based on a statute, an internal regulation, an organigram and a state of functions.

The object of activity of the institutes of political theory consists in carrying out research in the field of social and political theory, elaboration of doctrinal and political planning programs, development of studies on governance and programmes meant to support the act of governance, designing and organizing courses addressed to members and sympathizers of political parties or those aspiring to carry out public activities, carrying out journalistic and editorial activities, development of contacts and organization of cooperative relations with institutions of the same profile in the country and abroad, with personalities of the domestic and international public life and with civil society organizations.

In the second case, associations or foundations could be established by any individual or legal entity pursuing activities in the general interest, in the interests of local authorities or, where appropriate, in their non-patrimonial interest.

While the association is constituted by three or more persons who, on the basis of an agreement, share their material contribution, knowledge or contribution to work for the performance of activities, without the right to restitution, the foundation is established by one or more persons who constitutes a patrimony dedicated to the pursuit of a purpose of general or collective interest.

The main difference is residing in the volume of the initial patrimony. For associations, the patrimonial asset is of at least the gross minimum salary in the economy, while for foundations, the total value of the patrimonial assets should be at least 100 times the gross minimum wage in the economy at the time when the organization form is established. The patrimonial asset could include assets in kind or in cash.

In order to acquire the legal personality, the associated members of both associations and foundations conclude the constitutive act and the status of the organization. Usually, these documents are required to provide details on the name of the organization, the headquarter, the initial patrimony, the members of the governing bodies and their responsibilities and so, the purpose and objectives of the organization. After that, the organization acquires legal personality by registering in the Register of Associations and Foundations. Both associations and foundations could establish branches, as structures with legal personality, in the territory, or could found companies with economic activity.

Usually, each type of organization has a board of directors and a commission of censors, and for the association the generally assembly as a body of the association is also required. Moreover, both associations and foundations may engage in any other direct economic activities which are closely related to the primary purpose of the legal person.

The income of associations or federations could come from members' contributions; interest and dividends resulting from the placement of available funds; dividends of companies set up by associations or federations; income from direct economic activities; donations, sponsorships or related activities; resources obtained from the state budget or local budgets and so on.

The foreign legal entities without patrimonial purpose could also have the opportunity of being recognized in Romania, subject to reciprocity, on the basis of the prior approval of the Government, by registration in the Registry of Associations and Foundations of the Bucharest Tribunal Registry. The requirement is that institute has to be validly founded in the origin country and its purposes, as established in the statute, do not contravene to public order in Romania.

There is no comprehensive situation on the think tanks in Romania, in the sense that there are no statistics or distinctions based on the covered area of interest. Instead, the Ministry of Justice is monitoring and permanently updating the Register of Associations and Foundations, where all the organizations of such type are included.

As regards the contribution of think tanks to the establishment of public policies, the impact is hard to be assessed in Romania. Specialists in the area notice that the public policies are mainly designed by government officials, while their openness to the production of institutes, research centres or non-governmental organizations is still at low levels. In fact, Romania is recognized as a country where the contribution of the non-governmental organizations to the public debate is low, although the participation of the civil society and the organization of public debates before adopting policies are recognized on the paper.

A solution would be that the Government to develop own think tanks, which could collaborate with the independent ones. In this way, the public expertise could be better incorporated in public policies. The major issue would be, in this case, to ensure the professional independency of the Government think tanks and to avoid transforming them into organizations that only justify and support government policies. It is recommended for the authorities to be open to independent evaluations and ex-post assessment of the impact of their measures and to provide finance in this area, for external analysis and research, according to specialists.

The main non-formal feature that is perceived by people when related to think tanks is the one of their potential contribution to better and more efficient public policies, by benefiting of the expertise in the academic and civil society's environments.

A Romanian researcher¹ provides an analysis of foreign policy think tanks in Romania and identifies a pattern that could be further extended for the situation in the whole society. He provides the following classification:

- Think-tanks specializing in the intellectual production of solutions for their specific domain, which could be affiliated to the Government or different ministries;
- Specialized research institutes or university institutes in thematic areas, acting under the patronage of academic institutions and with or without financing from the state budget;
- Private organizations with non-governmental status, like foundations or associations.

The Romanian Academic Society is the oldest active think tank in Romania, which was founded in 1996 initially as an academic association, it further became

a public policy research institute that promoted governance and consulting services for the government and collaborated with international institutions such as the United Nations, World Bank, the European Union, before and after integration. The actual activity is focused on providing education in public policy field and the promotion of realistic solutions based on democratic consultation of public policy issues in the public space. Some of the major approaches in which the institution was involved were the Free Access to Information Act, the adoption of the flat tax rate, the Coalition for a Clean Parliament, while good governance actions are conducted through the Alliance for a Clean Romania.

The Romanian Diplomatic Institute was founded in 2005 as a specialized structure for reflection on foreign policy within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Institute supports the work of the specialized staff within the ministry by providing expertise and professional training courses in the field of international relations and diplomacy. A similar institute is the European Institute of Romania, who works under the aegis of a governmental structure, but this time provide expertise in the field of European affairs to public administration, the business environment, the social partners and civil society. The Institute of World Economy acts under the scientific authority of the Romanian Academy and is financed from the national budget. The main areas of research are focused on the global economy, globalization, European integration, competitiveness, and the result of the research activities are provided in the format of analysis on different recurrent themes, editing specialized magazines and collection of books.

In the economic area, the Ludwig von Mises Institute, founded in 2001, has the main aim of discovering and sharing the economic arguments developed under the Austrian School of economic thinking. It provides a debating framework for PhD students, edits an online magazine in the same area and provides dissemination for the main ideas in the field through brochures and articles.

A more politically oriented think tank is the Institute of Popular Studies, who promotes the centre-right doctrine and was founded in 2006 with the main aim of building the strategic thinking regarding Romania's belonging to the EU. The main voices representing the

¹ Străuțiu, E. (2011). Think-tankurile de politică externă în România, *Revista de istorie și politică*, 1, 66-76 [f](#)

principles, values and centre-right policies contributes with opinions and articles to the activity of the institute.

The foundation German Marshall Fund was created in 2007 in Romania. Its role is to share Romania's experiences to the countries in the region who confront similar development periods and to bring into the authorities' attention what is happening in the Black Sea region for better building the external policy. This means a large collaboration with other think tanks and organizations in foreign countries.

Several other similar organizations act in the field of institutional development, judicial area, defence and security etc. or are regionally oriented, scrutinizing the dynamics and evolutions in the European Union, East Europe and Asia, Middle East.