SOCIAL DEPENDENCY MENTALITY IN ROMANIA – CONSEQUENCE OF PATH DEPENDENCE OR RESULT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICIES?

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This paper discusses whether the social dependency mentality in Romania is a consequence of path (past) dependence (that is, the country's cultural and historical inheritance), or of the failure of social protection policies implemented after 1990. By taking a deductive approach and using data from Eurobarometers and several international databases, as well as by conducting several statistical analyses, we first identify the socio-economic and institutional factors associated with social dependency mentality in former communist countries, today members of the EU. Drawing on the results obtained, we then characterize the situation in Romania and provide explanations on two levels: dependence mentality as cultural inheritance - hypothesis supported by sociological, psychological and cultural-anthropological studies - and dependence mentality as a consequence of the implemented social protection policies which did not solve the issue of poverty but rather speak about incoherence, lack of vision, populism etc. We conclude that social dependency mentality is associated with the burden of the past, but also with the level and quality of education and the government strength to implement policies and provide incentives for individual responsibility in a free market. The limitations in terms of data coverage do not allow us to establish the exact weight each of the factors has in explaining social dependency mentality and, consequently, further studies are necessary considering the importance this issue currently has in poverty reduction.

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1. Introduction

Poverty reduction by means of social policies and the concept of social dependency subscribe to a large debate – the one between the supporters of the minimal state and those of interventionism in the name of welfare. At the same time, several socio-economic challenges – globalization, financial crisis, immigration, and the structural changes around the world – require to go beyond doctrinaire debates and find real solutions to reduce poverty.

The whole European project is strongly related to the design and implementation of social policies aimed to improve the European citizens' standards of living. Even if the idea of social assistance and protection has been refined since its institutionalization in the form of the 1942 Beveridge report, the need to call for the welfare state to fight against the five "giant evils" - want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness - is still widely embraced at European level.

At the same time, a brief overview of the European social model points out large inequalities in terms of social spending, social policies and their results on poverty reduction.

Increasing the expenditure on social protection, as often recommended by the supporters of welfare, might not be enough to fight against the "evils" and may hamper future prosperity. Moreover, for the "poorer" countries, as Balcerowicz (2001) outlined, trying to fight poverty by providing increased aid is a guarantee that the country will never get out of poverty.

Also, social protection in developed countries is a result of many years of creating and adapting the institutional framework which, based on private property and individual entrepreneurial initiative, has generated an adequate environment for capital accumulation and welfare. The former communist countries, today EU members, do not have this experience on their side. On the contrary, their past experience is a troubled one and still impacts negatively their present. Some of them still lack those institutions which create the incentives for prosperity. These discrepancies between them are consequences of the different paths adopted in transition but also of the specificities inherited from the past. That is why some of the ex-communist countries remained behind in terms of development and the population displays a certain state-dependent mentality, while others succeeded in their transition to a real market economy and adopted a capitalist mentality.

Considering these aspects, the main purpose of this paper is to investigate whether social dependency mentality in Romania is a consequence of path dependence, that is, the country's cultural and historical inheritance, or of the failure of social protection policies implemented after 1990. It should be mentioned that "path dependence" is employed in this

paper with the meaning of "past dependence" and "quantified" as the number of years spent under central planning and the initial conditions at the start of the transition towards the market economy.

The study takes a deductive approach, from general to particular, and aims at: providing an image of the European realities in terms of social protection, poverty and social dependency mentality; identifying the factors associated with this specific mentality in EU ex-communist countries and characterizing these countries from this perspective; and debating on the issue of social dependency mentality in Romania, as a burden of the past (as proven by numerous sociological, ethno-psychological and cultural anthropology studies) or as result of the path chosen after 1990 (as proven by the results of the adopted social policies).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 sets the background by using different statistical data and main ideas presented in the existing literature. Section 3 covers aspects related to data and methodology. Section 4 deals with the results obtained and their analysis. Section 5 discusses and debates upon several aspects related to the causes accounting for the social dependency mentality in Romania. The last part of the paper summarizes the main conclusions and presents the research limitations.

2. Background

The evolution of the expenditure on social protection at EU level shows that, on one side, there are countries (such as Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands) which have obviously expanded their social protection allocations, spending more than 30% of their GDP in this direction and, on the other, there are countries (mainly the ex-communist ones) which allocate much fewer resources, around half of the EU-28 average (Figure 1).

Although they are considered role models by the supporters of the welfare state, in the first group of countries, social protection is the result of a capitalist way of development. In all of them, the market economy has worked by all its rules. "Respect for private property was intertwined with the unhampered initiative of entrepreneurs, creating new opportunities for capital accumulation and production" (Ifrim, 2014, 214). The countries of the former Communist bloc have the lowest allocations of their GDP for social protection, as a result of both their economic situation, and the high level of corruption and underground activities, as well as the authorities' lack of constant concern with the reduction of poverty and social exclusion (Idem, 215).

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Figure 1. *Expenditure on social protection (% of GDP) in the EU*

Source: authors' presentation based on data from Eurostat

The inequalities between the EU countries in terms of the results obtained are presented in Figure 2. The same situation as above can be observed. The lowest percentages of population at-risk-of-poverty are in Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands, below the EU-28 average; the highest percentage, in 2015, is in Romania, and it accounts for 25.1% of the total population.

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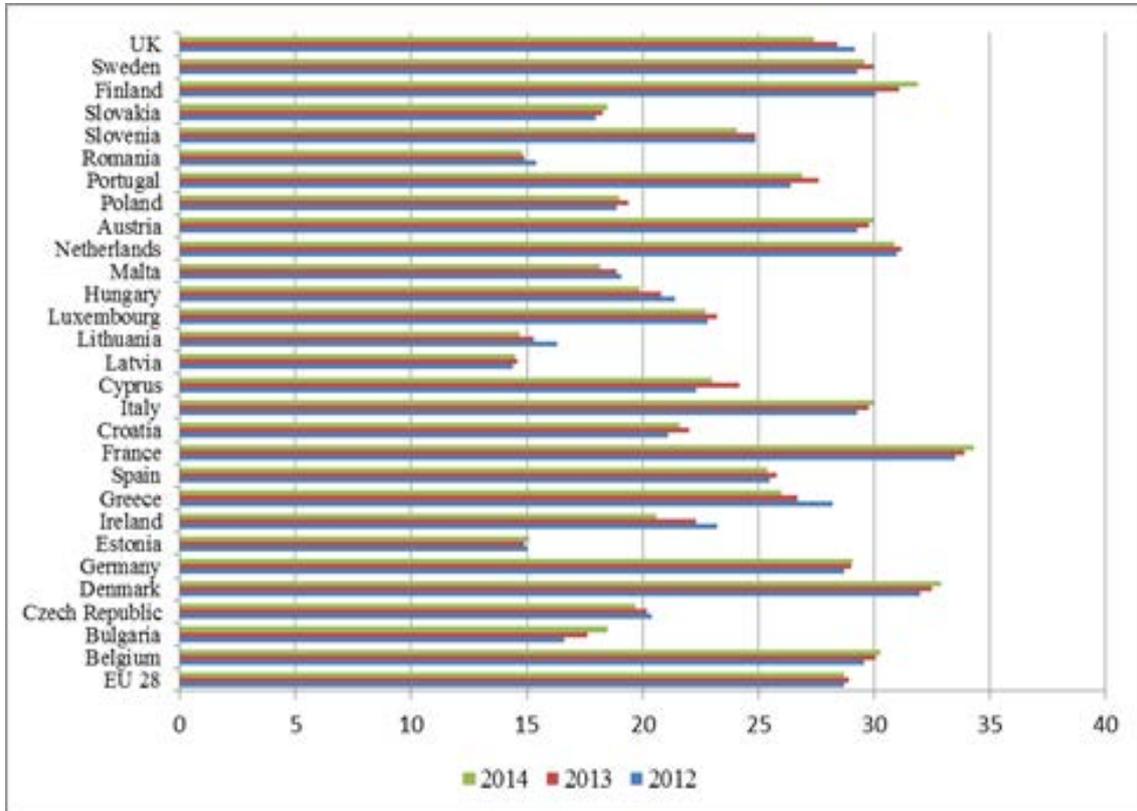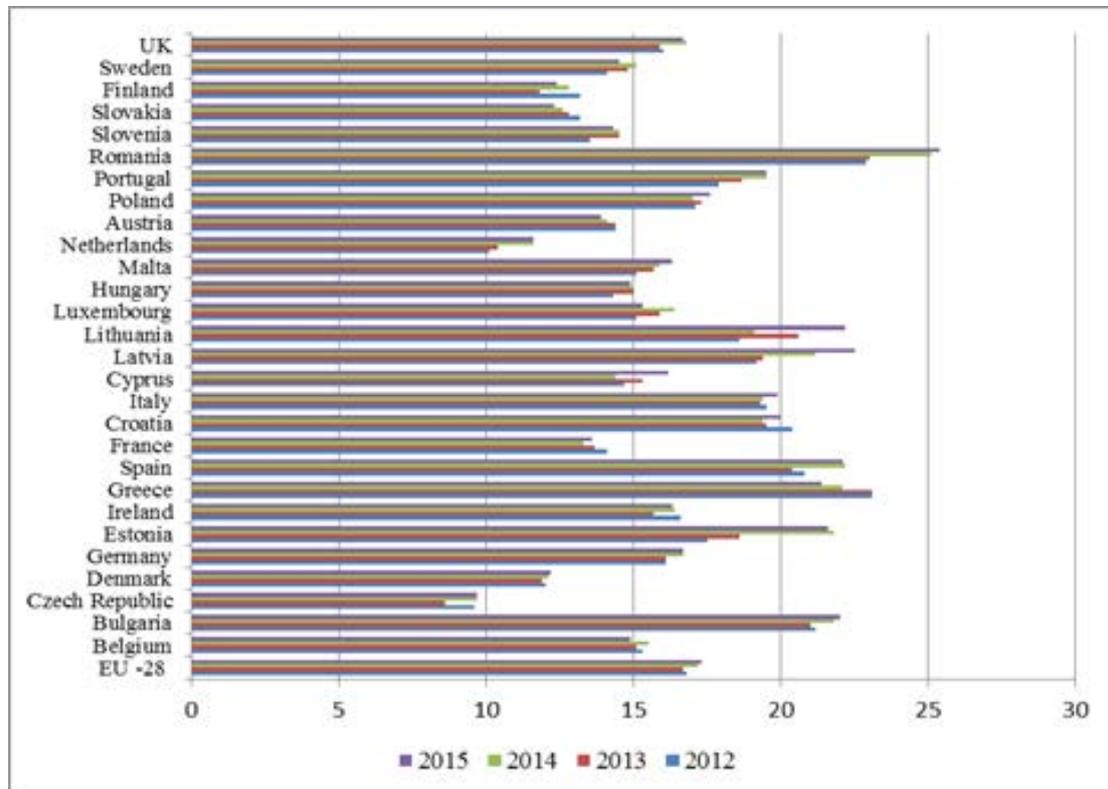

Figure 2. *At-risk-of-poverty rate (% of total population) in the EU*

Source: authors' presentation based on data from Eurostat

The differences between the EU member states, in terms of creating and allocating welfare, the social policies adopted, poverty reduction, labor market participation etc., point out to five sub-models within the European social model (Socol et al., 2010): the Scandinavian one, including Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands; the Anglo-Saxon sub-model, specific to the UK and Ireland; the Continental one, grouping France, Germany, Austria, Belgium and Luxembourg; the Southern sub-model characteristic to Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Cyprus, and the Catching-up sub-model which is specific to Central and Eastern European countries.

Considering the purpose of this paper, the Catching-up sub-model is of particular interest since beyond its apparent homogeneity, it reveals serious efficiency gaps in implementing social policies and consolidating their results. Also, beyond a common history of approximately half a century of communism, these countries have reacted differently to the

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novelty and challenges of transition. Some countries reached with a strong national consensus in favor of liberal reform (such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and the Baltic states); others were late reformers trying to catch up (such as Bulgaria and Romania) (Deacon, 2000, 150). Consequently, the results are also different. In terms of social protection policies, countries such as Hungary and Slovenia have made an option for increasing social protection expenditure. Others, such as the Baltic states, have tried to keep this spending at a low level and to stimulate the process of recovering the gaps in development by promoting taxation close to that of the Anglo-Saxon sub-model (Socol et al., 2010, 29). Overall, the Catching-up sub-model can be characterized by high social polarization and low social protection.

However, despite the countries' belonging to one sub-model or another, the state dependence mentality is widely spread within the European Union. 43% of the Europeans believe that the government is primarily responsible for providing jobs to the unemployed and almost half of them express a preference for a maximalist approach to social protection and transfer the responsibility to the state (Special Eurobarometer 418, 2014) (Figure 3).
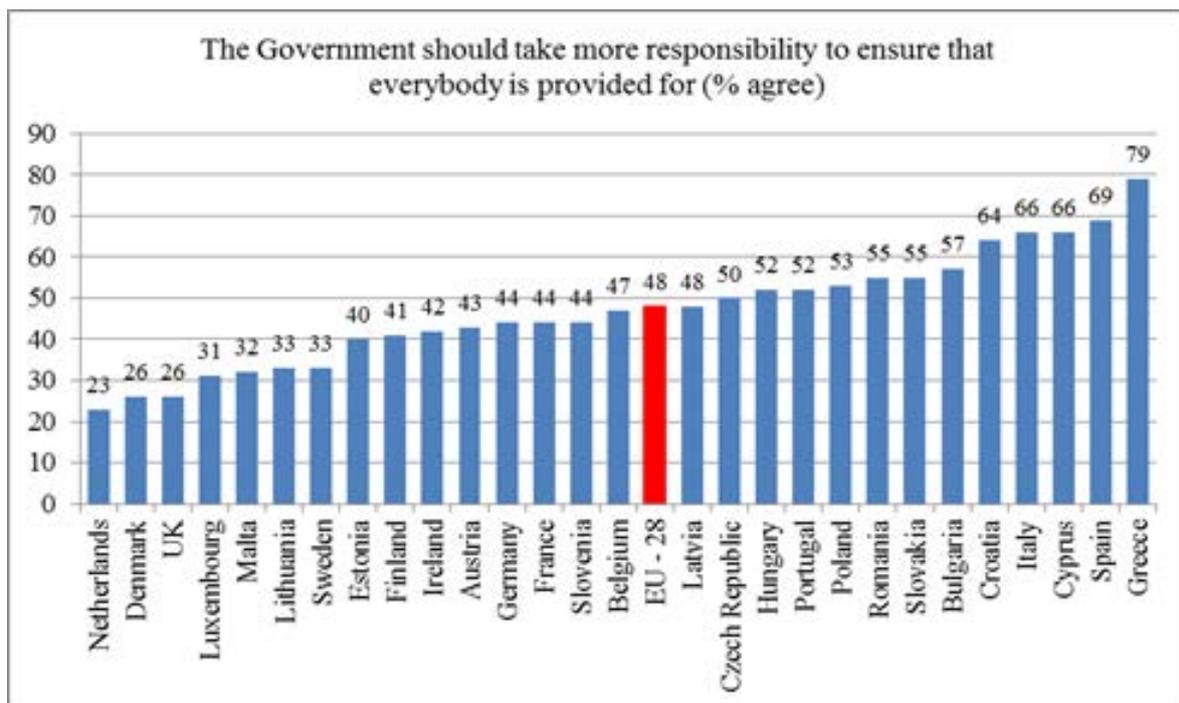
Figure 3. *Europeans' approach to social protection*

Source: authors' presentation based on data from Special Eurobarometer 418- Social Climate/Wave EB81.5, 2014, available from http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_418_en.pdf

Figure 3 above shows that 12 of the EU member states are above the average regarding the social dependency mentality. Their citizens call for the welfare state to solve their social issues rather than assuming individual responsibility. This group includes most of the former communist countries, except for Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia. In Romania, for example, 65% of the individuals believe that the government is responsible for providing jobs to the unemployed and 55% see government as responsible for ensuring the living standards of all citizens (Special Eurobarometer 418, 2014).

3.Data and Methodology

3.1. Data

The sample considered in our analysis includes the 11 countries in the catching-up model, all of them with a communist past and today members of the EU.

To capture the level of social dependency mentality (DEPEND_MENTAL) we have considered the percentage of the Europeans in each country who "agreed" with the statement "The Government should take more responsibility to ensure that everybody is provided for" (Special Eurobarometer 418, 2014).

As factors possibly associated with the dependence mentality we have selected:

- The number of years under central planning (YEARS_PLAN), retrieved from Fischer & Sahay (2004);

- The Initial Conditions Index (ICI), computed by the EBRD and based on a set of variables such as GDP per capita in 1989, pre-transition growth, wealth in natural resources, the share of the population living in urban areas; the distance between the country's capital and the EU, the share of employment in industry, agriculture and services, all relative to market economy benchmarks, the value of trade with the CMEA over GDP in 1989, repressed inflation, the black market exchange rate premium in 1989, the years a country lived under central planning, the initial private sector share in GDP, and state capacity (EBRD, 1999, p. 28). A higher value of the index indicates more favorable starting conditions at the beginning of the transition. The data used for our analysis was retrieved from Fischer & Sahay (2004);

- The expenditure on social protection, % of GDP (SOCIAL_EXPEND), from Eurostat;

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- Three factors related to education namely, Quality of the education system (QUAL_EDUC_SYST) and Quality of primary education (QUAL_PRIM_EDUC) – they are both indexes ranging on a scale from 1 (poor quality) to 7 (high quality), and they evaluate education from the perspective of the needs of a competitive economy. The third variable related to education is gross Secondary education enrollment (SECOND_EDUC_ENROLL). These three factors were selected from The Global Competitiveness Report (World Economic Forum);

- The Index of economic freedom (EC_FREEDOM) which captures ten economic freedoms, graded from 0 to 100, grouped into four categories (rule of law, limited government, regulatory efficiency and open markets). The higher the score a country gets, the higher the level of economic freedom (retrieved from Heritage Foundation).

- Government effectiveness (GOV_EFFECTIV) is a governance indicator computed by the World Bank. It ranges from -2.5 to +2.5 and it reflects the "quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies" (World Bank).

All data, except for the Initial Conditions Index and the number of years under central planning, are registered at the level of 2014.

3.2. Methodology

Summary statistics is used to check if the sample is relatively homogeneous and to provide an image of the differences existing between the statistical units, from the point of view of the variables considered in our analysis.

The identification of the factors associated with social dependency mentality is conducted using the correlation analysis and the principal components analysis (PCA). The correlation analysis is employed in order to study the intensity of the relationships existing between variables and to identify those factors which have a strong, positive or negative, relationship with social dependency mentality.

PCA strengthens the correlation analysis, but this method also allows us to highlight the resemblances and the differences among the 11 post-communist countries considered in our sample, using synthetic graphical representation of statistical variables and statistical units in a system of factorial axes (Pintilescu & Baciu, 2011, p.706).

4. Results and analysis

The summary statistics for the considered variables is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Summary Statistics*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variation coefficient (%)	Minimum	Maximum
DEPEND_MENTAL	50.091	8.5843	17.14	33.0	64.0
YEARS_PLAN	46.727	4.1495	8.88	43.0	53.0
ICI	1.864	1.4473	77.64	-.4	3.5
EC_FREEDOM	67.682	4.5429	6.71	60.4	75.9
SOCIAL_EXP	18.218	3.1534	17.31	14.5	24.1
QUAL_EDUC_SYST	3.627	.4452	12.27	2.8	4.4
QUAL_PRIM_EDUC	4.645	.4344	9.35	4.1	5.4
SECOND_EDUC_ENROLL	98.609	4.5421	4.61	93.1	107.1
GOV_EFFECTIV	.7309	.37442	51.23	.00	1.05

Source: authors' calculations in SPSS

As shown by the variation coefficient, below 50%, the countries are relatively homogeneous from the point of view of the majority of the considered variables, except for the Initial Conditions index and government effectiveness.

Two observations can be made regarding these aspects. The first one refers to the fact that the post-communist countries started their path to free market with significant differences in their initial levels of development. The second one points out the role of the governments in implementing the reforms. Regarding this latter observation, Romania is the country with the minimum value for government effectiveness from our sample. Also, out of the analyzed countries, Estonia shows the least favorable initial conditions at the start of the transition towards market economy (with a minimum of ICI of -0.4) but also the highest degree of economic freedom (a maximum of 75.9).

Further, the correlation between social dependency mentality and the considered socio-economic and institutional factors presumed to be related to it have been analyzed. Table 2 presents the results of the correlation analysis.

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Table 2. *Correlation coefficients for DEPEND_MENTAL*

Variable	Regressors	Correlation	Probability
DEPEND_MENTAL	YEARS_PLAN	-.690	.019**
DEPEND_MENTAL	ICI	.550	.080*
DEPEND_MENTAL	EC_FREEDOM	-.721	.012**
DEPEND_MENTAL	SOCIAL_EXP	.379	.251
DEPEND_MENTAL	QUAL_EDUC_SYST	-.710	.014**
DEPEND_MENTAL	QUAL_PRIM_EDUC	-.693	.018**
DEPEND_MENTAL	SECOND_EDUC_ENROLL	-.722	.012**
DEPEND_MENTAL	GOV_EFFECTIV	-.557	.075*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.10 level

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Source: authors' calculations in SPSS

By analyzing the data in the table above, it can be noticed that all correlations between social dependency mentality and the socio-economic and institutional factors are significant, except for the one with the level of the expenditure on social protection. At this level of analysis, we identified a negative correlation between the dependency mentality with the number of years spent under central planning and the three education indicators. As expected, the results obtained also point out a negative correlation with the institutional factors – economic freedom and government effectiveness – and a positive correlation with the initial conditions at the start towards market economy.

That is, the social dependency mentality is more spread in the countries with better initial conditions (i.e. where the socialism was less oppressive), which spent a smaller number of years under the old system, but also in the countries with lower economic freedom, lower government effectiveness and lower levels and quality of education.

The factorial solution, resulting from performing PCA, indicates the variables' grouping in two principal components accounting for over 77% of the total variation, the first factorial axis explaining 60.18% of variance (Table 3).

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Table 3. *Total Variance Explained*

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.416	60.182	60.182	5.416	60.182	60.182
2	1.541	17.126	77.308	1.541	17.126	77.308
3	.740	8.219	85.527			
4	.600	6.667	92.194			
5	.366	4.069	96.263			
6	.178	1.973	98.236			
7	.115	1.274	99.510			
8	.029	.323	99.833			
9	.015	.167	100.000			
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.						

Source: Output obtained in SPSS with PCA

The correlation coefficients between the considered variables and the factorial axes and the graphical representation of the variables in the first two factorial axes are presented in Table 4 and Figure 4.

Table 4. *Component Matrix*

Component Matrix [a]		
	Component	
	1	2
DEPEND_MENTAL	-.874	-.160
YEARS_PLAN	.911	-.087
ICI	-.824	.446
EC_FREEDOM	.772	-.189
SOCIAL_EXP	-.570	.793
QUAL_EDUC_SYST	.767	.082
QUAL_PRIM_EDUC	.812	.432
SECOND_EDUC_ENROLL	.806	.147
GOV_EFFECTIV	.569	.655
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		
[a.] 2 components extracted.		

Source: Output obtained in SPSS with PCA

The indicators which show the strongest correlations with the first factorial axis are the number of years under central planning, economic freedom and three variables describing the level and the quality of education, positively correlated, as well as Social dependency mentality and Initial condition index, negatively correlated (Figure 4).

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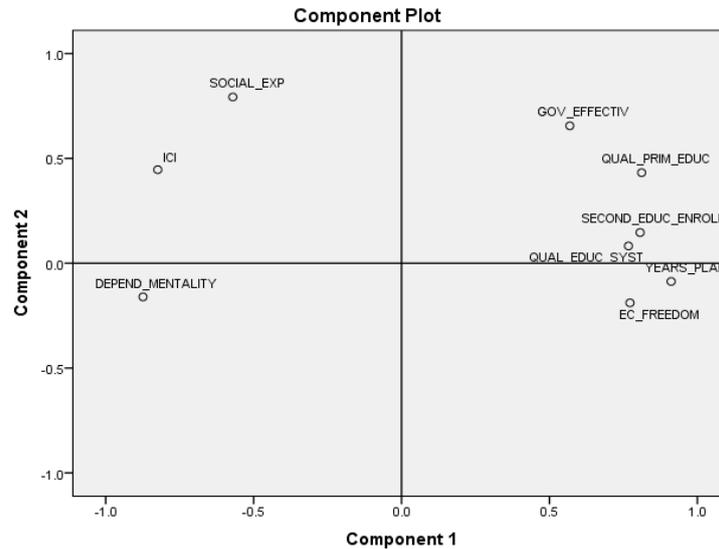

Figure 4. *Variables' positioning in the first two factorial axes*

Source: Output obtained in SPSS with PCA

In order to identify the profile of the group of countries under analysis according to the analyzed variables, we illustrated their position within the first two factorial axes system (Figure 5).
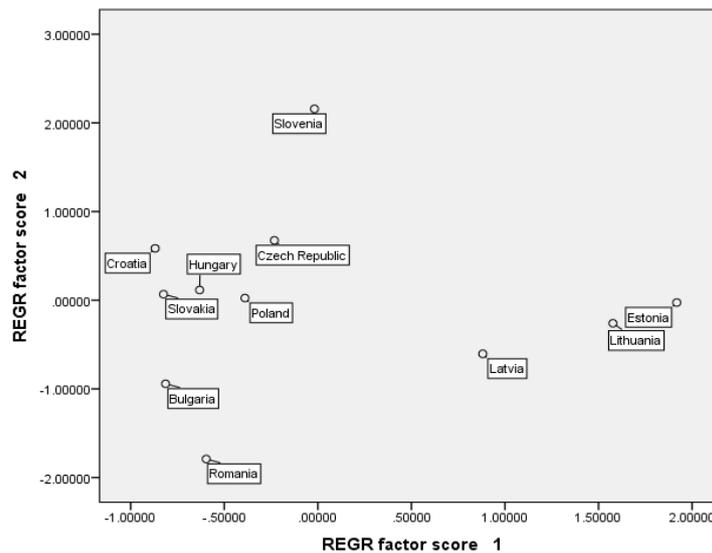

Figure 5. *Countries' positioning in the first two factorial axes*

Source: Output obtained in SPSS with PCA

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The first axis opposes countries like Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, on one side and all the other 8 countries in the sample, on the other.

A characterization of the countries in the sample can be provided when overlaying the two charts of Figures 4 and 5. The Baltic States are the ones with the lowest values for social dependency mentality, worst starting conditions and highest number of years spent under central planning. At the same time, they are the ones with the highest economic freedom, the best governments and the highest levels and quality of education. They confirm the fact that the importance of the past and of the initial conditions diminishes once you choose the right path to development; in this case, the implementation of policies and reforms is the essential explanatory factor for success.

All the other countries in the sample show the opposite situation. Romania also belongs to this latter group, with a level of social dependency mentality above the sample average and the lowest values of the quality of primary education and government effectiveness.

The next section tries to provide explanations for the Romanian case, with arguments balancing between the burden of the past or/and the weaknesses of the social policies after 1990.

5. Discussion: Which could be the causes of the social dependency mentality in Romania?

As shown above, Romanian people show a high level of social dependency mentality. This section of our paper tries to provide several explanations for this type of mentality, debating between two main causes, which also may intertwine: is this mentality a consequence of the past or is it a result of the social protection policies adopted after 1990?

One argument that supports the idea of social dependency in Romania as a consequence of path dependence comes from the people's orientation towards certain values such as, resignation, fatalism, obedience, lack of confidence etc., which can be associated with a specific mentality. Even if these cultural values only circumstantially speak about the social dependency mentality, they demonstrate that the Romanian society is a traditionalist one, still anchored in the past and rather oriented towards survival values (Figure 6).

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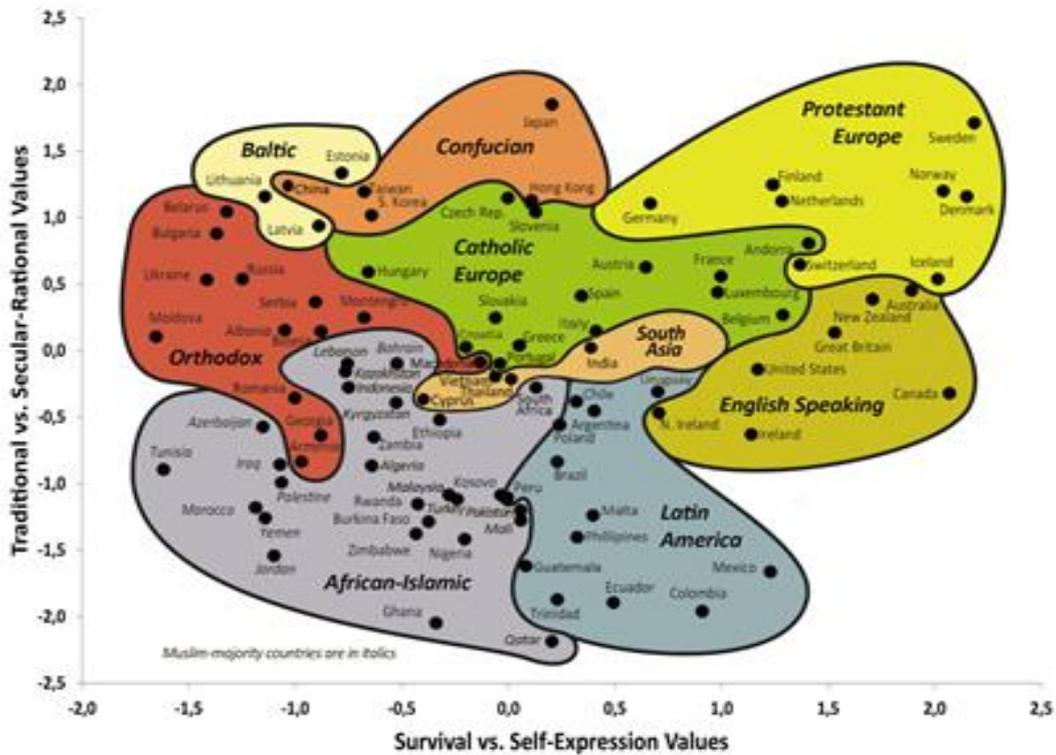
Figure 6. *Inglehart–Welzel Cultural Map*

Source: World values Survey, WVS wave 6 (2010-2014), http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp?CMSID=Findings

If compared to the other EU post-communist countries, the orientation towards the traditional values can be seen as most dominant within the mentality of the Romanians.

In a traditionalist society, the people's priorities are oriented towards the satisfaction of basic needs, things happen "as God wishes" or as "the chief ordered", the society in general is more religious, more inclined to obedience and respect for authority, work is seen as an obligation to society; inertia is very high, there is no concern for the future and passivity and lack of involvement prevail (Voicu&Voicu, 2005, 17; Baciu et al., 2009, 46-47).

The existing literature considers that, from a certain point of view, traditionalism can be interpreted as a resistance means in front of communist aggression. The orientation towards survival values is also a reflex derived from the communist period, this one being equally present in the neighbor ex-communist countries (Asandului et al., 2012, 111).

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But even if these cultural traits attributed to the Romanians are considered the cultural heritage of more than four decades of communism, the existing studies point out that they can be traced far back in our history. It seems that Romania "feels" the lack of continuity of a calm, undisturbed flowing history, as Liiceanu (2014, 19) has suggested.

Several ethno psychological studies dealing with the emic perspective, the way Romanians see themselves, as well as cultural anthropology studies dealing with the ethic perspective, the way Romanians are analyzed from outside, create a portrait of the Romanian people which has nothing to do with communism.

In his 1907 book, Drăghicescu speaks about a mixture of carelessness, idleness, lack of initiative, lack of self-confidence and, above all, fatality, blind belief in luck and fate (p.364-365). In 1919, Densusianu considers the work done by the Romanians as more of an exception, an accident, an intermittence (p.29). Cioran (1933) sees Romania as a country of "faded people", characterized by skepticism and superficial lack of trust. Rădulescu –Motru (1935), in the same unflattering manner, observes that Romanians work reluctantly, very few prove perseverance and a strong desire to overcome the burdens and to reach the satisfaction of fulfilled duty.

From the hetero image perspective, the Ruth Benedict's Romanian Culture and Behavior (1943) anthropological study points out several ideas strongly related to the issue of social dependency mentality in Romania: "the state is present in every corner and hidden part of Romanian life" (p.14) or "charity, this gift of the soul, is a behavioral pattern (...) for all social categories" (p.52).

All of the above mentioned aspects prove that the Romanian society displays certain negative cultural traits that might explain the social dependency mentality. But they are not only the consequence of the many years of communism, as it might seem at first glance. Lack of trust, obedience, the proverbial fatalism, fear of failure, work seen as an obligation, lack of self-determination are deeply rooted in the collective mentality of Romanians (Baciu et al., 2009).

On the other hand, the incoherence of social protection policies adopted after 1990 and the use of social assistance mainly for electoral purposes somehow strengthened social assistance mentality (Tiganas & Iacobuta, 2015, 23).

The social policies in Romania have proven to be inconsistent, ineffective, and rather reactive and providing ad-hoc solutions for specific crises. They often have conflicting goals, and lack

vision and a strategic approach. They are not based on evidence, on social indicators, and do not use monitoring and assessment of current and past programs (Idem).

They started each time from the beginning, ignoring previous projects as they belonged to the opposition, to the "others". The ongoing attempts to compensate for inefficiency by generosity and "charity" during elections periods or by surrendering when the "street" put too much pressure led to an increasing reliance on the state of many social segments, to a very low employment rate, to the poor targeting of benefits and to ignoring several social groups at risk but without opposing potential and major impact in elections (Preda, 2009, 5).

The results may be briefly summarized as follows: 65% of Romanians benefit in one way or another from social assistance, 202 forms of social support (a lot compared to other countries but in very small amounts), social benefits are given fraudulently, without obeying the existing laws etc., all proving that the Romanian state is not a welfare one but rather a populist one (Benezic et al, 2011).

Conclusions

This paper aimed at identifying the causes of the social dependency mentality in Romania arguing between the country's cultural and historical inheritance and/ or the failure of social protection policies implemented after 1990.

The analysis carried out on a sample of 11 EU ex-communist countries has shown that the social dependency mentality is more spread in the countries with better initial conditions (i.e. where the socialism was less oppressive), which spent less time under the old system, but also in the countries with lower economic freedom, lower government effectiveness and lower levels and quality of education. The results of our analyses clearly distinguish between the Baltic countries with population with social dependency mentality but high performance in terms of the institutional environment and the quality of education, on one hand and all the others, on the other hand.

Romania provides an example for the fact that history matters. The widely spread social dependency mentality, resulting from statistics and confirmed in literature is not only a consequence of the communist years but also older cultural heritage. This mentality has been maintained and perpetuated by the state with each failure to implement consistent and coherent policies to encourage individual responsibility towards its own welfare.

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This last aspect should be considered with certain caution. Because of poor data availability, our explanations for the social dependency mentality in Romania are based on indirect arguments derived from several existing studies related to values, ethno psychology, cultural anthropology. In order to provide a better image of the causes of this type of mentality, a more complex and country-level representative study should be carried out.

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