

## **"A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TRANSITION. WHAT WILL BE 'AFTER'"**

**Catalin Zamfir, 2004, Iasi: Polirom, 193 pages**

The book "A Critical Analysis of Transition" - written by a well-known Romanian sociologist, Catalin Zamfir, and published by Polirom - aims to be the starting point for what the author calls the "sociology of transition." The book is divided into two distinct parts: the first is supposed to be an analysis and assessment of Romania's post-communist transition ("Romania's Transition and Its Assessment"), while the second part tries to design a system of theoretical analysis based on the empirical findings and assessments presented in the first part of the book ("Epistemological Prolegomena of a Transition Theory"). The book was born, as the author himself claims, "during the first days of the Revolution" and is not merely "a cold sociological exercise, but also the expression of an emotional and intellectual global commitment." Had this scientific approach been closely pursued, this book might have realized the author's intentions, i.e. an objective critical analysis of the 15 years of Romanian transition. However, each and every chapter of the book is marked by the strong ideological and political beliefs of the author and, accordingly, objective analysis consistently degenerates into blatant partisanship.

Moreover, reading this book, one is given the impression that Catalin Zamfir is the only person to have ever broached the delicate subject of transition. The book makes no references to any foreign authors and thus ignores the significant work in the field of transition analysis on Central and Eastern Europe as well as Latin America. In fact, most of the references are made to other works by the author himself, despite the vast literature on this subject, ranging from the work of David Stark and Laszlo Bruszt to that of Claus Offe, Alfred Stepan, and Adam Przeworski, who - even if not sociologists - have laid the foundation for a coherent and thorough theory of transition.

Had these oversights been the book's only failing, they might have been more easily overlooked. However, partisanship is again obvious when the book tries to analyze the roles played by the most important political actors during the transition period. While other studies on the post-1989 Romanian political class divide Romanian political parties (the former FSN versus historical parties) on the anti-communist/post-communist divide, Zamfir argues that historical political parties opposed technocrats, who had an anti-communist attitude, although they were former party activists responsible for distributing public goods during communism. Historical parties are consequently described as unhealthy hybrid groups, disturbing the well-defined path suggested by technocrats: "historical parties have chosen the path of rupture: they organized themselves as political parties, and claimed power on the basis of some abstract legitimacy instead of that of a clear reform program and the capacity to implement such a program... while technocrats were promoting consensus, inviting everybody to a political dialogue based on a cognitive-technical analysis of the transition strategy, traditional political parties were forcing the political

process into a field of claiming historical legitimacy and of an obvious anticommunist attitude." Such examples can be found throughout the book.

Nevertheless, once one gets beyond the author's prejudices, the analytical matrix suggested in this book, and the idea of designing a sociology of transition, are valuable contributions and are worth being explored within a more objective framework.

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