Care in post-socialist Romania: Between gendered regulations, silencing and political concerns

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ABSTRACT

Care is a multi-layered concept that includes not only formal/informal aspects and public/private significations and effects, but also inherent political and gendered dimensions. Starting from the perspective according to which care is political by definition, this article takes a closer look at the political regulation of care in post-socialist Romania in order to reveal how it is conceived and delimited as a political concern, as well as in order to inquiry the extent to which care has been politicised (or not) after the fall of the former political regime. When and how does it become part of the strategic political plans as main political-administrative documents? And to what extent does the national political discourse encompass care as a real political problem? Seeking to address these questions, this article has a twofold structure. The first part of the article is dedicated to an overview on existing scholarship regarding care as a political concern. This analysis is indispensable for an in-depth understanding of the ways in which this issue has been tackled and theorized so far. Second, the article consists of a documentary analysis of the main governmental plans and political strategies elaborated between 1992 and 2020 in order to analyse the hegemonic political approach to the topic of care in post-socialist Romania.

Keywords:

■Childcare ■Politics of care ■Care policies ■Gendered regulations ■Gender equality.

Introduction

Scholars in social, political and legal studies generally agree that it is difficult, if not impossible, to give a clear definition to care. This multi-layered concept (Pfau-Effinger & Rostgaard, 2011) includes not only formal/informal aspects and public/private significations and effects, but also financial and emotional features (Hochschild & Machung 2012), and first and foremost, inherent political and gendered dimensions that have been little tackled in academic research until recently (Dahl 2017; Hoppania & Vaittinen 2015). At the same time, early feminist research has presented care as antithetical to political regulation (Wærness, 1987: 115). Regulation has yet become indispensable in order to establish legal rights and obligations for those involved in care activities:

> "Regulating care is not neutral. It matters how care is ruled, as it shapes our understanding of ourselves and our responsibilities. Thus, any form of regulation creates a specific way of seeing the social world, a framework of political obligations and an understanding about the roles and responsibilities of social agents." (Dahl 2017: 118).

More precisely, regulations contribute to different logics and cultural meanings related to care – either as social good or as object of choice and consumption. Regulations also play a crucial role in relation to care services – i.e. regulation can push forward the professionalization of care activities, or they can slow down their social recognition.

In Romania too, domestic care services have developed and became increasingly more visible and pervasive after the fall of the former communist regime. In the specific context of the transition towards the liberalisation of the labour market, some significant changes occurred at the national level. Female unemployment increased, although the presence of women in the labour market remained relatively comparable to other Central and Eastern European countries – CEECs (Băluță, 2014a: 234; Geambaşu, 2016). At the same time, a specific withdrawal of the state from welfare provision (Fodor *et al.*, 2002) has overlapped with an important development of some of the family policies instruments (i.e. parental leave provision), revealing a complex combination of neoliberal and conservative political approaches regarding family life and care services (Dohotariu 2015). While post-socialist family policies have not been shaped by pro-active social reforms, one can observe that

dominant cultural meanings and social practices, norms and values related to care have still remained governed by an essentialist and differential gender perspective, according to which women are responsible for organising family matters and the household (Băluță, 2014a: 239). For instance, whenever family relatives, usually grandmothers, are not an available option, domestic childcare services seem to be the most appropriate solution, at least for emerging middle-class families living in urban areas (Kovács, 2016; Băluță & Dohotariu 2019).

Moreover, at least two general observations are particularly relevant for the specific Romanian post-socialist context where the politicisation of care was supposed to take place. First, it is only since 1996 that the domestic government agenda has included the diagnosis and the setting of political objectives and priorities, structured on chapters, which are also the main sectorial directions of the political vision, outlining the sectors that are likely to be included within the spectrum of policymaking. For example, in 1990 there was no proper governmental plan, but rather a rough economic agenda introduced by the Prime Minister's decision (Postolache, 1990), once the new government had been installed. Only two years later, the strategic governmental plan (1992) started being shaped, in both form and content, similarly to what such document should look like within any democratic regime in the late 20th century. Second, Romania's accession to the European Union[11] has played a significant role in introducing certain themes and subjects on the political agenda. EU is thus an actor that has a considerable role within the puzzle of ideas, interests and institutions that have influenced the domestic political agenda and the successive governmental plans[12].

In spite of this political and societal dynamics, domestic research on care as a political concern has still remained insufficiently developed. Existing research can be structured in

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[11]Romania's request to become a member of the EU was first made in 1995. The negotiations began on 15 February 2000, being concluded in 2004, at the Brussels summit. The Accession Treaty was signed on 25 April 2005, and the accession itself took place on 1 January 2007.

[12] This inquiry should be developed further with a wider analysis on the Europeanization process of the domestic politics and policies. See, for example, the analysis on EU's ascension as a democratisation process, and especially with a focus on the conditionality dimension (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2005). Moreover, for an analysis of Europeanization seen as a possible process of structural transformation, see Coman, R., Kostera, T. and Tomini L., 2014.

three main categories: a) literature on family policies (Dohotariu, 2015; 2018; Fodor *et al.*, 2002; Inglot, Szikra & Raț, 2011; Stănescu & Nemțanu, 2015); b) literature on children's rights and parenting that emphasises mostly aspects related to the social construction of parenting (Cojocaru D., 2008; 2011; Robila & Krishnakumar, 2006), the social assistance services for children's protection (Cojocaru Ș. and Cojocaru D., 2008), as well as the biological parenthood and care (Cojocariu C., 2017; Cojocaru D., 2009); c) literature on early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Matei, 2014) d) literature on gender mainstreaming, work-life balance, childcare, and gender equality, which focuses on the ways in which the political approach correlates care with equal opportunities policies on the labour market, such as work-life balance (WLB) policies, or with the political principle of gender mainstreaming (Crușmac & Köhler, 2016; Băluță, 2014b). However, these publications do not focus on the process of politicizing care or on care analysis through the lens of the strategic political regulation in post-socialist Romania.

In line with the approach stating that care is political by definition (Dahl 2017; Hoppania & Vaittinen 2015), this article takes a closer look at the political regulation of care in order to reveal not only the degree to which it is conceived and delimited as a political problem, but also in order to inquire the hegemonic political vision stemming from the ways in which care is regulated through governmental plans and strategies – i.e. the standards that are established in relation to care receiving and also in relation to the professionalization of care activities: *what are the main aspects related to care that draw Romanian politicians' attention?* and *what kind of ideological and political approach prevails in defining and setting care politics?*

Starting from these preliminary questions, this article has a twofold structure. First, a brief overview of the main research axes related to the concept of care and to care as a political concern is very useful for an in-depth understanding of the ways in which this issue has been tackled and theorised so far. Second, we use these epistemological tools for analysing the hegemonic political approach to this topic in post-socialist Romania. More precisely, in line with the approach according to which "Changing words creates new understandings and new worlds." (Dahl, 2017: 107), we use the method of the thematic content analysis in order to identify all themes related to the issue of care within the main strategic political plans and strategies elaborated and adopted between 1992 and 2020. A lexical analysis of

the governmental plans is useful for observing when and how many times the issue of care appears in these documents, seeking to understand when and how exactly does care manage to enter the hegemonic political documents and discourse. We decided to focus on governmental plans and strategies as the two categories of sources have not (yet) been analysed through the lens of care as a political concern, at least in the Romanian case. Both strategic governmental plans and national strategies are fundamental sources that need particular attention in order to understand the political vision, as well as the policy options that are at play whenever care is being addressed, defined and also transformed from a social fact into an object of public policy (Pløger 2021). An exhaustive and qualitative analysis of these documents is also useful for an in-depth understanding of care politics as well as a starting point for any other enquiry on this subject. Hence, this article addresses a gap within the existing research findings on care as a political concern in post-socialism. Furthermore, it aims to contribute to the development of further analyses on care as object of the main processes that are at the heart of the current political sphere in Romania.

I. Care as a political concern

Beyond the fact that one cannot define care as such, as it refers to a multi-layered reality which is always context related, scholars generally agree that care is based on vulnerability and corporeal relationality (Hoppania 2015). These features invite us to reflect upon care as a matter of power and, consequently, as a political issue by definition. However, care has only relatively recently started to be conceived as a political concern in Western societies. In fact, it is only starting with the 1970s and the 1980s that theorists from the second wave of feminism contributed to bringing different forms of care (as work, as an ethical issue etc.) into research agendas as well into the public sphere. More recently, the increasing governance of care has implied the need to extend the political analysis of this issue, although one can hardly state that care has definitively entered the fundamental lexicon of political thought (Hoppania 2015, p. 26). Therefore, a brief theoretical overview of the concept of care is necessary in order to reach a better understanding of both its conceptualisation as a political concern, and the limitations of such perspective.

In the context of the redefined position of housework in Western societies, characterised by the increasing involvement of well-educated women within housework (Anttonen & Zechner, 2011: 16-17), second wave feminists start to examine the economic value of women's unpaid domestic work. On the one hand, care was discussed in terms of 'costs of caring', putting the focus on the socio-economic loss of those providing care. On the other hand, this perspective focusing on the 'liberation from care' did not include the idea that caring can also be a matter of choice (Kremer, 2007: 30-31). However, starting with the 1980s, care begins to be associated with positive emotions. Care is thus analysed as a moral attitude or as an 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1983) that cannot be reduced to a simple economic activity. Nevertheless, in spite of these theoretical developments, care still remained described as a difficult object of study. After the 1990s, the two approaches on informal unpaid care and formal paid care work are mingled to a larger extent, in a way in which paid care too starts to be seen as related to values, such as commitment and love (Knijn & Kremer, 1997: 330). Furthermore, 'hybrid' forms of care work (combining formal and informal care arrangements) are described through the concept of "informal care employment" related to the undeclared care work done inside households (Geissler & Pfau-Effinger, 2005). More recently, since the 2000s onwards, care research has been influenced by three main inter-related aspects: a) the need to consider intersectionality as an indispensable methodological choice in approaching care; b) the need to focus on care through the lens of care-receiving, not only from the perspective of caregiving; c) the need to analyse care in relation to the recent context of migration and globalisation.

Apart from the perspectives on care as work, another strand of research has been developed with a special focus on the ethical dimensions of care. For instance, Joan Tronto analyses moral theory in Western democracies and discusses the discursive historical shifts that naturalised care and pushed it into the private sphere (Tronto, 1993). According to this approach, care is both an (ethical) disposition and a practice, and it can be defined in terms of four intertwined phases – 'caring about', 'taking care of', 'caregiving' and 'care-receiving': care is thus a complex ethical practice and process, not a simple natural/biological instinct (Tronto, 1993: 102-110). Moreover, unlike the political philosophy that states the prominence of interactions among equals in humanity, the ethics of care requires paying more attention to unequals, as well as to lived and practical

experiences that actually dominate social life. Hence, the concept of care invites us to perceive the shift from the dominant ideal of autonomy and control, stemming from the liberal political thought, to a more sophisticated sense of gendered human interdependence and vulnerability.

Despite Tronto's seminal work, care still remains insufficiently assessed within the more recent context characterised by a "care deficit" or a "crisis of reproduction" (Fraser, 1996), and by different ways in which the democratic systems of governance address these concerns. At the same time, considering the prevalence of the economic logic of the market within the current socio-political contexts, care has become a "central site of the political in present day society" (Hoppania 2015, 50). In other words, beyond the hegemonic discourse that advances market rationality (of growth and competition), new political theory research needs to assess and explain the political mechanisms that lead to the recently visible transformations of human relations into capitalist life forms and consumer-producer rationalities. Starting from this assumption, Hoppania and Vaittinen have developed an analysis related to the logic of care (care rationality) alongside the level of the governance of care – the latter embracing various national and transnational social policies, as well as political discourses and marketisation tendencies of care. The Finnish authors reveal that care is a corporeal relation materialised through embodied encounters between care receivers, caregivers and the socio-political context providing resources, and thus an object of governance, regulation and commodification (Hoppania & Vaittinen, 2015). More precisely, care has its own logic or rationality, different from the classical logic of choice that increasingly prevails in marketised care and requires thinking about it in terms of transactions. Care can thus be referred to as an "ongoing process" (Mol, 2008: 11), denoting first and foremost a relationship. Consequently, the logic of care embraces the whole complexity of care practices and relations (including for instance the role of technology) and does not imply 'good care' as a natural response. It is, by definition, a political concern.

Furthermore, in line with the approach developed by Carol Bacchi (2009), the feminist political scientist Hanne Marlene Dahl interrogates care as a political problem through the lens of a post-structuralist perspective, according to which "everything is constituted relationally" (Dahl, 2017: 94). The Danish author's inquiry is of particular interest as it

invites us to investigate the process of politicising care, as well as two specific aspects that this process entails: the silencing of care, as well as the gendered regulation of care (Dahl 2017).

Dahl examines the opposition between care and the dominant discourse of autonomy and control – the latter stemming from the liberal political thought in Western societies, and reveals that care has become a paradox: on the one hand, it is a precondition for civilization, and on the other hand it threatens it, as it remains incompatible with the current dominant norms and ideals (Dahl, 2017: 96). At the same time, when care is being politicised, (i.e. when it becomes part of both political-administrative discourse *and* regulations), it also has to become intelligible in a political-administrative logic – i.e. "something that has to fit into our governing rationales of reason and control" (Dahl, 2017: 97), so that it can be governed. In other words, when care becomes governable (i.e. split into categories related to care activities and care needs, that fit into the politico-administrative logic), it is also suppressed and silenced, as its dimension related to the expectations of both caregivers and care receivers remain shadowed, as they remain outside regulations. Nevertheless, although political regulations do not cover all aspects of care, it would be scant to consider them as being antithetic: public discourses on care and the will to regulate it has definitively amplified, at least within consolidated democratic systems, which makes the process of politicising care more visible (Dahl, 2017: 115-116).

Moreover, politicising care refers to the fact that it becomes part of the political-administrative discourses and thus an object of political regulation: in other words, politicising care means that it is "waged, managed, governed and part of the professionalizing process" (Dahl, 2017: 91). However, as Dahl underlines it, politicising care is not a simple or linear attempt: on the contrary, it includes silencing of gender[13] and different aspects of care, as well as silencing of other less valorised aspects of human existence.

According to this perspective, silencing is an active and continuous process that can be identified within political discourse and documents. Moreover, it is a constitutive feature

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[13] "The silencing of gender means that potential gender biases have been ignored and an androgynous discourse used as though a gender equal society had been reached." (Dahl 2017: 140).

of the political discourse, "that reproduces and transforms discourse into a different discourse" (Dahl, 2017: 95), and which is also similar to 'doing gender' or 'gendering' (Dahl, 2017: 95). Silencing thus refers to "the lack of power that manifests itself when subjects, objects, relations and spaces cannot be described and hence do not seem to exist" (Dahl, 2017: 94). Therefore, identifying silence or silencing is not an easy attempt:

> "Silence is something that is absent, that which is not said and which cannot be said. […] Silence points two aspects of power: silence as normalization and silence as the forgotten/the unspeakable. […] Silence is about both sides of the power game. Power as dominance is the power to name something and 'which goes without saying', such as when whiteness is the dominant norm and everything is silently related to it." (Dahl, 2017: 93)

Furthermore, the regulation of care can encompass both silencing of gender or of any aspect of care itself: "In the regulation of care, we can identify silencing when relations, objects and particular subjects (positions) cannot be expressed and therefore cease to exist." (Dahl, 2017: 104). More precisely, the choice to investigate gendered regulations[14] is not limited to an analysis of the extent to which regulations increase or minimize gender differences. Instead, "Gendered regulation refers to indirect gendering, as it occurs in the way dichotomies and hierarchies are created concerning work vs. non-work, public responsibility vs. private responsibility and the professional vs. unprofessional." (Dahl, 2017: 139).

In line with the theoretical perspective presented above, the second part of our article consists of an analysis of the ways in which care appears within the main political governmental plans and strategies in post-socialist Romania.

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[14] "In sum, gendered regulation is neither exclusively about men, women nor gendered subjectivities. It is about investigating the potential silencing of gender, and the way social dichotomies are at play, and the fact that some of these dichotomies are also hierarchies: they prioritize some aspects of reality over others, for example warm versus cold, work versus (what was traditionally perceived as) non-work and scientific knowledge over knowledge of the body." (Dahl 2017: 140-141).

II. Politicising care in post-communist Romania

This empirical analysis starts from a simple yet complex question: when, and how more precisely, does care become a political subject and also a political problem within the Romanian post-socialist political agenda? Although our inquiry is based on a broader perspective on care, it insists yet on both the recognition of this kind of work (that has been invisible until recently, as unpaid and "naturally" attributed to the family, especially to women) and its recognition on the labour market. Furthermore, it focuses on the establishment of public infrastructure and services, the concern for those in need of care and the preoccupation to ensure a framework that guarantees both the quality of care and the human and ethical dimensions related to it. Considering all these aspects, we seek to analyse the extent to which care has been politicised (or not) in post-socialist Romania: when and how does it become part of the strategic political plans as main political-administrative documents? What are the 'silencing' processes and the gendered dichotomies in relation to care that these documents (re)produce and reinforce? what kind of tensions do these documents reveal? – i.e. what is their significance? what do they mean? how to identify and understand them? what do they teach us? Moreover, what is the political connection between the issue of care and the broader interconnected subjects and areas, such as family life, the labour market, equal opportunities, child protection, disability and elder care?

Starting from these questions, we analyse the strategic political documents elaborated in post-socialism (i.e. governing plans and national strategies) as two main categories of sources:

a) The governmental plans from 1990 to 2020. A government-planning programme conveys the electoral programme and the political vision of the party or of the coalition that won the majority of the votes during elections, therefore it can be considered as the hegemonic political approach related to a legislative cycle. The diagnostic assessment, the principles and the political objectives formulated within the preamble of these documents outline the political agenda underpinning the public policies related to each mandate (Pløger 2021: 3-6). However, our choice is to limit our analysis to post-election governmental plans, in order to be able to

compare different political approaches that had been validated through the electoral poll (in 1990, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012 and also in 2016).

b) The sectorial national strategies directly linked to the issue of care: equal opportunities strategies, employment strategies, as well as child-protection strategies. Brimming with political meaning, national strategies include an overall examination of the specific field they are addressing and also establish their major objectives over the period of governance, thus being fundamental documents for the analysis of the way in which policy objectives are being transposed into effective public policies.

The qualitative method of discourse analysis has been very useful in order to capture the key aspects that arise from the process of politicizing care. We have started with a lexicometric quantitative analysis, using the word "care" as main analysis unit seeking to identify the occurrence of the term and to highlight the chronology of its use[15]. We decided not to extend further this lexicometric analysis, as our approach is a qualitative-comprehensive one. More precisely, we have used the classical thematic discourse analysis as main methodological option, for several reasons: it allows us to analyse both the explicit as well as the latent content, and it also allows us not only to make correlations with the socio-political context, but also to use intertextuality for the purpose of identifying the connections between all our documentary sources (Coman *et al.* 2016: 135-159). All these methodological choices entail carefully reading and analysing our sources though the lens of the main themes revealed by our research object. As we focus on the chronological introduction of the term care within the strategic governing documents, we also seek to reveal both its scant presence as well as the implicit related silencing.

a) Care through the lens of post-socialist strategic governmental plans

Our analysis starts with the governmental plans based on winning electoral agenda implemented between 1990 and 2020, seeking to examine all the themes relevant for the

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[15] All quotes from governmental plans and national strategies used in this paper were translated by the authors.

issue of care – i.e. care work, social policies, family policies, equal opportunity policies, gender equality, care services, work-life balance (WLB) incentives and the labour market, as well as ECEC provision (Sarceno, 2011). Our lexical analysis also identifies care, as well as all the forms derived from the Romanian term of care – i.e. "îngrijire", "îngrijitor", "a îngriji" – within the main post-socialist governmental plans (for methodological reasons, we chose to exclude from our investigation any reference to health care).

Governmental plans	1990	1992-1996	1996-1998	2000-2004	2005-2008	2009-2012	2013-2016	2017-2020
Occurrences of the word *care* and its derivates	0	0	0	2	1	6	8	5

The main result of this classic lexical analysis is crystal clear: before 2000 the electoral programmes that turned into governmental agendas[16] had never used the term of care, nor other derivate expressions. Later on, right after the official beginning of the negotiations for Romania's accession to the EU, all governmental plans constantly use the term of care and its multi-layered meanings.

Our content analysis reveals that the first three governmental plans focus mainly on economic issues or institutional and legislative reforms. More precisely, from 1990 to 1992, the dominant political actors seemed to have no apprehension for the major social themes such as family life, children, youth or education. The issue of care was missing completely from these documents. The 1996 governmental plan, the best elaborated one from the first decade of the newly installed democratic system, casts light from the very beginning of the need to increase the birth rates and to protect mothers and children. The document also referred to "family allowance" (defined as a social provision aimed at covering the costs of raising and educating children – i.e. food expenses, school insertion, clothing and supervision) as well as to the creation of "specialised institutions" in the field of the legal protection of, disabled people, families with children, and orphans.

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[16] The limited length of this article does not allow us to approach and to proceed to an in-depth analysis of the ideological and political party dimensions that should be tackled through the main electoral plans. See for instance Jiglău and Gherghina, 2011; Kitschelt *et al.*, 1999; Soare, 2004.

In 2000, the governmental plan outlined from the beginning that the European and the Euro-Atlantic requirements constituted a benchmark in setting the government's objectives and strategies. These priorities were exclusively related to economic, justice and state institutions reforms. In the field of social assistance, the planned political approach settled the family at the heart of the social concerns, mainly through two types of subsumed instruments: subsistence allowances and family development allowances. For the first time, a post-socialist governmental plan had a separate chapter on social policies (chapter 5), which included three strands of the political agenda of that time: "families with young toddlers, marriages and intra-family relationships, as well as work-family balance". However, the document did not contain any concrete reference either to measures and actions necessary to support the implementation of these objectives, or to the need to find solutions related to the caring for non-autonomous people. It insisted yet on the need for family counselling and the importance of maternity. Furthermore, only the child protection subchapter (5.3) mentioned, among many other objectives that generally refer to children's rights, the need to adjust social benefits in order to financially support families. However, more emphasis was put on the way in which families were to be taught to care for their children, leaving aside the need to create new public tools and infrastructure.

The next governmental plan (2004-2008) contained a single chapter (7) dedicated to social protection. The document mentioned from the beginning some fundamental governing directions, among which the idea of strengthening individual freedoms and increasing the safety of citizens and of family (position 3), as well as the principle of equal opportunities (item 8). The chapter on education (5) referenced to the need to create new nurseries, kindergartens and support programmes for parents with children with special needs, but all these issues remained limited to education aspects, as if they were not care public services for children as well. Chapter 7 also included references to the labour market mainly from an economic perspective. It also discussed gender equality strictly from the point of view of the necessity to design some national institutions and strategies, as well as family policies from a pronatalist perspective based on different forms of financial support that could encourage birth rates – for instance, monthly allowances for mothers raising their children up to the age of 2 or 3 years old (p.116). The reference to care appeared only when the governmental plan mentioned elder care, insisting thus on the need to create

"specialised services to provide social and medical care as well as home assistance", and also on the necessity to ensure training sessions for the staff providing such services (pp. 121-124). The word care was also used in connection to disabled people (page 125).

In 2009, the governmental plan was based on 10 principles, among which the second one was related to "equality, non-discrimination and guaranteeing fundamental rights", and another one that treated all together the issues of family, child protection and equal opportunities (Chapter 9). The chapter on education evoked the necessity for building kindergartens, but strictly for educational purposes, excluding any care aspects. For the first time within the post-socialist governmental plans, one can also observe the reference to "school after-school" programmes, allowing pupils to stay eight hours per day at school. But once again, the arguments in favour of such plan are rather educational. Otherwise, Chapter 9 explicitly introduced the notion of WLB policies, with all related measures and instruments: increasing the number of nurseries, supporting the professionalization of homecare services' network, as well as increasing the preoccupation for the situation of disabled people, especially through allowances and other financial support for families.

The 2013-2016 governmental plan reflected and relied on a number of principles underpinning European governance: (p.2) equal opportunities and protection against injustice and discrimination; flexicurity on the labour market; social protection for families, and birth and family "stimulation" (p.3). The chapter on education cast light on the educational perspective without making any correlation between it and the care dimension, although some objectives could be interpreted as related to care as well: the creation of another 50.000 places in nurseries and kindergartens, and also educational campuses adapted to the regional needs of children and youth (p.42). The chapter on work explicitly mentioned the need for childcare and other dependent family members in order to ensure the (re)conciliation of work and family life (p 101). The explicit reference to care also appeared in the chapter on social assistance that included several directives: improving family services, such as education and surveillance services within pre-school or after-school programmes; services for disabled people; elderly care services, as well as medical care services for dependent people; the development of social care services for children and other dependent family members, as well as supporting the recognition of caregivers' work at home (p. 102). The chapter on social protection for the family and the child was

mainly focused on parental support mechanisms such as WLB strategies: standardizing the quality of day-care services for children within the domestic care and education system, supporting accredited and qualified childminders, as well as introducing a monitoring system of these services (fiscal deductibility for employers that furnish nurseries or kindergartens services, p. 103). As for elderly people, one of the goals was to develop first and foremost home-based services.

Last but not least, the governmental plan for 2017–2020 insisted, at least at the level of the governance principles and objectives, on the family institution, which became prevalent against the individual. Furthermore, the chapter on public policies for labour and social justice matters referenced an integrated set of measures: "support for housing, transport, childcare and medical care or recovery" (p. 53). Moreover, the "support for families and children" was conceived as "promoting mechanisms for supporting parents' work-life balance" (p. 55). This governmental plan also introduced the need to "regulate the professional status of social assistants" (point 11). The chapter on education largely reiterated the previous objectives, focusing again on the educational aspects, and without correlating it with care.

As we have already observed through the lexical analysis, care appears for the first time within the 2000 governmental plan, when the negotiations related to Romania's accession to the EU were officially launched. One can easily remark that the government's objectives had been established in relation to the European and Transatlantic requirements. All five post-socialist governmental plans do not make any link between care and education, although some of the proposed measures could be interpreted as leading to this correlation. At the same time, only the last two governmental plans mention, in their chapters related to the labour market, the need for the WLB measures, and also refer to the development of childcare services, disabled people, elder people and dependent others. Furthermore, since 2009, the professionalization of care services has been taking place, mainly though the regulation of childminders' profession (2009) as well as though the regulation of the professional status of personal social assistants (2017). However, until 2009, the reference to care appears strictly in the chapters dedicated to the family, social assistance and equal opportunities. Although, very slowly, the need for care services becomes officially recognised, it has largely remained a family responsibility within the political discourse.

Furthermore, the fact that all governmental plans have constantly maintained the interest for increasing birth rates and developing pronatalist policies – culminating, in 2017, with the objective of the "security" of the family as opposed to the social assistance for individuals – actually, it reveals the predominantly familialist political vision (Dohotariu, 2015), supplemented by a traditional view on gender roles, according to which maternity and care remain woman's natural and social "duty".

The European principles, legislation, strategies and political agenda undoubtedly influence the domestic political agenda. However, the lack of an integrated political vision that usually links different fields between them (e.g. – education, labour market, family, social assistance, gender equality and equal opportunities), as well as some options somewhat paradoxical (the neoliberal perspective on work, the conservative familialist perspective related to family life, and also the references to equal opportunities and work-life balance) are, in our view, highly relevant for the inconsistency and the eclecticism of the post-socialist governmental plans. These programmatic documents do not convey a clear political will, either to promote gender equality, or to create efficient care policies congruent to the democratic gender equality principle.

b) The national strategies related to the issue of care

The analysis of care through the lens of the way in which the hegemonic political vision is being transposed into public policies invites us to consider at least four thematic topics: a) family institution; b) work, c) gender equality, and d) children. In order to maintain a diachronic view and to address all these topics, we have chosen to focus on the related national strategies as reference documents for any public policy. Incidentally or not, all four domains are coordinated by the same ministry – i.e. the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice (MMJS), which has been re-entitled many times[17], and which subsumes different

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[17] Some of the Ministry's different designations are suggestive for the ways in which the issues of family, work, children and equality are ideologically tackled or correlated. For example, this governmental institution was previously entitled as *the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elder People.* Moreover, before 2014, it was designated either as *the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection*, or *the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family*, or as simply as *the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity*.

national 'Agencies' (or 'Authorities'), among which *the National Authority for the Protection of Child's Rights and for Adoption* (ANPDCA), *the National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* (ANES), as well as *the National Agency for Employment* (ANOFM). More precisely, children, work and gender equality (or equal opportunities) are treated as three different areas of interest. Each of them is the subject of some distinct national strategies elaborated after 2000 (as programmatic documents), and, moreover, each of them is being coordinated by different national agencies/institutions. In return, there is not any national agency or authority, or subsequent national strategy, for the issue of family[18], in spite of the fact that the website of the Ministry of Labour explicitly refers to 'family', as a distinct field of interest covering 'family policies' as well as parental leave issues.

Before analysing, through the lens of care, all national strategies reminded above, one has to make at least two preliminary remarks. First, from the point of view of the availability of information, one must underline the utter disorganisation of the websites of these institutions as well as the incredible lack of interest for the preservation of an electronic institutional archive. Moreover, the evaluation reports on the implementation of every national strategy within the three areas are not publicly available, although they are mandatory by law. This reveals the lack of transparency and systematisation that may be paradigmatic for the insufficient attention paid to both policy-making process and to national strategies' implementation.

Second, although the governmental plans define the institution of family as being central for the issue of care, there is not any national strategy in this field. On the one hand, childcare allowances and different parental leave schemes represent the main public instruments that serve, among others, children's interests. More precisely, childcare is being conceived first and foremost as a family responsibility, which explains the fact that parental leave allowances are the main public policy tool designed for childcare.

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[18] There was also a *National Agency for Family Protection*, but it was disbanded by H.G. 1385/2009 regarding the establishment, organization and functioning of *the National Authority for the Protection of Child's Rights*. This institutional reorganisation is suggestive for the way in which the issue of family is, somehow, being approached and reduced to the field of children's protection. Nevertheless, one has yet to be reminded that there is not any national strategy for the family institution in post-communist Romania.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the length, the payment and the eligibility criteria related to all forms of parental leave in post-communist Romania reveals that: a) financial interests are first and foremost behind the hegemonic political concern for childcare; b) there is no political determination to diminish the asymmetric gendered parental responsibilities related to childcare, which reveals old tensions between care and health features related to childcare, and which can also be understood as one of the main reasons that stalled the development of domestic ECEC provision (Dohotariu, 2018). On the other hand, elder people are the subject of a distinct legal framework that was created in order to provide care services for seniors (social assistance services as well as retirement homes)[19]. Without explicitly providing clarifications regarding this distinction, all national strategies on family life, work, equal opportunities and children refer to childcare on one hand, and to elder care on the other, as if they belong to different fields of interest – i.e. the former as a family concern by definition, and the latter as a mainly health care issue.

National Strategies for Employment

The recognition of care activities as work and their regulation as paid work can be considered as one of the major junctures registered at the level of politics and policies of care in post-socialist Romania. At the same time, WLB and childcare are two interrelated issues of public concern: public policies that offer concrete solutions for childcare allow both parents to be active in the labour market. All these aspects invite us to analyse the way in which care, and all related aspects, are being tackled within all National Strategies for Employment (SNOFM) entered into force after 1990.

Similarly to the governmental plans, the institutional and sectorial public policies development took place only after the first decade following the fall of the communist regime, being also utterly influenced by the EU accession process. At the institutional level, the National Agency for Employment and Professional Training is a public institution with legal personality, which started its activity in 1999. In 2000 it became the National Agency

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[19]http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/2014-domenii/familie/politici-familiale-incluziune-si-asistenta-sociala, last consulted in May 2018.

for Employment (ANOFM). Law 202/2006 regulates its structure and functioning, and H.G. 1610/2006 stipulates its institutional status[20]. After 2000, two national strategies related to employment have been adopted: SNOFM 2004-2010 and SNOFM 2014-2020.

The first one is not very clearly structured. It makes only one indirect reference to WLB policies and care – i.e. when it addresses the need to make working contracts more flexible in the labour market.

Unlike the first strategy, SNOFM 2014-2020 has a much clearer and organised content, and it includes several parts: a policy diagnosis, European directions (according to the *Europe 2020 strategy*), setting objectives, a presentation of policy measures and actions, and also an implementation plan. All these five parts highlight the low female employment rates compared to the male ones. Considering that increasing population's contribution to the labour force (including women, youth, and other vulnerable social categories) is one of the main EU priorities, SNOFM 2014-2020 underlines that the development of care facilities – for children as well as for other dependent people – has still remained insufficient (p. 51). More precisely, the concern for the issue of care is linked to the need to promote gender equality in the labour market, being also directly correlated with the broader objective of increasing women's employment participation (O2, Action 2.2; p. 50). The development of care services is presented as a WLB tool. At the same time, the concern to reduce gender stereotypes that disadvantage women in the labour market indicates the link with the Objective 2 of the strategy – i.e. "Improving the occupational structure as well as women's and other vulnerable person's participation in the labour market" (p. 52). The action plan also provides for two types of measures (2.2.8 and 2.2.9, p. 81): developing childcare infrastructure and "identifying the demand for personal-care services for dependent people, as well as developing training and motivational programmes for formal caregivers working in the labour market". Furthermore, the indicators presented within this document refer to the number of services and beneficiaries, with no reference to the need to update and adjust the current legislative framework. Finally, the budgeting is, in our view, the most vulnerable element of SNOFM 2014-2020. More precisely, "local budgets

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[20] More details regarding the structure and the objectives of ANOFM are available on its website: http://www.anofm.ro/prezentare-generala-actualizat, last consulted in May 2018.

within the limit of funds available" (pp. 81-82), as well as the European funds, are referred to as the main source of funding for the national public measures in this field.

National Strategies for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

Three National Strategies for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (SNES)[21] and their Implementation Plans, have been successively adopted: SNES 2006-2009, SNES 2010-2012 and SNES 2014-2017. Each of these documents makes reference, among different objectives and planning activities, to the institutional functioning of the National Agency for Equal Opportunities (ANES) which is the main public authority responsible for the elaboration and the implementation of all governmental strategies in the field of equal opportunities between women and men[22]. All these national strategies focus on gender equality in different areas (i.e. on the labour market, as well as at the social and political decisional level, or in the areas of education or family life), mainly through the lens of the need to deconstruct gender stereotypes and to fight against discrimination and violence. Furthermore, care is also addressed and correlated especially to the issues of WLB, family responsibilities or parenting.

SNES 2006-2009 is structured into eight "intervention areas" to which are being assigned different objectives, actions, as well as institutions responsible for their implementation. The document makes reference to care three times, once in relation to WLB, and twice in relation to the objective of "equal participation of women and men within the family". SNES 2006-2009 underlines that, in order to achieve WLB, fathers have to be "encouraged" to get more involved in childcare and thus to apply for paternity and parental leave, but the document makes no reference to the ways in which fathers could be

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[21]The fourth SNES 2018-2021 was approved by the Government, on 24 May 2018: http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/comunicare/comunicate-de-presa/5151-cp-strategia-nat-anes-24052018, but it has not been legally adopted yet: http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/proiecte-in-dezbatere/5003-20171026-proiect-hg-strategie-nat-es-vd (last consulted in June 2018).

[22] Invested with legal personality, ANES is under the subordination of the Ministry of Labour. It was created in 2002 (Law 202/2002), dissolved in 2010, and reintroduced as an institutional authority in 2015 (Law 229/2015). For more details regarding ANES and the institutional framework on gender equality in Romania, see Băluță, 2014b.

stimulated for taking such commitments (III.3.A, III.3.B). The strategy also reminds us the need to promote the development of public social services for care for children and other dependent family members (III.3.C), but there is no other detail related to the implementation of such measure. Furthermore, SNES 2006-2009 makes no connection between care (assigned mainly to the issue of family responsibilities, including parenting and domestic tasks) and education (approached though the lens of the gendered access to education, teacher's training, gender balance within the educational management, the need to include gender education in school curricula and textbooks), except only one implicit mention related to the urge to sustain father's involvement in children's education.

Later on, SNES 2010-2012 explicitly incorporates all targets set by the Governmental Plan 2009-2012, which contains a chapter (i.e. Chapter 9) treating all together the issues of family, child protection and equal opportunities (p. 4). Although it is better structured compared to the previous national strategy, SNES 2010-2012 makes even less references to care. More precisely, while care ("îngrijire") is not mentioned at all, in return, childcare is being tackled rather indirectly, twice, without being formulated as such (i.e. it was replaced by "child rearing and education"). Firstly, SNES 2010-2012 mentions the need to introduce the gender approach within formal and non-formal education (Education, 1.B; 1.C). Secondly, the document envisages achieving the objective of WLB through a) "an information and awareness campaign for fathers, about the need to stimulate their involvement in raising and educating their children" (Labour market, 2.A), and b) "editing a guide that contains work-life balance models and legislative provisions, to be distributed at national level." (Labour market, 2.B).

Finally, similarly to the previous national strategy, SNES 2014-2017 incorporates all targets set by the Governmental Plan 2013-2016 in the fields of 'Work/Labour market' and 'Education'. In addition, SNES 2014-2017 reminds us the most salient differences between the three national strategies on equal opportunities. First, SNES 2006-2009 insisted mainly on information and awareness campaigns. Second, SNES 2010-2012 planned a broader approach for the implementation of gender equality, including a concrete budget, but, finally, it had been almost abandoned in the context of the economic depression and the subsequent disbanding of ANES, which was the main institution responsible for its implementation. Third, SNES 2014-2017 focused on some distinct "areas of intervention":

education, labour market, gender balance within decision-making, gender mainstreaming and gender violence.

Overall, the analysis of SNES 2014-2017 through the lens of care reveals several silencing processes. Although the document reminds us that the EU's approach on WLB insists on the need to develop further childcare provision and facilities (p. 13), the strategy addresses the issue of care only twice, without making any kind of correlation between care and education. Care is mentioned only within two of the objectives related to the theme of the labour market. First, the document underlines the need to increase people's awareness related to the legislation in the field of equal opportunities for women and men, and it thus recommends one research study and one conference meant to reach a better understanding and legal support for "equal access to professional promotion of women returning to work after extended periods of care for children and other dependent family members" (Labour market, 2.b). Second, SNES 2014-2017 underlines the need to raise the degree of awareness related to WLB, seeking to "encourage private companies to provide day-care services for the children of their employees", to "support flexible working programmes for workers who have to care for their children and other dependent family members", as well as to "encourage the private life partnership between women and men and to stimulate men to take over childcare responsibilities" (Labour market, 4.a). Unfortunately, the only solution assigned to this objective is an "information campaign". All in all, the strategy's analysis reveals not only that its objectives in terms of care remain rather scant, but it also clear that there is neither a budget, nor any other concrete solution to address the identified problems.

National Strategies for the Protection and the Promotion of Children's Rights

The preoccupation for children's situation, especially the institutionalised ones, has occurred within all governmental plans since 1990[23], although the establishment of a specialised institution responsible for the protection of children's rights and interests was

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[23] These concerns are definitively linked to the numerous public outrages and debates that occurred also within international media, about the situation of orphan institutionalised children, and later on about the issue of international adoptions.

created as late as around 2000, with many reorganisations and restructurings ever since. O.U.G. 192/1999 and H.G. 96/2000 regulated the creation of the National Agency for the Protection of Child's Rights (ANPDC). Only one year later, the Agency was disbanded (H.G. 216/2001), its prerogatives being taken over by the National Authority for Child's Protection and Adoption (ANPCA).

In the context of all institutional restructuring within the public administration produced by the economic depression of the time, a new national authority was established, taking over the prerogatives of several institutions: the National Authority for the Protection of Family and Child's Rights (ANPFDC), (H.G. 1385/2009).

Finally, in 2014, the National Authority for the Protection of Child's Rights and Adoption (H.G. 299/2014) is re-enforced as a specialised body of the central public administration with legal personality, subordinated to the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice. In the context of these fluctuating and unpredictable institutional changes, the delayed formulation of a National Strategy, the lack of centralization of data on the various institutions and their actions, and the poor implementation of specific public policies, are not surprising at all.

One has to be reminded that the improvement of the child protection system was a condition within the process of Romania's accession to the EU (SNPPDC 2008-2013, chapter XI). As for care, the 2008-2013 Strategy focuses especially on children in special situations (particularly orphans, living in placement centres, or in the care of foster carers) or on children with special needs (i.e. with various forms of disabilities), which placed the issue of care under the perspective of some specific emergencies or some special situations. As for the rest of children, the document makes reference to family policies and to social assistance policies regulating services for children and families, as well as the related benefits: 'new-born allowance', 'state allowance', 'complementary family allowance', 'single-parent family allowance', 'the allowance for children placed within the social protection system', as well as 'child rearing allowance for toddlers under two years old'. The document also includes different objectives and actions particularly related to counselling and education as well as raising parents' and carers' awareness, in order to ensure that children's rights are being respected in accordance to the related international legislation. Care per se seems to be less important within these strategies particularly

concerned by children's rights and protection. Furthermore, whenever tackling the issue of childcare, the document makes reference exclusively to family and parents, as if care were not at all a paid work, but a simple 'labour of love'. While childcare is presented as a simple "natural" duty of the family, children's education is more often approached as a public concern.

The current National Strategy for the Protection and the Promotion of Children's Rights (SNPPDC 2014-2020) also emphasizes the issue of child's welfare and development. The document also tackles the issue of the necessary training of the professional staff working in day-care centres (p. 11), as well as the issue of WLB, which requires the development of day-care services (p. 12). In addition to these new objectives, the strategy maintains the interest for developing care services through the "maternal assistants" system, or care services for children with special needs. Consequently, the 2014-2020 Strategy introduces a new perspective on care that recognizes, at least partially, this activity as work or as a service that families need, especially from the WLB perspective. The document also addresses the problem of the professional training of people working in childcare institutions, which suggests the public interest for the professionalization of care that goes beyond the sphere of family life.

Concluding remarks

Our analysis reveals that the theoretical choice to tackle care as a political concern allows us to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the way in which this universal human phenomenon is treated at the level of political thought, public policies, as well as at institutional level. However, our work had to be limited to two major sources – the governmental plans and the national sectorial strategies, including also a very brief examination of the specific institutions related to care, which allows us to formulate the following concluding remarks.

First of all, one may observe that the first decade after the fall of the former communist regime can be characterised as a period during which the professional approach to governance had slowly been built, and, at the same time, the institutional construction of different care related areas (such as family policies, child protection and social assistance

policies, labour market policies and, last but not least, gender equality measures) had also begun. Moreover, the institutional settings and the related public policies started being developed after 2000, which was explicitly connected to the process of Romania's accession to the EU. As one may understand, especially from the preamble of the analysed sources, the governing objectives were set in connection with the norms and strategies of the EU or of other international partners, such as the United Nations. All institutional changes, the absence of any reliable budget, the missing reports on the implementation of the national strategies, the missing information on the related institutions' official websites – all these aspects show that, at least within the mentioned areas, the politics and policies of care in Romania occurred mostly in a top-down logic and have very rarely been implemented, revealing thus a lack of accountability.

The governmental plans use the term of care as late as 2000, first of all in relation to family policies, child protection and social assistance. Later on, these documents also mention the need to create a public infrastructure to ensure care services – since 2004 more precisely, as well as WLB incentives – since 2009. However, in Romania there is a clear lack of correlation between different areas that should develop specific (but integrated) public policies. This would not have been the case if care were a real governance technique (Howarth, 2010; Mungiu-Pippidi *et. al.*, 2011). Moreover, the analysis of care as a political problem reveals different relevant details, such as: a) the concern for increasing births' rate and for supporting the family as the main social institution providing care services; b) the marginal and also simply formal interest in care and gender equality.

As for the main national strategies related to the field of family life, work and gender equality, they reveal that although some random references to care have appeared since 2008-2010. At the same time, it is only in the latest strategies that there are, however, several objectives and actions explicitly related to care as paid work, as gender equality or WLB instrument, as well as some indirect concerns for the ethics of care within professional services. Nevertheless, there is no reference to the development of a legislative framework that should inflict public policies changes necessary for the implementation of these objectives. Therefore, according to the legislation in force, family allowances remain the only real policy instrument for childcare. In addition, there are no well-defined

indicators and no clear budget for achieving these objectives, which place the existing approach to care either into a future area that needs to be further developed (including specific legislative, financial and human resources), or into a paradigm revealing the absence of a real political will to change the current approach. The later could also be interpreted as the lack of any political determination to transform the limitation of the current politics and policies of care from their simple existence on paper, into a real sustainable correlation with the EU priorities and policies. In a nutshell, one can clearly observe that care is currently correlated with the family institution, which reveals the continuity of a traditional approach to care as a 'natural' domestic task. Moreover, especially in the case of childcare, the pronatalist policies, as well as the familialist and conservative dimensions of the national political thought related to family life suggest the prevalence of the political option for family childcare (especially mothering). While in many European countries, the political principle of gender equality has contributed to the reform of national public policies related to the issue of care, in Romania it still remains a minor political value, in a context in which there is no evidence of the implementation of the political principle of gender mainstreaming.

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