

THE ROMANIANS' SOCIAL REPRESENTATION OF NATO AND EU

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There is a wide spread idea nowadays (according to European level surveys and assertions) saying that Romanians show the highest sympathy (from all EU candidate countries) for the European and NATO integration processes because they are among the poorer populations on the continent. We thus tried, first of all, to see whether we could actually find a link between the high support for the integration process and the low economic status of Romanians. At the same time, we attempted to analyze the relationship between this high support and the Romanians' level of information concerning the two institution we are trying to be a part of: The European Union and NATO. The paper will try to show in what way and with what intensity is the Romanians attitude towards NATO and EU influenced by poverty and by their knowledge about these two international organizations. The first part of this research is a secondary analysis of a prestigious biannual national-level survey whereas the second part consists of a research concerning NATO and EU social representations among students.

First Part

Secondary Analysis on Public Opinion Barometer October, 2002

Introduction

“Integration” has been a very fashionable word in the last five or six years, in Romania. Although there is a lot of public debate concerning this subject, public opinion surveys show that Romanians have a low information level when it comes to NATO and EU. They express their sympathy for different international structures but they do not know – for instance – what the EU institutions are or what the NATO mission is. Moreover, they are not informed about what the process of “integration” consists of - from a military or economical point of view. International public opinion surveys also show that Romanians' support for “integration politics” has increased in the last few years, while decreasing in the other European countries. How can this phenomenon be explained? Could there be a link between the Romanians' positive attitude towards integration politics (NB: the highest in Europe) and their low welfare level, their economic expectations? Can we rightfully assume that behind this positive attitude belies in fact the strive for economic benefits?

In order to answer to these questions and to reveal some attitude patterns among regular people, we chose to conduct a secondary analysis on a national bi-annual survey: The Public Opinion Barometer (POB). Ever since 1994, POB is a “traditional” survey led by the most prestigious research institutes in Romania, with Open Society Foundation support. The survey is based on an