



I am angry

Matei Paun **13.05.2005**

I am angry. Angry that by the time you read this, Romania's new, so-called "reform-minded" government will be in its sixth month, and that, except for a flurry of activity in the first couple of days as they introduced something they called a "flat tax", not much has happened since. Angry that the "flat tax" wasn't even really a flat tax. Angry that privatisations and economic reform seem to have reached a standstill. Angry that incessant debates over early elections and government reshuffles have dominated the political scene. Angry that our media is not angrier.

I am angry that soon we will join the European Union. Angry because most Romanians don't understand what it will mean. Angry because our businesses and our economy are not yet ready because we are not ready because we are not in a position to take advantage of accession because we are inefficient. We are inefficient because we have poor management and lack technology. I am angry that we have no leaders or visionaries. Because when we do, we ridicule and trample them. Angry because we are petty, arrogant and ignorant. Angry because we are unable to cooperate amongst ourselves, let alone with our government or our universities.

I am angry that our politicians call themselves socialists, democrats, liberals and reformers, but are none of the above. Angry that they resemble each other more than they do not. Angry that we have no other politicians. Angry that the younger generation is not much different than the older one.

I am angry because under the guise of protecting our workers, we give them "rights" instead of opportunities. Instead of making it easier for companies to hire people, our government makes it more difficult for companies to fire employees. Angry because this mostly affects women and young people, and promotes a culture of stratification, not of innovation and change. Angry that in 1999 only 3% of the unemployed took part in retraining programmes. Angry that millions more are unemployed, even though the statistics don't reflect this. Angry that 45% of Romanians live in rural areas, most of them in unimaginable abject poverty without a hope for change. Angry that no one cares. Particularly our politicians. And their voters, who keep making the same mistake, over and over again.

I am angry that we abuse each other so much. Parents abusing children. Children abusing their parents. Husbands abusing their wives. Angry that we act as if this is not going on, that as long as we're not the ones being beaten, it's not our problem.

I am angry that we have one of Europe's largest Roma populations, without anyone acknowledging this. Angry that anywhere from five to nine percent of our population is considered to be invisible. Angry that you think less of me for bringing this up.

I am angry that only slightly over 80% of pupils initially enrolled in school manage to graduate from the eighth grade. The eighth grade! Angry that of these, only about 60% (as in 1999) go on to an academic high school ("liceu"). Angry that even though university enrolment is skyrocketing, it seems it's for naught as our children are not taught to think for themselves and to make the impossible possible. Angry that the "system" produces qualities fit only for bare survival, not for success. Angry that 3,000 euros still buys you a PhD in absentia. Angry that so many people bow their heads, pay up or extend their open palm.

I am angry because we have an appalling road system. I am sick and tired of potholes and dug up streets. I am angry at having to share the road with horse drawn carts and diesel spewing old trucks because we don't yet have a national freeway system. Angry at being promised gleaming new roads, every four years or so. Angry at being lied to. Over and over again.

Romania and Romanians need a new kind of politics with more openness and equality before the law. We need solid institutions. We need to understand and respect the different roles of government and markets. We need real political consensus. We need cultural change. We need courage and hope. But most of all, we need more anger.

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