

What's the Problem of Child Poverty Represented to Be?
The Politics of Discourse and Anti-Poverty Programme Design in Romania

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Abstract

While the importance of discourse and ideas to policy change or policy stasis are acknowledged, little scholarly attention has been devoted to the relationship between discourse and policy/programme design until recently. Romania presents an intriguing case in the way of discourse and policy/programme design towards tackling child poverty. With the main indicator of poverty (AROPE) in Europe showing that child poverty has remained largely stagnant in Romania between 2007 and 2014, this thesis examines what the problem of child poverty in Romania is represented to be and to what extent it is represented to be a problem in need of effective policy interventions. It does so using discourse analysis of statements from Romania's political elite between January 2007 and June 2014. The primary finding from this thesis is that effectively tackling child poverty was not presented as a priority nor as a relevant policy issue for Romania's political elite during the period analysed. Since child poverty was not presented to be a significant problem, child poverty was primarily left unproblematized, with direct repercussions for anti-poverty policy interventions. As an unproblematized issue, solutions to improving Romania's disconcerting child poverty figures remained practically absent during this period.

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List of Abbreviations

- AGER – Agerpress
- ALDE – Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats)
- AROPE – At risk-of-poverty or social exclusion (measure of poverty)
- CCT – Conditional cash transfer
- CEE – Central and Eastern European
- DI – Discursive institutionalism
- EPIC – European Platform for Investing in Children
- EU – European Union
- Ind. – Independent
- MEFA – Mediafax
- MIG – Minimum Income Guarantee
- MSII – Minimum Social Insertion Income
- NIOC – Nine O’Clock
- PC – Partidul Conservator (Conservative Party)
- PBF – Bolsa Família
- PD-L – Partidul Democrat-Liberal (Democratic Liberal Party)
- PLR – Partidul Liberal Reformator (Liberal Reformist Party)
- PM – Prime Minister
- PNL – Partidul Național Liberal (National Liberal Party)
- PSD – Partidul Social Democrat (Social Democratic Party)
- OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- RON – Romanian Leu (currency)
- UBI – Universal Basic Income
- UK – United Kingdom
- UDMR - Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania)
- UNPR – Uniunea Națională pentru Progresul României (The National Union for the Progress of Romania)
- US – United States of America
- USL – Uniunea Social-Liberală (Social Liberal Union)
- UK – United Kingdom
- WTP – What’s the Problem? (methodological approach)

1. Introduction

“I was often told that poverty is a choice. It is indeed, but the choice is too often made by government policies rather than by those living in poverty.” – Philip Alston, United Nations Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights

The above quote from Alston’s 2015 visit to Romania, where he examined the situation of widespread poverty on behalf of the OHCHR, has two points that are substantive to this thesis. First, it highlights the connection between government policy and poverty. Government policy can range between being effective in alleviating poverty and being influential in reinforcing a cycle of poverty. Second, this quote is illustrative of the way discourse and policy regarding poverty contribute to the way poverty is perceived and tackled (or not). For example, by learning through a common discourse – whether it is true or not – that poverty is a choice, one may believe that anti-poverty policies and programmes must be reflective of this perspective.

Gourevitch (1986:17) is renowned for stating that “policy requires politics” and Bacchi (1999:3) states that policy is “what governments do.” This link between policy and politicians is rather clear and accepted in political science. Yet, how discourses can help shape policy and also how discourse and policy reinforce each other is often overlooked (Bacchi; 1999:1-3; Bryant, 2013:44). In regards to poverty, Bryant (2013:45) notes that “responses to poverty are tied to how governments distribute resources through public policies and these policies are associated with these poverty discourses.” Moreover, what is often not considered in examining the design of policy – or in the discourse related to it – is how certain issues become problematized or not. As in, what is considered a social problem and what is not? Additionally, if it is a social problem, in what ways specifically and to what extent is it a problem? For example, changes in discourse regarding the way poverty was viewed in Mexico and Brazil are seen as the major impetus to the implementation of their generally well-regarded conditional cash transfer (CCT) anti-poverty programmes (Barrientos, 2013; Yaschine & Orozco, 2010). With changes in the way poverty was viewed, what caused it, and what maintained it, the proposed remedies for alleviating or tackling poverty were soon changed too.

One country that offers a puzzling context when it comes to examining poverty – and child poverty in particular – is Romania. Romania’s anti-poverty programmes have been criticized for being under-targeted, inadequately funded, stigmatizing, and featuring strict conditions (Avram & Militaru, 2016; Inglot et al., 2012; Pop, 2014; Popescu, 2015; Raț, 2013). To date, Romania has failed to implement policies and programmes with long-term objectives

and has instead primarily used short-sighted, ad hoc policies to address issues such as child poverty – while poverty has remained a constant issue (Alston, 2014; Inglot et al., 2012; Pop, 2014). The statistics support this claim. In Romania approximately one out of every four children faces persistent long-term poverty, one out of every three children is at risk-of-poverty, and one out of every two children is at risk-of-poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) (Eurostat, 2016c; Pop, 2014:12). UNICEF Innocenti researchers have found that children in Romania are amongst the most materially deprived in Europe, and at much higher rates than their European counterparts (Chzhen et al., 2014:19).

In neighbouring country Bulgaria – often compared with Romania (see especially Cerami & Stanescu, 2009) – child poverty decreased from 60.8% in 2007 to 45.2% in 2014 (Eurostat, 2016c). This is while Romania's child poverty levels remained rather consistent with little volatility going from 50.5% in 2007 to 51.0% in 2014 (Eurostat, 2016c). This figure is based upon the AROPE measurement which is used as the primary measure of poverty across the EU. Strikingly, the Romanian population as a whole saw a 5.7% decrease in being at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion in the period 2007-2014, from 45.9% to 40.2% (Eurostat, 2016c; see Table 1). The numbers appear to suggest that anti-poverty programmes may be better designed to alleviate adult poverty rather than child poverty. Though, severe material deprivation for children age 18 or younger fell from 40.4% to 31.5% during the 2007-2014 period with 2015 posting a provisional number of 31.2% (see Table 2; Eurostat 2016c).

The majority of child poverty figures in Romania have remained consistently high with little fluctuation in reported figures despite varying pledges from successive Romanian governments to improve the situation of poverty (Anghel et al., 2013:240). Interestingly, the discourse surrounding poverty in Romania is often reported by scholars to revolve around the theme of deservingness (Anghel et al., 2013:245; Inglot et al., 2012:38; Szirka & Tomka, 2009:27-34; Raț, 2009:166). Scholars have found clear links between political discourse and social policy design around the world and, inevitably, poverty levels (see especially Bachii, 1999; Bryant, 2013; Pantazis 2016). The implication here is that the continuation of ineffective social policy design from the viewpoint of children in Romania – which is indicated by high child poverty figures while other poverty figures in the country have declined – can be better uncovered by examining the discourses of the country's political elite and how they create problem representations.

Examining problem representation is worthwhile because they typically imply solutions to issues based upon how the issues are framed. By identifying how child poverty is

problematized via political discourse, we can also gain insight into how solutions to child poverty are understood. To do this, choosing a methodological approach that examines discourse is needed. Bacchi's *What's the Problem?* (WTP) approach (detailed in Section 3.2.) offers an effective tool in causally connecting political discourse to policy solutions and programme design. Bacchi's approach inspects the competing representations of an issue in the realm of politics and, with focus on the dominant representation, how the presented representations are causally connected to the proposed and practiced policies and programmes designed to resolve that particular issue.

In recent years, the social investment paradigm has dominated EU social policy and through Europeanization has become the dominant discourse on how to tackle poverty throughout much of Europe (see Kvist, 2013; Nygård & Krüger, 2012:764). Though Ferge (2008:150) does claim that EU efforts "to put poverty and exclusion firmly on the agenda have been relatively successful", efforts to seriously tackle poverty and exclusion remain wide-ranging across the EU and in some cases inadequate. The social investment paradigm, which draws on a Keynesian logic of investment in human capital and a neoliberal focus on activation, has facilitated a greater emphasis on targeting with stricter eligibility criteria (Barbier, 2012:378-382; Jenson, 2009:447; Nygård & Krüger, 2012:758-764). Nevertheless, Barbier (2012:391) points out that what happens at the national level takes priority over the supranational discourse. And in Romania there appears to be great emphasis on targeting and strict eligibility requirements, but little, if any, on human investment (see especially Pop, 2014).

Indeed, from most overviews of anti-poverty policy in Romania (for example Alston, 2014; Ingot et al., 2012; Pop, 2014), it is clear that there is a dissonance between Romania's current policy and the social investment perspective which is seen at the EU level. This is to suggest that even though discussions on poverty have been gaining greater prominence at the EU level in recent years, what occurs in Romania is largely dependent on the incentive and motivation of the national government. While policies and programmes can and do show how governments diagnose poverty, governments can also be restrained through path-dependent decisions made by previous governments (see especially Cerami & Stanescu, 2009; Mahoney & Thelan, 2010). Nonetheless, what a government does, what they announce as their intentions, or what they give political priority to in discussion, is how observers can better analyze how governments diagnose the causes to child poverty – as well as to what extent child poverty is considered to be a problem. That is why fairer observations can be made by analyzing the

discourse of the country's political elite as Romania's anti-poverty policies and programmes continue to be criticized by scholars and organizations.

With the above foregrounded, the research question I explore is: What is the problem of child poverty in Romania represented to be? More specifically: Looking at the discourse of Romania's political elite, what kind of problem is child poverty represented to be in comments and references towards anti-poverty policies and programmes, policy recommendations, policy debate, and overt attitudes towards poverty?

The outline of the remainder of the thesis is as follows: the second chapter reviews the relevant literature related to effective anti-poverty programmes, the relationship between discourses and welfare state design, and presents a timeline of the relevant child related anti-poverty policies and programmes in Romania. The third chapter presents the conceptual framework, the analytical method, the research plan and method of analysis. The analysis is presented in the fourth chapter. Lastly, the fifth chapter concludes this thesis.

2. Literature Review

In this section, I first review the literature and empirical evidence on effective anti-poverty programmes alongside examining the relationship between discourse and policy/programme design. The purpose of this is twofold: to show that there have been successful cases of poverty alleviation schemes in comparable nations and what makes them successful, and to establish the connection between political discourse and anti-poverty programmes. Secondly, I discuss discourses on poverty in conjunction with the terms and labels applied to particular groups to demonstrate that poverty's perceived causes vary and, consequently, so do the policies and programmes designed to tackle it. Thirdly, I discuss anti-poverty programmes in Romania with a focus on the second half of the post-communist era to better present the Romanian case.

2.1. Anti-Poverty Programmes and Discourses

2.1.1. Effective Anti-Poverty Programmes in Comparable National Contexts

Below, I demonstrate how two countries comparable to Romania have successfully implemented effective anti-poverty programmes in large part as a result of significant shifts in political thinking and the discourse surrounding poverty.

Mexico's flagship anti-poverty programme targeting especially families with children, *Progresa Oportunidades*, has been widely seen as a recipe for tackling child poverty in high-income developing nations (Bither-Terry, 2014). Mexico has measured poverty differently since the 1970s and consequently has had several different anti-poverty programmes since with each programme having "different assessments of the nature and causes of poverty, as well as on various ideological precepts, and therefore differ[ing] in their particular objectives and design" (Yaschine & Orozco, 2010:55). The development of anti-poverty programmes has transformed from "lax targeting" and programmes "focusing on wider subsidies and production incentives" to "strict targeting" with "direct transfers conditioned on specific actions by the beneficiaries" (Yaschine & Orozco, 2010:55).

Mexico's breakthrough came in 1997 when it introduced *PROGRESA* – CCT program¹ which sought to eradicate "the causes of poverty, conceiving it as a multidimensional problem based on a vicious circle of undernourishment, high morbidity, and low education with intergenerational transmission", with emphasis on development in human capital (Behrman et

¹ First known as *PROGRESA*, from 2002 known as *Oportunidades*, and currently known as *Prospera*.

al., 2011:94; Pereira, 2015:1686; Skoufias, 2007:632; Yaschine & Orozco, 2010:64). As such, the programme targets the poorest in Mexico and offers cash to families based upon children's regular school attendance, children's regular healthcare visits, and maternal attendance at health and nutrition education sessions (Behrman et al., 2011:97; Pereira, 2015:1686; Skoufias, 2007:632; World Bank, 2014b). The conditional monthly payment when the programme started equalled approximately "20% of the value of monthly consumption expenditures" for beneficiary families (Skoufias, 2007:632). The success of the programme led to its nation-wide rolling out under President Fox in 2002, rebranded as *Oportunidades*. In 2000, Fox had made more effective anti-poverty policy design a priority in his electoral campaign – thus placing poverty alleviation in the national spotlight and political discourse (Yaschine & Orozco, 2010:57). Even without experiencing economic growth, Mexico would see a steady decrease in poverty through a variety of indicators between 1996 and 2006 (Yaschine & Orozco, 2010:57). Moreover, the programme has been found to have long-term success in terms of beneficiary children's educational achievement (Behrman et al., 2011:116). While the programme cannot be credited for singlehandedly reducing poverty, it is considered to be one of the main contributors (Behrman et al., 2011:116-118; Skoufias, 2007:647-648; Yaschine & Orozco, 2010).

There are several main factors that make this programme work efficiently: there is a transparent process for selecting the beneficiaries, direct payment to the family/caregiver – typically the mother, a highly effective system of program monitoring, and addressing issues strongly correlated to poverty while helping families exit poverty (World Bank, 2014b). The programme's hailed success can largely be attributed to its relaxed eligibility requirements that extend to the majority of those living in poverty and an adequate monthly cash transfer (Skoufias, 2007:632; Yaschine & Orozco, 2010:68-71). Moreover, a nation-wide political consensus developed and maintained through political discourse is seen as facilitating the development of the programme – as evident in the ease of increasing the budget for the programme between 2000 and 2006 (Yaschine & Orozco, 2010:69). Without the shift in political discourse and the reframing of how poverty was viewed, it is possible Mexico would have not introduced and maintained such a novel programme.

Mexico's programme has influenced the development of anti-poverty programmes in other countries, e.g. Brazil in the shape of the anti-poverty programme *Bolsa Família* (PBF)²

² For a comprehensive review of social assistance programmes in Brazil, see Barrientos (2013).

(Barrientos, 2013; Behrman et al., 2011:94; Bither-Terry, 2014; Nica, 2014; Pereira, 2015; Yaschine & Orozco, 2010:55). Formerly, social assistance in Brazil was focused on seniors and middle-aged adults but paid little attention to child poverty since the way of thinking “was firmly rooted in conventional welfare policy, on a distinction between individuals with or without the ability to work” (Barrientos, 2013:888-889). What has made PBF so successful is the shift in discourse and policy towards focusing on families experiencing extreme poverty (Barrientos, 2013:889). Barrientos (2013:892) claims that the evolution of PBF can be seen through the “domestic discussion around the need for a guaranteed income and a growing realization among policy makers and researchers that poverty is multidimensional and persistent.”

Barrientos (2013:907) further suggests that the priority of reducing poverty on the political agenda is “perhaps the most significant factor explaining the rise of social assistance in Brazil.” Barrientos (2013:904) cements this when he says “the growth of social assistance reflects government efforts to shift the balance of public subsidies from social insurance to social assistance, an exercise in switching expenditure” and not just the growth in tax/GDP ratio. Pereira (2015:1688) too highlights the importance of leadership and the role of ideas for the development of social assistance in Brazil. What has also helped the development of PBF is the prevalence of discourse surrounding UBI as UBI advocates may have helped in preventing eligibility for PBF becoming stricter (Pereira, 2015:1683-1689).

The generosity of the monthly amount is dependent on the household income and household composition (Barrientos, 2013:898). Continuation of the monthly transfer is dependent on children’s school attendance, following an immunization schedule and other health related conditionalities, development monitoring for children up to age seven, and monitoring for pregnant and nursing women (Barrientos, 2013:898; Bither-Terry, 2014:143; Nica, 2014:113). The conditionalities are considered to be reasonable and failure to comply with them can be remedied relatively quickly if conditions are met the following month (Barrientos, 2013:899). Non-compliance leading to termination of benefits is a two-year process; thus families have an ample amount of time to become compliant again (Pereira, 2015:1689).

With PBF in place, the poverty rate went from 37.1% down to 21.4% in Brazil between 2003 and 2009 (Pereira, 2015:1687). While the success of PBF is connected to the growth of the Brazilian economy, there is evidence to suggest that PBF has had a significant independent effect even during the recent economic crisis (Barrientos, 2013; Bither-Terry, 2014:144).

Nonetheless, scholars have suggested that PBF is just the “first step” in tackling poverty and inequality (Pereira, 2015:1694). While can CCTs be successful in alleviating poverty, it is important to acknowledge that they can have limitations and that their success dependent on a several factors. Yaschine and Orozco (2010:71) note that the “gains [from CCTs] can be sustainable only if they are implemented within a social policy strategy that manages to articulate various initiatives and an economic policy that generates growth, creates employment, and gives incentives or pro-poor growth.”

Indeed, programmes like the CCTs in both Mexico and Brazil, but also in countries like Chile and Costa Rica, appear to provide the new orthodoxy in development and anti-poverty programmes and discourses as examples are abound in many countries in both Africa and South Asia (Samson, 2009:132; Townsend, 2009c:248). As seen in Mexico and Brazil, use of such programmes is effective in alleviating a variety of the negative symptoms associated with poverty, even though they may not exactly lift people out of being at risk of poverty all together.

2.1.2. So What Works?

Here, I discuss the components of poverty alleviation programmes which are found to be most effective in alleviating poverty. Cantillon (2009:240), with evidence from Poland and Estonia, argues that eligibility criteria and take-up rates matter more than the generosity of social assistance programmes in their potential effectiveness. Thus, Cantillon (2009: 236) notes that the universal model and ethos of social benefits which is seen in Scandinavia is rather effective. Cantillon (2009:240) also finds that the lowest poverty risks in Europe are found in countries with a combination of high levels of GDP, employment, and social spending. Aidukaite (2011:213) also stresses the relationship between high spending on welfare and reduced levels of poverty and inequality, but concedes that high or low spending does not necessarily guarantee a level of effectiveness. Townsend (2009b:164) recommends something like “a weekly allowance in cash or kind for children” up to a certain age that brings “resources directly to children.” Moreover, he believes that this is something that can be merged into CCTs and eventually transitioned into a universal benefit (Townsend, 2009b:164). In addition, a transfer project team at UNICEF Innocenti (2016:14) found that cash transfers to children can improve school attendance, psychosocial well-being, economic security, health and nutrition through food security, and a variety of other outcomes.

With social investment policies, Van Vliet and Wang (2015) argue that they have had mixed results. The authors even note that social investment policies have been linked to

stagnating poverty levels despite being linked to improved employment figures (Van Vliet & Wang, 2015:615). Yet, the authors state that each country provides a unique case and should be examined separately; but they also caution it may be too early to make conclusions regarding social investment policies (Van Vliet & Wang, 2015:634). Marques et al. (2015:209) cite evidence from the EU-15 countries for the period between 2000 and 2010 to argue that redistributive policies are vital to reducing poverty. The authors suggest that the best ways of tackling poverty and inequality, if the social investment approach is to be continued, is to place greater emphasis on redistributive policies alongside “promoting employment, growth based on R&D and education investment” (Marques et al., 2015:219).

Nonetheless, it seems like means-tested targeted programmes like the conditional cash transfer programmes seen in Mexico and Brazil can be successful depending on eligibility requirements, ease of the bureaucratic procedure, and if generosity levels are adequate compared to the poverty line (Bither-Terry, 2014:151). There are also findings that suggest that universal programmes mixed with targeted programmes for families with children can be very effective in reducing child poverty (Avram & Militaru 2016:5; Townsend, 2009b:164). Avram and Militaru (2016:4-5) state that considerable differences between countries with similar programme types are still possible as factors like “demographic characteristics and the wider fiscal context in which they operate” such as the tax-benefit system will indubitably influence programme outcomes. Thus, a CCT programmes must be designed appropriately to different countries. What can be problematic for means-tested programmes is the time needed to develop a “robust and fairly sophisticated bureaucratic apparatus” to design, implement, monitor, evaluate, and operate the programme (de Neubourg, 2009:70).

With the above stated, child and family benefits that are universal are typically found to be the most effective at reducing poverty and inequality – especially for children – and to be more effective than means-tested programmes in doing so (Cantillon, 2009:236; de Neubourg, 2009:74; Townsend, 2009a:17). In other words, eligibility requirements are vital to the success (or failure) of anti-poverty programmes (Bither-Terry, 2014:151; Cantillon, 2009). Even though Mexico and Brazil do not have universal eligibility, they present cases where eligibility requirements allow those below a certain income threshold to receive benefits if rather simple conditions are met. In the case of Romania, Pop (2014:15) claims that the few universal benefits for children there have been much more effective at alleviating dimensions of poverty compared to the targeted programmes and benefits – which have rather strict eligibility rules – which have been gaining prominence.

Beyond eligibility, benefit levels also matter greatly for programme effectiveness (Bither-Terry, 2014:151). It is not only sufficient to have non-strict eligibility requirements but also to have benefits levels that actually help alleviate the negative effects of living in poverty. For example, one of the criticisms of the PBF is that even though the programme has been relatively successful in reducing inequality, it has not done enough to lift families further out of poverty (Pereira, 2015:1690). Not only are their documented criticisms of eligibility in the Romanian case but also criticisms of its benefits being largely meagre (Avram & Militaru, 2016; Ingot et al., 2012; Pop, 2014; Popescu, 2015). Consequently, even families that do qualify for social assistance in Romania may only get little relief from the many negative symptoms associated with poverty.

What we can take forward from both subsections within 2.1. is that the reframing of the way poverty is presented in political discourse is often accompanied by changes in the way governments seek to reduce poverty. Moreover, relaxed eligibility requirements and sufficient benefits are vital to anti-poverty programme success. In comparison to Mexico and Brazil, Romania's anti-poverty programmes compare unfavorably in eligibility requirements and benefit levels (as will be evident in 2.3). As seen in Mexico and Brazil, those two important components were less favorable until the political discourse surrounding poverty started to change. The implication of this being is that to better see why Romania has not introduced more effective anti-poverty programmes – particularly tailored for reducing child poverty – one must look at the political discourse.

2.2. Perceptions of Poverty: Blaming the Victim?

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how discourses regarding the poor or those perceived to be poor can affect the design of anti-poverty policies/programmes – thus further establishing the relationship of discourse to policy/programme design. Consequently, this section demonstrates that governments make moral judgments when they design anti-poverty policy and programmes. In the case of Romania, discourses surrounding poverty typically involve the Roma and blaming individuals for their own economic situation. Included in poverty discourse in Romania is the emergence of the theme of deservingness.

By briefly focusing on the UK first, the connection between policy and programme design to political discourse is further strengthened. However, political discourse in the UK demonstrates how less generous programmes can emerge and be maintained. Pantazis (2016:4-9) notes that the discourse regarding deservingness and (over)dependency that was prominent

during the Thatcher era re-emerged under the UK Conservative-Liberal coalition following the beginning of the Great Recession, with emphasis placed on the individual's personal deficits and not with poverty perceived as a multidimensional issue. Thus, austerity and a rolling-back of the state quickly prevailed in the form of stricter eligibility requirements and reduced generosity in benefits (Pantazis, 2016:4-8). Pantazis (2016:10) also notes that issues such as low wages and a "lack of affordable or available childcare" received minimal attention in poverty discourse during this time.

Indeed, poverty discourse is strongly related to welfare state regimes (Bryant, 2013:44). Bryant (2013:44) connects the discourse of individualism in Anglo-Saxon countries to higher poverty rates since individuals are seen as mainly responsible for their situation. Social stigma attached to means-tested programmes have a very long pedigree, going back in modern times to the 19th century in Europe, though comparable stigma can be evidenced much further in history (de Neubourg, 2009:69-70; Gans, 1995:14). Such stigma has continued into present times throughout much of the world as mean-tested schemes "require a distinction between deserving and non-deserving poor" (de Neubourg, 2009:70-78). Stigma attached to Romania's MIG scheme has been well-noted (see especially Raț, 2009).

To help understand why some anti-poverty programmes are inadequate in alleviating symptoms of poverty and are hence sometimes stigmatizing, my focus now shifts towards some of the more negative perceptions of those who experience poverty – or are likely considered to experience poverty. Some scholars have argued that the domains of socio-economic status and ethnicity/race often overlap in the process of producing and reproducing poverty (Emigh et al., 2001; Vincze, 2014). When poverty becomes racialized, individuals belonging to the in-group (usually the ethnic majority) of a country are not typically perceived as possessing the undesirable traits associated with the poor and poverty, even when they are objectively income poor (Emigh et al., 2001:4-5). Conversely, those belonging to the out-groups (often the ethnic minority or racially different) are typically considered to possess the negative traits associated with poverty – even if they are not objectively income poor (Emigh et al., 2001:4-5). As such, when this occurs, poverty is collectively constructed as an out-group problem and not an in-group problem (Boston, 2014:976; Vincze, 2014:232). In Romania, this relationship exists between ethnic Romanians and the Roma – with the Roma being overrepresented in poverty figures as one of the reasons facilitating this relationship (Emigh et al., 2001; Raț, 2013; Vincze, 2014).

Adding the layer of socio-economic status, labels and terms associated with being poor can carry behavioral connotations. Lewis' (1968:187-199) claims that there is a culture of poverty amongst those who experience more long-term and chronic poverty that supposedly self-perpetuates a particular set of values, attitudes, and traits that are mostly contrary to societal norms. Moreover, Lewis (1968:187-199) considers this group to typically feature people not belonging to the dominant ethnic group(s) of the region or country. Gans (1995:25) states that Lewis' (1968) work and similar works and attitudes had considerable influence on the debate of deservingness between Liberals and Conservatives in the US from the 1970s onward. However, Gans (1995:25) takes exception with such labels and claims, noting that labels associated with poverty have ranged in use to "romanticize the poor" to stigmatizing them. Moreover, some claim that there is a perceived CEE welfare culture unique to the region due to its communist past (Ferge, 2008). Ferge (2008:141) names the defining behavioral trait of this perceived welfare culture as learned helplessness, i.e. when individuals become over-dependent on a paternalist welfare state. Yet, Ferge (2008:141-145) claims that accusations of traits such as learned helplessness help "serve a liberal agenda to cut back on welfare expenditures" and that they provide a "convenient myth" for that cause. Additionally, with existing perceptions of groups of people possessing these traits with negative connotations, retrenchment of the welfare state becomes easier to justify since the poor are framed as undeserving – or perhaps less deserving of support (Ferge, 2001:141). Again, this relationship has been found to exist between ethnic Romanians and the Roma (Raț, 2013; Vincze, 2014).

Similarly, Raț (2013:155)³ observes that reasoning for state retrenchment in Romania can be attributed to some Romanian politicians profiling the Roma as a "distinct and subversive" group. Vincze (2014:232) also sees evidence of state retrenchment with at least partial basis upon perceived traits that supposedly belong to those in need of social assistance. Vincze (2014:232) observes this occurring through the implementation of austerity measures in 2010 being justified on social assistance recipients supposedly threatening Romania's "economic security." Moreover, terms like "socially assisted" began to carry increasingly negative connotations in Romania around the time austerity measures were introduced in 2010 (Inglot et al., 2012:39; Vincze; 2014:232). Alston's (2015) comment that "many officials are in a state of denial about the extent of poverty [...] and of the systemic and deep-rooted discrimination against the extremely poor, especially the Roma" adds further suggestion that

³ See Raț, (2013) for one detailed account of the relationship between the Roma and local authorities in contemporary Romania.

politicians do not take the challenge of tackling poverty seriously enough and that the racialization of poverty remains prevalent in Romania with the discrimination likely culminating in policies that are unfavorable to many Roma. Additionally, PM Boc reinvigorated debates regarding eligibility based on deservingness for social assistance benefits around the beginning of the Great Recession (Inglot et al., 2012:38). Nonetheless, the Ministry of Labour remained a staunch supporter of universal programmes during this time, despite the practice of several means-testing programs and the larger shift towards means-testing (Inglot et al., 2012:38).

By having political discourse that strongly emphasizes themes of – and similar to – deservingness, and by having means-tested programmes with strict eligibility requirements, it is fair to suggest that governments make moral judgments when it comes to poverty. In other words, some governments view some types of poverty as more justifiable. Consequently, this creates a dichotomy between the objectively income poor as either deserving or undeserving. Means-tested anti-poverty programmes have been at least partially justified in Romania by discourses and perceptions surrounding the Roma (out-group). Yet, under such a perspective, children are unfair victims of poverty since they have minimal control over their situation.

2.3. Timeline of Anti-Poverty Policy in Romania

Here I provide an account of the timeline and transformation of the relevant policies and programmes directed towards tackling child poverty in Romania.

2.3.1 Context

Romania has had a more difficult and slower democratic transition compared to its CEE counterparts (Anghel et al., 2013:240; Cerami & Stanescu, 2009:112; Kaser, 2010:92; Stan, 2010:381). Authors have argued that a mixture of Romania's communist past under Ceaușescu and poor political decisions in the post-communist era have contributed to Romania's slower pace of development and welfare reforms (Cerami & Stanescu 2009:112; Inglot et al., 2012:28; Kaser, 2010:92; Stan, 2010:381). In the two-and-a-half decades since Ceaușescu's execution, anti-poverty policy and discourse have shifted focus towards means-tested programmes (see Inglot et al., 2012:46-49; Pop, 2014:15). Additionally, the debate on deservingness has come to prominence in recent discourse on poverty alleviation programmes (Anghel et al., 2013:245; Inglot et al., 2012:38; Szirka & Tomka, 2009:27-34; Raț, 2009:166).

Recent and current policies designed to tackle poverty and social exclusion in Romania are largely passive, with access to financial resources mostly only available via social benefits (Pop, 2014:9) rather than free-at-the-point-of-use services and/or benefits in-kind. Despite this shift, the child allowance (alocația de stat pentru copiii) has remained universal and is the only universal child/family policy instrument. Nonetheless, its cash value has undergone successive periods of erosion alongside a steadily decreasing amount of beneficiaries in recent years (Inglot et al., 2012:28; Popescu, 2015:97-98). The universal child allowance is separated into three categories with each category receiving a different flat amount: (1) for children under age 2 and for children with disabilities under age 3, (2) for children with disabilities age 3 to 18, and (3) for all other children age 2 to 18.

There are two primary means-tested programmes in Romania related to children and families. There is the two family allowances dependent on the relationship status of the parent(s): (1) the supplementary family allowance for single-parent families (alocația de susținere pentru familia monoparentală) or (2) the complementary family allowance (alocație complementară pentru familiile cu copii). The minimum income guarantee (MIG) scheme (venitul minim garantat) is another means-tested programme and despite its focus not being directly on children, the MIG scheme affects children if their parents can meet the strict eligibility requirements or not.

There is also an earnings-related and employment related child raising allowance (indemnizațiile de creștere a copilului) which combines (paid) parental leave with a monthly allowance which now has two options based upon leave time and potential amount of allowance. This is considered to be more of a work-family reconciliation policy for working parents but is essential for keeping some working families out of poverty (Popescu, 2015:100-104). Other anti-poverty policies/programmes in Romania also include – but not of major focus in this thesis: child related tax deductions, a means-tested heating allowance, aid for refugees, benefits for people with disabilities, and food allowances for individuals with HIV/AIDS.

To better comprehend the values of benefits in Romania it should be noted that the its monthly minimum wage in 2014 was €190.11 and that Romanian tax system operates a flat income tax rate of 16% (Eurostat, 2016c; KPMG, 2016). See Table 4 for wage and price comparisons to other EU countries.

2.3.2. Timeline

In 1993, Romania implemented the universal child allowance (alocația de stat pentru copii) (Law no. 61/1993) which was granted to all children age 18 or younger (EPIC, 2016b). Kaser (2010:103) notes that in 1994 funding for social assistance was only a quarter of that five years prior and that social assistance for families with several children had nearly disappeared during that time despite the child allowance. It was in 2007 when the universal child allowance reached its peak of effectiveness for children under the age of 2 after it received a sizeable increase in generosity (Inglot et al., 2012:36; Popescu, 2015:104). Nonetheless, the value for children age 2 to 18 and children with disabilities age 3 to 18 has trended downwards in value to 2014 (Popescu, 2015:97-98). Popescu (2015:97), with data from the Romanian Ministry of Labour, notes the universal child allowance remained stagnant in the amount of lei per month from 2009 to 2014 for all three categories of children.

In 2001, behind the overwhelming support of the Năstase government, Law no. 416/2001 passed through parliament introducing the means-tested MIG (venitul minim garantat). The MIG is a programme that has received continued evidence-based criticism since its introduction (see Raț, 2009; Pop, 2014) while at the same time receiving endorsement from the IMF (see IMF, 2010). From 2006 to at least 2013 some see Romania as taking a step back in regards to anti-poverty policy and the MIG programme played a large role in supporting that perspective (Briciu, 2014:8; Raț, 2009:173). One of the more criticized decisions was modifications to MIG rules that required local government officials to visibly post a “list of persons receiving social aid, the schedule of community work and the names of those supposed to perform the [obligatory] tasks” (Raț, 2009:173). This change of rules was criticized for being severely stigmatizing for those receiving such benefits (Raț, 2009:173-174). When the IMF presented Romania a plan to lend €12.9 billion in March 2009, the plan encouraged continuation of the controversial MIG scheme and various austerity measures (IMF, 2010). The austerity measures would also see the one-off universal birth grant and a one-off universal trousseau for newborns be terminated (Inglot et al., 2012:28). As of 2014, the amount transferred per month if criteria were met for the MIG scheme was: (1) 142 RON⁴ (€32.37) for an individual, (2) 255 RON (€58.13) for a family of 2, (3), 357 RON (€81.35) for a family of 3, (4) 442 RON (€100.76) for a family of 4, (5) 527 RON (€120.14) for families of 5, and (6) an increase of 37 RON (€8.43) for every additional family member for families over 5

⁴ All currency conversions in this thesis are calculated through <http://www.xe.com/> based on the conversion rate from July 1st of that year.

(World Bank, 2014a). Compared to Romania's minimum monthly income (€190.11), the amount offers little in the way of alleviating poverty.

In 2003, the family allowance was re-legislated with two separate allowances coming into being: one for low income two-parent families (alocație complementară pentru familiile cu copii) and one for low income single-parent families (alocația de susținere pentru familia monoparentală). An income threshold must be met to qualify for either of the allowances and the monthly amount is based upon the number of children in a family (Popescu, 2015:99; Pop, 2014). This means-tested social assistance benefit reached a significant marker in Romania by being one of the first to acknowledge the difficulties single parents faced, but the benefit was capped at four children (Inglot et al., 2012:36). Further eligibility was dependent on children's regular school attendance – though the Constitutional Court would overturn this stipulation in 2006 – and means tests twice a year (Inglot et al., 2012:36-39). The means-tested dimension was debated heavily between the government and opposition, but the Tăriceanu government when coming into power in 2004 would not transition the programme into what they previously desired – and argued for –: a more “equitable” programme (Inglot et al., 2012:36). Approximately 40% of children lived in households receiving either the two-parent or single-parent family benefit in 2007 (Avram & Militaru, 2016:6).

Changes in 2010 would see the two family allowances being unified as one benefit, but still presented through the two categories (Law no. 277/2010) (Avram & Militaru, 2016:6; Inglot et al., 2012:36; Popescu, 2015:99). The unification would see eligibility requirements tighten and thus the collective amount of beneficiaries dropped dramatically – only 40% of former beneficiaries remained in 2011 compared to the year prior (Popescu, 2015:99). By 2014, if criteria were met, for two-parent families earning a monthly net income of up to 200 RON (€45.59) per person with one child received 40 RON/month (€9.12), families with two children received 80 RON/month (€18.24), families with three children receive 120 RON/month (€27.36), and families with four or more children being capped at 160 RON/month (€36.47) (World Bank, 2014a). Families earning a monthly net income of 201-530 RON (€45.82-120.82) per person received slightly less under each category of children (Popescu, 2015:100; World Bank, 2014a). Single-parent families for both income categories have consistently received more per month but the amount is meagre as highlighted by a single parent with four children who earns no more than 200 RON (€45.59) a month receiving only 260 RON (€59.27) per month through the family allowance in 2014 (World Bank, 2014a). Of note, the majority of beneficiary children for this benefit live in rural areas (Popescu, 2015:101). Moreover, the

amount of beneficiaries of the two family allowances (for two-parent and single-parent families) had reached its lowest point in 2014 – less than a third of the number of beneficiaries in 2010 (Popescu, 2015:99).

The paid parental leave benefit with the child raising allowance (*indemnizatia de crestere a copilului*) shifted from a flat-rate to being earnings related in 2009 (Inglot et al., 2012:36-37). It would be modified again in 2011 with paid parental leave benefit now giving parents two options (EGO no. 111/2010). Both feature paid monthly transfers of “85% of the average net income over the last [year] before the child’s birth” (World Bank, 2014a), the main difference being the length of paid parental leave and the maximum potential allowance per month. The first option allows paid parental leave until the infant is a year old with a higher maximum allowance. The first option allows parental leave to continue for a second year but that year becomes unpaid. The second option sees the maximum lowered but the parent has the option for 24 months of cash transfers (World Bank, 2014a). With 85% of the prior year’s earnings previous earnings potentially delivered during the relatively lengthy leave possible, it is with parental leave under the child raising allowance, a rather pronatalist programme and more supportive towards middle-class families, that Romania does reasonably well in comparison to its EU counterparts (Popescu, 2014:106).

In Romania in 2011 the social assistance scheme was reformed with a supposed emphasis on improving its efficiency (Law no. 292/2011) (Pop, 2014:23). The reform sought to decrease social expenditures, improve targeting, and address administrative costs (Inglot et al., 2012:39). Despite this, Romania’s anti-poverty policy and programmes remain the focus of constant scrutiny (Alston, 2015; Avram & Militaru, 2016; Inglot et al., 2012; Pop, 2014; Popescu, 2014). Romania is expected to harmonize several of the means-tested anti-poverty programmes into a single programme called the Minimum Social Insertion Income (MSII) by 2017 (Alston, 2015). The budget for the MSII is expected to be double the collective budget of the existing means-tested programmes, thus at least offering the suggestion of increased priority to tackling poverty (Alston, 2015).

Beyond policy instruments in cash, it is also important to acknowledge that poverty alleviation can be aided through other means such as benefits in-kind and services. Romania has few benefits in-kind and, overall, they have a limited impact on poverty alleviation (Pop, 2014:22-23). EPIC (2016a) highlights the importance of services when it connects the superior level of generosity in access to child daycare and other services deriving from principles in preventative support towards helping Finland maintain one of the lowest child poverty rates in

the world. Compared to Finland in child poverty levels and many services such as childcare accessibility, Romania fairs poorly (EPIC, 2016b). Providing services fairly across Romania has been difficult since the responsibility of maintaining the services is largely placed upon local authorities in its 47 decentralized regions – particularly because each region often has their own approaches to services for children and families (EPIC, 2016b). Services in the way of healthcare, preventative healthcare, and alternative healthcare are also in dire need of improvement to reach EU averages in terms of funding, access and outcomes (see Pop, 2014:32-37).

In sum, this section has presented a general timeline of policies and programmes related to anti-poverty in Romania. Consistently high child poverty levels in Romania can be attributed to continued ineffective and ill-conceived social policies. Poignantly, since the Great Recession, child poverty in Romania has grown disproportionately compared to the rest of the population, which has seen its poverty levels decline (Eurostat, 2016c; see Table 1).

2.4 Summary

There are now two questions worth answering in helping this thesis progress forward: (1) what do we know? and (2) what do we still not know?

What we know is that to better understand why a country's anti-poverty policies and programmes are designed a particular way, one must examine the political discourse prevalent among decision-makers, particularly political actors able to design and implement poverty alleviation policy. Additionally eligibility requirements and generosity levels in benefits are two of the most important factors in poverty alleviation programmes and they must both be present in effective anti-poverty programmes. Not only can CCTs be effective in alleviating poverty, but they can be beneficial in ways such as improving a beneficiary's education and health. However, these programmes must be tailored appropriately to be most effective (e.g. not featuring strict eligibility requirements or be stigmatizing). We also know that governments make moral judgments on poverty when designing programmes. By promoting themes like deservingness – particular alongside means-tested programmes with stricter eligibility requirements – it appears that governments may deem some poverty to be more acceptable than other types of poverty. Moreover, scholars like Raț, (2013) and Vincze (2014) argue that retrenchment in the area of social assistance has occurred in Romania with at least partial justification deriving from blaming the objectively income poor and those perceived to likely to be poor for their economic situation.

From reviewing Romania's primary anti-poverty programmes, we know that the country has largely shifted towards means-tested programmes and the majority of the programmes offer benefits that do offer some assistance but seemingly not enough to help alleviate the many negative effects associated with poverty. Furthermore, we have seen criticisms from scholars and observers that serious attempts of tackling poverty in Romania have been neglected. Lastly, we know that child poverty figures in Romania have remained consistently high with minimal change in recent years. Meanwhile, poverty for the population as a whole has declined. One likely inference here is that Romania's anti-poverty programmes are not efficiently designed to tackle child poverty.

With minimal scholarly literature on child poverty in Romania, what we do not know is why Romania's anti-poverty programmes are not yet better designed to address child poverty. With the prior establishment that causal connections can be found between anti-poverty programmes and political discourse, the implication is that one must look at discourse from the Romanian political elite to help uncover why child poverty has not been seriously addressed in Romania. An effective way of uncovering this is by looking at problem representations in political discourse. And this leads back to the research question: what is the problem of child poverty in Romania represented to be? How this question is answered in this thesis is detailed in the following chapter.

3. Theory and Method

In this section I present the conceptual framework, the analytical method, the research plan, the sources of data for analysis, the method of analysis, and the limitations of this study.

3.1. Conceptual Framework: Discursive Institutionalism

I work under the conceptual framework of what has been called the fourth new institutionalism: discursive institutionalism (DI) (Schmidt, 2010)⁵. Though DI shares the same primary emphasis on institutions as other ‘institutionalisms’ do (see especially Hall & Taylor, 1996; Schmidt, 2010), DI places that emphasis on institutions providing the context and arena for where ideas and discourses are created, developed, and shared (Schmidt, 2010:4; Nygård & Krüger, 2012:757). Schmidt argues that DI “has the greatest potential for providing insights into the dynamics of institutional change by explaining the actual preferences, strategies, and normative orientations of actors.” (Schmidt, 2010:1/abstract). Panizza and Miorelli (2013:301) find great value in Schmidt’s work and emphasise the examining of discourse as a means to best understand institutional change. Moreover, DI has been used to examine domestic to international policy decisions (see Hope & Raudla, 2012; McCann, 2014; Nygård & Krüger, 2012; Panizza & Miorelli, 2013).

DI has two main focuses: “the substantive content of ideas” and “the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed and exchanged through discourse” (Schmidt, 2010:3). The substantive part of DI is an analysis of the essence of competing normative narratives and ideas, or at least what is prescribed as the normative, by various actors (Schmidt, 2010:3). Under this dimension, what is examined is primarily policies, programmes and philosophies and the normative ideas they build upon and communicate (McCann, 2014:459; Schmidt, 2010:3). The interactive dimension analyzes how political actors and parties create and develop policies and then debate them in the political arena against competing actors and parties leading to an eventual outcome normally featuring some level of consensus (Schmidt, 2010:3).

Not only can DI offer extensive insight into institutional change, but discourse and ideas are also valuable in explaining policy stasis (Hope & Raudla, 2012). Among many reasons, the authors argue that this is the case because sometimes “policy change is not in the immediate interest of actors” and that maintaining policies requires “a large amount of discursive activity” (Hope & Raudla, 2012:402-416).

⁵ For a comparison of the four new institutionalisms see Table 1 in Schmidt, 2010:4.

DI does not account for every change as it would be inconceivable to believe that all changes occur through ideas and discourse (Schmidt, 2010:12). DI accepts that influence from external events such as global economic turmoil, natural disasters, and other events beyond the control of domestic actors do occur (Schmidt, 2010:12). However, DI offers perspective into how institutional change occurs endogenously in a dynamic manner rather than the static manner seen in the traditional three institutionalisms (Hope and Raudla, 2012; Schmidt, 2010).

The implication of this discussion is that one must examine the discourses and ideas shared and presented by the political elite to better understand why national policies and programmes change or remain since discourse around policy issues frequently flags not just initiatives for policy change, but also non-change.

3.2. Analytical Method: The What's the Problem? Approach

Since DI focuses on ideas and discourse, an understanding of why anti-poverty policy is the way it is may be seen through an examination of ideas and policy discourses around poverty and the alleged solutions to poverty is needed. How to best carry out this investigation empirically is the focus of this section. In this section I demonstrate why applying the *What's the Problem?* (WTP) approach is most appropriate under the conceptual terrain of DI.

The basis of the WTP approach is to examine “what’s the problem represented to be [in political discourse]?” (Bacchi, 1999:1). Thus, the starting point is to examine the “items that do make the political agenda to see how the construction or representation of those issues limits what is talked about as possible or desirable, or as impossible or undesirable” (Bacchi, 1999:3). By doing this, we examine policies as “competing interpretation or representations of political issues”, in this case poverty and child poverty specifically (Bacchi, 1999:2). One critique of Schmidt’s DI, which is addressed through the analytical method, is that it has not completely taken political persuasion and articulation – in the sense of asymmetrical power relationships – into account (Panizza & Miorelli, 2013:306). In relation to Schmidt’s (2010) emphasis on discourse and ideas, this approach also insists on examining the difference between those who consider an issue to be a non-problem and those that designate an issue “problem status” (Bacchi, 1999:4). Moreover, this approach looks at the interrelated elements of concern and cause behind the policy design (Bacchi, 1999:4).

Bacchi (1999:1) states that “the guiding premise of the [WTP] approach is that every policy proposal contains within it an explicit or implicit diagnosis of the problem.” Thus, she notes that “identification and assessment of problem representations, the ways in which

‘problems’ get represented in policy proposals” deriving from discourse and ideas becomes essential in policy analysis. Bacchi (1999:8) states that policy responses are “part of the discursive construction of the ‘problem.’” And as Hope and Raudla (2012) point out, responses can include policy stasis. Those with the ability to heavily influence or the ability to actually design policy have their own assumptions and values and WTP is able to account for this while it is often neglected in other methods of policy analysis as policy becomes separated from its creators in analysis (Bacchi, 1999:1). This accounts for the critique of an umbrella DI conceptual framework that DI does not take into account persuasion (McCann, 2014).

Under WTP, problematizing certain issues can be seen as a political process in which politicians may frame an issue or policy agenda in a specific way (and, by implication, avoid framing the same issue in a different way) to suit their own interests rather than in consideration of something of a consensus of the interests of the public. Thus it is up to the evaluator to sort through, comment on and evaluate what Bacchi says is “the presuppositions and assumptions in competing interpretations” (Bacchi, 1999:9). Once again, the link to DI is evident in emphasizing ideas and discourse as paramount to change and the prevention of change. Additionally, one evaluates based upon their judgement of outcomes which are desirable (Bacchi, 1999).

Taking discourse seriously as a political act, therefore, points to the need to use a technique under discourse analysis to better evaluate how child poverty is represented to be a problem and to what extent it is a problem in Romania via Romania’s political elite. The strength of this method comes from its ability to delve deeper in the understanding of how policy issues do or do not become problematized via policy and policy recommendations while considering the discourse involving those behind the policy’s development and design (Hoggart, 2000; Gill, 2001).

3.3. Why Discourse?

One author describes discourse analysis as “the way versions of the world, of society, events and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse” (Potter, 2004:202, cited in Silverman, 2013:444). Halperin and Heath (2012:309) describe it as “a qualitative type of analysis that explores the ways in which discourse gives legitimacy and meaning to social practices and institutions.” When analyzing politics, Rhoetter (2013) notes that “discourse does not merely describe an external reality, but rather it fashions the world as the speaker/writer experiences it.”

Despite small differences, these descriptions share what Johnstone (2008:xiii) says is “a systematic but rigorous way of suggesting answers to research questions.” Discourse analysis is touted as a valuable tool because it delves deeper into research questions by providing interpretive and constructivist answers that quantitative research cannot provide (Bacchi, 2012:1-2; Halperin & Heath, 2012:309-311; Johnstone, 2008; Silverman, 2013:5-15). Bacchi’s WTP approach, primarily discussed in sub-sections 3.2. and 3.5., illustrates this by providing clear and relevant criteria for evaluation and the process of how to evaluate.

The study of discourse and ideas under Schmidt’s (2010) discursive institutionalism and Bacchi’s WTP approach which analyzes the discourse from those responsible for policy design involve the study of naturally occurring data. One of the strengths of qualitative research is its ability to analyze naturally occurring data (Silverman, 2013:97). Naturally occurring data is described as what “derives from situations which exist independently of the researcher’s intervention” (Silverman, 2013:447). What is advantageous about this is that qualitative research, in this case discourse analysis, can answer the ‘why’ questions which are difficult to answer in quantitative research (Silverman, 2013:97).

3.4. Research Plan and Data Sources for Analysis

Here, I return to the case selection, and explain how I answer the research question through my research design, detailing primary data sources and logic of their selection. This section is then followed by section 3.5., detailing the analytical process undertaken.

3.4.0. Why Romania?

The case selection is rather straightforward when taking into account the literature review. For the purpose of this thesis, greater depth, at the expense of breadth, is provided by only examining Romania. Considering the timeframe and space, each additional case would reduce the quality of context presented in the literature review and the quality of the analysis.

Compared to many other countries – particularly those in Europe – there is minimal literature on child poverty and overall poverty in Romania. This is despite a host of figures and trends over-time that suggest poverty to be a major issue in Romania. Particularly with the figures and trends, what makes the Romanian case more puzzling is that during the 2007-2014 period, when examining the table of being at risk to poverty or social exclusion (see Table 1), there is a reduction in the level for the population as a whole in Romania but not for children (age 0-18). With AROPE becoming the primary indicator of poverty in Europe, it is peculiar that this indicator has not seen improvements. Moreover, Romania’s neighbour Bulgaria, with

similarly high poverty rates, experienced a significant decrease in child poverty rates during this period (Eurostat, 2016c). Moreover, Romania holds the highest in-work poverty rates across Europe (see Table 3; Pop, 2014:9-19).

In addition to the unfavourable figures and trends, there are Romania's anti-poverty programmes that provoke further reason for investigation. Romania's anti-poverty programmes and available social benefits, excluding pensions, are largely considered to be inadequate to seriously alleviate poverty (Pop, 2014:9-19). Lastly, recent changes in family policy have largely been in favour of working middle class families and "sometimes at the expense of the poor" (Alston, 2015; Inglot et al., 2012:27). The means-tested programs are primarily considered to feature strict eligibility requirements and are inadequate at alleviating many negative symptoms of poverty (Alston, 2015; Inglot et al., 2012). These programmes are unfairly designed towards children since they have little control over their situation and are dependent on their parents or caregivers. Consequently, compared to their counterparts, children can unfairly receive less economic support from the government due to no wrongdoing of their own.

3.4.1. Research Design

Bearing in mind the selected time frame for analysis (January 2007- June 2014) and the timeline of anti-poverty policy timelines (see section 2.3), I turn to media coverage to construct the overt political discourse around child poverty and other relevant discourses. The data sources are the following: articles in Agerpres (AGER), Mediafax (MEFA), and Nine O'Clock (NIOC) focusing on child poverty. Only material in English is analyzed. All three sources are recommended by English language news sources (The Economist, 2010; The Guardian, 2002). Moreover, these are amongst the primary sources of Romanian news for non-Romanian speaking people.

Relevant news stories are selected under several different keywords through the sources' search engines. The keywords are: poverty, child (children), Roma (Roma issue), allowance (covers for three policy instruments) and minimum income guarantee (variations of, depending on amount of returns). Titles of reports that have little or no suggestion of being related are not examined. The breakdown of the keyword search from January 2007 to June 2014 can be found in Annex C.

Articles used are chosen in a selective manner depending on whether the title implies relation to the keyword or to child poverty or if the short abstract of the article suggests relation

to the subject. For example, under the keyword *child* or *children*, the search yielded articles that discuss movies or festivals were excluded from the analysis. Another example, the keyword *Roma* or *Roma Issue* returned many articles that had Romania in its title or abstract but nothing to do with the Roma – such articles were not selected. For further clarity, with the keyword *Allowance*, if the title or abstract clearly stated or suggested relation to either of the family allowances it was then analyzed; but, if it discussed allowances for politicians it was ignored.

2007 provides the starting point for analysis because measurement for people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in Romania was first recorded that year. Analysis continues until June 2014, as the last measurement of AROPE is recorded for 2014 and changes towards the end of 2014 would unlikely have a significant effect on poverty levels, especially when considering the rather consistent AROPE levels. At the time of this writing many poverty statistics for Romania in 2015 are yet to be released.

3.5. Method of Analysis

The perspective that I use and follow in this thesis is that (1) the reduction of child poverty is a normative objective that should be taken seriously by all governments and that (2) governments have a responsibility to implement effective policies and programmes in tackling this issue. Alongside said perspective, I answer the set of questions for each period as objectively as possible.

The period 2007-2014 will be separated into three periods with the 2008 and 2012 parliamentary elections being the dividers (See Annex B for a timeline of Romanian governments). Though similarities are expected, all five questions will be answered for each period and they will be complemented by an integrated concluding analysis to summarize at the end. I analyze the data through discourse analysis using Bacchi's WTP approach under the conceptual terrain of discursive institutionalism. In the analytical process I follow the list of questions that Bacchi (1999:12-13) presents for the WTP approach.

- What is the problem of child poverty represented to be either in public discourse from prominent government officials, specific policy debate, or in a specific policy proposal (or actual policy/programme)?
- What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation?

- What effects are produced by this representation? How are subjects constituted within it? What is the likely change? What is likely to stay the same? Who is likely to benefit from this representation?
- What is left unproblematic in this representation?
- How would ‘responses’ differ if the ‘problem’ were thought about or represented differently?

For rigorousness and replicability, I outline below a number of issues to do with quality in qualitative research.

For each news article, I first look for quotes from the politician or a description of a law or issue and see *how child poverty is framed* – if it is framed in a particular way at all. Second, I examine *what or who is implied – unless it is said explicitly – to be responsible for child poverty*: e.g. is it the government and they pledge for better services?; is the blame placed on the adults of the child for being poor?; or is the world economy to blame, etc.. Third, I consider *what is being said and compare it to current policies and programmes* (e.g. in regards to the MIG scheme do political actors place responsibility on the adult or do they argue for relaxed and less stigmatizing eligibility requirements).

For analysis, I am primarily interested in the discursive aspect rather than the linguistic aspect. That is, I am not concerned about the frequency of words but interested in the content (i.e. meaning) of what is being said, and the consistencies and inconsistencies of discourse within policies, programmes and political statements. More specifically, I am concerned with how child poverty is represented as a problem, to what extent it is represented as a problem, and what actors (e.g. the Government, parents etc.) are framed as having the greatest responsibility to tackle it and in what ways, to what ends. Being able to interpret is one of the key strengths under the chosen conceptual framework and analytical method.

For validity, I follow the conceptual framework outlined above. To support my interpretations, I provide direct quotes to ensure that what I report is as reported in the news articles. Moreover, I use the context and timeline to better understand the discourses surrounding child poverty, poverty as a whole, and the policies and programmes related to it – alongside with using it to help round out the analysis.

3.6. Limitations

There are several limitations to this analysis. Firstly, the findings cannot be transferred to other states, regions or global trends. With only three media sources and data that is not

transmitted through the dominant language of the country, coverage of speeches or quotes are possibility limited. The discourse is limited to what is presented in the articles during the period of examination and to the articles that are found through the search engine of each source. Moreover, the discourse is likely always coming from translated versions of Romanian, thus, word for word quotes may not be exact but the general sentiment and the intention behind the quotes would be expected to be on par with the original.

4. Analysis

Here I present my analysis of Romanian political elite discourse between January 2007 and June 2014. I inspect to what extent child poverty is represented to be a problem and in what ways it is represented as a problem from the selected media sources with consideration of policy and programme design.

4.1. Period I: Tăriceanu I & Tăriceanu II (January 2007⁶ - December 2008)

- I. What is the problem of child poverty represented to be either in public discourse from prominent government officials, specific policy debate, or in a specific policy proposal (or actual policy/programme)?

Romania's political elite did not overtly present child poverty to be a significant problem within the country during this period. When child poverty was presented as a problem, it was primarily mentioned in the context of the Roma minority (see MEFA, 08/04/08)⁷. This suggests that child poverty was represented to be a Roma problem and not necessarily a Romanian problem. With child poverty framed as a Roma problem, the blame was then shifted away from government anti-poverty policy and towards factors such as Roma culture (MEFA, 08/04/08).

During this period, politicians were shrewdly aware of the depth and breadth of child poverty and overall poverty in Romania – alongside a host of other problems such as ones related to education or healthcare (MEFA, 26/02/08; MEFA, 08/04/08; MEFA, 12/09/08; MEFA, 24/09/08; MEFA, 28/10/08; MEFA, 30/11/08). However, politicians and political parties blamed past politicians and past parties for the current situation (MEFA, 26/02/08; MEFA, 28/10/08). Unsurprisingly, current opposition parties also blamed the current ruling party and its key leaders for Romania's situation of poverty with minimal concrete solutions being put forth to address poverty (MEFA, 26/02/08; MEFA, 28/10/08).

In regards to overall poverty, it was also not presented as a major problem. Opposition and challenging political parties did present poverty as an issue the country needed to address during this period but offered little in how to effectively address poverty – in particular nothing concrete regarding child poverty. Then PD-L nominee for Prime Minister Stoloiu promised

⁶ Start of analysis. Not start of Tăriceanu I.

⁷ Dates written in the parentheses go in order of day, month, and year.

to alleviate poverty if elected (MEFA, 12/09/08) but his appeal appeared to be mainly directed towards seniors with no mention towards child poverty.

Earlier in the period, Finance Minister Vosgianian responded to a no-confidence motion put forth by the opposition that claimed it wanted to “put an end to poor living standards!” that were allegedly present because of President Tăriceanu (MEFA, 26/02/08) by stating that “most of the demands [...] such as fighting poverty, cutting budget expenses and increasing the minimum wage have already been solved or are being considered by the government.” One of the suggestions here is that the government was willfully ignorant of poverty statistics, those involving child poverty in particular, or that the government deemed the current living conditions of many Romanians to be acceptable. None of the articles analyzed featured politicians discussing statistics or over-time trends related to poverty.

Even with a relative small amount of articles available for this period of analysis, search returns for keywords that would likely return articles involving child poverty are negligible.

II. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation?

The representation of child poverty as being a Roma (out-group) problem through political discourse suggests that child poverty was not seem as a major issue for the in-group (ethnic Romanians and non-Roma) in Romania. As covered in sub-section 2.2., systemic discrimination against the Roma and the racialization of poverty has an extensive history in Romania. Subsequently, it is unsurprising to see comments and actions that continue to directly and indirectly lay blame on Roma culture, traditions, stereotypes, etc. for the situation many Roma children face (MEFA, 08/04/08). Nevertheless, this representation is incorrect since there are also many non-Roma in Romania who are objectively poor.

Vosgianian’s (MEFA, 26/02/08) comments presuppose that the majority living in poverty are there through their own action (or inaction). In turn, this type of poverty is deemed as justifiable by government officials. This also reverts back to the argument in 2.2. that anti-poverty government programmes can be aligned with moral judgments.

III. What effects are produced by this representation? How are subjects constituted within it? What is the likely change? What is likely to stay the same? Who is likely to benefit from this representation?

For this thesis, it is worth clarifying that an issue does not necessarily uphold a negative connotation like a problem does. An issue is more of a topic of debate that needs to be

addressed, but which is not inherently negative – even though that particular issue may be negative. While child poverty is certainly an issue, in some places it is not necessarily a problem – or at least a major problem. The political discourse from this period of analysis did not present child poverty as a major problem. Since it is generally not presented as a problem, it is unlikely for improvement to occur, be they significant or marginal.

When child poverty was presented to be a problem, it was mainly represented as one for the Roma (out-group) and not for the non-Roma (in-group) in Romania. This, of course, is completely contradictory since the Roma in Romania are legally very Romanian. The insinuation here is that anti-poverty policy and programmes are then likely to experience policy stasis since it is not a problem for the supposed in-group of the country. Moreover, there appears to be a political consensus that receiving social assistance is dependent on deservingness. Thus, the objectively income poor – a group in which the Roma are overrepresented in – are deemed poor because of their own action (or inaction).

One of the likely beneficiaries of this representation are politicians. It is likely that they have an incentive or moral judgment that deems continuation of the anti-poverty programmes as justifiable.

IV. What is left unproblematic in this representation?

From the literature review, it is evident that much was being left unsaid in Romania's political discourse on child poverty. As demonstrated in 2.1. and 2.2., evidence supports the claim that child and family poverty is a systemic issue that largely derives from ineffective policies and programmes based upon incomplete views on what causes and maintains poverty. The most effective anti-poverty programmes are based upon principles and policies that perceive poverty as a multidimensional issue (e.g. as seen in Scandinavian countries, and more recently in countries such as Mexico and Brazil). Romania's anti-poverty programmes are largely built around a theme of deservingness as evidenced by the shift towards, and continuation of, means-tested programmes with rather strict eligibility requirements. The programmes contrast sharply against programmes based upon poverty being a multidimensional issue. Consequently, this places blame amongst the parents of the children even though child poverty is not solely determined by parents' action (or inaction). The implication here is that Romanian politicians leave anti-poverty policy and programmes as unproblematic when it indubitably is a large source of maintaining high child poverty levels in Romania.

Moreover, education and healthcare are two other social policy areas that still needed dire improvement in Romania (Pop, 2014:22-37). Thus, the issues presented during this period do appear to be issues that Romanian society and Romanian politicians as a whole need to address; but with consideration of the keyword search terms, it seems peculiar that child poverty received minimal attention and negligible problem representation.

- V. How would 'responses' differ if the 'problem' were thought about or represented differently?

If child poverty was viewed in a perspective similar to that in Scandinavian countries, for instance, or countries such as Mexico and Brazil (i.e. as an multidimensional issue that can be better resolved through relaxing eligibility requirements, increasing benefit generosity, and aided by education and preventative healthcare etc.) it is likely policy and programmes would be designed differently. It is then likely that the central government would then attempt addressing child poverty through policies and programmes that account for both short-term objectives (e.g. adequate funding to help children and families escape poverty, immediate nutritional and health concerns etc.) and also long-term objectives (e.g. greater investment in education and child healthcare, installation of proper sewage systems throughout the country etc.). As evidenced in Mexico and Brazil in 2.1.1., once political discourse started framing poverty differently, policy and programmes began to change. Furthermore, one could expect to have seen a greater desire in tackling child poverty if poverty was thought of as more of a Romanian societal issue which included the Roma as Romanian.

4.2. Period II: Boc I, Boc II, and Ungureanu (January 2009 – April 2012)

- I. What is the problem of child poverty represented to be either in public discourse from prominent government officials, specific policy debate, or in a specific policy proposal (or actual policy/programme)?

The issue of child poverty was again not presented as a major problem by Romania's political elite during this period. Consequently, child poverty continued to receive minimal problem representation. Through discourse, child poverty appeared to be largely bundled together with poverty in general (e.g. MEFA, 08/02/12; MEFA, 07/03/12). Yet, even overall poverty was not presented as an issue worth tackling immediately as the effects of the Great Recession began to be felt and austerity measures were introduced. The austerity measures

which certainly impacted Romanian children alongside the rest of the Romanian public were often masked behind themes of solidarity (MEFA, 19/02/10a; NIOC, 22/02/10a; NIOC, 02/06/10). For example, in February 2010 when discussing the possible limiting of the universal child allowance, PM Boc said “[our] intention is not to achieve budget savings at the expense of the children, but we want to apply a principle of active solidarity and we need to support it” (MEFA, 19/02/10a; NIOC, 22/02/10a).

The theme of solidarity, or what was represented as solidarity in this case, deserves greater exploration. Solidarity is a term that can be presented in different ways. One way is with a group of people uniting together to protest against government or a particular policy. However, this version of solidarity was presented as solidarity with the Government of Romania when the austerity measures were being implemented. Inherent in this theme of solidarity is the importance of resolving macroeconomic issues rather issues such as long-term poverty. That is, issues facing the economic elite, the very wealthy, and even the middle class were given greater priority over issues facing Romania’s lower socioeconomic class – even though the austerity measures would undoubtedly still affect Romania’s middle class to some extent. Lastly, behind this promotion of solidarity, there was the insinuation for the public not to complain or protest against the austerity measures.

Indeed, one of the larger debates on social spending was on potentially making the universal child allowance a function of parents’ wages (MEFA, 07/05/10). Yet, some politicians like then MEP Rovana Plumb were vociferously critical of such suggestions (NIOC, 22/02/10a). Plumb stated that such suggestions were “in sheer contradiction with [Romania’s] public policies of increasing [the] birth rate” (NIOC, 22/02/10a). Nevertheless, the decision to extend the universal child allowance to children older than 18 if they were still attending “high school or a form of vocational education and [did] not earn their own income” does indeed show some commitment to alleviating child poverty even if the payments for the universal benefit remained relatively low and discourse remained minimal (MEFA, 24/03/10).

As this period of austerity progressed, tackling poverty increasingly lost commitment from politicians. In 2009 when PM Boc stated that “the government tries to limit the effects of the crisis and to prepare the ground for the economic revival”, it became clear that government priority had already shifted away from the commitment – at least ostensible – to tackling poverty and towards minimizing the negative macroeconomic consequences stemming from the global economic crisis (NIOC, 01/07/09). In reference to overall poverty in Romania, President Băsescu’s comment (MEFA, 26/03/10) that Romania needs to “stop lamenting and

concentrate on other matters that need to be solved” offers further insight into the level of priority that reducing poverty occupies in Romania. Băsescu’s (MEFA, 26/03/10) comment presents a host of assumptions that can be unpacked. First, it implies that the recession and Romania’s situation of poverty were two completely separate issues. By considering overall poverty to not be of importance for public policy, Băsescu was implying those who experience poverty or the risk of poverty prior to the recession experienced it based upon their own doing. The comment also suggests that Băsescu categorically viewed those who lived in poverty or at risk of it prior to the recession as either undeserving or less deserving of greater help from the government. It also shows that the government was deflecting responsibility for child poverty away from themselves and largely towards parents or guardians (MEFA, 07/01/11). Moreover, based upon the knowledge that the Roma are overrepresented in poverty figures, there is an implication that Băsescu may view the poverty of the Roma as justified due to, for example, their culture and traditions that he has a history of disparaging (MEFA, 24/06/09; NIOC, 09/09/09; MEFA, 22/02/10; NIOC, 27/05/10a; MEFA, 18/01/11; MEFA, 13/05/11).

Discussions about reducing public spending can hardly be considered surprising during a recession – especially on where potential budget cuts would occur and how extensive the cuts would be. Many politicians like Pogea (NIOC, 08/10/09) certainly shared Băsescu’s view that “social expenses [were] too high” (NIOC, 12/05/10). Yet, Romania’s anti-poverty programmes provided such meagre economic relief to its underprivileged citizens that even the World Bank advised Bucharest to increase the amount of its MIG payments (MEFA, 26/05/09).

Nevertheless, during this period of analysis, former Secretary of State from the Romanian National Child Protection Authority and PSD member Ileana Savu adamantly stressed that “Romania’s social assistance system risk[ed] collapsing because of [the] recent budget and staff cut plans” (MEFA, 07/01/10). Such comments are not only sympathetic towards children’s fate in Romania, but also towards the bulk of the Romanian population. Opposing politicians saw the changes and stasis to social assistance during this time as “[putting] the ordinary citizens’ interests at risk” and not sufficient in attempts at “eradicating poverty” (NIOC, 15/11/11). Additionally, PNL leader Crin Antonescu criticized the 2012 public budget bill as “one which legitimates poverty” (NIOC, 04/12/11).

Most notably, liberal democrat MEP Stolojan expressed desire to have Romania’s “outdated” welfare system overhauled (MEFA, 29/04/10). In this case, Stolojan stated that “school attendance, vaccination and annual medical check-ups” would be integral parts to reforming Romania’s anti-poverty programmes (MEFA, 29/04/10). Stolojan’s representation

of poverty here finally framed poverty as a multidimensional issue in Romania since it shows investment in human development and preventative measures. This comment presents a striking contrast to lack of problem representation in the analysis as a whole until then. While similar comments by other members of the political elite were not found, it would be peculiar to not have other members of the political elite at least share similar sentiments.

In relation to Romanian Roma children, it is evident that there is a continuation of child poverty still being a Roma issue rather than a Romanian issue (MEFA, 22/02/10). Comments related to impoverished Roma children often included hints of desired integration into Romanian culture and society but offered nothing substantially on what needs to be done to alleviate child poverty in the Roma community (NIOC, 21/08/09; MEFA, 22/02/10; NIOC, 09/04/10; MEFA, 09/09/10a; MEFA, 23/09/10b).

Though a one-time issue, Cristina Pocora of the PNL argued that one of the main problems associated with children is the amount of violence in cartoons such as Mickey Mouse (MEFA/02/02/10). Instead of discussing issues such as food security, access to healthcare, access to certain basic utilities, quality of education, daycare availability, meagre support from anti-poverty programmes, etc., Pocora introduced an issue which had little to do with improving the well-being of children in Romania. Pocora's (MEFA, 02/02/10) comment expressed a very middle class concern. Claims like this at such a time are questionable and distracted conversation from the greater problems facing children in Romania. It seems absurd for politicians to be considering violence in cartoons such as Mickey Mouse as one of the major problems children in Romania face when there were clearly more pressing concerns related to long-term poverty and even the economic uncertainty stemming from the Great Recession.

II. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation?

There is a continuation in the presuppositions and assumptions from the previous period. This is evidenced with the continuation of means-tested programmes and discourses of deservingness being the norm – perhaps even strengthening, as even the component of universality in the universal child allowance was debated during this period (MEFA, 29/04/10).

However, there is the addition of some new assumptions – one particularly worth emphasizing. It is clear that long-term, persistent poverty and the effects of the recession were considered separate issues. With national government largely focused on attempting to minimize the impact of the recession and with any attempt at resolving poverty in Romania consequently paused, it appears that the government had much more concern for middle class

issues rather than issues predominantly belonging to Romania's lower socioeconomic class. Thus, the government viewed the concerns of the middle class as more legitimate than the concerns of Romania's lower socio-economic class.

Moreover, Pocora's (MEFA/02/02/10) comment also supports the view that middle-class issues were of greater concern to politicians. Pocora's comment can also be found in relation to the perspective that the recession and overall poverty in Romania were two separate issues. It would seem unlikely that politicians would consider violence in cartoons like Mickey Mouse to be amongst the biggest concerns for Romanian child when considering statistics regarding child poverty in Romania – particularly during a major global recession.

- III. What effects are produced by this representation? How are subjects constituted within it? What is the likely change? What is likely to stay the same? Who is likely to benefit from this representation?

Although there is also a continuation of effects from representations that are similar to the previous period, there are also findings which are specific to this period. Behind the theme of solidarity is the elevated importance of addressing Romania's macroeconomic situation rather than its poverty alleviation programmes. Issues belonging to Romania's middle class and economic elite were then given priority, while any potential long-term or effective solutions of poverty alleviation for people belonging to Romania's lower socioeconomic class were halted. While some families – children in particular – suffered economically and materially, and possibly mentally and physically (in the manner of health) during this time, the government and politicians were able to deflect blame away from their decisions towards reduced public funding and continuing inadequate anti-poverty programmes behind a particular theme of solidarity which did not exist in the previous period.

Once again, politicians were the ones likely to benefit from this representation as it is likely that they had an incentive or moral judgment that deems stasis and retrenchment of the anti-poverty programmes and ethos behind them as justifiable. Though a government is expected to try to minimize the impact of any recession as best as possible, the Romanian government exerted much greater attention towards resolving macroeconomic issues masked behind a particular theme of solidarity. And they did so while not effectively addressing its poverty alleviation programmes. This implies that issues belonging to the middle class and Romania's very wealthy were of much greater legitimacy to Romania's political elite. Consequently, Romania's middle class and very wealthy are to benefit from this position in the

long term – even if they were facing economic uncertainty at that time. Even though Romania’s social assistance scheme was reformed in 2011 (Law 292/2011) (Pop, 2014:23), the continuation of strict and stigmatizing eligibility requirements, largely meagre benefit amounts, little in the way of benefits in-kind or services, etc. suggests that poverty alleviation for the chronically poor was not taken seriously enough. While there were some calls for change in Romania’s anti-poverty programmes, with the exception of Stolojan’s suggestions (MEFA, 29/04/10), what those changes were remains unclear (NIOC, 15/11/11). The result from this is that Romania’s chronically poor will largely remain poor, while Romania’s middle class and very wealthy – despite facing economic difficulties at the time – will likely recover.

IV. What is left unproblematic in this representation?

Child poverty and overall poverty were largely left as unproblematic by the Romanian political elite during this period. Băsescu’s comment (MEFA, 26/03/10) that Romania needed to focus “other matters that need to be solved” rather than poverty is perhaps the clearest indicator that long-term, persistent poverty in Romania was largely considered unproblematic by Romania’s political elite (MEFA, 26/03/10). Additionally, what was not being said in the political discourse was also very telling. With the exception of Stolojan (MEFA, 29/04/10), there appeared to be minimal discussion of child poverty in political discourse. Additionally, the continuation of poverty as not being viewed as a multidimensional issue persisted. And since there were minimal discussions of child poverty, there were negligible problem representations of child poverty at the political level. The representation of child poverty not being a problem via the lack of a representation of child poverty is disconcerting since statistics and trends suggest otherwise (see Table 1).

Related to the above, the separation between the recession and poverty in Romania, hindered poverty from being problematized. The issue of solidarity as a key theme of political discourse during this period is that it made it easier for Romania’s political elite to neglect improving the efficiency of Romania’s anti-poverty policy and programmes. The theme of solidarity even facilitated the tightening of eligibility requirements and subsequent reduction of poverty alleviation programme beneficiaries (NIOC, 02/08/10; NIOC 10/01/11; NIOC; AGER 22/11/11).

- V. How would ‘responses’ differ if the ‘problem’ were thought about or represented differently?

Similar to the previous period, if child poverty – or even overall poverty – were presented as more of a Romanian societal problem it is then plausible that greater effort would have been exerted by the government in tackling it. However, in this period the government was also able to use the Great Recession as an excuse for both high levels of poverty and not putting forth greater efforts at tackling child poverty in a substantive way. If this was not a period of such economic turmoil, the government would not have the option of such an excuse.

Moreover, if poverty was seen as a multidimensional issue during this time, the government could have considered ways to more efficiently alleviate poverty and prevent further poverty by actually overhauling Romanian welfare policy and programme design. The government could have also tested out what would be a novel anti-poverty programme (e.g. one similar to that of Mexico’s or Brazil’s) in one or more of Romania’s decentralized regions. Desires for a welfare system overhaul could not have been unbeknownst as they were at least expressed by liberal democrat MEP Stolojan – and conceivably others (MEFA, 29/04/10). Stolojan’s suggestions on what was needed to improve the efficacy of Romania’s anti-poverty programmes showed a strict departure from the lack of political discourse on child poverty and general poverty by perceiving it as a multidimensional issue and, thus, from the then practices of Romania’s programmes.

4.3. Period III: Ponta I, Ponta II, Ponta III, and Ponta IV (May 2012 – June 2014⁸)

- I. What is the problem of child poverty represented to be either in public discourse from prominent government officials, specific policy debate, or in a specific policy proposal (or actual policy/programme)?

Compared to the previous two periods, the issue of child poverty received greater presentation as a problem in Romanian political elite discourse. Yet, concrete solutions to child poverty were not really offered. Accordingly, child poverty continued to receive negligible problem representation. When issues related to child poverty and children’s rights were discussed by Romania’s political elite during this period, it was mainly from members of the Labour Ministry (AGER, 23/08/13; AGER, 20/11/13; AGER, 04/02/14). Additionally, the

⁸ End of analysis. Not end of Ponta IV.

confirmation of the increase in the child raising allowance in September 2012 demonstrated further acknowledgment from the government that more help was and is needed to address child poverty (AGER, 25/09/12).

In 2013, the Government signed an action plan with UNICEF Romania. Foreign Minister Corlăţean stated that the action plan “identifies solutions and sets a prospective time for their implementation” (AGER, 23/08/13). Perhaps more importantly, however, in February 2014 the Labour Ministry published the National Strategy for Protecting and Promoting the Rights of the Child 2014-2020, alongside publishing a variety of statistics regarding children and poverty in Romania (AGER, 04/02/14). Additionally, MEP Corina Creţu is reported saying that “poverty alleviation must be Romania’s national project” (AGER, 18/02/14). Such agreements, publications, and high profile comments offer hope for effectively addressing child poverty in Romania. Nonetheless, following through with the announced commitments with policy and more efficient programmes is needed.

Another example is when Labour Minister Câmpeanu suggested that education for Roma children is vital and if Roma “children do not get educated enough, they will stay on a lower social level, and this is true for all children in the world” (AGER, 22/04/13). Câmpeanu’s comment is important as it shows some recognition of the lack of education to be one of the roots of poverty (AGER, 22/04/13; NIOC, 22/04/13). Also, by linking poverty to (the lack of) education, there appears to be a slight shift towards poverty being presented as more of a multidimensional issue rather than strictly a matter of low income. Having high profile politicians publicly admit to what is one of the roots of poverty is an important step along the way to competently addressing the issue. With the above said, it is worth noting that child poverty in relation to (lack of) education in this case is still largely presented as a Roma issue as no articles similar to this were yielded that involved non-Roma children.

During this period, the pronatalist discourse appeared to be gain ground as population ageing progressed (NIOC, 16/04/13; NIOC, 19/06/13; NIOC, 20/06/13). President Băsescu even suggested that Romania’s biggest problem was the country’s birthrate – but he did so under controversial reasoning since he claimed that “Romania will have a population of 15 million people in 2030 and the ethnic structure of the country will change” and that consequently “the birthrate is a mission for Romanian women and a patriotic act” (NIOC, 19/06/13; NIOC, 20/06/13). The implication here is that the percentage of the Roma population in the country would grow to be significantly larger and that it requires a ‘patriotic’ response in the form of more childbearing among ethnic Romanian women. This is certainly a discourse

which would make Ceaușescu proud. Implied in this comment is the view that the Băsescu still did not view the Roma to be Romanian. Băsescu's comments would be heavily criticized by various organizations (NIOC, 03/07/13).

Unlike the previous two periods, it seems that the issue of child poverty gained a foothold in political discourse. This is a possible first step in more effectively addressing child poverty in Romania, but it requires active policy formulation efforts in the future. Moreover, child poverty will require problem representation, not just acknowledgement as an issue, for improvements in anti-poverty policy and programmes.

II. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation?

With a new government in place, greater emphasis was placed on children's issues despite a continuation of minimal problem representation. The PSD, or at least many of their members, were staunch critics of poverty alleviation programmes in Romania in the previous periods (MEFA, 26/02/08; AGER, 21/05/10). Thus, seeing a greater acknowledgement of children's issues and child poverty is unsurprising, even though policy and programme stasis is disappointing.

Yet, the growing pronatalist discourse during this period perhaps offers much to uncover. The discourse surrounding pronatalism seemingly promotes a concern for more births amongst ethnic Romanians and, consequently, those belonging to – and those perceived to be belonging to – Romania's middle class. The insinuation here is that there is continuity in middle class concerns being of primary concern to many Romanian politicians. With a growing pronatalist discourse, seeing improvements in services or benefits in-kind directed towards children and families may have been expected. Yet, as noted in 2.3.2., Romania lags in this department and this demonstrates a lack of seriousness behind a true pronatalist movement. Moreover, the insinuation of the Roma not being Romanian needs to be further explored since Băsescu framed the idea of having more Roma in Romania as undesirable (NIOC, 19/06/13; NIOC, 20/06/13). Disappointingly, it is clear that sharing veiled and unveiled anti-Roma sentiments through political discourse is still part of the norm – even if they are being denounced by various organizations.

- III. What effects are produced by this representation? How are subjects constituted within it? What is the likely change? What is likely to stay the same? Who is likely to benefit from this representation?

Though policy stasis largely suggests that child poverty was still not a significant problem within Romania, the statistics remain hard to ignore. While there is minimal in the way of problem representations, there begins to be greater acknowledgment from the government that child poverty is a problem that needs to be addressed. In other words, we continuously fail to see what kind of problem child poverty is for political elites and why it might be a problem – even though they could hardly be unknown.

With negligible problem representation and a clear indication that the Roma were still not viewed as being fully Romanian by some of Romania's political elite, it is likely that child poverty and overall poverty in general were viewed as more of a Roma (their) issue and not a Romanian (our) issue. Quite obviously, underprivileged children – approximately half of all children in Romania, whether they are Roma or non-Roma – do not benefit from this representation.

- IV. What is left unproblematic in this representation?

Despite an increase in attention to child poverty and child related issues during this period, child poverty is still left largely unproblematized and therefore no solutions for child poverty were expressed politically. This is also supported by the lack of evidence of politicians talking about statistics or trends in child poverty – and overall poverty. The trend of no problem representation is especially disconcerting when figures show child poverty remained consistently high since at least 2007 (Eurostat, 2016c).

Moreover, poverty is continued to not be presented as a multidimensional issue in political discourse despite efforts being taken to investigate issues Romanian children face. Policy stasis and the continuation of means-tested programmes with relatively strict eligibility requirements continues to suggest that some poverty is indeed justifiable. What is left unproblematized is that there are many children in Romania who are unfair victims of the means-tested programmes since they are reliant on their parents to fulfil the requirements.

- V. How would ‘responses’ differ if the ‘problem’ were thought about or represented differently?

If poverty had been thought of as a multidimensional issue then the government would have modified its anti-poverty policies and programmes – or even generated new ones – to be more efficient at resolving both the short-term and long-term effects associated with poverty. However, admittedly, the government may have been restricted in what they could do with social spending due to the loan deal with the IMF and due to the time needed to carefully plan new anti-poverty programmes.

Moreover, if pronatalism was taken more seriously, then it is likely that investment and improvement in services such as education and healthcare would have occurred. Even if the investment in improved education and healthcare were done only bearing the middle class in mind, it could have still had a positive impact on poverty alleviation through improved services. Thus, it appears that Romania’s pronatalist movement during this period was happening without long-term investments in its future adults. Lastly, if child poverty was viewed as not the fault of the child, perhaps improvements at least in services or benefits in-kind, if not in anti-poverty policy/programme design, would have been made.

4.4. Discussion and Summary

For the whole period of analysis there is acknowledgment from Romania’s political elite that child poverty is a problem. However, problem representation is persistently absent – even as acknowledgment increases as the period as a whole progresses. With few exceptions, Romania’s political elite largely did not discuss why child poverty is a problem or how it is a problem. This is disconcerting since statistics suggest that child poverty is indeed a major concern for a fast ageing Romanian society, where poverty is linked to a host of other social problems with life-long consequences, such as poor health, school absenteeism and dropout etc. – particularly when overall poverty figures are trending downwards.

With exceptions like Stolojan’s (MEFA, 29/04/10) comments in second period or Câmpeanu’s in the third period (AGER, 22/04/13), politicians did not appear to offer solutions on how to improve Romania’s anti-poverty programmes – particularly in a way that views poverty to be multidimensional. If there was a consensus amongst Romania’s political elite that poverty is multidimensional it is then conceivable that at least the means-tested features in the anti-poverty programmes would have transformed into criteria featuring children’s school attendance, adhering to vaccination schedules, and regular healthcare check-ups for children

and monitoring for pregnant women. It is possible that the increased discussion of poverty in political discourse during the third period is connected to the harmonization of programmes in the MSII. However, establishing that connection is beyond the scope of this thesis since political discourse in 2015 was not analyzed.

The other times child poverty and overall poverty were presented as a problem, it was mainly presented as a Roma problem – as evident in all three periods. Thus making child poverty and poverty in general as more of an out-group problem. In other words, we see clear evidence that poverty in Romania remains deeply racialized, hiding its breadth and real reach. Moreover, the racialization of issues carries over to topics like the growing pronatalist discourse which is primarily directed to Romania's middle class and which lacks a seriousness in long-term investment.

Romania's political discourse on poverty and the design of its anti-poverty policies and programmes allows for some poverty to be justified since social assistance is largely available only through means-tested programmes featuring eligibility requirements that are considered to be rather strict and sometimes stigmatizing. The second period of analysis saw a unique theme of solidarity emerge. Masked behind this theme of solidarity was the political elite's attempts to mitigate the effects of the recession by focusing on improving the macroeconomic situation but largely at the expense of Romania's lower socioeconomic class. Moreover, it is clear that the effects of the recession and long-term persistent poverty were seen as two completely separate issues. It is not until the third period of analysis that child poverty and child issues gained greater acknowledgment in political discourse. Though the outcome of the increased focus on child poverty or child issues in discourse is unknown, there are still many criticisms of Romania's anti-poverty policy and lack of services (see especially Alston, 2015). Taking into account that the pronatalist discourse is not directed towards all Romanians and does not feature long-term investments in its children, it seems unlikely that child poverty is yet to be fully considered as a Romanian societal problem or one that is multidimensional.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore what the problem of child poverty in Romania was represented to be during the 2007-2014 period since child poverty figures in Romania remained consistently high while overall poverty decreased. With the establishment of a causal relationship between national political discourse and problem representations of poverty to national anti-poverty policy and programmes, the best way to uncover what the problem of child poverty in Romania is represented to be was through discourse analysis. Support for this connection between political discourse and policy/programme design was established in the literature review with countries such as Mexico, Brazil, and the UK providing evidence. Under the conceptual terrain of DI, Bacchi's WTP approach offered an effective analytical tool for answering such questions using discourse analysis as a methodological tool by following an investigative set of questions that help uncover why certain issues become problematized and why they are problematized in particular ways.

The conceptual contribution of this thesis is further support in the burgeoning literature and recent findings connecting national political discourse with policy and programme design. In this case, and the unique contribution of this thesis, is that it is evident that the absence of problem representation in Romanian political elite discourse has a clear connection to policy stasis in anti-poverty policy and programmes which are supposed to alleviate child poverty in Romania. Moreover, further support is found for the usefulness of Bacchi's WTP approach in connecting political discourse to programme outcome.

The analysis in this thesis finds that child poverty was acknowledged as a problem by Romania's political elite throughout the period of analysis but it continued to receive negligible problem representation. With one out of every two children in Romania being at risk of poverty or social exclusion while the overall poverty rates in Romania declined during this period – a period that featured the worst global economic crisis since the Great Depression – it is puzzling that resolving child poverty did not receive greater attention from successive Romanian governments or was not a topic of greater discussion and government action (Eurostat, 2016c). Adding to this puzzle is that neighbouring country Bulgaria, which is often paired with Romania as the two poorest countries in the EU and until recently the two most recent member states, experienced a fairly significant decrease in the AROPE measurement during the same period (Eurostat, 2016c). While examination of Bulgaria was beyond the scope of this thesis, the implication of such a comparison is that it could have been possible for Romania to lower

its child poverty rate during this time. Additionally, Romania saw a decrease in poverty across the population as a whole, so why not for its children?

There is certainly evidence available for what is needed to create and maintain effective anti-poverty programmes, especially ones which seek to benefit children in both the short-term and long-term, as discussed in Chapter 2. And with the rise of popularity and effectiveness of CCT programmes as evidenced in Latin America in 2.1.1., it appears that means-tested programmes can be tailored to being rather effective at reducing poverty. Yet, this thesis has shown that the discourse in Romania has not made tackling child poverty a political priority to the end of the period of analysis. Moreover, social assistance in Romania has more recently been viewed through the dichotomy of being deserving and undeserving. The discourse seen through the articles analyzed here supports this. The deservingness perspective to anti-poverty policy is unfair to children as they are typically dependent on their parents (or guardians). Furthermore, Romania has a growing pronatalist discourse as the population of Romania has been in decline for several years now. However, this pronatalist discourse is more or less explicitly racialized also: it is mainly ethnic Romanians who are desired as future parents. There is an inherent contradiction in Romania's pronatalist discourse, as the government does little to invest in future generations and continually insists that parents are the primarily responsible for children while encouraging middle-class (mainly ethnically Romanian) families to have more children. It is also apparent that issues belonging to Romania's middle class and very wealthy are of greater legitimacy to Romania's political elite.

With the practice of anti-poverty programmes and policies primarily based upon an ethos of deservingness, this thesis argues that the Romanian government viewed some poverty to be more justifiable than other types of poverty. One way in which child poverty was politically fashioned into a non-problem is its consistent and overt racialization and articulation as a parental responsibility issue: child poverty affects Roma children and it is mainly the outcome of their (irresponsible) Roma parents' actions. However, this is not to suggest that politicians say or suggest that child poverty is not an issue – many politicians certainly do acknowledge it exists within the country, but often only state its problem status without any further elaboration. The kind of problem it might be and why it might be a problem for Romanian society as a whole and for the Romanian government is conspicuously missing from public discourse. Further research in relation to this thesis may want to continue examining the relationship between discourse and policy in Romania – particularly in relation to tackling child poverty and poverty in general.

Annex A: Statistics

Table 1: Percent of people at risk-of-poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) [ilc_peps01]

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Less than 18 years of age										
Romania	--	50.5	51.2	52.0	48.7	49.1	52.2	48.5	51.0	--
Bulgaria	61.0	60.8	44.2(b)	47.3	49.8	51.8	52.3	51.5	45.2(b)	43.7
EU27	27.5(e)	26.4	26.4	26.5	27.5	27.2	27.9	27.7	27.8	--
Total Population										
Romania	N/A	45.9	44.2	43.1	41.4	40.3	41.7	40.4	40.2	--
Bulgaria	61.3	60.7	44.8(b)	46.2	49.2	49.1	49.3	48.0	40.1(b)	41.3
EU27	25.3(e)	24.4	23.7	23.3	23.7	24.2	24.7	24.5	24.4	--
(b) break in time series (e) estimated										
Source: Eurostat (2016c)										

Table 2: Percentage of population experiencing severe material deprivation [ilc_mddd11]

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Less than 18 years										
Romania	--	40.4	39.2	40.3	36.7	35.8	37.9	34.1	31.5	31.2(p)
Bulgaria	57.7	58.3	40.8	43.6	46.5	45.6	46.6	46.3	38.4(b)	37.3
EU27	11.1(e)	10.1	9.8	9.5(e)	9.9	10.0	11.7	11.0	10.4	9.6(e)
NM12	29.4	26.5	22.2	22.3	22.5	21.5	22.5	20.9	18.8	--
Total Population										
Romania	--	36.5	32.9	32.2	31.0	29.4	29.9	28.5	26.3	24.6 (p)
Bulgaria	57.7	57.6	41.2	41.9	45.7	43.6	44.1	43.0	33.1(b)	34.2
EU27	9.9I	9.2	8.5	8.2 (e)	8.4	8.8	9.9	9.6	8.9	8.2 (e)
NM12	27.9	24.9	20.7	19.8	20.0	19.2	19.8	18.7	16.4	--
(b) break in time series (e) estimated (p) provisional										
Source: Eurostat (2016c)										

Table 3: In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate % (from 18 to 65 years) [ilc_iw01]

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Romania	--	16.5	16.9	17.2	17.6	18.9	18.9	18.1	19.5	18.6
Bulgaria	5.5	5.9	7.6	7.5	7.7	8.2	7.4	7.2	9.3	7.8
Hungary	6.9	5.8	5.8	6.2	5.4	6.2	5.7	7.0	6.7	9.3
EU27	8.0(e)	8.3	8.5	8.3	8.3	8.8	8.9	9.0	9.6	--
(e) estimate										
Source: Eurostat (2016c)										

Table 4: 2014 Wage and Price Comparisons

	Monthly Minimum Wage [tps00155]	Price per kWh (household) [nrg_pc_204]	Cup of coffee (1 cup) [prc_dap14]	White Sugar (1 kg) [prc_dap14]
Romania	€190.11	€0.125	€1.11	€0.82
Bulgaria	€173.84	€0.090	€0.97	€0.80
Serbia (non-EU)	€235.31	€0.060	--	--
Hungary	€341.70	€0.115	--	--
Croatia	€395.67	€0.132	€0.98	€0.76
Poland	€404.40	€0.141	€0.60	€1.25
UK	€1,251.05	€0.180	€2.57	€1.11
Source: Eurostat (2016a; 2016b; 2016c)				

Annex B: Political Timelines

Table 5: Romanian Government Timeline (2007-2014)

Prime Minister	Cabinet Name	Date (dd/mm/yr)	Composition
Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu	CPT I	29/12/04 – 05/04/07	PNL + PD + UDMR
	CPT II	05/04/07-22/12/08	PNL + UDMR
Emil Boc	BOC I	22/12/08 – 23/12/09	PD-L + PSD
	BOC II	23/12/09 – 0/02/12	PD-L + PSD
Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu	Ungureanu	09/02/12 – 27/04/12	PD-L + UDMR + UNPR
Victor Ponta	Ponta I	07/05/12 – 21/12/12	USL (PSD + PNL + PL) + UNPR
	Ponta II	21/12/12 -05/03/14	PSD + PNL + PL + UNPR
	Ponta III	05/03/14 – 17/12/14	PSD + UNPR + PC + PLR
	Ponta IV	17/12/14 – 04/11/15	PSD + UNPR + ALDE

Source: Comparative Political Data Set – Government Composition 1960-2014 (Armingeon, 2016)

Table 6: Timeline of Romanian Presidents (2007-2014)

President	Party Affiliation	Date (dd/mm/year)
Traian Băsescu	Ind.	20/12/04 – 20/04/07
Nicolae Văcăroiu*	PSD	20/04/07 – 23/05/07
Traian Băsescu	Ind.	23/05/07 – 10/07/12
Crin Antonescu*	PNL	10/07/12 – 27/07/12
Traian Băsescu	Ind.	27/07/12 – 21/12/14
Klaus Iohannis	Ind.	21/12/14 -

*Acting President

Source: Comparative Political Data Set – Government Composition 1960-2014 (Armingeon, 2016)

Annex C: Articles Available for Discourse Analysis

Table 7: Media Sources for Discourse Analysis

Media Source	Website
Agerpres (AGER)	http://www.agerpres.ro/english
Mediafax (MEFA)	http://www.miafax.ro/english/
Nine O'Clock (NIOC)	http://www.nineoclock.ro/

Table 8: Breakdown of Search Returns

Amount of articles selected for discourse analysis first and the amount of articles returned in the search following in brackets					
	Allowance	Minimum income guarantee ⁹	Roma ¹⁰	Poverty	Child ¹¹
Agerpres	4 (27)	7 (10)	6 (94)	11 (117)	8 (397) ¹²
Mediafax	14 (50)	7 (13)	6 (7)	21 (61)	36 (698)
Nine O'Clock	13 (87)	50 (2198) ¹³	18 (702)	19 (567) ¹⁴	27 (1105)
*Articles accessed between 14 May 2016 and 25 May 2016 - Several articles returned under two or more search key terms - Articles not included due to not being within timeframe, unrelated to Romania, editorials, opinion articles or essays, not specifically politically related (e.g. <i>Child's Pose</i> or <i>Destiny's Child</i> returned for Child).					

Table 9: Number of Articles Available for Analysis per Period

	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Total
No. of Articles	18	158	52	228

⁹ Variations of minimum income guarantee were used to yield maximum amount of results for AGER and MEFA, but to yield least amount of results for NIOC. AGER: *minimum guaranteed income* was used for search; MEFA: *minimum income* was used for search; NIOC: *income guarantee* was used for search.

¹⁰ AGER: *Roma issue* used for search, *Roma* returned 3841 results; MEFA: *Roma issue* used for search, *Roma* returned 3780 results.

¹¹ MEFA: *children* used for search.

¹² Vast majority of articles occur after period of analysis.

¹³ 110 articles originally selected. Articles excluding discourse from politicians were not considered for analysis to ensure a more manageable amount of articles were available for analysis.

¹⁴ Majority of articles unrelated to Romania, had text in Romanian, or were opinion pieces.

C.1. Agerpress (AGER) Articles Available for Analysis

25 March 2010. Senate President Mircea Geoana meets ambassadors of European states. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2010/03/25/senate-president-mircea-geoana-meets-ambassadors-of-european-states-13-52-19>

19 May 2010. Protest rally in Victoriei Square. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2010/05/19/protest-rally-in-victoriei-square-11-56-51>

21 May 2010. Number of poor Romanians will double from 4 to 8 million (Mircea Geoana). <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2010/05/21/number-of-poor-romanians-will-double-from-4-to-8-million-mircea-geoana--09-17-02>

25 May 2010. Gov't to pass letter of intent for the IMF today. <http://www.nineoclock.ro/go-vt-to-pass-letter-of-intent-for-the-imf-today/>

30 May 2010. Austerity measures are temporary and will correct structural deficits. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2010/05/30/austerity-measures-are-temporary-and-will-correct-structural-deficits-18-03-02>

18 June 2010. President Basescu: The EU 2020 Strategy suits well Romania's modernisation programme. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2010/06/18/president-basescu-the-eu-2020-strategy-suits-well-romania-s-modernisation-programme-10-03-29>

13 September 2010. CNSLR Fratia organizes rally in Bucharest on September 22. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2010/09/13/cnslr-fratia-organizes-rally-in-bucharest-on-september-22-18-39-01>

6 December 2010. President Basescu attends ruling coalition meeting. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2010/12/06/president-basescu-attends-ruling-coalition-meeting-11-49-53>

8 December 2010. Gov't: Two maternity leave variants to choose from. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2010/12/08/gov-t-two-maternity-leave-variants-to-choose-from-19-36-01>

8 September 2011. MEP Corina Cretu: Policy of oppressing poorest and most vulnerable European citizens is revolting. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2011/09/08/mep-corina-cretu-policy-of-oppressing-poorest-and-most-vulnerable-european-citizens-is-revolting-17-34-31>

22 November 2011. Labour Minister Barbu: Under social security framework law, 54 benefits are grouped in nine categories. <http://www.nineoclock.ro/pm-no-pension-salary-hikes-if-economy-doesn%E2%80%99t-allow-it/>

8 February 2012. Job generation, investment stimulation and economic growth – the principles of the 2012 governing program. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2012/02/08/job-generation-investment-stimulation-and-economic-growth-the-principles-of-the-2012-governing-program-18-31-11>

12 September 2012. Basescu: Schengen access, somehow blocked because of domestic developments. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2012/09/12/basescu-schengen-access-somehow-blocked-because-of-domestic-developments-15-30-46>

25 September 2012. Chamber of Deputies approves rises in child-rearing benefits to mothers in final vote. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2012/09/25/chamber-of-deputies-approves-rises-in-child-rearing-benefits-to-mothers-in-final-vote-17-37-25>

26 September 2012. Government passes resolution on giving food aid to underprivileged people. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2012/09/26/government-passes-resolution-on-giving-food-aid-to-underprivileged-people-16-37-03>

19 December 2012. MP Giurescu: Restore bicameral parliament's deserved place. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2012/12/19/mp-giurescu-restore-bicameral-parliament-s-deserved-place-17-30-49>

5 March 2013. PM Ponta: I suggest we fully reset Romania's European policy of the past eight years. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2013/03/05/pm-ponta-i-suggest-we-fully-reset-romania-s-european-policy-of-the-past-eight-years-09-33-13>

8 April 2013. ForMin to keep protecting all Romanian citizens' rights, Roma's included. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2013/04/08/formin-to-keep-protecting-all-romanian-citizens-rights-roma-s-included-13-16-02>

22 April 2013. Campeanu: Labour Ministry initiates cooperation with WB for the social and economic status of Roma. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2013/04/22/campeanu-labour-ministry-initiates-cooperation-with-wb-for-the-social-and-economic-status-of-roma-19-01-01>

25 April 2013. Ponta at PACE: After the general election, we identified best solutions for Romania; we have 'cohabitation'. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2013/04/25/ponta-at-pace-after-the-general-election-we-identified-best-solutions-for-romania-we-have-cohabitation--08-30-30>

10 May 2013. WB: Romania must maintain a flexible labor market, to shift to high-productivity jobs. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2013/05/10/wb-romania-must-maintain-a-flexible-labor-market-to-shift-to-high-productivity-jobs-09-51-16>

28 June 2013. At least 10 pct of EEA & Norway grants aimed at Roma population. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2013/06/28/at-least-10-pct-of-eea-norway-grants-aimed-at-roma-population-15-51-59>

9 August 2013. MFP: Letter of Intent with IMF aims at ensuring sustainable macro-economic balances. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2013/08/09/mfp-letter-of-intent-with-imf-aims-at-ensuring-sustainable-macro-economic-balances-11-27-25>

23 August 2013. Gov't, UNICEF sign action plan for strategic partnership to children's benefit. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2013/08/23/gov-t-unicef-sign-action-plan-for-strategic-partnership-to-children-s-benefit-16-05-23>

17 September 2013. Ponta: I wish in two years we can say Romania no longer needs any agreement. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2013/9/17/Ponta-I-wish-in-two-years-we-can-say-Romania-no-longer-needs-any-agreement17-09-2013-19-19-59>

20 November 2013. UNICEF's Blanchet calls on Romanian MP to promote, display commitment to children's rights. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2013/11/20/unicef-s-blanchet-calls-on-romanian-mps-to-promote-display-commitment-to-children-s-rights-18-20-08>

3 December 2013. Ponta: Government's main aim, every citizen should sense economic growth in income. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2013/12/03/ponta-government-s-main-aim-every-citizen-should-sense-economic-growth-in-income-17-18-20>

27 December 2013. Zgonea: 2013 arguably Parliament's most prolific year since Romania a EU member. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2013/12/27/zgonea-2013-arguably-parliament-s-most-prolific-year-since-romania-a-eu-member-16-43-14>

4 February 2014. Labour ministry: One in three Romanian children poor, 52.2 percent at risk. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2014/02/04/labour-ministry-one-in-three-romanian-children-poor-52-2-percent-at-risk-16-42-07>

9 February 2014. Speaker Zgonea agrees with Chairman Antonescu's Senate reform draft. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2014/02/09/speaker-zgonea-agrees-with-chairman-antonescu-s-senate-reform-draft-14-04-15>

10 February 2014. Basescu fined by CNCD for 2010 statement that Roma 'live on what they pilfer'. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/news-of-the-day/2014/02/10/basescu-fined-by-cncd-for-2010-statement-that-roma-live-on-what-they-pilfer--16-41-13>

18 February 2014. MEP Corina Cretu: Poverty alleviation must be Romania's national project. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2014/02/18/mep-corina-cretu-poverty-alleviation-must-be-romania-s-national-project-10-51-56>

11 March 2014. Government to pledge for political programme; VAT of 19% widening taxation base, lower CAS. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2014/03/11/government-to-pledge-responsibility-for-political-programme-vat-of-19-widening-taxation-base-lower-cas-12-26-22>

25 March 2014. Romania to qualify for 1 billion euros in European funds to prevent poverty, social exclusion risks. <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2014/03/25/romania-to-qualify-for-1-billion-euros-in-european-funds-to-prevent-poverty-social-exclusion-risks-16-27-17>

19 May 2014. 2014EP Stolojan: Politics must contribute to re-inventing industry-making manner. <http://www.agerpres.ro/ep-elections-2014/2014/05/19/2014ep-stolojan-politics-must-contribute-to-re-inventing-industry-making-manner-13-57-23>

C.2. Mediafax (MEFA) Articles Available for Analysis

9 January 2008. Romania's Govt Ups Social Aids 4.5% As Of Jan '08. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romania-s-govt-ups-social-aids-4-5-as-of-jan-08-2328206>

15 January 2008. Romania, Down One Position In Economic Freedom Classification, Ranks 68th. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romania-down-one-position-in-economic-freedom-classification-ranks-68th-2335736>

26 February 2008. Social Democrats, Conservatives' No-Confidence Motion Enacted By Senate. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/social-democrats-conservatives-no-confidence-motion-enacted-by-senate-2417032>

27 February 2008. Romanian Senate Oks Additional Aid To Low-Income Families. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanian-state-allowance-for-children-to-be-paid-in-bank-accounts-2670309>

28 February 2008. Romanian Govt Already Considered Most Demands In Opposition's Simple Motion – Fin Min. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanian-govt-already-considered-most-demands-in-opposition-s-simple-motion-fin-min-2420719>

8 April 2008. Ethnic Roma Still Discriminated In Romania – President. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/ethnic-roma-still-discriminated-in-romania-president-2531131>

15 May 2008. Romanian Social Democrats Vie For Higher Maternity Allowance. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanian-social-democrats-vie-for-higher-maternity-allowance-2636637>

29 May 2008. Romanian State Allowance For Children To Be Paid In Bank Accounts. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanian-state-allowance-for-children-to-be-paid-in-bank-accounts-2670309>

- 11 June 2008. Romanian Education Faces Kindergarten Deficit. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanian-education-faces-kindergarten-deficit-2700523>
- 18 July 2008. Romanians Working Abroad Can Request Higher State Allowance For Kids. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanians-working-abroad-can-request-higher-state-allowance-for-kids-2793327>
- 31 July 2008. Romania Admits ‘Partial Failure’ For Roma Situation In Italy. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romania-admits-partial-failure-for-roma-situation-in-italy-2839933>
- 12 September 2008. Romanian Democrat Liberals Officially Propose Theodor Stolojan for PM. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanian-democrat-liberals-officially-propose-theodor-stolojan-for-pm-3171266>
- 24 September 2008. Romanian President Voices Out Deficiencies In Education, Healthcare Systems. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanian-president-voices-out-deficiencies-in-education-healthcare-systems-3222597>
- 15 October 2008. Parental Benefit For Romanians Worth 85% Of Last Year’s Incomes. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/parental-benefit-for-romanians-worth-85-of-last-year-s-incomes-3314969>
- 28 October 2008. Romania’s Education Reform Ten Years Ago Was Bad – President. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romania-s-education-reform-ten-years-ago-was-bad-president-3385538>
- 30 November 2008. Romanian Democrat Liberal VP Flutur For “Romania’s modernization”. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanian-democrat-liberal-vp-flutur-for-romania-s-modernization-3582239>
- 16 December 2008. Romania’s New Center-Left Govt To Assign 6% Of GDP To Education. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romania-s-new-center-left-govt-to-assign-6-of-gdp-to-education-3664161>
- 17 December 2008. Romanian PM Urges Future Coalition Govt To Rethink Governing Program. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanian-pm-urges-future-coalition-govt-to-rethink-governing-program-3667050>
- 6 May 2009. Reform Is Needed In High School Curricula – Romanian Pres. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/reform-is-needed-in-high-school-curricula-romanian-pres-4304526>
- 11 May 2009. Romania Senate Oks Separate Child Benefit For Multiple Births. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romania-senate-oks-separate-child-benefit-for-multiple-births-4342406>
- 26 May 2009. Romania Guaranteed Min Income Might Increase By 15% As July – Draft Law. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romania-guaranteed-min-income-might-increase-by-15-as-july-draft-law-4453185>
- 27 May 2009. Romanian Govt Oks 15% Higher Guaranteed Min Income. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanian-govt-oks-15-higher-guaranteed-min-income-4458624>
- 11 June 2009. Romanian Labor Min: Payment Of Pensions, Social Benefits Not Endangered. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanian-labor-min-payment-of-pensions-social-benefits-not-endangered-4532300>

- 24 June 2009. Romanians Depend Too Much On Social Welfare – President. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanians-depend-too-much-on-social-welfare-president-4593862>
- 12 August 2009. Romanian Labor Ministry To Cut 1,316 Jobs. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/romanian-labor-ministry-to-cut-1-316-jobs-4746262>
- 24 October 2009. Presidential Contender Mircea Geoana Pledges Decent Living Standard For All Romanians. <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/presidential-contender-mircea-geoana-pledges-decent-living-standard-for-all-romanians-5038569>
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