

THE CURRENT BUDGET CRISIS IN TRADITIONAL VISUAL MEDIA

An analysis from the perspective of equity and social justice of the response of the governments to the crisis. Comparative analysis: media coverage of the 2010-2011 economic crisis and the 2025 budget crisis

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ABSTRACT: *The work I propose is part of a broader research approach aimed at the relationship between social policies and social equity in post-communist Romania. The respective approach, carried out in several stages, targeted policies in the field of pensions and salaries - including associated fiscal policies, policies regarding poverty and vulnerable groups. From the analysis of policies and their impact from the perspective of equity and social justice, I identified groups and categories constantly disadvantaged by these policies and groups constantly privileged - one of the ways of privileging these categories, analyzed in detail, being that of the so-called special pensions. The issue investigated is also of interest to the mass media, being widely reflected, both on social networks and in traditional media, in the written and audiovisual press. Although the themes are recurrent, in times of crisis, such as the current budget crisis in Romania, they gain increased importance, both in terms of weight and from the perspective of focusing on the dimension of social equity. The paper I propose will focus on analyzing how the issue of social equity and the relationship with social policies is reflected in the analyses and debates in traditional visual media in times of crisis, such as the current one. Starting from a content analysis that I conducted, from a similar perspective during the economic crisis of 2010-2011, I propose a comparative analysis of media messages, the senders of these messages and the implicit or explicit interests behind them. The comparative analysis will target the period of the economic crisis - the measures taken during that period and the way they were reflected in the mass media - respectively, the period of the current budget crisis, from a similar analysis perspective. The main news and socio-economic and political analysis programs of the main news television channels in Romania will be targeted.*

Key-words: *mass media; content analysis; crisis; social justice; social equity.*

Introduction

The paper I propose is part of a broader research approach that aims to identify and describe the mechanisms and factors that generate and multiply social polarization in post-transition Romania. One of the mechanisms that I propose to analyze in depth is that of the impact of public policies on the distribution and redistribution of welfare.

The hypothesis from which this research approach starts is that certain social policies, although declaratively aiming to reduce social inequality, in fact contribute to the increase of inequality and social injustice. This presentation focuses on the public justification of such public policy measures and on the way in which certain media stereotypes and superficial approaches in the public debate support, disinterestedly or not, such a justificatory approach.

The analysis proposed here is based on the individual research project carried out within the Research Institut for Quality of Life project "Unequal Development and Types of Social Inequalities in Romania", coord. Iulian Stănescu

Data sources

The analysis is based on three main data sources:

- statistical data
- legislative framework
- messages promoted by visual media through news, debates, talk shows during the economic crisis of 2010-2011, respectively, the budget crisis of 2025

Analysis of statistical data includes:

- evolution of salaries and pensions in Romania; analysis of data on the evolution of inflation and the value of the minimum decent consumption basket unitary wage;

Analysis of legal frame includes:

- laws in the field of remuneration of personnel paid from public funds: Law 330/2009; Law 285/2010; Law 153/2017;
- successive versions of the Pension Law: Law 19/2000, Law 263/2010, respectively, Law 153/2017; Law no. 127/2019; Law 360/2023 on the public pension system;
- law 174/2020 amending and supplementing the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 217/2000 regarding the approval of the minimum monthly consumption basket.

In addition to statistical data analysis and legislative analysis, an important source of data is media analysis. The analysis is based on two types of data sources that complement and validate each other:

A first source of data is represented by a systematic analysis of the media message promoted by several of the major news television stations in Romania:

A first phase of the analysis is focused on the media coverage of the impact of the economic crisis felt in Romania in 2009-2011 (analysis presented in Preotesi, 2015)

A second stage targets the budgetary crisis and the correlative measures in the current period (2025-still a work in progress).

The second source of data is the result of participatory observation carried out in over 50 "live" shows that I participated in during the period 2010-2025 on several of the main news TV stations.

Theoretical and conceptual framework. The perspective of social justice is what configures the analysis I propose. This theme seems to be a recurring one in crisis situations. In the messages of politicians, as well as in those of the media, the theme of justice or social justice becomes very present in the public space. Both in times of crisis, such as the economic one, from 2009-2011, as well as in the current budget crisis.

The analysis of the way in which the problems related to the aforementioned crises are reflected in the mass media will be carried out from a double perspective:

- the perspective of the reflected content - the problems generated by the crisis, the causes and solutions identified;
- the perspective of the interests and motivations that shape the way in which this content is reflected in the mass media and the

way in which the discourse around the idea of social justice in times of crisis is constructed and reconstructed

From the perspective of the interests and motivations that shape the discourse around the idea of social justice in times of crisis, the theoretical approach will be a dual one, integrating two major paradigms regarding the role of the press in reflecting social issues:

- functionalist paradigm
- conflictualist paradigm

Theories associated with the functionalist paradigm start from the premise of the existence of a consistent relationship between media and society (Leon-Guerrero, 2016), in which the press has a role and a positive impact on society. From this perspective, the roles of mass media are multiple:

- inform the population;
- educate and guide the population in understanding the complex problems of the economy and society

The conflictualist perspective focuses on identifying the interests behind the messages transmitted by the media. The interests are those of the sender, but also of the receiver, and media messages integrate the two types of interests.

"The media plays an important role in creating public agendas, influencing the public in what they think about (social issues) and ultimately, what the public considers to be a social issue" (Altheide, 1997).

The approach I propose integrates the two paradigms mentioned. On the one hand, I start from the premise that the press takes over a consistent part of the public agenda. On the other hand, it emphasizes certain parts of this agenda, to the detriment of others, as well as certain approaches in analyzing the debated issues.

There are certain similarities in the way media and politics function. The messages promoted are addressed to an audience, and a basic goal is that this audience must be as large as possible. While in politics the goal is the largest possible number of votes, in the media, the goal is the highest possible rating.

I intend to decipher the particular manner of functioning the promotion of these two types of interests and their inter-relations within the context of news televisions, their result being certain forms of manipulation that I intend to describe and analyze. A typology of the interests of the actors involved.

In the analysis I made regarding media messages during the economic crisis of 2009-2010 (Preotesi, 2015) I proposed such a typology from which the present analysis also starts. Moreover, even if I propose a comparative analysis of the way in which the visual media reflects the two particular moments of crisis, press monitoring does not only concern the two moments, but has a certain continuity.

We have identified several categories of media interests in promoting certain messages to a certain type of audience:

-the main interests of media institutions-financial interests directly related to the ratings of broadcasts;

- the secondary interests of some press trusts related to the relationship with certain parties/certain politicians. Some interests aim at a certain "convergence" or political affinities, others are particular interests, such as exemption from paying certain debts to the state budget, or even the prescription of certain criminal acts

Apart from the direct interests of the media institutions and the particular interest of the owners of the politically connected media trusts, we have identified two other categories of interests:

- the interests of some of the influential employees of these television stations;
- the interests of some permanent/recurring guests of these television shows

The more general theoretical background of this typology of the interests of public message promoters is that of the theory of post-communist elite conversion.

The model was described in detail in the 2015 paper, which represents an important reference for this analysis.

The frame of multidimensional model of elite circulation includes political capital, social capital, economic capital and, also, the cultural capital

Having the cultural means of maintaining and consolidating domination, in addition to the political and economic ones, this new elite approaches the definition of the total elite given by W. Mills (1951).

The interaction between part of this new cultural elite, part of the holders of the means of promoting the dominant culture and part of the vectors of promoting the corresponding messages led to the formation of sub-elites, defined by

Viorella Manolache as follows:

Mediocracy elite – “the occupational segment that holds power over the mass media, appealing to intellectual conformism, invective and sloganeering”;

The intellectual elite - "that apparently critical commentator who addresses an unspecialized audience on issues of broad public interest" (Manolache 2009, p.13).

Part of this new cultural elite "has professionalized itself, becoming public intellectuals through access to media coverage. (...) The public intellectual is becoming more and more public and less and less intellectual, proving its dilution in favor of politics (Gavrilescu, 2006, apud.Manolache, 2009).

The message transmitted through the mass media uses certain image vectors that, in turn, have their own interests, which they are in a position to promote, becoming sub-elites of function and position.

The premises of prioritizing problems and approaches concern implicit ways of defining concepts. Regarding debates on social justice, the central concept is that of merit.

The relationship between merit and justice-the concept of meritocracy.

The idea of social justice has been one of the important philosophical ideas since antiquity. From Plato's Republic to the analyses of social inequality of social philosophy in the modern period -the most influential proposed by John Rawls(1971), theories of justice have been developed, which have at their center a certain perspective that defines the idea of justice.

A common point of both classical and modern theories on the idea of social justice is the relationship to the concept of merit. There are differences in the definition of merits, one of the important differences being in correlation with the purpose of functioning an institution.

- The liberal approach associates merit with the idea of justice, postulating the meritocratic system as the one that ensures social equity
- The "left" approach (Pikety, 2013) discusses precisely the exacerbation of the idea of merit in the construction of a discourse justifying social inequality (Preotesi, 2020, 2024)

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Differentiated contents of the merit content:

- if the institution is a private one, merit is associated with the good of the company, operationalized, predominantly, in profit, so meritorious is the one who brings money into the company, directly or indirectly, for example, by contributing to building a positive image of the company;
- if the organisation is an NGO, merit is assessed in relation to the contribution to the achievement of the organisation's objectives;
- in the public sector the perspective is a more complex one. Beyond the performance criteria associated with the activity a component of the correlative merits and rewards pre-exists the activity itself and its evaluation. The social importance of the institution and the position in the institution are the ones rewarded, and at the individual, theoretical level, this importance correlates with the educational and professional level of the employees.

The approach I propose in the broader research project from which I cut this analysis integrates the two philosophical perspectives on social justice:

- on the one hand, I consider merit as one of the basic structuring principles of social differentiation
- on the other hand, I propose to question the way in which the relationship between merits and rewards is reflected in public policies from the perspective of power relations that exacerbate certain merits to the detriment of others and excessively and permanently privilege certain categories of "deserving"...

The merits from the active period should also be found in the rewards granted after retirement, which happens, as I will show below, with more than measure, only for some of the merits and only for certain categories of "deserving" (a relevant case analysed in several works within this larg research project-the magistrates).

Methodology

Monitoring during the crisis period (2009-2011) and the budgetary crisis (2025)Method: Systematic analysis of public discourse in relation to the main themes of public debate focused on debate shows on socio-economic and political topics on the main shows of this kind on the news channels Digi 24,

Antena 3,B1 TV and Realitatea TV. A number of approximately 300 shows were monitored, having a relatively constant format over time and a common body of themes and social actorsDebate framework: the main shows on social, political and economic topics on Realitatea TV,B1,Digi 24 and Antena 3

Actors involved in the debate:

- media representatives (analysts and moderators);
- experts (economic analysts, sociologists, psychologists)
- government representatives;
- political party representatives;
- trade union representatives

The categories are not strictly disjoint sets, the roles being, in certain cases, interchangeable.

In 2025, the number of trade unionists invited to shows, as well as the frequency of their appearances, decreases, comparing to 2010-2011. On the other hand, the frequency (not the number) of analysts and consultants increases. The frequency of sociologists involved in public opinion polling activities also increases. In many cases, a transfer of competence is made and it is assumed that being competent in one field generates competence in almost any field...

Although a clearer segmentation of expert guests appears, depending on the type of messages agreed by each television station, there are still a few itinerant and universally competent "experts"...

The main method of analyze is the content analysis. The methodological approach is qualitative.

The number of programs analyzed followed the logic of information saturation.

This analysis is focused on certain messages promoted explicit and implicit by mass media from the perspective of the a diversity of interests of those that promote them.

Even though the TV stations addressed have different political and ideological orientations and interests, the analysis does not go in the direction of individualizing these, but identifies a body of common interests and media stereotypes that abound in public debates addressing the issue of the impact of policies on social justice.

The analysis of the ideological orientation of each of these stations will represent a research approach that will continue this approach that is still in an exploratory phase.

Data analysis

Although the causes of the two crisis situations analyzed comparatively here are different, the effects are largely similar and require equally urgent measures to reduce spending.

Starting from the urgency of rebalancing the budget, in both situations analyzed there are three dimensions of the public debate:

- one dimension aims to analyze the causes of the budget deficit, an analysis focused largely on the analysis of state spending
- a second dimension aims to identify solutions to rebalance the budget deficit
- a third dimension of the debates concerns those "responsible" for the budget deficit - while the analysis of budget expenditures is rather neutral, the "beneficiaries" of these expenditures are viewed in a very different way.

Depending on the perceived desirability of the categories to which the proposed measures are addressed, they are considered, in turn, desirable or less desirable.

The context in which the following analysis will be made is defined by three benchmarks:

1. Macroeconomic data: GDP, public spending, as % of GDP by areas; average salary, median salary, minimum salary, average pension; ratio between the average pension and the average pension of a hyper-privileged area - that of magistrates.

2. The impact of the proposed measures on the state budget

3. The impact of these measures on social equity (justice)

Starting from the real situation - the one defined by statistical data, the desire to reduce the budget deficit would theoretically involve the selection of measures with maximum economic impact and which aim to reduce social inequality

In fact, the options considered desirable are, in most public debates, largely different from those that follow the logic presented above.

A first step of the analysis is to identify, through content analysis of the aforementioned TV shows, those budget deficit reduction measures that are the subject of debates in the visual media.

Excessive budget deficit - debate topics in the media

Causes

- Public spending: Salaries of public servants/not and the one occasioned by the accelerated increase in pensions starting with 2024
- Salaries and allowances in Regulatory Authorities and Public Companies Special pensions Social benefits/not and the "mother's allowance,,

Measures to reduce the deficit: increases in taxes and fees versus expenditure reductions

Increases in taxes and fees

- Increase in VAT
- Increase in the dividend taxation
- Increase in taxes on high incomes-progressive tax
- Introduction of health insurance payment to pensioners, child-rearing allowance.
- Increase in taxes and decrease in tax ceilings for microenterprises Solidarity taxes - Introduction of health insurance payment for certain exempt categories until 2024-areas: IT, food industry

Expenditure reductions

- Cutting public sector salaries
- Decreasing the number of public sector employees / staff layoffs

Privileged categories/responsible for increasing the deficit

Employees paid from public funds :budget employees; employees of Regulatory Authorities and State-owned Companies - especially directors and members of the Boards of Directors

Further, I will summarize the deficit reduction measures from 3 perspectives: the media's perception of their desirability; the impact on the budget; and the impact on social equity. The reference framework against which the identified measures will be analyzed is built starting from the analysis of statistical data and legislation carried out within this project within which the analysis proposed here is carried out. I will present, synthetically, some of the conclusions resulting from this analysis, started 15 years ago (synthesis from Preotesi, 2010, 2015, 2018, 2020, 2023, 2024) In a European context, capital taxation in Romania is at a low level, and labor taxation, especially of low wages, is significantly higher than the European

average; The minimum wage and even the median wage in Romania do not cover the minimum cost necessary to ensure a decent living; The health insurance system is unbalanced - over two-thirds of those insured do not contribute to the payment of health insurance. A significant part of those who contribute have lower incomes than a significant part of those who do not contribute, although they benefit to a greater extent - here the discussion concerns retirees with pensions above the minimum wage level in the economy. The payment of the contribution was proposed only as a measure for a fixed period (2 years) and only the part of the pension exceeding 3000 lei is valid. This exemption addressed to all 4.7 million retirees has a significant impact on the health insurance budget. The child-raising allowance, although necessary and beneficial, privileges parents with high incomes. The amount of 85% of the average income in the last year, corroborated with the condition of having had income in the last two years, does not characterize a contributory benefit, but one that imposes a contributory condition - neither the tax exemption nor the differentiation of the payment according to the beneficiary's income is justified from a moral point of view (analysis that I did in Preotesi, 2018)

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Over 1.2 million employees in Romania are paid the minimum wage in the economy. Over 80% of them are employees in the private sector.

The share of employees with higher education is significantly higher in the category of those paid from the public budget compared to those in the private sector - the comparison regarding the average salary of the two categories is not relevant.

The defense and public order system, the education system and the health system, which together include over 60% of the total number of public sector employees, are facing chronic staff shortages. The situation is also present in most of

the central and local administration system. Without a doubt, there are also areas where staff is surplus, but the problem must be treated with nuances...

The law on the uniform remuneration of personnel paid from public funds is not applied, even 15 years after the adoption of its first form, amended three times in the last 15 years. The discrepancies between categories of employees with similar levels of education and work responsibility are very large - none of the forms of this law only partially resolves these discrepancies.

The idea of such a law is, in itself, a correct one, by trying to introduce some structuring principles, meant to establish a certain order in the chaotic system of public payroll.

In fact, however, all 3 variants of this law, despite some declarations of good intentions from the perspective mentioned above, legitimize the perpetuation of a situation characterized by the unbalanced distribution of the salary level for certain categories of employees, with the obvious privilege of some of them and the clear disadvantage of most of them. Most of the positions, including for specialists with higher education, are positioned on the lower section of the salary distribution - on a scale of 1-15, most of these positions are found below the scale value 4 (Preotesi, 2024).

A significant part of the middle class, of which a significant part is found among employees paid from public revenues, have a salary level at or below the limit of ensuring a decent living. Another part, much less numerous, have public income that brings them closer, rather, to the upper class...

The significant increase in pensions in 2024 has a very large budgetary impact, being one of the causes of the excessive budget deficit - not being correlated with a correlative increase in budget revenues; Although the increase was necessary, the way it was done rather increased social injustice - the average pension increased by 1000 lei, but the increases were small for pensioners on the verge of survival and much more important for those who already had pensions that ensured a decent living.

The status of a part of the employees and a significant part of the members of the Boards of Directors and managers of State-owned Companies, Autonomous Regions and Regulatory Authorities is a privileged one compared to that of employees paid from the state budget. The argument of self-financing is incorrect, especially since most of them receive massive subsidies from the state budget or/and operate as monopolies or oligopolies...

Measures to reduce the deficit. Media attitudes. Economic impact. Social justice impact

Measures to reduce the deficit	Support/rejection in the media	National budget impact	Social justice impact
Increases in taxes and fees (general)	High rejection	High positive	Neutral (Differential)
Increase in VAT	Moderate rejection	High positive	High negative
Increase in the dividend taxation	High rejection	Moderate positive	Moderate positive
Increase in taxes on high incomes-progressive tax	Very high rejection-red line	Moderate positive	High positive
Increase in taxes and decrease in tax ceilings for microenterprises	High rejection	Moderate positive	Moderate positive
Introducing the obligation to pay health insurance to categories that were previously exempt from paying this tax: pensioners - for the part of the pension that exceeds 3,000 lei	High rejection	High positive	High positive
Introducing the obligation to pay health insurance to categories that were previously exempt from paying this tax: child-raising allowance	Very high rejection	Moderate positive	Moderate positive
Introducing a solidarity tax on high incomes	Very high rejection-red line	Moderate positive	High positive
National budget expenditure reductions	High support	High positive	Neutral (Differential)
Cutting public sector salaries by an equal percentage for everyone	Moderate support	High positive	High negative
Decreasing the number of public sector employees / staff layoffs	Very high support	High positive	High negative
Cutting/reducing special pensions	Very high support	Moderate positive	High positive
Increasing of minimum wage	High rejection	Moderate positive	High positive
Increasing of all pensions or, at least indexation of pensions correlate with the inflation rate	High support	High negative	Differential-positive impact regarding the increase in indexation of small pensions, rather negative, in the hypothesis of indexing all pensions by the same percentage.
Increasing the wages/indexation with the inflation rate	Moderate rejection	Moderate negative	Moderate positive

By superimposing the impact on the budget and on the level of social equity, assessed according to the criteria and data presented, over the perceptions mostly expressed in the visual media on these measures, we identified several clusters.

Cluster 1

Increase in taxes on high incomes-progressive tax	Very high rejection-red line	Moderate positive	High positive
Introducing the obligation to pay health insurance to categories that were previously exempt from paying this tax: pensioners - for the part of the pension that exceeds 3,000 lei	High rejection	High positive	High positive
Introducing the obligation to pay health insurance to categories that were previously exempt from paying this tax: child-raising allowance	Very high rejection	Moderate positive	Moderate positive
Introducing a solidarity tax on high incomes	Very high rejection-red line	Moderate positive	High positive
Increases in taxes and fees (general)	High rejection	High positive	Neutral (Differential)

The first cluster includes 5 of the total 15 measures analyzed. All these 5 measures are considered highly undesirable in the vast majority of media interventions in which they are analyzed. Although they would have a significant positive impact on the budget and are rather positive from the perspective of social equity, but they are vehemently rejected. The interests and stereotypes that generate such an attitude will be analyzed in the last section of this article.

Cluster 2

Cutting/reducing special pensions	Very high support	Moderate positiv	High positive
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The second cluster includes only one measure, that of reducing the so-called special pensions, with a focus on the very high ones - in this situation, retired magistrates are found almost exclusively. It is the only measure in which the analysis from the perspective of the positive impact on the budget and social equity overlaps with a highly supportive attitude of the mass media.

Cluster 3

Cutting public sector salaries by an equal percentage for everyone	Moderate support	High positive	High negative
Decreasing the number of public sector employees / staff layoffs	Very high support	High positive	High negative

The third cluster includes 2 measures, both addressed to public sector employees. In general, cutting salaries and the number of public sector employees can bring major savings to the budget. In the media, even if there are more nuanced analyses, the option of cutting the number and value of salaries by equal percentages also seems to be accepted. In these debates, the proposed exceptions do not refer to those with low or average salaries, but to the differentiated importance they give to the activity of some public sector employees, compared to others.

Cluster 4.

Increase in the dividend taxation	High rejection	Moderate positive	Moderate positive
Increase in taxes and decrease in tax ceilings for microenterprises	High rejection	Moderate positive	Moderate positive
Increasing of minimum wage	High rejection	Moderate positiv	High positive

The fourth cluster includes measures addressed to the business environment. Any tax increases are rejected, in the aforementioned context, in which taxation of the business environment is at a low level, in a European context. Although some economic arguments may prove their relevance, the vehemence with which any measure of tax increases (or spending, in the case of the minimum wage in the economy) is excluded, a priori, most of the time, excludes the nuances and rational approach.

Media discours/political discourse on social equity

There are several categories of convergent interests from the perspective of a significant part of the political elite, as well as from the perspective of representatives of the mediocratic and intellectual elites (Preotesi, 2015). The message promoted is actually a more general one and represents a combination of a right-wing pseudo-ideology and a populism taken, in some cases, to the extreme. Although it contains contradictory elements, this type of message is a successful one, being, at the same time, a manipulative one, but also one legitimized by previous manipulations.

The obsessive repetition of stereotypes and their dissemination through media invested with public trust generates a social acceptance of them as absolute truths, and the mere questioning of them instantly culpables the one who initiates it.

Meritorious versus undesirables. Media stereotypes

The same media stereotypes persist, after almost 15 years, and target:

- meritorious categories: pensioners, private employees, private employers;
- undesirable categories: budget employees, employers from public institutions;
- desirable rights/obligations (of desirable categories) versus undesirable rights/

obligations (of undesirable categories)

- imperative obligations versus optional obligations -intangible/earned rights versus rights that can be restricted

One of these stereotypes (persistent also, in 2025) is that the private sector is good, in itself, and the state is bad, in itself. A corollary of this reasoning presented in a simplified form is that taxes are bad and the lower they are, the better for everyone. At the same time, the quality of underfunded public services, such as health and education, is criticized. In addition to lowering taxes, the salaries of doctors and teachers should also be increased, and all this without making any kind of income redistribution or any kind of tax increase. Pensions should also increase, while contributions to the social security system should decrease.

The contradictions of simultaneously promoting such messages are, as obvious as they are little discussed in the public space.

Such a model of public discourse is promoted by an intellectual elite, which supports through its activity the complicity between the economic elite that also owns the important means of communication and to which it is subordinate, and the political elite, on the other hand (Preotesi, 2015). The treatment with different measures applied to some or other of the social categories is part of an approach dominated by an electoralist paradigm, which aims to resonate with the many, who become important precisely because they are many and can bring votes, on the one hand, and ratings for television, on the other.

A category of secondary interests that was also analyzed in this paper (Preotesi, 2015) concerns certain characters who became public and legitimated through this type of attitude, as a sufficient condition, even in the absence of any other qualities, and who have gained a certain notoriety through which they further promote their own image, becoming either "analysts" or simply commentators on social, economic and political events. Some of these initially appeared as

representatives of unions, employers' associations or simply protest movements, but continue to populate, as a kind of residue of intense burning from periods of incandescent debates, a current scene of rather dull debates.

Beside the "undesirable budgetary employees" and "the heroes of the private sector", in 2025, as in 2011, there is a media consensus (in this case, only on certain television channels, it is true) on the "absolute evil", responsible for all problems, including those related to the budget deficit. If in 2011 the "absolute evil" and the cause of all the socioeconomic problems was the president at that time then and his "regime", the new scapegoat may have become the "resisters", the absolute evil being identified this time, outside, in the person of the American philanthropist George Soros. In another context, the culprits back then were the Basists, while now they are the "Sorosists"...

Instead of conclusions

In 2025, as in 2011, debates about social justice return to the public sphere in the context of an economic/budgetary crisis. The measures identified as desirable, even if declaratively, aims to reduce social injustice, in fact, increase it. Media stereotypes overlap with some social stereotypes that they validate, to a large extent. Positive measures are addressed to the "deserving", negative ones to the "undesirable"... The rights of some are more important than those of others, the most important being those of the most "undesirable" of the "undesirables", those with great pressure power and privileged status. While the "undesirables", as well as the "desirables" without political power, will once again pay the price of the populism of the governors - validated by media populism - the privileged will remain with the privileges. After debates very similar to the current ones, in 2010, the solution to the excessive deficit was massive cuts in public sector salaries, protection of pensions - including the "very special" ones, and an increase in VAT - with major effects on the vulnerable people (included pensioners, employees with low and medium income - with major effects on the most vulnerable).

Low and middle incomes have been and will be eroded by inflation, which has a much greater impact on low incomes. Pensioners and employees with low and middle incomes will be

the most affected by austerity measures, those with high and very high incomes will remain largely immune to the social solidarity effort, supported only by those in the first category...

Even when excesses and inequities are correctly denounced by the media and debated, the approach to solutions is predominantly legalistic, without a sufficiently substantiated moral basis. And, in the absence of a real connection between morality and justice, social injustice becomes desirable, and the fact that the rights of some are more important and intangible than those of others becomes acceptable.

Some salaries of employees paid from public funds, which exceed three times the salary of the country's president, to which huge bonuses are added, cannot be reached, unlike salaries 10 times lower, which can be cut with bonuses considered infamous and treated as such in the media...

The directors of state-owned companies, autonomous governments or regulatory authorities, with salaries higher than those of managers of multinational companies, cannot be dismissed or have their incomes reduced. The explanation that ends any public debate on this topic is that "they have armored contracts"... While, in the case of the vast majority of employees, whether they are state-owned or in the private sector, neither their job nor their salary are not protected by such contracts.

Such debates on complex topics, such as those related to the relationship between rights and justice, are missing from the media landscape, populated, for the most part, by mediocrity and motivations generated by petty interests. I chose to conclude the analysis with such assessments, largely subjective, but which capitalize on a substantial experience of direct interaction with visual media, during the 15 years between the two moments of crisis addressed from the perspective of the debate on social justice.

There is no doubt that there are also deep and well-argued debates

On the other hand, the differences between the television stations are important, both from the perspective of ideological positioning and the interests they represent, and from the perspective of the quality of the journalistic act. This nuanced analysis will be carried out in the continuation of this research approach, which is still a work in progress. The analysis presented here only targeted the themes of debates in crisis situations from the perspective of social justice, in relation to which we identified common patterns across all these TV stations.

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