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Primitive accumulation of capital

Petre Popovăț



A friend showed me, in a street behind the blocks of flats in Colentina, a restaurant which seemed to have appeared there out of the blue and which was owned by a Gypsy. The story of the place was very simple.

In the winter of 1990, the man planted a collapsible table in front of his house and he started selling Carpați cigarettes for 3 lei each (instead of 2,50) and beer in one-litre bottles for 10 lei (instead of 8). He had a lot of clients in that poor district, considering the fact that our factories produced too little and the market was over saturated with goods we hadn't seen before, like American cigarettes and German beer, which were sold at prices that were too high for the common people.

After a period of prosperous business, the entrepreneur built a small stand in his yard. Now he also sold biscuits, chocolate, chewing-gum, instant coffee etc. He probably got them through the minor smuggling activities from Turkey and Yugoslavia. The business kept prospering and that was how the restaurant appeared. The friend who showed it to me was almost outraged at the idea that a "nobody" (and a Gypsy on top of everything) had become the owner of a restau-

rant. And he also criticized the building itself which, to be honest, was in the worst taste imaginable with a *jet-d'eau* from plaster representing some angels, all erected straight in the middle of the front yard.

My friend was wrong. Although in May 1990, following the almost disastrous sale of a small flat, I had placed a rather handsome sum of money in a bank account, I still wasted my time in front of the TV watching the debates in Parliament from dusk till dawn, I almost lost my voice shouting at meetings organized by the Opposition that Ilescu should leave Romania and spent hours in the University Square. Meanwhile, our Gypsy man was busy carrying bearings to Istanbul and bringing back blue jeans. The obvious result? He had accumulated a capital (even if his business was on the very edge of legality), and I had squandered mine until I got to live off a lousy state salary. Who had been the smarter of the two? Whose character had been stronger? These are questions I can't answer. But I can certainly say who the winner was.

Translated by Alina Popescu

