

Man attempts suicide in Romanian parliament

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The unprecedented austerity measures imposed by the conservative government of Emil Boc in Romania is leading to increasingly extreme protests by those who face growing poverty and a lack of perspective in what many now call the “the land of no opportunities”.

On December 23, a sitting of the Romanian parliament was forced to recess following a shocking incident. Adrian Sobaru, a 40-year-old man working as an electrician at the national television station (TVR), tried to commit suicide by jumping from the balcony of the parliament. The tragedy was caught on camera.

The man was wearing a white shirt on which he had written: “You shot bullets at us, you have destroyed our children’s future, you have sold us.” Standing on the edge of the balcony, Sobaru shouted “Boc, you killed my family! You’ve taken the bread from the mouth of my children. For you, Boc!” He then jumped into the plenary hall from a height of about six meters.

Sobaru sustained facial wounds and other threatening injuries. According to medical staff at the University Hospital, he will undergo surgery and psychological counselling. According to his relatives as well as specialists, his act was the result of despair resulting from his own plight and that of his family in particular.

The 40-year-old man was unable to offer a chance to his child suffering from autism. His income has been seriously affected and support that should be offered to him by the state is non-existent. He plunged into a serious depression. The man’s despairing act was clearly aimed at the government headed by Prime Minister Emil Boc.

Andrian Sobaru’s colleagues have provided some insight into his desperate living conditions. His income as the father of a sick child had been cut by the Boc government from 550 lei (US\$160) to 150 lei (US\$45).

One commented: “One of his children has autism. In recent years, he no longer received free medication for the treatment and one therapy session alone costs 200 lei (US\$55). The child needed three therapy sessions per week and he earns around 1000-1200 lei (around US\$350) per month. Even if he spent his entire income for the treatment, the money would cover only half of the 12 therapy sessions needed.”

The cuts introduced last year by the government affect every sphere of society and include huge reductions in public service and cuts to pensions, education and the health service.

The government has cut public service wages by 24 percent. At the same time, value added tax on basic commodities has been increased from 19 to 24 percent.

The case of Sobaru makes clear the consequences of these cuts. Romania lacks any specialised centres where children with autism can be treated. The number of specialists is limited and treatment, can exceed €1,500 per month, meaning many children are denied treatment.

Speaking after the suicide attempt, Prime Minister Boc denied any responsibility for the tragedy and declared that the protest would not affect the course of his government. He stated: “We know and understand that many Romanians have a hard life ... These are difficult times we have to live through ... The solution to the problems we have is not the one we have witnessed today.”

The attempted suicide in the Romanian parliament is not the only such tragedy. Recently a similar incident took place at the headquarters of the country’s national television station, TVR. On November 18, a 45-year-old electrician was found hanged in the basement. Investigators have concluded that the man chose to end his life because he had accumulated far more debt than

he could pay, and he had reached the brink of despair. The dimensions of the drama were even bigger since the TVR employee has left behind two children, a wife and a mother, who was paralysed when she received news of the death of her son.

According to the statistics of the Public Health Institute, the number of suicides in Romania has almost doubled in 2010 and there is no end in sight to the austerity measures driving increasing numbers of people to desperation.

A report in the *Financial Times* points out that Romania is subject to more stringent austerity measures than either the ailing economies of Portugal or Greece. These cuts are affecting a population that has already suffered greatly during the last 20 years since the downfall of the Stalinist regime. The Romanian economy is expected to shrink by a further 2 percent in 2011 and analysts anticipate that the government will introduce additional austerity measures later this year. On the government agenda are more cuts to public service jobs, wage cuts and the wide-scale closure of state facilities and institutions.

GNP has shrunk in this Balkan country for the third year in row with only Latvia, Estonia and Ireland posting worse results in the European Union.



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