

ROMANIAN RESEARCH: BETWEEN SURVIVAL AND DIGNITY

Flavius Cristian MĂRCĂU¹

There is a heavy silence that has loomed for far too long over the research laboratories of Romania. It is not the silence of focus or creativity, but one of absence, frustration, and the accumulated fatigue in the face of unfulfilled promises. While other countries are investing heavily in research and innovation - understanding that these are the backbone of long-term development - Romania remains trapped in a cycle of delays, chronic underfunding, and the systematic marginalization of scientific research.

For years, Romanian research has been operating in emergency mode. Funding programs are inconsistent and unpredictable, and when they do exist, they often arrive late or are vastly inadequate for the real needs of the scientific community. This is not just about missed grants or outdated infrastructure. It is about an entire institutional culture that seems incapable of grasping a simple truth: science cannot flourish without respect, without coherence, and without a foundation of mutual trust between the state and its researchers. And this lack of commitment is starkly reflected in one telling figure: €19.1 per capita - that's how much Romania allocated for research in 2024. It is the lowest amount in the European Union, a negative record that should not only alarm us but awaken a sense of urgency and responsibility.

This state of affairs has deep consequences, rarely visible in headlines, yet slowly eroding the very foundation of an already fragile society. Young people who dream of a career in research often find themselves trapped in a system that offers neither security nor hope. Many choose to leave - not out of selfishness, but from a natural desire to fulfill their potential in places where it is recognized and supported.

Those who remain fight each day not only for their ideas but also for professional survival. It is an unequal struggle in which they are often forced to compensate for institutional shortcomings through personal effort, financial sacrifice, and unpaid labor. Papers are written, experiments are conducted, students are mentored - all under conditions that, elsewhere in the world, would be considered unacceptable.

And yet, science is still being done in Romania. Despite all obstacles, Romanian researchers continue to publish in international journals, to participate in European projects, and to preserve their professional dignity. This speaks to an admirable resilience - but also to a glaring imbalance: individual enthusiasm cannot indefinitely make up for a lack of political will or institutional vision.

The paradox is striking: Romania does not suffer from a shortage of intelligence or human potential. We are not facing a "brain crisis," but a crisis of respect for those brains.

¹ Editor in Chef, RST Journal and Lecturer PhD., „Constantin Brâncuși” University of Târgu Jiu, flavius@rstjournal.com

Every researcher who leaves, every project that goes unfunded, every idea that remains on paper is a lost opportunity - not just for academia, but for society as a whole.

In the absence of a coherent strategy, research remains hostage to improvisation. In some fields, funding depends on the political whim of the moment, circumstantial interests, or the ability of certain institutions to access external sources. This creates a reality that deeply weakens the entire scientific ecosystem in Romania and makes it dependent on unpredictable factors.

Moreover, the lack of consistent funding exerts a corrosive pressure on research ethics. In the scramble for scarce resources, unfortunate outcomes emerge: rushed publications, forced project frameworks, and unfair competition. Rather than supporting quality and originality, the system sometimes seems to reward quantity and conformity, turning research into a bureaucratic routine rather than an authentic act of discovery.

In the long run, this situation produces effects that extend far beyond the academic sphere. Without strong research, we cannot have quality education, evidence-based public policies, technological innovation, or local solutions to global problems. Romania risks becoming a society that merely consumes the ideas of others, without meaningfully contributing to the shared progress of humanity.

It is time for the conversation around research to step out of technical reports and enter the public consciousness. We need to talk about researchers not only when they win international awards, but also when they are forced to pay for their own lab supplies. We must understand that investment in science is not a cost - it is a wager on the future.

As editor-in-chief of several scientific journals, and as a reviewer for multiple international publications, I see month after month promising articles, valuable findings, and ideas that could reshape entire fields - if only they were adequately supported. Our role, as members of the academic community, is not to remain silent. We must publicly and persistently advocate for fair, predictable, and transparent funding of Romanian research. We must demand more from our institutions, and in return, offer professionalism and integrity.

We cannot expect excellence without resources. We cannot speak of progress without vision. And if we want Romania to be respected in Europe and in the world, we must start by respecting the science we produce at home.

„Without research, a nation lives off the ideas of others and dies in its own ignorance”