

Main Views in Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu’s Economic Thought

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Abstract

Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu (1838-1907) was a historian, a philologist, an economist, a poet and a politician from Bessarabia, a descendent of a family of scholars. He was one of the most representative Romanian personalities of the 19th century. In his economic works he discussed the issues of Romania’s economic development, both from an industrial and an agricultural viewpoint. As far as doctrine is concerned, he was a supporter of protectionism. The aim of the paper is to identify the specific characteristics of Hașdeu’s economic thinking and to analyze his main ideas from a historical point of view.

Key words: nationalism, manufacture, protectionism, anti-semitism, land reform

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1. Introduction

Culturally speaking, he continued the old Romanian encyclopedia tradition launched by the writings of Dimitrie Cantemir, alongside prominent intellectuals such as Gheorghe Lazăr, Ion Heliade Rădulescu, Alexandru Odobescu, Mihai Eminescu, or Nicolae Iorga. “Young genius, gentleman, master of all instruments of romantic knowledge (...) who knows he is predestined and trusts his star” as Mircea Eliade described him, Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu wrote about himself that he „enjoyed going off the beaten path (...) fiercely despising money and the day to come”, which made him “confident in his own scientific curiosity” (Hașdeu, 1937, p. XLIX). Petriceicu Hașdeu studied in Vinnita, Cămența, Chișinău, as well as at the University of Kharkiv. He was a judge, a professor and the director of the National Archives, and in 1877 he was elected member of the Romanian Academy. As a Member of Parliament, he militated for Cuza’s reforms to be put into practice and he was an adversary of the “junimists” (supporters of *Junimea*), whom he considered to be cosmopolite.

His economic scientific research went into brochures, studies and articles in the written press of his times, but only for a short period of time, of only six years, which made C. Murgescu consider that the author “proved to possess a vast economic culture that in his opinion was not surpassed by any of the last century’s economists” (Murgescu, 1994, p. 219). His economic thought is to be seized in his literary and historical works as well.

2. Theoretical background

Bogdan Petriceicu-Hașdeu was a noticeable successor of the 1848 ideology and his economic patriotism was based upon ethnic principles. The opposite of patriotism was cosmopolitanism (in “non-national” countries such as Switzerland and the USA (Neumann, Heinen, 2010, p. 119-120). Preoccupied by Romania’s modern development, Hașdeu fought to support the authentic national values and criticized the tendencies to imitate and serve the western civilization. He believed that the past was the supreme argument for national specificity. Romania’s progressive evolution was to reflect the specificity and the originality of the Romanian nationality, and in order to achieve this goal it was necessary to give the land to its owners, to create a powerful national industry, to introduce universal vote and national education.

“The great nationalist”, as Mircea Eliade called him (Haşdeu, op.cit., p. XXXIX), had as his primary concern to state some state policy recommendations to insure the development of the Romanian economy, just as V. Slăvescu had noticed, in attempting to define Haşdeu’s doctrinary orientation: ” Haşdeu the nationalist influenced and determined Haşdeu the economist” (Slăvescu, 1943, p. 12). Opponent of the free trade theory and supporter of the protectionist doctrine thought out by List, Haşdeu aligned with Dionisie Pop Marţian’s view and tried to adapt the theoretical and practical norms of protectionism to the specific interests of the Romanian economy of his times. Pointing out the flaws of „cosmopolitanism” which appeared naturally („just as climate brought about plague and locusts in Egypt”) in federal states such as the USA and Switzerland (in which nationality did not exist), Bogdan Petriceicu Haşdeu gave France as an example, where the „death of the nationalist spirit” by adopting the cult of universality had bad outcomes. „Nationality is for a people what originality is for an individual” (Haşdeu, vol. II, op.cit., p. 123). He wrote that he considered nationalism a basic condition for novel ideas to immerge and for the peak of progress to be reached. Haşdeu harshly criticized free trade as being one of the causes of Romania’s economic offset as it favored the interests of the more industrialized countries such as France or England.

3. Research methodology

In writing the paper, we have consulted a rich bibliography and we have synthesized the most relevant points of view regarding the major coordinates of Haşdeu’s thinking. Based upon systematic research of the original editions of Haşdeu’s writings, we have identified his most remarkable opinions on the fundamental problems of the Romanian economy. Syntopic reading has led us to an in-depth understanding of the solutions that Haşdeu thought of for the development of industry and agriculture in our country, which proves that he was a patriot and a economic nationalist.

4. The manufacturing industry – the key to insure Romania’s economic independence

In 1866 Haşdeu published a paper titled „The National Industry. The Foreign Industry and the Jewish Industry as opposed to the Principle of Competition” in which he harshly criticized the theory of free trade: “Let us ask ourselves if it is possible to have free trade between a master and a slave, between an athlete and a pigmy, between a philosopher and an idiot, between a man and a boy, between a rich man and a poor man, between a man with a gun and a man with a stick, between one nation and another.” (Slăvescu, op.cit. p. 62). From a national point of view, free trade clearly gives the advantage to the more developed nation while for the other nation it means “slavery”.

Concerned with Romania’s future, as a developed and independent nation, Haşdeu asked for a powerful national industry to be created. He was the adversary of the „pernicious doctrine of agricultural exclusivism” put forward by N. Şuţu, D. P. Martian and Ion Ionescu de la Brad. In his 1869 paper “Agriculture and Manufacture” he pointed out that the lack of a manufacturing industry in an agrarian country leads to despotism (the exploitation of the agrarian population), to the domination of the agrarian nation by the foreign countries, and especially to “extreme viciousness” because if there is nothing else besides agriculture there is no freedom, and the “growth of everything comes from freedom” (Slăvescu, op.cit., p. 73). From this point of view, Bogdan Petriceicu Haşdeu laid the foundation of his doctrine upon reviewing the main existing schools of economic thought. He distinguished two main schools or systems of economic thought, according to the subordination between two fundamental concepts – humanity and nationality:

- the Humanitarian School (classical liberalism represented by A. Smith and his followers)
- the National School (the historical school of the German economists led by F. List)

5. Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu’s semi-Anti-Semitism

Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu started from the observation that most notorious economists (Smith, Quesnay, Sismondi, Turgot, Say, Malthus) were born and died poor and identified the exception to the rule: David Ricardo. And he offered an explanation: the Jewish origin of the famous economist! Through his statements, Hașdeu fully stated and supported his anti-Semitism. Though, Hașdeu’s anti-Semitism has to be translated as a constitutive element of his nationalist convictions that he used to explain the evolution and historical role of the Jewish population in Romania. In his 1868 paper titled *Istoria toleranței religioase în România* (The History of Religious Tolerance in Romania) Hașdeu made an analysis of the Jewish presence in Romania throughout history and emphasized a fundamental historical truth: Romanians have always had a tolerant attitude towards the Jews (Pecican, 2004, p. 119, p. 199). He did not propose the extermination of the Jews, but rather an equal treatment for them and for the rest of the „foreigners”. This is the key of his stance: he did not hate the Jew but rather their economic “habits” as a character included in the archetype of the “foreigner” who harms the country.

In his opinion, the Jews had three negative traits (Slăvescu, op.cit., p. 65-67):

The first one – the tendency to earn without working, since the Jews traded mainly with money and in shops. Since the Jews did not work and did not produce anything, the consequence was depicted by Hașdeu in a somber picture: „In the foreground, the numerous ones, the lazy ones. The lazy ones, the rich ones. The rich ones, the Jews. In the background: the few, the industrious. The industrious, the poor. The poor, the nation.”

The second one – the lack of shame and consequently the lack of dignity. Thus, they ended up getting rich quickly and easily, especially thought “fraud in everything”, through “usury smuggling, prostitution”, through “bankruptcy, espionage, bribery”.

The third one – the hate for the other peoples, since the Jews acted as members of “an association of mutual aid against all the other people”.

Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu was aware of the critical need for domestic capital in order to create a national industry, so that he constantly insisted upon the state’s strong intervention to insure the development of the Romanian industry. In his 1870 article *Ocnele în România* (Salt Mines in Romania) he asked for the development of the extraction industry to be supported indirectly, presently and efficiently at the same time. Since European countries already had a protectionist attitude towards the importation of Romanian salt, Hașdeu suggested creating a domestic fish and meat salt preservation industry. The country’s potential profits could have greatly increased as a result of exporting salt-preserved produces since „ the difference in profit between a live cow and the identical quantity of preserved beef was similar to the difference between the raw material and the manufactured goods” (Slăvescu, op.cit., p. 129). Through his rationale in terms of economic efficiency of exportations, Hașdeu brilliantly prefigured Mihail Manoilescu. Even if Romania had abundant raw materials (salt mines, rivers, pastures), two more things were needed: “sounder minds instead of showmen and Romanian politics instead of cosmopolitanism...” (Slăvescu, op.cit., p 130).

6. A sui generis land reform

In his economic writings, Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu did not neglect agriculture as the main branch of the Romanian economy. Against the conflict between the conservative boyars and the progressist liberal forces, he published the study titled *Mosiile statului* (The Domains of the State) in 1871, in which he established solutions to the two great problems of the peasantry: the lack of land and the low standard of living.

As far as the first problem was concerned, Hașdeu suggested leasing the land of the state through *emphyteusis*, which was “leasing a piece of land for a long period of time, up to 99 years, during which the tenant, called embatic, obtained full ownership of the land” (Constantinescu, 1974, p. 297). Even though it implied an advantageous lease payment for the peasant-the lease was to be paid fully after the first 20 years, half or a third of it upon the signing of the contract and the rest over the remaining 19 years (Slăvescu,op.cit., p. 143) -emphyteusis did not fundamentally solve the problem as it did not mean a reduction of the lease that was usually paid. The advantages

were only psychological (“having no illusions, he could not suffer from disillusion” (Slăvescu, op. cit., p. 142). The peasant did not recall every year that he was not a mere tenant, but a landowner. (Constantinescu, 1968, p. 371).

As far as the second problem was concerned, the improvement of the peasantry’s living standard, Hașdeu put forth the idea that the state should instate on its land “model farms” and “model villages” that were to insure economic conditions (credit, communications, irrigations), intellectual conditions (education, religion, military service) and hygienic conditions (housing, clothing, food, hospitals) meant to upgrade the peasant’s material and moral status.

7. Conclusions

Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu was a patriot and a democrat, and he loved his people and he loved freedom. He did not stop at stating and scientifically supporting his economic and social ideas, he also presented a program to reform the Romanian society as a whole, which can be resumed in 8 points (Hașdeu, op. cit., vol. I, p. LXVI-LXVII):

1. Good governing (“ministry and administrative responsibility”)
2. Arming the country
3. Education
4. Proper budget policy (“rigorous financial control”)
5. Standing against the “Jewish invasion”
6. Fighting against the interference of foreigners in the country’s affairs (nationalism and “Romanianism”)
7. Freedom of speech and universal vote
8. Opposition to the “boyars’ tendencies

Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu’s writings have an important place in our economic literature and they distinguish themselves through cohesion and clarity, while the solid arguments for the author’s beliefs rest upon the rich information and the exact knowledge of the doctrinaire corpus of the well established foreign economists. The main coordinate in Hașdeu’s economic thought was the study of the Romanian economic realities, mainly its economic independence. His greatest merit was probably the fact that he explicitly stated the need to develop a domestic industry *avant la lettre* and against the dominant concepts of those times. Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu is a rare example of a scholar who studied economic life from a multi-disciplinary perspective. The passing of time has validated his economic ideas and he remains “one of the most amazing geniuses that the Romanian people has produced” (Hașdeu, vol. I, op.cit., p. LXXX):

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