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Article

The Market for Ideas. For Common Sense Elites

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THE MARKET FOR IDEAS For Common Sense Elites

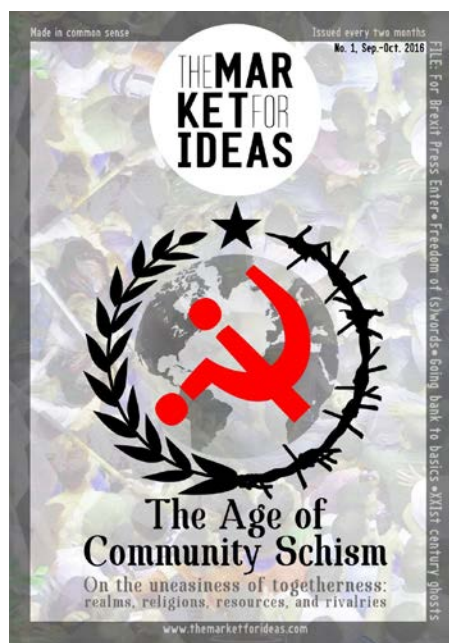
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A truth that is so well known that to reference it has become a cliché is that Romanian society is in a long and arduous transition, beset by internal setbacks and by external challenges. Having chosen a Euro-Atlantic future, through integration in the EU and NATO, Romania finds that, along with opportunities, numerous uncertainties and risks have manifested themselves along the way. To get in was not enough. We must leverage our new status to the best of our abilities and build the pillars of a successful society, from economics to rule of law and social policy, every one of these creating some sort of capital, whether financial, social or institutional that will lead to the fulfilment of the common good and to higher living standards. However, we have arrived on the scene in a period when old certainties are being shaken up and the status-quo's lacks and faults are being exposed, with the attendant disruption, uncertainty and crisis of confidence. The roosters are coming home to roost for the West and its particular models and Romania must, regardless of what shall happen in the future, be confident and able enough not just to unthinkingly emulate the West, but to critique this heritage in order to ensure that we have kept what is best and most useful to place our development on a more sustainable footing.

During these troubled times, we have launched **The Market for Ideas**



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(www.themarketforideas.com) – a both print and online magazine for consumers and producers of ideas –, addressed to elites and, crucially, to people who strive for that status. It was self-evident to the masterminds of established democracies in the West that, beyond their role in guiding their nation, they also served as models for people to follow on the road to forming a better citizenry. That emulation started with engagement – first with ideas and then with society itself. The role of the magazine is to offer an outlet for a new level of communication of ideas and policies, without enforcing an ideological constraint on contributors, save those of common sense, decency and demonstrable argumentation. It was established under the patronage of the Romanian-American Foundation for the Promotion of Education and Culture (RAFPEC), whose projects, the most famous of which is the Romanian-American University, pursue an osmosis of appropriate values, models and knowledge from the US – and its global system of civilization – to Romania and vice versa, guided by an ethos of voluntary work and exploring new ideas through a visionary rather than utopian mindset. **The Market for Ideas** was enacted through the extraordinary support of Professor Dumitru Miron, Ph.D., President of the RAFPEC Board of Directors.

The role of **The Market for Ideas** is, in the first place, descriptive and, in the second place, prescriptive. Some of our contributors may describe reality or potential scenarios in a novel way that arouses the interest of their audience and leaves readers with a better view of certain issues. Other contributors embark on a prescriptive course, advocating for an articulate policy, a structured even if not definitive idea or simply a working insight that is useful for a stated goal. They can follow-up on the declaration with argumentation, proofs, appeals to accumulated wisdom and other devices. Having made these arguments, we hope to see the results of our platform for deliberation and honing of arguments also enter into the wider society and the public sphere, and then possibly returning for further refinement. When multiple contributors address the same topic, or go through a more detailed analysis of a subject, **The Market for Ideas** compiles “editorial dossiers”, which may be single-issue affairs or continuous additions. This will amount to an accessible body of work on various topics for a wide readership of many different professional backgrounds, but with the intellectual means of approaching the subject and understanding its nuances.

Ultimately, **The Market for Ideas** sets out to develop and exploit a niche that Romanian media has left, for the most part, untouched – middlebrow or upper middlebrow commentary on issues of major importance for our nation and our civilization. The Romanian market serves the infotainment and news areas, as well as the realm of specialists working on a different level compared to laymen. What it has lacked is middle ground where specialists and people with deep insights neither simplify their ideas until they are devoid of content and nuance, nor remain arcane and impenetrable. Such literature is the quintessence of an engaged middle class of diverse means and training, which we would like the majority of our society to become, demanding a certain level of continuous interest and accumulated knowledge and rewarding them appropriately, not least of all with the means to exert purposeful influence on our leadership. Surprisingly, it seems to us that the closest Romanian media has come to a middlebrow market is in the hobbyist department, where fans of cars, gadgets and videogames expend intellectual resources on understanding the various intricacies of their chosen passions. What was chronically flawed was the area of commentary in the civic fields, which should interest the average citizen – social issues, economics, international relations, politics, geopolitics, history of thought and peoples and many others.

If we look towards the American market, we can see that the golden age for US middle class and, via a circuitous but well understood route, this democracy came in an era when various civil society groups published middlebrow commentary to persuade and to mobilize the readers in favour of one policy or another. For instance, during its heyday, *National Review*, the flagship of American conservatism, had over one hundred thousand subscribers, but its ideas extended far beyond its still small readership through its influence on public discourse. It is still influential, along with middlebrow publications such as *Foreign Affairs*, *Claremont Review*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker* and even the venerable *The Economist*. Today, the American mainstream media may be in a crisis of finance and credibility, but the “modus operandi” of the great persuaders in society has stayed the same, only moving online and exploring new business models. The backdrop to the recent American election, with its spectacle and scandal, was that of a sustained online effort lasting several years to critique the current political, social and economic consensus and formulate alternatives which were then boiled down to the slogans and memes that won Donald Trump the election. Behind the apparent frivolity of online argumentation and trolling stood a very serious effort, both from the right and the left, to lay down coherent arguments for their respective visions. It is the modern day evolution of when an influential American magazine would write an article critiquing some policy or another, and thousands of its readers would send letters to their elected officials demanding explanations or expressing their misgivings. If Romania were to have a pluralistic and open society that pursues its collective interests with meaningful input from the population, this would be the cycle of deliberation, dissemination, upward communication and refinement that influencers must attend.

The Market for Ideas strives to become a small tribute to the idea of such a society. It will feature in its pages both well-established and developing intellectuals, Romanian as well as foreign. Publishing exclusively in English was an early choice to provide an initial filter to any potential reader and to garner more attention and implicit prestige for its high production values. We also sought a better engagement with contributors, foreign and Romanian, who are thus able to relate to their contribution and consider it part of their permanent portfolio through its publication in an international language. Also on our minds were foreign readers who want a direct take on what Romanian elites are thinking and how they are reacting to events within and beyond our borders. For **The Market for Ideas** to succeed, it needs to become a true market for ideas, rather than the display window it currently is. We need to develop a community of readers who are also contributors of ideas to our print and online editions. We need the tools to not simply churn out new content, leaving the old one out of sight, but to consider the work as an evolving body of knowledge. And, finally, we need for part of our output to consist in critiques of already published ideas, meaning that our readers should want to deliver high quality rebuttals to ideas presented in the magazine, forming an asynchronous debate that is not unlike chess by post.

Beyond sustainability, our success will be measured not in issues sold or page views, but in the influence and spread of ideas which a presence in our pages will afford to the writers.