

THE ECONOMIC STRENGTH OF WOMEN
Andreea Paul (coord.)
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The incentives for putting together this volume lie behind several questions that Andreea Paul – the volume coordinator – asked herself and her readership in order to define the reasons and context for the writing and publication of this material: How much do men and women work? Where do they work? Salary/wages? What about their welfare? How do economists define gender discrimination? What is their impact on society? How does one characterize high fliers in Romanian culture and in the culture of the rest of Europe? What about Romanian entrepreneurship? What about Romanian women entrepreneurs? Which is the economic strength of Romanian women entrepreneurs? Who are these Romanian women entrepreneurs, exactly? How did they manage in a fierce business environment? Multiple initiatives for public support of female entrepreneurship – why?

In an attempt to offer a short answer to all of these questions and in order to trace back the original reason for the writing of the present text, the coordinator reminds readers that five years have passed since the publication of a first volume of testimonials dedicated to the *Political Strength of Women*, and since her made promise to follow that endeavor with an account of the economic strength of women. Inspired by the success of the first volume and the documented reality that in Western societies female entrepreneurship is a recognized and researched theme, while in Romania it is just a budding domain of research, Andreea Paul proposes to take under scrutiny a less explored area in Central and South-Eastern Europe, namely an area dedicated to businesses set up and run by women; in this case, Romanian women.

Indeed, the economic strength of women is a force to be reckoned with and the emergence of a social class of feminine entrepreneurship is certain, as the volume will argue and make proof.

The present volume is divided into three parts that coherently connect to one another, in order to create a solid argument for the initial statement on the emergence and consolidation of women economic power and Romanian feminine entrepreneurship.

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In the introduction to the volume the coordinator offers a brief historical perspective on the first forms of female entrepreneurship and an overall analysis of the economic power of women in Romania. The text constitutes a balanced and logically sustained argument on the (in)equality between women and men after a quarter century of democracy and capitalism. Andreea Paul did not hesitate to compare the performance of Romanian women with those of women from other states, particularly those in the European Union. The pros and cons transform the text into a catalyst for the debate on the causes and effects of gender imbalances among economists and other specialists, but not only.

In the second part, the reader finds examples of good practice from international experience and public support mechanisms for female entrepreneurship. Due to the highest positive increase in the index for female entrepreneurship in 2014 and 2015/country, His Excellency, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Bucharest Vladimír Valky offers useful reference points about female entrepreneurship.

In the third part of the volume, the coordinator invited women in manager position and active women entrepreneurs to recount their experiences. As such, the volume gathers 57 authentic testimonies from women engaged in different sectors of industry, geographic areas, domains, and of different age. The size of the companies ranges from small to medium, or bigger, and even start-ups, in order to include a wide variety of business and to account to a large readership interested in learning about, getting knowledge and possibly initiate own enterprise. The 57 women were invited to answer a few key questions: how did they start their business; how was identified the opportunity and how they got over difficulties; how they managed to develop; how they perceive the Romanian business environment and how they would like it to be; how they perceive women entrepreneurs; what are their dreams and what to do to accomplish them. In a nutshell, 57 experiences on how to succeed in this area and how to keep faith through difficulty and hardship. The history and theory argued in the first two parts are now rendered tangible with the real-life examples of competition, love for professionalism, hard work and joy brought about by rewarded effort and personal accomplishment. The 57 stories have been further personalized by the possibility offered to each one of the featured women to choose the title for their own story.

The volume is an example of craft in mixing formal research and practical issues. The well-researched part on the history of female entrepreneurship, with a strong profile of academic writing is not left at the level of theory, or what history showed us. The practical side of personal conduct and success documents the underlying thesis of the volume that women are strong, resourceful entrepreneurs, and these things can actually be done.

I will end with the words of the coordinator of the volume, which sum up best the message and optimistic, energetic tone of the book: "Why this book? Because I am convinced that women's potential can no longer be ignored. Because I am convinced that when women progress, countries progress". (Andreea Paul, in the *Introduction*)