

About Adoption and People Who Can Adopt in Romania

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ABSTRACT: Although, in principle, any person can adopt and become an adoptive parent, regardless of their marital status (married or single), sex, race, nationality, etc., the Romanian legislation in this area establishes a series of requirements for this. For this purpose, the law on the legal regime of adoption stipulates that the persons or families wishing to adopt must fulfill the moral guarantees, as well as the material conditions necessary for the child’s raising, education and harmonious development. The fulfillment of the guarantees and conditions provided by law, as well as the existence of the parental skills, is certified by the general directorate of social assistance and child protection within the territorial area of which the adoptee or the adoptive family resides, by issuing a certificate following the evaluation performed according to the provisions of the adoption law. This study will analyze the requirements to be met by the persons or families wishing to adopt, namely: the age of the adopter, the full exercise capacity, the moral and material ability to adopt, the consent of the adopter and the consent of the adopter’s spouse.

KEYWORDS: adoption, internal adoption, international adoption, adoptee, adopter, filiation, family, full exercise capacity, consent, moral aptitude, material aptitude

Introductory concepts and definition of adoption

Adoption, this “*noble expression of generosity by which we prove our solidarity,*” as the distinguished professor Emese Florian (Florian 2018, 465) considers, has played a very important role and has been accepted since ancient times, and in the Roman period, in some situations, it was the most convenient solution for families without legitimate descendants. Thus, in the absence of descendants, “*by adoption the perpetuation of the name and the domestic cult, that is, the feeling of admiration, respect and deep love towards the family is ensured*” (Lupascu and Crăciunescu 2017, 470).

Throughout the time, the adoption was used even for the “*hereditary transmission of the imperial dignity*” (Lupascu and Crăciunescu 2017, 470), in this sense, we can recall that Tiberius was adopted by Augustus, becoming after the death of his stepfather, the second Roman emperor, and Nero was adopted by Claudius and appointed heir, thus becoming, at the death of his stepfather, the fifth emperor of the Iulio-Claudian dynasty, at the age of only 16 years (Matei 1980, 303-306; 205-207).

At the same time, adoption “*has conquered the world,*” becoming an international phenomenon, captivated national parliaments and international bodies (Avram 2001, 90), raised questions and answers from politicians or people of culture. Thus, from their multitude, we mention the French professor Jean Carbonnier, who asked himself “*Adoption, a good or a bad?*” and he replied himself “*A bad because it has its origin in the abandonment of children, a good because those children are saved*” (Mihăilă 2010, 7).

In the Romanian specialized literature, adoption has been defined as “*a genealogical remodeling tool, a legal fiction by which the natural filiation and the relations of natural kinship are replaced with a civil filiation, respectively with civil kinship connections*” (Florian 2018, 465), a “*legal institution through which, between a person, called the adopter, and another, called the adoptee, kinship relations are established like those between parents and children*” (Popescu 1965, 107) or “*the operation by which filiation and civil kinship relations are created, according to the law, between the persons provided by law*”(Avram 2001, 90).

In a comprehensive definition the distinguished professor Bodoaşcă (2015, 606), considers that adoption is “*a sui generis legal act with complex and essentially solemn content, on the grounds of which, by observing the public order and good morals, the filiation and natural kinship relations cease for the future, and the connections of filiation and civil kinship are established.*”

The *legal* definition is provided by art. 451 Civ. C., according to which *adoption* is “*the legal operation through which the filiation connection is established between the adopter and the adoptee, as well as kinship connections between the adoptee and the relatives of the adopter.*”

Although, as a rule, adoption is “*a measure for child protection*”, in some cases, by way of exception, a major person may be adopted, provided that this one has been raised during the minority, by the adopter (Avram 2016, 427).

Regulations in the Romanian law regarding the adoption

After 1990, a true “legislative revolution” took place in all areas, including family law. For this purpose, a series of normative acts were adopted aimed at adapting some of the provisions of the Family Code of 1953, currently repealed, following the adoption in 2011 of the current Civil Code (Law no. 287/2009 on the Civil Code, Part I, no. 511 of July 24, 2009).

In Romanian law, the adoption procedure is regulated in Title III (Kinship), Book II (About family), Chapter III, in art. 451-482 Civ. C. These provisions are supplemented by those of Law no. 273/2004 on the legal regime of the adoption, republished in the Official Gazette no. 739 of September 23, 2016, with those of Law no. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of child’s rights, republished in the Official Gazette no. 159 of March 5, 2014, as well as with those of the numerous secondary normative acts, adopted in this regard.

Based on art. 5 of the Government Emergency Ordinance (GEO) no. 11/2014 on adopting reorganization measures at the level of the central public administration and for the amendment and completion of some normative acts, published in the Official Gazette. no. 203 of March 21, 2014, approved by Law no. 145/2015, published in the Of. G. no. 145 from June 12, 2015, the National Authority for the Protection of Child’s Rights and Adoption (A.N.P.D.C.A.) was established as a specialized body of the central public administration, with legal personality, subordinated to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, which ensures, among other activities, the monitoring and controlling the enforcement and observance of the regulations in the field of the protection of child’s rights and adoption, as well as the coordination of the activities carried out by legal persons of public or private law in this field [art. 5 paragraph (3) of GEO no. 11/2014].

International regulations on adoption

The internal legislative framework on adoption is supplemented by a series of international regulations on the matter, to which Romania is a party, of which we specify:

- UN Convention on the rights of the child, adopted on November 20, 1989 (Romania acceded to this convention by Law No. 18/1990, republished in the Official Gazette no. 314 of June 13, 2001, as a result of finding differences in translation from English into Romanian);

- The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation on International Adoption, concluded on May 29, 1993 (ratified by Romania by Law no. 84/1994, published in the Official Gazette no. 298 of October 21, 1994);

- The European Convention on the Adoption of Children, concluded in Strasbourg, on April 24, 1967 (Romania acceded to this Convention by Law No. 15/1993, published in the Official Gazette no. 67 of March 31, 1993), reviewed on November 27, 2008 (it was signed by Romania in Strasbourg on March 4, 2009 and ratified by the Law no. 138/2011, published in the Of. G. no. 515 of July 21, 2011);

- Convention on personal relations regarding children, adopted in Strasbourg on May 15, 2003 (Romania ratified the convention by Law no. 87/2007, published in the Official Gazette no. 257 of April 17, 2007).

Classification of adoption

Depending on the habitual residence of the adopter, the adoption may be *internal and international*:

- *Internal adoption* is the adoption in which both the adopter or the adoptive family and the adoptee have their habitual residence in Romania [art. 2 let. c) of Law no. 273/2004]. In a case (Bucharest Court of Appeal, Third Civil Division, decision no. 471 of April 20, 2011, unpublished, *beside* Lupașcu and Crăciunescu 2017, 473-474 footnote 7), “*the question arose whether the adoption of a Romanian child by a family consisting of a citizen of the United Kingdom and his wife (a member of his family) who enjoys a right of permanent residence on the territory of Romania is internal or international. Since the granting of the permanent residence cards of the defendant appellant, as a citizen of a Member State of the European Union and of the defendant appellant, as family member of a citizen of the European Union involved the proof that they had a continuous and legal residence on the territory of Romania for a previous period of at least 5 years*”, the Court held that the domicile of the defendant appellants is in Romania and found that the adoption has an internal character”.

- *International adoption* is the adoption in which the adopter or the adoptive family and the child to be adopted have their habitual residence in different states, and, following the approval of the adoption, the child is to have the same habitual residence as that of the adopter [art. 2 let. d) of Law no. 273/2004].

For example, in a case, Bucharest Court of Appeal, decision no. 73 (2011), having as object the adoption of a child, “*The Court finds that, in this case, we are in the presence of an international adoption, since both the adopter, L.G. and the adoptee, G.B.M., have their domicile in Italy. The appellants are in a real error in interpreting the legal provisions, since the text of law clearly defines the internal adoption by reference to the domicile of the adopter and the adoptee, all the other adoptions that are not internal adoptions according to the law, being considered international. On the other hand, Law no. 273/2004, at art. 45, explicitly states that international adoption can be approved only in case the adopter or one of the spouses of the adoptive family residing abroad is a relative up to the third degree inclusively with the child for whom the opening of the internal adoption procedure was approved. Or, in this case these legal requirements are not met, as a matter of fact the appellants refer to the special procedure of internal adoption, if the adopter is the spouse of the minor’s natural parent. For these reasons, the Court finds that the first court has grounded and legally held that we are in the presence of an international adoption, an adoption that can only be approved under certain special conditions that are not met in this case.*”

Conditions regarding the persons who can adopt

Adopter, shall mean the person who has adopted or wants to adopt”, and *adoptive family*, shall mean “the husband and wife who have adopted or want to adopt” [art. 2 let. b) and let. i) of the Law no. 273/2004, republished].

Although, in principle, any person can adopt and become an adoptive parent, regardless of their marital status (married or single), sex, race, nationality, etc., the Romanian legislation in this area establishes a series of requirements for this.

However, race, nationality, religious faith of the adopter will be eligibility criteria, in promoting the principle of continuity in the education of the child, taking into account his/her ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural origin, according to art. 452 letter c) Civ. C.

The legislation in force regarding the adoption establishes a series of criteria for the adoptive parent that we are going to analyze herein after.

The age of the adopter

According to art. 459 thesis I Civ. Code, the persons who do not have full capacity to exercise cannot adopt. *Per a contrario*, only persons having *full capacity to exercise* can adopt. According to art. 38 Civ. Code., the full exercise capacity begins on the date when the person becomes of age, that is, at the age of 18 [revised European Convention on the Adoption of Children, adopted in Strasbourg on November 27, 2008, states in Article 9, that “(1) *A child may be adopted only if the adopter has reached the minimum age stipulated by the legislation for this purpose, this minimum age being not less than 18 years, not more than 30 years. There must be an appropriate age difference between the adopter and the child, respecting the best interests of the child, preferably a difference of at least 16 years. (2) However, the legislation may provide for the possibility of derogation from the condition of minimum age or from the age difference, considering the best interests of the child: a) if the adopter is the spouse or registered partner of the father or the mother; or b) in exceptional circumstances*”].

The Romanian law does not set a minimum age and no maximum age as a condition of eligibility for adoption but, from reading art. 460 paragraph (1) Civil Code it follows that “the adopter must be at least 18 years older than the adoptee”.

For *grounded reasons*, paragraph (2) of the mentioned article stipulates that the guardianship court may approve the adoption even if the age difference between the adoptee and the adopter is less than 18 years, but not less than 16 years. This solution chosen by the Romanian lawmaker seems to be designed to ensure compliance with the provisions of Article 9 of the European Convention on the Adoption of Children in Strasbourg, revised on November 27, 2008.

We must emphasize that the courts have decided that the advanced age of the adopter would not be the one that would withstand adoption, but the age corroborated with other elements *de facto*, in particular the general, physical and mental state of the person concerned and the foreseeable evolution of these parameters, considering that the adoption must be carried out in the best interests of the child (Florian 2018, 486). For example, as it has been decided in a case, “*the approval of the adoption may be refused in those exceptional circumstances, undoubtedly proven, in which the advanced age of the adopter constitutes an obstacle for the fulfillment of the purpose of the adoption, namely the satisfaction of the best interest of the adoptee*”. (Supreme Court of Justice, Civil Section, decision no. 578/1992, in “Law”, no. 2/1993, p. 68). In another case, the supreme court decided that “*the decision of the lower court to accept the adoption of a minor of only 6 years old by an 84-year-old adopter, who died within 2 months as of adoption, and with an income of only 300 lei per month, is groundless and illegal*” (Supreme Court of Justice, Civil Section, decision no. 144/1985, 1986, 65).

Full capacity to exercise

As I have mentioned before, only persons who have *full exercise capacity* can adopt. Therefore, “*the minor and the persons under judicial disability cannot adopt*”.

The full exercise capacity is defined by art. 37 C. civ., as “the person's ability to conclude alone civil legal acts” and begins on the date when the person becomes a major. In Romania, a person becomes of age when he or she reaches the age of 18 (art. 38 Civil Code).

Also, according to article 39 paragraph (1) of the Civil Code, the minor can acquire, *through marriage*, the full exercise capacity, and if the marriage is canceled, the minor who was of good faith at the conclusion of the marriage retains the full capacity of exercise [art. 39 par.(2) Civ. Code].

For *grounded reasons*, in Article 40 of the Civil Code, the possibility is provided that the guardianship court *may recognize* the full capacity of exercise to the minor who has reached the age of 16 years. It is the so-called “*anticipated exercise capacity*” (Moloman 2012, 63). For this purpose, the parents or guardians of the minor will also be listened to, taking, when appropriate, the opinion of the family council.

Moral and material aptitude to adopt

According to art. 461 paragraph (1) Civ. Code and art. 13 paragraph (1) of Law no. 273/2004, republished, the adopter or the adoptive family must fulfill the *moral guarantees* and the *material conditions* necessary for the child's growth, education and harmonious development.

The fulfillment of these guarantees and conditions, as well as the existence of the parental skills is certified by the competent authorities by issuing, according to art. 18 paragraph (5) of Law no. 273/2004, republished, a *certificate of a person or family able to adopt*, on the occasion of the *evaluation* performed according to the provisions of this law. The phrase “*competent authorities*” means the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (D.G.A.S.P.C.) from the domicile of the adopter or the adoptive family.

The law also establishes the cases in which obtaining the certificate is not required. Thus, art. 26 of Law no. 273/2004, republished, establishes that the obtaining of the certificate *is not necessary*: a) for the adoption of the person who has acquired full capacity of exercise; b) for the adoption of the child by the spouse of the natural or adoptive parent.

The evaluation of the adopter or the adoptive family is carried out by specialists within the D.G.A.S.P.C.) from the applicants' domicile and represents the process by which the identification of the parental skills is performed, the fulfillment of the *moral guarantees* and the *material conditions* of the adopter or the adoptive family is analyzed, as well as their preparation for undertaking, in full knowledge, the role of parent. With this evaluation, the *psychological, social and medical characteristics* of the other family members or other persons living together with the applicant are going to be analyzed too, as well as *their opinion on the adoption* (art. 18 paragraph 1 and 2 of Law no. 273/2004, republished).

For example, during the psychological evaluation of a family who wished to adopt a minor, it was found that the applicants suffer from “*emotional instability and dysfunctional attitudes, intellectual capacity characterized by slow ideals, rigid and concrete thinking, irrational, negative thinking, fact for which specialized psychiatric investigations, support from specialists qualified in counseling and/or psychological therapy were recommended*” (Cluj Court of Appeal, Civil section of work and social insurance, minors and family, decision no. 4/2007, beside Frențiu 2012, 577).

Also, when evaluating the moral guarantees and the material conditions, as well as the parental abilities of the adopter or the adoptive family, evaluation that will be carried out on the basis of their request by the directorate from their domicile or by the private bodies authorized to carry out activities within the internal adoption procedure, the following aspects, stipulated in art. 18 paragraph (3) of Law no. 273 / 2004, republished will also be taken into account: personality and health status of the adopter or adoptive family, family life, living conditions, aptitude for raising and educating a child; the economic situation of the person/family, analyzed from the perspective of the sources of income, of their continuity, as well as of the expenses of the person/family; the reasons why the adopter or adoptive family wants to adopt; the reasons why, if only one of the two spouses requests to adopt a child, the other spouse does not associate with the request; impediments of any kind relevant to the capacity to adopt.

For example, in a case that had as its object the annulment of the provision regarding the non-issuance of the certificate of adoptive person issued by the General Directorate of social assistance and the protection of the child Iasi (D.G.A.S.P.C), the court held that “the claimant lodged a petition to D.G.A.S.P.C. *Iasi by which he applied for his certification as an adoptive person, wishing to adopt a child between the ages of 10-15 years, preferably male, healthy (...).*”

It follows from the final evaluation report prepared by the Adoption and Post-Adoption Department, that the claimant does not have the socio-psycho-material factors needed to raise and care for a motivated child of advanced age - 74 years, lack of a female figure, lack of resources/support, lack the distribution of responsibilities (housekeeping, house and household activities), which will determine the tendency to share such kind of tasks with the child, low interest to the specific needs of the child, unrealistic expectations and difficulties of accepting the "real" child, the child's perspective being idealized, reduced ability to adapt to challenging or stressful life contexts and to manage more difficult problems, the impossibility of providing predictability, the safety to a child.

As compared to all those held, the court finds that the decision not to grant the certificate of adoptive person is grounded and legal, the action being groundless” (Iași District Court, Civil Sentence no. 1633 (2017).

At the same time, the law establishes, in art. 7 paragraph (1) of the Law no. 273/2004, republished, that the person who was definitively convicted for an offense against the person or against the family, committed with intent, as well as for the offense of child pornography and drug trafficking or precursor offenses *cannot adopt*. Also, according to par. (2) of the same article, the person or family whose child benefits from a special protection measure or who is deprived of parental rights cannot adopt.

The prohibition to adopt, applies also to people who want to adopt alone, whose spouses are mentally ill, have a mental disability or are in one of the situations provided in par. (1) and (2) of art. 7 of Law no. 273/2004, republished. At the same time, in article 462 paragraph (3) of the Civil Code, it is expressly stipulated that two persons of the same sex cannot adopt together only if they are husband and wife, but in Romania, the law prohibits the marriage between two persons of the same sex.

Adopter's consent

Based on art. 463 paragraph (1) letter c) Civ. Code, for the approval of the adoption, *the consent of the adopter or the adoptive family is mandatory*, if they adopt together. The consent to the adoption represents a manifestation of will given by a married, unmarried person or both spouses together, before the court, together with the settlement of the petition for approval of the adoption, on the grounds of art. 16 of Law no. 273/2004, republished (Moloman 2018, 237-256).

As provided in art. 470 paragraph (1) of the Civil Code, following the approval of the adoption, the filiation connection between the adopter and the adoptee is established, with all the consequences arising there from. Once the adoption is finalized, the relations of kinship cease between the adoptee and his/her descendants, on the one hand, and the natural parents and their relatives, on the other hand (art. 470 paragraph (2) of the Civil Code).

In order to be valid, the consent given before the courts regarding the adoption, must cumulatively fulfill several conditions: it must come from a person with discernment; be expressed with the intention of producing legal effects; to be externalized; not to be altered by any defect of consent (error on the identity of the adopter, misrepresentation and violence) (Drăghici 2013, 287).

The consent of the adopter's spouse

According to art. 463 paragraph (1) letter d) thesis I Civ. Code, if the person who wishes to adopt is married, *the consent of his/her spouse is also mandatory*. As shown in the specialized literature (Avram 2016, 436), this constitutes a “*consent of non-suitability*” to adoption by the other spouse and is meant to guarantee that the adoption will not destabilize the family life of the spouses and thus the child will grow up in a favorable family environment.

The consent of the adopter's spouse is given before the court (see Bodoaşcă 2018, 409-418), together with the resolution of the application for approval of the adoption and “*it is*

necessary even if the spouses are separated de facto” (Florian 2007, 168). It must be emphasized that “*by expressing consent, that spouse does not become an adopter*” (Moloman 2016, 626).

The consent of the spouse of the adopting person is not necessary, in case the lack of discernment makes it impossible for him/her to manifest his/her will (art. 463 paragraph (1) letter d) thesis II of the Civil Code).

Finally, we must mention that in accordance with the provisions of art. 463 paragraph (2) of the Civil Code, *the consent given in considering the promise or the actual obtaining of some benefits, regardless the nature thereof, is not valid*. If the consent is given in consideration of the promise or obtaining of benefits regardless the nature thereof, the sanction, although not expressly provided by law, is the *absolute nullity* of the adoption for fictitiousness because it was concluded for a purpose other than that of protecting the best interest of the child (Florian 2012, 507). For example, in a case that aimed to establish the nullity of adoption, the court found that “*the adoption of the major person was occasioned by the need for the adoptee to acquire another name, an identity that would allow him/her to travel abroad, in Germany, from where he/she was previously expelled, being raised exclusively by natural parents*” (Bistrița-Năsăud Court, Civil Section I, Judgment no. 60 / CC of June 14, 2012, *apud* Frențiu 2013, 228-231).

Conclusions

Currently, the domestic law on adoption, this especially important legal institution within the family law, is much simplified compared to the legislation prior to 2011, when the current Civil Code came into force, and in recent years all the normative acts in this area have undergone significant amendments, supplements and updates, in accordance with all the international treaties to which Romania is a party, as well as with the European Union legislation.

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