

IAȘI LIGHT INDUSTRY - BETWEEN REGRESS AND RELAUNCH

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Abstract. Les changements qui surviennent dans l'industrie légère se trouvent de plus en plus au centre des préoccupations de l'économie actuelle. L'industrie légère est une des industries avec une vieille tradition dans la ville de Iași, traversant depuis 1990 de nombreux processus de restructuration, modernisation et amélioration, afin de s'adapter aux conditions spécifiques de l'économie de marché. Après un développement sans précédent dans les années du communisme, la baisse dans l'industrie légère semble être relativement récente, car elle est encore l'une des industries qui ont réussi à survivre dans la ville de Iași. Les importations massives développées ces dernières années ont déterminé, actuellement, quelques changements dans l'industrie légère de Iași: elle est dominée par des entreprises avec une production de plus en plus faible, des profits réduits et un nombre d'employés de plus en plus réduit. De l'industrie légère, l'industrie de confections est celle qui a résisté le mieux, due avant tout à l'application du système *lohn*. L'industrie légère a les perspectives de redressement, étant donné qu'il est possible produire de petites quantités d'articles chers et de les mieux promouvoir. L'article tente d'analyser la structure des industries légères de Iași, en particulier après 1989, dominée d'un part par la désindustrialisation profonde caractéristique pour la ville, et d'autre part par la nécessité de revitaliser les industries. L'industrie légère est l'une des branches qui, apparemment, pourrait avoir une chance minime de récupération et de redressement.

Keywords: *light industry, lohn system, decline, relaunch, Iasi*

1. Introduction

Light industry is one of the most globalized in the world. In terms of production textiles and clothing are very different sectors: textile sector requires major capital investment, while the clothing sector requires significant human resources. In the sector predominates SMEs (small and medium enterprises) and a predominant proportion of the female workforce. Production and jobs are characterized by a high regional concentration.

According to <http://www.businessdictionary.com> light industry can be defined as: „A section of an economy's secondary industry characterized by less capital-intensive and more labour-intensive operations. Products made by an economy's light industry tend to be targeted toward end consumers rather than other businesses”

Light industry was one of the most important sectors of Romanian economy, but massive imports of products from China and Turkey have led to a significant decrease of market. Because of lower living standards, currently is preferred shifting from products with high prices to products with a poor quality.

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One of the most important moments in light industry evolution was the development of production and export in Lohn system. The main factor that led to the extent of the phenomenon is represented by the collapse of CAER and the loss of such an important market for Romanian textile. On the other way the marked decline, after 1990, of the textile industry, was mainly due to lack of financial capital required for production and endowment with modern equipment.

Romania has offered numerous comparative and competitive advantages for Lohn system: low labour cost, long tradition of textile and clothing production, well-trained labour, able to ensure quality products at the required level of Western European firms.

In the City of Iași the light industry (textile, clothing, leather, footwear), experienced over time an unprecedented growth, representing one of the most important and dynamic sectors of economy and contributing in a positive way to exports. With a numerous and trained workforce, this industrial branch was gradually equipped with new facilities and technologies, equipment which, at that time (in the days of communism), have been absolute premiers being applied immediately in the field units.

This industrial branch covers a large category of products, from fibre and textile yarn to finished textile, knitwear, clothing etc. The light industry from Iași is using most of raw materials from import, the added value of its products is still low and the salaries of the workers are among the lowest in EU.

Light industry intensely uses workforce, its cost decisively influencing the competitiveness. The existence of a saturated market, highly competitive, with increasing globalization of production and trade, contributed to the decline of light industry in Iași city.

The article states that light industry is very important for Iași city, which calls for its recovery. Making a comparison between light industry before and after 1989, especially by highlighting the main features of the current firms belonging to light industry, can be the basis for identifying the possible reasons for the decline and afterwards its recovery.

2. Appearance and development of light industry in Iași city - premises

In Iași, before 1944, the predominant industrial branches were textile industry and food industry. Within these most common there were small firms (more than 50 textile factories) most of them occurred between the two world wars and specialized in processing of cotton.

In the years of socialism, new investments were directed towards heavy industry, neglecting in some measure the light industry branch.

With the trend of modernization, it has passed to the development of new industries (chemical industry, ferrous metallurgy, electricity and heat industry), light industry fell on the second level. *Țesătura* was the single large company in Iași, belonging to light industry, which was part of the industrial platform in the south-eastern part of the city.

Perhaps the most important premise for the development of socialist industry was the allocation of huge investments in this sector of activity (59% between 1966 and 1970, 65% between 1970 and 1975) (Nimigeanu, 1984). Raw material available in the county partially favoured the development of light industry. Anywise light industry in Iași city was backed only in a small measure by raw material supply from the region. Good skilled workforce was the third premise extremely important in developing light industry in Iași.

3. Light industry before 1990

The City of Iași, known for its cultural and academic function was not included among the major industrial cities, gaining this position during socialist construction. In the last decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth century have established new workshops or factories, from which those related to the light industry were *Rope factory* - the current *Textila* (1886), *Moldova* factory (1907), *Țesătura* (1910), *Viitorul* footwear factory (1908). In 1885, a number of 36 factories in Iași city are mentioned in the statistical records, with 532 workers. Between the two world wars their number reached 65, most of which having a textile and alimentary profile.

In 1938 the textile industry had an important share of the total county industry. Among the many textile units, three fabrics stand on the top: *Moldova*, *Țesătura* și *Textila*. Leather industry had an insignificant share in county industry - 0.5%. Shoes industry was also insignificant. The only shoe factory in Iași city, *Future*, founded in 1908, failed to impose itself on the market and shortly became bankrupt.

Therefore the textile industry, component of light industry, is part of traditional industrial branches for Iași. Considering the physical volume of production, the number of industrial units and the number of workers, we find that the old industrial profile of Iași i was textile and alimentary (Barbu, 1987).

After the Second World War Iași was part of the general trend of industrialization, characterized by rational distribution of productive forces all over Romania, the harmonious development of all geographical areas and full exploitation of labour. The old capitalist factories due to small size, low efficiency of the equipment, disappeared one by one, the remaining buildings being turned into garages, storage or living spaces (Popescu, 1993). A small part of these factories was taken over by the handicraft cooperatives, re-equipped and reconverted: *Iași textile industry* (textiles), *Perfecț iunea* (knitwear). Among the plants that have kept the profile are included: *Textila*, *Moldova*, *Țesătura*.

After 1960 a large number of large scale industrial enterprises were built in the industrial area from south-eastern city, an area which at that time held 2.2% of the country's industrial production. (Barbu, 1987)

The flax and hemp plant *Textila* is one of the oldest textile industrial units in Romania (1886). The factory was based on Moldova's agricultural resources being supplied with raw materials brought from Suceava, Vereș ti and the production was capitalized only in the country.

In 1910 was founded *Țesătura* plant, which took over all assets of an old weaving workshop built in 1904 with foreign participation. Following the nationalization (1948) the firm grows increasingly more, primarily due to investments allocated by the state. One of the most important moments for the development and evolution of the firm but also for light industry from Iași, was in 1964, when over 80% of the sections are re-equipped and modernized (Barbu, 1987). Consequently the production has significantly increased, providing a wide range of products both at home and abroad. Around the year 1972 *Țesătura* was the largest firm in the county by the number of employees (Șandru, 1972). *Țesătura* was supplied with cotton from USSR, Egypt and Sudan, using also and staple fibres made by the Artificial Fibres Factory Brăila. Near 40% from the manufactured products were for export (Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, etc.) and the remainder was directed at the domestic market (Bucharest, Cluj Napoca, Timișoara).

In 1969 silk weaving *Victoria* was founded, being at that time the largest firm in the country with this profile. From the second year of production, 21% of factory production was

exported. Raw material supply was made from Iași and Săvinești factories and the products were exported to Germany, Austria and Lebanon.

The knitwear enterprise *Moldova* has functioned since 1965 in the Țuțora industrial area, being specialized in the production of knitwear and clothes. The export exceeded in some years the rate of 50% (Germany, France, Austria and Sweden).

The Clothes and Knitted Textures enterprise has functioned since 1959 in the southern extremity of Iași, being originally intended for mass production of clothing, to cover the internal market (Șandru, 1972), following that after an extensive process of re-equipment and readjustment, after the 1970, to mass production of school uniforms, pants, underwear, etc.

Leather, fur and shoes industry had at that time an insignificant share, being represented only by units from the handicraft cooperative.

4. Light industry after 1990

After 1989 the industry from Iași is characterized by the phenomenon of deindustrialization that generates unemployment and urban labour conversion (Stoleriu, 2008)

Light industry presents itself as an industry in decline, dominated by small companies with decreasing production, halved profit, without any close perspective to get back on track. In addition, in recent years, the attention is not focused any more on obtained products but on the land where the former textile factories are located and which the owners are trying to sell, taking advantage by the strong demand for land from real estate developers.

Because the statistical dates for Iasi are not numerous for this industrial sector, the analysis will be mainly directed towards textiles and clothing industries. In fact, these two were even more dynamic after 1990, leather and shoes industry accounting insignificant shares.

The fact that from the light industry, the clothing industry has resisted is due to application of the „lohn” system. The firm have adopted a system that under the appearance of directly producing companies is making products for other firms outside the country because the workforce is still cheap.

The lohn contract is a „commercial transaction in which a company named beneficiary, provide a company named executor, raw or semi-raw materials, in order to processing them according to the beneficiary requirements. The operation is therefore in the interest of the beneficiary, who ultimately raises his processed products, but also for the benefit of the performer, which receives the value of the performed labour” (as of www.contabilizat.ro).

The lohn system, although heavily criticized sometimes, brought also advantages to light industry market from Iași. The main disadvantages are related to working conditions – many extra hours, discouraging syndication. The most important advantages of this system are: the influx of capital, new technologies, reduction of unemployment especially among the female population (Rusu, 2009).

Once Romania joined EU, the textile industry had more disadvantages than advantages. The first disadvantage is related to the enterprises that use lohn system. Opening markets for textiles and transferring contracts to countries with lower costs of labour, could lead to closure of a large number of textile enterprises from our country. The President of the Light Industry Employers Federation - Maria Grapini anticipated the following: „[...] over 84% of the companies operating in the clothing industry are working in lohn system. Worse is that most of these firms are micro-enterprises, with few employees, who often rely on a single client. This category of companies is in danger of disappearing after market opening”.

Among the positive aspects of adhesion we can remember attracting new foreign investors, increasing the competitiveness of Romanian products on the European market, the absence of restraints imposed in terms of quantity of imports into EU. Currently, transition from the production in Lohn system to own brand started to become a necessity for most local textile producers. The economic agents need to realize the importance and the necessity of products registration as own brand.

It is very difficult to achieve statistical information of light industry for the period 1990-2011. The number of small firms with few employees is relatively high, but the main disadvantage is that they have rather an ephemeral character. Most of the information is collected from local media, various editions. In order to observe the evolution of textile industry, a comparison of statistical data collected from newspapers and the web sites (www.firmeopenet.ro, www.firme.info and www.datasmart.ro) has been drawn. This way we can highlight the evolution of the employees' number, but also the years when the companies have incurred losses or went bankrupt.

Table 1: Vacant jobs in light industry - 25 January 2012 – 01 February 2012

Economic agent	Job
All Cio Construct SRL	Confectioner knitting by order
Art limited SRL	Confectioner simple machine clothing/ overcast
Belum Dan SRL	Confectioner
ConfecȚ ii Integrate Moldova SRL	Ironer lingerie (press operator ironing board)
	Confectioner (55 jobs for Iaș i county, 18 jobs for Vaslui county, Vetriș oiaia commune)
Iaș i-Conf SA	Confectioner
	Unqualified worker in clothing
	Chief training clothing industry
Iaș iTex	Confectioner
	Operator service looms
Isabelle Fashion SRL	Confectioner
Katty Fashion SRL	Confectioner
Mancetta SRL	Confectioner
Michael Com SRL	Confectioner
Nelmar SRL	Confectioner
Neyla SRL	Confectioner
	Engineer textile, leather
	Foreman textile industries, leather
	Clothing and knitwear industry technician
S.C.M. Gr. 1 Carpatex	Confectioner
Teritex România	Confectioner
Timtex Company SRL	Engineer knitwear, clothing
	Unqualified worker in clothing

Source: www.ajofmlaș i.ro

Light industry enterprises that have survived so far in Iași have few employees and are hardly coping with foreign competition. According to an article in 2004 from *Ieșeanul* newspaper, Iași textile industry had, in 2003, 52% of total exports of the firms in Iași. In 2003 Iași had about 260 clothes companies. Successful companies at that time were Aya Sports,

Bolero, Iași-Conf, Gold Revoli, Scirom Tex. In 2008, Aya Sports Company had a turnover of 1.5 million Euros. In the present days, the company is bankrupt.

Attempting to capture the dynamics of light industry, closer to 2012, in Table no. 1 are recorded vacant jobs in the period 25 January 2012 – 01 February 2012, in light industry, according to County Agency for Employment Iași.

By analysing the above table we can say that in Iași we look for a wide range of workers for light industry (textile and clothing in particular): from unqualified workers, confectioners, ironers, to chief training clothing industry. The most active firms in terms of employment are *Confecții Integrate Moldova*, *Iași-Conf*, *IașiTex*, *Neyla*.

The General Manager of *Confecții Integrate Moldova* Company is the famous Irina Schrotter. The company has experienced a great evolution working in Lohn system for Benetton Company.

Iași-Conf has as main activity the production and sale of clothing. Since 1995 the company works with private capital. After privatization the majority of investment focused on improving manufacturing technologies and working conditions. *Iași-Conf* had in 2001 (according to www.iasiconf.ro) 1800 employees and performed over 1 million products / year, of which 95% are exported to Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom. Until 1989 the company worked for the U.S. (the company Gitano).

IașiTex (former *Țesătura*) is one of the largest textile companies in Iași city. On May 9th 2003, by acquiring majority stake from A.P.A.P.S. Bucharest (Authority for Privatization and Administration of the State's Participation), *IașiTex* became the property of Companies Group called the Romanian Commercial Services. S.C.R. Group includes firms with different profiles, unanimously focused on foreign production and trade. The company produces yarns for tissues and knitwear, clothes.

For the companies above, the figure 1 is highlighting the evolution of employees number between the years 1999-2010 (for the enterprise *Confecții Integrate Moldova* the founded in 2004 and therefore there is no data before this year). For the companies *Iași-Conf* and *IașiTex* we observed a decrease in the number of employees year after year, but to appreciate is that in 2010 there were still about 1000 employees in both companies. *Confecții Integrate Moldova* had an upward trend until 2009, the fateful year for the entire economy of Romania. Currently the company has the most employees of all companies from Iași light industry.

Neyla Company produces in a proportion of 95% ladies clothing in Lohn system and 5% clothing for ladies and children for internal market. In Lohn system is produced for Gruppo MaxMara Italy (Marella, Maria Rinaldi, Manifatture del Nord) as well as for Spijkers en Spijkers and for Trois du Boulogne from Netherlands. Although it has very few employees (17 employees in 2010) the company is still profitable.

From the traditional enterprises, which formerly had a major contribution to Iași industry, but currently they are one step away of extinction, we mention *Moldova Tricotaje* and *Textila*.

The enterprise *Moldova Tricotaje* has experienced a very interesting evolution after 1990. In 2003, 97.8% of the shares were bought by Gheorghe Ciobanu and SC „Quorum Palace” S.R.L from Bucharest. They were required to maintain the existing number of employees, respectively 421. The company recorded great losses in the period 2000-2007. The number of employees came from 1335 (in 1999), to 6 employees (2008). After insolvency, a part of the land where the factory was located - 1.5 hectares and 4500 square meters of warehouses were put up for sale (2009).

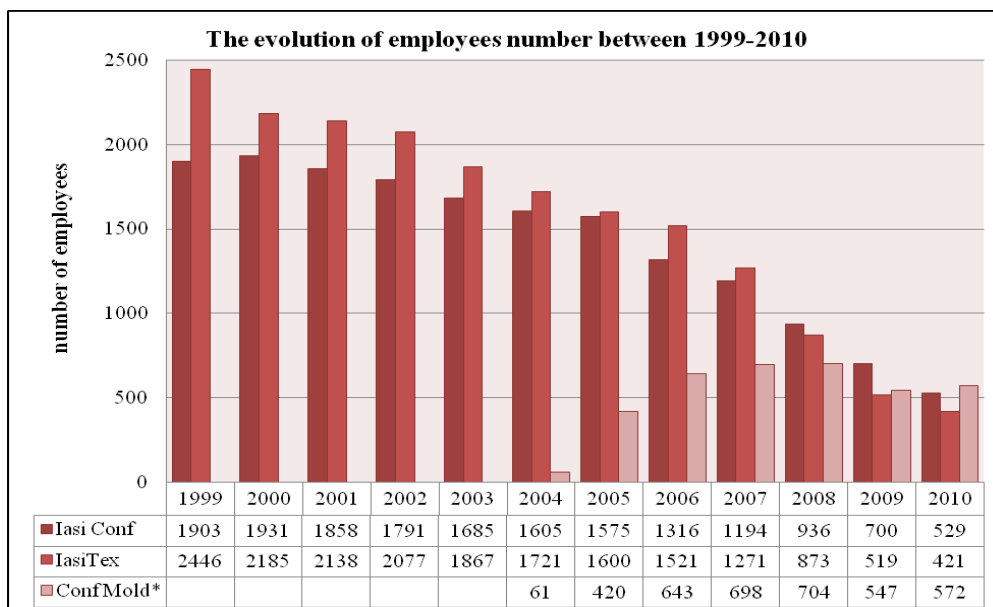


Figure 1: The evolution of employees number between the years 1999-2010 for the companies IaȘ i-Conf, IaȘ iTex and Confecții Integrate Moldova

*Confecții Integrate Moldova was founded in 2004

Data source: www.firme.info

The company *Textila* was fully privatized in 1995, through the MEBO program, the stake being taken by employees. The privatization method MEBO was a process by which a company's assets were sold to employees. In Romania, during 1993-1996, the number of companies sold by MEBO was 837, meaning 28.8% of total privatization (Harry G. Broadman – pag 59).

Textila currently produces a wide range of articles of flax, hemp and jute: natural fibre yarn, twine of flax, hemp and jute rope, jute bags, canvas bag. In 2010 the company had only 34 employees. The General Manager of the factory declared in 2008 that is prepared a relocation of manufacturing activity in the industrial area, releasing the land for a large real estate investment. Consequently, next year the plant put up for sale a plot of 2.7 ha. For half of the surface it has been already obtained the demolition permit, so that the investors could have a better view on real estate offer. A supermarket, a neighbourhood or a complex of mansions were projects that could materialize since 2009, but the financial crisis has prevented their implementation. The investments will materialize in the end because the land is located in Copou residential area, which currently has very few clear, is a veritable gold mine.

Regarding the number of employees of both plants (figure 2), the decline is obvious. If *Textila* still has a minimum production, *Moldova Tricotaje* is in insolvency and currently has only five employees.

In 2007 the factory *IașiTex* sold 40% of the owned lands. In conclusion, at present, the ex-factory *Țesătura* is almost completely demolished. The land was purchased by SC Green Plaza SRL Bucharest, an investment fund of Israel that plans to build in the next two years a mega urban complex. The place where once were producing clothing will become a shopping centre, an important part of the factory halls being already demolished. According to the Urban Plan of IaȘ i, on an area of 4.6 hectares of land commercial spaces and offices will be

built. With a budget of 70 million Euros, in two years, new building with two and three floors will rise, one with 12 floors and 1400 parking spaces.

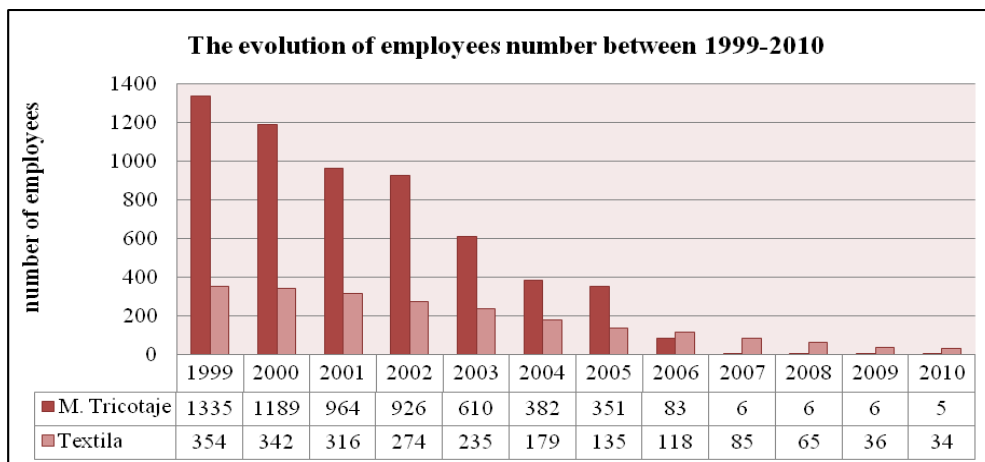


Figure 2: The evolution of employees number between the years 1999-2010 for the companies Moldova Tricotaje and Textila

Data source: www.firme.info

5. The relaunch of light industry

Some of the negative aspects which has faced Iași light industry in recent years, issues who led to the decline of this industry are represented by utility price increases, with consequences in the Lohn system (gas, electricity) and the need to implement European quality, environmental, social, safety and decent work standards in order to sell the products to EU, USA, etc.

The decline of Iași light industry can be attributed to massive imports of various products from Turkey and China. The trend recorded gradually and in very small percentage is to give up those products and to buy quality products from Western Europe (Asaftei, 2010).

One of the solutions that could boost future production in light industry is the production in small quantities of expensive items and better promotion.

The main competitive advantages of light industry in Iași are: a long tradition of this branch of industry, qualified and cheap workforce, lower costs for job creation and the existence of production capacity that can be upgraded with a relatively low investment effort with immediate effect.

The return of Lohn orders could be perhaps the most important step to recovery light industry. In the city many production capacities still exist, requiring only a few months until the departments dissolved are back on (Albu, 2009).

Light industry is currently experiencing an increase of producer prices in Asian countries, which is why big brands might consider the return on the Romanian market. Even though most companies bankrupt were removed from the market due to lack of orders, the small ones have survived, and the return of Lohn orders could contribute to their recovery and regaining business partners.

One of the major obstacles that could interfere with the recovery of light industry is the workforce problem. Many former employees along with the job loss went abroad or turned to other jobs. Unfortunately, we no longer train specialists, light industry losing interest among young people. Given the fact that jobs in textiles remain sometimes unfilled for months, and

the experts are endangered, the local producers do not exclude the option of importing workforce.

When it comes to light industry recovery is vital to talk about the benefits that support this industry, but also the obstacles that might stand in the way of return. Till now, Iași light industry (Textile/Clothing and Leather/Shoe) had the advantage of low labour costs and intensive work. Like in many other cities, Iași industry has suffered competitiveness loose in the last 20 years. Some of the factors (with positive or negative effect) which are important in competitiveness of Iași light industry are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: SWOT analysis of Iași light industry

Strong points	Weak points
Light industry is a viable sector with long tradition in Iași The products are destined to vital and fashion needs of people Its products are competitive for domestic and export markets Has a well-qualified personnel Large flexibility and adaptability to changes The modernisation or the establishment of new company's costs are not very high	Lack of domestic raw materials as quality and quantity Still a large amount of low-performance machines and technologies Low productivity High material and energetic consumption Lack of investment funds and work capital Lohn system limits the possibilities of capital rising from company own sources Communication and information problems Difficulties in accessing the financing sources
Opportunities	Threats
Pan–Euro–Mediterranean free trade area The existence of three new potential markets: enlarged EU, USA, CSI countries Direct investments growth, both from internal or external sources Companies' competences growth in quality management, design, branding, marketing Romanian economy connected to the European and international ones Favourable environment for the creation of SMEs with low investment expenses	Financial threats (due to the low incomes consumers prefer to buy poor quality products at low prices) Competition from European and Asian products High export costs Dependence of the raw materials and accessories which are not produced in the country Producer threats (lohn system has reduced innovation, development of new and original products/brands; quality standards)

Conclusions

According to the idea that the progress of society is based on the industrialization, this phenomenon had an unprecedented extent in Iași, during the communist regime. Light industry is experiencing a significant development, especially along with specific equipment modernization (equipping the department of weaving with automatic looms).

After 1989, industry of Iași escalated the privatization phenomenon, which has not always been beneficial, considering the fact that it sometimes led to the disappearance of many industrial units.

With every year, there are substantial changes in the light industry sector: from the insolvency of large units of production to the development of small businesses, all led to a growing instability in the light industry.

One of the factors that favoured Iași city was the reorientation after 1996 of Western firms to Romania because of the conflict situation in Yugoslavia, which by then was the principal producer of clothing under Lohn system for the EU. In this context, the Lohn system in light industry (textiles, clothing and footwear) was the best solution and even a positive factor in the short and medium term, ensuring function at full capacity of clothes factories which have concluded such agreements and the modernization of these factories.

Making modernizations, retooling light industry in general and the textile industry in particular, have attracted the attention of foreign investors, a positive aspect considering the fact that this sector still holds in Iași well-trained workforce in areas such as design, weaving.

In recent years, the sector recorded a series of radical changes, due to increased production prices and increasing of international competition, which forced the industry to restructure and modernize and to move the production to countries with lower labour costs. Growing importance of subcontracting, relocation of production, the pressure for restructuring and modernization of industry, the difference in productivity between new and old EU member states, there are the major challenges for the light industry. Although it has to face a fierce competition, the light industry in Iași remains competitive due to its high productivity and strong points as: innovation, technology, quality, creativity, design and fashion.

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