

## **A PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS AND MANAGERS' POINT OF VIEW ON ELABORATING AND GROUNDING THE ACCOUNTING POLICIES**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The following study is meant to present the professional accountants' perception opposite to the managers' one regarding elaborating and substantiating the accounting policies in nowadays conditions, of harmonizing the Romanian accounting system with the European and international referential. The research method used is the inquiry (survey) and the research instrument is the questionnaire. As the objective was achieved, a series of research hypothesis were put in places, which were later tested with the help of the „Square Chi” method. The hereby study aims to bring awareness to the ones involved in the accounting by highlighting the importance which every single company should consider when the accounting policies and strategies are set up.*

**KEYWORDS:** *accounting policies, professional accountants, accounting options, accounting policies handbook, CECCAR.*

**JEL CLASSIFICATIONS:** *M40, M41.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Before the accounting regulations to be harmonized to the European and international accounting referential, the accounting policies were set by an annex (the last one) of the balance sheet, without giving too much importance to this document.

In the context of the Romanian accounting regulations, approved by OMFP no. 1802/2014 for approving the accounting regulations regarding the annual financial statements and consolidated annual financial statements, these politics are detailed in section 2.5 „Accounting politics, accounting errors' correction, estimations and events happening after the balance sheet's date”. At the international accounting referential

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level, the requests for reflecting and applying the accounting policies are consisted in the IAS 8 „Accounting politics, amendments of accounting estimations and errors.” According to pt. 1 of IAS 8, the objective of the standard is „the prescription of the selection and changing criteria of the accounting politics together with the accounting treatment and with presenting the information regarding changing the accounting policies, changing the accounting estimations and errors’ corrections. The standard is meant to strengthen the relevance and reliability of the financial statements of a company, the comparability of these financial statements in time and in space”.

The reference system regarding the formulation and the development of the accounting policies is consisted by the International Financial Reporting Standards, which are the standards and the interpretations issued by IASB. When an IFRS regulation, which specifically applies in a transaction case, in another event case or in another condition case is missing, the company’s management will use its professional reasoning in order to establish an accounting policy which will provide relevant and reliable information for the users of the information from the financial statements. Order 1802/2014 (section 2.5, pt. 60(1)) overlaps with IAS 8 (pt. 5) regarding the definition of the accounting policies. Thus, the accounting policies represent „the principles, the basis, the conventions, the regulations and the specific practices applied by a company during the establishment and the presentation of the annual financial statements”. In other words, economics and techniques specialists who are familiar with the activities and strategies will have to adopt and put in place a set of principles, basis, conventions, regulations and specific practices so that the events and transactions which had an impact on the company during the financial exercise to be correct and well reflected in the annual financial statements. The accounting politics adopted by the company are judgmental decisions for obtaining quality information mandatory to diverse users in decision making (Feleagă et. al, 2008, p.21). The approval for such accounting policies for economics and financial operations is made by the company managers or the people who are designated to manage those situations when no manager is appointed.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

After the fall of communism, Romanian rulers have had ongoing concerns for harmonizing Romanian accounting system to the European and international accounting referential. While the assimilation of the European directives and of the IFRS regulations, within the Romanian accounting system appear certain scientific concerns regarding the area of elaborating and substantiating the company’s accounting. In this context, it was noticed in the accounting research area a series of works that take into consideration the issue of the company’s accounting policies.

An important role in the area of the research related to elaborating and substantiating the company’s accounting policies have had the professors Niculae Feleagă and Liliana Malciu by the appearance on Economic Publishing House of the work "Accounting policies and options", containing a number of concerns related to the accounting policies and options placed in the service of a sincere accounting (fair accounting) and, also, in the service of cosmetic accounts (bad accounting). Feleagă et

al. (2008, p.25) focus on the role of professional judgment in developing accounting policies and believes that it is a decisive one, the financial statements presented to users being a result of decisions taken in the company.

Another outstanding contribution in the company's accounting policies research belongs to Professor Mihai Ristea. Professor Ristea distinguishes between accounting policies and methods. It states that "whether the accounting policies are options on the principles, measurement bases, conventions, rules and procedures adopted by companies in preparing and presenting the financial statements, however, methods are treatments or procedures used by the company in accordance with the rules and accounting policies to produce and provide accurate information about the financial position, financial performance and cash flows of a company" (Ristea, 2000, p.9).

Ristea & Dumitru (2012, p.15) take into consideration the issue of the accounting options dilemma that "move between freedom and conformity in order to set the truth, a truth molded in accordance with a set of principles, rules, conventions and specific accounting practices". In another vision, the above mentioned researchers define the accounting policies as "options determined by certain interests, subject to certain principles, rules and conventions concerning the registration, recognition and valuation of the elements described in the accounting model, preparation and presentation of financial statements. To the extent that those rules are mandatory, applicable by legal and regulatory texts, the accounting policy is related and set by regulatory system in the field" (Ristea & Dumitru, 2012, p.32). The existence of the options in the accounting field involves several policies (namely bases, conventions, methods, rules or practices) and/or estimation techniques for solving a problem (Feleagă & Malciu 2002, p.18). Among the options permitted by IAS-IFRS, the entity's management will opt for those that would be most appropriate to the entity's profile and for those solving issues as fairly as economic and financial reality asks.

Duțescu (2003) present in the paper entitled "Accounting policies of the Entity" a detailed model of the set of accounting policies applicable to a hypothetical company "X", a model outlined by the practical experience gained by the author in collaboration with a significant number of Romanian entities, important for the Romanian economic landscape. Thus, the approach of the paper begins with general policies regarding the format of the financial statements, continues with specific accounting policies of valuation and recognition of major categories of assets, liabilities, equity, expenses, revenues and results, and ends with the exposure of a set of special cases on the set options in case of changes in accounting policies, on the correction of fundamental errors, on the segmental reporting, on events after the balance sheet date, on contingent assets and liabilities.

According to Romanian accounting referential each entity must have an accounting policies handbook and procedures for their application. Thus, Gurău (2015) sensitizes entities and experts about how to prepare an accounting policies handbook, about the reasoning behind the choice of methods, treatments, accounting procedures for recognition and valuation, according to the activity type but also to the target of an economic entity, on using accounting policies in achieving a true and fair image of the financial position and earnings. Cenar (2012) opines that "accounting policies are

circumscribed to the primary objective of accounting, that of providing a fair image of financial position and performance of reporting entities". It is desirable that financial statements to reflect the reality of the company, therefore, it is proposed that, in the analyze made by users of financial statements, to be first discovered the eventual practices of creative accounting by the use of tests to undergo financial statements. In addition, the attention of users of financial statements should be redirected, in the sense that they should not give an excessive importance to the accounting result because so, without their intention, they encourage those leading to do so in order to achieve by any price the required performance in order to meet the demands of those who have a direct interest on the financial statements (Ivan, 2015, p.34). In developing accounting strategies and policies, the issues of professional ethics are particularly important because using the professional judgment in order to manipulate the results may have, as an effect, hiding the truth about the situation on the financial position and on the performance of the entity.

The specialised literature discusses a number of concerns relating to the investigation of the perception of the main actors involved in the company's life about the need for morality and ethics in the accounting area. Among the authors who leans on these concerns are included: Adkins & Radtke (2004), Duarte, F. (2008), Koumbiadis & Okpara (2008), Maruszewska (2010), Onyebuchi, V. (2011), Balaciu et al. (2012), Cuzdriorean (2013), Ugar, A. ; Gungormuş, A. (2013) Boyce (2014).

Nicolaescu & Tăgăduan (2015, pp.277-284) discusses the influence of accounting policies on fiscal management of economic entities. The above-mentioned authors concluded that, most often, economic entities accounting policies are most adapted to tax needs, the tax advantage excelling in front of the goal of "true image". This link, called by some authors "quasi-dependent approach" is most evident in small and medium enterprises in which the state remains the preferential user of the accounting information.

Cernușca (2015, pp.59-77) leans on a study regarding the perception of the CECCAR accounting professionals on the strategies of elaborating and substantiating the accounting policies.

We intend, through this material, to expand their investigation on the approach regarding elaborating and substantiating the entity's accounting policies, taking into consideration the perception of the professional accountants opposite to managers.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The main objective of our research was to study the perception of professional accountants opposite to the managers regarding the approach of developing and substantiating the company accounting policies. The research is a descriptive cross-sectional one, the period during which the research was conducted was May-June 2015, the research method used was the inquiry (survey) and the research tool was the questionnaire. In order to accomplish this task it was elaborated a questionnaire containing 12 questions. The questionnaire contains two categories of questions: general questions, their role being to provide a more complete picture on the personal profile of professional accountants and managers in the sample as well as questions

about the perception of professional accountants opposite to the managers on developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

The questionnaire was distributed to the target group consisting of a number of 200 professional accountants, members of CECCAR, Arad branch and 180 managers from Arad County, as well. The second part of the questionnaire includes a number of nine questions analyzing the perception of professional accountants opposite to the managers on developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies. The material is based on four objectives, dynamically emphasized by testing four hypotheses, presented in detail in chapter four.

The research hypotheses were tested using the statistical test "chi square". In this context, the following steps were followed: defining the statistical hypotheses, establishing the materiality "alpha" and the degrees of freedom, defining the chi square parameter, defining the critical region, calculating the observed parameter value and decision making.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

We intend to bring to attention the analyzed issues in order to achieve the objectives.

**Objective no. 1.** The perception of professional accountants regarding the importance of the process of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

Within this objective we are going to test the following hypothesis:

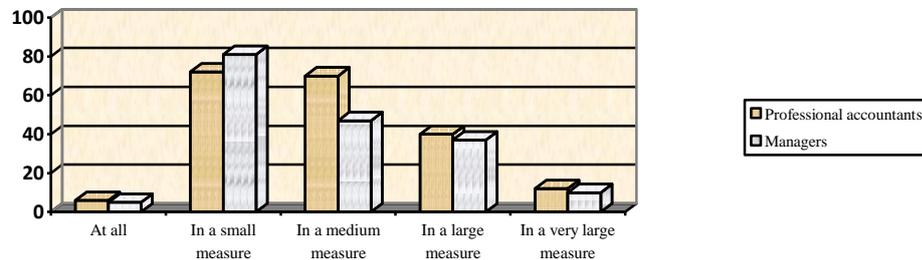
**Hypothesis no. 1** There is a difference of perception between the professional accountants and managers regarding the degree of involvement in the approach of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies. The target group was asked to point out its opinion on the degree of involvement in the approach of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

**The null hypothesis  $H_0$ :** There is not a difference of perception between the professional accountants and the managers regarding the degree of involvement in the approach of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

Criteria of decision:

- The materiality:  $\alpha=0,05$
- Number of degrees of freedom:  $df=(\text{no.columns}-1) \times (\text{no.rows}-1)=(5-1) \times (2-1)=4$

OBSERVED / THEORETICAL	At all	In a small measure	In a medium measure	In a large measure	In a very large measure	Total on rows
Professional Accountants	6/6	72/81	70/61	40/40	12/12	200/200
Managers	5/5	81/72	47/56	37/37	10/10	180/180
<b>Total on columns</b>	<b>11/11</b>	<b>153/153</b>	<b>117/117</b>	<b>77/77</b>	<b>22/22</b>	<b>380/380</b>



Source: own work based on the answers from the questionnaire

Calculation of the observed value of the parameter:

$$\chi^2_{\text{calculated}} = 4,88$$

$$\chi^2_{\text{critical}} = 9,488$$

Taking the decision:

$$\chi^2_{\text{calculated}} < \chi^2_{\text{critical}}$$

The null hypothesis  $H_0$  is accepted, the first hypothesis being invalid by testing.

The accounting policies will be contained in a manual which should be the result of consultation with the management of the entity in order to select the most suited accounting treatments for providing relevant and reliable information to users of financial statements. Besides the accounting policy manual, entity shall have procedures for the application of this manual and the existence of checks to ensure their compliance. Entities must resort to update this instrument according to concrete situations. After testing the first hypothesis we find that it is invalidated, both accounting professionals and managers interviewed are of the opinion that not enough attention is given to the process of drafting accounting policy manual. There are situations in which holding this instrument is made only at the formal level in order to avoid any penalties imposed by tax authorities.

**Objective no. 2** The perception of accounting professionals opposite to managers regarding the accounting-taxation report in the approach of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

Within this objective we are going to test the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis no. 2** There is a difference of perception between the professional accountants and managers regarding the relevance of the taxation impact on the entity in the approach of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies. The target group was asked to point out its opinion on the relevance of the taxation impact on the entity in the approach of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

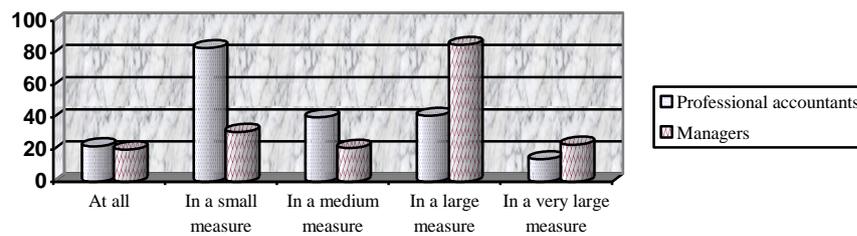
**The null hypothesis  $H_0$ :** There is not a difference of perception between the professional accountants and managers regarding the relevance of the taxation impact on the entity in the approach of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

Criteria of decision:

- The materiality:  $\alpha = 0,05$

- Number of degrees of freedom:  $df=(no. columns-1) \times (nr. rows-1)=(5-1) \times (2-1)=4$

OBSERVED / THEORETICAL	At all	In a small measure	In a medium measure	In a large measure	In a very large measure	Total on rows
Professional accountants	22/22	83/60	40/32	41/66	14/20	200/200
Managers	20/20	31/54	21/29	85/60	23/17	180/180
Total on columns	42/42	114/114	61/61	126/126	37/37	380/380



Source: own work based on the answers from the questionnaire

Calculation of the observed value of the parameter:

$$\chi^2_{\text{calculated}}=46,62$$

$$\chi^2_{\text{critical}}=9,488$$

Taking the decision:

$$\chi^2_{\text{calculated}} > \chi^2_{\text{critical}}$$

The null hypothesis is rejected, hypothesis no. 2 being validated by testing. There are many situations in which entities' management opt for elaborating strategies and accounting policies motivated rather by tax consequences than by need for adequate financial information. Professional accountants often try to temper this trend of managers.

One can speak of two approaches on how to choose accounting policies by accounting theories: having as an effect the increasing of earnings or the reduction of it, launched throughout time, identified by Professor Raffournier, namely: 1) assumptions which lead to the increase of earnings; 2) assumptions which aims to adopt accounting methods in order to minimize the earnings. (Popa, 2011, pp.74-78)

Following the assumptions presented by Popa (2011), one can get to the conclusion that „earnings represent a subjective indicator, depending on the interested parts, on the economic and political system in which it is included and by the way in which the company is organized and lead.

**Objective no. 3** The perception of professional accountants opposite to managers regarding the underlying factors of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

Within this objective we are going to test the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis no. 3** There is a difference of perception between the professional accountants and managers regarding their opinion on the underlying factors of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

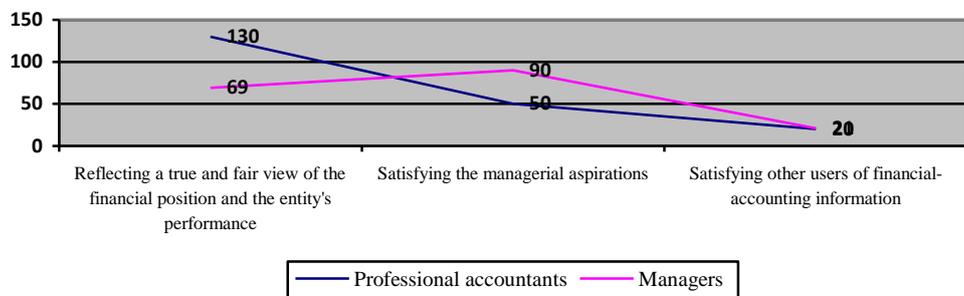
**The null hypothesis  $H_0$ :** There is not a difference of perception between the

professional accountants and managers regarding their opinion on the underlying factors of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

Criteria of decision:

- The materiality:  $\alpha=0,05$
- Number of degrees of freedom:  $df=(no.columns-1) \times (nr.rows-1)=(3-1) \times (2-1)=2$

OBSERVED THEORETICAL	Reflecting a true and fair view of the financial position and the entity's performance	Satisfying the managerial aspirations	Satisfying other users of financial-accounting information	Total on rows
Professional accountants	130/105	50/74	20/21	200/200
Managers	69/94	90/66	21/20	180/180
Total on columns	199/199	140/140	41/41	380/380



Source: own work based on the answers from the questionnaire

Calculation of the observed value of the parameter:

$$\chi^2_{\text{calculated}}=29,20$$

$$\chi^2_{\text{critical}}=5,99$$

Taking the decision:

$$\chi^2_{\text{calculated}} > \chi^2_{\text{critical}}$$

The null hypothesis  $H_0$  is rejected, as it follows is accepted the alternative hypothesis  $H_1$ .

The third hypothesis is validated by testing. The management of entities aims in most of cases a certain image on the result of the entity. Some professional accountants satisfy their aspirations, but most of those asked consider the fair image of the financial position and of the entity's performance more important.

**Objective no. 4** The perception of the professional accountants regarding the intention accounting policies and practices used in the approach of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

Within this objective we are going to test the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis no.4** There is a difference of perception between the professional accountants and managers regarding their opinion on the intention accounting policies and practices used in the approach of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies. The target group was asked to point out its opinion on using the

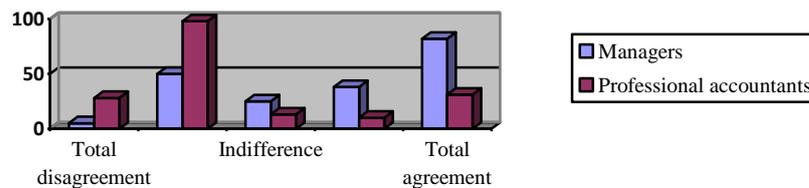
intention accounting policies and practices in the approach of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

**The null hypothesis  $H_0$ :** There is not a difference of perception between the professional accountants and managers regarding their opinion on using the intention accounting policies and practices in the approach of developing and substantiating the company's accounting policies.

Criteria of decision:

- The materiality:  $\alpha=0,05$
- Number of degrees of freedom:  $df=(nr.columns-1) \times (nr.rows-1)=(5-1) \times (2-1)=4$

<b>OBSERVED</b> <b>THEORETICAL</b>	Total disagreement	Disagreement	Indifference	Agreement	Total agreement	Total on rows
Managers	5/17	50/78	25/20	38/25	82/60	<b>200/200</b>
Professional accountants	28/16	98/70	13/18	10/23	31/53	<b>180/180</b>
<b>Total on columns</b>	<b>33/33</b>	<b>148/148</b>	<b>38/38</b>	<b>48/48</b>	<b>113/113</b>	<b>380/380</b>



Source: own work based on the answers from the questionnaire

Calculation of the observed value of the parameter:

$$\chi^2_{\text{calculated}}=72,66$$

$$\chi^2_{\text{critical}}=9,488$$

Taking the decision:

$$\chi^2_{\text{calculated}} > \chi^2_{\text{critical}}$$

The null hypothesis  $H_0$  is rejected, as it follows is accepted the alternative hypothesis  $H_1$ .

After testing the fourth hypothesis we find that it is validated, accounting professionals trying to temper the tendency of managers to resort to creative accounting practices in order to obtain a favorable image of the financial situation and performance of the entity.

Ristea & Dumitru (2012, p.37) believe that "freedom of maneuver in formulating accounting policies and in choosing accounting methods, although seen as positive in terms of creativity, has always been a source of controversy regarding the construction and acceptance of the accounting truth. How different methods lead to different results, on many occasions IASB recognized the need to reduce the possibility of using alternative treatments allowed to really ensure a genuine harmonization. Also, standards are needed in order to bring more uniformity in the elaboration of accounting reports."

Given that accounting rules allow a number of degrees of freedom, managers will be tempted, taking into consideration the interests pursued, either to turn its attention towards a pessimistic attitude about the earnings for the purpose of tax optimization or to an optimistic one in order to attract the investors or contract a bank credit. Thus, there is the temptation to resort to creative accounting practices and techniques in order to provide users of financial accounting information a favorable image on the entity's financial position and performance, in most cases better than the real one. The target group's opinions are divided. Some assign to creative accounting a negative connotation, others believe that the intention accounting practices and techniques are unacceptable. There are voices among respondents who do not exclude the positive alternative of creative accounting.

Dumitrescu (2013, p.23) opines that "instead of being preoccupied with finding the results embellishment techniques in order to display bigger profits for attracting the investors, it would be better for companies to be concerned with finding means of maximizing the results actually, better managing resources and avoiding waste, and thus removing the risk of granting higher dividends than they can afford and pay an additional tax on cosmetic ".

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Entities that elaborate financial statements in accordance with the 1286/2012 and 1802/2014 Orders will have to give a big importance to elaborating and grounding of the accounting policies handbook, in order to deliver accounting information being understandable, relevant, reliable and comparable. In the current context, of harmonizing the Romanian accounting system to the accounting European and international referential elaborating and grounding the entity's accounting policies must fall within the spirit, principles and requirements of Directive 2013/34/EU of the European Parliament, of the Board and of the IAS-IFRS Standards, with the purpose of obtaining qualitative financial information and financial statements.

Our research seeks to raise the main actors involved in the life of entity of the importance that each entity must give to the approach of elaborating and grounding the accounting policies and to the approach of elaborating, in a most responsible way, the accounting policies handbook, in order to achieve a most favorable image of entity's financial position and performance. The questionnaire distributed to the target group was the basis on which the interpretation of scientific endeavor was performed.

The target group believes that entities should give a greater importance to the process of elaborating the accounting policies handbook. It is necessary for entities to have procedures for applying the handbook, controls in order to ensure its compliance and to proceed to updating the instrument according to the occurred legislative changes and according to any other specific situation faced by the entity. Some entities have only formally this handbook, only to avoid any penalties imposed by tax authorities.

There are entities in which the tax impact has a relevant role in the process of elaborating the accounting policies handbook. The result can be a subjective indicator, depending on the interests of the actors involved in the life of the entity, on the economic and political system in which the organization is included, as well as on the

organization and management. In some cases, the entity's management may pursue an optimistic attitude on earnings.

At the opposite pole, it may be interested in maximizing earnings for tax optimization purposes. Economic literature discusses various techniques and practices in order to cosmetic annual financial statements. More than half of professional accountants responding consider that creative accounting practices have a negative connotation. However, there is a not negligible percentage of those asked asserting that these creative accounting practices can have a positive connotation and a very small percentage considering them as being unacceptable.

A significant percentage of the accounting professionals asked consider that, in the process of elaborating the accounting policies and strategies, it is desirable to be used those accounting treatments and policies provided by the national and international referential, in order to reflect an accurate image of the financial position and performances of entity. There are entities that elaborate accounting strategies and policies motivated rather by the taxation consequences than the need for an adequate financial informing. Professional accountants often try to temper the tendency of managers to resort to practices and techniques aiming to cosmetic entity's performance and financial position.

From the questions asked to respondents we could notice that they used as sources of information, in elaborating the accounting policies handbook, knowledge acquired during undergraduate and graduate as well as information gathered from the Internet, magazines and books and from training courses organized in companies.

An important role have, also, the continuing training courses organized by the professional bodies and by companies, where are discussed as well themes related to elaborating and substantiating entity's accounting policies. Most respondents show their real interest on participation in continuing vocational training courses organized by the professional bodies as well as within companies, in order to improve their skills related to the process of elaborating the accounting policies handbook.

The main limitation of our study is that the target group includes only professional accountants and managers of the subsidiary CECCAR Arad. We intend that, in the future, to expand the target group to other subsidiaries CECCAR from Romania, to members of other professional organizations, investors, students, members of academia and to other users of financial information in order to obtain further information and to substantiate relevant conclusions.

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