

NO: 4, ISSUE: 1, 2016



Journal
of Global Politics
and Current Diplomacy

D E D i C [Center for
European Dialog
and Cultural Diplomacy]



Journal of Global Politics and Current Diplomacy

GLOBAL POLITICS AND CURRENT DIPLOMACY (JGPCD)

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JGPCD is a biannual (June and December), peer-reviewed academic journal. The issues of the journal will include multi and interdisciplinary papers. Occasionally, individual issues may focus on a particular theme.

ISSN 2344 – 6293 ISSN-L 2344 – 6293

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Microfinance: an important tool to reach European Cohesion policy's objectives

Vittorio Tavagnutti*

Introduction

This paper departs from the recognition of the enormous potentialities microfinance has in the financial inclusion of disadvantaged stratus of the population, in job creation and support of microbusinesses and, therefore, in the reaching of the thematic objectives 8 and 9 of the Europe 2020 strategy. Accordingly, its aim is to shed further light on what European microfinance is (and its links with the European 2020 strategy) and further describe the funding opportunities available at the European Union level.

The paper will proceed in 3 chapters. In the first one the European Cohesion Policy (that in the present programming period is strongly linked with the Europe 2020 Strategy) will be presented. Moreover, the link between the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and thematic objectives 8 and 9 and the link between the latter and microfinance, will be described. The second chapter will be entirely devoted to the description of the European microfinance sector and the opportunities available under the European Structural and Investment (ESI) funds and those made available by the European Commission and European Investment Bank and managed centrally by the European Investment Fund (EIF). In the third chapter the general conclusions will be presented.

1. European Cohesion policy

Before addressing specifically the role of the European Structural and Investment (ESI) funds (that for the 2014-2020 programming period are composed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), together with the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EA-

* Vittorio Tavagnutti is a MA Student at the Università degli Studi di Padova, Italy, and Erasmus Student at the Babes-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of History and Philosophy, e-mail: vittorio.tavagnutti@studenti.unipd.it

FRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)) and their role in combination with the funds managed by the European Commission and European Investment Fund in the support of microfinance in Europe, it is useful to briefly describe the broader context in which they operate, that is, the European Cohesion policy.

Despite the establishment of the ESF in 1958, initially designed to offset the loss of jobs in the traditional industries by retraining workers ([Vladimír Špidla 2008:6](#)) and despite the addition in 1975 of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), until 1988 there was no European regional policy. ([Leonardi 2006, 157](#))

As stated by Wallace, “it required the twin stimulus of ‘widening’ (Greece, Spain, and Portugal), and ‘deepening’ (the Single European Act (SEA), and the single market programme) to create the pressures for a ‘historic’ deal to develop the structural funds further. ([Wallace, Wallace, and Pollack 2005:218](#)) In fact, at the Community level there were concerns regarding the potential negative outcomes the two aforementioned processes could have had. Namely, regarding specifically the second one, the main worries were related to the possible negative consequences of eliminating controls on the free flow of productive factors and the ability of national governments to manipulate both exchange and interest rates to compensate for internal market failures. ([Leonardi 2006, 156-157](#)) It is not a case then that in the SEA itself for the first time the objective of economic and social cohesion was linked with the idea of the reduction of regional disparities. ([Wallace, Wallace, and Pollack 2005:218](#)) Later on, in its Communication of 15 February 1987 entitled ‘Making a success of the Single Act: a new frontier for Europe’, later referred to as the ‘Delors I Package’, the Commission proposed a new interinstitutional agreement under which Parliament, Council and Commission would agree on a multi-annual financial perspective and budgetary priorities. ([Raphaël Goulet 2008:8](#)) Moreover, the Delors-1 package led to a doubling of the structural funds so that by 1992 they would account for 25 per cent of the EU budget. ([Wallace, Wallace, and Pollack 2005:218](#)) In the light of the conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 11 and 12 February 1988, the three institutions concluded the Interinstitutional Agreement on 29 June 1988 which established for the first time a five-year financial perspective, from 1988 to 1992 ([Raphaël Goulet 2008:8](#)), making it possible to concentrate on long-term objectives. Moreover, the 1988 marked the birth of the principle of partnership, ([Vladimír Špidla 2008:6](#)) cornerstone of today’s Cohesion policy. The Maastricht treaty further enhanced the role of the structural funds, creating a new fund, the Cohesion Fund. It was specifically designed to encourage economic convergence among EU members through infrastructure investments and was made available to countries with an income below 90% of the EU average. ([Maynou et al. 2014:4](#)) In general, between 1988 and 1999 the structural funds underwent a significant expansion. ([Wallace, Wallace, and Pollack 2005:218](#))

An important step forward in the development of the European Cohesion policy was the link with Lisbon agenda, an action plan devised in 2000 by the European Council with the specific purpose of making the EU “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy by 2010”. Already in the programming period 2000-2006, the Lisbon priorities were indicated as an important point of reference for development strategies, although there were no binding conditions. ([Domorenok 2016:4](#)) Despite this fact, however, in this programming period around 80% of the regions have taken these priorities into consideration when drafting their development programmes. ([Domorenok 2016:4](#)) The reference to the overall EU objective when drafting projects falling under the European Cohesion policy became then central in the programming period 2007-2013, with the operationalization of the earmarking mechanism. It required in fact 60% of expenditure under Convergence programmes and 75% under Regional Competitiveness & Employment (RCE) programmes to be allocated to certain categories of investment: innovation; the knowledge economy; information and communication technology; employment; human capital; entrepreneurship; small and medium-sized enterprise support; and access to risk capital. ([Bachtler and Ferry 2015:1267](#)) Therefore, one witnesses a radical change in the drafting and selection process. In fact, “contrary to the previous period, the so-called mainstream Objectives of cohesion policy are (no more) formulated according to the typology of structural problems that affect regions admissible for community aid under one or another Objective (lagging behind industrial or rural regions, etc), (but) the new definition of the Objectives (Convergence, Competitiveness and Jobs, Territorial cooperation) is thematic and the majority of admissible actions are based on the issues tackled by Growth and Jobs”. ([Domorenok 2016:4](#)) In other words, in the 2007-2013 period, the scope of cohesion policy have been extended beyond its main objective (reducing the gap between the most and the least developed regions) to comprise actions fostering research and innovation, on the one hand, and social and economic cohesion, on the other, with a territorial coverage that is no more restricted to lagging behind regions. ([Domorenok 2016:5](#))

The new rules on the European Structural and Investment Funds for 2014-20 were agreed in December 2013, providing for greater strategic realignment of Cohesion policy with the Europe 2020 strategy, a more integrated approach to programming and a stronger performance orientation. ([Carlos Mendez and John Bachtler 2015:1](#)) In order to contribute to the strategy, in the REGULATION (EU) No 1303/2013¹ the European Parliament and the Council selected 11 thematic objectives that shall be supported by the ESI funds (these broad objectives were then translated into priorities that are specific to each of the ESI Funds and are set out in the Fund specific rules). These are:

¹ Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0320:0469:en:PDF>

- strengthening research, technological development and innovation;
- enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT;
- enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs, of the agricultural sector (for the EA-FRD) and of the fishery and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF);
- supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors;
- promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management;
- preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency;
- promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures;
- promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility;
- promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination;
- investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning;
- enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration.
- This list makes it evident how the Cohesion policy definitely moved beyond its original function of “shock absorber” to encompass a larger set of additional functions.

This paper will focus on financial instruments co-financed by ESI funds and those managed by the EIF related to the disbursement of microfinance services, set up to tackle mainly the objectives 8 and 9.

Before moving on with the section uniquely devoted to microfinance it is useful to present the relationships the ESF and the ERDF, the only funds among the ESI fund to provide financing to microfinance projects have with the relevant thematic objectives.

1.1 ESI funds and thematic objectives

In relation to thematic objective 8, that follows the Europe 2020 strategy’s aim to reach the target of 75% of 20-64 year old in employment by 2020, as underlined by the European Commission, ESF is the European Union’s main tool for helping people get a job (or a better job), integrating disadvantaged people into society and ensuring fairer life opportunities for all. ([European Commission 2014a:2](#)) More in detail, as outlined in Article 3(a) of the ESF Regulation (1304/2013)², the ESF will promote employment and support labour mobility through the support of activities regarding: (i) access to employment for job-seekers and inactive people, including local employment initiatives

and support for labour mobility; (ii) sustainable integration of young people not in employment, education or training into the labour market; (iii) self-employment, entrepreneurship and business creation; (iv) equality between men and women and reconciliation between work and private life; (v) adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change; (vi) active and healthy ageing; (vii) modernisation and strengthening of labour market institutions, including actions to enhance transnational labour mobility.

Employment policies include, in addition to the ESF measures, investments to ensure that enterprises can create the jobs which are needed. These investments fall within the scope of the ERDF. ([European Commission 2014a:5](#)) As presented in Article 5(8), of the ERDF regulation (1301/2013)³, the fund’s investment priorities comprise: a) supporting the development of business incubators and investment support for self-employment, microenterprises and business creation; (b) supporting employment-friendly growth through the development of endogenous potential as part of a territorial strategy for specific areas, including the conversion of declining industrial regions and enhancement of accessibility to, and development of, specific natural and cultural resources; (c) supporting local development initiatives and aid for structures providing neighbourhood services to create jobs, where such actions are outside the scope of Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council (1); (d) investing in infrastructure for employment services.

The ESI funds’ contribution under thematic objective 9, that is, “promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination”, is meant instead to contribute to the achievement of the target set within the Europe 2020 Strategy that aims to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty. ([European Commission 2014b:3](#)) Following the Article 3(b) of the ESF regulation the fund supports the following investment priorities: (i) Active inclusion, including with a view to promoting equal opportunities and active participation, and improving employability; L 347/474 Official Journal of the European Union 20.12.2013 EN (ii) Socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma; (iii) Combating all forms of discrimination and promoting equal opportunities; (iv) Enhancing access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services, including health care and social services of general interest; (v) Promoting social entrepreneurship and vocational integration in social enterprises and the social and solidarity economy in order to facilitate access to employment; (vi) Community-led local development strategies. The ERDF, as stated in Article 5(9) of its regulation, will contribute to the realization of the thematic objective 9 through: (a) investing in health and social infrastructure which contribute to national, regional and local development, reducing inequalities in terms of health status, promoting social inclusion through improved ac-

2 Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0470:0486:EN:PDF>

cess to social, cultural and recreational services and the transition from institutional to community based services (b) support for physical, economic and social regeneration of deprived communities in urban and rural areas (c) support for social enterprises.

1.2 Microfinance and thematic objectives

Before stating why microfinance in Europe is important in the achievement of the objectives 8 and 9, it is essential to define what European microfinance is and what in general microfinance aims at.

Microfinance (through the provision of microloans without collateral, insurance, savings and technical assistance services) is specifically directed towards micro entrepreneurs and disadvantaged people who wish to enter into self-employment or to individuals that have personal consumption's needs but face obstacles in accessing traditional banking services due to banks' lending conditions. In other words, the primary target of microfinance institutions (MFIs) are those people that suffer of financial exclusion, defined as the "process whereby people encounter difficulties accessing and/or using financial services and products in the mainstream market that are appropriate to their needs and enable them to lead a normal social life in the society which they belong" ([SWECO, University of Strathclyde – EPRC, et al. 2016a:25](#))

Moving to the European context, it is important to specify that the EU definition of "microcredit" is twofold: "a business microcredit is a loan under EUR 25 000 to support the development of self-employment and microenterprises (that is, enterprises employing less than 10 people, Ed.); a personal microcredit is a loan under EUR 25 000 for personal necessities such as rent, medical emergencies, or education." ([SWECO, University of Strathclyde – EPRC, et al. 2016b:3](#)) While microenterprise lending targets nearly bankable clients (new and existing enterprises) with loan amounts at the upper end of the €25,000 limit, inclusion lending is intended for "unbankable clients", persons who are likely to remain excluded from the banking system in the medium to long term ([Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:8](#)), due to bank's lending conditions.

But which are the main causes that led to the exclusion from the financial market of a section of the European population? First of all, the high transaction costs of managing small loans and low profit margins make commercial banks reluctant to lend small amounts. ([Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:7](#)) Moreover, in general banks also perceive lending small loans to self-employed persons and micro-entrepreneurs as too risky. Furthermore, people from disadvantaged groups often have neither a business track record nor any collateral. ([Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:7](#))

In general, lack of information regarding the borrower leads to two forms of information asymmetries that could hinder people's opportunity to access financial services. The first one is adverse selection that appears when banks cannot determine whether the borrower's project is low or high risk or whether one borrower is riskier than others. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:7](#)) The second one is moral hazard, caused by the financial institution's difficulty in observing whether the customers are making the full effort for a successful investment of the loan amount or engaging in risky behaviour which increases the risk of default. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:7](#)) In addition, sometimes the applicant's lack of awareness of their own legal status, financial condition, requirements or financial possibilities for their enterprise, might undermine from the start the individual's integration in the financial system. ([SWECO et al. 2016a:28](#)) In some cases there are skill barriers as well. For instance, members of some target social groups (such as low-educated or migrants) may be unfamiliar with business finance concepts that are key to understanding the risks and opportunities associated with a business ([SWECO et al. 2016a:28](#)) and therefore essential in order to draft a convincing business proposal. Furthermore, in particular for migrants and ethnic minorities, there can be cultural language and social barriers undermining the development of a close and confident relationship with financial intermediaries. ([SWECO et al. 2016a:28](#))

The financial crisis and the consequent economic recession have then made debt financing even more expensive and difficult to obtain. ([Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:7](#)) They have then harmed poorly educated persons more than the well-educated, at the same time threatening the governments' capacity to invest in education and skills enhancement. ([SWECO et al. 2016a:9](#))

It is not a case then that the share of enterprises which perceive access to finance as their most pressing problem is larger among microenterprises than among other SMEs. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:8](#)) For these potential microfinance clients it is especially difficult to obtain capital during times of recession. This is even more significant in the case of vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities or female entrepreneurs. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:8](#))

In conclusion, looking at the aforementioned obstacles faced by individuals and microenterprises and taking into consideration the fact that micro enterprises are reported to make 91% of all business in EU-27 and that 99% of all start-ups falling into the SME category, a third of these are established by unemployed individuals ([Baldi, Sadovskis, and Sipilova 2014:4](#)) it is evident how microfinance is central in the European context in order to promote sustainable and quality employment (Objective 8) and to promote social inclusion, combat poverty and any discrimination (Objective 9).

2. The micro-finance sector in the European context

Regarding the lenders, the 2012-2013 European Micro-finance Network's (EMN) survey reveals that among the surveyed institutions⁴ there is still an high level of diversity. Namely, as stated in the survey, "Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or foundations, non-bank financial institutions (NBFI), governmental bodies, savings and commercial banks, credit unions, cooperatives, Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI), microfinance associations, and religious institutions are active in microcredit provision in Europe and are represented among the MFIs surveyed". ([Mirko Bendig, Benjamin Sarpong, and Michael Unterberg 2014:10](#)) It is then further highlighted the fact that among the most common institutional types are nonbank financial institutions and NGOs or foundations, even if a report drafted by the "European Banking Federation's Working Group of experts in the financing of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises" stresses how private banks are still among the main providers of microfinance within the European Union, supplying microfinance services both independently for their own account, and in partnership with other providers, such as public bodies, notably the European Investment Bank (EIB), and specialized Microfinance Institutions (MFIs).⁵ ([Guido Ravoet \(Ed.\) 2010:3](#))

Data from the 2012-2013 survey show the importance of microfinance in the promotion of microenterprises and creation of new jobs that are respectively, with 67% and 58% response rate, the first and the second widespread missions of European MFIs. ([Mirko Bendig, Benjamin Sarpong, and Michael Unterberg 2014:37](#)) This is also reflected in the composition of microloans disbursed: in 2013 in fact, 79% of the total value of microloans was issued for business purpose and 21% for personal consumption purpose. ([Mirko Bendig, Benjamin Sarpong, and Michael Unterberg 2014:9](#)) This resulted in the same year in the support by the surveyed organizations of a minimum of 121,270 microenterprises and start-ups resulting in an approximate impact of at least 250,000 jobs throughout Europe. ([Mirko Bendig, Benjamin Sarpong, and Michael Unterberg 2014:10](#)) As to the amount of money lent, MFIs from the 24 countries covered by the survey disbursed a total of 387,812 microloans with a total volume of 1.53 billion EUR in 2013. ([Mirko Bendig, Benjamin Sarpong, and Michael Unterberg 2014:19](#)) It is then possible to note a huge variety also in relation to the potential funding sources the MFIs have. For a long time the provision of funding for European MFIs had been confined to public

⁴ MFIs from 24 countries took part to the survey. In total, 150 out of 447 MFIs that were contacted provided data to the survey, translating to an overall response rate of 34%.

⁵ The in-depth analysis of the interactions among micro-finance services providers would go beyond the scope of this paper. If interested look at the works of Sérgio Lagoa and Abdul Suleman, Anastasia Cozarencu, Aaron N. Mehrotra and James Yetman

actors, namely governments in the form of Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), public programs with a local development agenda, administration departments or public agencies with the goal to support employment or entrepreneurship. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:26](#)) Nowadays, in addition to the already mentioned partnerships among MFIs and private banks (that is, direct funding or savings collection by private banks and provision of BDS services), one can notice the growing importance of the EU-based funding in microfinance. It can be delivered in two ways. Some of these offers are backed by resources of the European Commission (and EIB, Ed.) and are managed centrally by EIF as managing organization. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:29](#)) Others are only available at national/regional level backed by nationally/regionally co-financed EU Structural Funds resources (ERDF or ESF) and managed by Managing Authorities (national/regional authorities responsible for the implementation of Structural Funds) ([Unterberg et al. 2014:29](#))

2.1 ESI funds and micro-finance

As stated in chapter 1, the "European Structural and Investment Funds" or "ESI Funds" is a common designation for five European funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), which operate under a common framework (i.e. the CPR) as well as under fund-specific regulations, valid specifically for the single funds. ESI Funds are some EUR 450 billion of EU funding over the 2014-2020 programming period, allocated to Member States and delivered through nationally co-financed multiannual programmes to develop and support actions related to the key Union priorities of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in line with the objectives of each Fund. ([European Commission 2016:8](#))

As a matter of fact, structural Funds schemes play a growing role to directly finance microcredit provider on the national or regional level in different countries. The funding offered is loan capital in most cases to be used instead of debt finance to refinance loan portfolios. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:62](#)) The funds involved are the ESF and the ERDF. While the latter is primarily used for support to enterprises (mainly SMEs), urban development and regeneration, energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy in buildings, the former is used to support self-employment, business start-ups and micro-enterprises. ([Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:29](#)) This development is a consequence of the growing popularity in the use of Financial Engineering Instruments (mainly loans, loans guarantees and equity) in the implementation of EU cohesion policy ([Kalvet, Va-](#)

nags, and Maniokas 2012:6), due to their double advantage of having revolving character, as resources can be used over and over again, and of making projects more sustainable and efficient by moving them away from their dependency on grants. (Lopriore and Pati 2012:44) The European Commission then underlines how financial instruments create a multiplier effect (higher for the loans guarantees than for loans and equities), since additional resources come to the funds from national and regional budgets or from banks and other investors. (European Commission 2012:3-4)

Financial instruments co-funded by the ESF were first introduced under Cohesion Policy in the 2000-2006 programming period in the framework of the Community Initiative EQUAL. (Unterberg et al. 2014:29) Then, in the funding period of 2007-2013, and specifically after the Commission's communication 'A European Initiative for the development of microcredit in support of growth and employment' were developed several dedicated national and regional microcredit schemes or funds financed by structural funds. Referring to the initiative funded by the ESI funds, the introduction of JEREMIE in 2007, which facilitated the use of ERDF funds to promote the use of financial engineering instruments and improve access to finance for SMEs, generally boosted the inflow of EU structural funds into the European micro-finance sector. (Unterberg et al. 2014:62) In the present programming period, ESI funded schemes can take the form of direct funding for microfinance like in the case of Germany where a national guarantee fund was set up ("Deutscher Mikrokreditfonds") or programmes that fund support services for the clients of microfinance, e.g. coaching or business development services (BDS). (Unterberg et al. 2014:29)

Before going on with the analysis of the programmes centrally managed by the EC and EIF, it is useful to briefly describe the process that goes from the funds allocation at the European level to the implementation at the local one.

Firstly, at the Member States' level, selected managing authorities are asked to hand in, in April of each year, their National Reform Programmes (NRPs), the National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRFs) and the related operational programmes (Ops), in which Member States propose possible project in order to translate at the national level the targets and policy priorities established at the European level (Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:29), that in the current programming period correspond to the Europe 2020 strategy's ones. ESI Funds programmes proposed by EU countries are then approved (or rejected) by the Commission and subsequently implemented by Member States and their regions under shared management. (European Commission 2016:8) It is therefore the ultimate decision of managing authorities in Member States where and how funds are invested at project level within the framework of the relevant programme setting out the specific objectives, results to be achieved and types of action to deliver

them. (European Commission 2016:8) At the sub-national level, after their selection, the Managing Authorities need to conclude funding agreements with the financial intermediary or microcredit provider (Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:39), that, as highlighted by the EMN survey, can be either banks including commercial banks, cooperative banks, and saving banks, or non-bank intermediaries such as NGOs, religious foundations, social equity funds, specialised microfinance intermediaries, and government bodies. However, since these instruments require specialist management teams, there is a widespread use of holding funds as intermediaries between Managing Authorities and financial intermediaries. (Kalvet, Vanags, and Maniokas 2012:6) In other words, a usual management structure envisages the selection by a Managing Authority of holding fund manager, that is responsible for launching a 'call of interest' looking for possible financial intermediaries who will then reach beneficiaries on the ground. (Lopriore and Pati 2012:44) In this case, therefore, is the the fund operator that selects and signs funding agreements with the national/regional financial intermediaries and that then makes a contribution of resources to them. (Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:40)

2.2 Programmes centrally managed by the EIF

Outside the ESI funds framework, one can note the creation by the European Commission, jointly with the European Investment Bank, of programmes such as 'Jasmine' to support microfinance institution, the European Progress Microfinance Facility for employment and social inclusion (2010) which provides resources to increase access to, and availability of microfinance – facility now included in the programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). (Georges Gloukoviezoff 2016:6)

The EC-sponsored overview of the micro-finance sector in the EU (data valid until 2012) shows that in most EU countries centrally managed EU- funding offers only play a minor role in funding MFIs. The share of EU-funding is especially low in Scandinavia where no funding deal with centrally managed EU-resources was realised between 2010 and 2012 and UK /Ireland where only one guarantee deal was reported. In Western Europe the percentage of estimated total funding was 2% while in the more mature micro-finance sectors in Eastern Europe was 4%. In Southern Europe even if the use of centrally managed EU- funding is rising, the percentage is still 3%. (Unterberg et al. 2014:30) It does not mean however, that the role of the centrally managed funds in the microfinance sector is negligible. As highlighted in the same overview (and as it will be shown below), centrally managed EU-backed funding offers can have a central role in the attraction of additional funding from public and private sources into the

sector. Especially the integration with EU Structural Funds based funding schemes at the national or regional level can help to mobilise much of the needed funding for microcredit providers throughout Europe. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:34](#))

2.2.1 Jasmine

Jasmine was a programme developed in 2008 by the EC's Directorate General for regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) (but managed by the EIF) in response to the great demand for funding to access direct Technical Assistance (TA) support and capacity building among Western as well as Eastern European MFIs. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:25](#)) The programme sought to help non-bank microfinance institutions in scaling up their operations and maximizing the impact of microfinance products on microenterprise development and unemployment reduction within the EU through:

- Assessment exercises, which targeted younger and emerging institutions wishing to improve their institutional strength, attract donor funding and enhance their social impact;
- Rating exercises for risk and social impact, which targeted mature micro-credit providers wishing to enhance visibility and obtain new financing; and
- Training courses and consulting to build the capacity of staff or management at financial intermediaries, particularly in the areas of risk management, strategic planning, governance, and management information systems. ([Kristin Lang, et al. 2015:5](#))

These three activities are tightly interlocked and do not have to be conceived separately but as part of a single process. As explained by the EC, the technical assistance to MFIs takes the form of an assessment by a specialized rating agency (that analyses the internal procedures for decision-making and day-to-day management and how the micro-credit provider manages risks) and subsequent training in areas where improvement is needed. ([European Commission and Directorate-General for Regional Policy 2010:6-7](#)) In the framework of Jasmine was then developed the European code of good conduct, with the objective of setting out good practice guidelines that will better enable the sector to face the challenges of accessing long-term finance, benefiting funders, investors, customers, owners, regulators and partner organisations. ("JASMINE – European Code of Good Conduct for Microcredit Provision" 2016) In the present programming period it is compulsory to follow it in order to receive European funding. ([Dr Pål Vik 2016](#))

Given the positive impact of JASMINE on the sector, recognized also by the EC in its

report *Evaluation of JASMINE Technical assistance: pilot phase*⁶, the programme has been extended in the framework of the 2014-2020 programming period. It was in fact integrated under the fi-compass advisory platform, designed to support managing authorities under the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and microfinance providers under EaSI. ("JASMINE" 2016) However JASMINE was also the subject of criticism by some MFIs that benefited from its services. For instance, some Western European MFIs reported a lack of consultants experienced in Western European micro-finance operations, while some stated that JASMINE and the implementation of the Code of Good Conduct requires a proper social performance measurement system, but does not offer the funding to finance it. More in general it was underlined how the capacity building measures like JASMINE should be linked to suitable funding to implement the ideas and strategies developed with the consultants. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:25](#))

2.2.2 PROGRESS Microfinance Facility

In March 2010, as a response to the economic crisis ([Unterberg et al. 2014:35](#)), the EC's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) established a dedicated Microfinance Facility for employment and social inclusion in the framework of the Progress programme (already active from 2007). It is funded by the Commission and the EIB. The first one contributed with EUR 100 million, of which EUR 25 million have been allocated to the guarantee window. ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:11](#)) Under this window the EIF can issue portfolio guarantees to microcredit providers to cover their portfolio losses. The Commission further guaranteed the coverage for eventual losses of EUR 80 million, favouring the attraction of the EIB's money ([Riccardo Aguglia 2016](#)), that contributed with another EUR 100 million to be allocated just to funded instruments. ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:9](#)) The Project Signing Period of the facility, managed by the EIF, will end at the 7th of April 2016. The remaining funds will then be paid back to the Commission that in turn will use them for the new facility that is planned under the Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). ([Unterberg et al. 2014:35](#))

As stated in Art. 2 of Decision 283/2010/EU, the aims of Progress MF are twofold:

⁶ Precisely, in the overall findings, the EC highlighted how "overall JASMINE Technical Assistance Pilot Phase has met its objective of contributing to the development of the European microcredit sector by: Improving the productivity, professionalism and efficiency of beneficiary institutions; Promoting good governance within the sector; Enhancing its transparency; Developing and promoting industry standards such as the European Code of Good Conduct" (European Commission et al. 2014:iv)

the first objective is to make microfinance more readily available to persons who wish to become self-employed, start-up a microenterprise or develop existing microenterprises further and that have lost or at risk of losing their job, are facing the threat of social exclusion, are vulnerable persons in a disadvantaged position with regard to access to the conventional credit market, or that have difficulties re-entering the labour market ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:8](#)), by enabling microcredit providers in the EU to increase their lending activities. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:35](#))

The other objective is to improve the access to microfinance, mainly by reducing the risk borne by the microcredit providers, so that they can lend to groups who would normally not qualify for financing, because they could not put up sufficient collateral or because the interest rates would have to be very high if they were to reflect the real credit risk. ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:8](#))

Analysing in depth the instruments available under the facility, the maximum guarantee rate covered by the guarantee instrument is 75 % of the underlying microcredit or guarantee portfolio and the intermediary is to remain liable for at least 20 % of the portfolio. ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:11](#)) Generally, the guarantee issued by the EIF covers the first loss, but a cap is also agreed for each guaranteed portfolio. In this case, the maximum liability for the European Progress Microfinance Facility is set at 20 % of each guaranteed portfolio. ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:11](#))

In the 2007-2020 programming period guarantees loans UNDER EUR 25,000 for microenterprises were also available under the SMEG of CIP ([Unterberg et al. 2014:40](#)), now EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME). Under COSME there will not be any guarantee scheme specifically addressing microenterprises, even if they will remain potential target, since its main target are loans under EUR 150,000. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:41](#))

Moreover, there are 4 types of funded instruments available under PROGRESS MF: the senior loan, the subordinated loan, the risk-sharing loan and the equity participation. The Senior Loan instrument can be used by MFIs as an alternative to existing debt offers in the market. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:48](#)) Used for refinancing loan capital ([Unterberg et al. 2014:48](#)), it is generally in the range of 5-7 years, depending on the intermediaries' debt servicing capacity. ([European Investment Fund, n.d.](#)) Subordinated loans are used typically to enhancing the intermediaries' capital structure. ([European Investment Fund, n.d.](#)) As to the risk-sharing loan, a Senior Loan is combined with a risk participation of the facility in the micro credits provided by intermediaries, ([Unterberg et al. 2014:48](#)) making it particularly useful for MFIs with a strong social focus. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:53](#))

As of the end of 2014, the EIF has signed under Progress Microfinance EUR 174.2 m in loans and EUR 25 m in guarantees ([Kristin Lang, et al. 2015:ii](#)), facilitating the access to and availability of micro-finance for microenterprises. ([Kristin Lang, et al. 2015:23](#)) In total (until February 2016) it reached 43 000 borrowers: 45% were unemployed when reached and 69 % were start-ups. ([Stefan De Keersmaecker 2016](#)) Moreover, according to the 2014 report *Interim evaluation of the European PROGRESS Microfinance Facility*, 17% of the borrowers surveyed had previously been unable to obtain a conventional loan from a bank, 68% said that they were applying for a loan for the first time ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:51](#)), and another 56% assumed that it would have been impossible for them to obtain a loan on similar terms elsewhere. In addition, 43% of those surveyed reported income below the corresponding national poverty threshold ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:51](#)) – a significantly higher proportion than the EU average of 18.2% (“[REPORT on Implementation of the European Progress Microfinance Facility - A8-0331/2015](#)” 2016), while 17% described themselves as materially deprived – which is almost twice the average for the EU population. (“[REPORT on Implementation of the European Progress Microfinance Facility - A8-0331/2015](#)” 2016) However, as further stated in the report, “evidence suggests that Progress Microfinance did not induce microfinance providers to target groups which they were not already targeting before the Progress Microfinance support”. ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:53](#)) However, there are some cases in which the EIF helped the outreach of new segments. For instance, Adie's Propulsion, which drew on Progress MF's Senior Loan product in order to offer microcredits between EUR 6,000 and EUR 10,000, enabled Adie to reach out segments that were not completely covered by their previous offering. ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:9](#))

The EIF has also played a direct role in kick-starting the operations of some financial intermediaries ([Kristin Lang, et al. 2015:23](#)), lending them credibility. ([Kristin Lang, et al. 2015:9](#)) As shown by the interim report in fact, as a consequence of the aforementioned leverage effect, Progress Microfinance was also found to help microcredit providers (such as Mikrofond, Qredits, Patria Credit, FAER and ADIE) get access to additional funding. ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:67](#)) As a consequence, as further revealed by the report, “financial intermediaries often apply for EIF products and services in order to open financing doors, receive a stamp of quality and attain increased visibility”. ([Kristin Lang, et al. 2015:9](#))

Finally, it is possible to find some complementarity between Progress MF and ESI funds. Namely, in Poland, several financial intermediaries have offered ERDF-backed loans (under Jeremie) along with microfinance products supported by

Progress MF. ([Kristin Lang, et al. 2015:25](#)) Moreover, the report *Interim evaluation of the European PROGRESS Microfinance Facility Evidence of this study*, suggests that - apart from ESF-programmes in Poland and Romania providing microfinance - ESF support complementary to Progress Microfinance mainly pertains to training and business development services. ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:78](#)) However, the report further reveals how, as a consequence of the difficulties encountered by the financial intermediaries in establishing collaboration and of the lack of information on ESF funding, the potential synergies between the ESF and Progress MF micro-loans were not fully exploited. ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:79](#)) It is therefore suggested the need for a stronger strategic approach in the Member States to coordinate Progress Microfinance and ESF support activities. For instance, it is here proposed to outline the principles of complementarity of ESF and Progress Microfinance already in the OPs. ([Karin Attström et al. 2014:79](#))

2.2.3 Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)

As mentioned above, the successor of Progress MF is the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). Developed by DG EMPL, it will underpin the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy in the field of employment, social affairs and inclusion, supplementing the ESF. ([European Commission 2014c:3](#)) Namely, as stated by the EC, "EaSI's priority activities in 2014-20 will help the Member States to modernise their labour markets and social security systems and increase their rates of employment, in particular among young people. Other important tasks will involve supporting job creation, promoting a highly skilled workforce, encouraging adaptation to change and the anticipation of restructuring, enhancing geographical mobility and promoting social innovation". ([European Commission 2014c:3](#))

EaSI builds on the microfinance support provided under Progress MF and Jasmine and goes beyond the previous mandates by providing funding up to EUR 500,000 to develop and expand social enterprises (therefore, it will deliver services also outside the microfinance realm) and funding for capacity building in financial intermediaries, in the form of Jasmine-type activities provided by the EIB under fi-compass's dedicated work stream, EaSI Technical Assistance (EaSI TA). ([Kristin Lang, et al. 2015:5](#)) More in detail, EaSI integrates and extends the coverage of three existing programmes managed separately between 2007 and 2013 ([European Commission 2014c:7](#)):

PROGRESS (Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity), which supported the development and coordination of EU policy for employment, social inclusion, social protection, working conditions, anti-discrimination and gender equality;

EURES (European Employment Services), a cooperation network between the European Commission and the Public Employment Services of the Member States that encourages mobility amongst workers;

PROGRESS Microfinance, which (as described in the previous section) aims to increase the availability of microcredit to individuals for setting up or developing a small business. Under EaSI it will be managed together with the social entrepreneurship window.

The overall budget of EaSI 2014-20 is EUR 919 m, 61% of the budget will be allocated to the first axes, 18% to the second and 21% to the third. ([Unterberg et al. 2014:35](#)) The EUR 193 m managed under the microfinance and social entrepreneurship (MF/SE) axes, funding will be evenly spread between microfinance and social entrepreneurship, with a minimum of 45 % going to each. Cross-cutting projects will account up to 10 %. ([European Commission 2014c:19](#)) Differently from Progress MF, 50 % of the funds will be devoted to guarantees services and 50 % is allocated to funded instruments ([Riccardo Aguglia 2016](#)), while EUR 9 m will be used to fund institutional capacity building ([Unterberg et al. 2014:36](#)) Moreover, the estimated leverage effect of the EaSI is 12 ([Riccardo Aguglia 2016](#)), sensitively higher than the Progress MF one, that was approximately 5. ([Kristin Lang, et al. 2015:9](#))

Regarding the first axes, even if it is not specifically focused on micro-finance, the Commission communicated that around 8-9m EUR of this specific budget could be used to support microcredit providers, based on Article 16 (3b) of the proposed regulation of EaSI, which provides "support with regard to capacity-building of national administrations [...] and microcredit providers;". ([Unterberg et al. 2014:36](#)) Therefore, as far as micro-finance is concerned, it will mainly support technical assistance with Jasmine-type activities (now instead managed, as stated before, by the fi-compass platform).

2.3 Beyond financial instruments: Business Development Services

The European Microfinance Network in its bi-annual survey shows that the great majority of microfinance providers in Europe do offer support services to their clients in addition to the financing. ([Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:52](#)) In fact, in addition to the lack of funds, micro- and small entrepreneurs' business growth is frequently hindered by non-financial factors such as inadequate business management skills, lack of information and poor market access. ([Stefanie Lämmermann and Gerrit Ribbink 2011:3](#)) Moreover, administrative tasks common to all enterprises weight heavily on SMEs' balance, since they have limited resources. ([Stefanie Lämmermann and Gerrit Ribbink](#)

2011:3) The role of BDS is then particularly relevant within the European economic system, whose bureaucratic requirements and complex fiscal, regulatory and accounting systems could undermine the birth and survival of microenterprises and self-employment initiatives. ([Costantini et al. 2016:127](#)) Their role is even more essential in Western Europe, where there is a specific focus on the (re-)integration of excluded people that might lack entrepreneurial and management skills ([Stefanie Lämmermann and Gerrit Ribbink 2011:14](#)) In addition, BDS provision might be fundamental for people belonging to specific groups facing interlocking disadvantages, such as minority groups or women (in this case nonfinancial services may include also linguistic literacy, IT literacy, specific initiatives aimed at women's empowerment and the provision of essential goods). ([Costantini et al. 2016:129](#)) Therefore, it is possible to state that access to business development services (BDS) is a key aspect for the success of a microfinance project ([Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:52](#)), contributing to the lower default rates it is possible to note in the microfinance sector in comparison to the commercial one. ([Jorge Ramirez 2016](#))

The Committee of Donor Agencies for Small Enterprise Development in its "Guiding Principles for Donor Intervention on BDS for Small Enterprises" outlines two types of BDS, operational and strategic. While under operational services are labelled those services needed for day-to-day operations (information and communication, management of accounts and compliance with regulations), strategic services address medium and long-term issues related to a business' market access or competitiveness. ([Stefanie Lämmermann, Elisabeth Zamorano, and Philippe Guichandut 2007:8](#)) BDS services could be further divided into 3 clusters: client development, entrepreneurship development and business development Services. Client development services are those services aimed at raising awareness among clients of their basic business or (personal) financial situation. Generally aimed at preventing harmful situations, they are mainly directed to clients are in survival mode. ([Stefanie Lämmermann and Gerrit Ribbink 2011:7](#)) The purpose of entrepreneurship development services is instead helping individuals to start their own business and raising awareness on entrepreneurship as a career choice, plus basic business skills training. Clients seek to set up a business as a conscious choice, not so much out of necessity. ([Stefanie Lämmermann and Gerrit Ribbink 2011:7](#)) Thirdly, with business development services MFIs essay to support existing small businesses to improve their operations, with the services ranging from business advice to technical skills training and linking entrepreneurs to markets. ([Stefanie Lämmermann and Gerrit Ribbink 2011:7](#)) Moreover, Harper proposes the division of BDS in physical, social, natural and human. ([Stefanie Lämmermann, Elisabeth Zamorano, and Philippe Guichandut 2007:8](#))

Far from being a fruitless listing exercise, the variety of possible classifications is in itself a testimony of the large spectrum of services commonly included in the BDS, consequence of the extremely differentiated needs the final beneficiaries have. One of the challenges faced by the European MFIs derives precisely from the extreme variety of services they should provide. Nowadays it is in fact very difficult for them to adapt to the needs of their clients, especially as new types of entrepreneur and new types of business are emerging. ([Stefanie Lämmermann and Gerrit Ribbink 2011:3](#)) This led a portion of the financial intermediaries (namely those that did not have the skills in themselves to provide the given service) to establish a partnership with another entity, giving birth to the so-called "linked model". ([SWECO, University of Strathclyde – EPRC, t33, and infeurope 2016b:18](#)) Among the European MFIs it is then possible to find two additional models: the parallel model, in which services are offered by the same organization but managed separately (in this case specialised staff has direct control over each service) and the unified model, where financial and business development services are included in a hybrid product provided by the same staff. ([SWECO, University of Strathclyde – EPRC, t33, and infeurope 2016b:18](#))

Finally, it is important to underline that in general such support services are hardly sustainable. Therefore, financial intermediaries most often rely on the European Structural funds such as ESF and ERDF support. ([Stefanie Lämmermann and Gerrit Ribbink 2011:14](#)) Moreover, many microfinance organisations in Europe have chosen to work with volunteer coaches. ([Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:59](#)) Furthermore, an emerging trend is the use- of internet as a tool for business support. ([Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:61](#)) For instance, the online platform "MicroMentor" ([www.micromentor.org](#)), has matched more than 3,000 entrepreneurs and mentors with impressive results: more than 60% of the mentoring relationships contributed to both revenue and employment growth at less than 90% of the industry average cost of delivering these services. ([Evans 2011:11](#)) Social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube can, in addition, provide tools that can encourage collaboration, discussion and learning from entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs. ([Evans 2011:13](#))

However, the provision of BDS alone is not sufficient for the success of a microfinance project. In fact, it is in general perceived the need to improve the regulatory framework dealing with microentrepreneurship and self-employment. For instance, the loss of state subsidies when a former unemployed sets up a business (as happens in some countries) could be a disincentive in the creation of new businesses. ([Jorge Ramirez 2016](#)) In doing so, since self-employment, entrepreneurship and microfinance are at the crossroads of several policy fields: employment policy (integration of the target groups into the labour market), social policy (for what the fight against exclusion of disadvantaged persons is

concerned and economic policy (Brigitte Maas and Stefanie Lämmermann 2013:20), at the national level it is necessary a tight collaboration between ministries and departments. (Jorge Ramirez 2016)

That is why, as stated by Gloukoviezoff, "(microfinance) has a positive transformative impact for some clients but not for all. (...) (In fact), it is a tool in the toolbox to tackle poverty. It is neither the only one nor the best one, but it can be particularly effective." (Georges Gloukoviezoff 2016:26)

In conclusion, in addition to the financial support (provided by European, national or private institutions), the presence or absence of the aforementioned features, both at the microfinance provider and national levels, marks the difference between microfinance as a potentially useful from an useful tool to increase disadvantaged people's life conditions.

3. Conclusions

This article has sought to further our understanding regarding the links between microfinance and the achievement of the thematic objectives 8 and 9 of the European 2020 strategy that is underlying the European Cohesion policy for the programming period 2014-2020. Namely, it was stated its central role in the financial and labour inclusion of disadvantaged people and microenterprises, for whom is very hard to receive a loan from commercial banks.

Moreover, the financing opportunities available at the Union level for the microfinance operators were described. Specifically, it was firstly highlighted the growing role of the ESF and the ERDF in financing microfinance project, consequence of the growing popularity in the use of Financial Engineering Instruments in the implementation of EU cohesion policy (result of their double advantage of having revolving character and of making projects more sustainable and efficient by moving them away from their dependency on grants). Moreover, the paper further described the EIF-managed programmes (Jasmine and Progress MF, now under the EaSI and ficompass platforms) and highlighted the important role they have (together with ESI funds) in the direct financing of microfinance projects and most of all in the attraction of private funds, consequence of the credibility they are able to give to the microcredit operators that take advantage of their services.

Finally, it was stressed how microfinance can be a really helpful tool only if matched with business development services and only if national policies are drafted taking into consideration the multi-faceted nature of microfinance, that is at the crossroad of different policy fields (namely economy, employment and social policies).

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Refugee crisis reflected in Romanian online media in the second half of 2015: three perspectives

Marius Mureşan*

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the refugee crisis during the second half of the year 2015 in terms of media messages promoted in Romania by various politicians and journalists. The assumptions of this analysis are as follows: the online publications are promoting fear and intolerance using unconfirmed information; when referring to the refugees, the online environment is used by some leaders to win capital image by appealing to nationalism, while a part of public opinion is not favorable receiving refugees by Romania; the political opposition uses the online media in order to capture the support of those unhappy with the official policy on immigrants, as promoted by the president and the government / European leaders. To prove the first hypothesis, we chose to analyze the articles published on websites like [aflasitu.ro](#), [infoalert.ro](#) and [inliniedreapta.net](#) because they are a model of incorrect journalistic practices based on incomplete, unverified information, thus encouraging xenophobia and fear of the Muslim community. In the case of the second hypothesis, we will consider the interventions in the online media of two Romanian journalists, Lucian Mîndruţă and Robert Turcescu, because they are two of the most active public figures during September-November 2015, regarding the topic of this paper. The last hypothesis refers to two other opinion makers, but this time involving political leaders of opposition parties. The examples we have chosen are those of Bogdan Diaconu, the United Romania Party (Partidul România Unită) chairman and Traian Băsescu, Romania's former president and current leader of the People's Movement (Mişcarea Populară).

Keywords: refugees, media, journalism, opinion makers, politics

Introduction

In the contemporary period, Europe has experienced several waves of migration, which peaked especially in the postwar period. The immediate consequences of the Second World War consisted of population movements carried out in Europe. Countries such as Germany or Austria have significantly reduced their territory and ethnic Germans who now saw themselves forced to live in the new eastern countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the USSR, chose to cross the border into West and East Germany.

* Marius Mureşan, PHD Student at Babeş-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of History and Philosophy, e-mail: muresan.marius91@gmail.com.

Having achieved the economic stability, the European countries have passed through another immigration wave, this time the residents of Southern Europe towards Western and Northern Europe. In parallel, the decolonization process was the cause of a movement of population from the former colonies to metropolises (UK, France, Netherlands, Belgium and Portugal). Along with the population, which chose to return to their origin countries, residents of former colonies moved to Europe with political purposes, but most often for economic reasons. While countries like France and Britain used immigrants from former colonies for jobs requiring unqualified workers, others, such as Germany, Austria or the Scandinavian countries recruited workers from the Mediterranean and Turkey. According to statistics of authors like Christian Dustman and Tommaso Frattini (2011) the foreign population of Germany rose to 3.9 million by 1973, which means 9.8% of the population.

The fall of the Berlin Wall created the opportunity for nearly 400,000 ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to emigrate to Germany, a trend that continued in subsequent years. Recently, migration has been facilitated by extending eastwards borders of the European Union borders, which has led many inhabitants of these countries to seek a higher standard of living in countries such as Italy or Spain, along with common destinations, above mentioned.

Currently, Europe is facing one of the biggest waves of immigration after the Second World War. The first attempts of illegal entry across Europe were detected in 2011, as thousands of Tunisians have crossed the Mediterranean into Italy, following the outbreak of the Arab Spring. (Park, 2015). Immigrants from Africa, Middle East and South Asia chose to leave their home territories because of precarious economy, social change, political oppression, ethnic discrimination, religious and racial persecution, traumas of war and the threat of terrorist groups like ISIS. (Lehman, 2015)

The official position of the Romanian state to the refugee crisis, expressed by President Klaus Iohannis, lies in the idea that Romania does not consider mandatory quotas as an option, adding that the voluntary participation of each member state of the European Union is the correct solution. However, the President believes that Romania can easily manage a number of 4.837 refugees which were allotted to Romania by the vote given in the JHA Council of 22 September 2015. The other reason that Iohannis brings forward is the need for solidarity among all EU countries.

In this paper I intend to analyze the “refugee crisis” in the second half of the year 2015 in terms of the messages promoted in Romanian mass media by various politicians and journalists. The assumptions of this analysis are as follows: some online publications are promoting fear and intolerance by unverified information; the online environment is used by some leaders to gain notoriety on the refugee crisis by appealing to nationalism,

while a part of public opinion does not agree that Romania should receive refugees; The political opposition uses online media to capture the support of those unhappy with official policy on immigrants, as promoted by the President and the Government / European leaders.

The online publications rely on messages that promote fear to attract readers

During the second half of 2015 a number of sites that presented the immigration crisis using various unverified stories or based on older events, but returned to date, made their presence felt. Four of them had the following titles: “Syrians beaten by Roma in Timisoara! Go to your place, you have no place in our Romania!” ([aflasitu.ro, 2015a](#)) “U Cluj supporters attacked a group of Syrians. Get out of here while you can” ([aflasitu.ro, 2015b](#)) “A Romanian monastery of nuns in Switzerland will be evacuated to receive Muslim immigrants” ([infoalert.ro, 2015](#)) “The real victims of the Islamic State are not among migrants coming to Europe - Witold Gadowski”. ([Cerneia, 2015](#)). On first examination we noticed that all four articles contain incomplete information, without giving details. However, they have reached a large number of readers.

The first article was published on the 1st of September 2015 and refers to a brawl that took place between “a feared clan in Timisoara” and “some Syrians who marched to another town.” Along with this article, which received a total of 11.252 likes via Facebook, a clip was also published, entitled “Syria and Romanians threatened by Al-Qaeda in Romania 2013/10/13”, but the content itself had nothing to do with the subject and even the clip title. It showed a report about a protest organized by the Syrian community in Romania against the regime of Bashar al Assad. The text did not give any details about the highway where the incident allegedly occurred or about the city that the Syrian refugees were heading to. Also, there was no statement by the authorities. The event allegedly happened on September 10, 2015, but no television or newspaper in Romania reported or mentioned it. The second article was published on the same website on September 13, 2015 and tells a story where Syrian refugees were involved in a conflict with the supporters of a football team. The text refers to a protest against racism attended by “several Romanian origin Syrians”, without mentioning when and where the event took place. Following the violent action of the supporters, the anonymous author of the article claims that the police arrested 13 people. This article gathered a number of 2.105 likes on Facebook. By analyzing the content of this website, we find that it does not provide any contact or information regarding the authors of the texts.

The third article that I considered, used more details in describing the situation, but

the presented facts are not verified. It claims that the information is retrieved from the platform evz.ro ([Forest, 2015](#)), which generated 19.013 hits by this news. The main idea of the text published on 14th of September 2015 is that a Romanian Orthodox monastery who received in 2013 the right to settle in Grolley, on the site of a former Catholic monastery, the Swiss authorities urged the building staff to leave the buildings so Muslim immigrants could be installed. Moreover, they published details of an account where people could make donations to support the Protection-de-la-Mère-de-Dieu Monastery. Even if a part of the article may contain accurate information, there is no evidence that refugees are the reason for the evacuation. If by this text the anonymous writer wanted to increase the number of readers, the birth of a debate or dispute on otherness, on the cultural differences between Christians and Muslims, the goal was reached, and user comments in this regard are suggestive: "This is a first sign of what's going to happen across Europe. I thought only in England church buildings were given to the Muslims to make their mosques. A generalized phenomenon", "This is about the fact that a religion is simply removed to make room for terrorists", "Switzerland ... a country without tradition, heartless and without history! a country where they hid the great criminals of humanity, the big crooks; it is the country accomplice and beneficiary to/from the financial crisis". We chose this article especially because of the debates it has provoked among readers: the idea conveyed is that an example can become a rule at European level and has the potential to affect Romania, a country that is Christian and attached to traditional values. This time, fear is not directly suggested from the article, but it is clear from the arguments used by the author, which propagates the idea that refugees are directly responsible for this situation.

Some of the sites mentioned above are niche-oriented to attract readers, using various forms of media manipulation: intriguing titles (In the article on evz.ro the terms "[monastery] Romanian" and "Muslims" are highlighted, by capitalization), invented, unverified or fragmented information. In other cases, various online information sources speculated that among the Syrian refugees that seek political asylum in Europe are also terrorists.

This kind of information was partially presented by the Romanian online media. One of these examples is an article published on [inliniedreapta.net](#), a portal that presents itself as belonging to the "Romanian Conservatives". While describing its work, the site exposes its objectives and also the challenges that the contemporary society is confronted with: "The deserted churches and the increasingly empty schools across Europe are symbols of a dying civilization living its last days. Somewhere on its edge, the barbarians are preparing the assault". ([inliniedreapta.net, 2015](#)) Such a statement suggests a certain position on the Muslim immigration issue. The article I refer to was published on 26th of September 2015, getting 4,000 likes and 8,465 shares on Facebook, a sign that it reached a huge number of people. The article is actually a translation of an interview with Witold Gadowski published

by the Polish newspaper [fronda.pl](#). Gadowski is a Polish investigation journalist and war reporter. The main idea of this interview is that all borders controlled by the Islamic State are impenetrable so the refugees leaving must have the approval of the Islamic State. Anca Cernea, the one who translated the article in Romanian, has a single intervention outside the interview. Three phrases are the ones that attract the most attention: "Those who now flood into Europe are mostly young men, coming from who-knows-where. These people violate every rules, are entering Europe using illegal ways and are immediately presented as refugees", "These criminals who invade Europe take the place of real victims of the war", "90 percent of them are brought here by the Turkish, Albanian and Russian criminal mafia". In addition, there are two images that should help the reader to make a difference between genuine Syrian refugees in Turkey - is given a refugee camp, with many children and "migrants" in Tovarnik, Croatia - only men trying to get on a train using the windows. The terms used highlights the negative character of immigrants. Thus, according to this article, they "invaded" - so rushed over Europe with aggressive, hostile, murderous intentions while everything is called into illegality by using words from the "offense" lexical family: "criminal [ways]", "[these] criminals", "crime [path]". The author does not bring concrete arguments to support these claims, so it separates from the meaning of the translated interview.

As we have seen in the cases described above, various online publications in Romania promoted fear among the population. This was done on the one hand, by presenting unverified and even invented information - cases which if they were real, would have prompted the interest of other media actors and on the other hand, with the language used - terms which have negative connotations. As shown, reference is made to violence, war and crime. Also, they want to make a clear delimitation between genuine refugees and immigrants, which are not fleeing war, are using it as a pretext for pursuing other objectives. These investigations rely on fear, which is closely related to intolerance: once identifying the problem, the main way to solve is by demarcation, blaming and its repudiation of the other, in this case the Muslim immigrant. It is a form of manipulation practiced by appealing to the sensitivity of the population, whose instinct is to defend its values, material or immaterial, threatened by the arrival of the refugees presented in these articles.

The opinion leaders are addressing the refugee issue to gain notoriety

Amid debates in the Romanian society, on receipt or rejection, of Muslim immigrants, various opinion leaders found the opportunity to assert themselves through a vehement opposition, capturing an audience intolerant of such a possibility. We chose the example of Lucian Mîndruță, a Romanian journalist, whose activity in the Romanian

online environment most often causes extensive debates, because of the controversial positions he adopts. In support of the hypothesis that the refugee issue is used as a tool for obtaining notoriety, we chose to analyze posts on the subject, between August and September 2015 on his Facebook page (93,000 followers) – a number of 5 posts and on his blog - which includes 3 articles on this matter. The first post I want to bring into attention dates from August 26 and its main idea refers to the danger that confronts Europe, if it fails to distinguish between political refugees and economic ones – which Mîndruță believes are the majority in this case. This text attracted 1,669 likes, 402 comments and 360 shares. The main argument he uses is that immigrants would not be interested in finding only a place devoid of hazard (Romania and Bulgaria are given as examples, but economically they are not very offering), but their goal is to arrive in a country that allows them a better way of living. Lucian Mîndruță's analysis proposes an analogy with the fate of Rome, sacked by barbarians, stating that, what is happening now is "A slow robbery of some cohorts descending upon Europe in search of unemployment benefits or (possibly) jobs for which no one has a qualification". (Mîndruță, 2015a) From the example above, the phrase that has the greatest resonance is "cohorts descending upon Europe": the term "cohort" has a military origin, which in this case suggests big proportions of demographic manifestation; the verb "descends" means more than simply moving; it refers to a brutal and a vertical action. Thereby, Lucian Mîndruță has a contribution in promoting a negative attitude against Muslim immigrants, causing many negative reactions regarding his posts.

On 17th of September, Lucian Mîndruță returns with a post entitled "The Crimea model, now in Europe: how our minds are occupied." (Mîndruță, 2015b). This text falls within speculation, by considering the refugee crisis as an instrument through which Russia tries to create confusion in Europe, so Europe as a whole looks like it is unable to manage such a crisis. According to Mîndruță, Russia is doing this by supporting two types of campaigns: on the one hand, the left wing politicians are criticizing Western governments for not accepting a sufficient number of immigrants and on the other hand the far-right politicians, who believe that the number of immigrants is actually too high and that their arrival may represent a threat to Europe's traditional values. This type of post, however, has not attracted as many reactions from people, so it only got 270 likes, 18 shares and 47 comments. However, the speculative nature of the discourse and the lack of clear information is a way that can attract attention.

The latest example of posts from Lucian Mîndruță's Facebook page was dated September 27, 2015. (Mîndruță, 2015c) It is in fact a comment on the declaration of Gen. Constantin Degeratu from DIGI24 television, who said that if you put an equal sign between immigrants and war refugees, then it would be necessary "to maintain these camps until

the crisis comes to an end and possibly help these people to get prepared, to arm themselves, to go and liberate the country". (Digi24, 2015a) Mîndruță's post generated 808 likes, 260 shares and 69 comments. Most comments are positive about the idea of this message. By this we see a polarization of Romanian public opinion, but also a change of perceptions: during a few months, while the media were preoccupied by the issue of mandatory refugee quotas, opinions of the commentators on this page have changed considerably, especially highlighting the positions taken against receipt of Muslim immigrants.

The article from Lucian Mîndruță's blog that generated the most interaction is entitled "You cannot escape from yourself. The drama of not understanding why you are poor". (Mîndruță, 2015d) The text was published in the context of the problems in Hungary, where refugees who wanted to go to Germany were stranded in train stations. This time, the text that has generated over 9,000 shares on the social networks, discusses the question of a confrontation between an evolved European culture and one that does not understand the principles of liberty - most have lived all their life's under a dictatorship, gender inequality, separation between religion and state, did not know Voltaire, Goethe or Marconi. Mîndruță addresses a few questions, which he answers himself. The conclusion reached, is that the Muslim refugees are a class of misfits, "who want to move their existence, without any change, where it's better for them". Mîndruță doesn't refer directly to the case of Romania, but the discussion generated by the article (147 comments) is due to the ambiguity that the journalist uses: talking about Europe - without differentiating what is political and geographical, about the West - as a model of society, about the Enlightenment - which according to the author is specific only to the West etc.

Robert Turcescu is a Romanian journalist who over time moderated several TV shows in Romania. For online communication he uses two Facebook pages (a private and a public one), a blog and an online TV platform called *unde.tv*. For this analysis we considered the Facebook page which has 34,400 fans. Between September and November 2015, Turcescu posted 14 messages that refer to the refugee crisis. Many of these were simple distribution of articles published by various websites, but others were statements of the journalist. The post which caused the highest number of reactions is dated 19th of September, 2015, when Robert Turcescu announced that in the next six months, Romania will receive "at least 40,000 refugees." (Turcescu, 2015a) This information was not accompanied by any source and was called into question by Turcescu with similar posts on 20th and 25th of September, and also on 18th of October. Even though the original post has gathered just 210 likes, 37 shares and 38 comments, it was taken over by other information sites, reaching a much larger number of people. Thus, using the information above, the site *stiripesurse.ro* attracted 1,900 likes, the site *nasul.tv* – 1,700 likes and 8,900

shares, aktual24.ro - 402 likes, napocanews.ro - 303 likes.

The two journalists haven't adopted a clear personal position on the refugees, but they exploited the controversial elements, like the idea that the Romanian state should receive a share of immigrants, as set by the European authorities and took advantage of a general state of discontent of the population in Romania, expressed especially in the online environment. Although he had more nuanced positions, Lucian Mîndruță each time brought forward a new interpretation of the refugee problem - cultural differences between them and Europe, establishing the distinction between political refugees and economic migrants, Russia's involvement in perpetuating the crisis in the European Union. All these standpoints were made without holding theoretical or practical experience in respect of geopolitics and international crisis management. On the other hand, Robert Turcescu was noted especially by stating that Romania will be obliged to receive 40.000 immigrants over a period of six months. Without manifesting for or against this idea and without mentioning any credible source, he promoted this idea in the online environment. The fact that his prediction was not implemented proves that was not based on accurate and verified information and his only intention was to attract public interest and arouse controversy.

The opposition politicians criticize the official policy of Romania regarding the refugee problem

After the Romanian president, Klaus Iohannis, presented his views on the refugee crisis, various opposition politicians have criticized the official policy of the Romanian state. Trying to capture the support of those not satisfied with the president's position, the main way of promoting their ideas was the online media, especially social networks. In this regard, I chose the case of Bogdan Diaconu, the President of the Romania United Party. He was elected in 2012 as a Member of the Romanian Parliament on behalf of the Social Liberal Union (formed by the Social Democratic Party, the National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party), but resigned from SDP in August 2014 after tensions regarding the governmental cooperation between social democrats and UDMR, the Hungarian ethnic minority party. ([Dadacu, 2014](#)). Accordingly, Diaconu has set up a new party, which assumed the national-democratic doctrine, because Romania needs someone to solve the great amount of crisis: identity, moral and demographic crisis. ([Diaconu, 2015a](#)) He was even accused of adopting an ultra-nationalist attitude similar to that of the Jobbik Party in Hungary. Bogdan Diaconu communicates his idea through multiple channels: television stations, personal blog, Facebook page, the *Adevărul* news-

paper *blogging* platform. Within this analysis, we will consider the online means that the politician uses.

A study of the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES) from August 2015 shows that 72% of Romanians agree with the statement: "The risk of a terrorist attack by the Islamic State grows with the arrival of immigrants". ([digi24.ro, 2015b](#)). It is one of the ideas that Diaconu builds his argument - relying on Romanians fear of otherness, of a different culture - against Muslim immigrants. So far, he has published seven articles on the *Adevărul* newspaper blogging platform. The article titled "Allah Akbar, the battle cry of the immigrants who attacked the borders of Europe, published on September 17, 2015, shows aggressiveness as a general characteristic of immigrants. ([Diaconu, 2015b](#)). Another title which continues in the same vein is entitled "Immigrants burned Europe even before entering its territory", and submits an appeal to the European leaders and the public by issuing an invitation to meditate on what will happen when the Muslims "feel that they have the right to impose their religious laws and their way of life." ([Diaconu, 2015c](#)). In the other articles Bogdan Diaconu criticizes the NGOs who supported the idea that Romania should receive a certain number of immigrants. At the same time, he criticizes the Romanian President, Klaus Iohannis and the Interior Minister, Gabriel Oprea for the failure of negotiating with other members of the European Council and the Council of Ministers of the European Union. His allegations relate even to the Western leaders such as Angela Merkel and the states that oppose Romania's entry into the Schengen Area, while supporting the acceptance of a large number of immigrants from outside the European Union.

On his blog, Bogdan Diaconu sends messages especially to the European leaders. During September-November 2015 he has published five articles that refer to the refugee problem. The main idea of most of is that the European leaders and Europe itself, seen by him as an "exporter of security" ([Diaconu, 2015d](#)), have failed to respect the promises made to the citizens. More than that, he published a manifesto against Europe, which he calls "a non-Christian, bureaucratic, corporate and newer, a Muslim continent," considering that the multiculturalism which characterizes this space has led to "terrorist attacks and the loss of identity of nations" while the European Union is now transformed into the "Asian, African and Muslim Union" ([Diaconu, 2015e](#)). He publishes two articles referring directly to immigrants: the first one on 21st of September, 2015, which called for European leaders to realize "the dangers this invasion of immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers brings with", because Muslims are in many respects primitive, "under the clouds of the Middle Ages, which can be explained by the fact that they only have 1,400 years of religious history" ([Diaconu, 2015f](#)). By comparing the two media, we can observe an increased hardness language in the articles published on his blog and targeting the Muslim

population. The *Adevărul* online platform requires some self-censorship and adaptation to the rigors of the publication.

The Romania United Party's President's discourse reveals a series of semantic constructions that determines and feeds fear, intolerance and hatred towards refugees. This is done through the negative connotation of the terms used by him: the arrival of immigrants is seen as a threat towards the "loss of identity of nations" - the idea of a United Europe involves creating an own identity so the Muslim refugees would determine the denial of perennial values and identity of each state; the arrival of immigrants is described by the words "danger" regarding the existence and integrity of national states and "invasion" an action that is unexpected, unwanted and has a harmful nature; certain discussions at the European level are seen as a "deadly game" in which Romania can be absorbed - refers to a situation of no return, which would mean the end of European civilization as we know it today. Lastly, by accepting immigrants, Diaconu considers that Romania will become a battleground - uses the phrase "theater of war" - of the "fundamentalists". By using the last term, the Romanian politician makes a generalization in which immigrants are labeled as fanatics and Muslim extremists.

In the third part of the analysis, we will consider the Facebook page of Bogdan Diaconu which gathered over 158,000 followers. At the time of this study it was the fifth popular page among Romanian politicians. (Popa, 2015) An analysis of the first three months after the refugee crisis emerged shows the following situation: in September 2015 he posted 24 messages, on October 6 and in November 8. Most of the posts have attached pictures showing violent scenes during clashes between immigrants and order forces, while others ridicules German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who, according to a post of November 25, "stubbornly tries to stick the Muslim immigrants down our throat". (Diaconu, 2015g). The basic idea is that the European Union is forcing Romania to accept quotas of refugees while Bucharest authorities are unable to show any opposition. Most often, the messages are short, interrogative, easier to share with users of social platforms. One example dates from November 22, when Belgium was on alert because of terrorist threats: "Right now Brussels is holding several operations against terrorists. Shots were fired in the capital of Europe! And Europe continues to fool us and compel us to welcome Muslim immigrants so Romania turns into a war scene as well! How much more should we listen to our unconscious leaders, whether from the country or outside it?". (Diaconu, 2015h) The main ideas are: Western states are trying to mitigate the terrorist threat and direct the immigrants towards Eastern countries such as Romania; our country is about to become a war theater; political leaders are unable to manage the situation, whether in Europe or Romania.

The second politician to be analyzed is the former Romania's President, Traian Băsescu.

He is already known for the impact of the messages he posts on Facebook. The first one referring to the refugee crisis dates from 4th of September, 2015 and is an excerpt from the Romanian Constitution: "Romania Constitution, Article 3, paragraph 4: The Romanian territory cannot be displaced or colonized with foreign populations". (Băsescu, 2015a) The point is taken over by Bogdan Diaconu, who transmits this message as an image with the Romania's flag in background. During the JHA Council in September it was decided that the European Union countries have to receive a fixed number of refugees.

Analyzing the Facebook page of Traian Băsescu, between September and November 2015, we see that the positions taken on the issue of immigrants are few compared to those of Bogdan Diaconu. On 14th of September, Traian Băsescu appeals to the government leadership to strengthen the protection of Romanian borders, seeing this act as a "major test of our ability to be good Europeans". (Băsescu, 2015b). In another post he evokes a meeting which took place during the European People's Party Congress in Madrid between 21st and 22nd of October, 2015 with Dimitris Avramopoulos, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, during which he exposed his vision on the refugee crisis, summarizing the idea that "the mandatory quotas stimulates migration and doesn't diminish it". (Băsescu, 2015c). This subject comes back to Băsescu's attention after the terrorist attacks in Paris, when in the post published on 14th of November, 2015 he adopted a strong position against "Islamic terrorism" (Băsescu, 2015d) failing to ensure the assertion by clarifying the distinction between Muslim immigrants and Muslim terrorists. Also, the former president did not refer to the fact that most of those who belong to terrorist groups and act on the European soil, are already citizens of EU member states. Surely the former president of Romania knew that information, but preferred to omit it.

Even if Traian Băsescu's public positions on this topic in the online environment are only a few, he has had numerous television appearances and interviews in some printed newspapers. One of these was given to Dan Andronic, general manager of the daily newspaper Evenimentul Zilei, dated 23rd of November 2015. In this discussion, the former President refers to the cultural differences between Islam and Christianity, considering that the western states failed to integrate those who came from former colonies. In this direction, the fault is identified precisely inside these Islamist communities who, says Băsescu, refused to integrate, even if they had all the necessary resources. Even though it has a more moderate approach to the idea that with the immigrants, also terrorist came to Europe, he highlights the fact that in the Paris attacks, two people who arrived in Europe in the past two months were involved. One of the strongest statements of Băsescu of the entire interview is: "I would not want my grandchildren to live in an Islamized

Europe, which loses European values". The mechanism of this type of argument is flawed in its logical structure because of betting on the emotional factor, being known as a rudimentary form of manipulating the public opinion. By this phrase, the current leader of the People's Movement projects a future in which Europe is undergoing a proportions cultural transformation, the Islam being the main danger. Such positions are not a first: in the first televised debate for the 2009 presidential elections, candidate Traian Băsescu, said that the best deed he did was to baptize a Muslim child. ([mediafax.ro, 2009](#)) This position has prompted a wave of discontent, within the Democratic Tatar Union, which interpreted his response as a declaration with an electoral purpose, aiming the support of the Orthodox population. The problem itself to the idea expressed then, consists of two ideas according to DTU: "we see the Christianization of a Muslim as being the free choice of every person to live in the faith he wants, but Christianization of a child who does not have the power to choose, we don't think is a commendable gesture" and that "it accredits the idea that the child was "saved" by saving him of the cruel fate of being a Muslim all his life." ([Novăceanu, 2009](#))

Because during the last term of his presidency, Traian Băsescu no longer had such standpoints, we consider that all these elements of discourse were based on political and electoral reasons. Returning to the Article of the Constitution we mentioned before, in the same interview, Dan Andronic reveals that the decision of the JHA Council is temporary, whereas the Constitution covers issues permanently applicable. Traian Băsescu argued by the fact that those quotas were imposed on Romania and that there is no indication of how long the refugees will stay in our country.

This kind of approach of the two politicians may be interpreted as a denial of the idea of European solidarity and it is, without a direct intention from the former President, on the same page with the ideas of nationalism and anti-Europeanism, promoted by the United Romania Party's leader.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this paper, Romanian online media had an important role in spreading negative attitudes against refugees in three ways: online publications seeking to attract readers with stories that inspire fear, opinion leaders seeking notoriety by addressing this problem, especially using controversies and opposition political leaders, which stands in contrast with the Romania's official policy in this matter, trying, by appealing to nationalism, to attract the sympathy of a discontent public. Both articles and posts on social networks have attracted a large number of readers and supporters, which

leads us to believe that the online environment in Romania is a forum that feeds fear and intolerance by those who disagree with the external political direction of Romania. This is done through invented, unverified news and using a harsh language that leads to discrediting the cause of refugees.

We can also identify European level similarities with the situation in Romania. In many states the extreme right parties have gained support using a nationalist and xenophobic discourse, presenting the European Union as an entity which failed in protecting its citizens and will lead, by permissive policy, to the loss of national identities. Such ideas were supported by Marine Le Pen, leader of France's National Front, Nigel Farage, the leader of UKIP in Great Britain, Viktor Orban, Prime Minister of Hungary and the Jobbik Party members from the same country.

So Romania is not an exception to the debates in the European online media when it comes to refugees. The same kind of messages are transmitted, promoting nationalism, religious intolerance and frustration with the European Community system.

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Transition, Europenization and Identity in the Ukraine Case

Anton Gabriel Moldovan *

Introduction

Ukrainian crisis whose manifestations are known as Euromaidan broke out on November 23, 2013, when former President Viktor Yanukovych has decided to suspend preparations for Ukraine's Economic Association Agreement with EU, preliminaries commenced in March 2012 ([Gardner 2014: 6](#)). Also, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has suspended the agreement with the European Atomic Energy Community ([Interfax 2013](#)). Former Ukrainian Prime Minister, Mykola Azarov, claimed that this decision was taken in order "to ensure Ukraine's national security," a financial security measures, as will be seen: if the EU at that time offered a loan of 610 million Euros in addition, being required major changes in Ukrainian law; Moscow will provide to Kiev 15 billion Euros in loan ([McHugh 2014](#)) to which was added the promise to lower the price of gas by one-third without structural reforms, such requests were imposed for receiving West loan ([Gardner 2014: 8-9](#)). In these circumstances, the former leadership of Kiev chose Russian support. Ukrainians discontent against the decision of the former president, Viktor Yanukovych, was manifested by protests in Independence Square in Kiev, demanding the government resumed negotiations with Europe and removing with Russia. The protests intensified after the former administration signed the law on banning protest.

The population's disappointment was expressed especially in the western part of Ukraine, closer to Europe as politically and culturally point of view. Soon, the protests turned into real riots, forming two camps, pro-Western (with the centre in Kiev) and the second one pro-Russian (dominant in the Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk, areas populated mostly by Russians ethnics and Russo phones). This event was the pinnacle of social

* Adrian-Cosmin Iușan is a PhD Student in History at Faculty of History and Philosophy of Babeș-Bolyai University from Cluj Napoca (Romania). Email: iusanadriancosmin@gmail.com.

and political instability that has persisted in Ukraine, since the beginning of its existence as an independent state.

From the beginning, starting with the events which marked the recent history of Ukraine, this paper aims to highlight the political and social development of the Ukrainian state that led the second revolution of Ukraine and the reasons why dissatisfied people up against former leadership. The transition / democratisation and Europeanization of the state were the main demands of pro-Western revolutionaries. In this context, this analysis will address the concepts of transition and Europeanization in the context of existential situations in Ukraine, being analysed in relation with the concept of *identity* and the role that concept may have on the political vision of state under an international regime. The work will be divided into two levels of analysis: a) approach the theoretical concepts of transition / Europeanization and identity in the context of the existential situation in Ukraine; b) evolution of Ukraine's relations with the European Union over various presidents of the Ukrainian state.

Transition and democratization in the context of Euromaidan

The events that occurred for approximately two years (November 2013 to mid-2015) revealed differences of attitude, vision and political orientation between Western and Eastern Ukraine. The revolution's results showed that the Ukrainian society is much divided, and the phenomenon of transition and Europeanization is not agreed in unison. Ukrainian crisis episode can be analysed at least two respects:

- The society openness to change, which involved two camps: modernist who wants change, transition and Europeanization of Ukrainian society and the traditional, adept of classical and historical values outlined by Russian historical tradition.
- The shaping of pure social identity, the Ukrainian identity- a mix between pro-westerns (who measure the formation of a pure identity by merging with European values) and nationalist (whose new values will be shape on a semi-western foundation, but where Ukrainian identity means a majority of indigenous elements – in other words, the vision of moderate segment of society). This vision has faced the society who militated to preserve the identity of "our" Eastern identity which cannot be merged with the immoral western values.

The process of Europeanization (westernization) of the Ukrainian state is a phenomenon initiated since 2004 and has gained momentum during the next period and Euromaidan Revolution. Overall observation of Europeanization phenomenon and its application in Ukraine case will enlighten efforts being made and the extent to which

this process of will be met in the context of the state. On the other hand, the adoption of identity constructivist theory can explain the phenomenon met post-Euromaidan in Ukraine, that of societal division, in this case, the militants for a pure Ukrainian identity and activist of maintaining indigenous traditions (Russian values). Using these two theoretical approaches - the Europeanization process (transition) and construction of identity - will be examined socio-political metamorphoses and their impact on the future of Ukraine, becoming part of the western environment or remaining hereinafter under the political-cultural influence of Russia.

The concept of Europeanization is essentially a benchmark for non-Member States whose progress should be guided by this standard ([Kratochvil 2008: 397](#)), in the idea that they want to be an integral part of European society. Unfortunately, at the base of European evolution of Ukraine lays several issues which have delayed the process: foreign policy promote by his leadership, over time (an oscillatory policy between West and East); pro-Russian administrations at the helm of state and the influence of the Russia Federation, in close link with the lack of coordination between EU and Ukraine. All this made almost impossible developments of Ukraine to Western values – incompatibility of standards. In another ways of things, political discourses have an important role in determining of external objective, and the following structure can explain how discourses influence foreign policy of a state:

- Speeches of public and elites are key factor in our debate
- The idea of structuralism - speeches of these agents (public and elite) can be divided into two categories: specific discourses and superficial discourses
- Then, the incompatibility between different discourses of agents obstructs successful socialization between small agent (audience or governmental organizations, in the case of Ukraine) and one higher - political figure.

Starting from this perspective, in the sphere of foreign policy and politics, in general, the discourse is a tool that analysed worthy may provide important details of a person's thoughts. There are particular rules of political actions that can be identified in political discourse, and also its frequency. On the other hand, making a structure of discourse may be revealed three stages of its: deep speech that would be the link between nation and state; speech as concept of a demonstration of the nation-state related to its relation with Europe and the discourse regarding the state outlook speech towards Europe ([Kratochvil 2008: 398-399](#)) (this classification belongs to Oleg Weaver). The same theorist states that relation between state and his people is identical with the deepest discourses, because, in this context, Weaver sees a link with the country's identity, a link which is more important for state's foreign policy than internal security. Nevertheless, the classification made by Oleg Weaver does not fit entirely to the internal case of Ukraine, providing only

a general explanation of the mismatch between elite and public discourses. Using the analyse of discourses just for foreign policy utility, it does not explain as well the internal political crisis.

Further, referring to Kratochvil, he emphasises the requirement of the *nation-state* concept dissociation, because, in the case of Ukraine, associating the term of state with the term of nation makes difficult to determine the type of “nationality” which is preferred by the society/public (Kratochvil 2008: 400-401). For instance, we speak about pro-Western “nationalist” and pro-Russian, thus it can be designed no concrete, comprehensive, unambiguous foreign policy as a single-voice of estate, nor achieve of internal security. The belief that Ukraine is one entity can confuse the essence of analysis forasmuch customizing of identity may be incompatible with the principles which the European regime is built now. International regime no longer focuses so much on the nation-state based on national identity, the less European, the less EU.

The second approach refers to contemporary social-constructivist theory vision, according whom identity is located in relation to “others”. These “others” (Russo phones and Russian ethnic in this case) plays an important role in the identity politics and constructivism theory display identities, generally, in relation to others. In this dealing “we-others”, an issues is the uncertainty whether the latter are needed into establishing an identity and whether they may be associated with antagonism and identity violence that occur in a given territory. The second assumption is concerning if the “others” play or can play a subversive role in the negotiation and the contest of identities (Morozov, Rumelili 2009: 28-29).

The assumption that constructivist theory starts is that “others” must be regarded as “we”, in other words, they must be embedded and integrated in society and national identity, in the end to regional or global identity. Thus, identity is constructed linked to various factions of “others”, both internal and external. By giving this multiplicity to “others”, a key question is whether the identity (national case) can be built through temporality of “others”, i.e. by this instrument, the status of their past to be taken as a benchmark in the construction of identity (Morozov, Rumelili 2009: 30-31). This is a very sensitive issue for Ukraine. At the moment, what happens at the socio-political level in Ukraine contradicts seriously the hypothesis exposed by constructivist theory – namely identity is built alongside “others” - for two reasons:

- Shaping a pure Ukrainian identity supposed to depart from tradition and ancient culture. The old identity is always associated with oppressive political influence of the Soviet Union and then Russia. For the moment, version of ‘others’ inclusion into version of “pure” Ukrainian identity seems excluded.
- Socio-political nature of the Ukrainian state is still incompatible with Western

model, where “others” means largely “us” (recognition determined by the status of a European citizenship). Vision variant of Ukrainians for “others” fall into two categories: a model of a central-eastern, of attempt to identify and self-identify in their own values, as currently happens in Poland or Hungary or model promoted by the Russian Federation - that of Russian identity, different from others with too less similarities. Therefore, this nature of identity vision obstruct for the time being the adaptation of that kind of constructivist theory hypothesis.

In other news, the construction of identity does not mean exercising power over “other” or coerce them. To build an identity implies an process, somehow, conditioned by a common “written-constitution” of the “insiders” and those “outside”, where the both category enjoy the same rights (Morozov, Rumelili 2009: 32) (to use their own language, religion, and the possibility of setting up agencies, their own organizations).

Also, the creation of a national identity consisted by “we” and “others” faces one more obstacle in Ukraine. Presuming that could be achieve a national identity (but hybrid yet) and the process of Europeanization of the Ukrainian state should start, there is no guarantee that both political class and society will not be affected by the fact that they have to embrace Western values, different by the tradition they have shared during the last twenty-five years. Taking into account the messages illustrated by some anti-Western demonstrators, in those short interviews conducted on the street during the revolutionary movements, they worried about the extent of liberty that Western countries allow to its citizens in terms of moral or legal rights – for example, the acceptance of prostitution, recognition of homosexuality and other such aspects.

Finally, we must not forget that Ukrainian society seeks for shaping of her national identity, a process that implies two phenomena:

- an identity that is currently trying to define itself by giving up old values, directly associated with the Soviet Union or Russia, and
- adoption of new values, new visions. But what means “new” for Ukrainian society cannot be guaranteed as a synonymous with European values.

The failure of EU relations with Ukrainian administrations

A brief history of the Ukrainian leadership, after the country got his independence, helps in order to point out the attitude of different presidents of Ukraine and their position and openness to cooperate with European Union. This action emphasises why both Ukraine and EU failed to get close. Equally, EU’s leadership because of their tolerance and lack of determination to engage more decided to bring Ukraine closer to EU represented another point that maintained a continuous process of duplicity, in terms of Ukrainian’s foreign policy.

After a period of almost three years, Leonid Kravchuk, the first president of an in-

dependent Ukraine, was replaced by Leonid Kuchma, who apparently declared himself pro-European, took controversial policies and he frequently changed the priorities of foreign policy of state. He declared formal alliances with all the countries which he visited (United States, Russia, India, China – on the principle of the highest bidder), as for the relation with EU, he seemed to be willing to reforms until intervened Russian blackmail and better offer from Russia. As a result, Kuchma proved that he was a very unpredictable President and easy to be blackmailed.

Only in 2001, for the first time, EU has taken a firm stand against Ukrainian president because of two reasons:

1. The case of Gongadze - President Kuchma was allegedly implicated in the murder of a journalist, the proof of records of a conversation between the president and killer being disregarded as evidence.

2. The dissolution of Yushchenko's government - disagreements between the president and Prime Minister at that time, Victor Yushchenko, has led to the dissolution of the government. The main causes of this event were corruption and economic reforms that was attempting to be applied in the interests of oligarchic class by the president, and Yushchenko did not respond to those requests.

Following these two events, the Council of Europe discussed, for the first time, the exclusion of Ukraine from the European Commission. Shortly afterwards, everything was forgotten.

In 2004, took place extremely controversial presidential elections, but in the end, Viktor Yushchenko won. Yushchenko's victory represented a step further for EU-Ukraine relations as well as seeming to be a step toward democratization of the state. Immediately after his election, the new president visited European capitals in the hope that, sooner or later, Ukraine will become an EU member. Finally, everything remained at the level of rhetoric, Ukraine has found them as corrupt and undemocratic as before.

In 2010, the presidential chair was won by Viktor Yanukovych, which meant reorienting Ukraine toward Russia Federation and the cooling of relations with European Union. In 2010, the presidency was won by Viktor Yanukovych, which meant turning away toward Russian Federation and Ukraine weakened relation with the European Union. President Viktor Yanukovych has established the Working Group that aim to improve the electoral legislation in line with international standards. Despite the fact that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, OSCE, the Venice Commission and other organizations has stressed the need for immediate changes to legislation regarding elections at various levels, in the end, this body has failed to carry out amendments to the law on presidential, local and parliamentary elections. These changes were necessary in the context of the preparation of Ukraine for the subsequent signing of the Association

Agreement with the European Union. Finally, three years later, we witnessed what was called generic Euromaidan, a bloody revolution, which led to his removal and taking power by force of new political figures, until the election that took place in May 2014.

Currently, the administration led by President Petro Poroshenko, seems to have a pro-Western vision. It remains to be seen whether this policy will materialize in the coming years. If the beginning seemed promising, about two years after the installation of new management, things are looking confuse - the new administration inability and political instability are revealed by events such as the conflict in Ukraine's parliament, in December 2015, when a member of Petro Poroshenko Bloc, namely Oleh Beam, bullied Prime Minister Iatseniuk. Petro Poroshenko Bloc and the People's Front have been the parties that began the governance and have promised to Ukrainian people to reform the state, but the results are still far from expectations. Relevant in this perspective was a message sent on a social network against political class: "*We do not want a new revolution, which you are unknowingly pushing us towards. We are ready to take responsibility for the future of our country. Thus, we do not ask, we demand: to start a real fight against corruption; restoration of justice, rule of law implementation; transparency in government; formulating a plan (action) clearly ... and every day of delay (to implement them) kill your chances to return the people's support*" (Euromaidan Press 2015).

Conclusion

The transition process / Europeanization of state is and will be a costly episode in the process of Ukraine's evolution which cannot be achieved without solidarity of the whole Ukrainian society. Without awareness of the new political class, which was chosen on the grounds of his pro-Western vision, any setback would mean the loss of Western support in this process. Although the new leadership's inception was promising, yet domestic developments are identified with difficulty. On the other hand, the European Union must realize that the ultimatum imposed in November of 2013 is, on the one hand, its obligation to engage more strongly in the domestic construction of Ukraine, because despite support in reforming main systems and institutions towards democratic transition, numerous reports of international organizations (EU, CoE, OSCE) pointed out that many of these legislative provisions have not been fully implemented and the political and judiciary system were subject of political actors interference (oligarchs or groups of oligarchs). In other words, it encountered an Ukraine that made very small developments which attest their incline towards a democratic perspective both institutionally and socially, an example being national minorities who suffer whenever the government changed.

During Yushchenko mandate, the minorities suffered because many of their rights was violated; when presidency was taken by Victor Yanukovych, he introduced the law concerning regional language (a law that put advantages to Russian minority) and after assumption of power by interim govern (led by ultra-nationalist political activists) meant to repeal that law – the law of “regional language” was reinforced after Poroshenko took the lead. Thus, the Union’s position must to be more committed and when the Ukrainian politicians that hold the offices “will fail” to be sanctioned.

Whenever European Union tried, economically speaking, to spur the Ukrainian state to develop democratic institutions, the initiative was halted from the very beginning, perhaps because of Russian Federation, which has all the interest that Ukraine to remain an unstable country, to depend by Russian support. But in these circumstances, the EU aware of the situation, fails to westernize Ukraine, the Union has to accept that Ukraine is an essential buffer-zone and “shield” for the Russia to prevent the extension of EU and NATO near Russian state border. On the other hand, incentives for Ukraine for the most part were considered unsatisfying for association and no motivating for the country to undertake the required reforms (if the EU at that time offered a loan of 610 million Euros, in addition, being required major changes in Ukrainian law; Moscow was offering to Kiev 15 billion in loan, to this being added the promise to lower the price of gas by one-third and no applications for structural reforms as they were required to receive Western loan - this is the level whereon the European Union must be aware she is struggling with the Russian Federation). Ukraine became more a burden for the European Union than a reliable partner, for the most part because Action Plan for Ukraine contains a number of priorities which are general and devoid of concrete targets. Also, regarding judicial reforms and anti-corruption policies, it is noted that, aside from a few warnings and negative assessments about Ukrainian administration regarding alignment prospects to EU, there has been nothing concrete in Union’s hand (concrete steps consisting in sanctions, termination / suspension of the partnership, to the exclusion of Ukraine from CoE etc.).

At least, Ukraine is a particular case concerning European integration. The unsuccessful attempts of the EU to support European reconstruction of the Ukrainian state can be attributed to two key issues - social, political and cultural development of Ukraine and the influence of Russia that the EU failed to replace during the last two decades - issues that are key elements of the debate on Ukraine’s integration in the European space, a central-western Europe characterized by other values, different by the former Soviet Union whose traces can still be found in the attitude of a part of Ukrainian society and the Ukrainian leadership.

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Sandu Frunză, *Fundamentalismul religios și noul conflict al ideologiilor*, [Religious Fundamentalism and the New Conflict of Ideologies], the Second Edition, revised and enlarged, Cluj-Napoca, 'Școala Ardeleană' Publishing, 2015, 429p

DISTRIBUTING HIS IDEAS and his points of view along six distinct parts, each with its own chapters and subchapters, distinguished Professor Sandu Frunză brings to the attention of the interested reader, in a revised and enlarged edition, the issue of fundamentalism manifested in all the world religions and contemporary ideological conflict. As the author himself confessed, the topic is more present because myth and imagination are becoming increasingly visible in contemporary ideologies.

At the very beginning of the reading volume submitted to the attentions, the reader learns that, as specified by prof. Frunză, in the modern human life, the presence and importance of myth can be detected in the system of choices, as in the way of valorisation social reality. He also mentioned that the myths may have a variety of roles, functions and purposes. That is: a) myth can be an instrument of transfer of identity, the creating of new identities in the process of identity homogenization; b) the myth provides a solid fundation of communication; c) the myth can cause a series of distortions and conflict in term of social life; d) myth has an important role in political discourse; e) myth provides ways to explain the destiny of community, etc.

Volume continues with an interesting analysis of what the author called „Ideology as secularized religion and religion as ideology”. In the three chapters grouped under this title, the author preferred both maintaining a clear distinction between religion and ideology, but also considering theology as the most elaborated form of doctrinal reflection in a constituted religionas.

In Part III, „Aspects of Christian fundamentalism”, S. Frunză revealed that initially the term *fundamentalism* has had a positive connotation, assuming a return to the biblical foundations of faith interpretation; later fundamentalism appears as a reaction to modernism interpretations which trying to adapt the Bible to theories and challenges of the modern world. But in the few decades, significance of the term was degraded, reaching finally to designate a negative phenomenon. And, to bring as many clarifications of

his readers, the author has provided interesting examples. Also, the author specifies that in Christian violence practices can be found an instrument similar to the textbook for efficiency practices violence in the Islamic culture, since this same spirit of violence committed in God's name.

Then, the Sandu Frunză's analysis moves to the Jewish fundamentalism, mentioning that traditional political theological vision of Judaism is distinguished by the fact that the form of theocracy functioning as monocracy. And, taking into account of this reality, the author also revealed another reality, namely that Jewish tradition is by nature a political tradition, assumes that its laws are state laws, and from here possible conflicts with what could, in the case of modern states, be constituted as civil society or the state of law, democratic. Not least, the reader is also indicated if must be considered that Judaism is a religion incarnated in a community, religion and Jewishness are mutual reinforcing, and in the center of this culture, that was built on the principles of Jewish law, is the idea of duty. And Sandu Frunză dedicated a separate chapter in his book to the significance and the role of Jerusalem in Jewish history, but also Muslims. Not least, also said that the Zionist enterprise in Palestine was (and is) associated with a miracle, which was possible because Zionism has formulated an ideology that capitalize on the idea of returning to Jerusalem. The difference between Zionism and religious traditions is that in theological vision the return should take place with the coming of the Messiah, while ideological vision assign messianic attributes to the intellectuals and members of the Jewish community. Part IV of the volume ends with a very interesting chapter about Jewish fundamentalism.

Of course, incursion realized by Sandu Frunză would not be complete without approaching the problems of the Islamic fundamentalism. First author mentioned that secularism has become a characteristic of the Arab world until the second half of the twentieth century, when modernity has become a reality for institutions and way of thinking of the Arabs, although some communities have not even got to know the forms of secularization. The appearance of Islamic fundamentalism is placed closely with contemporary ideologies of modernization failure – the failure of Western liberalism in the Arab countries, especially Egypt. On the other hand, the failure of traditional Marxism (although that was a factor of modernization) was due to the fact that it was applied without being adopted Muslim society. And scientific ideology of Marxism had no way to take root in a society where myth, symbol, narrative, imagination, playing a central role. Not least, prof. Frunză has considered necessary to clarify that tends imposing Western culture in the Islamic space have caused, in most cases, a strong anti-Western reaction. And on this fund, was developed conscience that Islam can exceeding crises that brought Western modernization process and even overtake the West by establishing Islam as the new world order. A separate chapter is dedicated to Sandu Frunză analysis of Jihad as a form

of political communication and the existence of survival Muslim, being offered examples of Al-Qaeda, the Islamist attack on Charlie Hebdo, Daesh, etc.

The volume concludes with an analysis of religions identities, multiculturalism and ideology in a global context, tolerance and multicultural policies in the context of globalization, but also with a case study on the Church and nation state in Romania. All these phenomena are placed in a larger context, in which Sandu Frunză raises the issue of religions minorities and multiculturalism state intervention in regulating religions community life, secularization, etc.

Finally, I assert with responsibility that we have a successful book, which is already a point of reference in literature in our country. The style of the book is concise, dividing into chapters and subchapters increases clarity of ideas, and by accessible language in which they were exposed all information and ideas, the author has the great merit of being able to establish a direct link with the reader.

As for me, I welcome Professor Sandu Frunză option to publish this volume and I can only wish him success in the future and wait for his next publications.

Marcela Sălăgean *

* Marcela Salagean is a Professor at the Department for International Studies and Contemporary History, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.
E-mail: marcela_salagean@yahoo.com