

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

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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 *inlinedreapta.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 Mîndruță 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 (Mișcarea 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.

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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”. ([Cernea, 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-Quaeda 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. (Dadacus, 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-

cu. 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”. (Bănescu, 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 Bănescu, 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 Bănescu 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”. (Bănescu, 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”. (Bănescu, 2015c). This subject comes back to Bănescu’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” (Bănescu, 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 Bănescu’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 Bănescu, 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 Bănescu 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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