

**The economic migration of Romanians in the European Union.
Two case studies: Spain and Italy**

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“Migrația este un fenomen normal. La nivelul colectivităților umane, naturală este mișcarea unei părți, nu stabilitatea exclusivă.”¹

[Migration is a normal phenomenon. Movement is natural for part of any human community, they are not exclusively stable.]

“75% din cetățenii români care au plecat la muncă în țările Uniunii Europene motivează că în România nu sunt apreciați la adevărata lor valoare. Cei mai mulți dintre aceștia (77%) sunt tineri cu studii medii (76%). Al doilea motiv al emigrării, legat de subsistență, este invocat de numai 13%.”²

[75% of the Romanian citizens that left to work in the countries of the European Union explain their decision by the fact that in Romania they are not appreciated at their true value. Most of them (77%) are young persons with a high school education (76%). The second reason for emigration, subsistence, was given by only 13% of them.]

“Sigur că într-o epocă a globalizării lucrurile se pun cu totul altfel decât în societatea feudală. Dar, orice-am zice, nu e normal ca în țară să rămână escrocii, profitorii și hoții, iar de plecat să plece, pe de o parte, creierele, pe de alta brațele. Înseamnă că falimentul țării e inevitabil.”³

[It's sure that in the age of globalization the problems are not treated in the same way as in a feudal society. But, no matter what we think, it is not normal that the cheaters, the racketeers and the thieves are the only ones that stay in the country and that all the brains on one hand and all the working arms on the other leave from it. It means the failure of the country is inevitable.]

¹ Șerban Monica, “Trasee de migrație internațională către Spania”, in Sandu Dumitru (coord.), *Locuirea temporară în străinătate, Migrația economică a românilor: 1990-2006*, Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă, București, 2006, p. 119.

² Barascu Magda, “Românii emigrează pentru că nu sunt apreciați în țară”, on EurActiv.ro, December 5th, 2005, http://www.euractiv.ro/uniunea-europeana/articles%7CdisplayArticle/articleID_4800/Romanii-emigreaza-pentru-ca-nu-sunt-apreciati-in-tara.html [31/07/2008].

³ Mihăieș Mircea, “Amazon.ro”, in *Evenimentul zilei*, no. 4990, November 12th, 2007, www.evz.ro [12/11/2007].

During the 1980's, travelling outside Romania and just going for a visit, to work or simply just for the sake of leaving in another country it was not possible. The regime introduced a clear law stating that the citizens of the 'multi-developed Republic' could not leave the country unless explicitly allowed to do so by the authorities. According to the propaganda machine, the citizens of Romania were the happiest in the world, for Romania was the most perfect country one could have dreamt of living in. At least that is what two generations – mine and the one of my parents were taught in school. Alas, the “perfect society” failed in so many ways. Despite all obstacles, there were people who managed to migrate abroad, but one needed lots of courage, money, luck or help to do this. Then were the stories of the successful ones. Stories of places where people could speak freely, where there were shops with plenty of products available to anyone (and not just rationed like during the war), where there was even light on the streets and in the houses. What a mirage this was!

Nowadays, one third of the families in Romania (2,5 millions) have at least one member of their family that has or had worked abroad.⁴ As the temporary working migration of Romanians is something that has become an ordinary way of life, I was curious to find out how this phenomenon is perceived. My paper will thus try to identify the manner in which the image of the Romanian immigrants is created and used both in the destination countries and in the country of origin.

As Marie-Eve Blanc remarked, “*the representations produced in the host countries of immigrants are major elements constitutive of the social and cultural capital which lead to the actions of the migrants.*”⁵ The representation of the immigrants becomes a kind of mirror that reflects the image the majority has upon the others, the foreigners. A mirror with influential powers – it influences the process of discrimination and also that of integration.

⁴ Sandu Dumitru, “Explorarea Europei prin migrații pentru muncă: 1990 – 2006” [Exploring Europe through work migrations: 1990 – 2006], in Sandu Dumitru (coord.), *Locuirea temporară în străinătate, Migrația economică a românilor: 1990-2006*, Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă, București, 2006, p. 17.

⁵ Blanc Marie-Eve, “La difficulté d’échapper à sa “bonne réputation”: l’immigrant vietnamien dans la presse en France et au Canada”, in *Transtext(e)s – Transcultures*, no. 1, Lyon, 2006, p. 123.

I chose to analyse Romanian immigrants' images in two countries: Italy and Spain. My choice was based on various reasons. First of all, these two countries have been the main destinations for the Romanian emigrants for the last 10 years. Secondly, they have the largest communities of Romanians abroad. Being an immigrant myself, that happened to be for some months in Italy, I was able to discover the different sorts of perception about the Romanians there.

Object of my analysis are several newspaper articles and cartoons from Spain, Italy and Romania.

The theoretical framework is based upon the sociological analysis made by Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă in 2006, several studies of Ana Bleahu on the emigration of Romanians and two issues of the intellectual magazine *Dilema veche*.

How many?

*"[...] des millions de Roumains partis travailler à l'étranger: combien de millions? Impossible de préciser. Mais leur apport net à la nouvelle prospérité du pays se reflète directement dans les milliards d'euros qui, bon an, mal an, viennent alimenter les banques roumaines au moins depuis 2000."*⁶

[millions of Romanians that went working abroad: how many millions? Impossible to say. But their net contribution to the new prosperity of the country is directly reflected in the milliards of Euros that, taking one year with another, have been feeding the Romanian banks since at least 2000.]

Ilie Șerbănescu, a reputed economic analyst, wrote an alarming editorial concerning the number of Romanians working abroad. He stated that there are as many Romanians working outside Romania as there are people working legally in Romania.⁷ To be more precise, although nobody knows for sure how many Romanians work outside their country, there are some estimations:

- The Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister suggests that 1,2 million Romanians are legally working outside the country;

⁶ Durandin Catherine, Petre Zoe, *La Roumanie post 1989*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2008, p. 165.

⁷ Șerbănescu Ilie, "Afară lucrează tot atâția români câți în țară", *Revista 22*, XV (909), August 10th – 16th, 2007, www.revista22.ro [22/05/2008]

- The Minister of Labour states that 2 millions of Romanians are legally and illegally working abroad;
- The United Unions of Workers (Blocul Național Sindical) announces that 3,4 million workers seek better paid jobs abroad (including the temporary workers).

There are 4,5 million legal workers in Romania. In this way, the editorialist continues, “*spațiul numit România este amenințat de extincție ca lăcaș al națiunii române*”⁸ [the space called Romania is threatened by extinction as the birth place of the Romanian nation].

How many of those Romanians are in Italy and Spain? Officially, there were 270.845 Romanians in Italy by the end of 2005⁹. The Romanians, as from 2005, became the largest minority in Italy. The Italian Minister of Internal Affairs calculated that there are around 2,5 millions Romanians in Italy¹⁰. Unofficially, there are considered to be 1 million Romanians in Italy, while when talking about themselves, the Romanian immigrants in Italy think they amount to number in the millions.

In Spain, there are around 300 000 legal Romanian immigrants¹¹; unofficially, journalists believe them to be around 1 million.

Although this paper is not primarily concerned with the impact migration is having on Romanian identity, it is notable that there has been vociferous reaction from otherwise disinterested experts.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ According to the Caritas/Migrantes, *Immigrazione. Dossier Statistico 2006. XVI Rapporto sull'immigrazione*, <http://www.stranieriinitalia.it/news/sintesicaritas25ott2006.pdf> [01/07/2008].

¹⁰ According to Moga Camelia, “Dosar: Migrația românilor în Europa – trecut și viitor”, on EuroActiv.ro, May 7th, 2007, http://www.euractiv.ro/uniunea-europeana/articles%7CdisplayArticle/articleID_10156/Dosar-Migratia-romanilor-in-Europa-trecut-si-viitor.html [29/06/2008].

¹¹ Reher David-Sven (dir.), *Informe Encuesta Nacional de Inmigrantes (ENI - 2007)*, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Madrid, 2008; there are officially 530.786 Romanians and Bulgarians in Spain, as the web site of the Spanish National Institute of Statistics show <http://www.ine.es/jaxi/tabla.do> [01/07/2008]. In the same time, in 2006 there were 690.679 Romanian immigrants that applied for a one-year renewable work and residence permit, and in 2005 they were 192.134 Romanians with resident permits and 126.298 Romanians with permits for work in Spain, as Ana Bleahu showed in her paper “The Story of the *Căpșunari* – Romanian Migrants on Labour Market in Spain” presented at the “Migration and Social Policies in Europe” Conference, June 8th - 10th 2006, Pamplona, Spain.

Why Italy and Spain?

“L’Ouest demeura longtemps l’inconnu, puis l’interdit désiré et s’incarne aujourd’hui dans une attente confuse de prospérité. Une inaccessible prospérité. Dix ans après la chute du régime de Ceausescu, la société roumaine n’est pas une société occidentale.”¹²

[The West, an unknown entity for a long time, then was seen as the forbidden desire, and today creates confusing expectations of prosperity. An unachievable prosperity. Ten years after the fall of Ceausescu’s regime, the Romanian society is still not a western society.]

It must be mentioned that Romanian emigration had three stages during the nineteen years since the events of 1989. According to the study *Locuirea temporară în străinătate. Migrația economică a românilor: 1990 – 2006*¹³:

- in the first period, 1990 – 1995, there were five main destinations that accounted for more than 7% of the total leavings: Israel, Turkey, Italy, Hungary and Germany;
- in the second stage, 1996 – 2000, Canada and Spain are added to the first five destinations;
- during the last stage, which starts in 2002 and continues today, there is a massive concentration of emigration to Italy and Spain

In 2004, the European Institute in Romania¹⁴ remarked that the migration phenomenon is in a state of perpetual change. With time ethnicity will be less important in the choice of a destination country – the emigration that is oriented around the family and friendship relationships will prevail. The type of migration that is representative nowadays is network migration:

“Legăturile stabilite între actorii participanți la procesul migrației bazat pe rețele se referă la schimbul de informații, asistență financiară, ajutor în găsirea unei slujbe și alte forme de asistență. Unele rețele informale fac posibilă finanțarea transportului, găsirea unei slujbe, cazarea migranților.”¹⁵

¹² Durandin Catherine, *La Roumanie, un piège?*, Ed. Hesse, Saint-Claude-de-Diray, 2000, p. 105.

¹³ Sandu Dumitru, “Explorarea Europei prin migrații pentru muncă: 1990 – 2006” [Exploring Europe through work migrations: 1990 – 2006], in Sandu Dumitru (coord.), *Locuirea temporară în străinătate, Migrația economică a românilor: 1990-2006*, Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă, București, 2006, p. 19.

¹⁴ Constantin Daniela – Luminița (coord.), *Fenomenu migraționist din perspectiva aderării României la Uniunea Europeană*, Institutul European din România, București, 2004.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[The relationships established between the actors involved in the migration process based upon networks refers to sharing information, financial assistance, help in finding a job and other forms of assistance. Some informal networks make possible the financing of transportation, finding a job and accommodating migrants.]

From 2004 to 2007 in Italy and Spain this network migration was characterised by Romanians arriving in the destination countries and finding jobs without having previously dealt with the legal formalities involved. After a migrant had found a job and a place to live, legalization of his/her status followed. The authors of the study noticed the permanent existence of a group of illegal Romanian immigrants in the two countries looking for jobs, as well as another group that is formed by immigrants having a job and seeking a way to legalize their status.¹⁶

Italy and Spain are chosen for this study for such the network already exist. As Ana Bleahu expressed it, a network of migration started with a “pioneer” in 1994 (a young unemployed Romanian aged 25) that succeeded in bringing in no less than 38 people (friends and family) to work in Spain by 2002.

The danger, nonetheless (and this appears to be the case of Italy today), is the suffocation of the networks. A network works as long as its dimensions are large enough to assure help in different ways, but small enough to keep it's members in close contact.¹⁷

“Rețelele de rudenie, de vecinătate, precum și apartenența la aceiași comunitate (sat, cartier) din România reprezintă un punct important în creșterea numărului de emigranți clandestine spre Italia.”¹⁸

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39. See also Bleahu Ana, “Italia: Între informal și ilegal, tolerați, dar nelegalizați” , in Sandu Dumitru (coord.), *Locuirea temporară în străinătate, Migrația economică a românilor: 1990-2006*, Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă, București, 2006, pp. 85 – 91.

¹⁷ As mentioned by Trandafiroiu Ruxandra, “Voice from the margins. A study of Romanian diasporic websites, symbolic geography, transnational capital and nostalgia” presented in the “Cultures in Transit” Conference, July, 18th – 21st 2008, Liverpool, UK.

¹⁸ Bleahu Ana, “Italia: Între informal și ilegal, tolerați, dar nelegalizați”, in Sandu Dumitru (coord.), *Locuirea temporară în străinătate, Migrația economică a românilor: 1990-2006*, Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă, București, 2006, p. 86.

[Kinship, neighbourhood and community (same village, same district) networks in Romania represent an important point in the growth of the illegal Romanian immigrants in Italy.]

There are theories about why the first wave of Romanian migrants chose Italy and then Spain. One of them is that the languages spoken are easy to understand and assimilate: both Italian and Spanish are Latin languages, having the same origins as the Romanian language.

Another theory is the one of incomplete laws. As Monica Șerban explains:

*“Cei care doresc/decid să migreze dar nu satisfac condițiile destinației trebuie să speculeze “scăpările” legislației și să găsească modalitățile de a îmbina legalul cu asumarea clandestinului pentru a-și pune planul de migrație în aplicare.”*¹⁹

[Those who wish/decide to emigrate but do not satisfy the conditions imposed by the host country, have to speculate the “loopholes” of the legislation and to find ways in which to combine legal methods at the same time as assuming a clandestine status in order to put his/her migration plan into practice]

Basically, in a country that did not have very definite and clear laws concerning the immigration (which was the case of Italy, for the country used to be an emigration country, not an immigration one), was easier for the immigrants to settle there.

We love you, but do not come back – how Romanian migrants are seen back home

*“Opinia publică românească percepe fenomenul migraționist în primul rând ca o migrație pentru muncă. În proporție majoră, se consideră că migranții obțin câștigurile bănești din muncă, numai o mică parte a opiniei publice apreciind că aceștia câștigă bani din furt și cerșit.”*²⁰

[Romanian public opinion perceives the migration phenomena first of all as migration for work. In a major proportion, it is considered that the migrants obtain the pecuniary benefits

¹⁹ Șerban Monica, “Trasee de migrație internațională către Spania”, in Sandu Dumitru (coord.), *Locuirea temporară în străinătate, Migrația economică a românilor: 1990-2006*, Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă, București, 2006, p. 119.

²⁰ Constantin Daniela – Luminița (coord.), *Fenomenul migraționist din perspectiva aderării României la Uniunea Europeană*, Institutul European din România, București, 2004, p. 6.

through work, only a small part of the public opinion appreciates that they obtain the money from theft and begging.]

The affirmation above may be right, but it's not how the Romanian media presents the Romanian emigrants.

When searching the articles about Romanian immigrants, there were a few categories in which they could be found:

- the crimes the migrants do when abroad;
- Romanian migrants and the impact they have upon the economy;
- the social problems migrants cause (a generation of children abandoned by their parents);
- the problems migrants face once they return back home.

Romanian crimes abroad

In most of the Romanian newspapers, the crimes Romanians commit abroad serve as catch titles which sell the newspapers. For example:

“Infractori români, arestați în Italia - Șapte bărbați, care clonau cărți de credit și furau bani din bancomate, au fost reținuți de poliția din Bologna, informează agenția ANSA, preluată de Rompres”²¹

[Romanian transgressors arrested in Italy – Seven men, who were duplicating credit cards and stealing money from ATMs, were detained by the Bologna police.]

“Hoț român imobilizat și predat poliției de doi pensionari - Doi bătrâni, unul de 88 de ani și altul de 76 din Rovigo (40 de kilometri sud de Padova) au imobilizat un român de 35 de ani, Aurelian Marinescu, intrat în casa unuia dintre ei pentru a-l jefui.”²²

[Romanian thief immobilised and turned in to the police by two retired men – Two old men, one of 88 and the other of 76 from Rovigo (located at 40 Km south from Padua) immobilised a Romanian aged 35, Aurelian Marinescu, that had entered the house of one of them in order to commit a robbery.]

²¹ *Evenimentul zilei*, nr. 5251, August 5th, 2008, <http://www.evz.ro/articole/detalii-articol/815238/Infractori-romani-arestati-in-Italia/> [07/08/2008].

²² *Adevărul*, August 19th, 2008, <http://www.adevarul.ro/articole/hot-roman-imobilizat-si-predat-politiei-de-doi-pensionari/366410> [20/08/2008].

“Șase români au băgat în spital doi polițiști - Șase români au băgat în spital doi polițiști spanioli, după o altercație ce a avut loc într-un apartament de pe Plaja De Las Americas din Arona, Tenerife.”²³

[Two policemen hospitalised by six Romanians – Two Spanish policemen hospitalised by six Romanian, after an altercation that took place in an apartment on the beach De Las Americas in Arona, Tenerife.]

“Românii din Italia, imigranții care comit cele mai multe crime - Românii se află pe primul loc în ceea ce privește crimele comise de imigranți în Italia, potrivit unui studiu Eures-ANSA, publicat de Il Messaggero. Cercetarea a relevat că în cazul a 75% dintre omorurile comise de străini, autorii sunt imigranți ilegali.”²⁴

[The Romanians in Italy, the immigrants who commit the most crimes – The Romanians are in the fore in relation to the crimes committed by immigrants in Italy, according to a study Eures-ANSA, published by Il Messaggero. The research revealed that in the case of 75% of the murders committed by strangers, the perpetrators are illegal immigrants.]

“Infrațiuni comise de românii de peste hotare în 2007 - Plecați din țară pentru o viață mai bună, emigranții români au devenit, în 2007, o adevărată problemă națională pentru state precum Italia sau Spania, țări unde se înregistrează o creștere alarmantă a infrațiunilor comise de conaționalii noștri.”²⁵

[Crimes committed by the Romanians abroad in 2007 – Gone abroad for a better life, the Romanian emigrants became, in 2007, a real national problem for countries like Italy and Spain, countries which register an alarming increase of crimes committed by our co-nationals.]

This increase in crime by Romanians abroad is illustrated in the frequency and nature of the news paper reports concerning them. For example, during the first wave of Romanian migration there were occasional stories about the Romanians eating swans in Vienna²⁶,

²³ *Adevărul*, August 19th, 2008, <http://www.adevarul.ro/articole/sase-romani-au-bagat-in-spital-doi-politisti/366419>.

²⁴ *Ziare.com*, January 24th, 2008, http://www.ziare.com/Romanii_din_Italia_imigrantii_care_comit_cele_mai_multe_crime-222770.html

²⁵ *Ziare.com*, December 31st, 2007, http://www.ziare.com/Infrațiuni_comise_de_românii_de_peste_hotare_in_2007-204324.html.

²⁶ As mentioned by Popescu Adina in the editorial that opens the special issue of *Dilema veche*, vol V, no. 235, August 14th, 2008, centred upon the theme “Romanians abroad”, <http://www.dilemaveche.ro/index.php?nr=235&cmd=articol&id=8858> [20/08/2008].

whereas nowadays there is practically no edition of the any newspaper that doesn't print a subject related to the crimes committed by the Romanian immigrants abroad.

In Romania, the newspaper *Adevărul* started from November 2007 publishing two columns dedicated to the Romanian emigrants working in Spain and Italy. The columns appear on each issue of the newspaper and they focus on presenting the events (cultural, social, educational, but also the news items) that are directly related to the two communities. "Români în Spania" [Romanians in Spain] and "Români în Italia" [Romanians in Italy] have a good audience judging from the numerous reactions of the readers of the on line versions. The moment when the newspaper chose to start publishing these columns is linked to another criminal act committed by a Romanian. In October 2007, a Romanian immigrant in Italy robbed and hurt an Italian woman that died after several days in the place where she was aggressed. When the crime was discovered, the Italian press started a campaign against the Romanian immigrants that continues even now. The Romanian newspaper wanted to counterbalance that negative campaign with a more positive one. Although a small initiative, it seems that most of the TV channels and a large majority of newspapers have a special correspondent to the countries in question – a sign that the media acknowledges the existence of a large group of Romanians abroad.

Even though there are some newspapers that have special articles from time to time dedicated to the Romanian communities living in Italy and Spain, the media (the written one at least) prefers focusing on crimes committed by Romanian immigrants.

The negative campaign against Romanian immigrants in Italy has the same basis as all the right wing campaigns against immigrants that appeared throughout Europe for the last two centuries. Words like "flood", "invasion", or "danger" are to be found in the Italian press concerning the Romanians as they were used in the British press one century ago concerning the Chinese immigrants or in the French press before and after the Second World War concerning the African immigrants.²⁷ Here are some examples:

"Altri cinquemila rumeni verso Padova - Cinquemila rumeni sono pronti a prendere casa a Padova. Da ieri la Romania (con la Bulgaria) ha fatto il suo ingresso nell'Unione

²⁷ For more details on the question, see Lee Gregory, "L'Opium et les Chinois dans le discours colonialiste", on <http://www.gregorylee.net/> [30/06/2008] and also Lee Gregory, *La Chine et le spectre de l'Occident*, Paris, Ed. Syllepse, 2002.

Europea. La Caritas ritiene che siano almeno 40 mila i cittadini rumeni pronti a fare le valigie per venire in Italia a cercare fortuna. Padova è una delle città più amate dai rumeni. Potremmo assistere, dunque, nel giro di pochi mesi, ad una nuova piccola invasione dall'Est europeo."²⁸

[Five thousand Romanians more going to Padua – Five thousand Romanians are prepared to settle in Padua. Since yesterday Romania (with Bulgaria) entered the European Union. Caritas evaluated at around 40 thousand the number of Romanians that are ready to pack things and come to Italy for a better life. Padua is one of the favourite destinations of Romanians. So we can expect, in a few months, a new small invasion coming from the Eastern Europe.]

*“L' audizione del ministro al Senato. Il collega Ferrero: limitare l' afflusso dalla Romania Il governo e l' allarme rom «Un esodo verso l' Italia»”*²⁹

[The hearing of the Minister by the Parliament. The minister's colleague, Ferrero: we have to limit the flood from Romania. The Government and the Roma alarm signal: “An exodus to Italy”]

*“**Nomadi, invasione di poche ore** - Ieri mattina una trentina tra camper e roulotte si è fermata nel parcheggio di via Casola. Non si trattava di turisti, ma di nomadi, di una comunità rumena che sta attraversando l'Italia. [...] L'episodio ha indotto, inoltre, i consiglieri comunali di Alleanza nazionale Stefano Benedetti e Stefano Porzano a chiedere all'amministrazione «interventi preventivi per arginare il fenomeno». Sono ormai migliaia, argomentano i due esponenti del centrodestra, «i nomadi arrivati nel nostro paese dopo l'ingresso della Romania nell'Ue e gli unici mezzi di cui dispone il comune per frenare la loro presenza sono i portali anticamper e il divieto di transito nella zona di Marina di Massa ai mezzi che toccano i due metri di altezza.»*³⁰

[Nomads, invasion for few hours – Yesterday morning, around thirty camping cars and caravans stopped in the parking of via Casola. They weren't tourists, but nomads from a Romanian community that is transgressing Italy. [...] The episode made two local

²⁸ Barsotti Leandro, “Altri cinquemila rumeni verso Padova”, in *Il Mattino di Padova*, January 2nd, 2007, <http://espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio-local/Altri-cinquemila-rumeni-verso-Padova/1466587/6> [02/08/2008].

²⁹ Sarzanini Fiorenza, “Il governo e l'allarme rom “Un esodo verso l'Italia””, in *Corriere della serra*, September 26th, 2007, http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2007/settembre/26/governo_allarme_rom_esodo_verso_co_9_070926080.shtml [10/08/2008].

³⁰ “Nomadi, invasione di poche ore”, *Il Tirreno*, March 16th, 2007, <http://www.italysoft.com/news/il-tirreno.html> [08/08/2008].

councillors, Stefano Benedetti and Stefano Porzano, ask the authorities to do preventive intervention in order to put away the phenomena. The two representatives from the centre right state that nowadays there are thousands “of nomads who arrived in our country after Romania joined the EU and the only ways in which the local authorities can stop their arrival are the anti camping disposals and the interdiction of transit through the commune of vehicles that are more than two meters high.”]

In reaction to this type of articles, a Romanian cartoonist, Mihai Matei, draw several caricatures. I chose to present one of them, called “Romanians in Italy”³¹ which shows how is perceived in Romania the attitude of the Italian authorities regarding the Romanian immigrants.



The invasion of Romanian immigrants, as perceived by the Italian media, takes the form of an old bus filled with persons that have the same face: that of the above mentioned Nicolae Măilăuț. An invasion of outlaws. This invasion is announced by a border patrol in a desperate cry to his colleague: “Mamma mia! Mario, turn the alarm on! A new group of Romanian emigrants arrived!”.

In the European Union, the space that should allow the free circulation of all the European citizens (for one of the principles on which EU was created was the right of free movement for all the citizens of the member states), the borders still exist for some. And the proof of that is the law adopted for the first time by the Italian government in December 2007 that allows Italian authorities to expel EU citizens that are considered to be a threat to the

³¹ The comic is taken from the web site of the author, www.ironic.ro [14/05/2008].

security of the country. Rejected several months after by the European parliament, the law was modified and was validated once again in the spring of 2008, without much protest coming from the EU authorities.

The free movement of Romanians in the EU is a subject for caricatures not only in the Romanian and Italian press, but also in countries that do not belong to the Union. During the European Football Championship, the Swiss newspaper “Le Temps”³² published a cartoon in which the Romanians are described as a poor gypsy woman begging in front of a bank. “Move on!” the policeman orders her, in that implying the new rules concerning the rights of free movement given to Romanians. For the Romanians, the only option is to move, for they do not belong to the Western society.



Romanian strawberry pickers

No one knows for sure when the expression “căpșunari” [a word that designates the Romanian temporary immigrants that left before 1997-1998 to work in Spain for the fruits picking season] was coined. But the word started to be used more and more by the media, in an derogatory manner. The fact that these impoverished people increasingly had to rely on this source of income resulted in immigrants being progressively placed in this same

³² Chappatte, “Free circulation rights given to Romanians”, in *Le Temps*, May 29th, 2008, www.letemps.ch [29/05/2008].

category. The label “căpșunari” is also deceptive in that it portrays all Romanian fruit pickers as “Strawberries pickers” when, as Adina Vălean, the European deputy discovered when making the documentaries about the temporary labour emigration of Romanians, they are actually working in several other domains.³³

The stories about the “strawberry pickers” appear periodically in the Romanian press during the summer time, when the temporary Romanian workers abroad usually come back for holidays – usually from the end of June up until mid August. Most of the Romanian TV networks during that period have a reporter at the borders of Romania that has to present the way in which the temporary workers come back. And every time the question focuses on the same aspect : “How was working abroad?”.

The comics that one of the most known Romanian cartoonist published on the 1st of August 2006³⁴ reflects well the way in which the Romanian media represents the Romanian workers that left for work abroad:



The Romanian immigrants are people with no voice – they have a strawberry on the place of their head. They have no opinion for the journalist that is interested to describe a controversial subject. In the case of the comics I have chosen to present, the question is more allusive to the labelling of those workers as being “căpșunari”: “How is the work in Spain?”.

³³ Dordea Alexandra Livia, “*Migratorii salvează onoarea României*”, in *Evenimentul zilei*, nr. 5204, June 19th, 2008, www.evz.ro, [19/06/2008]; and <http://www.valean.eu> [19/06/2008].

³⁴ Vidu on <http://www.vidu.ro/capsunari-la-munca-in-spania.php> [28/06/2008].

In one of the most famous poems written by Ana Blandiana during the communist period, she stated: “Eu cred că suntem un popor vegetal - / Cine-a văzut vreodată / Un copac revoltându-se?”³⁵ [I think we are a vegetable nation - / Who ever saw / A tree revolting?]. Who could ever imagine strawberries rising up?] As the trees, they have no voice, no will, no way of protesting, they just become a humorous image that will fill three minutes on television.

It could be considered when seeing these comics that the way in which the Romanian workers are represented is just the way in which they are seen by the journalists in question – voiceless person that occasionally produces a newsworthy piece of news. A part of the “société du spectacle” as Guy Debord presented it³⁶. But neither a concentrated, nor a diffuse spectacle, for the boundaries do not exist anymore in between the poor, the bureaucratic society and the plenty, the capitalist one. It is the “Spectaculaire intégré”³⁷, the integrated spectacle that one sees in the media – the show in which (s)he is both the author and the player.

As recurrent as the summer info about the comeback of the Romanian immigrants for holidays, there is, at the end of the year, the economic analysis about how much money the same “strawberry pickers” sent to Romania.

In the analysis Radu Tatucu made for Hotnews.ro³⁸, he states that there are two types of Romanian emigrant workers. One category is that of the “strawberry pickers”, the nurses, the temporary tourism workers that spend 3, 6 or 9 months working abroad and then come back to Romania to spend the money in their home country, then repeating the cycle. The other category is that of the Romanian emigrants that work all year abroad and come back only during holidays. Since the former category actually spend their money in their native

³⁵Blandiana Ana, “Eu cred”, published for the first time in the *Amfiteatru* magazine in 1984, had as a result the assignation of Ana Blandiana to home – she suggested that the Romanians deserve their situation, for they submitted to the communist regime without protesting.

³⁶ Debord Guy, *La Société du spectacle*, Ed. Champ Libre, 1971, http://pagesperso-orange.fr/dumauvaiscote/la_societe_du_spectacle/societespectacle.htm.

³⁷ Debord Guy, *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle*, Ed. Gerard Leibovici, 1988, <http://pagesperso-orange.fr/dumauvaiscote/commentaire4.htm> [20/06/2008].

³⁸ Tatucu Radu, “Despre căpșunari și cum folosesc ei banii câștigați în strănătate” [About the strawberry pickers and how are they using the money gained abroad], on HotNews.ro, April 18th 2006, <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-arhiva-1182097-despre-capsunari-cum-folosesc-banii-castigati-strainatate.htm> [28/06/2008].

country and the later just come back for short visits to friends and family to whom they present their new status and their new cars that were bought in the place where they work and live, the most beneficial category for the native country is that of the “strawberry pickers”. He defended them on these terms:

“Nu m-aș mira ca peste zece ani să avem o Românie în care, chiar dacă nu vor predomina Audi-urile A6, fermele de căpșuni cultivate în solarii, cele de agricultură organică și cele de curcani să devină norma și nu excepția în mediul rural din România.”³⁹

[I would not be surprised if in ten years we will have a Romania in which, even if the Audi A6 cars do not predominate, the solarium produced strawberries farms, those of organic agriculture and those of turkeys shall be the norm and not the exception in the rural Romania].

At the beginning of 2008, another economic analyst, Ionuț Popescu, published an article in the *Capital* magazine, titled “Îi vrem pe căpșunari înapoi?” [Do we want the strawberry pickers back?], in which he states the profound change in the Romanian society that would come from those that everyone calls “strawberry pickers”. However, even though Romanian government officials are announcing measures to secure the return of Romanian emigrants, the “strawberry pickers”, it must be considered that this may have a limited effect. Romanian emigrants did not leave Romania at the desire of it’s government, and are unlikely to return at its request.

“De întors se vor întoarce doar cei care au plecat cu acest gând: să-și facă suma și apoi, eventual, să pună pe picioare o afacere acasă.”⁴⁰

[Those who shall return are those that left with this purpose in mind: to gather a sum of money and then, eventually, to start a business back home.]

In the report of 2003, the International Organisation for Migration estimated that every household that has one of its members working abroad gains from him/her, each month, money or goods worth around 265 Euros.⁴¹

³⁹ Tatucu R., *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Popescu Ionuț, “Îi vrem pe căpșunari înapoi?” [Do we want the strawberry pickers back?], in *Capital*, January 9th, 2008, <http://www.capital.ro/articole/ii-vrem-pe-capsunari-inapoi/106497> [28/06/2008].

⁴¹ International Organization for Migration, *Risks of irregular Migration to the European Union. Perception and Trends*, <http://www.iom.int>, 2003; and Bleahu Ana, *Fenomenul migrației în rândul tinerilor din România*, in *Calitatea vieții*, vol XV, (3-4), București, 2004, pp. 303 – 315.

How the computer, the cell phone and the grandparents replaced parents

In March 2006, Răzvan Suculiuc, a ten year old boy, committed suicide because he was missing his mother. She had left the country to work abroad in order to buy her son a computer. The case of Răzvan is not the only one. In 2006 two other children committed suicide for the same reasons, and a fourth case was registered at beginning of 2007. As stated by Alexandru Racu, “*este una dintre cele mai sumbre consecințe ale fenomenului migrației de masă, altfel aducător de prosperitate economică, care afectează România de mai bine de cinci ani*”⁴² [it is one of the gravest consequences of the mass migration phenomena, that otherwise brings economic prosperity, that has affected and still affects Romania for more than five years].

In an attempt to count the number of children that have one or both parents working abroad, Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului [The National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Children] advanced the number of 34 536 children. Their data is incomplete, for the Authority itself acknowledges that there are departments that have sent only 30% of the cases, while others up to 100%.⁴³ The incapacity of the Government to control the situation is also seen in the fact that the only measure taken until now is the modification of the law that concerns the protection of the rights of the Romanian emigrants – since 2006, every Romanian that wants to move to the country (legally) in order to work abroad has to present to the agency that employs him proof from the local authorities in Romania stating that the children left behind are registered by the authorities in question.

Of course, it is plausible, as Alexandru Racu states, that the press looks only for the sensational events. But there is a lot of suffering and frustration among those children left alone. Even though the most sensitive cases are subject of the news, evidence suggests that all children left in this situation are more likely to abandon school and even commit crime. Most of them are emotionally unbalanced, with sleep and alimentation disorders and often do poorly in school.⁴⁴

⁴² Racu Alexandru, “Singuri acasă. Copiii românilor plecați la muncă în străinătate” [Home alone. The children of the Romanians left working abroad], in *Revista 22*, vol. XV (892), April 13th – 19th, 2008, <http://www.revista22.ro> [22/05/2008].

⁴³ As presented by Racu Alexandru in the above mentioned article and according to the piece of news published on the site of Realitatea TV (a Romanian informational channel) on January 25th, 2007 http://www.realitatea.net/capsunarii-au-lasat-in-tara-aproape-40-de-mii-de-copii_38565.html [28/06/2008].

⁴⁴ According to the News published on the site of Realitatea TV on June 8th, 2006 http://www.realitatea.net/singu-acasa_9704.html [28/06/2008].

The fact that the parents left in order to try to offer them a better way of life, is frequently shown at the material level. Children that have the parents away often have expensive toys, computers and laptops, cell phones and scooters. However it is common for these children to complain about missing their parents.⁴⁵

Some of them dream even to go with their parents abroad. For children that left Romania with their parents, and are as a result of this educated in their destination country, there are issues concerning their loss Romanian identity, as they forget their knowledge of the Romanian language. In 2006 the Romanian government put in place a program of Romanian language, history, geography and culture classes.⁴⁶ This initiative is only for Italy and Spain.

We came back, but we're depressed

In July 2006, in one of Romania's most affected department with the phenomena of work emigration, Vaslui, there were no less than 30 cases of patients registering to the mental hospital. All of them were persons returning home after several months of work abroad.⁴⁷

In the beginning of 2008, the Romanian government decided that something must be done to bring back the Romanians working abroad – two important job offer markets were organized in Italy and in Spain for the Romanians working abroad. Although the initiatives were given media coverage in the Romanian press and also in the newspapers of the Romanians diasporas, the participation to this job offerings sessions were weak and the

⁴⁵ As presented in the article of Tudor Nicoleta, "Jucăriile și laptopurile alintă dorul de părinți" [Toys and laptops heal the miss of the parents], in *Adevărul*, no. 5536, May 2nd, 2008, <http://www.adevarul.ro/articole/jucariile-si-laptopurile-alina-dorul-de-parinti/350126> [02/05/2008].

⁴⁶ According to the article "Peste 20 000 de copii români din Spania vor urma cursuri de Limbă, cultură și civilizație română" [More than 20000 Romanian children living in Spain will follow classes of Romanian Language, culture and civilization], on http://www.realitatea.net/peste-20-000-de-copii-romani-din-spania-vor-urma-cursuri-de-limba-cultura-si-civilizatie-romana_79333.html [28/06/2008].

⁴⁷ According to the news "Căpșunari la psihiatru" [Strawberry pickers to the psychiatry] published on the Realitatea TV web site on the July 19th, 2006, http://www.realitatea.net/capsunari-la-psihiatru_12639.html [28/06/2008].

results were very poor (out of 300 job offers proposed by companies in Romania, only 30 had interested persons in Italy⁴⁸).

With the economic crisis that is starting in Spain, even though we cannot speak yet of a phenomena, there is a tendency for the Romanians working in there to return in Romania and start a business with the money gathered in Spain. A case like this was presented in the Romanian press last week⁴⁹.

Instead of conclusion⁵⁰



⁴⁸ According to the weekly newspaper *Gazeta Românească*, in its 29th number (IV year), for the period 18-24 of July 2008.

⁴⁹ Chiva Laura, "Iau viața de la capăt după 10 ani în Spania" [They start anew life after 10 years in Spain], *Adevărul*, August 19th, 2008, on <http://www.adevarul.ro/articole/iau-viata-de-la-capat-dupa-10-ani-in-spania/366289> [19/08/2008].

⁵⁰ http://www.trilulilu.ro/p3_sv/d25c8032cdaa14 [20/08/2008].

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