

# **The Impact of Migration on the Construction of Romania's Country Image: Two Intersecting Public Problems<sup>i</sup>**

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In Romania, the promotion of the country image has been a recurrent topic on the public agenda after the fall of communism in 1989. After 1990, the governmental campaigns, initiatives or slogans meant to promote and communicate Romania to the world generated so many heated and recurrent debates involving a variety of social actors that the country's image eventually became a public problem relevant to the entire society. After the country joined the European Union these debates about the country's image started to be closely linked with the increased wave of Romanian migration towards Western Europe. Migrants have become both resource of positive visibility and image crisis for Romania due to their behaviours and actions in the destination countries. In fact, migration itself became a public problem, due to its unprecedented magnitude and socio-political complexity. The two public problems clearly intersected in 2007 when the Romanian government faced an international image crisis after a Romanian migrant in Italy was accused of homicide and the Italian and international media covered the story widely: consequently, in 2008, the Romanian government issued its first government decision to finance a campaign to promote Romania and Romanians in Italy and Spain. This chapter draws a longitudinal analysis of the gradual interconnected construction of Romania's country image and migration as public problems: it identifies several stages (between 1990 and 2010) when the government played a key role and more recent developments (between 2010 and 2015), when various non-state actors seize the opportunity for increased visibility and instrumentalize the two public problems in brand communication campaigns. Thus, it is showed how the different stages in the construction of

these public problems have reconfigured over time and, especially, the impact of migration on the construction of Romania's country image.

### **The Theoretical Context**

This chapter investigates the impact of migration on the gradual construction of country image promotion as a public problem in Romania after 1990 and up to 2015. The evolution of different discourses about the nation addresses a current topic of greatest interest and concern at both European and Romanian national level: the shaping of national identities and images of countries in the context of increased migration, a complex phenomenon that has social, political and economic effects and questions established political and economic models, policies and systems. At the same time it is set within a more general context: the global preoccupation of countries to gain visibility as competing actors in a globalised economy and culture; this led governments across the globe to adopt various *promotional* practices (Wernick, 1991) from the business sector (e.g. nation branding, public relations), which followed a gradual process of *habitualization* and even *institutionalization*. Consequently, specific *power discourses* about the nation were mobilized as part of their strategies to reposition themselves within the global arena, resulting ultimately in a process of marketization of national identities (Kaneva, 2011; Surowiec, 2017)

Although largely used long before, these practices of country promotion start to be systematically studied and conceptualized after the 1950s due to the global changes brought by the rapid development and expansion of information technologies, media and the Internet. Consistent lines of research have thus emerged: (1) in political sciences and international relations that focus on the transformations occurred in diplomacy, often referred to as *public* diplomacy and the *new* public diplomacy (Cull, 2008, 2009; Gilboa, 2016; Melissen, 2005; Snow, 2009); (2) in economic sciences and business studies that reflect on the rise of place

branding, marketing of places and nation branding (Anholt, 2002, 2004; Dinnie, 2008; Govers & Go, 2009; Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Kotler, 2009; Olins 1999, 2005); (3) in communication sciences, particularly in public relations of nations or for nations (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992; Grunig, 1993; Kunczik, 1997, 2003; L'Etang, 1996; Signitzer & Wamser, 2006; Taylor & Kent, 2006; Szondi, 2008, 2010). However, much too often concepts associated with country promotion practices have been used interchangeably or even misused contributing to (the amplification of) an already existing “conceptual fog” (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015). In addition, this led to a rather positivist research dominated by a focus on efficiently mastering these practices for the competition taking place on the global neoliberal market (Dolea, 2015a).

The parallel development of research on country promotion practices in different fields and disciplines that did not “speak to each other” until very recently requires caution in investigating and understanding their origins. Most scholars in international relations, communication sciences or economic and business studies preferred to use the existing framework and consecrated theory in their field and discipline and very few explored further or embarked on interdisciplinary studies. There has been much reproduction of “how to” studies, rather than knowledge production and theory building. Consequently, during the last decade, several critical approaches to country promotion have developed mostly as an organic reaction to this parallelism in literature that ultimately narrowed the research imagination of scholars. It is precisely for this reason that there is a need for digging deeper in the complex body of works in order to reach, comprehend and discuss the origin of terms and concepts. It is not mere terminology. Concepts reiterate and enact an entire framework of knowledge, theory and research existing in their “mother” discipline. In other words, they constitute a reference paradigm and a “horizon” of interpretations and understandings for various phenomena. One needs to grasp this in order to properly use a concept, trace its

evolution, and reflect on major debates around, as well as before one engages in developing a concept, analyzing it from a different angle or even criticizing it.

One of the critiques is the impossibility of measuring the efficiency of country promotion practices, particularly nation branding, although the prevalent case study approach in nation branding literature frames as success stories the branding of various nations (Dolea, 2015a). In the context of the global economic crisis, nation branding is facing serious challenges, since the countries presented as success stories (e.g. Spain) deal with consistent economic and social problems and ratings downgrading due to the policies previously praised by nation branding advocates. Not to mention the current turbulent global contexts with the rise of nationalist parties that led to the Catalan independence referendum and proclamation in Spain in October 2017. These developments show how necessary it is to include the discussion about nation branding practices within wider socio-political contexts and time frames.

Another critique is linked to the isolation of nation branding from the other disciplines that studied the practices of promoting country images. It is only recently that branding scholars started to acknowledge the necessity of assuming an interdisciplinary approach to country promotion in both theory and practice. The rebranding of the *Place Branding* journal into *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* journal published by Palgrave is the result of this emerging interdisciplinary.

Perhaps the most consistent line of critique is the one voiced by scholars in media and cultural studies (Aronczyk, 2013; Kaneva, 2011; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). They use concepts and theories inspired by Critical Theory and apply them to nation branding to illustrate the social dimension of the phenomenon and its social implications. They bring forward issues mostly neglected until recently in nation branding literature, such as national

identity, imbalance of power in society and argue for reflecting on and interrogating practices instead of labelling or measuring them.

It is interesting to notice that several scholars who assume a critical approach to nation branding come from the postcommunist region: it might be the very need of identity reconstruction in these countries that led to the coagulation of such a critical approach and to a response to the widely Western conceptualizations of nation branding from both academics and consultants. The reality and the specific context of these countries bring aspects that are being left out in the Western perspectives on nation branding. Although a cultural context specific approach is widely advocated in nation branding literature, the overwhelming focus is on “how to” market, promote and brand countries (more) effectively.

In recent years, this critical thinking turn has also been consolidating in public diplomacy literature (Dutta-Bergman, 2006; Der Derian, 2009; Hayden, 2012; Pamment 2012, 2014; Surowiec, 2017) and public relations (L’Etang, 2009; Dolea, 2015a, 2015b, 2018 forthcoming). Consequently, these practices of country promotion and particularly public diplomacy have started to be analysed from a sociological perspective (e.g. Castells, 2008) and considered “social practice” (e.g. Wiseman, 2015).

The outcome of this “re-setting” in thinking about country promotion is a change in the very object of research that “is not reduced anymore to the communication products and campaigns, but is extended to include their context, the conditions of their production, the types of discourses they embody, and how these are perceived and debated within society” (Dolea, 2015a, p. 282).

Reviewing the evolution of concepts and the research on country promotion practices in the literatures on public diplomacy, nation branding and public relations, I proposed a complementary approach to study the phenomenon of country promotion in postcommunist countries (Dolea, 2015b): I translated the main concepts and key statements of social

constructivism (e.g. reality as construct, reality as social construct, interaction, institutionalization, historicity, legitimacy) (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) to the study of country promotion and proposed an analytical model for empirical investigation. I conceptualize country promotion as a process with two distinct phases: one external, of communicating and engaging with foreign audiences, and one internal, which happens within the nation. It is considered that in the internal phase several social actors engage in the public debates within the country about what is representative for that country, they construct their own definitions of country promotion and try to dislocate existing significations in society and to impose others in constant negotiation and interaction with other social actors. This constant social construction of country promotion leads to its becoming a public problem, while the typification of practices related to country promotion leads eventually to an institutionalization. The external phase of country promotion comprises the final products—the campaigns aimed at foreign audiences, which are considered to stand for a certain definition about the country that has been temporarily imposed during the internal phase of negotiation. At the same time, it is considered that during the entire process (internal and external) the social actors define and negotiate also the meaning of the techniques and instruments associated to country promotion—public diplomacy, public relations and nation branding. Therefore, such an analysis can reveal how public diplomacy, public relations and nation branding are understood within the nation by the social actors involved in country promotion.

Such an approach facilitates an in-depth analysis of the entire phenomenon of country promotion in Romania after the fall of communism and its gradual transformation from *a theme on the civil society agenda* into a theme on the *public agenda* and into a *public problem*. It allows a reflection on how various social actors (institutions, journalists, experts in communication, intellectuals, etc.) contribute to a co-construction of what is representative

about their nation and their national identity: country promotion practices as constructs (institutional, organizational, social) and subject to power relations (at institutional/ organizational/ social levels) that ultimately influence a certain vision of actors on those practices.

### **Linking Country Image Promotion and Migration in the Case of Romania**

By using such a social constructivist approach, it is also possible to identify how other public problems have come to be linked, over time, with the country image promotion problem and have re-configured it. It is the case of the Romanians' migration within the EU which has become a social, economic and political phenomenon due to its magnitude: according to the UN Report 2015 (Trends in International Migrant Stock, 2015), between 2000 and 2015 Romanian diaspora had a growth rate of 7.3 per cent per annum and is estimated at over 3.4 million people living abroad (which is around 18% of the current population). This constant growth led to its recurrence on the public agenda and consequently to the emergence of certain migration related practices of visibility in both Romania, as sending country, but also in the receiving countries (Beciu and Lazăr, 2014).

Media, in particular, played an important role in the construction of the Romanian migration as a public problem and linked it with how Romanians are perceived abroad (Beciu, 2012). For instance, in the context of the liberalization of UE labour market, the Romanian media has reiterated and gradually legitimized the idea of “a dominant discourse in the UK that talked about an imminent ‘invasion’ or ‘siege’ of the British territory by the ‘masses’ or ‘hordes’ of Romanians, ‘the immigrants of poverty’” (Beciu & Lazăr, 2016, p. 58). All these developments have impacted the internal recurrent debates within the country

about how Romania is promoted or should be promoted and ultimately triggered initiatives and campaigns.

While the role of migrants and diaspora has been studied in public diplomacy and nation branding literatures, the approach has been rather functional, praising or investigating how to boost their positive potential for promoting the image of the country of origin within the destination country. However, linking lines of research that have looked at country promotion practices (in public diplomacy, nation branding, public relations) with migration and transnationalism and the construction of public problems might open a new avenue for research in the future. This study explores these mutual interdependences of public problems in the case of Romania, while inviting for more theoretical investigation and empirical research for in-depth reflection and analysis on these complex intertwined phenomena.

### **Methodology**

This chapter sums up my extensive research on the construction of country promotion as a public problem in Romania, between 1990 and 2010 (Dolea, 2015b). It shows there was a constant interaction of several social actors who had different understanding and agendas of country promotion and who engaged into a symbolic negotiation of definitions and interpretations of country promotion, process considered within a wider social and institutional context and related with the institutionalization of the communication practices in Romania after 1989. The vision of the state institutions is privileged in this research because, of all social actors, the state institutions are the actors that carried out most of the initiatives of Romania's country promotion abroad. However, the state institutions are not a unitary category nor do they present a unique vision, as several institutions are analyzed, each with its own specific agenda and understanding of country promotion. Therefore, the vision of state institutions is always considered and analyzed in this chapter within the network of

relationships and interactions with each other and with the other social actors engaged in the process of country promotion in Romania (e.g. media, experts in communication, intellectuals, etc.). It is within the context of the recurrent public debates in Romania that the state institutions constantly position themselves and de-construct, construct and re-construct the significations of country promotion.

At empirical level, this chapter: (1) identifies the state institutions that contributed to the construction of country promotion as a public problem, as well as the initial emergence of country image and migration as issues on their institutional agenda after 1990; (2) traces the historicity of the practices of country promotion in relation with migration till 2010; it is considered the practices reflect how the state institutions in Romania use (and maybe re-interpret, re-contextualize) the terminology, the various techniques and instruments of country promotion (public relations, nation branding and public diplomacy). Therefore, following the constructivist logic, another objective is to reveal how, in interaction with each other and with other social actors, state institutions (3) de-construct the issue of country promotion, trying to dislocate existing significations about country promotion, to bring and negotiate new arguments, definitions, interpretations and terminologies, thus re-constructing and imposing new significations; and how this is related to the issue of migration. Finally, the chapter (4) shows the evolution of different conceptualizations about country promotion within state institutions and the influence of migration on their vision of country promotion. All this in a period of 20 years in which Romania also changed its (inter)national status from a “country in transition” (1989-1999), to a “candidate country” (1999 - 2006) and finally to an “EU member country” (2007- onwards) (Beciu, 2007; Beciu & Perpelea, 2011).

Starting from these aim and objectives, the chapter reflects on the following main research questions: When did the issue of migration intersect with the issue of country promotion? How did it impact the vision of state institutions on promoting the country?

There were selected for analysis only the state institutions that had on their agenda the country promotion issue and, more important, initiated several actions and campaigns to promote Romania abroad: the Agency for Governmental Strategies (ASG), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE), and the Ministry of Tourism (MT). The analysis aimed: (1) to trace the emergence of country promotion as an issue of each institution's agenda and its intersection with the issue of migration; (2) to follow the development of the issue in time and point out possible key moments and distinct stages in this development; (3) to reconstitute the specificity of each institution's discourse on country promotion before and after migration became a public problem in Romania —the position assumed, arguments and definition of country promotion proposed, a symbolic construction or re-construction of what is representative for Romania, as the essence of what is being promoted. Thus it is possible to distinguish how each institution's vision about country promotion as a process was negotiated and evolved over time, in interaction with each other and with other social actors.

A mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology was used, including a historical documentary reconstitution and discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews. At ASG interviews were carried out with councilors and the former Presidents (Valeriu Turcan, Alfred Bulai) and former General Director (Dan Jurcan), between August and September 2011. The interviews with the representatives of MAE included: Simona Miculescu (former press officer, spokesperson, press secretary at the Romanian Embassy in USA, and Director of Public Communication within MAE after '90), Oana Marinescu (former Spokesperson of MAE and General Director for Public Diplomacy within MAE between 2008 and 2010) and Amelia Tue (former Director of Public Diplomacy in 2008, former Director for Communication and Public Diplomacy in 2011). The interviews were taken between September 2011 and November 2011. For the historical reconstitution of the initiatives launched by Ministry of Tourism, an interview was made with Carmen Moraru, General

Director of the Directorate for Tourism for almost the entire period 1990-2010, in October 2011.

In addition to the interviews, the research area was made up by the state institutions' public communication (content of their official websites, press releases, promotional materials used during the campaigns—films, spots, ad prints—and statements of the representatives of state institutions), but also the legislative framework, internal documents and strategies, the Government's decisions for the establishment or reorganization of ministries or departments. All these are considered to create a diverse corpus of materials that constitute the basis for a discourse analysis meant to reveal the institutional discourse on country promotion of the Agency for Governmental Strategies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Romanian Cultural Institute. The corpus covers a period of 20 years and makes it possible to integrate individual discourses of the representatives of the state institutions into the discursive practices of the institutions ever since they put the issue of country promotion on their agenda and up to the moments when interviews were taken.

In order to analyse thematically how these state institutions interact with each other and with other social actors, thus trying to dislocate the existing signification about country promotion and to impose others, an additional corpus of electronic press materials was created for the period 1989 – 2010. More than 100 articles and news were included in the corpus after searching the name of the initiative and/or the slogan of the campaign on Google or on the search engine of the newspapers and portals such as hotnews.ro, iqads.ro, evz.ro, adevarul.ro, revista22.ro, obsevatocultural.ro, etc.

This mix of quantitative and qualitative methodology and the complex corpus selected for analysis furnish elements for analyzing not only how the country promotion problem emerged and developed within each institution, but also to show: distinct stages in the

definition of country promotion as a public problem; how each institution legitimized the imposed definition in a specific stage; how the vision of each institution about country promotion evolved between 1990 and 2010, due to the constant process of interaction and negotiation with the other social actors in Romanian society.

The chapter continues with an exploratory analysis of several Romanian brand communication campaigns initiated by non-state actors between 2011 and 2014. The aim is to show how the issues of country image promotion and migration have gradually become interconnected, influencing each other, beyond the sphere of institutional communication. The case studies discussed are a series of TV ads of the Rom chocolate bar (from 2010 to 2014) that link the migrants and Romania's image. It is for the first time that a Romanian commercial brand decides to use systematically the two issues in its brand communication campaign and this is the reason they were selected for analysis. It is thus argued that the instrumentalization of the country images and migration issue by non-state actors illustrates, in fact, the high public interest in and relevance of these issues for Romanian society. Moreover, this might actually represent a new stage in the construction of country promotion as a public problem, as the argument of citizens' involvement and even duty in country image promotion is assumed, mobilized and legitimized by non-state actors.

### **Stages in the Construction of Country Image Promotion as a Public Problem and the Impact of Migration**

#### **Stage 1. Country Image Promotion is an Problem on Civil Society and Media Agenda (1990-2000)**

Civil society is probably the first social actor to have discussed the image of Romania after the 1989 Revolution. The first post-revolutionary months were characterized by several violent protests of miners in Bucharest and by a high degree of uncertainty and anxiety

among Romanians. In addition, the foreign correspondents that arrived in Romania covered extensively the “unseen” faces of the country, kept hidden by the communist regime: the existence of many children with disabilities, institutionalized children and orphanages with insufficient funding and very hard conditions to live in. The national media and the Romanian opinion leaders criticized the international media for obsessively circulating these images and thus consolidating the clichés among foreign audiences, although Romania was not the only country facing these kind of problems. They also criticized the Government for the lack of reaction and raised the question of “What is the Government doing in order to repair this?”

The discourse of civil society focused on the rediscovery of Romania’s national identity, after the long years of communism, and on the need for going back to authentic values, political leaders and intellectuals that Romania had before the dictatorship. The intellectuals, academics and media representatives forming the civil society in the 1990s were very active at that time, ran manifestations and were strong supporters of the historical parties and of the coming back of King Michael I. They were arguing for building a closer relationship with the Western political powers and consolidated democracies.

However, the public agenda was dominated by “We don’t sell our country”, one of the first populist slogan used in Romanian political communication after 1989 (Teodorescu, Gutu & Enache, 2005). Briefly, it referred to the refusal of authorities and union organizations to accept the privatization of Romanian state-owned companies by foreign investors that were portrayed as taking advantage of Romanians. Therefore, between 1990 and 1995 the theme of Romania’s promotion abroad remained latent on the agenda of intellectuals.

Starting with 1995, when Romania signed the official request to become a member of the European Union, the approach towards the West started changing and even a first action to promote Romania abroad was taken in 1996—the production of the “Eternal and

fascinating Romania” photo album. The album was meant to promote a unique country with immutable values, some of them undiscovered yet. The cost of 5.7 million euro paid by the Romanian state for 97,000 copies of the album was considered enormous by the press of that time. Journalists revealed that, in fact, only 10,000 albums were printed and only 4,200 came in Romania, which led to a cost of over 600 Euro per copy. There were lots of speculations regarding the printing of the album during the presidential campaign of Ion Iliescu, president of Romania at that time who was running for a second mandate, and the possible connections with a financial scandal, known as the Costea affair (Adrian Costea, a former councilor of the president Ion Iliescu, living in France, was accused of money laundering by the French authorities). Since the album “Eternal and fascinating Romania” was produced by one of Costea’s companies with state-funds, the media labeled the entire initiative as corruption.

In 1996, the right wing coalition, the Romanian Democratic Convention, won the elections with a program assuming the European and NATO integration (Teodorescu et al., 2005, p. 67). Nevertheless, besides the intensification of Romania’s international relations with the representatives of Western countries, via diplomatic channels, no major initiatives to promote Romania were publicly initiated.

## **Stage 2: Country Image Promotion Emerges on the Government’s Agenda (2000-2004)**

A new stage in the construction of country promotion as a public problem was represented by the recurrence in media of themes related to Romania’s European Union integration. This resulted in (1) a constant reporting on the economic and political actions of the Government as illustrated by the regular monitoring of country reports elaborated by the European Commission (EC) and communicated by the Raportor assigned by EC for Romania; (2) the media construction of the collective actor “the Romanians”, assuming an identity discourse about the effects of European integration for “us, the Romanians”. However, the focus of

general media was not on the self-reflective efforts of Romanian society, but rather on the practical aspects related to the European integration that will affect Romanian old practices coming from tradition, such as the traditional Christmas sacrifice of pigs. It was in the cultural media (Alama, 2004) that an identity discourse was constructed on the dialectic Romanian identity (old tradition and values) – European identity (modernity – new values, ways of understanding life and the relationship with authorities).

It is within this context that the Social Democratic government and its Prime Minister, Adrian Nastase, announced the program “Made in Romania”. The aim was to promote and sustain Romanian products on the internal and, especially, on the external market. According to the organizers, by joining the program, Romanian producers could promote their brands, products and services in a unified and efficient way, for a long term period, with minimum financial efforts. Few producers actually joined the program because the costs were considered too high, so it eventually collapsed.

Romania was promoted as “simply surprising” starting with 2002 and 2004, when advertising campaigns were launched by the Ministry of Tourism. The campaigns included a website <http://www.romaniatravel.com>, an advertising campaign with TV commercials aired on Discovery, Euronews, Eurosport, CNN, BBC and five Romanian televisions, and an action of branding several busses in Madrid, Spain, with the logo “Romania, simply surprising”. The budget used was of over 52 billion lei and was considered too high by the media because there were only some punctual actions that had no continuity, so that the suspicion of money laundering appeared again: journalists focused rather on how the Ministry of Tourism handled the contract than on the concept of the campaign or what messages about Romania it sent. The argument of an arranged tender was clearly formulated since five out of six competing agencies at the tender were part of the same communication group: “the competition was a `family` tender” (Romania, `mereu surprinzatoare` [Romania

`always surprising` ...], 2004, Capital). The argument was later taken over by other journalists (Barbu & Obae, 2005), imposing the idea that public funds were used for private benefits, especially of the agencies close to the political party governing the country.

### **Stage 3: Country Image Promotion Becomes an Problem on the Public Agenda (After 2005)**

The Government publicly defined country promotion as nation branding in 2005, when a series of meetings were organized to answer questions about “How we promote our country?” It was for the first time that different actors with competing agendas (state institutions, journalists, consultants in branding and communication, politicians and intellectuals) sat at the same table discussing Romania’s nation brand.

Initially, the journalists covered the initiative in a rather positive manner, endorsing the initiative, explaining what a nation brand was and introducing the comparative argument – how other countries built nation brands (Rusu, 2005). They also privileged the perspectives of the different actors participating in the meetings: the government’s representative who legitimized the initiative in the context of a possible delay of Romania’s integration into the EU and its effects on the status of the country; the professional association in communication assumed an intellectual discourse and pointed out the issue of national identity and the need for research to find out Romania’s perception about it, and then the perceptions of others; opinion leading journalists emphasized the need for the nation brand to reflect the development of Romania (Scarlat, 2005); experts in branding underlined the “battle between different groups to catch a piece of the business in their own interest” (Benezic, 2005).

Later, as more meetings were organized, some journalists started to point out that although in July 2005 was the fifth meeting of the committee, ASG was delaying the calendar of the strategy – the task book was supposed to be finished in the following month, when the

tender was also expected to be announced (Benezic, 2005). The president of ASG was changed, but ASG continued with the preparation of the task book for the tender and eventually launched the call for the public tender, but no agency submitted an offer. As a result, media started to criticize heavily ASG for the handling of the nation branding project and mainly assumed the position of the consultants in branding and advertising in their headlines (“Brandul de tara paseste cu stangul” [Country brand starts on the wrong foot], 2006, Capital; “Brandul de tara al Romaniei, varza la Bruxelles [The Romanian brand, cabbage for Bruxelles], 2007, Cotidianul; “Branding Romania, 2007, Capital). The discourse of agencies meant to position them as experts, imposing the argument of having the expertise and vision for implementing such a project. Eventually the project was stopped and the media imposed the argument that ASG’s committee for the nation brand was inefficient, consecrating it as the main label for this governmental initiative.

#### **Stage 4. Country Image Promotion Makes it to the Prime Minister’s Agenda Because of Migration (2007)**

Towards the end of 2007, a new issue was closely linked to the one of country promotion: the free movement of citizens inside EU’s borders led to a consistent immigration phenomenon towards Western countries and the appearance of a numerous Diaspora. Thus, a new actor in the issue of country promotion emerged, as the events in Diaspora had a major impact in both the international and the domestic public space. In fact, it was only after the incident in Rome in 2007 when a Roma ethnic of Romanian origin killed an Italian woman that the Romanian Government initiated its first integrated communication campaigns of public diplomacy and public relations in Italy and Spain, where more than 2 million Romanian live and work. This event and the others that followed brought about the problems of the Romanian Roma communities who immigrated in Europe and were most of the time associated with beggary,

stealing and other crimes. The question of “how we are perceived outside our borders” had gained a new dimension focusing on the dissociation from this minority and on the idea that Romanians are not gypsy.

The incident generated an international image crisis for the Romanian authorities, while within the country a heated public debate emerged and added to the already existing pressure from outside Romania. The Italian politicians used the incident in a pre-electoral context (in the spring of 2008 legislative elections and elections for the chair of mayor in Rome were to take place). Therefore, the dominant themes imposed on the public agenda in Italy were social security and immigration, and even a decision to expel the immigrants was also discussed.

This also spread quickly also in the international media and soon the incident grew to become a crisis situation for the Romanian Government that had to handle it. As the Romanian authorities failed to take an immediate action (according to Alfred Bulai, personal interview, October 2011), the Mailat case was transformed into a scapegoat, as the discourse of Italian authorities mobilized a powerful emotional and symbolic context—the value and respect for human life. The symbolic construction of the Romanian immigrant as a villain gained credibility in Italy because the Mailat case wasn’t a singular act and had a certain history of mediatisation:

“it followed after a lot of problems that we had in Italy” (my translation) (Alfred Bulai, personal interview, October 2011);  
“back in 2002-2003 [...] we had monitoring reports and saw the cases, especially beggars, thefts, little aggressions that happened and were visible, but they did not create a negative opinion climate” (my translation) (Dan Jurcan, personal interview, September 2011).

The Romanian media covered extensively the actions and statements of Italian politicians and legitimized a new social actor involved in Romania’s promotion abroad – the

Romanian Diaspora. Insisting on how the international media had told the story of the Romanian immigrant (the villain) and the Italian woman (the victim), thus placing Romania on an inferiority position, the journalists constructed a dual image of the Romanian immigrant: the (bad) immigrants who committed crimes and the (good) law-abiding immigrants who have respected the law, have started various businesses and are themselves affected by the actions of the other immigrants. In addition, the Romanian media questioned the Government about what it was doing in order to solve these problems, formulating the following arguments: (1) the political responsibility of the Government for the Romanian diaspora (Culcer, 2007); (2) the need for consistent social, economic programs for the development of the country (Palade, 2007); the current situation was the direct result of the Government's lack of interest in the projects of country promotion that had only negative labels: scandal, money laundering, public money spent in private and sometimes electoral interest, projects started but not finalized. The context was manipulated with ability by the experts in communication to legitimize their previous claims for consistent approaches, public policies and a vision for the future development of Romania.

The civil society also engaged in the public debate, placing the discussions on the Romanian Diaspora and the responsibility of the state (Braileanu, 2007) into the wider social context of the Romanian society. Therefore, the images of Romanians (Mavrodin, 2008) that "the Mailat case" had projected were considered and analyzed as part of the internal debate on the Romanian identity and the development of Romanian society. The discourse about country promotion of the civil society was mainly an identity discourse pointing out different actors and types of problems, all related in fact to their positioning towards the Romanian identity issue: "the Romanians" and the relationship with the Roma community – an old issue in the history of Romania with social effects consisting in marginalization and discrimination (low degree of alphabetization, increased unemployment, poverty; different traditions)

(Schwartz, 2008); “the Romanians” and their relationship with Europe (the general problems of the European Union as a new political construction meant to ensure equal rights to all its European citizens - Schwartz, 2008); the diasporic actor and the problems it faced in relation with the new country and population (cultural and social integration), but also in relation with the Romanian diplomatic missions abroad (administrative aspects); the Government as responsible for the development of the country and for representing Romania abroad.

The Romanian Diaspora in Italy, through various nongovernmental organizations, also called, via diplomatic channels, for the support and reaction of Romanian authorities, underlining the effect of the Mailat case on their projects, businesses and in general on their everyday life (According to 2 councilors from the ASG, involved at that time in development of the campaigns, personal interview, August 2011).

Facing an unprecedented social pressure, the government was forced to react and the Mailat case was the turning point that transformed the governmental approach towards the issue of country promotion. It was for the first time in the history of postcommunist Romania that the Government allocated significant funds for the development and implementation of a complex communication program to promote Romania abroad. In fact, the Mailat case transformed the very governmental approach towards the diasporic community that became more numerous year by year and grew to become an important social actor, whose problems and requests needed to be taken into account by the government when formulating public policies. Ultimately, the Mailat case legitimized the diasporic actor.

“The Mailat case created political decision – increased the staff at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I mean I am not referring only to the communication campaign. That was punctual (...) and only one component. The Ministry of Interior had its own program (...) to send policemen there. It was a radical change in the way the Romanian authorities in consulates and embassies handled the everyday issues and requests of the Romanian immigrants.” (my translation) (Alfred Bulai, personal interview, October 2011).

The Mailat case brought legitimacy to this positioning of ASG:

“it was a huge `earthquake` that gave credibility to previous requests for serious budgets in order to conduct promotional campaigns, not only punctual actions” (Alfred Bulai, personal interview, October 2011);

“We had already informed the prime minister and proposed around... 4 memorandums with preventive measures. (...) Mind you, (it was) the same memorandum (...) created 2 years ago, included the project and everything, then the prime minister Tariceanu said `ok, go for it`.” (my translation) (Dan Jurcan, personal interview, September 2011).

Building on the strategic mission of ASG within the Romanian Government and on the favorable context, the president of ASG places himself in a position of power, assuming the initiative to split the funds received, in order to start a campaign in Italy, but also in Spain. In imposing his vision, he used the argument of the sociological research that indicated the need for such an action and the signals from Spanish journalists:

“we built on the idea, I decided this, even against Tariceanu, I mean I did it eventually, although I knew it would have been better not to do it, I split the sum that was approved. (...) Spain was and still is, the second country considering the Romanian (i.e. immigrants). The situation in Spain was apparently good, as compared to Italy, but it could blow up in any moment. (...) When Spanish journalists came and took interviews absolutely all of them were asking me if the Romanians would stay there, meaning the problem was quite important and the crisis wasn't even approaching.” (my translation) (Alfred Bulai, personal interview, October 2011).

Once the project was defined internally, ASG started to work on a task book, organized a tender and prepared the campaign. Besides the concept of the campaign itself, the main aim of the campaign was to send a signal that the Romanian state was getting involved in the issues related to its immigrants, because:

“one of the accusations (i.e. from the Italian part) was that the Romanian state doesn't do anything (i.e. for its immigrants). (...). This campaign which could not be, you know, for that money and for an entire country and only for three months, could not be phenomenal, but it was a sign that the Romanian state

was getting involved, was doing something, including sending policemen there.” (my translation) (Alfred Bulai, personal interview, October 2011).

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (MAE) and the Agency for Governmental Strategies (ASG) received funds to develop and implement communication campaigns in order to promote Romania abroad. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched “Piazza di Romania” (2008), a public diplomacy campaign, taking place in Italy and the Agency for Governmental Strategies launched “Romanians in Europe,” which was developed in Spain and Italy.

Formally, the campaign “Romanians in Europe” was the first communication campaign to promote Romania abroad after 1989 and was conceived and implemented taking into account all the steps of a public relations campaign (Dolea & Țăruș, 2009): first, sociological research studies were conducted in Italy and Spain to lead to the analysis of the situation and the defining of the actual, existing, problems for each of the two countries; then the purpose and the objectives of the campaign were formulated, target audiences and key-messages were established, strategies and specific tactics were adopted for each country, but in accordance with the general communication line and the global concept of presenting success stories. Different visual and communicational identities were created: slogan, logo, posters, TV commercials and press layouts for each country. There was a budget and a definite period of time to carry out the actions and, at the end, there was a final sociological research to evaluate the effects of the campaign. Indeed, it is for the first time that the Romanian Government used an integrated communication campaign, with components of public relations, advertising and marketing.

Media had mainly an informative discourse, initially announcing the allocation of the budget and the launch of the campaigns. Then, it assumed a questioning discourse of the events organized by ASG and MAE: some journalists assumed a critical discourse pointing out the fact that the Romanian authorities were organizing concerts and public events, instead

of solving the social problems caused by the immigration (Rockhoff, 2008) and the specific problems faced by the Romanian community (Topciu, 2008). The stigmata of the previous campaign of country promotion was also mentioned, the journalists arguing this is another attempt of the state to spend, without efficiency, public money for the image of Romania (Toma, 2008). However, despite these elements of criticism the majority of articles was informative and insisted on the novelty of the initiative and on the good feedback of the Italians and Spanish people.

### **Stage 5. Country Image Promotion and Migration Used in Marketing Communication (After 2010)**

Starting with 2010, there is an emergence of communication projects, initiatives and campaigns to promote Romania, its major cities or regions launched by various non-state actors: for example, Ana Busuioc, a Romanian student at Leeds University created a promotional video for Romania ("Why not get to know Romania?") on YouTube that quickly became viral in social media (Iolu, 2012). The video got coverage in Romanian media and was evaluated as "better promotion for the country than the one of the government" due to its high number of views on YouTube (220,000) as compared to the official government videos, Carpathian Garden (between 800 and 22,000 views) (O româncă invită străinii să cunoască România [A Romanian invites foreigners to get to know Romania], 2014, RomaniaTV.net). Other Romanian young entrepreneurs, Alex Filip and Toma Nicolau, have launched various projects of digital marketing aimed to promote cities (e.g. Travelers of Bucharest, Bucharest City App, #enjoyBucharest, #priNeamt) or regions (e.g. #explore Dobrogea). They are emblematic for a tendency towards projects initiated by non-state actors to generate alternative discourses about the country (or its cities and regions), while gaining more and

more visibility in the public space and particularly on social media, because there is an already created context and large public interest.

One of the most interesting developments after 2010 is also the strategic decision of commercial brands to instrumentalize and manipulate this favourable context in order to link the public problems of country image promotion and migration in their marketing communication campaigns. One example is the “Why don’t you come over” campaign initiated by the Romanian newspaper Gandul and a Romanian communication group (GMP Advertising, GMP PR and Webstyler) to tackle a foreign policy issue (the UK-Romanian relations after the liberalization of the EU labour market in 2015). The campaign aimed to respond, with humour, to a series of articles published by The Guardian (Syal, 2013) on an alleged UK government campaign to discourage potential immigrants (“Don’t come to Britain. It’s full”). The Guardian invited their readers to create their own posters and messages to illustrate such a governmental campaign (Walsh, J. & Guardian readers, 2013). In a 24-hours response, the Romanian campaign said “We might not like Britain, but you will love Romania. Why don't you come over?” in a series of posters uploaded on the Facebook account of the Romanian newspaper Gandul. The posters contained short messages that strategically mobilized either key figures in British society (Kate Middleton, Prince Charles, Prince Harry) or aspects of ordinary life (weather, beer, food, level of English): “Our draft beer is less expensive than your bottled water”; “Half of our women look like Kate. The other half, like her sister”. According to an internal document of GMP communication group, their aim was to fight discrimination

“by creating engaging content for gandul.info that would also energize the friends and relatives back home of those who live in the UK or planned to go there as honest tax payers [...] “we looked for topics that would generate buzz for both the Romanian and British audience. From the price of beer to the Middleton sisters” (Presentation of the campaign “Why don’t you come over”, GMP, 2015, p. 2-3).

The posters became viral on Facebook and “over 300.000 users had seen or commented or shared the posters on Facebook in the first 24 hours after posting, according to our data” said Mihai Gongu, Creative Director, GMP Advertising (Pantus, 2013). Therefore, the agency created an app so that Facebook users could generate their own posters inviting the British to come over. The “Why don't you come over” campaign was widely covered by international media across the globe, with over 100 articles published by the press agencies Reuters and Associated Press, and publications such as Der Spiegel, El Pais, Le Figaro, Washington Post, BBC, Daily Mail, etc. (Presentation of the campaign “Why don't you come over”, GMP, 2015). The Romanian media also covered extensively the campaign and its international coverage. Therefore, the overall huge rate of engagement in the campaign (of Romanians both within and outside the country) obtained by the campaign

“can be explained through the agile and strategic exploitation of: (1) different contexts (both from the past and recent history of Romania), (2) the different sensitive issues in society (the country image and the self-representations of Romanians), (3) as well as the use of expert knowhow in managing integrated campaigns by a top communication agency in Romania”. (Dolea, 2018 forthcoming).

Another example is the of the Romanian chocolate brand Rom and the agency McCann Bucharest: they initiated a series of brand campaigns between 2011 and 2014 that symbolically construct their core slogans and messages around *the image of Romania, the migrants, the foreigners*. In fact, the Romanian chocolate brand Rom has been using strategically its association with the country name and its packaging in the Romanian flag to stress its “Romanian-ness” and appeal to nation identity.

Here is a short overview of the campaigns: in 2011, Rom launched “The American Rom”, replacing the Romanian flag on the packaging of the chocolate bar with the American flag. The agency who won several international awards for this campaign (Rom Case Study:

American Rom, n.d.) declared this was a courageous campaign aimed “to boost Romanian national pride in a period when Romanian youth saw their dreams abroad, and patriotism could not be appealed to.” (my translation) (American Rom, n.d.). This idea was further developed in the following campaigns that started to heavily use symbolic moments, such as the national day of Romania (December 1), and highly symbolic aims of achieving *unity*, *unification* in order to increase exposure for the brand. On December 1, 2011 Rom launched *Romanians are Smart*, a campaign that invited Romanians to use search optimization engine (in this case the Google search engine) in order to type in positive associations for Romanians. The idea behind was to alter and manipulate the algorithms so that every time someone starts typing Romanians, the first suggested associations are positive (not negative as they were at that time):

“The image of Romania on internet was not exactly favourable. And this could be easily seen on the most popular search engine where the auto-complete function revealed all the negative stereotypes associated with Romanians. That is why [...] Rom launched the first campaign to change the image of the country on internet” (my translation) (Romanians Are Smart, n.d.).

The following year, on December 1, Rom continued the campaign under the slogan “a country, 19 million ambassadors”, with the aim to gather the positive associations under the dedicated hashtag #romaniansaresmart.

Starting with 2013 Rom used even more the symbolic of the migrant and the country image in the campaign for the (re)launch of the new products (Rom Sandvis, Romtoff, Rom Milk Chocolate) which had two video ads. Under the slogan “Revenge is sweet” one of the ads builds around the relationship between two general categories (the Romanians and the foreigners), who are constructed in the dichotomist logic of *us* versus *them*, while a certain historical sensitivity of *the past* is mobilized:

“Romanians had the best ideas. We are creative, but every time we have an idea, somebody else gets rich. Henri Coada built the first reaction plane in France, but the French patented it. The same happened to Petrace Poenaru, the inventor of pen, known today as a French invention. [...] this time, we took the successful ideas of the foreigners and made them Romanian, with the authentic Rom taste and then we took revenge for the past wrongdoings.” (my translation) (Razbunarea e dulce [Revenge is sweet], n.d.).

In the second ad, the Romanian migrants and the foreigners are constructed symbolically through both language and action: the ads reproduce the media discourses about a certain category of Romanian migrants who work in agriculture or in households in the destination countries and the inferiority position in which they were placed (the relationship between master and servant): “For all the years that we picked their strawberries, we made their softs and computers abroad, Rom called the foreigners to discover our fresh air and made them milk our cows for our Rom Milk Chocolate.” (my translation) (Razbunarea e dulce [Revenge is sweet], n.d.). In fact, this is why the campaign is titled *revenge*, as it symbolically aims to reverse the positions between the masters (the foreigners) and the servants (the Romanian migrants), mobilizing a registry that goes beyond humour. The campaign thus instrumentalized an established media discourse in order to maximize the visibility of the campaign, as well as its impact among the national audiences.

Later that year, in December 2013, Rom celebrated the national day proposing a digital unification for a day of two countries (Romania and the Republic of Moldova) that were one territory back in history in 1918. The main idea behind the ad was “to create the Great Digital Unification, people with people and website with website. Because on the internet there are not borders” (my translation) (Mare Unire Digitala [The Great Digital Unification], n.d.).

In December 2014, Rom took a next step and addressed directly the Romanian migrants in the campaign “Romanians, come home”. It did it directly by targeting the Romanians at home to reach out to their friends and family abroad:

“Because it has become a tradition for Rom to celebrate December 1, in 2014 we went again on the internet, waving the Romanian flag. [...] Thousands of Romanians wrote ‘Happy birthday, Romania!’ while missing home, from thousands of kilometres away. [...] we organized a plot: on intoarceteromane.ro anyone could make an emotional movie to remind their friend from abroad how well it is at home. Emotional blackmail.” (my translation) (Intoarce-te Romane [Romanians come home], n.d.).

All these marketing communication campaigns initiated by Rom followed the same strategy of engaging Romanians (within and outside borders) to join a conversation about who or how they are (e.g. smart, creative, hardworking). They used social media and the internet, in general, as a platform for increasing brand visibility, building around highly sensitive aspects such as unification or existent negative perceptions that could be changed if all Romanians would act as ambassadors. Moreover, as migration gradually amplified through the years becoming a more complex social and economic phenomenon, also the public sensitivity on the issue reached a climax; the campaign *Romanians, come home* was a skilful manipulation of a highly emotional context.

## **Discussion**

This chapter has investigated the construction of country image promotion by various social actors in Romania after 1990 and its gradual linkage with migration within a macro context (the adoption of promotional practices by the Romanian government) and a local context (the recurrent debates on migration in Romanian society).

The main stages in the construction of country promotion as a public problem ultimately reveal a dynamic of instrumentalizing country promotion in Romania after 1990: initially it was an identity discourse of the civil society (“who are we after communism?”), followed by a media discourse of questioning the government on what it is doing in order to integrate Romania into NATO and the EU and to address the growing phenomenon of

Romanians' migration. In the context of a much needed transformation of the Romanian society and its institutions into democratic and modern ones, experts introduced logics of instrumentalization, along with modern practices of communication and the new terminology of branding. Media took over the discourse of experts and imposed the arguments of efficiency and effectiveness into the public debate as criteria for the evaluation of the government's actions. As a direct result of the pressure coming from the society, state institutions also assumed the technical discourse of experts.

However, the logics of instrumentalization and the discourse of experts dominated the public debate, marginalizing to a certain extent the identity discourse of the civil society that re-emerged on the public agenda especially after 2007 and the Mailat case. The questioning of "who we are" in relation to a certain category of Romanian migrants (Roma) and other Europeans and with their stereotypical projections reveals the very limits of the instrumentalizing perspective: Western "forms" have been adopted for the modernization of society, but the Romanian "content" is still being debated upon. The paradox is that this focus in the public debate has privileged mechanisms and institutions over the key issues of the Romanian society and its identity, as illustrated also by the lack of consensus and support for the country promotion initiatives and their definitions about Romania. The research ultimately illustrates that a major role in the failure of the government's initiatives to promote Romania was due to the fact that Romanians ultimately don't feel represented by the symbols and definitions that the state institutions propose.

Consequently, after 2010, there is an emergence of initiatives of non-state actors who engage in promoting the country (and/ or certain cities and regions) within and outside borders, to complement the failed attempts of the government. The communication agencies, in particular, have started to use their knowhow in order to develop complex communication platforms and marketing campaigns for their clients (commercial brands) that are explicitly

constructed around the image of the country and the issue of migration, as illustrated in this chapter. Moreover, they seek to engage, on social media, Romanians within and outside borders in collective initiatives of storytelling about the country and about themselves. Thus, the communication agencies end up manipulating a favourable context and a highly sensitive topic within Romanian society on matters of national identity and self-representations. The key question is to what extent they don't ultimately reproduce the instrumentalization model of the government they have contested so far? After all, they use the public problems of the country image and migration in order to gain visibility for commercial brands, and capitalize on their high sensitivity in media and public space in order to obtain commercial benefits (e.g. increased sales).

Summing up, this chapter shows that the issue of migration has impacted not only the government's approach towards the promotion of Romania's image abroad, but also has reconfigured the thematic repertory of brand and marketing communication campaigns in Romania. In a global context of increased corporate social responsibility, corporations and communication agencies are linking their campaigns to the local socio-political context to make their brands more relevant. The strategic decision of Gandul newspapers and GMP communication group, as well as of Rom chocolate brand and McCann Bucharest to develop campaigns that tackle on migration and Romania's image proves they have seized an opportunity: these two public problems have intersected and become of interest for the entire population. At the same time, the success of the marketing campaigns in engaging target audiences (at home or in Diaspora) to participate, share and produce their own discourses about Romania and Romanians illustrates the extent to which the two problems of country image and migration have been interiorized at society level. Otherwise, the call for action of the campaigns would have remained without echo.

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<sup>i</sup> This chapter sums up and develops further the extensive research carried out by Alina Dolea in her PhD published as “Twenty years of branding post-communist Romania: actors, discourses, perspectives. 1990-2010” (Curtea Veche Publishing, 2015)