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# ROMANIAN'S NATIONAL IDENTITY WITHIN A WORLD OF DIFFERENCES

Case  
Study

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## Abstract

*Post-communist Romania still caught in the net of ubiquitous and unstoppable globalization tries to articulate the need of redefining its national identity in the context of modernisation and Europeanisation. After spectacular and unpredictable geopolitical changes of recent decades that have enhanced interactions between societies and distinct cultures, national identity has become an important topic. The idea about national identities these days seemed to incorporate increased expressions of patriotism. Witnessing the mixture of worlds and a real process of hybridisation, where each nation leads a fierce competition to build and promote a favourable image within the global communication space, the article aims to expose the perception about the image of Romania and Romanians in the eyes of foreigners.*

## INTRODUCTION

Motto: "Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do." — Goethe

We live in a world that no more resembles the one of our parents, in which every country tells its own story about its aspirations in the nowadays context of major transformations, socially, technologically, culturally and with regard to permanent daily challenges. In the background of pointing out a culture without identity mark and the decrease of national sovereignty, there is a humans' need to reshape themselves, to rediscover themselves and to capitalize their individual and group features by reporting to their own cultural hallmark. For most people the identity represents an important issue. It's about who we are and what others believe about us. How can we get around of understanding who we are? How do we communicate our identity to others?

## GLOBALIZATION AND IDENTITY

Within postmodernism, the concepts of globalization and identity are subject to diverse interpretations, having no general accepted definitions. The reaffirming tendencies of identity issues appear as specific trends of globalization and also of the processes which it arises. Note the fact that identity described by Taguieff as "the devil itself...has an unbelievable power" (Cordellier 1997). Consequently, identity represents an increasingly current problem, pertinent answers are being looked for to what Taguieff said and that is, the identities will merge in a "differentiated human kind". The identity problem as globalization unforeseen effect is also analysed by Huntington (2004), who draws our attention to the fact that states undergo an identity crisis, so that "crisis in relation to national identity have become a global phenomenon". On the other hand, the last decades different conflicts (economical, geopolitical, religion) pinpoint the improper management of differences by political decision factors, confirming Huntington's foresee, that the human kind is witnessing "a conflict of civilizations". By taking this fact into consideration, some authors consider that one of the biggest issue of the today world would be the peaceful management of cultural differences and identities, so to ensure their conflict free "cohabitation" (Wolton, 2009), by maintaining at the same time those differences that give personality and identity. Therefore, we cannot oppose globalization and its outcomes, but that does not mean we need to give away the native cultural pattern, our own values, because "without national identity, we wouldn't be what we are nor

we know what we are. Ages of faith, blood and song would be permanently erased from the collective memory and from the Romanian soul. And our future would be uncertain." (Georgiu, 1997). Identity is synonymous today with a sense of belonging, which explains the solidarity of the identity subjects (individual, group) and their desire to share a common living and also values. People have various ways of thinking about national identity and sometimes they confuse nationality with ethnicity. Nationality refers to one's legal status in relation to the nation. Ethnicity it's a gift, the individual is born with it, does not acquire it.

In the context of globalization and complex processes it fluxes wise unbinds, more freely and faster, such as people, capital, technology and innovation, we are facing an individuals' frequent opening to other cultural models, which leads to changes of individuals, groups and societies, and overall identity. To the same extent, Roland Robertson (1992) explains the globalization concept by referring to "shrinking of the world and raising awareness of the world as a whole". Thus, we're witnessing the unravelling of previous identity forms and the transition towards a new context, made of unique crosses between global and local, with new identities' forms of existence, but which remain difficult to predict or define.

The first step to globalization in Europe meant donning the old continent of new clothes. In this new representation, the European Union grows itself by uniting the national states, trying to shape its own identity, the European identity. National identity is given particular importance in the European context which promotes the motto "unity in diversity", mutual respect between nations and raising its citizens' awareness on cultural differences and ethnicity. Diversity is promoted as a value that enriches both the individual and also the community, contrary to what was stated in the eighteenth century when it represented "the reason of discord and strife between states." (Sartori, 2007). The problem we face "is not only to share what we have in common, but to learn to manage the differences that separate us" (Wolton, 2009). In this context seemingly beneficial, the members' reaction is a surprising one, emerging in a new attitude, that of revival of interest for national and cultural identity, both at individual and at community level, at the basis of which is the people's need of self-discovery and self-definition, of maintaining their roots. "None of the European Union nations want, rightly, to die in the name of a ghostly European identity" concludes Sabourin in 1999 (Georgiu, 2010). Despite various strategies for building an European identity, such as the establishment of a National Day of Europe, setting the flag and the European anthem, adopting the single currency, the creation of community

institutions and developing a Constitution, it is often outlined by theorists and analysts that Europe is going through an identity crisis. The total success of the European project was thwarted by the power of faith, sense of belonging and tradition, culture in general, of the national states.

Under the pressure of globalization, we are witnessing the mixture of worlds and a real process of hybridization, where each nation leads a fierce competition to build and promote a favourable image within the global communication space. The image is a symbolic capital with strategic value, and paradoxically, it is not us who decide who and what we are, but those for which we define ourselves as otherness- „the others”.

Romanians' image, by identity labels made by audiences abroad is mostly negative, which is mainly due also to the foreign press coverage of crimes committed by Romanian citizens. Given the data gathered through surveys conducted on the subject worrying phenomenon is that even Romanians changed their perceptions about themselves, especially those in the Diaspora, who are often ashamed of their own country and identity. Painful for some of us, we counteract with rejection and indignation the view of our interlocutors, but we fail to find solutions, which once put into practice, will help us provide abroad a picture closer to reality.

Here are some descriptions of the Romanian elite thinkers in their many and precious articles and publications, in the country and abroad, urging us to browse through books and historical past: "Romanian is endowed with a lot of common sense, it has the prudence of people who have suffered many, the prudence of one who's been through the mill." (M. Eminescu in 1877).

"The indifference and fatalism, fruit of the few most important features of our history and often the echo of East leaven, are the clearest and more clarified notes which can be detached from our soul and character." (D. Drăghicescu in 1907).

The Romanian "is being distinctive through good modesty, a resigned wisdom, seeking, mostly formally, to remove the dangers by warning them" (D. Drăghicescu 1907).

"Being Romanian means being a creature with plenty of water in the blood. And this dilution is found in all areas of life." (E. Cioran in 1933).

"... In Romania, the kind of intelligent and universally liked man is the systematic slacker, for whom life is a moment of subjective caprice, of minor exercise of contempt, of superficial negativity. [...] We are a nation too good, too decent and too settled." (E. Cioran in 1933).

"A measure and an unsurpassed common sense of these people, had threw from itself everything that didn't match." (N. Iorga in 1940).

"Romanian soul is a very interesting fusion of qualities and flaws of the most diverse ... All

wonder lies in perfecting this merge, in its own conscience of its unity." [...] (Mihail Kogălniceanu, in 1840).

Might the call to cultural heritage allowed to foil these attempts to destroy the image of Romanians, giving us a much more favourable position in the eyes of foreigners? M. Eliade told us the answer "It would be so simple to have 'roumain, rumenian, rumane, rumeno' no longer connected in the memory of Europeans to tip, to political incapacity and to cheap for money consciousness, but to the work of a Rebreanu, Blaga, Brancusi or Enescu. It would be so simple ".Unfortunately, it is not at all easy. If Romania's image would be rehabilitated by promoting the values of our culture, a fact known only to certain circles, we could not state the same about Romanian society, and again we remember Eliade who warned us in 1935 "foreigners judge us after the people who lead us, after those who represent us abroad"(Georgiu, 2010). As a result, the general public will continue to maintain its negative opinion on the Romanian reality and the image of Romanians as a nation.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This painful truth emerges also from a survey conducted in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on a small number of Emirians, who interacted directly with Romanians or visited Romania in the recent years. In order to identify the image of Romania and Romanians in the eyes of foreigners we used as a research instrument the interview. The interview touches issues about the strengths and weaknesses of Romanians and about the assessment of Romania and Romanian society. The research objectives are - to identify the strengths and weaknesses that represent us and the appreciation of Emirates' citizens' knowledge about Romania.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To highlight the study participants' perception about the image of Romania and Romanians, it was started from the following hypothesis - predominantly negative image of Romania and Romanians in UAE is stronger in the UAE than in Europe. At the beginning of the interview each individual was asked if they conduct some research about the country they were going to spend their holiday. They have admitted that before going to Romania they have searched on Internet information about the country regarding geographical coordinates, climate, culture, religion, language, habits, and tradition. Moving forward, Romania is seen by Emirates' people as a poor country, with economic difficulties, jobless, corrupt

leaders and "people who can be bought cheaply", "a country insecure and dangerous", "having too many stray dogs and many hobos" and with many of its capital city forgotten zones - "ruined buildings". There are also, however, kind words in describing the country - "a country full of special places –Bucharest, Constanta, Brasov, Predeal, Rasnov, Bran and Peles castles, Transylvania, Sigisoara, Maramures, Sibiu and its surroundings, the Danube Delta", a country of forests and distinguished mountains", "a country with old customs and traditions". Romania is also identified with Ceausescu and communism; Hagi, a symbol of Romanian sport; Dracula, the vampire from Carpathians. Regarding the characteristics of Romanians, opinions are divided, but most UAE people describe us as "civilized people", hardworking people, in search of a better life, hospitable, modest, tolerant, intelligent, friendly" ..... "and here all the minorities enjoy a tolerant treatment from their part". We are also assigned negative characteristics, such as - "stressed, frivolous, theft, does, not being united, grumpy, cowardly". When it comes to naming one of the barrier which affects their communication with Romanians a majority of respondents identified that English language is the one. A small number of the respondents commented that in some cases because of their „strong” accent it was difficult to receive the message and they were misunderstood.

Asked what were the reasons behind choosing Romania as a destination, we can identify two subject’s categories broadly numerically balanced: those who first visited our country based on reasons such as "stirring up interest," "medical reasons" and "trip cost "and the second category, those who returned to Romania, because they fell in love with the "tourism specifics and locals", the "diversity of places" and "climate". In general, respondents do not have sufficient knowledge about Romania and Romanians before interacting with Romanians or researching the information sources.

The study highlights and confirms what we already know in fact, that many of the negative images about Romania and Romanians have at least a grain of truth in them, but also confirms that Romania is a country with much to offer, with more pluses than minuses , but too little promoted.

## CONCLUSION

As long as we will still be identified with Ceausescu and communism, Hagi, a former football star and Dracula, the vampire of Carpathians and the foreign press will continue to describe us through our mistakes, it will be our duty to those at home and those in the diaspora, to change the perception of the stranger’s eye. Romania needs practical and rational solutions to

reinvent itself and promote the values and creations that define us and characterizes the Romanian spirit. Romania does not yet have a country brand to make itself known to foreigners, which is quite complicated and requires a long period of time. But "a successful brand will be considered an essential national wealth. No country will no longer be able to ignore the way it is seen by the world". (Olins, 2006). Achieving „obligations towards the future go beyond those facing the past "as stressed by Lovinescu (1997, p. 12) in his famous reference work ‘History of modern Romanian civilization’, and this should give something to think about to primarily intellectual and political elite. On the other hand, considering the findings of this study it is strongly recommended that Romanian citizens look, for a moment, at Romania, through the eyes of foreigners, those who visit our country, not to detach us so quickly from the past, fascinated by the frenzy of entertainment and consumption, as Romania’s and Romanians’ destiny largely depends on our choices we make today. This bad image of Romania affects every Romanian citizen, living and working in Romania or abroad. Unstoppable changes in post-communist Romania failed but only to remove people, especially the young wing, who perhaps scented by flowers in the painting of globalization, will be willing to embrace a new identity. As a result, we are called to know and love our own values, to cherish and promote them. The way we handle this call depends of imposing the image of Romania and Romanian community in the global arena.

## LIMITATIONS

Several limitations of the present study should be noted. Firstly, the study should have been conducted on a larger scale and secondly, the findings of the present study could not be translated to other ethnicities.

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