

**THE REFUGEE CRISES, A NEW CRISIS  
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION – AN ANALYSIS  
OF THE ROMANIAN ONLINE MASS MEDIA**

(Ph.D. Dissertation Summary)

The discourse on the European Union has been dominated in recent years by the many crises that have significantly marked this area: Brexit, the sovereign debt crisis and the conflicts in Ukraine, the refugee crisis, as well as the rise of populist parties, but also the increasing popularity of the talks on the break-up of the EU. Despite these blows, the attitude of the European Commission towards advancing the integration process has remained proactive and positive. What has changed is how this advancement of the integration process is wanted. Whereas the slogan "This time it's different!" used to be promoted before the elections for the European Parliament, alluding to the increase of the European Parliament's competences, in 2017, Jean Claude Juncker is speaking about a European Union with different types of integration.

This White Book on the future of Europe was presented at the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Rome on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, shortly before Theresa May, the British Prime Minister, formally invoked Article 50, in a letter addressed to the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, on March 29<sup>th</sup> 2017. All this, after an unprecedented number of people illegally crossed the Mediterranean from Turkey to Greece in 2015: 885,386 people, according to the figures reported by The European Parliament, plus other several hundreds of thousands who fled to Italy, Spain, Malta or Bulgaria. Most of those who arrived in Greece went further, via the Balkans, to the borders of the

Schengen area, passing through the territory of the Eastern European states, which are also the southern border of the Schengen area. This route was followed in an attempt to reach the northern EU countries, considered not only to have a more welcoming refugee-acceptance system but also a superior economy to the eastern and southern European Union Member States.

The unprecedented number of migrants has created anxiety in countries such as Hungary, Slovenia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, but also in Romania and Bulgaria - countries which are not in the Schengen area, but which border the routes chosen by migrants to reach the Schengen area. This state of restlessness in the Eastern Member States has been amplified by how the media in these countries presented the events that precipitated at the end of 2015. The fact that the European Union institutions have reacted with difficulty to the "refugee crisis" served only to amplify the negative message from the public sphere. Furthermore, the measures taken individually by Member States to address this issue have created a division within the Union.

One of the most controversial measures taken by some Member States, and one of the most widely discussed in the public space, was the raising of fences at the national borders. At the same time, seven EU Member States from the Schengen area reintroduced checks at the national borders. Such measures have placed a question mark on the free space itself, that borderless Union, which would become abruptly divided again. But the way in which the national states responded to this crisis was a consequence of the delay of a position from the European institutions. Although conflicts during the Arab Spring, as well as the Middle East wars, occur in the vicinity of the European Union, the expression of at least some positions on these conflicts has been fragmented and therefore diluted. Fragmented, on the one hand, between the European and national institutions and, on the other hand, between the different institutions and services within the European Union, involved in one way or another in policies and actions that concern the European Union's foreign policy. This context highlighted not only the slowness with which the Union responded to these conflicts, but above all this segmentation of the EU foreign policy discourse. One example of this is that although the European External Action Service (EEAS) was launched in 2010,

the European Commission retains its duties on the financial instruments that the European Union uses in external relations (Bicchi, 2014, p. 320).

The effects of this split had repercussions primarily on the southern states (Italy, Spain, Malta, Bulgaria), but especially on Greece, a Member State already in a fragile condition after the economic and financial crisis. These same states, along with the ones on the eastern border of the Schengen area, were expected by the remaining EU Member States, according to the Dublin Regulation, to take over and host all migrants arriving illegally in the EU by crossing the southern border of the Union.

The first chapter of the paper summarizes the context in which the Arab Spring started, some aspects of how states such as the United States and the UK intervened in the Middle East, namely the war in Iraq, and how this intervention triggered internal ethnical and religious conflicts in this space, for political power, as well as a brief retrospective of the political landscape in the Middle East and North Africa as a result of the Arab Spring. The chapter ends with a section detailing how the EU was prepared from an institutional point of view to respond to events in its neighbourhood. with the outbreak of the Arab Spring.

Shortly after the outbreak of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, they were called the Arab Spring, alluding to revolutionary movements in Europe that led to radical transformations, such as the 1848 Revolution or the Prague Spring. Under the influence of opinions that saw the beginning of some revolutionary democratic movements in the conflicts in northern Africa and the Middle East, many analysts have been quick to identify the zero point of these movements.

At a regional level, the situation in the Arab world has been a complex amalgam of turmoil. What appears to have characterized the Arab world, at least in the past, emphasizes Gregory Gause III (2011, p. 82), "was the presence of undemocratic regimes" considered by researchers, including Gregory Gause, to be "a viable option for the stability of the region ". This vision has been questioned as the events of the Arab Spring began.

The power of "autocratic regimes" could be maintained in the region, first of all, by coercive force (Gause III, 2011). Their clearest manifestations were related to the "state control over the economy", as well as to the imposition of "a complex of military security measures" (Gause III, 2011, p. 88), which, in the long run, failed to ensure a sustainable political and economic climate in the region.

One of the major issues that have been highlighted in this context is the demographic change. It translates into an increase in the population segment of up to 25 years, which has generated an increase in the labour force at a pace that has exceeded the growth of jobs (Malik, 2014). The demographic growth has been corroborated with an increase in the level of education within the population (Campante & Chor, 2012, p. 168). Economic issues stem from state control over the economy. From this point of view, Malik and Awadallah (2013) consider that "the absence of an independent, competitive and integrated private sector in the global market is a distinguishing mark of the Arab world." The Arab world created an environment that, through the control of the centralized economy and the restrictive economic barriers, has led to the emergence of an economic apartheid system that has pushed both people and companies to marginalization (Malik & Awadallah, 2013, p. 310). The opposition to the corrupted system came from the "social media", thus replacing the traditional press space that was subject to censorship pressures (Howard & Hussain, 2013, p. 19). This created a new space of documentation and disapproval of corruption and regime abuses, which had the effect of eroding the "taboo on criticizing authority" (Howard & Hussain, 2013, p. 39).

There is a variable in the region that gives the Arab world a special connotation, namely the perspective on religion. The fact that religion has played a role in the Arab Spring is unquestionable (Benhabib, 2011; Hoffman & Jamal, 2014; Stepan & Linz, 2013). Whether we are talking about the fact that most of the participants were pious Muslims who fought side by side with secular, left-wing, nationalist and non-Muslim people, and many of the protesters were seen "in ritual manifestation" (e.g. praying on the street or in markets), using religious moments (e.g. Friday) and places (e.g. mosques) (Bayat, 2013, p. 590), whether we are talking about ethnic distinctions in the "Arab world". We are talking here, first of all, about the misunderstandings between Sunni and Shia Islamists, and secondly about the other ethnic religious groups that,

although smaller, have often proved to be extremely active in both territorial and political conflicts (e.g. Kurds) in the Middle East, but also in North Africa.

On the other hand, one of the criticisms that we can partly bring to the literature that analyses the Arab Spring is the lack of perspectives that go beyond the regional sphere and analyse the specific reality of each country in the region. We must not forget that the romantic perspective of a "pan-Arab feeling" (see: Gause III, 2011, p. 88) was wrong. This does not deny that there were similarities in the causes that led to the violent events in the North African and Middle East countries in 2011 and beyond. But, we must consider in any approach, at least the ethnic distinctions in the space of the "Arab world." This should have been the case for Iraq, where the approach was based on a series of erroneous assumptions and erroneous visions of the Iraqi society, as shown by the "Chilcot report", the final report of the "Iraq Inquiry" ), initiated by British Prime Minister (2007-2010), Gordon Brown.

A misconception that has embraced the prospect of an upgraded Iraqi society at the level of the state and policies, a state in which the middle class transcends divisions imposed by religion and ignores ethnic differences, a state that has invested in education, health and public services (Stansfield , 2009, p. 3). A vision that the "Coalition Provisional Authority" – CPA, a post-invasion body created in Iraq "in order to temporarily exercise the power of government if necessary to maintain a security climate, facilitate humanitarian aid, and eliminate weapons of mass destruction" (Negroponte & Greenstock, 2003), glamorised through the "glorious past", and, according to Gareth Stansfield (2009, p. 4), attributed to the history of the modern Iraq a sense of unity and civic identity without a realistic approach to the sectarian past, which has been an important factor in Iraqi politics over the centuries.

It remains to be seen what form the Arab Spring regimes' power will take and, above all, under what form it will stabilise, whether it is to receive religious connotations, or fall back into the sphere of authoritarianism, or whether the vision of the researchers imagining a new step of democratization (Stepan & Linz, 2013, p. 20) will materialize. For in Tunisia, post Arab Spring, there is an Islamic ruling party, the Ennahda. This, along with the Nidaa Tounes party, won the majority in parliament in the 2014 elections, after Ennahda had won 40% of its seats in 2011 in the new

Constituent Assembly of Tunisia (al-Majlis al-Waṭanī at-Ta ' Sīsī) (Bayat, 2013, p. 592). Similarly, in Morocco the largest number of seats in parliament after the Arab Spring was obtained by the Islamic Justice and Development Party (Bayat, 2013, p. 592). In Egypt, the Muslim Brothers party (Gammā'at al-'iwwān) and the Salafites, the Ḥizb al-Nūr party, have won 60% of the seats in Parliament. Muhammad Morsy, the leader of the Muslim Brothers, was elected president until the 2013 coup which set up Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as president in 2014. He launched a war against members of the "Muslim Brothers" (Encarnación, 2013; Trager, 2015).

A separation of the two powers, the religious and governmental would also be beneficial, according to Stepan and Linz (2013). In order for this to become an achievable goal, this reality needs to be first admitted and acted upon, in the context of these realities. What the absence of understanding of these ethnic and religious forces in the Arab world suggests is that the lack of readiness of the international community for the second step of these "interventions" - "peacekeeping missions" - has strong consequences.

Here the European Union was caught up in the initial stage of establishing the European External Action Service (EEAS), which was to deal with common foreign and security policies under the Treaty of Lisbon, which came into force In December 2009. The urgency of setting up this Service was obvious, with the EU facing a series of crises: (i) the Arab Spring; (ii) the military conflicts in eastern Ukraine (2012), which led to the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, and have led to a "deep crisis" in the relations with Russia (including an energy crisis); (iii) the crisis in Syria; and (iv) but not least, the increase in the terrorist threat, especially after the 2015 Paris attacks. These crises have in fact disrupted the processes initiated by the development of a foreign and security policy in the European Union (Wesselink & Boschma, 2016, p. 11). The European Union has focused on policies meant to encourage reform in the Arab Spring states, summarised for the first of the three communications by Catherine Ashton as "the three M's": "money", "mobility" and "market access", the second reinforces the provisions of the former and the fact that EU aid is conditional, and the third provides support for the development of democracy, economic growth and institutional development (in Bicchi, 2014, p. 323). These policies were added to the ENP

("European Neighbourhood Policy"). And if we accept that from an institutional point of view the European Union has managed to unify its message in one voice (Börzel & Hüllen, 2014, pp. 1039-40), the states neighbouring the EU will be reluctant to adopt the reform program proposed by the EU because it would mean "costly transformations" to change the status quo. This can create a picture of inefficiency of the EU policies, because the less democratic a country is, the less effective the EU policies will be. This creates a vicious circle in which the EU will also hesitate to negotiate to overcome such impediments and the ENP countries will be reserved to adopt the policies proposed by the EU (Börzel & Hüllen, 2014, p. 1042).

The second chapter starts with a secondary data analysis, which brings together at least three institutional perspectives - IOM, UNCHR and FRONTEX - on the number of people who illegally crossed the EU border in 2015. This study provides an incipient picture of EU border security at the start of the "refugee crisis", of the EU migrant reception policies, and of the forces involved in dealing with situations such as the refugee crisis, which complements the picture of the European Union's capacity to deal with neighbourhood and security policy issues. The chapter continues with an analysis of how the refugee crisis has reconfigured free movement within the European Union and especially in the Schengen area. Next, the chapter presents an account of the situation in Italy, which has been experiencing an increase in migration since the start of the Arab Spring, an alarm signal that the European Union has ignored, counting on the policies on migration and border security, in force at that time. The penultimate part of the second chapter follows the line of decisions that Brussels took over in 2015 and a retrospective of the Dublin Regulation. The chapter is concluded with the solution proposed by the Commission for the settlement of the refugee crisis, the Agreement with Turkey.

At the end of 2015, more than 2 million asylum applications were filed in 38 European countries, almost three times as many as 2014, according to UNHCR's report "Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2015" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016, p. 35). According to the same UNHCR report, out of more than 2 million asylum seekers, more than 1.2 million arrived in the European Union, and the most asylum-seekers (almost 50%) were in Germany and Sweden. In 2015, Germany

was the EU country that received the highest number of asylum applications, namely 441.900 applications, more than twice the figures of the year 2014, when 173.100 asylum applications were registered in this country. According to Figure 3, in Germany, asylum applications have been on the rise for the last eight years. As far as refugees' countries of origin are concerned, they are Syria and Afghanistan, followed by African countries such as Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, etc.

In one of its reports, namely the 2015 Annual Risk Analysis, FRONTEX identifies that the "roots" of the increase in the number of illegal crossings across the European Union border are "the struggles in Syria" that "gave rise to the worst crisis of refugees from the Second World War" (Frontex, 2015, p. 17). As the UNHCR data shows, the same is reflected in the total number of refugees. The FRONTEX 2015 Annual Risk Analysis identifies eight (8) routes to the European Union: the Eastern Mediterranean route, the Western Balkans route, the Central Mediterranean route, Albania's circular route to Greece, the Western Mediterranean route, the Eastern Border route, the West Africa route and, last but not least, the Black Sea route. According to the UNCHR, the most dramatic change occurred on the Western Balkans route, which saw an increase of 1,662.00% in the number of people who crossed the EU border between crossing points, as compared to the previous year. The second most significant route is in the Eastern Mediterranean where in 2015 there was an increase of 1,642.00% in the number of people who illegally crossed the border between the border crossing points as compared to 2014.

Faced with an unprecedented number of migrants, most affected states have made changes to their national law. According to the IOM report "Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and Beyond. Compilation of available data and information. Reporting period 2015", Bulgaria set up the "National Council for Migration and Integration" in February 2015, Greece amended the law on granting citizenship so that children who attend primary school, and whose parents have lived legally in Greece for at least five years, can be granted citizenship (IOM, 2015, p. 9). In Hungary, several amendments have been made to the law governing political asylum, namely that in September 2015 Serbia was designated as a "safe third country", thus creating the possibility for Hungary to reject asylum applications from persons who crossed Serbia



on their way to Western Europe. In September 2015, Croatia established the "Activity Coordination Headquarters" to help better manage the situation of migrants. (IOM, 2015, p. 15) In Slovenia, the law on national defence has been amended by assigning tasks to the armed forces in terms of border protection, ensuring security on borders and in reception and accommodation centres, and police support when needed (IOM, 2015, p. 16).

The unprecedented number of people in search of refuge has created a climate of unease, especially in countries that have not been confronted with such a phenomenon in their recent history. This justifies the measures taken by the governments of the above-mentioned states, which, as we can see, address in particular border security and not the identification of long-term and integrated solutions meant to solve problems globally and not at the level local. The border closure measure, which many of the Central European countries, including the EU Member States on the southern border of the Schengen area, have implemented, has not stopped the influx of migrants who were making their way to Western Europe across the Mediterranean Sea.

As a result of the migration phenomenon, since September 2015, seven EU Member States have reinstated border controls: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia and Sweden. (European Parliament, 2016a, p. 2) Closure of borders within the Schengen area was one of the most important signs of the division created by the "refugee crisis". In December 2015, the European Commission would propose to amend the Schengen Border Code, so as to verify the entry and exit of all Schengen Member States' citizens and to check third country nationals exiting the Schengen space (European Commission, 2015). The European Commission has justified the above-mentioned proposals as follows: "This proposal is a response to the intensification of terrorist threats in Europe (...)". The 2015 refugee crisis has greatly changed the landscape in terms of migrant protection in the EU Member States, meaning that, in 2015, more EU Member States were forced to effectively protect migrants (from countries traditionally known as recipients of migrants, for example Sweden or Germany, to countries like Hungary).

In the early years of the Arab Spring, Italy felt pressure from the growing number of refugees. UNHCR recognizes that Italy has made considerable efforts to save the

lives of migrants who ventured into crossing the Mediterranean. (UNHCR, 2013) A notable operation was the initiative of the Italian authorities, called "Mare Nostrum". A number of 421 missions were carried out, during which 150,810 migrants were rescued, 5 mother ships were seized and 330 traffickers were brought to justice (Navy Military Navy). Better communication between the EU institutions and the central and local authorities of the Member States, as well as providing support to resolve these regional crises, could have meant a more prepared Union for the 2015 Mediterranean disaster. The encountered problems are the very problems that FRONTEX had reported in its Annual Risk Analysis.

In this context, on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the European Commission added the following set of measures to the 'European Migration Agenda' (see European Council 2015): a proposal for the emergency relocation of 120,000 people in EU border countries; a permanent resettlement mechanism for all Member States; a more efficient return policy; a public procurement guide for refugee support measures; measures addressing the external dimension of the refugee crisis; a trust fund for Africa. None of these proposed points addressed directly the resolution of the problems in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans and Central Europe. These issues were directly discussed only in a series of meetings that took place in late September 2015. Among them, we mention the meeting of the Home Affairs Ministers within the JHA, on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, in which the "Required quotas" were voted.

On November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the leaders of the EU member states met in Brussels with Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. During this meeting, the participants agreed to give new impetus to Turkey's accession process and to adopt a joint action plan for managing the "refugee crisis". As a result of FRONTEX' and Turkey's efforts, as the latter has begun implementing measures to fulfil its obligations under the "EU-Turkey Agreement" of November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the number of people crossing the Mediterranean decreased, especially in 2016, to 366,350 people (according to IOM, 2016b).

The third chapter looks into the political context in the European Union, before the refugee crisis, especially two phenomena that have highlighted Euroscepticism and populism. The first section of the chapter reunites theories on Euroscepticism, one of

the most frequent phenomena related to the opposition against European Union, even in times of prosperity. The second one brings together theories about one of the most disputed concepts in recent years, populism, while the third section brings together some theories about the connections between the two concepts, Euroscepticism and populism, as highlighted by academic research. The final section includes a brief overview of how EU political parties categorized as falling into one of the two concepts, or even both, have evolved from an electoral point of view in recent years. This is important because the two phenomena have intensified in the years after the 2008 crisis, playing an extremely important role in the political landscape of the refugee crisis and beyond.

Attempts to conceptually clarify the attitudes towards the European integration have been numerous. The ones listed in this paper are only a very small part of the studies dedicated to this theme, primarily focusing on defining Euroscepticism in the context of the European integration process. As Trenz and de Wilde (2009) propose that the Euroscepticism study should be a multilateral approach that targets both its content, its performances, and its popularity in different environments and contexts.

A phenomenon that should not be overlooked is the ever more frequent association of Euroscepticism with populism. This association is shaping up in the context of the multiple crises of the community space, where a series of voices with a speech that goes beyond the sphere of Eurosceptic ideas, anyway we describe it, and crosses into a protest speech against the EU, which reflects what researchers see as an exploitation of the existing cleavage between the views of the European electorate and the way in which the issue of European integration is nationalised (Leconte, 2015, p. 256). Here we can integrate the emergence and growth of what researchers call "entrepreneurial political agents", using the word "entrepreneurship" (Hobolt & de Vries, 2016b; Leconte, 2015) to describe a political group that, taking advantage of the unfavourable context, exploits this type of position towards European integration. Therefore, Sara Hobolt and Catherine de Vries (2016b, p. 425) point to the need to better understand the link between the opposition against the European Union and other issues such as anti-immigration and anti-austerity attitudes in the electoral context, and especially in the context of the erosion of the political union. Cécile Leconte (2015)

makes a connection between the two, calling them "polemic notions", dysfunctions of democracy, which allow us to link the national and European dimension of the protest-based politics.

What Cas Mudde notices (2015a) is that: (i) in five EU states, the populist parties are the strongest (Greece, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and Switzerland); (ii) in three of the EU states, populist parties have won the majority of the votes (Hungary, Italy and Slovakia); (iii) populists are governing seven other EU states (Finland, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia and Switzerland); and (iv) in six member states, a populist party is an established party on the national political scene (Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Switzerland). We cannot deny that, in combination with the multiple crises in the European space (e.g. the economic crisis, the sovereign debt crisis and even the democratic deficit crisis), not only populist parties but populist ideas have gained momentum. The issue is approached in terms of: whether or not to be in power in the national governments, whether to be right-sided or left-sided, how populist actors position themselves in the spectrum of populist parties (in this context, Mudde said it was not about the attitudes, but rather about the themes that these actors were addressing) and how they position themselves in the European Parliament and, more importantly, on the subject of the European integration process. However, researchers agree that this type of parties are characterized by the volatility of both their electorate (Paul Taggart 2000, p. 76), and the sustainability of these popularity flares (see: Hobolt & de Vries, 2016a, p. 14; Mudde, 2014, p. 98 and not only).

The fourth chapter of the paper focuses on three important moments for the European Union that have led to the transformation of the vision on the future of the EU, or even to structural transformations. They are also closely linked to Euroscepticism as a phenomenon of defiance against the EU, as well as to the emergence of populism in the European political space, as a result of the democratic deficit in the European Union. The first section of the chapter follows a series of theories that have at their heart the process of democratization in the EU in anticipation of the second subchapter that outlines how the 2014 European Parliament elections transformed the distribution of decision-making power in the EU and how the electorate perceived this change. The third part of the chapter returns in time before the 2014

elections to the Greek crisis, which was one of the key moments that has led to a decrease in the level of trust in the EU. The chapter is concluded by a brief incursion into the mechanisms that have led to Brexit.

This "democratic deficit" has become an important topic in the European integration research, capturing the interest of a significant number of researchers (Follesdal & Hix, 2006; Moravcsik, 2003; Spanje & de Vreese, 2011; Vries, Edwards, & Tillman, 2010). The democratic deficit remains a constant in the EU, and a central issue in the European integration process. Attempts to overcome the many crises that have haunted the Union space since the onset of the economic crisis begin to be perceived by the most pessimistic as a domino effect waiting to be triggered, and each new error is carefully evaluated and inevitably associated with the question, "Is this the beginning of the end?".

The European Union, as we have seen, has proven to be an area conducive to politicisation but not to the creation of a political question. The 2014 elections promised to be different by the entry into force of the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon. "Europe" should have played a more important role in these elections. The European Parliament - after the May 2014 elections - should have had greater legislative power in a number of issues concerning European integration both politically and economically, namely: to regulate the single market, to change EU policy on free movement, to amend and approve the annual budget, to reform the Common Agricultural Policy, to ratify or reject the EU-US Free Trade Agreement, and to verify the implementation of the "Budget Pact", as well as other new provisions on the governance of the euro area. (Hix, 2013). Along with the increasing power in these areas, the Parliament should have "formally" elected the next chairperson of the Commission (Hix, 2013).

Finally, it should be noted that the steps taken in the 2014 elections with regard to the advancement of European democracy did not have radical consequences. Of course, these effects have also been counterbalanced by the persistent effects of the economic and financial crisis, as well as the Eurosceptic feelings accumulated over the years when the democratic deficit was a leitmotiv of European integration. This kind of attitudes were also promoted in the public space, with problems regarding the structural crises of the European Union being openly debated, perhaps, sheltered by the idea that

European subjects are especially preferred by elites, i.e. by a small group. One such issue was the exit of Greece from the eurozone and even from the EU. The issue has become more salient especially in the context of street protests in Greece during the onset of the sovereign debt crisis. In this context, public discourse, both in the European space and in the international arena, circulated countless representations and models of the financial and socio-political crisis, proposing numerous solutions and potential culprits. (Wodak & Angouri, 2014, p. 417) Greece was seen as a victim of debtors who wanted to implement too drastic measures of austerity, but also as guilty, or as a negative example of the European Union, who lied and now pays for the decisions made. The public discourse goes quite suddenly from the presentation of Greece as being about to leave the eurozone to Greece as a "success story" (Wodak & Angouri, 2014, p. 419), this lack of consistency in the public discourse is a reflection of the lack of policy coherence between the three institutions involved in the bailout effort for Greece: the EC (European Commission), the ECB (the European Central Bank) and the IMF (International Monetary Fund).

Peter Spiegel describes in a Financial Times article, published in April 2016, Greece's *status quo* that was given a € 13 billion loan by creditors in exchange for a package of tax and pension reforms just to barely escape a slip up, proving to be only a step in postponing the big decision that need to be made till the first quarterly evaluation of 2016. We must not forget that under the leadership of Tsipras Greece is the first developed country that failed to pay its obligations to the IMF and at this point the IMF will be reluctant in giving new loans to Greece, thus adding to the uncertainty of the Greek crisis (Spiegel, 2016). Still the fate of Greece hangs in the balance as the first trimester transformed in two trimesters, IMF has called for a rescheduling of the Greek debt and a decrease in the budgetary target, meanwhile Germany decided there is no need for debt relief and Tipras " returned to an angry, defensive crouch, railing against outside forces" (Spiegel, 2016). In addition to this debt crisis, Greece is an important player in the refugee crisis. In 2015, according to UNHCR, 856,723 people arrived in Greece crossing the Mediterranean Sea (UNHCR, 2015). Thus the crises of the Union seem to cling to the territory of a single Member State. For some this situation is emblematic for the EU, for others, the result of unwise decisions, but in the end certainly an opportunity for the European Union to prove solidarity. The possibility of a

Grexit has been extensively discussed since the beginning of the sovereign debt crisis. What is even worse is that, although the ECB committed itself, through Mario Draghi's voice, in 2012 to "do whatever it takes" to save the euro (Draghi, 2012), discussions on a possible Grexit were still on going in 2016. Such rhetoric can have negative consequences on a market that is struggling with uncertainty, although it should assure investors in regards to the future of Greece and the eurozone and that the ECB is willing to invest in Greek government bonds (Moore, 2016).

Meanwhile, let us not forget that Britain is the first and only country (European Parliament Think Tank, 2016, p. 6) to have held a referendum on membership status in the EEC - in 1975. So, the 2016 referendum is not the first government consultation with the citizens about EU membership. The difference is that in 1975 British citizens chose to remain members of the EEC with a share of 67% and a turnout of 64% (European Parliament Think Tank, 2016, p. 6), as opposed to 2016, when British citizens opted to leave the European Union with a 52% share and a 72% turnout. The UK is the only European Community country to hold a referendum on CEE membership and the first to have held two referendums on EU membership. Glencross (2015, p. 305) ascribes the 1975 referendum to „British exceptionalism”. A point of view perfectly described by Winston Churchill: „*we are in Europe, but not of it*”, as well as William Hague, First Secretary of State for 2010-2015, who said that: „*Britain should be in Europe, but not run by Europe*” (Glencross, 2015, p. 305). The referendum is in this context an "extension" of this exceptionalist spirit which excludes the idea of a normative commitment to the EU and which evokes British superiority (Fernando Mendez et al. (2014) in Glencross, 2015).

Summing up, the Brexit vote is an unfortunate outcome of the crises that have eroded the ideal of a united and prosperous Union. The European Union will have to redefine relations with the UK, beyond the many complex crises that have not yet come to a resolution. This process will include at least two steps. One where the EU will have to apply Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon - a stage in itself complex and likely to have unexpected effects, given that it is the first time it is applied - and the second stage in which Great Britain and the EU will have to negotiate a co-operation agreement. Jean Claude Juncker has been very firm in this respect, of first leave the EU and only after

renegotiate a cooperation agreement, as well as in regards to the mandatory conformity to the four freedoms of the European Union, the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital, in return for access to the free market of the European Union.

The fifth chapter brings together some conclusions to the *status-quo* of the European Union, in the frame of the multiple crises - legitimacy, communication, economic, security, migration, a fragile equilibrium shaken to the core by each tremor. A series of events has put into question the very unity of the Union itself. The vote in the Brexit referendum, although it was not a vote especially against the European Union and more attributed to the „British Exceptionalism” (Fernando Mendez et al. (2014) în Glencross, 2015) should be an alarming signal for the European Union institutions, especially because it is an indication of the disconnection between the citizens and the European Union, and so far away from the European Identity ideal.

In the context of the divisiveness created by the crises of recent years, it is more clear now than ever that we need to take in to account for the future of Europe not only public opinion but also the institutional space that has often proved to be taken by surprise by some of the critical situations in which the Union found itself. Moreover we need to aspire to a regional focus not only an overall perspective of the EU. This could bring about a more detailed understanding of the space of the European Union. In this respect this study hopes to bring light into the topic of how the Romania public opinion perceived the refugee crises of the European Union, in its most critical point September 2015.

The sixth chapter of the paper is dedicated to the empirical study that looks to highlight to what extent the Romania press presented the subject of the refugee crisis, which are the topics associated with this issue and how the subject of the refugee crisis is framed by the online press. The first section is devoted to detailing the step of the research project, the second section of the description of the analysis grid and the third section is devoted to an analysis of the visibility and prominence of the news on the refugee crisis, the fourth section follows the logic of the thematic news on the refugee crisis and the last section is devoted to an analysis of media framing of the refugee crisis in the Romanian online press.



The last part of the paper is dedicated to conclusions regarding the empirical study as well as general recommendations.

Mass media had an important role in the public debate of the refugee crisis. Be it written or audio-video, be it online media or traditional one, the news was full of content regarding the refugee crises. The Romania press aligned to the international trend and took on the topic of the refugee crises, especially in its most dramatic stages, in September 2015. The data analyses has shown an overall great interest in the topic from the Romania public opinion, especially in the context of the rising numbers of illegal migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea in Greece and on land, in one of the neighbouring countries, Hungary. Also the data suggests that as soon as the official meetings in Brussels have been kick-started the interest for the refugee crises has dropt although the articles are more detailed. This trend s interrupted only by a small peek that can be most probably explained by the popularity of the subject throughout the analysed period.

We can assert that this can be indicative of a preference for the sensational news, be it dramatic situations or controversial policies, like the mandatory quota of refugees. This is even more poignant when we take in to consideration that the topic is treated as an external issue, far away, that is consequential for the most to other actors, than Romania, itself.

The part of the study that includes the contextualization analysis has revealed an inclination towards a predilection for national issues. The topic that has been the most salient was "proposed and implemented decision of the EU member states". Another highly present context is the one "proposed and implemented decisions of the EU", but this one seems to be highly connected to the "mandatory (refugee) quotas", which will also suggest a more national perspective, as the mandatory quota were implemented not on an unanimous vote but on a majority vote. So what we can reflect on is the amount of energy spent at a national level rather than EU policy making level, where it should have been focused. This can be, in itself a research topic. At the same time the least visible context given to the refugee crises was the "Syrian war", which adds up to the perspective of a shallow perspective on the refugee crises, that was more contextualized in a national perspective and at best in a EU context. This is more evident if we consider

the results of the third component of the empirical study, a framing analysis, where the results have shown the economic frame as being the least visible. The use of the economic frame usually is an indicator of a more comprehensive perspective on policy and issues in the media. The framing analysis has shown the responsibility frame as being the most used one throughout the data which is indicative of blame attitudes rather than following an approaches to the topic that looks in to the consequences and finding solutions.

Looking at the results of the components, of the empirical study, we can argue that the Romanian mass media tends to approach EU topics as external topics, a context to whom Romania does not belong. They rely more on the power of the extraordinary and tend to have a "breaking news" approach, an overall episodic approach to the topic of the refugee crises. They tend to miss out on the more profound changes in the EU, the reconfiguration of the *status-quo*. This is mainly a counterproductive attitude for Romania, as it promotes an isolationist perspective, that of a forgotten member state. To go even further this could contribute to the euroscepticist attitudes of the public opinion and can create an image of a "wronged" member state by the more "powerful" ones. This in turn can push towards a national centric perspective.

The Romanian mass media doesn't go to the more introspective perspective of the topic of the refugee crises - please note that even though I have included a component of news or editorial, no editorials have emerged. The lack of scrutiny can be a cause of the editorial policy as well as an attempt of keeping a more objective approach or even a propensity of the public. This in itself can be an interesting research topic of research. At the same time this leaves information gaps that the public tends to fill in by looking in other places. Lately there has been an on-going debate on the outpour of fabricated news and the way they are spread through social media, a topic that would be valuable to follow in another research.

Finally we can conclude that the Romanian online media follows on the refugee crises as a trending topic, since it was a first page issue all over the European Union. This is testimonial to the lack of interest for European subjects in the Romanian public space and the outsider stance that Romania takes in the European Union. A worrying stance not only in the context of the multiple crises of the European Union, but

especially in the new imagined future of the each at its own pace European Union. So an oversimplification and a lack of context on issues in the mass media can only be detrimental to the public opinion, who will miss out on vital information to better understand the long term effects of thus issues, as well as holding on to the status of being a member state of the European Union, without getting involved in shaping the future path of the EU. Thus the results of this paper can be a starting point for future research, that will advance more complex solutions to the pressing issues of today that will take into consideration public opinion as well.

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