Populist-Nationalist Discourse in the European Periphery. The Case of Romania.

***Abstract**: Our article focuses on the reproductive dynamics of the populist nationalist discourse present in Romanian social media. We are particularly interested in exploring the possible emergence of a specific Eastern-European type of right wing populism, reflected by the authoritarian politics professed by Viktor Orban, Andrej Duda, Robert Fico or, in Romania, Traian Băsescu and the PMP (Popular Movement Party). Thus, in the first part of our article we are exploring the main theoretical discussions regarding populism in general and its Eastern European manifestation in particular. In the second part we are proposing a*

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Introduction

After the 2012 protests and the subsequent social unrest in the following years (eg the Save Roşia Montana movement, then the Collective protests), the online environment and particularly the social media proved to be an excellent mobilizing tool for civic protest. At the same time, the increase in street protest participation and online mobilization was doubled by the ideologization of the formerly civic discourse, which took a significant turn towards the far right. This, in our opinion, was later reflected by the emergence of an important number of nationalist-populist new political parties, of which perhaps the most important is that of the former president Traian Băsescu – the Popular Movement Party (P.M.P.)

Therefore, the main focus of our proposed paper is on the reproductive dynamics of the Romanian populist-nationalist discourse as an everyday practice in a particular structural setting, provided by the online environment and also the relation between the grass roots nationalist rhetoric and the newly appeared populist-nationalist parties. We will try to provide an answer to the following questions:

– What are the main characteristics of the Romanian nationalist-populist discourse present in the social media?

– Is there an identifiable link between the grass-roots nationalist rhetoric and the party populist discourse?

– Can we speak, in broader terms, of the emergence of a particular Eastern-European populist model, reflected by the authoritarian poli-

tics professed by Viktor Orban, Andrej Duda, Robert Fico or, in Romania, Traian Băsescu and the PMP (Popular Movement Party)?

East European nationalist populism in context

The vast majority of the papers on populism describe this political phenomenon as one which is very difficult to explain and to analyze due to its discursive versatility and behavioural chameleonism. Furthermore, we would argue that the term populism covers more political and social realities than one single term would normally concentrate from a semantic point of view.

Politics is, as shown by Lucien Sfez, a business of symbols because it is based on legitimacy (Sfez, 2000). And legitimacy is an abstract reality that can be demonstrated only by political majority and the support of public policy rather than by specific or economic interests. For this reason the struggle for legitimacy is probably more likely to take place in the realm of image and discourse than in the area of ??public policy. That is, politics – almost everywhere in the Western world and in other places as well, has become dependent on the electoral campaigns that slowly take over the whole public space, not only during elections (whatever they are) but also before and after the election. Basically the political space has become one of constant electoral campaigns, that is to say a sandbox where image and symbol take up more space than political action itself, which aims mostly to take steps and innovate through public policy or through channeling public support for large projects, such as sending people to Mars or eradicating hunger from the planet.

This permanent campaign generated, as Guy Hermet points out, the emergence and strengthening of a new string of political parties, namely the populist parties (Hermet, 2007). These parties are, as shown by the last decade and a half, not able to govern, but are able to mobilize societies and to gather enough votes to represent a real threat to main-stream political parties. And when we say they are not able to govern, we can give examples: Pym Fortuyn in the Netherlands or the FPO in Austria, who came to power (in Austria they even gave the prime minister) did not produce any notable things in government and were forced to retreat relatively quickly. But even in these conditions populist parties continue to attract a wide electorate that is sufficiently large so as to control or at least influence most of the governments. Take the case of Holland, where the Christian Democrat Conservative government was forced to form an alliance with the Freedom and Justice Party of Geert Wilers or Austria, where parties following contradictory ideologies (socialists and conservatives) were forced to ally themselves in order to isolate the populists, who were the kingmakers in the election. Thus, there was a certain political instability which lead to early elections and that in turn lead to a new electoral campaign.

The vast majority of works about political populism describe this phenomenon as being very difficult to explain and analyze due to its versatility in discourse and chameleonical behavior. In addition, I would add that the term "populism" describes more political and social realities than one term can concentrate semantically. Therefore, many analysts of the phenomenon like Guy Hermet (2007) or Gianfranco Pasquino (2008), try to introduce the term "populisms" instead of "populism", in their search to find a clear definition as to how this phenomenon could be defined. Some authors (Frölich-Steffen et al., 2005, p. 4; Mudde, 2004, p. 541; Touraine, 2007, p. 38) defined populism as a system of "post-industrial" parties leading

to the sense of "post-clasical". Others (Decker, 2006; Knight, 1998; Viguera, 1993) defined it as a specific style of doing politics, that has a different discourse for each society, but that shares an intimate structure of behaviour and ideas.

Therefore, before asuming one definition, we should consider describing the main political elements that are regarded as populist, no matter the region where it is encountered: 1. despise and even hatred of the elites; 2. a strong anti-corruption rhetoric; 3. anti-system discourse based on the appeal to the people as a whole; 4. cultural (or religious) conservatism; 5. economic egalitarianism; 6. rhetorical anti-capitalism; 7. assumed nationalism; 8. xenophobic behaviour and speeches; 9. contradictory public policies (when in government); 10. a foreign policy and an alliance system that is also anti-system (Krastev, 2009).

Of course these are all pieces of a puzzle, and they are not found everywhere in the same formula, or with the same intensity at the same time. But each of these elements can be considered as expressions of populism. And perhaps this is why the term "populisms" seems more correct than "populism" as a generic term.

Despite the rather large differences in behavior and speech there is a defining core that allows to take into account the multiple forms that can be embodied by populism. Canovan (1999), defines this common core as "a call to the people to unite against the established power structures and dominant ideas and values ??of society". The other definition belongs to Cas Mudde (2005) who tries to get a synthesis of populist discourse and he defines populism as an ideology with a diluted core that aims to devise society into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: the "pure people" against the "corrupt elites", arguing that policy should be the expression of the general will of the people. In a populist democracy nothing is more important than the general will, not even constitutional laws.

Increasing scientific interest about this subject reflects a growing presence in the empirical reality of the global political landscape of the populist discourse. This is also because it is happening in areas that appear to have nothing in common and in the most unexpected forms. And yet the identity elements of populism seem to unite different social and political areas. We can generally distinguish three types of populism and they are largely considered to be quite different: the Latin American, the West European and the Eastern and Central European discourse. We will try to show how the discourses and the political actions for the latter two are linked, which shows in turn that political discourse is becoming more and more globalized.

In Western Europe the success of radical right populist parties like the National Front in France, or the Freedom Party in Austria, which have a stable base around 10% starting from the 80s, has intrigued researchers. They built theories and analyzed this phenomenon, but their theories were not suited to describing populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe. This doesn't mean that essentially CEE parties had very different discourses, but that they were adapted to the political and social realities of their region. Parties like the Social Labour Party and the Greater Romania Party in Romania, Vladimir Meciar's People's Party in Slovakia and others had a both nationalist and xenophobic discourse, dividing society between the "right people" and "corrupt elites" like in the West, but they related to different situations and to different targets.

Radical right-wing populist parties have had relatively comparable scores on both sides of the former Iron Curtain in Europe in the early 90s. Despite this common trait, most authors tend to focus their analysis on Western populism, avoiding the perspective of pan- European populism and a thorough examination of populism in post-communist countries. What little lit-

erature exists attempting comparative studies on populism in this regard is deeply divided, as some authors focus on the intrinsic difference between populism in CEE and Western Europe, while others emphasize the risk of drawing artificial distinctions between East and West and generating different categories and realities, arguing that the phenomenon is pan-European. This latter group believes that the growing success of populist discourse in both parts of the EU is generated essentially by a common dissatisfaction of Europeans with democracy. If we focus on the definition of populism pointed out earlier, these two approaches are not necessarily contradictory. In other words there is a "common analytical core " (Panizza, 2005) or a structure that can be found in populist discourse in both East and West. However, because populism appears on two fundamentally different political backgrounds: the well-established democracies of Western democracies and the post-communist East, we need to analyze these different strings on both sides of the former Iron Curtain.

Before analyzing the various expressions of populism in Europe, it is necessary to define more precisely the "common analytical core" that Francisco Panizza (2005) uses to draw together these various forms of populism. Under his approach, populism is "a speech against the status quo, which simplifies the political space, symbolically dividing society between "The People" and" The Others ". "The People" from this perspective, is not an abstraction that is necessary for any democratic theory, but a unitary and homogeneous body, defined by its opposition to its enemies. The latter consists primarily of the political and economical elites that usurped political power and of minorities that threaten the identity and homogeneity of "The People".

A defining characteristic of populist discourse is what Paul Taggart calls "the intrinsic chameleonic quality of populism" (Taggart, 2000), which varies according to the specific realities in which the discourse takes place. In other words, there are always "signifiers devoid of content", which can take a variety of forms. According to Canovan (1999) the power structure of the state (or region), that is essential in the formation of a specific populist discourse as populism, is above all a reaction to the power of elites and the dominant political discourse. Therefore, by following this trail, we see a much better opportunity to identify specific forms of populist discourse in CEE and in Western Europe.

Depending on the definition of "the Other", we can find differences between populist discourse in East and West: for instance while in Western populist rhetoric "the Other" is described as an external threat, an invasive structure threatening the homogeneity of the people, a category in which immigrants and those who are calling for economic or political asylum are included, "the Other" in CEE populist rhetoric is often an insider that has been a part of society for a long time, but that is not part of the nation as such, such as ethnic populations like Roma, Jews and Hungarians (for Romania and Slovakia for example). More precisely, in Eastern Europe populist discourse tends to be more inclined towards exclusion, having open racist and xenophobic overtones. As Cas Mudd (Mudd 2005) pointed out, Anti-Semitism and racism are more widespread and accepted in CEE societies and, as a result, they are a more obvious part of radical political discourse while "populist political parties and even main stream parties(…) are less willing to act against racist or nationalist extremism than in the West". On the other hand, the argument for exclusion of radical right parties in Western Europe is based on economic speech ("immigrants steal our jobs") or sociological ("they refuse to integrate"), becoming a form of political correctness of xenophobia.

While Western Europe has a long tradition of anti-establishment populist discourse, the elite being defining for those holding political power – and as Vilfredo Pareto's theory points

out – the economical power as well, CEE anti-elites discourse is often associated with national-communism. In most cases anti-elitism in Central Europe is often directed against the main party of the left political spectrum, especially the one considered the successor of the former communist party. The Polish case of the Order and Justice party of the Kaczynski brothers is extremely relevant, because it came to power with a profoundly anti-communist discourse a decade and a half after the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. Another fundamental difference between populisms of Western post-communist countries is that generally speaking, perhaps with the exception of Forza Italia (currently Popolo della Liberta) in Italy, political parties in Western Europe usually recognize the political legitimacy of its political enemies, or, in other words, take into account political pluralism as a necessary component of a functioning democracy. Chantal Mouffe takes the view, that "the opposition monopoly against the established order" (Mouffe, 2005) of populist parties in the West gives them the aura of adolescent rebels against the democratic order, allowing at the same time for them to be largely ignored as such. And they too are forced to respect the democratic order, which (they claim) is at the center of their ideology. Precisely because they hold so much to the people's will, they are unable to afford to question democracy, although they would like to impose their principles upon it. As Michael Shafir (2011) points out "the image that non-populist politicians are trying to cultivate is one of the reluctant politician, whose entry into politics is considered a necessary evil which also demands his sacrifice. It follows then, that politicians who are non-populists are "systemic" at least in appearance. […] they no longer aim for targets that would destroy the existing political system, but on the contrary, claim that their objective is to maintain a genuine democracy".

This is not necessarily the case of post-communist Europe, where center-right parties tend to have a similar populist discourse like their extremist nationalist counterparts, such as Fidesz and Jobbik's in Hungary, or PDL and PRM in Romania. In their discourse that "left" part of the people is their main political opponent, and it is often regarded as an llegitimate representative of the nation, because it is associated, at least symbolically, with communism. Viktor Orban, leader of the ruling Fidesz party in Hungary, is a good example for this trend. After losing the 2002 elections in Hungary, he stated: "We, who are gathered here today, we are not and never will be in opposition. The Nation can not be in opposition." (Tamas 2009). Even though it is officially a center-right party, FIDESZ will adopt more and more populist perspectives, using the concept of nation in an extensive, even totalitarian sense, where representative democracy – the legitimacy of each elected person – is abandoned. Also, because of the banalization of the link between populism and nationalism in CEE, the center-right parties cannot distance themselves from and never truly have condemned the populist radical right, and are more open to forming coalitions with them (see again the Hungarian case, also Slovakia in 2012).

According to Panizza (2005), populism thrives in "times of crisis and distrust" as a result of the "failure of existing social and political institutions to limit and regulate political themes in a relatively stable order". In other words, populism is the most seductive ideology (or alternative) when the institutional system is unable to resolve the imbalances caused by general change or a specific crisis in the political, economic or social spheres. This happens also because the number of unsatisfied demands and expectations grow in times of crisis and populist parties provide an explanation for the emergence of problems in the figure of "the Other" and an apparent solution which is to truly restore popular sovereignty.

In this sense, populism also offers to fulfill a vital function of representation, to "narrow the gap between representative and represented" (Panizza, 2005), at times when traditional parties fail to do so. Populism is therefore not only an effective demand for change in the economic or social, but also a fever that reveals a "democratic malaise" (Surel, 2002).

Most CEE states have adopted a multiparty democratic system somewhat abruptly after a long period of following the one-party model or a military dictatorship (for Poland), which led in fact to the reproduction of the one-party model to competing political parties, each being more interested in the political game than in building policy that is adapted to their societies. Moreover, by routinely adopting European programs to better integrate in the EU, these parties have "forgotten" how to make programmatic politics and are interested only in accessing power. Their societies then seem to be taken "hostage" by populist discourse, the only one which is directly addressed to them. Hence, the democratic malaise appeared once mainstream parties could no longer perform a service for the community, but only to support the interest groups around them.

In this analytical framework, the rise of populism in Western and in post-communist societies can be linked, at least partially, to accelerated social and economic change that people had to face in the last 30 years. All the EU, new and old, had to cope with an increasing pressure generated by the opening of the economies to international competition, Europeanization, the transition to a post-industrial economy and an aging population. Not only have these changes generated high social costs, but they also meant that severe constraints were put on the ability of the state to address these costs, which led to a considerable reduction in welfare. In this context, populist parties were able to build their discourse on discontent caused by these changes by targeting the "losers" of globalization in the West and the "losers" of transition in post-communist countries. But populist discourse did not propose solutions to the economic crises, it only tried to find guilt in the "profiteering political elites" (Mudde 2007). In general, especially in CEE, populist parties are adepts of an ultraliberal economic model similar to the American one and some western populist parties have the same economic principles as well.

Of course, economic differences between East and West continue to be extremely important, even though both face similar social and economic situations due to the economic crisis. But the political changes are more different. Populism appears in Western Europe in a time of redefinition of discrepancies between party systems operating within the democratic well-known landmarks. On the other hand, populism appears in CEE at a time when democracy and political identification are in the process of being invented. This difference can be defined by using the concept of inheritance: while most Western European political systems are based on a legacy that is fundamentally democratic, in CEE countries the system is based on an authoritarian legacy, often called "communist" or "national communist". Through the concept of inheritance, beyond the specific elements, we can also speak of a "crisis of representation" in both parts of Europe.

Populism in Western Europe was often viewed as a side effect of the depolitization of public action and the increased importance of consensual politics in contemporary democracies. According to Mouffe (2005), Western populism stems from the predetermination of liberal values over democratic ones, and from an end of adversative politics in Western democracies. The crisis of representation is the key here, because those who disagree with the establishment's main parties consensus feel that they have lost the ability to influence representatives according to their wishes. Citizens feel that politicians have a different agenda, driven by po-

litical correctness and multiculturalism, while their own problems lie elsewhere. In this sense, populism is a symptom of a dysfunctional democracy: it occurs because the principle of popular sovereignty has been neglected, and that, in the words of Canovan (1999), is a principle that is "reaffirmed as a populist challenge."

On the other hand, depoliticizing political action cannot explain the specifics of populism, especially since there is no such depolitization, in CEE, in particular, its mass character and its drive for the exclusion of "undesirables." Firstly, politics in the new EU Member States can hardly be described as consensual. Although there was a covert consensus, at least concerning foreign affairs and economic policy in the 90s, most CEE party-systems have rapidly become extremely and adversatively polarized around socio-cultural values. The cleavage communist/ anti-communist stayed the main driver of Eastern European policy for a long time but was expanded to include the element of minority exclusion. For example, in Poland, where the Kaczynski brothers were holding power, communists, Jews and gays have played roughly the same role of "enemies" of the people.

Sigmund Freud shows that the identification process is a psychological process that is fundamental for forming the self (ego), but that this process is rather social than personal, because it takes place as a process of assimilation of external models and it takes place during the whole lifetime (but especially in the first part) through a series of processes of comparison and assimilation of identities (Freud, 2010). The process described by Freud is complicated and we will not discuss it here, but what is important is that there are three types of identification: 1. primary identification (between personal self and the given self – that is the name provided by society), 2. narcissistic identification (of the young man) and 3. partial (secondary) identification: with a leader or a social or cultural model. This third identification interests us most, because it belongs – according to Freud to the adults, to people with a conscience who are being seduced by models whom they tend to copy. It is a projection of the group upon its leader and a projection of its leader upon his loyal subjects. And in a society that has passed through decades of moral infantilization (as shown by Pascal Bruckner) and the assumption of the star system model, the middle class individual has a much greater appetite for identification with his hero, which can be a real leader or just an ideal type.

In this process of identification both group affiliation and group trust are forged, which gives comfort, solidarity and finally an identity (geographically, affiliation, emotional attachment, etc.). But at the same time the relation to the "Other" is formed, the one who is not part of the group and does not share the same identity and who is often not willing (or is not wanted) to integrate. Thus, the alien (as in otherness to the group, not necessarily in the ethnic sense) turns into the enemy, into the one who is not like us. This identification process is best explained by Umberto Eco: "Having an enemy is important not only to define our identity, but also to procure an obstacle, to measure ourselves and our value –system against it, and to show by confronting it, our own value. Therefore, when there is no enemy, one has to be constructed" (Eco, 2011). Of course, this is an experience that the vast majority of human individuals go through during their social and psychological formation. But Pascal Bruckner gives us a very interesting hint- namely that in recent decades more and more adults in the West refuse to assume the social responsibilities incumbent to modernity and because they have to, in order to do so, deny reality in a certain sense, it leaves them increasingly attracted to the negative discourse of populism (Bruckner, 2005).

Two social phenomena overlap: on the one hand we are witnessing an ever-increasing impoverishment of the middle class and at the same time a growing infantilization of this social group (still the widest in contemporary society), both compared to the previous generations, who were socially more active and economically optimistic. Both these processes, apparently contradictory, are not to be understood on a personal level, but one can see that there are longer and longer periods of unemployment, there is a deprivation and a lack of average welfare, a lack of an economical and political project and they all tend to generate sympathy for populist discourse.

Populism starts, as most ideologies, by referring to myths and political symbols, especially negative ones. The major symbol is the Alien/Enemy that can take many forms, depending on the adopted cultural and historical model: it may mean the Muslim, the Roma (Gypsy), the Polish or the Corrupt, the Rich, the Poor (the one who does not want to work) etc. By relating to the Alien /Enemy, populist currents on the left and the right pay the price of a democratic election being transformed into a battle between a majority of the people against a minority that is branded as the cause for which the majority cannot retain its true original identity. All populist currents are nationalistic, no matter what doctrine they claim to follow, thus nationalism and Euroskepticism become the emblems of contemporary European populism.

It must be said that nationalism as a political principle is not the same in Western and in Central and Eastern Europe. R Griffin (2003) is the one who coined the term "ethnocratic liberalism" to describe this paradoxical form of European populism, that enthusiastically embraces a liberal system of political and economic competition, but considers at the same time that only some members of an ethnic group as being full members of society. The nationalism assumed by the National Front in France, the Northern League, the Flemish Block and others involve a rejection of the ideas of multiculturalism, proposing some kind of nostalgia for a mythical world of racial and cultural homogeneity. In other words, right-wing European populism brings into question a nationalism that is centered on an ethnic community and tradition and is often the advocate of xenophobia and authoritarianism in regards of immigration and free movement of persons. For example, the Flemish Block proclaims its sympathy for the former apartheid system in South Africa claiming the "Eerste eigen volk" (our people must come first), leading to a complete separation of Belgium: Flanders for the Flemish, Wallonia for the Walloons (Francophone), Europe for European whites. And the Flemish model is not unique, as similar principles were promoted by Haider in Austria and by Bossi in Italy during the last decade. We see that this kind of populist reaction is not just against the ruling elite but also against all those who are in one way or another considered foreigners.

The most obvious elements of this form of populism is anti-immigrationism, and in principle, it is considered the most important. But anti-immigration must not be understood as having only an economic basis, reducing the success-formula of populist fear mongering only to that of loss of workplaces or higher taxes in order to pay social allowances for the poor of other countries. This issue does occupy a specific place in populist discourse, but the essence of this discourse is rather cultural and political than economical. The fear that populism tries to provoke is similar to that of Oswald Spengler at the end of the First World War: the fall of European culture under the domination of the far East, only the actors have changed.

In contrast, Central and Eastern nationalism is more complex, being both endogenous and exogenous: it reacts both to internal factors (national, ethnic or religious minorities) and to external factors (especially to the "Russian threat"). From this perspective, nationalism had (and still has in some countries) a positive connotation especially in societies that have lived for

over four decades in a "dissolution of the nation-state into an internationalist socialist order" (Minkberg, 2002). Therefore appeal to historicism and national memory are constantly a part of post-communist populist discourse. What is interesting is that most CEE societies still value European integration, but continue to appeal to specific national characteristics and religious cultural differences. Populist-nationalist leaders in Romania like Corneliu Vadim Tudor and Laszlo Tokes worked together in the European Parliament (declaring their belief in European values) and simultaneously build ultranationalist identity discourses related to a philosophy of ethnic separation.

Romanian populism and the crisis: quick overview and typology

After 1989 populism was a relatively constant presence in the Romanian political landscape, perhaps its first use being by former president Ion Iliescu in the early 1990's. This was the time when he mobilized the society against foreign capital and capitalists (and, politically, against successful Romanians from diaspora that returned home and tried to pursue a political career, as it was the case of Ion Rațiu[3]) by formulating what in Leninist terms could be called the slogan of the moment: "we are not selling our country!" and, directly aimed at the abovementioned newly repatriates: "you did not eat soy salami!"[4]. This founding moment could arguably be seen as originating the specific opposition/conflict between the so-called "political class" and the "people" that is still structuring the Romanian populist ideological imaginary today.

The rhetoric revolving around the foreign interests aimed at controlling – directly or indirectly – the Romanian economy and implicitly the entire country was to re-emerge during the 2008 crisis, and becoming one of the issues of then president Băsescu[5]'s reelection campaign, along with his strong support for reshaping the parliamentary institution via referendum. Also, centered on the single issue of Alro Slatina[6], the same type of discourse structured the newly formed People's Party – Dan Diaconescu[7]'s campaign for the parliamentary elections in 2012.

Dan Diaconescu's approach was a bit more different, in that he added some elements which he took from the communist past, particularly the view that "the country" and the state are not the same thing, they do not overlap: "the country" is the people, and it belongs to them (in terms of collective property even), while the state appears to be in the hands of the corrupted few that are in position of power and rule. In this logic, off course, the country can be alienated by the state, in the name of formally higher (and, in reality, individual, egotistical) interests. In effect, Diaconescu's rhetoric, resembling in many respects the Latin American populisms[8], tried and, in our opinion for the very first time succeeded, to structure the opposition between the political elite and the popular masses as a coherent, cvasi-argumentative discourse destined to mobilize vote and political action for a particular political platform or leader (in this case himself). Also it must be noted that Diaconescu's ideological move towards populism took place on the background of the January and February 2012 anti-governmental mass demonstrations in Romania, which eventually resulted in the Prime Minister's Boc resignation. These street mass demonstrations anticipated the 2013 Roșia Montana protests, which in their turn represented a key element in structuring the Romanian grass-roots populist nationalism[9]. The 2012 demonstrations and subsequent protests regarding various issues – from Roșia Montana to Colectiv – were the catalyst for a vibrant and extremely active online civic and political community that overtime has initiated concrete political actions and, more importantly in our

view, represented the main agent of ideological construction of the grass-roots Romanian nationalist-populist credo. A similar phenomenon stimulated the creation of USR – the Save Romania Union in 2016 and, more recently, after the February antigovernment mass demonstrations, the creation of Romania 100 Platform, lead by former Prime Minister Cioloș.

The grass roots national-populist phenomenon in Romania has, as stated above, as its main channel of construction and dissemination the online environment, where it is professed either via blogs or alternative news sites or, most commonly, trough social networks such as facebook. Also, here can be found the sites of various new political parties that have sprung after the changes made into the political parties law in 2015. We used the dimensions of populism as identified above to formulate keywords that we subsequently used to identify sites, facebook pages or groups and individual posts and texts for our analysis. Secondly, in the case of facebook groups and pages we used bouth the relevance criterion, by referring to the same dimensions in order to select our material, and to the number of members (in the case of groups).

We would try to offer an example for each of these. Journalist Cătălin Striblea, tries to respond to a corrupt Romanian politician on his blog in an article called "The politicians now are calling us thieves!": "No, Mr. Severin, we are not all thieves. Most of us Romanians are decent, honest people minding their own business in a badly shaped country. And, if we're guilty of anything, is of the fact that we didn't succeeded in making the elections correct and we failed to fight more. But no, we are not all thieves. We have a ruling class filled with impostors and thieves, not a people who in its entirety would get accustomed with their habits."[10]. Striblea here reflects what it appears to be the most widespread theme of contemporary Romanian populism – the deep division between the political elite and "the people" (by using the dichotomy honest/dishonest). On Facebook, one of the groups reflecting this particular issue is named "România curată – fără politicieni și partide politice" (A clean Romania, without politicians and political parties)[11] and it numbers 15735 members and, in the description of a similar group – Români dezamăgiți (Disappointed Romanians, numbering over 11000 members), one can read that: "Good people! Don't let yourselves manipulated by the political class which is interested only in its own pockets! We are manipulated enough by the U.S.A. and E.U. I am glad to see that, finally, we're learning to take a stand, go out in the streets and show to the world that we are not simply some puppets dancing as they are played."[12].

These various associations in groups on Facebook has managed to produce real-world effects, as it is the case with the group "Democrație Directă România" (Romanian Direct Democracy, numbering almost 12000 members), who created a political party bearing the same name, amongst its objectives being "giving back the power to its rightful owners, the citizens"[13]. But perhaps the most vivid example is represented by postings on individual pages, of people that are not members of such groups. This offers, in our opinion a glimpse on the banality of the national-populist discourse. On the 4th of October, a young woman in Bucharest posted a picture of an old man working in a supermarket and commented that "Hers's my experience from this morning: I stopped at a supermarket and I could not believe my eyes who was about to serve me at the cashier. Well, this gentleman (…) and I would like you to pay attention at his hands, these were not the hands of a field worker, but of an office one. He is an intelligent person, but in Romania he is forced to work here because, after a lifetime of work, his pension is insufficient!!! (…) What sort of a country is this we're living in…? Foreigners do whatever they please with us, three quarters of our salaries are going to them, and they use our people for pocket money… Maybe this would not impress you much or it would simply

seem as something banal, but we all have parents, grandparents… ROMANIA… A country ruled by foreigners on our money, the simple people's money…!!"[14].

Another essential element in this respect is represented by the media discourse, particularly that of the small specialized news televisions – eg Antena 3, B1 TV, Realitatea TV, România TV etc. Romania has a very significant number of such posts, their programs mainly consisting of talk shows and news bulletins. These allow the news anchors to express their own (or the station's) views on politics, current affairs and so on, not only affecting the political agenda of both governing and oppositional parties, but also sending a strong ideological message to the consumers, to the public, thus shaping preferences, political orientations and expectations of the potential voters[15]. As the economic crisis started to reverberate in Romania, the media discourse performed by the abovementioned news stations took a nationalist-populist turn – questions addressed to public figures were involving "Romanians" and not particular groups or individuals targeted by the public policies discussed, when approaching economic policies suddenly the framework was divided between "us" and "them" in terms of gains and prospective social, economic or even political outcomes, where by "them" was implied an informal alliance or conspiracy of corruption between either Western financial institutions (either global, like the IMF or the EU related ones) and the local political and economical elite, as an implicit tension between honest, law abiding people – the mass of citizens – and a small corrupted elite governing for its own interests or, finally, just as a concerted effort done by "external" economic actors to gain control over Romanian economy and state. As a result, Romanian news TV news broadcasts were actively guiding the ways in which politicians approached various issues and/or themes towards a particular model involving "the people" – either as "Romanians", "people" or "citizens". The well-being of the national community as a whole was (and still is) being taken into consideration, disregarding variations in gender, interests, disabilities, regional or local specificities and so on. The same news channels started – particularly Antena 3 – a series of national(istic) shows, such as searching for Romanian "unknown", "unsung" everyday heroes, or for the most appreciated leaders in Romanian history (from rulers to football players) and stressing the Christian-orthodoxist values held be at the very core of Romanian nationhood. Also, in relation with the street protests, the same media agents appeared to be using the social movement for their own specific agenda, by associating the street with particular discourses and narratives, all involving a strong national(istic) identitary dimension. This – and other similar mediatic enterprises performed by these nationwide news channels – constitute in our opinion a structuring structure, as Bourdieu would put it, for the development and reproduction of the populist nationalist discourse.

As an example, perhaps one of the most interesting points that characterize the Romanian national-populism is that of migration, which mixes both exogenous and endogenous origins. A very sensitive issue in election campaigns, it had center stage in more than one occasion. For example, in 2008, Mircea Geoană, the social democrat running for the presidency made some far fetched promises to the Romanians living in Europe – 25.000 euro and a 60% deduction for equipment and machinery for the young Romanians returning home to start a business in agriculture[16]. Similar promises were made by Dan Diaconescu and, more recently, by the Cioloș "technocratic" executive (2016 being an electoral year)[17]. The Romanians abroad are perceived as having an important electoral weight, therefore receiving attention in every electoral year, particularly by the (center-)right parties. But, more importantly, they represent the concrete failure of the transitional period, of the precarious living standards and economic life

in Romania, both of which are usually considered to be the result of poor governmental decisions after 1989 and widespread political corruption, and implicitly being seen as the responsibility of the political class as a whole. Apart from this endogenous dimension of the national-populist reaction to the migratory phenomenon, there can also be identified a second, exogenous one, primarily referring to the perception of the Romanian diaspora in the countries of residence and, implicitly, an issue of identity. Romanians seem to be suffering from their "bad reputation" in Europe which is presented in both national and international media, resulting in a sort of a national inferiority complex constantly present in the public discourse, which produced in more than one occasion strong nationalistic reactions, usually aimed at the alterity, particularly the Roma minority. They are considered to be in fact responsible for Romanian's bad perception in the West, due to the resemblance between "Roma" and "Romanian", fact that for example has lead to public campaigns conducted by major Romanian media corporations against the Roma, particularly aiming at changing the name Roma with "gipsy" (in Romanian "țigan"), which has a pejorative sense[18].

Conclusions

In order to sum up, we can identify two major types of national-populism in contemporary Romanian society: top-bottom (eg that manifested by various political parties or the media news corporations), and bottom-up, a grass roots phenomenon perhaps most visible in the online environment, particularly on the social networks. All of these forms are reactive in respect to a variety of stimuli, both endogenous and exogenous, this perhaps constituting one of the central characteristics of the East European peripheral nationalist populism. In the particular case of Romania, the national-communist past has undoubtedly left a significant mark on the way in which the populist discourse was shaped. The Romanian social imaginary has adapted the elite vs the people opposition in a specific manner, by adding a new dichotomy, between "the state" as it is (with an emphasis on the party system) and an idealized state, the "state of the people", with perfect democratic processes, purified of all corruption and in which it appears that the control over the economy is public or democratically exercised by the citizens. The political elite appears to be replaced by a technocratic one, as latest developments appear to be showing, particularly characteristic in the case of the right wing populism that seems to be on the rise, first with the creation of the USR in 2016 and more recently, with Dacian Cioloş's Romania 100 Platform.

Notes

[1] Ion Rațiu was a Romanian successful business man and exilé from the Ion Antonescu regime until 1989. He returned in his native coutry after the fall of communism and actively involved in politics, contributing to the recreation of the National Peasant's Party (Christian-Democrat), for which he unsuccessfully run, in 1990, for Romanian's presidential office.

[2] The so-called "soy salami" became, during the last decade of the Ceaușescu regime a symbol of the generalized poor living conditions and of the scarcity of resources characteristic of that particular period. Therefore, the slogan emphasized the profound differences in life experiences between those living under the communist regime and those coming from the Western capitalist world, thus delegitimizing their claims that they had any viable solutions for the transitional period: they simply could not understand Romania anymore, and their solutions would either be unfit for the post-89 social and economical conditions of Romania or, on the

other hand, would just simply reflect a greedy, corrupt capitalistic individual agenda aimed at "getting their hands on our country".

[3] Traian Băsescu – Romanian politician, pary leader and former president and mayor of Bucharest. Băsescu started his political career in the early 1990's, when he is appointed Minister of Transportation in Petre Roman's cabinet (1991). From 2004 to 2014 he served as the country's president, running for the former Democrat Party (later Democrat-Liberal Party). From 2013 initiated the Popular Movement Party, which he currently leads.

[4] An aluminium factory in Oltenia region, constructed under the communist regime.

[5] Dan Diaconescu – former TV talk show host and TV station owner, entered into politics in 2011 when, with the strong support of his own television station – Oglinda TV – he founded the People's Party-Dan Diaconescu. He launched his candidacy for the presidential office in 2014 but he obtained only 4%. In the 2012 parliamentary elections, PP-DD obtained 11.41% in the Chamber of Deputies (lower chamber of Parliament) and 11.93% for the senate. Dan Diaconescu was charged and condemned to 5 years in proson for extorting a mayor in Arad county and a business man.

[6] See Nicolescu Valentin Quintus, Basiul Sabina, (2013) "Dan Diaconescu: the Politics of Bread and Circuses", in Proceedings of the Challenges of the Knowledge Society, Bucharest: Nicolae Titulescu University, pp. 1136-1143.

[7] See Poenaru Florin (2014), *Nature, Nationalism and Anti-Capitalism in Romania*, Research papers of Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Stiftung Southeast Europe, No. 1, Belgrade.

[8] http://www.striblea.ro/ajuns-politicienii-sa-ne-faca-hoti-pe-noi/.

[9] https://www.facebook.com/groups/FaraPartide/?ref=group_browse_new.

[10] https://www.facebook.com/groups/930035950418859/?ref=group_browse_new.

[11] https://www.facebook.com/groups/DemocratieDirecta/?ref=group_browse_new.

[12] https://www.facebook.com/loredana.gheorghe.180?fref=pb&hc_location=profile_browser.

[13] Regarding the mediation element with a focus on Romanian society, see Fairclough Norman, "Semiosis, Ideology and Mediation. A Dialectical View", in Lassen, I. , Strunck J., Vestergaard T., (2006) *Mediating Ideology in Text and Image. Ten Critical Studies*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 19-36.

[14] http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-politic-6048015-mircea-geoana-romanii-care-intorc-tara-lanseaza-afacere-agricultura-primesc-25-000-euro.htm.

[15] http://www.euractiv.ro/we-develop/romanii-din-diaspora-ar-putea-primi-50.000-de-euro-pentru-un-start-up-daca-se-intorc-5256.

[16] Such was the case in the national campaign initiated in 2009 by the Inact maedia trust, calling for legal action against the Roma denomination. http://jurnalul.ro/campaniile-jurnalul/tigan-in-loc-de-rom/de-ce-tigani-si-nu-romi-146036.html.

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