

Who is the Diaspora?

The Negotiation of Diasporic Identities in the Romanian Online Political Discourse

Florența TOADER, PhD

Department of Public Relations
Faculty of Communication and Public Relations
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: florenta.toader@comunicare.ro

Abstract: *Drawing on an interdisciplinary framework based on critical and pragmatic discourse analysis, this study investigates the way Romanian politicians negotiate the identity of the Romanian diaspora on their Facebook pages. It also points out to the way discourse is used to introduce and (de)legitimize political decisions and actions. The topic is analyzed in different political and social contexts: the presidential elections in 2014 and 2019, the Euro-parliamentary elections in 2019, and the crisis generated by the comeback of the Romanians abroad as a result of the corona-virus pandemics in 2020. The results of the study show that the diaspora is part of the political discourse as a topic mainly during electoral periods, which are more heavily stake driven. The subject of the diaspora was approached by political actors in a strategic manner, starting from their communication project and the political outcome they were aiming for. The paper contributes to the growing body of knowledge on strategies of constructing diasporic identities in the political discourse. The paper also illustrates specific and emergent strategies of diasporic identity construction in different political and social contexts in a social media environment.*

Keywords: Diasporic identity; Political communication; Discourse analysis; Facebook, Romania.

Acknowledgements: *This research project was carried out through the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration's investigation program of the Romanian scientific diaspora, "Spiru Haret" (PN-III-P1-1.1-BSH-2-2016-0005).*

Introduction

In the last three decades, several political and social contexts have generated ample debate regarding the identity of the Romanians living and working abroad, referred to as the diaspora. Romanian studies on diaspora and migration address these topics mostly from the perspective of the media discourse and the way journalists define diaspora in specific political and social contexts (e.g., Ciocea & Cârlan, 2012; Beciu, 2012; Beciu *et al.*, 2017; Cheregi, 2015; Cheregi & Adi, 2015). For example, migrants are portrayed as heroes or villains (Beciu, 2012) or as victims who leave the country as a result of faulty governing policies (Ciocea & Cârlan, 2012).

This paper investigates the way Romanian politicians negotiate the identity of the Romanian diaspora at a discursive level and the way this identity fosters specific (de)legitimation strategies of political actors and actual decisions, actions, and long-term initiatives. From a methodological stance, the study is based on discourse analysis and investigates how political actors construct the identity of the diaspora and how they define different social and political contexts in order to justify future policies and generate long term objectives. In doing so, it relies on a longitudinal study which shows the way politicians define the diaspora in three electoral contexts (the presidential elections of 2014 and 2019, and the Euro parliamentary elections of 2019) and a social context (the crisis generated by the comeback of the Romanians abroad as a result of the corona-virus pandemics in 2020).

To achieve its purpose this research starts from two theoretical premises. The first premise is based on research regarding the discursive construction of identity (Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003; Achugar, 2007; Costelloe, 2014) and implies that the diasporic identity is a dynamic and fluid construct negotiated at a discursive level. Thus, imagological attributes of the diaspora are not coherent and unchanged but can be influenced by specific political and social contexts. Romanians abroad are either portrayed in the media or political discourse as ambassadors who can improve the country's image or, on the contrary, as villains who can worsen this image through undesirable behaviors. In key electoral contexts, the diaspora is discursively defined either as a vector of change, which can contribute positively to the election results, or is criticized for moving away from the immediate needs of Romanians living in the country.

The second premise is that political discourse is oriented towards social actions (Augoustinos, Hastie, & Wright, 2011) such as accepting or rejecting responsibility, expressing or eliciting emotions, defending or justifying certain positions or decisions, (de)legitimizing actors and initiatives (Van Leeuwen, 2007). In this

sense, politicians use specific discursive strategies to build a position of power in relation to the interlocutors and to influence the way citizens understand the political process. This trend finds its relevance especially in the context of the professionalization of political communication (e.g., Mancini, 1999; Negrine & Lilleker, 2002; Negrine *et al.*, 2007). Political discourse becomes a carefully constructed product starting from the rules of political marketing and from the communication project of the politician and the political party they belong to. Consequently, political discourse is the result of carefully thought-out practices, focused on consolidating the politician's image, creating characters (heroes, victims, and villains), and defining a context.

As a result, this paper will address the following research objectives: (1) to investigate the discursive strategies used by Romanian politicians for building an identity for the Romanian diaspora in different political and social contexts; and (2) to investigate the discursive strategies used by Romanian politicians to introduce and/or (de)legitimize political actors, decisions, actions, and initiatives starting from the specific meaning attributed to the context and the discursive identity assigned to the diaspora. The contribution of this study is that of identifying the way Romanian politicians define diaspora by invoking contextual elements in order to structure present or future political initiatives. This research continues the line of work of other scholars that identify a link between migration as a problem built in the public space by media, political, institutional or social actors and discourse or semiosis (Beciu *et al.*, 2018). As a result, discourse is defined as a means of representing transnational actors and relations, of (de)legitimizing political decisions or to (re)produce ideologies or representations about the world (Fairclough, 2006, cited by Beciu *et al.*, 2018, 21).

The diaspora and its many facets

The growing phenomenon of professional migration after 1990 has led to the emergence of a new identity category in the media and political discourse in Romania: the diaspora. Professional migration can be placed in a larger context, created by market liberalization and the mobility of the workforce specific to globalization, but it can as well be associated with the rise of neoliberalism (Ragazzi, 2009). Diaspora's identity is continuously negotiated and redefined at a discursive level to answer the specific social and political contexts in which it is discussed (e.g., Ciocea & Cărlan, 2012; Beciu, 2012a; Cheregi, 2015; Cheregi & Adi, 2015). The term was used initially in the research literature to refer to specific "historical categories" (Beciu, 2012a, 51) such as Hebrews, Armenians, Africans, Palestinians etc. who migrated because of political reasons and sought refuge in different countries to regain their fundamental rights. In this sense, the diaspora is discursively defined as a "victim" category which faced catastrophic conditions (Brubaker, 2005, 5).

Currently, the identity of the diaspora is renegotiated in the contemporary era of economic migration (Castells & Miller, 2003). This redefines diaspora as a category of professionals or workers who live and work temporarily or on the long term in a different country but maintain links with their country of origin (Naim, 2002; Brubaker, 2005). Research (Beciu, 2012a, Beciu, 2012b) also signaled the rise of the new diaspora which is associated with the fall of the communist regimes in the states of Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 (Weinar, 2017) and with the beginning of the democratization process of these states. The emergence of the new diaspora has been favored both by European migration policies but also by the inability of economies in transition to provide decent living conditions for their citizens. This has led to the emergence of seasonal migration, temporary or long-term migration, which have restructured the nature of trans-national relations between Romania and Western European countries (Horváth & Anghel, 2009).

This paper analyzes the process of negotiating diaspora identity in online political discourse in Romania from the broader perspective of studies on transnationalism and migration (Brubaker, 2005; Ragazzi, 2009; Boccagni, 2012). According to Ragazzi (2009), the discourse on the diaspora is closely related to the transnationalization of power and the redefinition of the concept of territoriality. Transnationalism leads to a reconfiguration of social relations in contexts of cross-border mobility (Boccagni, 2012). Thus, migrants develop relationships and affinities with both the country of origin and the country in which they migrate and create complex relationships that link the two societies (Basch, Glick Schiller, & Szanton Blanc, 2005). As researchers such as Beciu and collaborators (2017) point out, this process is usually used in the public space to outline new public issues, to support ideologies or to reproduce hierarchies of power. In the same time, Brubaker notes that the diaspora is far from being a specific category of analysis, but an “idiom, a stance or claim” (2005, 12). This approach is relevant in the context of the analysis of the political discourse on migration and Romanians abroad, to highlight how different political or social contexts can mobilize distinct diaspora identities and specific political and social projects or actions.

Diaspora, media and political discourse in Romania

Political discourse is seen in this paper as a social practice oriented towards social actions (Augoustinos, Hastie, & Wright, 2011). As a result, political discourse can introduce not only discursive identities, but also social and concrete actions depending on the political project of the actor who produces it. Through the emphasis of the electoral contexts of 2014 and 2019, the paper deepens the issue of the diaspora vote (Beciu *et al.*, 2018). The controversies that have accompanied over time the capacity of the Romanian state to guarantee the constitutional right of Romanian citizens abroad to vote, the debate that started in

2009 and ended in 2019 with the introduction of correspondence vote, as well as the capacity of the diaspora to influence the outcome of elections have made this category a collective actor that is part of power relations in the electoral context (Beciu *et al.*, 2018). By counterbalancing this issue with a social and public health crisis, generated by the return of Romanians abroad as a result of the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in the spring of 2020, this study illustrates the fluid nature of the diaspora identity in Romanian political discourse in contexts loaded with different meaning.

The 2014 presidential election was marked by one of the most intense discussions regarding the Romanian state's ability to safeguard the constitutional right to vote of its citizens, especially those who are living or working abroad. The small number of polling stations abroad has led to large crowds and made it impossible for a large number of voters to express their democratic choice. In the second round of the presidential elections, images of Romanians waiting in line outside polling stations circulated on traditional media, but especially on Facebook. This encouraged the mobilization of voters in the country and abroad, which led to the victory of the Liberal Christian Alliance's candidate (PNL-PDL), Klaus Iohannis. The theme of the diaspora contributed to the reversal of the score established after the first round of elections, when the winner was the candidate of the PSD-UNPR-PC electoral alliance, Victor Ponta. Starting from the events of 2014, for the European Parliament elections in 2019, the polling stations abroad were supplemented, but despite this measure, the crowds could not be avoided, and once again large numbers of Romanians abroad could not vote. In both cases, the media and political discourse relied on a strategy of victimization of citizens living and working abroad, whose constitutional rights could not be ensured, and on an interpellation and blaming strategy towards the politicians who organized the election. The presidential elections in the fall of 2019 brought a novelty in terms of organizing elections in the diaspora, voters who went abroad had three days to vote. As a result, voter mobilization abroad was the highest compared to the last elections cycles. In this case, the media speech pointed out the importance of the votes in the diaspora for the victory of the PNL candidate, Klaus Iohannis.

The three electoral contexts presented illustrate how the diaspora identity is renegotiated from one election to another, depending on the political stake of the actors involved. Previous research on the 2014 presidential elections (Toader & Grigorași, 2016) revealed that the diaspora vote was approached by politicians in a strategic manner, starting from their electoral communication project and their political stakes. Politicians such as Klaus Iohannis, Monica Macovei or Elena Udrea capitalized on this issue by emphasizing the government's inability to respect the right to vote of citizens working abroad. The politician representing the establishment, Victor Ponta, addresses this issue less, focusing on his electoral communication project.

The vote in the diaspora also had effects on the type of political actions taken from one election to another – from supplementing the polling stations for the 2019 European elections, to supplementing the number of voting days in the presidential elections of the same year. The diaspora as a topic discussed in the Romanian public space is strongly connected with the electoral context, as it has been proven repeatedly that by its political options and voter turnout it can have a decisive impact on the result of elections (see also Beciu *et al.*, 2018, 13). In these contexts, citizens from the diaspora are either seen as heroes by political and social actors they support or are criticized by other fellow voters for their impact on the results of elections given the fact that they are away most of the time or definitively. The onset of the coronavirus pandemic in the spring of 2020 has led to a redefinition of the image attributed to the diaspora in the public space, at a discursive level. This time, the Romanians who live and work abroad were advised by the president elect, Klaus Iohannis, not to return to Romania for the Easter holidays, invoking the need to protect their relatives left at home, or the need to respect quarantine measures. Thus, at a hypothetical level, one can observe a discursive redefinition of the image of Romanians abroad, who from responsible citizens and main supporters of the projects of right-wing parties in Romania, have become a source of concern and a possible source of illness.

Methodology

This research proposes an empirical investigation of how the diaspora identity is constructed and negotiated in the online political discourse in Romania. At the same time, the study highlights how the meaning of different political and social contexts is constructed at a discursive level to justify or legitimize future policies or to generate the formulation of long-term goals and initiatives. Therefore, the study starts from two research questions:

RQ1. Which discursive strategies are used by Romanian politicians to build an identity for themselves and the Romanian diaspora in different political and social contexts?

RQ2. Which discursive strategies are used by Romanian politicians to introduce and/or (de)legitimize political actors, decisions, actions, and initiatives, starting from the specific meaning attributed to the context and the discursive identity assigned to the diaspora?

From a methodological point of view, the present study is a qualitative one, and proposes an interdisciplinary approach based on critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Van Dijk, 1993; 1997; Van Leeuwen, 2007) and discourse pragmatics (Beciu, 2011). Starting from an analytical framework proposed by Camelia Beciu (2011, 36–47), the study starts with a pragmatic analysis of the online political discourse. Firstly,

the study reveals the thematical orientation of the overall messages posted by politicians on their Facebook pages in the selected political and social contexts. Secondly, using speech act theory, the analysis identifies specific discursive strategies used by politicians on Facebook in relation to the diaspora topic and offers hypotheses of possible discursive effects. Thirdly, the study discusses the discursive identities created for the diaspora and the political actors involved. Lastly, using the critical discourse analysis framework proposed by Van Leeuwen (2007), the study will analyze the discursive strategies through which politicians (de)legitimize political actors, actions, decisions and initiatives. In this respect, reference will be made to strategies such as: authorization – (de)legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority is vested; moral evaluation – (de)legitimation by reference to discourses of value; rationalization – (de)legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action; and mythopoesis – (de)legitimation through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions (Van Leeuwen, 2007).

The study explores a heterogeneous corpus that brings together 910 messages posted on Facebook by mainstream Romanian politicians in specific political and social contexts: the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, the 2019 European elections, and the crisis generated by the return of Romanians abroad during the onset of the corona-virus pandemic in 2020 (see Table 1). The selected contexts generated intense debates both in the media and in the political sphere, regarding the diaspora. The Facebook posts were gathered using Facepager (Jünger & Keyling, 2020) an application for automated data retrieval on the web. The corpus was firstly analyzed in its entirety in order to see the preferred themes of politicians on their Facebook pages. The empirical area was then narrowed down to 74 posts that made direct reference to the diaspora, to investigate the discursive strategies used by political actors to define diaspora and to (de)legitimize or introduce political actions.

The role of this research is to reveal the way in which the fluid character of the diasporic identity manifests itself at the level of the online political discourse in Romania. The research analyzes the messages published by Romanian politicians on Facebook to facilitate the investigation of the diaspora's identity starting from an emerging communication device – a social media page. From this point of view, the research highlights several levels of online political discourse. Facebook pages fall into the category of owned media and foster specific conditions for producing political discourse that combines the contract of communication of the medium used, the communication project of the political actor and the rules of communication of the situation in which the political discourse is conceived. In this situation, the identity of the diaspora is the result of emerging online communication practices, as well as those generated by context.

Depending on the context discussed, representative politicians and relevant time-frames were selected, in which the diaspora was part of the political and media

Table 1. The empirical area

Politician	Fuction	Facebook posts (N=910)	Diaspora references (N=74)	Context
Victor Ponta	Candidate of the Alliance PSD-UNPR-PC	160	5	2014 Presidential elections: November 3–16
Klaus Iohannis	Candidate of the Liberal Christian Alliance (PNL-PDL)	161	30	
Călin Popescu Tăriceanu	Independent candidate	18	0	
Elena Udrea	Candidate of the Popular Movement Party	14	5	
Rareș Bogdan	Candidate of the National Liberal Party	188	13	2019 Euro parliamentary elections: May 13–26
Rovana Plumb	Candidate of the Social Democratic Party	11	2	
Dacian Cioloș	Candidate of the alliance USR-PLUS	35	9	
Victor Ponta	Candidate of the PRO Romania Party	61	1	
Klaus Iohannis	Candidate of the National Liberal Party	15	1	2019 Presidential elections: November 11–24
Viorica Dăncilă	Candidate of the Social Democratic Party	41	1	
Dan Barna	Candidate of the alliance USR PLUS	23	5	
Mircea Diaconu	Candidate of the electoral alliance A Man	3	0	
Klaus Iohannis	Romanian president	38	1	Coronavirus state of emergency: March 15–May 15, 2020
Ludovic Orban	Romanian prime minister	0	0	
Marcel Ciolacu	Leader of the Social Democratic Party	72	0	
Dan Barna	Leader of the alliance USR-PLUS	70	1	

discourse. For the presidential elections of 2014 and 2019 the first four candidates who obtained the most votes after the first ballot round were selected. The analyzed periods were 3–16 November 2014 and 11–24 November 2019 representing the interval in which the campaign for the second round of the presidential elections took place. For the 2019 European elections the corpus includes candidates who opened the lists for the parties that obtained the most votes after the election of May 26, 2019. The analysis period was represented by the last two weeks of the election campaign: May 13–26, 2019. In the case of the crisis generated by the return of Romanians from the diaspora as a result of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the corpus includes the main representatives of the central political institutions in Romania (Romanian Presidency and Government), but also the leaders of the most important political parties (according to the results of local elections in 2020). The analysis period was: March 15–May 15, 2020, representing the period in which Romania was in a state of emergency. Even though, the Romanian prime minister did not have an actual Facebook presence in the analyzed interval, this political

actor was kept in the corpus, as the absence of their voice on a largely discussed topic in mass media and the political realm is relevant to the way Facebook political discourse is conceived.

Data presentation. The strategic approach to diaspora

The results show that the diaspora is part of the political discourse mainly during electoral periods, but overall it tends to be a marginal topic. The diaspora was an important topic in two voting rounds: the second tour of the presidential elections in November 2014 (40 mentions), and the Euro parliamentary elections in May 2019 (25 mentions). The subject of the diaspora vote was approached by the selected politicians in a strategic manner, starting from their communication project and the political stake they were aiming for. While these results are predictable, they are particularly relevant as they offer an indication of how political discourse on Facebook is conceived, in comparison to the media discourse. Whereas debates in the media regarding the diaspora vote were lengthy and intense, political actors tend to carefully curate the topics they address on their shared media channels, in this case Facebook.

This process is directly related to the political stakes involved and the context. When the diaspora vote was a topic that could elicit emotion and voter mobilization, it was largely addressed by the challengers and only briefly touched by the politicians in office. Preferred topics during electoral campaigns revolved around campaign messages and actions, voter mobilization messages, political attacks, political endorsements, and the underlining of achievements for the politicians in office, or engagements and promises for the challengers. As the debate regarding the organization of the ballots got resolution in the fall of 2019, by supplementing the number of voting days, the number of direct references to the diaspora dropped. The least number of direct referrals to the diaspora was encountered during the Coronavirus state of emergency in 2020, when in a period of three months only three direct mentions of the diaspora were identified. In comparison, the media discourse in the same interval was both rich and intense, as a lot of emotion was generated by the return of Romanians abroad to the country.

As shown in Table 2, when talking about diaspora, the most common themes are those related to ballot organization, shortcomings that impede citizens to vote, and voter turnout. Smaller topics are related to the relations with the EU, diaspora support measures and responsibility during the crisis generated by the spread of the coronavirus. The gathered results confirm previous research that found a strong connection between the diaspora as an identity category discussed in the public space and the electoral context (Beciu *et al.*, 2018). The analyzed political actors rarely debate transnational relations or launch actual initiatives related to the diaspora on their Facebook pages. This shows the strong strategic approach that

Table 2. The political discourse related to diaspora

Themes	Speech acts	Examples
Impossibility to vote	Validation	The dissatisfaction of Romanians who could not vote in the diaspora is legitimate and the measures ordered by BEC and MAE regarding the increase of logistical capacity will be supported by #Government (Ponta, November 2014). I understood and considered legitimate the fact that the Romanians from the diaspora were upset because of not being able to vote. (Ponta, November 2014).
	Value judgement	It is unfortunate that, due to the poor organization of the voting process on election day, many Romanians at home and abroad who could not exercise their right to vote! (Iohannis, November 2014).
	Ascertainment	Tens of thousands of Romanians in the diaspora are waiting in endless queues to vote! (Iohannis, November 2014). Romanians stand in line to vote both in the country and in the diaspora. (Cioloş, 2019).
	Interpellation	I urge the government to swiftly find a solution to set up polling stations so that Romanians in the diaspora can find a practical opportunity to vote. (Iohannis, November 2014). I call on the government now to make an effort and extend the voting program. I ask the government to pay a minimum of respect to these people who want to vote. (Iohannis, November 2014).
Ballot organization	Warning	Infernal queue at Arganda del Rey, Madrid. Art. 385 Criminal Code: The impediment, by any means, of the free exercise of the right to choose or to be elected shall be punished by imprisonment from 6 months to 3 years. (Bogdan, May 2019). There is unacceptable pressure exercised by President Traian Băsescu and candidate Klaus Iohannis, who are asking state institutions to break the law. Under these conditions, the Minister of Foreign Affairs submitted his resignation. (Ponta, November 2014).
	Statement	Diaspora voting has begun for the second round of the presidential election. As in the first round, Romanians in the diaspora have three days to exercise their vote. (Barna, 2019)
	Obligation	The voting program in the polling stations abroad can and must be extended by emergency ordinance. It is the last chance for the Ponta government to prove that it does not mock the rights of Romanians. (Iohannis, November 2014). Thousands of Romanians are waiting to vote and we will probably not all be able to vote. It is mandatory to extend the voting program! (Udrea, November 2014).
	Value Judgement	It's a shame what's happening right now! (Iohannis, November 2014). Absolutely inadmissible what the PSD Government is doing! Inadmissible. (Bogdan, May 2019). Other humiliated Romanians in Torrejon de Ardoz Spain. (Bogdan, May 2019). Disaster in Stuttgart!! In a few moments I will make a press statement! (Bogdan, May 2019).

	<p>Promise</p> <p>The right to vote is a constitutional right. 9.5 million citizens voted without obstacles in Romania. In the diaspora, through the measures taken by BEC and MAE, everyone who wants to vote will be able to do so. (Ponta, November 2014).</p>
	<p>Value judgement</p> <p>It is a huge turnout but, unfortunately, a poor organization. (Iohannis, November 2014).</p>
Vote participation	<p>Munich and London are already queuing for the vote! I am deeply impressed by your will and perseverance and I am 100% with you! (Iohannis, November 2014).</p> <p>Thank you to the Romanians in New Zealand for the crushing victory! (Iohannis, November 2014).</p> <p>Thanks to the beautiful and free brothers from Rome! Romania does not die or surrender, wherever it is! (Bogdan, May 2019).</p> <p>I congratulate Klaus Iohannis, I congratulate the Romanians at home and in the Diaspora for the extraordinary mobilization. It is the victory of Romanians who want a modern and democratic country. (Barna, May 2019).</p> <p>It's amazing how many good people have joined our project. They explain every day, in the cities and villages of Romania, from house to house and in the diaspora, that the old parties have exhausted their resources. (Cioloș, 2019).</p>
	<p>Injunction</p> <p>I ask those who are queuing at the polling stations in the diaspora to call home and tell everyone what is happening to them! I also ask Romanians to vote instead of those who cannot because of the disastrous organization! (Iohannis, November 2014).</p> <p>Starting today, for three days, Romanians abroad vote in the presidential elections! Dear Romanians, come to the polls because our country is in great need of each of you, wherever you are. (Iohannis, November, 2019).</p>
Unifying messages	<p>Romanians everywhere, I am with you! (Iohannis, November 2014).</p> <p>Only PRO Romania talks to all Romanians !!! Only PRO Romania convinces those who want a clean center-left alternative for all Romanians! (Ponta, May, 2019).</p>
	<p>Statement</p> <p>We stood in the street, we took the step towards them - in the villages, in the cities, in the country and in the diaspora, to convince them that they are no longer alone. (Cioloș, 2019).</p>
Relations with the EU	<p>Value judgement</p> <p>All those who vote in the country or abroad are good citizens of Romania (Ponta, November 2014).</p>
	<p>Statement</p> <p>The PSD team has firmly assumed the mission to defend and promote the interests of the country and of the Romanians in the European Parliament. We fight for dignity and respect in Europe! (Plumb, May 2019).</p>
Diaspora support measures	<p>Value judgement</p> <p>FAKE NEWS is when you falsify messages about the diaspora in the conditions in which we have implemented support programs for Romanians abroad. (example: Diaspora Start-Up) and we facilitated the vote through the 3 allocated days, increasing the number of sections and voting by correspondence. (Dănciă, November 2019).</p>
	<p>Statement</p> <p>We are talking to Romanians in the Diaspora. Tonight I will be live here with USR Senator Radu Mihail, from 20:00. (Barna, 2020).</p>
Responsibility during the health crisis generated by the spread of the coronavirus	<p>Injunction</p> <p>The most important Christian holidays are fast approaching. I make an appeal to the Romanians in the Diaspora, a necessary call, but one that fills me with sadness: my dear ones, do not come home this year for the Holidays. (Iohannis, 2020)</p>
	<p>Internal obligation</p> <p>It is very important to understand, no matter how difficult, that returning to the country, within the family, can be extremely dangerous both for you and for those you care about so much. We will make these painful sacrifices today so that we can be together again later. (Iohannis, 2020).</p>

Facebook communication encompasses. The political actors embrace the topic of the diaspora vote passionately, as it can create a base for mobilizing messages and delegitimizing discourses meant to discredit the politicians in power. The results also show the propensity of challengers to talk more passionately about the diaspora than the politicians representing the political party organizing the elections. The latter, either ignore the topic, or address neutral themes such as Romania's relation with the EU or support measures for the citizens from the diaspora.

During the crisis generated by the return of Romanian citizens abroad during the coronavirus crisis in the Spring of 2020 the diaspora is mainly part of the presidential discourse, but scarcely mentioned by other politicians from the selected corpus. This time, politicians resort to unifying discourses, where most referrals are made generally to "Romanians" and less to the diaspora, as a possible attempt to avoid controversy on a topic that was largely and passionately discussed in the media. The accent falls on responsibility and the need to comply to the travel and sanitary restrictions aimed to stop the spread of the virus.

Discussion: Diaspora according to political actors

The results of this study show that there is a distinction between the diaspora as a discursively constructed space, and the diaspora as a discursively constructed social category. In the first category, the analyzed politicians often use the term "diaspora" to designate all places and communities outside the Romanian borders, where Romanian citizens live temporarily or on the long term. In the second category, common referrals are made to "the Romanians in the diaspora" or "the Romanians from... (a specific place a.n)". A more direct referral is made with the help of the juxtaposition between the place they live in and Romanians abroad: Berlin, Paris, Tokyo etc. In other messages political actors generally refer to the "Romanians", "the citizens", thus promoting an inclusive discourse that doesn't distinguish between different identity categories. This tactic is particularly used during the corona-virus state of emergency, when the need to convince citizens to comply to sanitary rules and restrictions is higher.

During the years, the discursive identity attributed by politicians to the diaspora is dependent on the political stakes involved and the affiliation of the politician. Challengers in the 2014 presidential elections and 2019 Euro parliamentary elections usually portray Romanians living and working abroad as victims, that are being misrepresented by their government. These politicians (e.g., Iohannis, November 2014; Bogdan, May 2019) usually make extensive use of value judgements, interpellations and obligation in order to refer to their counter candidates. In order to describe the faulty organization of elections these politicians use words such as "inacceptable", "shameful", "disaster". This in turn create delegitimization strategies through moral evaluation. These discursive strategies are coupled with appreciations and injunctions which are meant to elicit emotion and promote voter mobilization. From this

point of view, citizens from the diaspora are seen as an important electoral resource that can decisively influence the results. Consequently, challengers usually create discursive partnerships with the citizens in the diaspora, talking about joining forces in order to defeat an incompetent and corrupt government.

Politicians who represent the political party organizing the elections (e.g., Ponta, November 2014; Plumb, May 2019) tend to practice a more reserved type of discourse. Ponta in 2014 tends to promote a unifying discourse through the use of statements and validating messages. In this manner, the Romanians from the diaspora are portrayed as valuable citizens, worthy of understanding and respect. In 2019 Plumb eludes the diaspora as an identity category and focuses on Romania's relations with the EU, thus implying the efforts of her party to promote the interests of both Romanians at home and abroad.

When the problem of the diaspora vote found its resolution, in the fall of 2019, with the supplementation of voting days, the number of direct references to the diaspora dropped, and political discourse regarding the diaspora shifted towards a more balanced one. Politicians who represented the political power (e.g., Iohannis, November 2019) resorted only to injunction to communicate with citizens from the diaspora, but gave up the militant tone of voice promoted in 2014, as the stakes and context were different now. The discursive identity attributed to the Romanians aboard this time is of responsible citizens who have the power to change the course of how the country is being governed through their vote. The challenger, Dan Barna, uses mostly statements and appreciation in order to talk about the diaspora vote. His focus is on educating voters abroad on the voting process, on making sure the votes are correctly counted, and on mobilizing voters. By doing so he portrays himself as a correct leader and representative, who sees in the diaspora a powerful electoral resource and a partner.

The political discourse in the three electoral contexts analyzed also generated identities for the politicians involved:

- the militant politician, who relies mostly on interpellations and accentuates the incapacity of the government to respect the voting rights of its citizens living outside state borders (Iohannis, 2014; Udrea, 2014; Bogdan, 2019);
- the balanced politician (Dacian Cioloș, 2019; Dan Barna, 2019), who recognizes the difficulties of the diaspora vote, but mainly relies on statements and mobilizing messages to promote their message;
- the acknowledging politician, who recognizes the barriers to vote faced by Romanians abroad and validates them, but does not necessarily issues an apology or a plan of action in the analyzed time-frame (Ponta; 2014);
- the statutory politician, who focuses mostly on current political topics, internal politics, political attacks, party politics etc. or just marginally address the diaspora topic (Tariceanu, 2014; Plumb, 2019; Ponta, 2019; Dăncila, 2019; Diaconu, 2019).

During the state of emergency, Romanians abroad are discursively constructed as responsible citizens through the use of internal obligation as a speech act. Political discourse this time became more reserved and elusive of the diaspora topic, as the crisis generated by the coronavirus pandemic generated a lot of emotion and panic. The return in Romania of citizens working abroad bred as well a heated debate in the media regarding the risk associated with their comeback. As a counterbalance, the political discourse became more unifying, with politicians avoiding to directly refer to the diaspora and addressing “Romanians” or “the citizens” as a whole. In this particular context, the political scene was shared by unifying politicians (Iohannis, 2020; Barna, 2020) and statutory or unrecognizing politicians who focus exclusively on their political communication project and do not discuss the diaspora topic (Ciolacu, 2020).

Based on these results, the answer to the first research question (RQ1) is that the type of discursive strategies used by politicians is directly influenced by context and the stakes involved. The identity of Romanians from the diaspora remains fairly stable throughout the election cycles and is only slightly adapted during the state of emergency, considering the context and its requirements. Generally, the diaspora is defined as a powerful electoral resource and Romanians living and working abroad are characterized as responsible citizens who want an can/must do the best for their country. What changes during the years is the interest given by the politicians to the diaspora topic and the way they address it discursively. The study revealed a shift from more militant and critical discourses against those in office, practiced in 2014 and the spring of 2019, towards a more balanced approach that focuses more on mobilizing messages, as the problems with the diaspora vote found alleviation. Compared to the media discourse on diaspora in the same periods as those analyzed here, the Romanian political discourse tends to be more conservative in its definition of the diaspora. This is however the result of a very strategic approach of the topic, considering the context, position and the stake of the political actor analyzed. Political actors who can directly benefit from addressing the topic of the diaspora vote tend to make use of militant or mobilizing messages. Other politicians who are directly targeted by political attacks on the diaspora vote tend to avoid the topic altogether, or to treat it marginally.

In what concerns the second research question (RQ2), political actors in Romania tend to mainly use Facebook communication for political attacks and mobilizing messages, when addressing the diaspora. This is as well a reflection of the strategic approach towards Romanians abroad. Achieving a certain political outcome is the motivation that governs the way politicians deal with this topic. The results of this study showed Facebook as a safe place for politicians, where vulnerable topics can be eluded or carefully adapted to serve the political agenda of the politician. As a result, we can barely talk about the introduction of decisions, actions and initiatives through the help of Facebook.

Politicians either tend to use a militant tone of voice anchored in value judgments and interpellations in order to delegitimize their opponents, or resort to a more deferent tone of voice anchored in statements and ascertainties. This underlines the importance they place on the unfolding events, but also creates a degree of objectivity of the situation, that is meant to alleviate their responsibility for the overall outcome of the events. However, each election cycle analyzed here elicited change and a different way of addressing the diaspora vote – by raising the number of polling stations or by increasing the number of voting days. These were however initiatives taken and debated outside the election.

Politicians mention the need to supplement voting hours or reassure the citizens that all measures have been taken in order to facilitate voting. Still, the politicians in the first category place the responsibility of action and initiative on their opponents. The latter category merely portrays itself as a victim of “inacceptable” political attacks and of the circumstances. As a result, Facebook was used more as a place to symbolically delegitimize the actions of other political actors, based on moral evaluation (see Van Leeuwen, 2007).

A change in the way politicians address the introduction of actual political initiatives and measures was seen during the emergency state in 2020. The president elect made an appeal to rational and emotional arguments as a strategy to legitimize the recommendation that Romanians abroad avoid returning home for Easter. This direction was motivated by the necessity to protect those at home and was presented as a temporary effort so that people can reunite in safer circumstances. In this case, the different stakes, represented by the need to impose and convince citizens to respect certain sanitary restrictions, guided the political discourse on the topic. Still, the scarce reference to the diaspora in this time-frame makes these strategies marginal.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to investigate the way Romanian politicians negotiate the identity of the Romanian diaspora on their Facebook pages in different electoral and social contexts such as: the presidential elections in 2014 and 2019, the Euro parliamentary elections in 2019, and the crisis generated by the return in Romania of citizens working and living abroad as a result of the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. To this goal, the paper structured its empirical approach based on two premises. The first premise was that diasporic identity is a dynamic and fluid construct negotiated at a discursive level. The second premise stated that political discourse is oriented towards social actions like accepting or rejecting responsibility, provoking emotions, introducing or justifying certain positions or decisions, and (de)legitimizing actors and initiatives.

The results of this study showed that, contrary to the first premise, the identity discursively assigned to the diaspora is fairly stable throughout the election cycles,

and is faintly adapted during the state of emergency, to answer the specific requirements of the context. The diaspora is mainly discussed in relation to elections and is only marginally addressed in the analyzed social context. While the identity of the diaspora is unquestionably fluid in the media discourse, politicians tend to be more conservative and careful when addressing this category, given its powerful impact over the results of elections. Considering the second premise, the results showed indeed a great propensity of politicians to make use of political discourse regarding the diaspora to elicit emotions, and to create different identities for those involved. However, little attention was given to the introduction or justifying of specific political initiatives. Facebook is a place of symbolic negotiation of meaning and identities, a place to develop the strategic communication project of the politician, but a safe place where problematic topics can be eluded. This trend slightly changes during the coronavirus state of emergency, when the president elected launches recommendations for the diaspora by making an appeal to internal obligation. But the scarce references to the diaspora do not consolidate this initiative as a trend.

Overall, the contribution of this paper is to offer an idea on how Romanian political actors tend to discursively construct the image of the diaspora. This is a useful input, as previous studies on the topic mostly focused on the media discourse. The paper also illustrates emergent strategies of diasporic identity construction in a social media environment, which is differently constructed as compared to traditional media. The main limitation of this study is that it focused on mainstream Romanian politicians. From this point of view, the study can be further expanded to include representative of fringe political parties, as this can bring more light over the way Romanian political actors refer to the diaspora. Lastly, the study can be expanded with a comparative approach between the political and media discourse, in order to point out to the specificities of the two different actors.

References

1. Achugar, M. (2007). Between remembering and forgetting: Uruguayan military discourse about human rights (1976–2004). *Discourse & Society*, 18(5), 521–547.
2. Augoustinos, M., Hastie, B., & Wright, M. (2011). Apologizing for historical injustice: Emotion, truth and identity in political discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 22(5), 507–531.
3. Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N., & Szanton Blanc, C. (2005 [1994]). *Nations Unbound: Transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments and deterritorialized nation-states*. London and New York, NY: Routledge.
4. Beciu, C. (2011). *Sociologia comunicării și a spațiului public*. Iași: Polirom.
5. Beciu, C. (2012a). Diaspora și experiența transnațională. Practici de mediatizare în presa românească. *Revista Română de Sociologie*. XXIII(1-2), 49–66.
6. Beciu, C. (2012b). Qui fait la diaspora? Le problème de l'identité dans les recherches sur les diasporas. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*. 14(4), 13–28.
7. Beciu, C., Mădroane, I. D., Ciocea, M., & Cârlan, A. I. (2017). Media engagement in the transnational social field: discourses and repositionings on migration in the Romanian public sphere. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 14(3), 256–275.
8. Beciu, C., Ciocea, M., Mădroane, I. D., & Cârlan, A. I. (2018). *Debating Migration as a Public Problem: National Publics and Transnational Fields*. Peter Lang Publishing.
9. Boccagni, P. (2012). Rethinking transnational studies: Transnational ties and the transnationalism of everyday life. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 15(1), 117–132.
10. Brubaker, R. (2005). The 'diaspora' diaspora. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 28(1), 1–19.
11. Castles, S., & Miller, M. J. (2003). *The Age of Migration*. New York: Guilford Press.
12. Cheregi, B.-F. (2015). The construction of identity of anti-immigration: The case of discourses about Romanian immigrants in the British Press. *Romanian Journal of Sociology*, 10(1), 279–298.
13. Cheregi, B.-F., & Adi, A. (2015). The visual framing of Romanian migrants in the national press: A social semiotic approach. *Romanian Journal of Journalism and Communication*, 48(2), 12–25.
14. Ciocea, M., & Cârlan, A. (2012). Debating migration as a public problem: diasporic stances in media discourse. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*, 14(4), 181–201.
15. Costelloe, L. (2014). Discourses of sameness: Expressions of nationalism in newspaper discourse on French urban violence in 2005. *Discourse & Society*, 25(3), 315–340.
16. Horváth, I., & Anghel, G. R. (2009). Migration and its consequences for Romania. *Südosteuropa*, 57(4), 386.
17. Jünger, J. & Keyling, T. (2020). *Facepager. An application for automated data retrieval on the web*. Source code and releases available at <https://github.com/strohne/Facepager/>.
18. Mancini, P. (1999). New frontiers in political professionalism. *Political Communication*, 16(3), 231–245.
19. Naim, M. (2002). The new diaspora. New links between emigres and their home countries can become a powerful force for economic development. *Foreign Policy*, 131, 96.

20. Negrine, R., & Lilleker, D. G. (2002). The professionalization of political communication continuities and change in media practices. *European Journal of Communication*, 17(3), 305–323.
21. Negrine, R., Mancini, P., Holtz-Bacha, C., & Papathanassopoulos, S. (2007). *The professionalization of political communication. Changing Media Changing Europe*. Bristol: Intellect.
22. Ragazzi, F. (2009). Governing diasporas. *International Political Sociology*, 3(4), 378–397.
23. Toader, F., & Grigorași, C. (2016). Storytelling in online political communication during the presidential elections campaign in Romania. *Journal of Media Research*, 9(3), 38–54.
24. Triandafyllidou, A., & Wodak, R. (2003). Conceptual and methodological questions in the study of collective identities: An introduction. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 2(2), 205–223.
25. Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 249–283.
26. Van Dijk, T. A. (1997). What is political discourse analysis. *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, 11(1), 11–52.
27. Van Leeuwen, T. (2007). Legitimation in discourse and communication. *Discourse & Communication*, 1(1), 91–112
28. Weinar, A. (2017). From emigrants to free movers: whither European emigration and diaspora policy? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(13), 2228–2246.