REFUGEES IN EUROPE: ROMANIAN ONLINE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE REFUGEE'S CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the way in which Romanian online media had covered the refugees which had entered in Europe between June 2015 and October 2016. The content analysis of the articles enclosed in the sample allowed us to identify the main perspectives (economic, geopolitical, delinquency, security, religious, ethnic, humanitarian, human rights) associated with refugees in Romanian media. The authors have attempted to identify the ways in which online media journalists in Romania have used these perspectives. The main focus of analysis was on the types of articles (opinion articles, reports, interviews), the sources used in reporting, the use of images, the type of media (newspaper, aggregate sites, TV sites). The analysis had pointed out the fact that journalists represented refugees using mainly the geopolitical, humanitarian and human rights perspectives. Also, in the case of this topic media used more photographs with refugees and less videos, drawings, graphics or maps related to them.

Keywords: *refugees, online media, Romania.*

INTRODUCTION

For Europe, 2015 was the year in which the number of refugees had increased by 43% between January (3,075,200 refugees) and December (4,316,200) (UNCHR, 2015: 14). The migratory flow of refugees towards Europe had continued also in 2016 but in a lower degree (the increase of refugees' number was 19% throughout that year) (UNCHR, 2016:12). At the end of 2016, a total number of 5,199,900 refugees had arrived in Europe (including Turkey) according

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to the international statistics (UNCHR, 2016: 12). The refugees who had entered Europe had been trying to go towards the developed European countries, being attracted by the better life-perspective and the generous social protection systems of them. Thus, only for 2016, the largest number of refugees who had arrived only this year was of 669,482 in Germany, 304,546 in France, 147,370 in Italy and 21,484 in Greece (UNCHR, 2016:61). Apart from those countries which had represented the final destination of refugees, there had been other European countries placed at the entrance in Europe or on the route towards destination countries which were affected by the migratory flow. Romania was one of the countries that faced a smaller number of refugees who were trying to transit its territory or to settle here. The number of refugees registered in Romania was of 2598 persons in 2015 and 2905 persons in 2016. As compared with other European countries this was a relatively small number (UNCHR, 2015:59; UNCHR, 2016:61). At the beginning of 2017 the countries placed on the s-called "Balkan route" (Turkey-Greece-Macedonia-Serbia-Hungary) had blocked the movement of refugee and those had started to use alternative routes towards Europe. One of those alternative ways of entering Europe had passed through Romania. Thus, for te first six months of 2017, Romania's Border Police statistics had recorded the illegal entry of 2474 foreign citizens, most of them organized as groups accompanied by traffickers (353 illegal migrant groups and 143 traffickers) (Poliția de Frontieră Română, 2017).

Between June 2015 and October 2016, despite the fact that Romania seemed not to be directly affected by the entry of refugees in Europe, there have been frequent reports of the Romanian journalists about the issue of refugees within the European space. The journalist from television, printed press and online media have constantly approached this issue, especially during the European debate on the topic of refugees' distribution according to strict allowances criteria to the countries members of the EU. Romanian politicians also discussed and presented in the media their opinions about the refugee crisis in the European Union

The way in which Romanian media covered the refugees' issues had been studied in some research projects and various authors had pointed out some effects of the discourses disseminated through Romanian mass media. After 2015, some studies have stressed that refugees have been associated with media delinquency and national security risks (Marinescu & Balica, 2018). At the same time, the researchers have underlined the obvious difference within the European parties and governments' political discourse between, on the one hand, the international legal rights that any person has and, on the other, the ethical criteria used by different states to accept migrants as their citizens (Holmes and Castaneda, 2016; Holzberg, Kolbe and Zaborowski, 2018).

Our analysis on refugees'media representation in Romanian online media was based on a series of peculiarities related to this theme in the existing literature. Thus, from the perspective of the way in which media presents migrants, refugees

or asylum seekers the analysis made by McAuliffe and Weeks had pointed out the existence of four main contexts (frames) in Australia: socio-cultural (in this case the articles discussed the issues of migration focusing on its impact on social integration and social cohesion), economic (this was the situation in which media has emphasized the role of migrants in the economic development of recession for a country), humanitarian (this being the case in which media have emphasized the suffering, the need for welfare or social assistance for migrants or refugees) and security (when the journalists have highlighted elements of personal or group security in relation to migrants, as well as the importance of state control and sovereignty) (McAuliffe and Weeks, 2015: 14–15; 47–100). Media's humanitarian perspective on immigrants and refugees was also identified by Benson (2013) in his analysis on immigration debates in the North American and French media, while Garcia (2008), Suro (2011) and Van Gorp (2005) have highlighted the emergence of a human rights perspective of media about refugees and migrants. As regards the security, this was approached in connection with the public discourse about refugees after 9/11 in Canada (Krishnamurti, 2013) and United States (Brader, Valentino, &Suhay, 2008; Grimm &Andsager, 2011).

When religion was connected to the topic of refugees' presentation in media the analysis was centered mainly on Muslims (Moore, Mason and Lewis 2008, Richardson 2004, 2009, Poole 2006, Nickels et al., Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery 2013). However, in South-Eastern Europe's online media this relation between refugees and religion seemed to have an important place in journalists' discourse after 2019. The comparative analysis of online coverage of refugees (articles and readers'comments) published in Romania and Hungary had pointed out the existence of four types of religion reporting: "Generic religion, religion as difference, visible religion and religious threats" (Vincze, 2018: 93).

From the perspective of the sources used in presenting the refugees in the media, the existing studies (Cook, 2005; Hallin, 1989; Bennett, 1990) have noticed that journalists had made appeal especially at government institutions and organizations – mainly at Police and the legal system. When media's presentation of migrants and refugees used extra-governmental sources the organizations with a favorable attitude to migrants and refugees were quoted more frequently in mass media (Benson, 2013; Figenschou & Beyer, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

The method of research used in this research project was the quantitative content analysis of Romanian online articles published between June 2015 and October 2016. The data gathered had come from articles covering the issue of migrants (e.g. Romanian emigrants and refugees) published during the above-mentioned period of time.

In order to identify the articles of interest we used Google Chrome and we searched the article with the help of specific key-words. The key words used for search were: "Romanian migrants", "Romanian emigrants", "Romanian diaspora", "refugees" and "violence and refugees". We have analysed all articles from the first ten pages of Google Chrome in the case of each of the key-words used. The resulting sample was made of 730 articles selected according to the above-mentioned criteria.

The articles enclosed in the final sample were analysed with the help of a grid of analysis. This one was structured in two main parts. The first part of the grid had included the variables and indicators which were related to general features of the articles: date of publication in media, the type of media in which the article was published (e.g. aggregated news sites, newspapers, magazines, TV sites etc.), the type of the article (news, reportage, opinion article, interview), the visual elements which were published together with the text (photos/charts/diagrams/maps), what was the article's main theme, the presence (or the absence) of readers' comments, the number of comments, the number of views per article, the country where the migrant was located, the sources used by journalists in the article). The grid's second part had included the items and variables related to migration and violence.

The analysis of data which was focused on Romanian emigrants and the acts of violence committed by the refugees were published in other papers (Marinescu & Balica, 2018; Balica & Marinescu, 2018) and the present article has a different focus. More specific, this study started from the results of our analysis for the online Romanian articles where only refugees (N = 296 articles) were presented and which were published in the time-frame already mentioned (June 2015 – October 2016). We have used the total data basis from which we have removed all articles which covered simultaneously both the issues of Romanian refugees and emigrants. Also, we removed from the total data basis all articles focusing on the situation of Romanian emigrants.

The present analysis aims to identify the way in which Romanian online media had represented the refugees who arrived in Europe between June 2015 and October 2016. More specific, we have attempted to answer at the following research questions:

RQ1. What were the Romanian journalists' views on refugee issues in Europe? What techniques to present the refugees were used to build the media's approach in this case? What were the types of articles published on this topic in Romania?

RQ2. Did the Romanian media made appeal to the so-called "the public of viewers" or their possible audience was mainly the "public of readers" during the above-mentioned period of time?

RESULTS

According to our set of data, around half of our sample was made of opinion articles (44.3%), and from the rest, one third of articles were simple news (28.4%) and one fifth of them were articles of analysis (18.9%). Reports (3%) and interviews (5.4%) were the articles'genres less used by Romanian journalists who had approached this topic. The analysis of the type of media in which articles on refugees were published showed that two-thirds of articles on refugees were published by the aggregate news sites (76.3%). From here, our results also indicated that the vast majority of opinion articles (92.3%), two thirds of the news (64.2%) and two thirds of the articles of analysis (64.2%) were published by those aggregate news sites (see Table 1).

Table 1

The article's type. The media in which the article was published.

The article is	Media in which the article was printed or broadcast					
	News aggregate site	News agency	Newspaper	Magazine	TV site	Total
News	54 (64.2)	2	17	3	8	84 (28.3)
Articles of opinion	121 (92.3)	2	5	-	3	131 (44.3)
Analysis	36 (64.2)	5	10	2	3	56 (18.9)
Report	3	-	3	2	1	9 (3)
Interview	12	1	1	1	1	16 (5.4)
Total	226	10	36	8	16	296

THE VISUAL ELEMENTS PUBLISHED ABOUT REFUGEES

Articles about the refugees were published together with photos, drawings, maps, and video materials, the graphic materials aiming to stress aspects from the written texts. As our data has shown, the vast majority of articles were accompanied (95.9%) by at least one real photo of refugees in different life-situations. In this case, the photos were extremely different, varying from the images of the refugees as those were delivered by different organizations to those of wounded, suffering refugees or even dead children or adults.

Table 2

The article was published together with a photo/graphic/video.
The type of media in which the article was published.

| The article is published together with | Media in which the article was printed or broadcast | | | | | |
	News aggregate site	News agency	Newspaper	Magazine	TV site	Total
A real photo	228 (80.2)	9	29 (10.2)	8	10	284
A drawing	–	1	2	–	1	4
A map	2	1	1	–	–	4
A graph	7	–	3	3	1	14
A video clip	15 (46.8)	2	3	3	9 (28.1)	32

In addition, 10.8% articles were published together with a video, 4.7% of them together with one or more graphics, 1.3% of articles were published together with drawings and a similar number of articles (1.3%) was accompanied by maps. The greatest percent of articles published together with a photo was published by aggregate news sites (80.2%), followed by online newspapers (10.2%). Almost half of the sample of articles published together with a video were from the aggregate news sites (46.8%) while 28.1% of them were from the TV sites (see Table 2).Our analysis also revealed the fact that the majority of opinion articles about refugees were accompanied by real photos (46.7%), while videos were mainly used to support articles of analysis (31.2%) and news (28.1%).

Table 3

The genre of the article. The visual/graphic material published together with it (photo/graphic/video).

| The article is published together with | The article is | | | | | |
	News	Opinon articles	Analysis	Report	Interview	Total
A real photo	73	132 (46.7)	50	13	16	284
A drawing	2	2	–	–	–	4
A map	–	2	2	–	–	4
A graph	–	5	6	–	–	11
A videoclip	9 (28.1)	7	10(31.2)	1	5	32

LOCATIONS OF THE REFUGEES

Giving the fact that, as stated in the beginning of the present article, the refugees entered through different points in Europe and they had decided to stop in specific countries, we have been interested to see what were the locations of refugees as those were presented by Romanian journalists. Only the fifth part of the analyzed articles referring to refugees had located their coverage exclusively in

Romania (N = 53, 17.9%). More than half of the sample had reported about the refugees entering (or about to enter) in Romania and/or in other European countries (N = 154; 56.4%). Two fifths of articles covered the refugees located in EU countries (N = 107; 39.1%) and a small number of articles made reference and covered the situation of refugees in the non-EU countries (4.5%) (see Table 4).

THE CONTEXTS (FRAMES) USED FOR REFUGEES' PRESENTATION IN ROMANIAN ONLINE MASS MEDIA

As we have mentioned in the Methodology section for this analysis we have took into account only those articles which made no reference at the crimes and violent acts committed by refugees. The analysis of this specific sample of Romanian online articles had revealed that when crime reporting articles were excluded, the refugees were mainly presented within a geopolitical context (frame) (55%).

At the same time, one could notice that no context (frame) was preeminent in the jurnalistic discourse. Instead, one could notice a mix of different contexts (frames) in the analysed sample. Thus, the difference between the geopolitical perspective and the humanitarian one (41.9%) is low and, in addition, the sum between the humanitarian perspective (41.9%) and human rights (32.1%) had represented two-thirds of the total articles which were analysed (74%).

Table 4

The articles made reference to refugees located in:

Romania	53 (17.9)
Romania and neighbor countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia)	8 (2.7)
Romania and other EU countries	90 (30.4)
Romania and non-EU countries	3 (1.01)
The European Union	64 (21.6)
Countries from the South-Eastern Europe	9 (3)
Countries from Western Europe	27 (9.1)
Countries from Northern Europe	1 (0.3)
Countries from Southern Europe	2 (0.67)
Countries from the European Union and USA	4 (1.35)
Countries from the European Union and Israel	1 (0.3)
The European Union and the Middle East	1 (0.3)
The European Union, Turkey, Syria, China	1 (0.3)
United States of America	3 (1.01)
Turkey	2 (0.67)
Canada	1 (0.3)
Brasil	3 (1.01)

If we include in the analysis the articles that made explicit reference to crimes and violent the image is completely changed. In this last case (when one take into account all articles about refugees, including those which associate them with criminal acts), it could be noticed that the first context (frame) was the geopolitical one, but with a decrease in its total share of the sample (47.3%). Also significant decreases for the use of humanitarian context (frame) (29.9%) and human rights one (22.7%) in covering the refugees' issues were noticed. If the sample of all articles covering the refugees (where the articles which linked refugees with criminal and vilent acts) is compared with the sample of articles which does not comprised those articles (the ones which covered refugees in relation to crime and violent acts) we could notice the sharp increase in share of delinquency/crime context (frame) – a ratio which went from 6.1% (in the sample without violence associated with refugees) to 28.1% (in the sample with refugees and crimes).

The geopolitical context (frame) has been identified mainly in the case of opinion articles (83) and articles of analysis (40), while the humanitarian (53) and human rights (43) perspectives have been used by the Romanian journalists in their opinion articles. Our data also had indicated that the interviews published on this topic in the Romanian online media had used the humanitarian (9) and human rights (9) contexts (frames) in presenting the refugees' issues (see Table 5).

Table 5

The contexts (frames) used to present the refugee. The type of article

The refugees are presented using the context / frame	The article is					Total (N=296)
	News	Opinon article	Analysis	Report	Interview	
Economic	33	30	21	5	5	104(35.1)
Geopolitical	30	83	40	3	7	163(55)
Cultural	11	31	9	2	8	61(20.6)
Health policies	4	3	–	–	1	8 (2.7)
Delinquency/crime	3	4	8	2	1	18 (6.1)
Security (terrorism)	9	13	12	–	2	36 (12.1)
Religious	4	23	2	–	4	33 (11.1)
Ethnical appartenance	12	23	6	5	3	49 (16.5)
Citizens' initiative	3	3	3	1	–	10 (3.3)
Humanitarian	37	53	22	3	9	124(41.9)
Human rights	19	43	19	5	9	95 (32.1)

As compared with the "old" media (e.g., radio, newspapers and television), in recent years internet development allowed to online media outlets (newspapers, TV websites, aggregate sites) to employ in a greater degree the graphic elements together with texts. On that basis we have been interested to identify the ways in which the images (photos, graphs, drawings, and videos) were used in building up a certain perspective of refugees' coverage.

On the basis of our analysis we could notice that Romanian online media had published real photos of refugees in the case of articles using the geopolitical (153), humanitarian (119) and human rights (89) contexts (frames). Although the number of videos was smaller fewer than that of photos, they were published mainly with articles where the geopolitical perspective was identified. In the same vein, although used in a lesser degree, the drawings, graphs, and maps had accompanied articles written from the geopolitical perspective (see Table 6).

Table 6

The perspective from which the refugees were presented in the article. The visual elements (photo/graphics/video) published together with the article

The refugees are presented from perspective	The article is published together with				
	A real photo	A drawing	A map	A graph	A videoclip
Economical	89	2	1	5	9
Geopolitical	153	4	7	10	32
Cultural	60		3	1	14
Health policies	7	1			1
Deliquency/crime	15		2	2	2
Security (terrorism)	21	1	1	3	5
Religious perspective	32			1	2
Ethnical appartenance	56	2		1	9
Citizens' initiative	12				1
Humanitarian	119	1	3	6	7
Human rights	89	1	4	5	5

INFORMATION SOURCES USED IN REFUGEES' PRESENTATION BY THE ROMANIAN JOURNALISTS

The journalists from the Romanian online media who had written about refugees had made appeal to various sources of information about this topic. The most used sources in the articles on refugees' topic were the national and international press agencies (94) and other media (87). The Romanian officials (83) were also frequently mentioned and the same was the case with the officials from those countries where the refugee refugees were located in that moment (56) plus the international officials (ambassadors, the representatives of international institutions) (48).

In order to see what were the way in which those sources had been used by Romanian journalists we have analysed the correlation between the type of source and the perspectives used by media in covering the refugees. The data analysis allowed us to stress the fact that in the case of media materials where refugees were presented from a geopolitical perspective, the main sources of information have

been other media (53), the national and international press agencies (50) and the Romanian national institutions (44). On the other hand, the articles using humanitarian and human rights perspectives made appeal as the main sources of information at the Romanian national institutions and the international employees of some international organizations (UN, UNCHR, UNICEF, etc.) (Table 7).

Table 7

The refugees are presented from perspective	Sources													
	National news agency	International news agency	Other media	Police	Institutions from the penal system	Romanian institutions	Institutions from other country	Migration office	Individuals /ordinary people	NGOs	International employees	Social media	Experts	Eurostat, National Institut of Statistics
Economic	30	10	26	4	2	23	14	8	4	3	12	–	6	3
Geopolitical	34	16	53	6	1	44	33	10	2	2	29	2	15	10
Cultural	9	3	17	1	–	10	11	1	3	3	7	1	9	2
Health policies	3	2	3	–	–	2	3	1	–	2	–	–	1	–
Deliquency/crime	3	1	6	4	–	2	6	1	1	2	2	1	–	–
Security (terorrism)	2	7	13	3	–	11	10	3	1	2	3	2	1	–
Religion	6	–	9	–	–	9	7	–	–	-	2	2	1	1
Ethnical apartenence	15	6	23	4	-	8	14	4	2	1	3	-	7	–
Citizens' initiative	1	1	3	–	–	2	2	1	2	2	-	-	-	1
Humanitarian	12	10	25	8	–	56	13	13	6	5	29	5	15	5
Human rights	5	9	16	2	–	40	11	10	-	7	25	-	7	5

DISCUSSION

The studies devoted to the analysis of refugees and migrants' image have been also aimed to lake clear the differences between the central and local printed media in the case of this topic (Lawlor, 2015). Referring to this difference, Lawlor (2015) had concluded that while national media had covered the refugees from a security perspective, the humanitarian approach emphasized their impact on economic conditions and the criminal nature of their acts was more employed by local journalists (Lawlor, 2015). The results of our study had indicated that Romanian online media has used a more uniform type of coverage. Thus, we could notice that Romanian online media have used the same perspectives about refugees as mainstream media, degassing the above-mentioned difference between the

central and local media. In building up those different perspectives, Romanian journalists from the online media have used as main sources of information the national and international media agencies and other media. The sources employed in articles which covered the refugees were assessed by previous researches (Esses, Medianu and Lawson, 2013; Henry and Tator, 2002) as promoting a negative discourse about refugee, due to the prevalence of security, violence and criminality contexts (frames) in relation with them. The perspective of solidarity with refugees was identified in the discourses on these topics in social media (Siapera, 2019), but our results showed that Romanian journalists did not make extended use of social network sites as information source. In addition, we have recorded fewer presentations of the citizens' initiatives related to the feelings of solidarity with refugees, this situation confirming the low interest of Romanian media towards this perspective.

The religion of refugees was discussed in a lesser degree than we expected in Romanian online media. Between June 2015 and October 2016, various discourses which were present in the online media did not seem interested to put an accent on the religion of the refugees presented as marching in their ways towards the Western European countries. According to the data included in our analysis, only a small part of articles (11.8%) had addressed the religious affiliation of those refugees. It is worth to notice that this situation had changed starting with July 2016, from that moment onward the online media frequently covering the religious theme and "religion appears as a designator of differences" (Vincze, 2018: 96).

Although at the early stages of the crisis the refugee entry routes in Europe have circumvented Romania, the articles about refugees have made (directly and indirectly) reference to our country. This was clear through the association with the European Union and the allotment of refugees' quotas which was discussed in the autumn of 2016.

CONCLUSIONS

The study made by d'Haenens and Lange (2001) on the representation of asylum seekers in the Dutch press had highlighted the existence of five great contexts (frames) of representing this social group: 1. conflict; 2. responsibility; 3. human interest; 4. economic consequences; 5. morality frame. The authors of the study concluded that the presentation of the refugees using the moral perspective was absent in the case of the Dutch media (d'Haenens and Lange, 2001: 859).

On the basis of our quantitative content analysis we can assess that the Romanian online journalists were interested to address the refugees' issues using the geopolitical, humanitarian and human rights perspectives. The ways in which the perspectives of presenting the refugees were made were different, in these cases the Romanian journalists employing various types of sources and images in their articles. As sources of information on refugees' topic, Romanian journalists had

used mainly the national and international press agencies or other media (newspapers, TV). Their appeal to experts, to the personnel or institutions from the legal system or Police was a minimal one. Also, although online media allowed the use of videos to accompany the text, these visual elements were published in a smaller degree than the static photos. The great number of photos which were recorded as accompanying the articles covering the refugees confirmed the fact that Romanian journalists attempted to gain the interest of the audience of viewers and not that of the readers of their articles. A further argument for this conclusion was the fact that the majority of news was published together with photos.

As we have previously stated, there was a minimal interest of Romanian journalists to present refugees from the perspective of their religious affiliation.One of the most interesting aspects revealed by our study was the (indirect and implicit) confirmation of Gerbner's "cultivation theory" about media (Gerbner, 1998). Although we did not make appeal at this classical approach in understanding the relation between media and violence, the dramatic increase of the criminal context for presenting the refugees (from 6.1% – in the sample of articles where no violence was associated with refugees) to 28.1% – in the sample where articles on refugees and crimes were included) allowed us to postulate the post-festum confirmation of the above-mentioned theory.

The present study had a number of limitations, the most important being the country-specific character of the analysis. Despite this fact, our analysis was in line with other researches (Gemi, Ulasiuk and Triantafyllidou, 2013; Klocker and Dunn, 2003; Van Gorp, 2005), pointing out the complex character of media presentation of refugees' issues.

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