

# DOMESTICATING FOREIGN NEWS IN ROMANIAN NEWS OUTLETS: GLOBAL ISSUES IN LOCAL FRAMES

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## ABSTRACT

National online media outlets employ domestication practices of foreign news to render global news meaningful for local audiences. This paper investigates discursive features of news items published in three of the largest Romanian online news outlets when reporting on foreign news. The research is content-oriented and aims to identify which are the recurrent discursive patterns that are used to construct the news value of proximity; which are the main discursive domestication practices by which local relevance is constructed; and which are the local political languages that intersect with and frame global issues.

*Keywords: domestication, foreign news, news values, content analysis, discourse analysis.*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper<sup>1</sup> investigates the domestication practices of three of the largest Romanian online news outlets when reporting on foreign news. We employ the concept of domestication to study the discursive features of news items that render global news meaningful for local audiences, “casting far-away events in

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frameworks that render these events comprehensible, appealing and relevant to domestic audiences” (Gurevitch, Levy, Roeh 1991, 206).

Our research is situated at the intersection of two large research traditions in journalism studies. On the one hand, previous studies of international news flows have pointed to the tendencies of homogenization and cultural hegemony defined by the large international news agencies which serve as the main source of foreign reporting (Mac Bride 1980; Clausen 2010; van Dijk 1988, 33–34), in the case of Romania as well (Surugiu, 2005.) These tendencies can be expected to be strengthened by the economic pressures brought about by the rise of online news consumption (Paterson 2007). More recent literature on international news flows has identified determinants of international coverage in external variables like country size and power, demographic or economic proximity or dramatic events (Segev 2015; Wu 2000). On the other hand, studies in news values have emphasized that as structures used by journalists to make sense of the world, these are deeply rooted in local political, social, economic contexts, and that any taxonomy of news values should take into account the value-laden, indeed ideological nature of these (Bednarek, Caple 2014; Richardson 2007). Research on Romanian public perceptions of international agendas has also shown that local concern is strongly connected to the national or personal relevance of the issues (Corbu *et al.* 2015, 41–57).

We aim to contribute to this body of research by employing a content-oriented approach, and focus on discursive structures and practices employed by news media to construct the meaningfulness of events. Generally, one of several news factors (Galtung, Ruge 1965), sometimes used as a synonym of proximity (Caple, Bednarek 2013; Joye, Heinrich, Wöhlert 2016), we treat meaningfulness a more general feature of news discourse combining relevance with suggested frames of interpretation. Our research investigates the ways in which generic news values like eliteness or conflict are endowed with local relevance, and intersect with issue-specific frames (de Vreese 2012) or local sociopolitical languages. By local sociopolitical languages we mean discourses, thematic sensitivities, sets and styles of problem definitions and argumentations that frame public discussions. In doing so, apart from offering a descriptive analysis of the thematic sensitivities and symbolic geography of a national news culture, we also aim to contribute to the more general discussion of the relationship between news values and news frames.

The analysis is structured around three main research questions: 1) as the language of journalism is highly formulaic, which are the recurrent discursive patterns that are used to construct the news value of proximity? 2) which are the main discursive domestication practices by which local relevance is constructed? 3) which are the local political languages that intersect with and frame global issues?

The analysis is based on a sample of articles published in the foreign news sections of three large online Romanian news outlets, *adevarul.ro*, *digi24.ro* and *antena3.ro*. All three are among the largest such outlets, and all are online portals

of media organizations with offline content as well, *Adevărul* being a print newspaper, while *Digi 24* and *Antena 3* are news television channels. We collected articles labelled as foreign news from a three-year period, 2016–2018,  $n=46329$ . In order to identify the discursive patterns that construct the news value of proximity, we created a *proximity corpus* of articles that index their local relevance by making reference to Romania or Romanians in their titles ( $n=2272$  articles). Methodologically, we employ corpus-assisted discourse analysis (for RQ1) and qualitative content analysis (RQ 2 and RQ3).

In this corpus of a total of 1 million words we ran a collocation analysis using Lancsbox (Brezina, Timperley, McEnery 2018). In corpus linguistics, collocates are words which tend to co-occur together regularly in a given corpus to a statistically significant degree (Paul Baker 2008). Analysing collocations has been adapted in discourse analysis as a methodologically rigorous way of understanding meanings and representations (Baker, Gabrielatos, McEnery 2013). In the analysis of news values in particular, looking at collocates has been employed as a useful technique in identifying ways in which the newsworthiness of an event is linguistically constructed (Bednarek, Caple 2014).

### CONSTRUCTING THE NEWSWORTHINESS OF PROXIMITY

In order to identify ways in which proximity is constructed, we looked for collocates of the stem “român”, from which, in Romanian, terms referencing the country as well as ethnonyms are constructed. We identified the top collocates in a three-word window using the mutual information value statistic (threshold:  $MI>5$ ), and a collocate frequency threshold of 5. We then looked at the context of the resulting collocates by concordancing them, and grouped them into semantic categories. The resulting categories are summarized by Table 1.

Table 1

Referencing Romania and Romanians in foreign news: collocates and semantic categories.

Category	Collocate (translations)
Arts	Artists, Eurovision, represent
Ancestry	Origins
Assistance	Accessible, affected, located, appeal, assistance, travel, CCSCRS (Centre for Contact and support for Romanians Abroad), citizens, citizenship, disposal, manage, inside, reminds, request, requests, abroad, support, telephone number, maintain, monitor, provide
Casualties	Deceased, declared, disappeared, exist, figure, identified, hurt, relatives, signals, lift
Crime	Gang, beggars, hacker, criminals, driver, passports
Diaspora	Bulgarians, communities, residents, settled, diaspora
Ethnic minorities	language, teaching, Cernăuți, ethnicity, minority

Study abroad	Student
Travel abroad	Tourist
Commemorations	Centenary, unify, union
Vehicle registration	Registration
Diplomatic institutions	Embassy, ambassador, consulate, consul, [names of cities and officials]
Economy	GDP, attractive
Foreign perception	Rethink, respondents, included, ranking
Foreign policy	Atlantic, count, congratulates, signed, interested
Domestic institutions	Academy, prisons, Foreign Policy edition, Foreign Policy awards, Orthodox Church, riot police, traditions
International organisations	Joining, admitting, Bulgaria, qualify, MEPs
Social movements	Wake up

As the categories and terms above show, foreign news in Romania tend to index their relevance for Romania in terms of its citizens abroad, along several main dimensions: the Romanian diaspora, crimes committed by Romanians abroad and Romanian casualties of various tragic events. Apart from this metonymical proximity, Romania also appears in the foreign news as an actor in the international arena, represented by diplomatic institutions and various officials pursuing foreign policy goals. Foreign news can of course be expected to be dominated by foreign actors, and the presence of foreign perception and international organisations among the collocates of our search term referencing the country and its people point to the intersection of the news value of proximity with other factors.

#### DOMESTICATION PRACTICES AND LOCAL POLITICAL LANGUAGES

In a second step, we have filtered the articles in the *proximity corpus* by length (over 500 words, n=644). In this new subcorpus the primary actor was manually coded using the MaxQDA software. Three types of actors were coded: Romanian domestic (n=133, 21%), Romanians abroad (n=201, 31%), and foreign (n=310, 48%). As these actors can of course also occur together, in such cases coding decisions were based on the actor occurring first, as online journalistic discourse tends to be front-loaded, with the order of occurrence indicating emphasis.

##### A) Romanian actors in/on the international arena

In foreign news with Romanian primary actors, the obvious main domestication strategy is the very presence as such actors. The relatively low weight of such articles (21%) in our length filtered proximity subcorpus is due to the fact that such news tend to be covered as domestic news, and indeed the domestic–foreign differentiation is blurred.

Most of this type of foreign news represents coverage of Romanian officials acting in the international arena, like the president meeting other presidents, Romania taking over the presidency of the EU, or Romanian actors reacting to

foreign events or statements of foreign actors concerning Romania (eg. IT specialists react to Bernie Sanders' declarations on internet speed in Romania). The country also appears as a location involved in global events or processes, from migration routes cutting through the country to news of local celebrations of International Women's Day, phenomena of communist nostalgia in Central and Eastern Europe, or international criminal activities originating in Romania.

A specific way in which foreign news with domestic primary actors domesticate the news is giving voice to domestic actors who comment on implications of foreign events. It is in such commentary that domestic voices render foreign news meaningful for local audiences. In our timeframe, one of the predominant themes of international news throughout Europe was Brexit. The coverage of the European debates around Brexit also provides a collection of local concerns and discourses that frame international events and processes: the distancing of the country from the Visegrad group ("the country wishes to overcome these handicaps of development and be as close as possible to the core that progresses most at the level of EU")<sup>2</sup>, the importance of the country's partnership with the US in the context of the loss of the "historic strategic expertise of the UK with regard to the Eastern part of the EU, which is very complicated, I mean Russian, Ukraine"<sup>3</sup> or the increase of the weight of the country in terms of voting rights in the EU<sup>4</sup>. In most cases, such commentary is attributed to a known actor, but there are also cases when journalists themselves offer such commentary, like a piece on "What can Romania learn from the French example of educational reform"<sup>5</sup>, commenting that "Romania is as yet far from European standards, and it might not be a bad idea to follow the example of other countries" as an introduction to a detailed presentation of educational reforms proposed in France. In terms of domestication strategies, thus, quoting known domestic actors, apart from invoking the news value of eliteness along with proximity, also domesticates foreign news by invoking domestic political languages (themes and styles of argument) like backwardness, the perceived Russian threat, the strategic partnership with the US, the geopolitical position of the country, the competition with and divergence from other Central and Eastern European countries.

<sup>2</sup>De ce România nu se orientează către Grupul de la Vișegrad, *digi24.ro*, 2017-03-12, <https://m.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/ue/de-ce-romania-nu-se-orienteza-catre-grupul-de-la-visegrad-686044>

<sup>3</sup>G. Maior, despre cum își poate juca România cartea în noul context diplomatic European, *digi24.ro*, 2016-09-01, <https://m.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/sua/g-maior-despre-cum-isi-poate-juca-romania-cartea-in-noul-context-diplomatic-european-558055>

<sup>4</sup>Radu Magdin: BREXIT-ul urcă România pe locul șase ca putere de vot în UE. *Digi24.ro*, 2016-06-24, <https://m.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/ue/radu-magdin-brexite-ul-urca-romania-pe-locul-sase-ca-putere-de-vot-in-ue-532209>

<sup>5</sup>Ce ar putea învăța România din exemplul francez de reformă a educației? *Digi24.ro* 2018-07-06, <https://m.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/educatie/ce-ar-putea-invata-romania-din-exemplul-francez-de-reforma-a-educatiei-959361>

### *B) Romanians abroad*

In the Romanians abroad subcorpus (n=201), the Romanians appear as three distinct categories, with varying degrees of notoriety: Romanians defined as a group or a rather vague entity, usually when political actors tackle the topic of work related immigration (Romanians will have the right to work in the UK after Brexit), ordinary citizens involved in or witnessing extraordinary events (deaths or casualties in the case of the terrorist attacks or natural disasters), and celebrities (Romanians running for a mandate in local or national institutions).

There is a vast literature (Gans, 1979; McNair, 1995; Bennett, 2007) about the role of the government, political parties and social movements as sources that shape and influence the media agenda, a tendency documented for Romanian journalism in general (Petre, 2015) as well as for international news coverage (Nistor, 2013). In this case, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs<sup>6</sup> is a source frequently cited by the three media outlets, especially when major events occurred in other countries. In this case, domestication of the foreign news consists in linking dramatic events (e.g. terrorist attacks<sup>7</sup>, accidents, natural disasters) that caused victims or injuries with Romanians that lived or travelled abroad and might (or might not) be affected. It is worth mentioning that, in a few cases, the news sites published press releases of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs that were communicating that no Romanians had died, were injured or suffered.

Major dramatic events, especially when Romanian victims were involved, encouraged media institutions to look for and identify Romanians who witnessed the events<sup>8</sup> and were able to offer a subjective, emotional point of view. Since the Romanian media outlets rarely have their own correspondents, they construct stories told by “our Romanians”, as they have seen and lived them.

Negativity is a major news value identified in the subcorpus, with 31 stories about Romanian citizens that broke the laws<sup>9</sup> of one or more states – from petty crimes to rapes, drug dealing and human trafficking. The description of perpetrators is, in some cases, associated with their victims<sup>10</sup> (abused children,

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<sup>6</sup> O româncă a fost rănită în atentatul de la Stockholm. Presupusul autor al atacului, un uzbek în vârstă de 39 de ani, plasat în arest preventiv. Adevarul.ro, 2017-04-08, [https://adevarul.ro/international/europa/atentat-stockholm-politia-arestat-doua-persoane-unul-suspecti-uzbec-1\\_58e880335ab6550cb8124e8e/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/international/europa/atentat-stockholm-politia-arestat-doua-persoane-unul-suspecti-uzbec-1_58e880335ab6550cb8124e8e/index.html)

<sup>7</sup> Doi români răniți în atacul terorist de la Londra. Starea unuia dintre ei este „relativ critică”. Adevarul.ro, 2017-03-22, [https://adevarul.ro/international/europa/doi-romani-raniti-atacul-terorist-londra-1\\_58d2c4665ab6550cb894f7bc/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/international/europa/doi-romani-raniti-atacul-terorist-londra-1_58d2c4665ab6550cb894f7bc/index.html)

<sup>8</sup> Românii din Italia povestesc despre cutremur. Digi24.ro, 2016-10-30, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/ue/cutremur-italia/romanii-din-italia-602317>

<sup>9</sup> Un clan de romi din România a „ușurat” turiștii de la Disneyland Paris de circa un milion de euro. Digi24.ro, 2017-08-27, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/ue/un-clan-de-romi-din-romania-a-usurat-turistii-de-la-disneyland-paris-de-circa-un-milion-de-euro-783706>

<sup>10</sup> Încă un caz de sclavie în Italia: 2 români arestați, 30 de persoane abuzate. Digi24.ro, 2018-09-18, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/ue/inca-un-caz-de-sclavie-in-italia-2-romani-arestati-30-de-persoane-abuzate-reactie-de-la-bucuresti-996218>

women and persons with disabilities). Even though the Romanian workers are not associated with a negative frame, there is an underlying common explanation for leaving the home country – precarious life conditions, search for a better life.

Domestication strategies follow several clear patterns: when portrayed as victims, Romanians are seen as members of *our group*, who suffer or even die abroad; the eye witness role becomes central in emotional reports about major dramatic/catastrophic events which are otherwise depicted in articles produced and widely distributed by foreign news agencies.

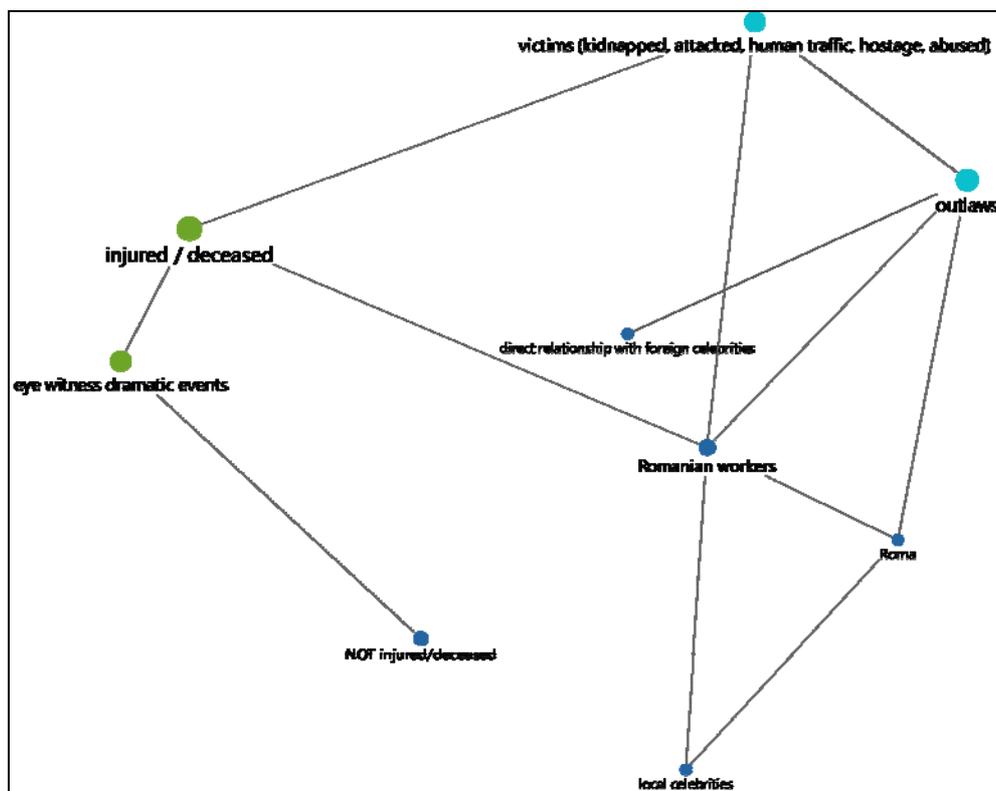
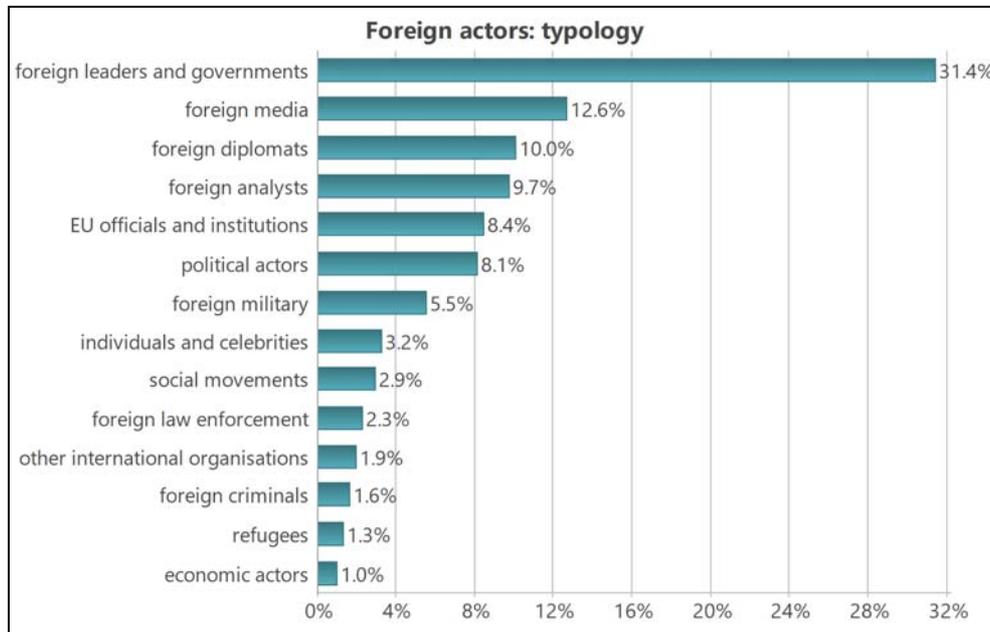


Figure 1. Romanian actors - codemap for the Romanians abroad subcorpus.

### C) Foreign actors

In the largest subset of articles indexing the proximity of the event to Romania by a country name or demonym (n=310), the news value of the piece is defined, apart from proximity, by the prominence of a foreign actor. Foreign actors identified, in the order of frequency, were foreign leaders and governments, foreign media, foreign diplomats, foreign analysts, EU officials and institutions, foreign political actors, foreign military, social movements, foreign law enforcement,

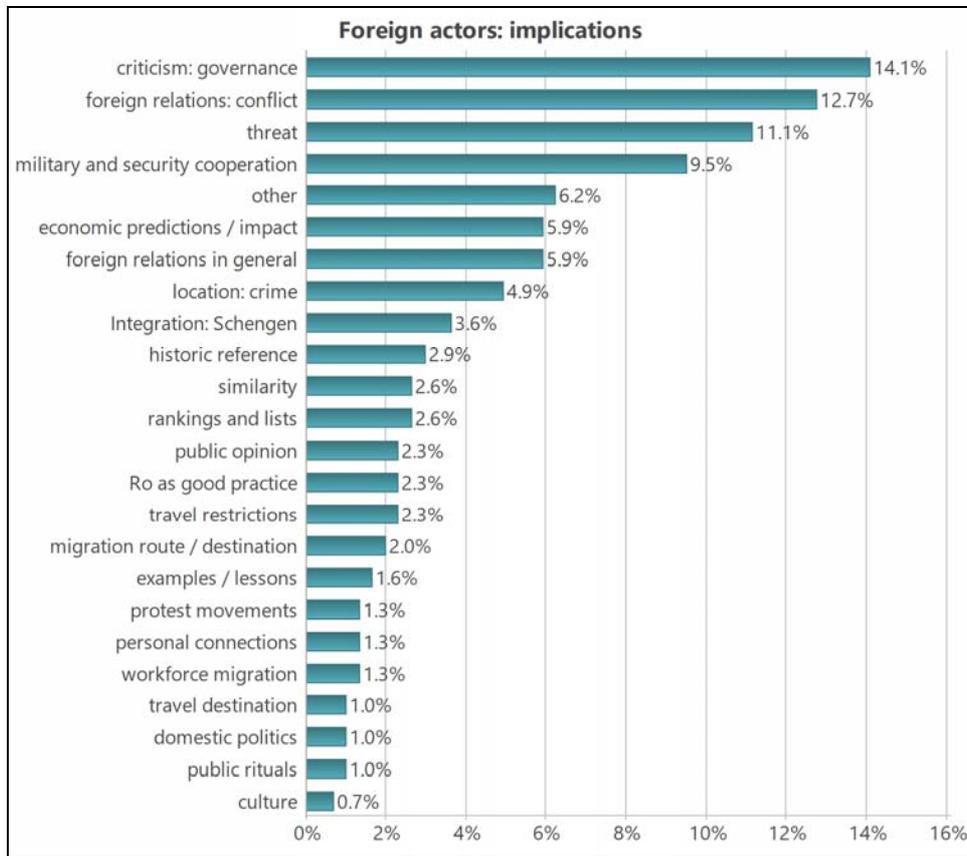
individuals and celebrities, other international organisations, foreign criminals and foreign economic actors:



**Figure 2.** *Typology and weight of primary actors (foreign actors subcorpus).*

Among foreign leaders and governments, the most prominent actors belong to Russia, the USA, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, the UK, Canada, Germany, France and Bulgaria, indicating that eliteness and geographic proximity are the main news values driving coverage. Foreign media and foreign analysts are a major source of foreign news on Romania. We have coded these as “actors” partly because, especially in the case of research organisations and think tanks, these possess active newsmaking capacity, but also because of the marked interest in the foreign perception of and foreign reporting on the country, which is also reflected in the prominence of “foreign perception” as a major category of collocates of Romania / Romanians in the corpus.

The main implications on Romania prompted by actions or reports of these actors are criticism of Romanian governance, conflictual foreign relations, threats, military and security cooperation, Romania as a location of or source of international crime, the acceptance of the country to the Schengen area, historic references, similarities, the place of the country in various rankings and lists, reports on public opinion, but sometimes also reports on Romania as providing examples of good practices:



**Figure 3.** Typology and weight of domestic implications (foreign actors subcorpus).

As can be expected based on the extensive literature on news values and foreign news, negativity and conflict dominate the coverage, even though we must note a special emphasis on, or a domestic sensitivity to critical voices at the address of the country or its government. The importance of the military actors and security cooperation also reflects the importance of the topic on the country's domestic and foreign policy agenda. There are also several further categories in the above, inductively developed code system, which fall outside the framework of the traditional news values, nor do they reflect local actor's priorities: examples/lessons, historic references and similarities, which constitute journalistic domestication strategies meant to render intelligible far-away events. A piece on Bulgaria's road tax system for example<sup>11</sup> points out the differences in revenues thus generated from

<sup>11</sup> Bulgaria își reformează vinieta. O sugestie pentru România. Digi24.ro, 2018-07-31, <https://m.digi24.ro/stiri/economie/transporturi/bulgaria-isi-reformeaza-vinieta-sugestia-pentru-romania-972869>

those of Romania, an overview of the French presidential elections points out implications on the chances of the local governing coalition in Romanian elections<sup>12</sup>, while the independence referendum in Catalonia was covered with the title “the Catalan lesson for Romania”<sup>13</sup>. Historic references also provide a way of connecting foreign events to local concerns: US president George H.W. Bush was remembered as “the man who contributed decisively to the fall of Ceaușescu”, and memories of the communist past are invoked in the coverage of Kim Jong-un’s visit to China, pointing out in the title that his grandfather used a similar train carriage to visit Romania<sup>14</sup>. Similarities with current Romanian events, especially protests against the government are sometimes also highlighted: “10,000 people protested against the Albanian government in a manifestation inspired by those from Romania”<sup>15</sup>; “Two protests: how and why are protests in Romania and South Korea similar”; “Romania exports protests. The French revolt against corrupt politicians”<sup>16</sup>. The 1989 revolution sometimes also appears as a framing comparison: “What the African version of the Romanian Revolution looks like”<sup>17</sup>, and the dispute between Poland and the European Commission regarding the rule of law is introduced as “Poland finds itself in the situation of Romania in 2012”<sup>18</sup>.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our analysis of the *proximity corpus* (i.e., the subsample in which local relevance is indexed) indicates that the prevalent news values follow global patterns: eliteness, geographic proximity, economic connections, dramatic developments like terrorist attacks or natural catastrophes drive the coverage.

<sup>12</sup> Lecția alegerilor din Franța pentru „invincibili” României. *digi24.ro*, 2017-04-24, <https://m.digi24.ro/opinii/lectia-alegerilor-din-franta-pentru-invincibilii-romaniei-711714>

<sup>13</sup> Marea șarlatanie. Lecția catalană pentru România. *Digi24.ro*, 2017-10-09, <https://m.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/marea-sarlatanie-lectia-catalana-pentru-romania-807321>

<sup>14</sup> Misterul trenului nord-coreean: blindat, lent și plin de soldați pentru Kim Jong-un. Bunicul dictatorului a venit în România cu o garnitură asemănătoare. *Digi24.ro*, 2016-01-02, <https://m.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/mapamond/misterul-incendiului-de-la-dubai-relatarea-unui-roman-din-hotel-472594>

<sup>15</sup> 10.000 de oameni au protestat față de Guvern în Albania, într-o manifestație inspirată de cele din România. *Adevarul.ro*, 18-Feb-17, [https://adevarul.ro/international/europa/10000-oameni-protestat-fata-guvern-albania-intr-o-manifestatie-inspirata-cele-romania-1\\_58a8bee25ab6550cb898d1b5/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/international/europa/10000-oameni-protestat-fata-guvern-albania-intr-o-manifestatie-inspirata-cele-romania-1_58a8bee25ab6550cb898d1b5/index.html)

<sup>16</sup> România exportă proteste. Francezii se revoltă împotriva politicianilor corupți. *Digi24.ro*, 2017-02-19, <https://m.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/ue/romania-exporta-proteste-miting-anti-coruptie-la-paris-672768>

<sup>17</sup> Cum arată varianta africană a Revoluției din România. *Digi24.ro*, 2017-11-22, <https://m.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/mapamond/video-cum-arata-varianta-africana-a-revoluției-din-romania-832904>

<sup>18</sup> Polonia, în situația României din 2012. Cum se apără guvernul de la Varșovia în fața acuzațiilor că nu respectă statul de drept. *Digi24.ro*, 2016-01-13, <https://m.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/ue/polonia-in-situatia-romaniei-din-2012-cum-se-apara-guvernul-de-la-varsovia-in-fata-acuzațiilor-ca-nu-respecta-statul-de-drept-476505>

The newsworthiness of proximity is constructed by recurrent terms that co-occur with references to Romania and Romanians. Grouping such collocates into semantic groups showed that the news outlets investigated tend to index the local relevance of foreign news in terms of its citizens abroad, in terms of Romania as an actor in the international arena, and by focusing on local implications of foreign actors' actions.

In the subcorpus defined by Romanian primary actors, the main domestication strategy consists of giving voice to domestic actors, whose voices render foreign news meaningful for local audience who often also frame events in local political languages, focusing for example on the geopolitical position of the country of comparisons with neighbouring countries. In news of Romanians abroad, the focus shifts towards the emotional impact and human interest by offering eye witness stories and constructing profiles of Romanian participants of events. Turning to diaspora voices as a journalistic practice also reflects the importance of the emigration of workforce in postcommunist Romania and domestic political discussions, and functions as one of the main discursive anchors connecting local political languages and international affairs, also by offering a specific outlook on the globally relevant issue of migration. At the same time, the emergence of diaspora voices as a strategy of domesticating foreign news is a result that indicates new developments in the field of international coverage. It also calls for further, comparative research, in the context of the more general discussion on the changes of international reporting and the increased importance of local voices worldwide (Hamilton, Jenner 2004).

The largest subset of our proximity corpus consists of news with a foreign primary actor. The most frequent such actors are foreign leaders and governments, foreign media, foreign diplomats, foreign analysts, EU officials and institutions. The main implications on Romania implied by actions or reports of these actors are criticism of Romanian governance, conflictual foreign relations, threats, military and security cooperation, Romania as a location of or source of international crime, the acceptance of the country to the Schengen area. We also note the presence of several implication types that fall outside of the framework of the traditional news values of negativity and conflict that dominate the coverage, and constitute journalistic practices that domesticate foreign news for local audiences: emphasizing the exemplary value of events, lessons drawn, pointing out similarities and drawing on historic connections. Local political discourses and thematic sensitivities, like attention to foreign perception, the emphasis on security issues, or the importance of the Romanian diaspora act as further factors driving not only coverage, but also frame global events for local audiences.

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