

## THE ROMANIAN PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON TRANS-FORMING/ DE-FORMING/ RE-FORMING/ CON-FORMING (TO) EUROPE

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### ABSTRACT

Long ago, Europe ceased to be just an objective geographic notion; it has been covering for centuries cultural, ideological, political or economic realities. From Renaissance to Post-Communism, in the Romanian public discourse, Europe legitimized or de-legitimized different aspirations, desires or utopias. The present lecture aims at analysing the idea of Europe in the Romanian cultural space; its main purpose is trying to catch a glimpse of the way Romanians perceive Europe. The premise I start from is that certain paradigms, such as tolerance or multiculturalism are understood differently in Occident and Orient, that is in West and East, based on some historical moments when Romanian culture, alongside with some other Balkan cultures, seems to drift apart from the cultural realities of what we nowadays consider the core of Europe. Moreover, analysing the discourses on identity, one needs to oppose two concepts which are, at the same time, interdependent: identity vs. alterity. The present paper will discuss the idea of Europe on two different levels. Firstly, a brief introduction to Romanian history is absolutely necessary. Secondly, having the objective facts on the table, one needs to try to make the necessary connections between history, culture and collective mentality. At the end, the result should be a better understanding of how and, more importantly, why discourses on integrating into Europe remain challenging and polemic in the Romanian culture even today

### KEYWORDS

Romanian culture, Europe, discourse on identity, alterity, history

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To speak about discourses on identity seems to be rather a process of opposing different identities hoping to define one of them. For me, the supreme irony here is that, we define our cultures, our values the only way we can, and that means to

place them so that they face other cultures or values. Consequently, the existence of an alterity, of an otherness, is absolutely necessary in order to determine and strengthen one identity. Identity in itself can be defined as what remains after a struggle with an alterity, an otherness which challenges it in a precise moment in history. Ego, the concept itself is doomed to be conflictual. For a more graphic image, allow me to picture the struggle like this: a certain identity and a certain alterity collide in a certain moment in time; they mingle in a melting pot and then, they end up by being influenced one by the other, but never to that point to become one. The conflict still exists inside the melting pot, although 'in times of war, we forget how much we owe to our enemies' (Bond, 2008: 87). In the end, no pure identity and no pure alterity will arise from the melting pot; nevertheless, any discourse on identity will emphasize, at one point or another, the idea of 'purity'. *I am pure, The Other is impure*. In his book entitled *Pure and Impure*, the French philosopher Vladimir Jankelevitch says: 'Once fallen into History, what is pure, is doomed to become impure, even if it were to remain alone in the world' (Jankelevitch, 2004: 27, our translation). History is here a metaphor for the human interaction throughout time. By interacting permanently, humans share their ideas and values in such an indistinct way that it is impossible, at one moment in history, to state precisely that one's identity is completely unaltered by these continuous interactions. The idea of purity degenerates in nationalism and violence precisely because those who consider themselves pure feel the desire to defend their purity at any cost.

What does it mean for a 21<sup>st</sup> century Romanian citizen to be European? It depends, of course, on the citizen we discuss about but, at the same time, more disturbingly, it depends on what kind of space and time this European identity faces. On the streets of Tel Aviv, one can have a different sense of being European than on the boulevards of Paris or Berlin. For an Eastern European, the paradigm is even more confusing. For almost half a century, inside the Iron Curtain, the Easterner had a distinct feeling of being thrown out of Europe, the feeling of not belonging to a type of society upon which he/she had projected dreams, wishes and images. In order to describe this sense of awkwardness an Eastern European felt after the fall of Communism when being in a Western country, allow me to quote a Georgian writer, Lasha Bugadze, who said in his novel *The Literature Express*: 'I guess the Europeans don't suspect such complexes exist. One has to come from the former Soviet Union or be a survivor of the '80s in order to understand these fears. The fear of making a mistake. The fear of misdemeanour. The fear of pissing in Vienna airport toilet design for handicapped and being obliged to pay the fine out of the miserable amount you managed to save for your trip abroad. *Why have you urinated in the toilet for handicapped, citizen?*' (Bugadze, 2012: 16). Therefore, the title I chose for my article. '50 Shades of Europe' is a metaphor covering the idea of Europe as an escape from a world of prejudices, conformism and lack of freedom

and prosperity. Throughout my article I will use the terms Occident and Orient, as an alternative for the commonly used East and West precisely because this terminology is closer to the Romanian cultural realities about which I will try to discuss.

After centuries of being in the Ottoman sphere of influence and, much recently, under the Russian influence, the way Romanians perceive Europe is significantly different from the way a Westerner does. Apparently, we all speak about the European identity; in reality we just use the same concept which covers completely different, and sometimes antagonistic, realities. Precisely because of this unavoidable dialectic, allow me, at the beginning of my study to draw some red lines on which I would like to focus on. Firstly, I would like to introduce a brief history of the idea of Europe in the Romanian culture starting with the Romanian Renaissance, moving through Enlightenment, then to the dawn of the Romanian state (19<sup>th</sup> century), the interwar period, the Communist era and, finally the spectacular change of paradigm which began at the Fall of Communism, in December 1989. Secondly, after stating the obvious, meaning East and West have different views and approaches on the same European concepts, I will try to identify the moments in history when Romanian culture, alongside with some other Balkan cultures, seemed to drift apart from what is today the core of Europe. My conjecture is that we need to focus mainly on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I think we will find fascinating premises there.

As opposed to the Dark Ages, Renaissance (14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> century) detached from the idea that the human being was being reduced to just a creation of a Divine force by stating that Man was defined by free will, freedom and the ability of evolving on his own. Europe rediscovered the Latin and Greek Antiquity not exclusively through the filter of religion, as it had been before. For Moldavian and Wallachian intellectuals (two separate Principalities which, centuries later, would form Romania), the stake was even higher.

In spite of the generous Renaissance ideas, it is precisely the religious paradigm that was to fuel up the discourse about a common European identity during the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries when the Ottoman Empire reached its peak. At the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Balkan Peninsula falls under the influence of the Ottomans; in 1453, after the Conquest of Constantinople, Europe felt the constant threat of an alien identity which produced soon enough a retaliation, an exacerbation of a common European discourse whose core was the idea of defending Christianity.

The Myth of the never-ending fight of the Medieval Moldavian and Wallachian rulers to protect the Christian Europe is one of the strongest ideas which is still extant in the Romanian collective mentality and excites it even today. Facing a common opponent, the Renaissance intellectuals from Moldavia and Walachia discovered the Latin roots of their language, portraying the struggle against the Ottoman Empire as a resistance of a Christian world against an Islamic one. The

Moldavian historians Grigore Ureche and Ion Neculce of the 17<sup>th</sup> century attempted to create a feeling of belonging by emphasizing the ideas of Moldavians being the ancestors of Romans. In his chronicle covering the history of Moldavia between 1359-1594 (allegedly written between 1642-1647), Grigore Ureche provides us with a relevant depiction of the Ottomans, emphasizing the paradigm Islam vs. Christianity: ‘This kind of people which we call Turks, who were, in the beginning, but a hand of criminals spread so much that they cover two parts of the world, Asia and Africa, and they are attempting now to conquer the third part, Europe; they [seem to be] allowed by God to fight the Christians and spread horror on all their neighbours’ (Ureche, 2004: 73, our translation) . With Russia not playing yet a major role in the European game of power and not having a common border with any of the later Romanian territories, with the Ottomans shaking the gates of Europe, there were not too many options left. The immediate consequence of Romanians’ perceiving and presenting themselves as the inheritors of Roman ancestors was to give birth later to the Romanian national conscience. At that time Europe was a euphemism for the Christian world. As a consequence, Christianity remained until later on a defining idea of the major discourses on European identity.

With the Enlightenment (17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century), the history of Europe seems to evade the religious paradigm. The *new religion* of Enlightenment will be the concept of the social contract and, later, the notion of the Nation State. With the decline of the common enemy, the Islamic world, (The Ottoman Empire will collapse in 19<sup>th</sup> century), there was enough room for the new enemy. The old paradigm Christianity vs. Islam was temporarily downgraded and replaced by the new one, The Empires vs The Nation States. The alterity was now not the Non-European, but the foreigner from within, from inside the continent. On the stage of the history of ideas, the Transylvanian Romanian intellectuals emerged. After 170 years of independence, Transylvania was part of the Austrian Empire from 1699 till 1867. From 1867, the province fell under the influence of the Hungarian side of the newly created Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although, throughout the years, the numbers have been used ideologically, according to a census organised by the Austrians at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, 34% of the total population of Transylvania were Romanians. Poorly educated and having no civil rights, Romanians, as many other minorities incorporated in the dualist Austro-Hungarian Empire, were fascinated with the ideas of the French Revolution. The Transylvanian Enlightenment (‘Școala Ardeleană’ i.e. The Transylvanian School) developed at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Samuil Micu, Gheorghe Șincai and Petru Maior, following the Enlightenment tradition in Western Europe, strive to make knowledge available to people in their own language that is Romanian. They translate, publish dictionaries and set up schools, disseminating the idea of the Latinity of the Romanian language. Their cultural option for the Western Europe

is defined in opposition to what they perceived to be the Hungarian oppression. In an official document sent to the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Leopold II, was written 'The Romanian nation is the oldest amongst all the nations in Transylvania, because it is well known and proved, by historical documents, which testify of a [Romanian] tradition never interrupted, of the language, customs and folkways all proving that that the Romanian nation originates in the Roman colonies set up at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century by the Roman Emperor Trajan, who repeatedly sent large numbers of veteran soldiers to defend the Province Dacia' (*Supplex Libellus Valachorum Transsilvaniae*).

Perhaps now there is the right moment to introduce in this stream of thought one of the strongest inner contradictions which defines Romanian culture even today; the vast majority of the Romanians are Greek Orthodox, but the language they speak is Latin rooted, Latin being the liturgical language of Catholicism. Moreover, the relation between State and Church, the perception of the state in the collective mentality derives from Byzantium; even today we have European aspirations, but Byzantine expectations. Precisely this contradiction was and still is the source of many cultural conflicts and a possible explanation for the superfluous and superficial understanding the Romanian society has of some European concepts such as tolerance, multiculturalism, plurality or globalization.

With the creation of the first Romanian state, a never-ending debate starts: where are we, the Romanians, culturally placed? In the shade of Orient, in the shade of Occident or, if of neither, are we a bridge between Orient and Occident, and what exactly does this mean and imply?! Never before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century did this debate seem to be more prolific. Not having a state, struggling to create one, while the Ottoman Empire was haunting the continent and sending cold shivers to the Christians, the option for the Romanian intellectual elite seemed to be clear: we have the Latin language, we belong to a Christian Europe, we have to keep our eyes opened to the West... In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the matrix is much more complicated. When a nation needs to create a state, its elite faces many challenges, and the first question which arises is: on what kind of values, on what kind of institutions, on what kind of foundations should this new state be built? Above all, a newly created nation needs heroes. Nicolae Bălcescu, a Romanian revolutionary of 1848, created one of the most important Romanian heroes, the medieval ruler Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave), in his book *The Romanians under Michael the Brave* (allegedly written in 1846). For Bălcescu, Europe should be grateful to the Romanians for their fight against the Ottomans. 'If our neighbours had been making the same sacrifices as we were or, at least, if they had had supported us more, if the Germans had not been so soft in the war and so unreliable in their promises, if the Polish had not stopped us [...], then the Turks, these cruel enemies of civilization, whose cruelty have been delaying the enlightenment and the freedom of the world for centuries, would have been

thrown away to their Asian deserts, and Oriental Europe would have had a different fate' (Bălcescu, 2008: 32, our translation).

In 1859, Moldavia and Wallachia became unified under a single ruler, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, forming The Romanian Principalities. A series of reforms follow soon; a national system of education was conceived, the Latin alphabet replaced the Cyrillic one (1862), the estate of the Church was nationalized and given to people. The Orient and the Occident were still disputing their pre-eminence; centuries of being under the Ottoman influence shaped the mind of people in a way that was incompatible with the ideas of the French Revolution. On the streets of Bucharest and Iași, the two capitals of the young state, one could easily catch a glimpse of this puzzling reality by paying attention to the way people used to dress. If, by any chance, one of us were to get teleported in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania, maybe the most striking image would be that of an amount of Romanians wearing the old Oriental clothes while the other amount dressed according to the fashion of Paris and Wien. The dressing code is primarily a significant, relevant metaphor for these two cultural options which the Romanians faced. The most important Romanian play writer, I.L. Caragiale, in his comedy *A Lost Letter* (1883), creates a character (Nae Cațavencu, a demagogic politician) who summarizes, in a comic way, the confusing attitude towards Europe: 'I do not wish to know, my dear honourable man, about your Europe, I want to know about my Romania and only about my Romania. The progress, my dear honourable man, the progress! In vain do you come with lies and antipatriotic inventions, with Europe, to deceit the public opinion [...] Europe should mind its own business. Are we interfering with its business? No, we are not!... Consequently, Europe does not have the right to interfere with ours...' (Caragiale. 2007: 42, our translation).

With the first king of Romanians, Carol I, who comes to power in 1866, the option for Europe, for West, seems to be clear, strong and irreversible. Ruling for 48 years, the King gave his country a Constitution, inspired by the Belgian Constitution, created democratic institutions, while the political parties played a certain role in governing the country. But the state itself, young and vulnerable, remained corrupt and venal. Authoritarian, the King, coming from the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen family, has the merit to have accomplished a major achievement and that achievement was that of turning the country face to the West, and of removing it out of the Ottoman sphere of influence. But, we are now at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the European paradigm became even more complicated and when the West itself could not be defined anymore as just the land of Enlightenment and culture. The time when the Ottomans were the only alterity is long gone. In 1918, Transylvania became part of Romania. In the field of culture, the old debate was soon to be returned to: the Orient vs. the Occident, the East vs. the West. This time, with the rise of Russia, the cardinal points which

catch the intellectual's attention are much more diverse. Two major cultural trends were being disputed on the Romanian stage of ideas in the interwar period: Modernism vs. Traditionalism. While traditionalists considered Western Europe as being the otherness, Modernists, on the contrary, saw in the West the Lighting House. Nichifor Crainic published, in 1929, an article entitled 'The meaning of Tradition'. He wrote the following: 'If the purpose of the Romanian people is to create a culture of its own, this also implies an orientation towards something. Those who seek an orientation towards the Occident, state a non-sense. The Orientation has in itself the word 'Orient', and means looking in the direction of the Orient. The religious altars are built facing the Orient, the religious icons are placed on the walls facing the Orient; the peasant, when making the sign of cross on the fields, turns to the Orient. An old saying says the light comes from the Orient. And, because we are geographically placed in the Orient and, through our Orthodox religion, we possess the truth of the Eastern light, our orientation cannot be elsewhere but towards the Orient, towards ourselves, towards what we are through the heritage we are proud of. We inherited an Eastern land, and we are the inheritors of our Christian forefathers – our fate is all contained within these geo-anthropological data. [...] Occidentalizing ourselves would mean denying our Oriental side; the European nihilism means the denial of our creative potential' (Crainic, 1929, 23, our translation). Unfortunately, this view, not at all singular, will be the root of Romanian nationalism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia.

On the other hand, Eugen Lovinescu, the promoter of Modernism, elaborated his well-known theory of synchronicity. For him, the Romanian culture should try to keep an eye open for the Occident, the place where the main philosophical, political and cultural ideas were spreading from country to country, shaping a strong cultural identity. In his monumental three volume work, *The History of the Modern Romanian Civilization*, published between 1924-1926, Lovinescu proved that the modernization of the Romanian culture was based on European ideas. While for traditionalists, the Greek Orthodox religion was the natural expression of the Romanian spirituality, a cardinal point which should guide the Romanian culture, Lovinescu had the remarkable intuition of seeing inside the Romanian society the clash between an Eastern religion and a western based culture. He also argued that the Slavonic language having been imposed as the liturgical language delayed the appearance of the first documents written in Romanian. Moreover, he equated Capitalism with the modernization of the Romanian state. Lovinescu also spoke about the spirit of the time (*zeitgeist*), a concept used, in various contexts, by Hegel or Herder. Each century, each specific historical moment has its own spirit, is defined by a set of values and norms which cross borders and contaminate cultures. For Lovinescu, this was of extreme importance for a culture, to be connected to the spirit of the time, to evolve and manifest itself while being aware of the existence of the spirit of the time. In the particular case of the Romanian culture, connecting to the spirit of the time means connecting to Occident. The main challenge his theory had to face was the accusation that, by accepting the

Occidental cultural influence, the Romanian culture would be doomed to remain a minor one, imitating and not producing original works. To this accusation, Lovinescu replied with the same theory of synchronicity; to him, any process of synchronizing a culture with certain cultural models would eventually lead to integration and finally, originality. As a consequence of his ideas, a new generation of Romanian writers were born. Writers such as Camil Petrescu, Hortensia-Papadat Bengescu, Anton Holban, Ion Barbu, reading their texts in Lovinescu's literary circle held in his own house, being guided and influenced by his aesthetic views and theories, produced a type literature partly synchronized with the new aesthetic ideas which animated the Occidental literatures.

Unfortunately, those were not auspicious times for ideas and debates. Nationalism, fascism, anti-Semitism and Communism arose; ideas were silenced by the noise of arms. After the Second World War, Europe was split, Romania falling under the influence of USSR. On February, 1945, in Ialta, Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill divided Europe into two spheres of influence. Eastern Europe was supposed to follow the Communist ideology while the West went on the Capitalist path with more than financial help from the USA. For more than four decades, the Iron Curtain (the term was used with its nowadays meaning by Churchill) fell over Europe, blocking any kind of cultural exchange between The Occident and Romania. Poverty, provincialism, propaganda, political cleansing were mutilating the Romanian society. Although having a theoretical international agenda, Communism imposed an aggressive nationalism under Nicolae Ceaușescu, the last Romanian Communist president. Not only was synchronicity as envisioned by Lovinescu not possible anymore, but also Capitalism and the Occident, the entire world outside the Iron Curtain became, in the official propaganda, a demon, an euphemism for exploitation. In the field of culture, the Romanian Communist Party encouraged writers to reflect on their works the great achievements of Communism, idealizing the status of the workers. Those who would fit in the new ideology were promoted and published, the others were constantly marginalized and banned. Everything was rigorously controlled by the Party-State that is the Party which was the State; the censorship and propaganda were functioning precisely like in Orwell's novel *1984*. For Romanians, Orwell's novel was not a Utopia or fiction, but the reality itself. During Communism, the Romanian collective mentality perceived Europe as a forbidden land. The borders, so strictly monitored, prevented the Romanians from travelling abroad, giving them the feeling that they were, in fact, outside Europe.

Immediately after the Bolshevik coup d'état, in 1917, a new political ideology was to be created. According to it, art was supposed to reflect the struggle and the triumphs of two social classes: workers (proletarians) and peasants. In Romanian literature, this trend artificially imposed by the Communist Party was later on



called 'proletcultism' (effective between 1945 and 1960). The word derives from two Russian words 'proletarnaia kultura' (the culture of the proletariat). For the new ideology, the artist was supposed to come down from his ivory tower, to go to factories, to speak with the workers and to reflect the contribution of the latter to the creation of the Communist State. Although several remarkable novels were written and published, the general view one has of the culture under Communism is that of a culture ideologically oriented. The crisis of the Communist system, more than obvious in the late seventies, contributed to the idealization of Western Europe. The more propaganda would say Capitalism was the absolute evil, the more powerful was the fascination towards it. Europe ended up by being seen in opposition to the Communist world. More than relevant is the fact that by saying the word 'Europe' in Romania, everyone understood exclusively 'Western Europe'.

With the fall of Communism, the full proportions of the disaster appeared in front of our eyes. Everything seemed to be collapsing; one by one, the old illusions so carefully and nicely presented by Communist propaganda were falling apart. For more than forty years, Western Europe was moving in a different direction. The art of dissimulating, a common practice for the Romanians, where everyone had to live in a schizophrenic universe, with bright official political speeches and dark realities, was easily transferred to the field of culture. An entire mythology so aggressively promoted by Romanian Communism became effective. Europe, for so long a forbidden place, was poorly understood in its values and ideas. The tolerance for sexual, religious or ethnic minorities, freedom of speech or the commitment against death penalty were ideas built during centuries in Western Europe. They grew up gradually and were internally assimilated while in Romania, there was never a real debate on any of them in the public space. Before joining E.U, in 2007, being forced to adjust the legislative system in such a way as to become compatible with the E.U standards, Romanians did not have the time to fully understand and commit to any of the values which define E.U. today. Whenever tough decisions had to be made, Romanian politicians would blame E.U for trying to impose them on Romania. Although Euroscepticism was initially marginal, after Romania's joining E.U, the faith in Europe dramatically decreased. After so many dreams, after so many unreasonable expectations, the tendency was nothing but normal. The desire to be part of E.U was exclusively based on the idea of being part of a richer world. Often, Europe was seen as an aggressor to the Romanian national specificity. On April 2013, a pole on Romanian Euroscepticism revealed the following data: 58% of the respondents considered their life had been changed for worse after joining E.U. 53% of them did not know anything about the European institutions and their role.

On the other hand, after empathizing with the Romanian revolution (December, 1989), several waves of Romanian emigrants severely reduced the sympathy the Occident had for this Eastern country so highly regarded for its struggle to get rid of Communism and embrace democracy. While separated by the Iron Curtain,

East and West, Occident and Orient, were idealizing each other. When, finally Romanians were not only a geographical, abstract reality, but a real presence on the streets of Madrid, London, Paris or Rome, it was impossible to ignore anymore a simple fact; for more than four centuries, East and West were speaking different languages, were raised to believe in different values. The tolerant Western Europe, facing an economic crisis and meeting easterners whose minds had been shaped by decades of Communism, rediscovered an early 20<sup>th</sup> century discourse, nationalistic and hatred-centred. All the illusions, all the expectations regarding a unifying Europe seem to fade away today.

Now, after having briefly covered some centuries of Romanian history and culture, centuries where the idea of Europe changed under ideological pressure, there come, perhaps, the time to try to give a possible answer to the question I raised at the beginning of my study. When exactly in history, did Romanian culture drift apart from the West, ending up being embedded in a different cultural paradigm? I suggest we focus on two crucial moments. The first one takes place in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century and is referred to as The Age of Discovery. Westerners, pushed forward by economic necessities, were discovering and colonizing exotic spaces. For them, this was the alterity, the otherness. From the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the mind of the Westerner was shaped around two concepts which have remained unknown for the Easterner: colonialism and post-colonialism. While these two topics are merely subjects of academic interest in the East, they had become important parts of the everyday life in the West. For Romanians, the 15<sup>th</sup> century alterity was the Ottoman Empire. While the West was arguably imposing its own values on faraway territories, the East was preoccupied with accommodating itself to the values and desires of the Ottoman Empire. For centuries after, the East and the West were playing these two different games. In spite of the fact that the ideas of the French revolution penetrated the cultural Romanian space in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the seeds were falling on a completely different ground. An Oriental one.

Secondly, for the Romanian collective mentality, the date of 30<sup>th</sup> of December 1947 was a crucial one. It came precisely when the gap between the Orient and the Occident was slowly closing. The Romanian king was deposed by Communists. What initially seemed to be but a mere sinister joke that is the Romanian Communist Party having only few members at that moment, became a reality which was to shape the Romanian cultural space for almost half a Century. The gap was dramatically widening. It is of extreme importance to state that in the whole Romanian history, the period between 1990 till present is the longest time of uninterrupted democracy. And, as we all know, democratic mechanisms need time to impose themselves, nations need time to assimilate them, and people need to continually exercise democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of vote, equality of opportunity a.s.o in order to profoundly understand how they function.

At the end of my paper, allow me to indulge in a speculative attempt to picture the future of the Romanian's relations to Europe. It is merely an exercise of imagination, plus an important dosage of wishful thinking. The key to closing the gaps between West and Romania might be... time. More than two and a half millennia ago, the Chinese general, Sun Tzu, in his well-known *Art of War*, said: 'If you wait by the river long enough, the bodies of your enemies will float by'. Provincialism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, xenophobia can be, sooner or later, alien concepts for the new generations travelling from country to country, meeting people having different ethnic origins, sexual or religious options. The sense of belonging, for so long defined in a violent opposition to the Other will, perhaps, step aside from the path of violence. The body of the enemy, which is the ignorance and the exacerbation of several forms of cultural autism, will float by the river if we wait long enough and, while waiting, we find ways of allowing young generations to travel and find the Other, speak to him about things we share. The Bogeyman, portrayed as a dark and devilish monster, might be, when met directly, just a human being who perhaps thinks differently, behaves differently, speaks differently but has the same desire of stating his difference in a calm voice, using arguments and ideas... I am the first to admit there are not too many signs to justify such a bright view today. But, no one can reasonably predict the way our world will be in, let us say, 2090. The grownups who will populate the Earth in 2090 are not even born, and the beauty of it is that, under the circumstances, everything is possible.

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