Article

ethnicities

More than voters: Parliamentary debates about emigrants in a new democracy

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Abstract
There is much research about how migrants engage with politics in their home countries and about how state institutions facilitate this involvement. Yet, we know little about how members of Parliament refer to, and debate, issues related to communities of emigrants. The ways in which legislators give voice to and represent the de-territorialized demos has broad implications for the functioning of contemporary democracies. This article analyzes the ways in which the Romanian parliamentarians refer to emigrants. We focus on the parliamentary speeches from the plenary sessions in the Chamber of Deputies in the two most recent terms in office (2012–2016 and 2016–2020). The study includes 239 parliamentary speeches and uses thematic analysis. Our results identify an ambivalent attitude toward emigrants that transcends political divides. The Romanian legislators express concerns related to the representation of emigrants and their needs and see them as a valuable pool of economic and electoral support.

Keywords
Emigrants, speeches, members of Parliament, discrimination, resources, Romania

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Introduction

The significant mobility of individuals in contemporary times leads to situations in which various segments of nationals live abroad (International Organization for Migration, 2020). Earlier research identifies the alteration of the Westphalian articulation between state territory, authority and people (Caramani and Grotz, 2015; Turcu and Urbatsch, 2015). The emigrants who live temporarily or permanently outside a country's territory are subjects of representation in their home country. In a context of diffused extension of political rights beyond a country's borders, the political mobilization of external citizens has received increased scholarly attention (Finn, 2020; Lafleur, 2015). Earlier studies focus on the implications in terms of home countries' party politics and explore how and why political parties started to organize and mobilize their support abroad (Kernalegenn and Van Haute, 2020; Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei, 2019b; Paarlberg, 2017; Turcu and Urbatsch, 2020).

All this body of research refers to the ways in which overseas communities involve in their countries of origin. There is extensive documentation about the range of rights, institutions, and policies developed to deal with what these communities collectively care about and incorporate them in the countries of origin's dynamics. However, we know less about how the needs and concerns of overseas communities find a place in the political discourse in their countries of origin beyond—and between—electoral campaigns. This article seeks to address this gap in the literature and explains how the Romanian members of Parliament (MPs) refer to the communities of Romanian emigrants. Our analysis focuses on the themes of their speeches and the ways in which they justify their positions. The research question that drives our study is How do parliamentarians refer to the communities of emigrants? We focus on the parliamentary speeches from the plenary sessions in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower House of the Romanian Parliament, in the two most recent terms in office (2012–2016 and 2016–2020). The study includes 239 speeches and uses deductive thematic analysis to identify those patterns of meaning that emerge as being important. We choose Romania for several reasons: its large share of emigrant population, diaspora is represented in the Romanian parliament, and relevance of the community of emigrants in Romanian politics.

Our analysis contributes to the literature in two ways. First, we engage with the debate on democratic representation regarding the instances in which elected representatives substantiate the connection with citizens beyond the static moment of elections (Proksch and Slapin, 2015) and beyond the sphere of state authority (Laguerre, 2015). Parliamentarians make heard overseas citizens' voices, opinions, and grievances in the decision-making processes. The parliamentary debates matter because they shape the public agenda and can form a basis for future policies. Second, we complement the existing research that indicates how the meanings associated with these communities are dependent on the specific institutional confines, past political struggles and the domestic game of politics (Laguerre, 2015; Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei, 2019a; Pedroza, 2019; Waterbury, 2014). Our analysis provides a fine-grained account of parliamentary discourse toward communities of emigrants and reveals that issues transcend political divisions.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The first section reviews the literature about politicians' discourse toward emigrants and identifies several key themes on which they focus. Next, we describe the research design with emphasis on the case selection, method for analysis and sources of data. The third section presents an overview of Romanian political parties and of emigrants' importance for domestic politics. The fourth section includes the empirical analysis of the themes identified in parliamentary speeches. The discussion and conclusion link the main results to the theory on politicians' attitudes toward emigrants and discusses the main implications for the broader field of study.

Three theoretical approaches

The literature on migration studies shows that restrictions based on residence have been increasingly contested, and many countries enfranchised their non-citizen residents (Pedroza, 2019). The interactions between nationals living abroad and their countries of origin are reflected in different levels of participation, incorporation, and representation (Ciornei and Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020; Pedroza, 2019; Turcu and Urbatsch, 2020). In the last two decades, the countries of origin started being active toward their communities abroad (Délano Alonso and Mylonas, 2019). There are three theoretical perspectives that explain how countries of origin engage with their communities abroad. They identify variations or convergence in their practices and why they mobilize in favor of claims (Gamlen, 2014). These approaches are *utilitarian*, *identity-based*, and *liberal-universal*.

The utilitarian, value-rational, approach entails that the national political elites have a wide space for maneuver in the application of enfranchisement and support policies. These elites provide different justifications for their positions with regard to the non-residents, filtered by the dynamics of national politics, the foreign policy agenda, or by the structure of opportunity at domestic level such as civil society leverage, the discursive opportunity structure created by the media (Gamlen, 2014; Ireland, 2018; Palop-García and Pedroza, 2019; Waterbury, 2018). The national elites' strategies can be grouped into multiple engagement policies: "tapping," "embracing," and "governing" explanations (Gamlen, 2014). This does not mean that the elites invest in single-tier, homogenous policies, programs and institutions. Instead, there are different, overlapping scenarios, echoing different visions among and within national parties, as well as divergent evolutions across time (Koinova and Tsourapas, 2018; Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei, 2019a; Pedroza, 2019; Turcu and Urbatsch, 2015).

A utilitarian justification assumes that national elites are strategic utility-maximizers aiming to secure their own power and welfare in the national arena. In the management of their political agenda regarding the communities abroad, the national elites are influenced by pragmatic calculations. Through remittances and financial investments, the communities abroad are seen as agents that support the economic development and guarantee stability in economically stressed periods (Eckstein and Najam, 2013; Gamlen, 2014). The countries of origin are primarily motivated by "tapping" resources that are economic, political, epistemic, and military (Greenhill, 2010). The evidence shows that national

elites may differentiate their agendas by harnessing certain communities more than others on the basis of the estimations of the specific return they have and the priorities of the moment (Ireland, 2018; Lafleur, 2013; Tsourapas, 2015).

A second group of arguments focuses on identity-based explanations (Gamlen, 2014; Koinova, 2018; Waterbury, 2010). The national elites connect the need to secure the incorporation of the communities abroad as part of a symbolic we-ness (Brubaker, 2005). The emphasis on political, cultural, linguistic, and/or religious actions is justified by the need to support spiritual, national, and cultural preservation (Bauböck and Faist, 2010) and to reinforce the constitutive identity of the state (Koinova, 2018; Tsourapas, 2015; Waterbury, 2010). This engagement is translated into positive actions such as support for educational programs, organization of commemorative events and coordinated actions in supranational institutions. It is also reflected in forms of voicing discontent/protesting against discriminatory practices in national and international fora (Tsourapas, 2015; Waterbury, 2018).

The liberal-universal approach includes those instances in which the policy-makers justify the incorporation of non-resident nationals in their home country politics as a proof of commitment to democracy and international norms (Gamlen, 2014; Turcu and Urbatsch, 2015). The incorporation of the communities abroad is presented as a cultural openness to liberal ideas and values, to universal rights that are claimable by all the members of the demos, regardless of their residence. In this field, these communities are represented as "agents of democratic diffusion" (Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow, 2010: 120) able to enhance the quality of democracy in their countries of origin (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow, 2010). The repertoire of argumentation refers to general moral principles, among which references to equal rights and non-discrimination of the nationals in their host countries (Lafleur, 2013; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003).

A research gap

This literature has surprisingly little to say about the role of elected representatives in shaping the relationship between countries of origin and their communities abroad. The approaches presented earlier remain strictly connected to the outputs of specially designed arrangements. Although the parliamentary arena is regularly present in this literature, it has been prevalently treated as a background variable connected to migrant voting rights and party politics.

This article follows a different route. In line with the literature in legislative studies, we consider that parliamentary speeches allow parliamentarians to present their interpretation of specific issues to different external audiences (Laver et al., 2003). Although these speeches are, in essence, monologues, they have an implicit dialogical character as parliamentarians refer to what their colleagues have previously argued (Bayley, 2004: 25). As such, these speeches are likely to allow the identification of reasoning processes, themes and patterns of argumentation within a public narrative. Moreover, echoing the mechanisms of throughput legitimacy (Schmidt, 2013), the political incorporation of these communities abroad cannot be fully assessed by looking at the participatory process

(including demand and supply-sides), the output (rights and programs), and potential interactions among them.

The "government with the people" can be ascribed to not only procedural elements such as fairness, transparency, openness, and efficiency (Schmidt, 2013) but also to symbolic aspects such as how and on what bases elected representatives justify and define their involvement with regard to communities beyond state borders. We refer to the so-called "justification frames" (Statham and Trenz, 2013) and the role that political elites play in shaping how specific stances are publicly understood. Parliamentary debates are particularly important because they allow elected representatives to communicate (to their parties and members and/or to the electorate) a legitimating basis for voicing the concerns and taking up positions (Proksch and Slapin, 2015).

Research design

The Romanian case is appropriate for this analysis due to its high number of emigrants, their representation in the Romanian parliament and relevance of the community of emigrants in Romanian politics. Romania has one of the largest migrant populations in Europe, both in estimated raw numbers of migrants and as a percentage of estimated migrants relative to the total population in the home country (Dospinescu and Russo, 2018; International Organization for Migration, 2020); for the representation of emigrants and their relevance in politics, see the following section.

The unit of analysis is the speech delivered in the plenary session of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies, which is the lower House of the Romanian Parliament with intensive legislative activity. There were 412 Deputies elected in 2012 and 329 elected in 2016 (see the following section about the different electoral systems). We focus on the 2012–2016 and 2016–2020 legislative terms; the latter term in office is incomplete: our data collection stops in March 2020 while it officially ends in November 2020. These cover the developments after the financial crisis and several important events in which the diaspora participated actively: elections (legislative, presidential, and European) and anti-government protests. Our analysis includes all the parliamentary speeches about emigrants—a total number of 239 split between the two terms in office as follows: 135 for 2012–2016 and 104 for 2016–2020. The speeches are publicly available on the website of the Chamber of Deputies. Their length ranges from 77 to 1548 words (average length 530 words) for the first term and from 204 to 1505 word (average length 517 words) for the second term.

The distribution of speeches appears to be quite balanced across the 8 years, without bias around elections. In the 2012–2016 term, more than 85% of the speeches are almost equally distributed across 2013–2015. In the 2016–2020 term, more than 90% of the speeches are distributed almost equally across 2017–2019. Partisanship does not have a strong impact on the number of speeches. As illustrated in Appendix 1, the speakers come from various parties. In both terms in office, the MPs belonging to government parties delivered roughly 30% of the speeches included in the analysis. Those parliamentarians who represent the diaspora speak, on average, more than other parliamentarians, but they are only a small share of the total number of speeches.

To identify the ways in which the Romanian parliamentarians refer to the Romanian emigrants in their speeches, we use a deductive thematic analysis that relies on pre-established themes, derived from the literature (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is appropriate for this study because it allows for the identification of common themes that match the approaches outlined in the theoretical section: liberal-universalist, utilitarian, and identity-based. This type of analysis provides several ways to interpret meaning from the dataset of speeches. We read all the speeches and sought to assign them to these themes. In the process of reading, we came up with several fine-grained sub-themes that match the themes and make the interpretation of results much more straightforward and substantial. Our procedures included three phases as follows. In phase one, we (i.e., the authors) independently read all relevant speeches and grouped the speeches according to the three themes. In phase two, we ran an inter-coder reliability test in which we compared and contrasted the speeches associated to these themes. There was a very high degree of convergence between the coders. In phase three, we created a final list of sub-themes and speeches associated to the three themes; these sub-themes and speeches are used in the analysis (Table 1).

Romanian political parties and emigrants: An overview

Our analysis covers two legislative terms for which elections were organized under different systems. The 2012 elections used a mixed-member proportional representation in which voters cast a vote in their district, which are then transformed into seats either by

Table 1. An overview of the themes and sub-themes approached in the parliamentary speeches.

	Sub-themes	2012–2016	2016–2020
Liberal-universal	Discrimination	Discrimination Human rights violation Need for protection Victims of Euroscepticism	Persecution Abuses Rights are threatened
	Demands to address problems	Better consular services Modern diplomatic facilities Better education Solutions for irregular workers Stronger security Help for integration	Lower consular fees More diplomatic missions Reform of diplomatic services
Utilitarian	Electoral resources	Alternative voting method Messages to gain electoral support	Political representation Alternative voting methods Competition for support
	Helping the home country	Remittances	
Identity-based	Culture abroad Image promotion	Promote and represent Romania (in general)	Specific promotion and representation: image, culture

direct allocation to the candidate or through redistribution (Gherghina and Jiglau, 2012). The 2016 elections used a closed-list proportional representation with redistribution of votes at national level. Both elections had a threshold for representation, which can be met in two ways. First, parties must get 5% of the total of valid votes at national level, while the electoral alliances and coalitions must get between 8% and 10% of the votes (Law 35/2008, 2021). There was an alternative threshold in place: in 2012, parties could get parliamentary representation if they won at least three Senate and six Deputy districts (Gherghina and Jiglau, 2012); in 2016, the alternative threshold was 20% out of the valid votes in at least four constituencies for all political competitors (Law 208/ 2015, 2021).

We begin with a brief discussion of the eight parties the analyzed parliamentarians come from. There are four established parties with a relatively long presence in parliament. The Social Democratic Party (PSD) is the largest party in post-communist Romania and a successor of the communists. It has won all but one popular vote in the parliamentary elections and has been part of a large number of coalition governments. Its electoral appeal has been quite stable between 2000 and 2012, gaining approximately one third of the vote share (Gherghina, 2014). The party had a significant increase in the 2016 elections, to 46%. The National Liberal Party (PNL) is the second-largest party in the country with a continuous presence in Parliament since 1996 and an average share of votes around 20% since 2004. The party has had a high intra-party dynamic with many splits and mergers over time. The most recent merger was in 2014 with the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL), which consolidated their position as the second important party in the country. PNL was part of several coalition governments with many parties across the political spectrum, including one with the PSD between 2012 and 2014. In 2012, the party ran in an electoral alliance with PSD when they won together approximately 58% of the votes (King and Marian, 2014).

Democratic Liberal Party has the same origin as the PSD and the two parties split in 1992. It merged with an important splinter from PNL in 2007 and led the government between 2008 and 2012. It participated in several coalition governments with various political actors, including PSD and PNL, and merged with the latter in 2014. The party had a continuous presence in Parliament since 1992 but a relatively limited appeal until 2004. After governing between 2008 and 2012, the party went on a downward slope that resulted in a merger with the PNL in 2014. The Conservative Party (PC) was a small political party that gained parliamentary representation between 2004 and 2012 due to electoral alliances with PSD. It was included in several coalition governments next to PSD and PNL but continued to have a very limited electoral appeal. The party leader owned several media outlets, which made him a desirable partner for the bigger parties. In 2015, PC disappeared after joining forces with another party to form a new party.

Turning now to the four episodic and newly formed parties. The National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR) was formed as an intra-parliamentary party in 2010 by defectors from PSD and PNL rallied around the country president (who had strong ties to PDL). UNPR joined the electoral alliance between PSD, PNL, and PC in 2012 and got into parliament, also being part of government coalitions until 2016. It merged with People's Movement Party (PMP)

in 2016 and did not run in those elections. However, in 2018, the party recalled the merger and revived its existence. The People's Party Dan Diaconescu (PP-DD) was formed in 2011 and came third in the 2012 legislative elections. The party was formed around the personality of its leader Dan Diaconescu, who was a journalist with high visibility and strong appetite for sensationalism. He was arrested in 2010 for blackmailing and entered politics to fight back against the system (Gherghina and Miscoiu, 2014). The party disappeared in 2015 after merging with UNPR and after many of its parliamentarians left the party.

People's Movement Party emerged from the People's Movement Foundation, formed in March 2013 as a result of an intra-party conflict in PDL. Two factions emerged within the PDL: one supporting the country president Traian Basescu and one supporting the party leader Vasile Blaga. Basescu's supporters left the party after Blaga secured a new term in office and formed the PMP as an intra-parliamentary party in January 2014. In October 2015, Basescu joined the party after finishing his term as head of state and was elected as party leader the same month. In the 2016 national legislative elections, it was the fourth placed party. People's Movement Party was constantly in opposition but supported the PNL minority government between 2019 and 2020. Save Romania Union (USR) was formed in 2016 to run in the legislative elections of the same year. It ran an anti-corruption campaign and came third with almost 9% of the votes (Dragoman, 2020). The party pulls its electoral support mainly from the large cities with established universities and among the diaspora. The party was in opposition until 2020.

Although enfranchised since the early 1990s, the Romanian emigrants have had an increasing impact since the 2008 parliamentary elections when the diaspora could elect four deputies and two senators in the legislative elections. In spite of these special seats, the emigrants are under-represented since their number is considerably higher than what was allocated. In spite of this shortcoming, the emigrants mobilized and their political participation had several political consequences for Romania. In the 2009 presidential elections, the incumbent president benefited from extensive support in the diaspora that secured him a new term in office. In 2014, the incidents with diaspora voting led to extensive mobilization and changed the outcome of elections between the first and second round (Gherghina, 2015). In the 2016 legislative elections, much electoral support for the newly formed party USR came from emigrants. Also, the emigrants triggered, on several occasions in the last decade, anti-government protests in Romania and abroad, which had an apogee in the August 2018 anti-government protests.

All these indicate that Romanian emigrants are a relevant target group for most political parties. Under these circumstances, there are two types of messages in the public space. On the one hand, the political parties that do not enjoy electoral support from emigrants occasionally question the legitimacy of external voting. In particular, the PSD voiced its discontent that those who do not live in the country have a say in how it is ruled and some officials suggested in the media the idea of stripping the Romanian emigrants of their right to vote. On the other hand, debates focused on how to facilitate the right to vote abroad. These emerged after the 2014 incidents, when many Romanian emigrants could not vote in the presidential elections due to the poor organization of voting in the diaspora. The debates referred to issues such as the introduction of postal

voting in the parliamentary elections of 2016 or to increase the parliamentary seats for the diaspora given the large number of Romanians living abroad (Vintila and Soare, 2018).

The MPs' speeches about emigrants

The three main themes covered by the parliamentary speeches are presented in Table 1 in the order of their frequency and importance to the Romanian legislators. These are accompanied by the sub-themes identified when reading the content of speeches. There is a quantitative dominance of the liberal-universal approach that covers 91 speeches, which is 38% of the total number of speeches covered by our analysis. This includes sub-themes such as the discrimination faced by Romanian emigrants, their demands and the problems encountered in their country of residence. The utilitarian theme that sees the Romanian diaspora as a "stake" is reflected in 58 speeches, 24% of the total. The identity-based approach is used the least in the parliamentary speeches and covers the culture abroad and emigrants as promoters of country's image (10 speeches, 4% of the total).

The remainder of parliamentary speeches—roughly one quarter—refer to the diaspora indirectly, mainly as a starting or background topic. They were oriented toward domestic issues such as the strategies of the Romanian state to bring back emigrants, the negative effects of the Romanians departures to the diaspora, or the reasons to migrate. Speeches could not be clustered in themes because their content was either not substantive or not touching upon any of the themes.

The liberal-universal speeches

The liberal-universal theme can be divided into two sub-themes: discrimination and policy demand to address problems. To begin with discrimination, most parliamentary speeches revolve around Eurosceptic attitudes, xenophobia, the existence of stereotypes in the residence countries and the abuses carried out by foreign employers against Romanians. Some speeches explain that Romanian labor emigrants are the victims of Euroscepticism. This appears to be rooted in a cliche discourse of populist politicians in Western Europe, according to which the EU accession to the East coincides with an exodus of emigrants. The existence of such a belief is acknowledged by speeches of the Romanian parliamentarians: "since Romanian's accession to the EU there were critical voices regarding an invasion of Romanians on the labor market in the member countries of the Union" (Birchall, 2013a). Such beliefs have become an important tool for electoral mobilization in countries of residence. The Eurosceptic attitudes are primed in messages during election campaigns, something that is again acknowledged "Euroscepticism gains more and more followers and we are already accustomed to having the issue of our citizens raised every time various electoral campaigns take place in their countries of residence" (Birchall, 2013b).

These attitudes are perpetuated by the media: "it is not enough that Romanians do their best to keep their promises to employers, they continue to be attacked by the West European media for the simple fact that they are seen as second-class citizens" (Mihai,

2013b). Along these lines, many parliamentarians expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the discrimination of the Romanian migrants in the UK promoted via different newspapers (e.g., *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*) or TV channels (e.g., Channel 4). They labelled these attitudes as anti-democratic and deeply discriminatory and argued that the media focused solely on the Roma population, beggars, or other disadvantaged categories and neglected most of the Romanian labor emigrants, who were well-integrated in British society (Alexe, 2015; Birchall, 2013; Ciuhodaru, 2014; Diniţă, 2015; Guran, 2015; Mihai, 2014a; Nica, 2015; Smarandache, 2013; 2014; Tănase, 2014; Tîlvăr, 2013a; 2013b).

Second, some speeches were formulated around the idea of abuses from employers in the country of residence. These are meant to raise awareness about the situation of workers: "Romanian citizens, agricultural workers in Puglia, were treated inhumanely by their employers being paid with ridiculous amounts of 150-200 euros per month and being forced to work even 16 hours a day, without a contract" (Coliu, 2017). Several MPs outlined that the Romanian labor women are often not paid by the employers and sometimes are sexually abused by them (Bichineţ, 2017; Coliu, 2017; Dehelean, 2017). They use metaphors to produce a dramatic perspective and to generate compassion: "The Hell in Sicily" (Mihai, 2015a) or "forced labor camps as those for extermination" (Bichineţ, 2017).

Moving on to the demands for the Romanian diaspora, the speeches addressed directly the necessity to improve consular services. These were often slow in addressing the problems of Romanian emigrants in the past. For instance, the Romanians in the US spent a lot of time and money when they use the Romanian consular services (e.g., passports, rights of residence) because there are too few Romanian diplomatic missions there and the distances between them are significant. This gave rise to explicit claims from some MPs:

> the Romanian citizens who have settled in the US face countless of problems and difficulties in their interactions with the Romanian authorities there. Specifically: the General Consulate of Romania in Chicago has under its jurisdiction 11 states, a huge territory […] Obviously, one of the problems faced by the Romanian citizens from there concern the long distances they have to travel to reach the consulate. As if consuming these resources of time and money is not enough, the parking fee at the consulate is extremely high, around 25 dollars. (Lubanovici, 2015)

Apart from requests related to the number of diplomatic missions, parliamentarians emphasized that the Romanians abroad asked for the modernization/reorganization of the diplomatic missions' buildings (e.g., Cairo and Tel Aviv) as well as for lower consular fees (Lubanovici, 2015; Pocora, 2013; Mihai, 2014b; 2014c, 2015, 2016b; Raeţchi, 2013). Moreover, the problem of relocating Romanian diplomatic buildings was addressed by some parliamentarians:

> the Romanian community in Toronto asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lazăr Comănescu, through a petiton, to support the relocation of the Romanian Consulate in

Toronto [...] Basically, Romanians in Ontario, Canada, are dissatisfied with the space where the Torono Consulate operates, in a location that does not meet the standards of decency. (Simedru, 2016)

The improvement of the educational system for diaspora, more involvement of the Romanian state in the integration of emigrants in their countries of residence, and the necessity for better solutions regarding the status of irregular emigrants were approached by several parliamentarians. They stated that "the Romanian educational system abroad is deficient in many ways […] we need to consider the development of the Romanian educational facilities abroad and equipping them with textbooks in Romanian" (Lubanovici, 2013b). Moreover, Romanians reported that it is quite difficult for them to integrate in the residence countries and:

pointed out the need for help from the Romanian state's institutions for a better integration in the new communities […] I am convinced that a greater involvement in addressing the problems of those who work abroad can reduce the gap between the Romanian communities and the citizens from the residence countries. (Dolineaschi, 2013)

Similarly, "it is an embarrassing situation for us as a state to have hundreds of thousands of Romanians working illegally abroad, and I am speaking only about Italy" (Mihai, 2016c). There were also cases in which the security of Romanians abroad was endangered without a prompt reaction of the Romanian authorities. The MPs raised this issue in their speeches:

With regret I found out that a Romanian citizen was kidnapped in Burkina Faso and the Romanian authorities found out about this case only after 45 days. This fact is inadmissible, especially because that citizen was hired to work with a perfectly legal contract for a Romanian citizen. (Marin, 2015)

Several parliamentarians acknowledged that "it is our moral duty, of all, beyond any political color to prove to Romanians around the world that they are not abandoned by Romanian politicians" (Coliu, 2017a) and "we have to protect the Romanian citizens abroad" (Birchall, 2013b). Such reactions come from both opposition parties (Coliu) and government parties (Birchall). Nevertheless, there is explicit criticism against the Romanian institutions for their lack of involvement. This comes from parliamentarians who belong to parties that were not in government throughout the analyzed time period. For example, one PMP parliamentarian refers to the absence of government action: "What are you doing to make Romanian slaves in Italy escape from what is happening? What do you do for Romanian women mocked in Spain? What do you do for Romanian workers exploited in Great Britain, Germany or France?" (Coliu, 2017b). Similarly, an independent legislator who got elected on the PP-DD lists demands action to stop the attacks of institutions in the countries of residence against the Romanian emigrants (Mihai, 2013b).

The utilitarian speeches

Most parliamentary speeches in this category reflect a strong competition between the two large Romanian parties that alternate in government or even governed together between 2012 and 2014 (e.g., PSD and PNL) for more support in the diaspora. These speeches focused mainly on the implementation of correspondence/electronic voting for the Romanians abroad. The vast majority of speeches come from the 2012–2016 term in office because the 2016 legislative elections were the first ones in which the Romanian citizens abroad could use postal voting. The national liberals picked on the high costs associated to voting in diaspora: money, time and queues at the voting stations (Turcan, 2018). In their arguments, they refer to negative experiences: "we cannot forget the bad experience of the last presidential election and the endless queues at the polling stations from the European cities" (Cozmaniciuc, 2015). Along the same lines and explicitly put:

> even though the National Liberal Party did not organize the last fall's scandalous presidential elections when thousands of Romanians abroad […] were unable to exercise a fundamental right, staying for hours in the rain and being unable to vote, we feel obliged to put in the debate of the Romanian Parliament the bill on voting by correspondence. (Donțu, 2015)

Many PNL parliamentarians argued that the adoption of postal or electronic voting for diaspora is one of the most important goals of the party. Voting is a fundamental feature of democratic regimes and these parliamentarians explicitly argued that they respected the rights of the Romanians everywhere (Bica, 2020; Nicoară, 2015; Nicolăescu, 2015; Paul, 2015; Raețchi, 2015; Turcan, 2015). They pointed out that the social democrats have opposed the alternative voting methods because "they are afraid that the voters they deceived with false electoral promises will sanction them in the voting booth. They are afraid that will lose their privileges, allowances and special pensions" (Bica, 2020).

The PSD engaged in this debate and replied that "the current opposition has embroidered the image that the social democrats do not care about the diaspora and also that the diaspora is predominantly right-wing and that automatically rejects anything [that] comes from us" (Găină, 2017). Some parliamentarians labelled the national liberals as being denigrators and stated that they approached this attitude for gaining more support from the diaspora during the elections (Iacoban, 2015; Iane, 2015). The social democrats did not let their guard down and outlined that "the vote for the Romanian diaspora was and remains a priority for the Social Democratic Party, that is why we assumed the presidency of the commission for this vote" (Iordache, 2015).

Furthermore, some PSD parliamentarians accused the PNL for trumping the legislative process that could adopt the law of postal voting (Iacoban, 2015) and:

> The national liberals have elaborated a shallow project just for pretending in front of the Romanian diaspora that they will keep their promises […] The truth is that the national liberals use a double-language when they stated that the necessary steps for the success of the project are taken. Their desire is not to regulate the postal voting but to use this subject in the next elections. (Iane, 2015)

The importance of the topic reached beyond the debate between the two parties. An USR MP explains that the use of "an optimized postal voting would give millions of Romanians abroad the opportunity to take part in the electoral process, without having to travel long distances and without having to stand endless queues" (N. Popescu, 2018).

Several speeches referred explicitly to remittances and acknowledged that "the main investor, the number one supporter and the most loyal partner of Romania is the Romanian diaspora. The Romanian communities abroad have never betrayed the national interests, helping and building from there, from far away" (Mihai, 2013a). In terms of economic and financial support, one MP calculated that "in the last 20 years, 53 billion dollars entered in the country from the Romanians who work abroad […] benefits that they bring to the motherland" (Lubanovici, 2015). Some parliamentarians spoke in the name of the Romanian diaspora representatives and highlighted the fact that "in all of these years, we sent to Romania almost 10 million euros a day, this amount being far above all foreign direct investments to our country […] 10 million euros are not little money" (Mihai, 2016a) or "we believe that we contribute annually with over one billion euros to the state's budget only from VAT and the other four billion euros we send in the country ensures abundant bank liquidities in Romania" (Mihai, 2015b).

Therefore, the economic and financial help from the Romanian labor emigrants is not denied by the Romanian parliamentarians who state that "in the last years the money sent from diaspora in Romanian has kept alive the state's financials […] each year roughly 6 billion euros arrives in the country […] which represents a net contribution to the Romanian economy" (Donțu, 2014) and that the labor emigrants "represent the biggest investor in Romania, taking into consideration that the amounts sent annually to the country far exceed the total foreign investments" (Chereches, 2014).

Identity-based discourses

The identity-based speeches refer to the Romanian diaspora as a possibility to maintain the identity, preserve culture and establish connections with those in the home country. The speeches covering this theme refer either to the patriotic behavior behind the remittances or to the promotion of the Romanian culture and values abroad. Some parliamentarians stated that "the image of Romania abroad is not built only through political levers, ambassadors or at the official state level, but also through every Romanian who works, lives and is an integrated part of the host societies" (Birchall, 2014); or that the Romanians "beyond borders represent us too, good or bad, they are our tentacles in the world […] they are not fugitives, traitors or cowards, they are our best allies" (Peia, 2013). It is also emphasized that the Romanians abroad promote the Romanian culture in their countries of residence and introduce the Romanian traditions to foreigners, including the cuisine (Peia, 2013).

Other parliamentarians emphasized similar campaigns of promoting Romania's image abroad using the National Tourism Authority or issued resolutions in this regard (Ispir, 2013; Lubanovici, 2013a). This could be done by strengthening the cooperation between the Romanian authorities and the Romanians abroad and their residence countries. The Romanian emigrants could play a considerable role in the promotion of these initiatives because they interact directly with the population of the residence states. The

parliamentary speeches acknowledge this situation explicitly. For example, one of the PNL legislators explains that they "are very important to Romania, not only because they are our blood brothers but also due to the fact that they are the promoters of the image of Romania abroad" (F. Alexe, 2015).

Discussion and conclusion

This article aimed to analyze how the Romanian parliamentarians refer to Romanian emigrants. The results indicate that the content of speeches covers three major themes, out of which liberal-universal is the most frequent. The MPs voice the needs and interests of Romanian citizens residing abroad. In general, the MPs refer to a growing interdependence between Romania and the countries of residence—their positions voice a moral obligation to defend Romanian citizens abroad. Their stances are conflict-neutral and address the issue in terms of European cooperation and liberal international norms, openly criticizing forms of discrimination as a trigger of Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant attitudes.

The Romanian MPs present themselves through speeches as responsive elites engaged in a dynamic relationship with those citizens abroad. The diaspora's demands and problems are included in a broader debate about the reform of services provided by the Romanian state institutions abroad. The speeches pitch this debate in a way that matches voters' inputs. This is reflected in the speeches about the content and implementation of electoral laws, or on the need to control/diminish the cost of external voting. In addition to this responsiveness, the Romanian MPs refer to the diaspora's needs and expected returns. Although the normative praising of the diaspora is regularly emphasized, the speeches are oriented toward economic benefits from the flows of emigrant remittances or toward more symbolic benefits such as the promotion of country's image and culture.

One important general observation refers to the complexity of the speeches. They include statements that cross-cut the themes from our analytical framework. For example, the voting rights for the diaspora and voting procedures are both liberal-universal and utilitarian. Another example is that some of the statements related to discrimination belong both to the liberal-universal values but also to identity issues. The speeches defending the Romanian emigrants against the attacks of media in the country of residence touch upon arguments related to identity issues. Beyond the parliamentary speeches and the goal of this analysis, the importance of identity for discrimination is visible in the public speech of Romanian emigrants. In particular, when the Romanians as a group are accused of something, there is an identity claim to differentiate between Romanian and Roma coming from Romania. A second, general observation is that the themes gain priority at different moments in time. The speeches are likely to reflect what the MPs perceive as salient issues relative to emigrants. At the same time, one theme cannot be present for a longer period of time due to the current context. For example, the utilitarian frame occurred more around the presidential elections where the votes in the diaspora count more. In legislative elections, the emigrants are under-represented and their high turnout cannot produce a major change in domestic politics.

The analysis has important theoretical and empirical implications that go beyond the single-case study analyzed here. We bring three main contributions to the literature. First,

our study supports the foundational idea of representative democracy according to which parliaments are forums where political actors react and respond to the citizens' preferences and needs between elections. While these debates are not followed by emigrants or the resident population, they reflect an extension of the contractual relation between representatives and those represented beyond territorial boundaries. This result can provide a more nuanced understanding of the contemporary meaning of a multilayered representation: territorial, post-territorial, extra-territorial.

Second, our findings show the need to analyze the MPs' approach toward communities of migrants beyond the celebration in national meetings and public discourses as national heroes, perpetrators of the national identity, and economic saviors (Gamlen, 2014). Parliaments are a particularly useful arena for claims-making (i.e., identifying problems, formulating proposals, and articulating political demands) that can interact with the interests of the emigrant communities. It informs the theory by illustrating how the Romanian MPs use the features of speeches—arguments, reasoning processes and implicit dialogue—to approach specific themes about the diaspora. The active representation of emigrants' policy preferences alters those conditions that usually feed the articulation between a nationally functional citizenship and a "good" democracy (Diamond and Morlino, 2004: 22). It does so by enabling a multiplication of interactions and by evoking representatives' loyalty and obligations toward both national and transnational communities.

Third, the study complements the existing literature on emigrants seen as electoral gains (Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei, 2019a) and reflects a much richer and nuanced picture. Our results reflect an ambivalent attitude toward emigrants in the parliamentary speeches. On the one hand, the Romanian legislators express concerns related to the representation of emigrants or engagement with their needs. On the other hand, they see the Romanian emigrants as a valuable pool of economic and electoral support. Parliamentarians elected in the special seats for diaspora (e.g., Codreanu, Coliu, Lubanovic, Mihai, and Popescu) are particularly active (see Appendix 1) probably because they hope that frequent mentioning of diaspora experiences, rights and needs might bring them more votes in the future. However, there are far more speakers: MPs across the political spectrum and from different constituencies actively voice their views on the diaspora, confirming the increased salience of the transnational communities for domestic politics (Østergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei, 2019a). Both government and opposition parties engage in debates about emigrants which do not appear to be ideologically motivated. In spite of their contrasting electoral performance in the diaspora—PSD with very limited support and PNL with many votes—both large parties in the country appear to court the diaspora votes. The same is valid for other parties with extensive support among emigrants such as PMP or USR and with others that have gained very little in the past, such as PC or UNPR.

Further research can take this endeavor one step further and explore the reasons for these approaches. It could analyze what determines MPs to refer to the issues of discrimination as opposed to those of electoral resources in the diaspora. An explanation of such causal relationships would provide necessary and welcome insights about the process of representation. It would shed light on why the legislators prioritize some themes over others. Such explanations may require different types of data, which can be

collected with semi-structured interviews with the parliamentarians. They can focus on what MPs consider to be important features of their term in office and on how they assess the importance of diaspora communities. Another avenue for further research would be the use of a theoretical framework derived from the research on parliamentary debates in countries of destination. This could be used either to replace or to complement (and compare with) the framework employed by this paper. Also, future research can compare the approach of MPs toward co-ethnics abroad and within the territory of the country. For example, it is important to understand how issues related to personal discrimination and national identity are treated by MPs across different communities. This can provide a more extensive understanding of the way in which the legislators see the process of representation.

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Appendix 1. The list of speeches used in the analysis (in chronological order).

MP Name	Party	Speech Date
Cristina-Ancuţa Pocora	PNL	19.03.2013
Ana Birchall (a)	PSD	26.03.2013
Aurelian Mihai (a)	PP-DD	09.04.2013
Ovidiu Alexandru Raeţchi	PC	09.04.2013
Raluca-Cristina Ispir	PNL	28.05.2013
Mircea Lubanovici (a)	PDL	11.06.2013
Mircea Lubanovici (b)	PDL	18.09.2013
Ninel Peia	PSD	18.09.2013
Aurelian Mihai (b)	Independent	08.10.2013
Ana Birchall (b)	PSD	15.10.2013
Miron Alexandru Smarandache	PSD	19.11.2013
Andrei Dolienaschi	PSD	28.11.2013
Angel Tîlvăr (a)	PSD	17.12.2013
Angel Tîlvar (b)	PSD	17.12.2013
Aurelian Mihai (a)	Independent	04.02.2014
Tudor Ciuhodaru	PP-DD	04.02.2014
Răzvan-Ionuţ Tănase	UNPR	04.02.2014
Miron Alexandru Smarandache	PSD	04.02.2014
Aurelian Mihai (b)	Independent	01.04.2014
Aurelian Mihai (c)	Independent	08.04.2014
Ana Birchall	PSD	17.09.2014
Mihai Aurel-Donţu	PNL	30.09.2014
Florina Cherecheş	PNL	25.11.2014
Aurelian Mihai (a)	PNL	17.02.2015
Ion Diniţă	PC	24.02.2015
Nicolae-Ciprian Nica	PSD	24.02.2015
Florin-Alexandru Alexe	PNL	24.02.2015
Ovidiu Alexandru Raeţchi	PNL	03.03.2015
Florin-Alexandru Alexe	PNL	10.03.2015
Virgil Guran	PNL	10.03.2015
Mihai Aurel-Donţu	PNL	24.03.2015
Raluca Turcan	PNL	24.03.2015
Gheorghe-Eugen Nicolăescu	PNL	21.04.2015
Costel Alexe	PNL	28.04.2015
Ovidiu-Cristian Iane	PSD	28.04.2015
Mircea Lubanovici	PNL	05.05.2015

Appendix 1. (continued)

MP Name	Party	Speech Date
Marian Cristinel Marin	Independent	28.05.2015
Romeo Florin Nicoară	PNL	28.05.2015
Aurelian Mihai (b)	PNL	26.06.2015
Aurelian Mihai	PNL	24.09.2015
Corneliu-Mugurel Cozmaniciuc	PNL	08.10.2015
Sorin-Avram Iacoban	PSD	08.10.2015
Florin Iordache	PSD	08.10.2015
Maria-Andreea Paul	PNL	15.10.2015
Aurelian Mihai (a)	PNL	11.02.2016
Aurelian Mihai (b)	PNL	10.03.2016
Dan Coriolan Simedru	PNL	31.03.2016
Aurelian Mihai (c)	UNPR	06.09.2016
Doru-Petrişor Coliu (a)	PMP	14.03.2017
Doru-Petrişor Coliu (b)	PMP	21.03.2017
Corneliu Bichineţ	PMP	21.03.2017
Silviu Dehelean	USR	21.03.2017
Mihăiţă Găină	PSD	25.04.2017
Nicolae-Daniel Popescu	USR	12.09.2018
Raluca Turcan	PNL	26.09.2018
Dănuţ Bica	PNL	10.03.2020

Note: PC = Conservative Party, PDL = Liberal Democratic Party, PMP = People's Movement Party, PNL = National Liberal Party, PP-DD = People's Party Dan Diaconescu, PSD = Social Democratic Party, UNPR = National Union for the Progress of Romania, USR = Save Romania Union.