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Structural Transformation of Romanian Journalism before the Adhesion to the European Union

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Abstract

This paper analysis the structural transformation of Romanian daily newspapers during the time of Romania's integration (2002-2006) in the European Union, namely the introduction of specific columns and thematic pages dedicated to the European Union and the adhesion process, which proved certain continuity after January 2007. We interrogated a selective corpus of six Romanian newspapers that introduced, at specific moments of the pre-adhesion process, thematic columns, pages or supplements dedicated to Europe, in order to identify the way Romanian journalism adapted and integrated the European perspective as emerging actuality. This study proposes a retrospective view that focuses on the most 'visible' element of the Romanian daily newspapers' formal structure in transformation – thematic columns on European issues, via the methodological framework of journalism mutations paradigm.

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1. Introduction

In Romania, no studies have been conducted so far with regard to the nature and transformation of daily newspapers during their more than 180 years of existence. The topical or developmental approaches which have been considered so far have taken into account the complexity of this object of study and require a more accurate

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examination of journalistic practices as temporal structures whose impact varies according to the specific social, political and cultural context of occurrence and interpretation. Recent studies conducted in parallel by renowned research teams in Quebec and France consider journalism as an instrumental discursive practice and recommend various methodologies for approaching the structural transformation of journalism.

This paper has as starting point the building blocks of journalistic practice as discursive action, according to the definition given by Jean Charron and Jean de Bonville (1997), namely: the journalistic text, the newspaper or journal text, the journalistic practice and the journalists, or otherwise stated, the instruments, the subjects, the actions and the actors - producers of discourse. We shall base our approach on the concept that journalistic practice is a temporal sequence which acts in a specific manner according to the set professional and social context, where the journalist is seen as the producer of a representation of current reality seen “first of all as an instrument to generate social reality” (Mouillaud & Tétu, 1989, p. 15) or as “the simultaneous presence of the journalist and the reader-spectator on a certain occasion” (Tétu, 1993, p. 719). In other words, “the media considers the news and the (journalistic) discourse for establishing social bonds, as well as symbolic, social and political liaisons” (Lamizet & Silem, 1997, p. 10).

The first approach to the transformation in contemporary journalism is presented by Jean Charron and Jean de Bonville in *Communication* journal in 1997; later on, the collective work coordinated by Colette Brin, Jean Charron and Jean de Bonville (2004) reiterates this “diachronic analysis of journalism” (Charron & de Bonville, 1997, p. 16), by explaining the theoretical and methodological background of the concepts involved: paradigm, paradigmatic crisis, change, mutation or metamorphosis, structure and context. Under the circumstances, the mutations of journalism account for a “paradigmatic crisis” generated by a profound social change which has been, in its turn, triggered by a disregard of the professional rules which apply to the production of journalistic discourse and of the discourse itself, regardless of the contingent nature of journalistic practice. Notwithstanding all the tensions and changes, “the crisis of the journalistic paradigm is not to be interpreted as a crisis in the journalistic profession” (p. 85) and will be considered nothing more than a conceptual instrument available to the researcher. The sociological method advanced by the above mentioned researchers aims at identifying the transformation occurred in the structure and professional identity of journalism, the two items which, in our opinion, would complete the picture of recent history in the Romanian media.

The identification of the structural transformation which defines daily newspapers in Romania during the period of preparation for adhesion to the EU – i.e. before 1 January 2007 – is characterised by a state of “expectation”, which we also highlighted in our doctoral thesis (“Mutations actuelles de la presse roumaine en vue de l’intégration européenne,” 2006, published in 2011). This state of expectation has gradually gained momentum due to political and media discourses, and was for the first time asserted in September 2006, when the effective date of Romania’s adhesion to the European Union became known to the public. Nevertheless, the structural mutations reviewed here have started with the strengthening of discourse on Europe and have been triggered by the sustained effort of the Romanian public figures – particularly politicians and journalists – to present national realities from a rather dramatised European perspective. In this context, we define the present “*non pas comme un présent qui ne peut se dire, mais comme un état de tension ancré dans un passé "composé" et en permanence dans l’attente de quelque chose à quoi nous sommes suspendus et une forme de co-présence du journaliste et du lecteur à l’occasion de quelque chose*”. (Jamet & Jannet, 1999, p. 28), while the dramatic effect is achieved by exaggerating present realities (“*la formulation d’une représentation amplifiée de l’actualité dans le but de séduire, de convaincre ou d’émouvoir ses destinataires.*”, p. 19.)

The structural transformation considered for the purposes of our study refers to the structure of daily newspapers in general; thus, the structural mutations analysed could be better defined as *normal changes* generated by particular social, political and discursive circumstances – i.e. Romania’s adhesion to the EU. We shall in what follows present the research we conducted on the newspapers which have gradually introduced columns, sections, pages or supplements addressing European issues/the topic of Romania’s adhesion to EU.

2. The column titled “Europa / Integrare” (Europe/Integration)

Being aware that “*le discours des medias se fonde autour du présent de l’actualité, et c’est à partir de ce point de référence absolu qu’ils regardent timidement vers l’"hier" et le "demain", procédant à ce que le milieu*

professionnel appelle des "mises en perspective." (Charaudeau, 1997, p. 151), we shall briefly point out to the critical changes which took place in the Romanian daily newspapers "in view of European integration":

1. Between 2002 and 2005, the number of articles featuring European integration topics has doubled on a yearly basis;

2. The articles addressing the topic of European integration are included in the "*Home politics*" section (a significant structural transformation, given that in the period between 2000 and 2002, the articles addressing the topic of European integration had been featured in the "*World politics*" or "*World*" sections of daily newspapers, while the period between 2002 and 2003 marked the transfer of content from "World politics" to "Home politics," a change which supports the idea that Romania's adhesion to the European Union had knowingly become a domestic affair.

3. The first dedicated supplement was issued by *Azi* in 2002; the supplement was titled "Oportunități europene" (*European opportunities*) and was issued with the financial support of a foundation (IDEE): *Azi* published 11 issues of the supplement which was distributed free of charge each Thursday. The supplement was later on republished twice a month, separately from the newspaper. The same daily newspaper had the initiative of a dedicated one-off supplement titled "*Azi în Europa*" (*Europe Today*). The supplement was issued on 21 June 2002 and was dedicated to the Seville Summit. On 18 December 2003, *Curierul National* issued the one-off edition of the supplement titled "*Uniunea Europeană. În ce ne integrăm?*" (*European Union. What are we heading for?*). This edition was dedicated to the first wave of enlargement in May 2004 as well as to EU preparations for the adhesion of both Romania and Bulgaria in January 2007.

4. The end of 2003 witnesses the publication of the first permanent column dedicated to the progress of adhesion proceedings and shows the first signs of media orientation towards European issues. The column was titled "*Săptămâna europeană*" (*Europe Weekly*) and was first published on the weekly page "*Din presa internațională*" (*World News*) of the 4/5 October 2003 issue of *Curierul național*. The first such attempt was made by *Evenimentul zilei*, the daily paper which included the page titled "*Drumul spre Europa*" (*On our way to Europe*) in its 17 May 2003 issue; the publication of the page would be resumed on 3 July 2005 under the title "*Viața în Europa*" (*Life in Europe*). Starting with 2004, some of the newspapers included in our sample have published weekly and then, daily columns dedicated to the topic of European integration or the European Union. As of 5 March 2004, *Jurnalul național* has introduced the weekly page titled "*Integrare*" (*Integration*), while starting 29 July 2004, *Cotidianul* publishes an identically titled page whose weekly publication would be resumed in November 2004, when the newspaper changes its format; last but not least, on 21 November 2004, *Azi* published the page titled "*Integrare*" (*Integration*) (in a one-off edition, that would never be resumed.)

All the above mentioned formal mutations help us identify the exact point of expectation for the Romanian media which addressed the topic of European integration; planning, future projections, the return to the past and anticipation are all temporal discourse markers which are dramatised through the use of verbs on the past-future time axis to render present actions, thus providing a motion picture image of the "*European integration*" topic. Mention should be made that unlike historians, journalists refer to the past with the sole purpose of building up and dramatising expectation at the level of discourse (cf. Jamet & Jannet, 1999, p. 28). Nevertheless, the most critical item which defines the idea of expectation is the countdown to 1 January 2007, first in years (starting with 2003) and later on, in days, hours, minutes and seconds (starting with 2004). Time to integration thus becomes an individual entity, a pro-active actor in the media discourse. Moreover, the two variables of anxiety – i.e. hope and fear – are also present in the media discourse in order to describe the same state of expectation. We shall only focus on the publication of the column titled "*Europa/Integrare*" (*Europe/Integration*). The topic of interest for our final sample facilitates the identification of the development stages of a specific area: "Europe / Integration." This new topic was developed following the stages shown below: 1/ The publication of supplements dedicated to European issues and the topic of Romania's adhesion to the European Union; 2/ The introduction of dedicated columns titled "Europa" (Europe); 3/ The introduction of columns titled "Integrare" (Integration).

Azi is the first national daily newspaper to publish a supplement dedicated to the topic of European integration in May 2002: the supplement was titled "Oportunități europene" (European Opportunities) and was supported by IDEE (Initiatives for Democracy in Eastern Europe, www.idee.ro) in cooperation with the European Media Institute in Düsseldorf and printed by the CICERO S.A. Foundation (*Azi* Publishing House). The inaugural edition of this

weekly supplement (issue 0 / 9-16 May 2002) was the first of a series of 11 editions distributed free of charge together with the *Azi* daily newspaper (final edition: issue no. 10 / 18-24 July 2002).

The supplement “Oportunități europene” (European Opportunities) would be subsequently published independently from *Azi* and would also be posted online (see <http://www.idee.ro/projects/opportunities.htm>.) The latest edition we reviewed was issue no. 43 / 1-15 November 2003, published on 6 November 2003; this edition was dedicated to the topic of the Progress Reports for Bulgaria and Romania.

The second themed supplement published by *Azi* is a “special supplement” dedicated to the Seville Summit on 21-22 June 2002. The new themed supplement, released on Friday, 21 June 2002 and titled “*Azi în Europa*” (Europe Today) had the same format as the main newspaper and had two (out of eight) full-colour pages (the first page and the last page). The supplement included 18 news articles featured on pages 2-8, all under the heading “Euro-summit”; the eight most relevant headlines are shown on the first page.

On 18 December 2003, the daily newspaper *Curierul național* published the supplement titled “UE. În ce ne integrăm?” (EU. What are we heading for?), a themed “special supplement” dedicated to the large EU integration wave of May 2004, with reference to the preparations for the adhesion of Romania and Bulgaria in January 2007. The eight (black and white) broadsheet pages are all under the heading of the supplement’s title, shown at the centre of each page, with no specific columns. The first edition focused on the history of EU relations and the process of enlargement. Several articles deal with the process of EU integration, focusing more on a reinterpretation of the fundamental principle of the European Union: “unity in too much diversity”. The leading article advances the temporal marker of the “final countdown” to the effective date of Romania’s EU accession.

As a conclusion, the columns dedicated to the topic of European integration were first introduced in 2003, became more frequent in 2004 with the publication of weekly columns, and culminated with the publication of the first daily column dedicated to Europe in *Evenimentul zilei* in 2005; *Adevărul*, the most popular daily newspaper in Romania at that moment, choose to introduce such a specific column in January 2007.

Table 1. Introduction of the columns titled “Europa / Integrare” (Europe/Integration).

Year /Newspaper	<i>Azi</i>	<i>Cotidianul</i>	<i>Curierul național</i>	<i>Evenimentul zilei</i>	<i>Jurnalul național</i>	<i>Adevărul</i>
2003	21.10.2003 pages 8-9 “Integrare” (Integration) (1 article)	-	4/5.10.2003 column “Săptămâna europeană” (Europe weekly), in the weekly page “Din presa internațională” (World News)	17.05.2003 page 7: “Drumul spre Europa” (On our way to Europe) (1 article)	-	-
2004-2005	-	29.07.2004 pages 1,4-5 “Integrare” (Integration) (13 articles); column resumed in November 2004	↓ Column continued until the newspaper’s editorial profile is transformed in a thematic one (economic)	3.07.2005 Daily column “Viața în Europa” (Life in Europe)	5.03.2004 Weekly column “Integrare” (Integration)	-
2007	-	-	-	-	-	4.01.2007 Pages 9-10 “Europa” (Europe) In January 2007, the column is present in 21 editions

The table above confirms the fact that the first daily newspaper to introduce columns focused on “European integration” topics was *Evenimentul zilei*; the column was titled “Drumul spre Europa” (On our way to Europe) and brings to public attention the metaphor of the country’s way to effective accession. From now on, this metaphor

would be present in the discourse of the media for its dramatic effect as well as with the aim of building awareness among the public as regards the imminence of the adhesion process. The same daily newspaper publishes in July 2005 another daily column titled “Viața în Europa” (Life in Europe), with the purpose of preparing readers for the social and cultural changes that would have a direct impact on daily realities.

The first columns published aim at setting the ground for Romania’s EU accession; the first of such columns, generically titled “Integrare” (Integration) (given that the opinion of the Romanian media was already in favour of EU accession) was published by *Azi* in October 2003 and focused on the topic of French investments in Romania, starting from an interview conducted by the news agency Mediafax with His Excellency Philippe Etienne, Ambassador of France in Romania. Nine months later, *Cotidianul* published 13 news articles on two pages, both under the headline “Integrare” (Integration) (pages 4 and 5 of the 29 July 2004 edition). The temporal marker is still characterised by expectation – forecasts of the cost and impact of integration – and the dramatic effect is all over present, as confirmed by featured article headlines: “Higher costs until 2007, greater benefits later”, “Companies or even entire sectors to vanish”, “Hundreds of thousands of Chinese immigrants to force Romania’s state frontiers”, “Security and defence policies to worsen Romania’s dilemmas”, “Amount of industrial waste impossible to determine”, “What are the lessons learned from the SAPARD test?”, “Only 73% of Romanian legislation in line with community laws”, “High risk of large scale bankruptcies.” (A selection of headlines featured in *Cotidianul* first column „Integrare” (pp. 4-5), 29 July 2004.)

Jurnalul national introduced the weekly column titled “Integrare” (Integration) on 5 March 2004, comprising the following permanent sub-columns: “Despre Uniune” (About EU), “Inedit” (News), and “Info” plus two articles on EU member states. This effort inform the Romanian public opinion about the realities of daily life in the European Union will be resumed, as already shown, by *Evenimentul zilei* on 3 July 2005, with the publication of the daily column titled “Viața în Europa” (Life in Europe).

3. In lieu of a conclusion

Our analysis of the structural transformation of the media within the paradigm of journalistic transformation considers the specific circumstances of Romania’s adhesion to the European Union, with a major impact on the format of the national daily newspapers. Other studies that we conducted so far have taken a close-up view of all this structural transformation, starting from its very early stages. We have reviewed all the changes in the news discourse, as well as the dedicated columns and supplements. While national media discourse was in line with the European perception of the negative image projected upon Romania, the pre-adhesion period was characterised by discursive “sanctions” in the national press, with a shift towards European topics, enhanced by the feeling of anxiety as regards European integration, while the post-adhesion period was marked by enthusiasm at the very beginning (in 2007), and then by necessity of a new European project for Romania.

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