

**The Italian Mass Media - a Promoter of  
Discriminatory Practices towards the Community of  
Romanians?**

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**Challenges of a new Europe** - in between local freeze and global dynamics

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# **The Italian Mass Media - a Promoter of Discriminatory Practices towards the Community of Romanians?**

This paper aims to find out whether the famous case of Nicolae Romulus Mailat – a Romanian immigrant who violently assaulted a 45-year-old Italian woman, Giovanna Reggianni - was the triggering event of a discriminatory press campaign against the community of Romanians between October 30, 2007 and November 15, 2007.

My paper consists of two important parts. The first part tries to enframe the Romanians' migration to Italy in the larger process of international migration; this - in order to find out its basic characteristics which will greatly contribute to a better understanding of the entire process. Firstly, I introduced the concept of "migration"- definition and types. Secondly, I elaborated a cause-effect analysis of the process of Romanians' migration to Italy in order to have a deeper insight into the issue put into focus. In addition, I tried to enlarge upon some official statistical data regarding the community of Romanians in Italy in order to see how many members this particular immigrant community has, where exactly they are situated on the Italian territory, as well as what jobs they hold, how much they earn, how they choose to invest their wages and whether they have an important contribution to the Italian GDP. Moreover, as Italy is one of the founding member states of the European Union, it is primarily subjected to the EU legislation regarding migration. Therefore, I searched for the European directive regarding the right of citizens of the Union to move and reside freely within the Community - in order to see its provisions as well as its conditional stipulations.

The second part of my paper deals with the Italian mass media and its overall perspective on the issue of immigration, as well as with the way in which it chose to present the particular case of Nicolae Romulus Mailat. First and foremost, I conducted a research activity with regard to the Italian legislation regulating the media sector so as to obtain more information on the Italian media system. I then elaborated both a quantitative and a qualitative research analysis on the particular perspective promoted by the Italian mass media in the case of the above mentioned Romanian immigrant. The purpose of this analysis was to see whether there was indeed a manipulative and discriminatory press campaign against the community of Romanians in the autumn of 2007.

After interpreting the results of my research, I will reveal the consequences of the attitude promoted by the Italian mass media towards the community of Romanians in Italy. At the same time, I will try to offer some practical suggestions so that such discriminatory and manipulative press campaigns against immigrants could be avoided.

## **I. Romanians' Migration to Italy**

### **1. The concept of "migration"**

The term "**migration**" comes from the Latin word "migrare" which has a Sanscrit origin - "mej" meaning "change", both positive or negative. Therefore, "migration" is a concept which describes "the movement of the population either inside or outside the borders of a country in a determined period of time" (Florice 2006:13). **An international migrant** is a person who is moving from his resident country to another, for a minimal period of time which varies (in the particular case of Italy, for about three months).

### **2. Types of migration**

According to Octavian Florice (Florice 2006:14-15), there are different types of migration:

#### A. Emigration vs. Immigration

- Emigration = the departure from one country in order to settle in another;
- Immigration = the entrance in a country, other than the resident country.

#### B. International vs. domestic migration

- International migration = the moving of the population outside the borders of the resident country in hope of finding better living conditions in the host state;
- Domestic migration = the moving of the population within the borders of the resident country.

#### C. Legal vs. Illegal migration

- Legal migration = the moving of the population in accordance with the legislation of the host country;
- Illegal migration = the moving of the population by not abiding by the legislation of the host country.

#### D. Voluntary vs. enforced migration

- Voluntary migration = the moving of the population according to their own will;

- Enforced migration = the moving of the population as a result of an external element, such as: a natural disaster, war, domestic conflicts, government persecution, etc.

#### E. Individual vs. mass migration

- Individual migration = the decision to leave a country is taken by a single individual, who intends to stay longer in the host country;
- Mass migration = the decision to leave a country is usually caused by a natural disaster, war or violent domestic conflicts and it refers to a large number of people who are seeking shelter in the nearest host country.

#### F. Permanent vs. temporary migration

- Permanent migration = the moving of the population with the purpose of definitive settlement on the territory of the host country (it usually involves the acquiring of the citizenship of that respective country);
- Temporary migration = the moving of the population with the purpose of temporary stay on the territory of the host country, which is then followed by the return to the country of origin.

The Romanians' migration to Italy is a voluntary, individual process, mainly caused by economic reasons. Italy is generally offering low paid jobs in sectors with low attractiveness for Italians, jobs which usually imply a lot of hard work: the constructions industry, domestic services and agriculture. Despite the fact that they are not always paid according to the results of their work, Romanians are still better paid than in their mother country. This is why most of the Romanian immigrants rather choose a stiff job in Italy than unemployment or a low wage in Romania. More and more Romanians coming from extended families are striving to receive Italian citizenship in order to definitively establish themselves on the Italian territory and enjoy the same rights as the indigenous people, also hoping to bring their families close to them. This propensity towards permanent migration is reflected in the growing number of Romanians, who now form the largest immigrant community in Italy.

### **3. A cause-effect analysis on the process of Romanians' migration to Italy**

#### **3.1. Why do Romanians migrate to Italy?**

Besides **economic reasons**, reflected in the desire to find a better paid job, there are also **social reasons** which play an important role in the Romanians' decision to leave the country. For instance, Romanian parents usually choose to work abroad and separate themselves from their families in the hope of properly bringing up their children. Moreover, no perspectives for improving their living conditions at home are combined with examples of relatives or friends working in Italy, succeeding in bettering their lives. Furthermore, the rebounding of families is also a social reason because of which Romanians choose Italy as a destination. Families are leaving Romania as a response to their relatives who are already established in Italy and possess the financial means for providing maintenance for their loved ones - be they parents, grandparents, children or friends.

**Cultural reasons** also influence greatly Romanians' choice for Italy as a destination for work. Common Latin origins and a common cultural background are regarded as important elements, helping them to adapt more easily to the Italian social and business environment. (see Campbell; Voudouris; Savulescu and Bîrsan 2007:133)

#### **3.2. How does Romanians' migration influence the two countries?**

A half-an-hour brainstorming activity showed me that there are more negative effects in what Romania is concerned as opposed to Italy in the case of which there are more positive ones.

##### **a. Romania**

Romanian immigrants positively contribute to the increase of the GNP in Romania by means of sending considerable amounts of money at home (777 million euros in 2007) (<http://www.muncainstrinatate.anofm.ro/anuarul-statistic-imigrare-2007-elaborat-de-fundatiile-caritas-i-migrantes-din-italia> May 10, 2008). Moreover, much of the money sent at home is invested in the housing industry, in the building new houses or in the mere improvement of old ones. In addition, some of the experienced Romanian workers come back home after a couple of months. Therefore, Romania does not entirely lose its working force.

However, there seem to be even more negative effects related to migration for Romania, as more and more immigrants are striving to obtain an Italian citizenship. Besides the social loss of the emigrants and their work potential, the Romanians' departure for Italy contributes to the demographic decline in Romania and highly increases its chances of being affected by the ageing process. Moreover, many children are left behind by their parents, who are striving to offer them the necessary financial means for their upbringing. Simultaneously, these children have to face many problems within the sphere of their communities, and these problems are usually caused by the lack of proper education and care. Furthermore, stereotypes and negative perceptions regarding the community of Romanians, as well as numerous expulsions of Romanian immigrants, have had a negative impact on Romania's image in its foreign relations.

### **b. Italy**

As opposed to the case of Romania, Italy seems to enjoy greater advantages as a result of Romanians' immigrants. Firstly, Romanians' investments in the housing and constructions industries, as well as their being obliged to pay taxes, contributes to the increase of the Italian GDP (6.1% in 2007) (<http://www.muncainstrinatate.anofm.ro/anuarul-statistic-imigrare-2007-elaborat-de-funda-iile-caritas-i-migrantes-din-italia> May 10, 2008). Secondly, Romanians are usually taking jobs in sectors with low or no attractiveness for Italians (agriculture-4% and constructions-24% in 2008), jobs which also imply a low wage (domestic services-19% in 2007) (<http://www.muncainstrinatate.anofm.ro/anuarul-statistic-imigrare-2007-elaborat-de-funda-iile-caritas-i-migrantes-din-italia> May 10, 2008). In spite of this, Romanians are still better paid than in their mother country, and this is why they choose Italy as a work destination. Furthermore, Romania is sending Italy not only its low or medium skilled work force, but also its highly skilled labour force in top sectors, such as the health system (for example, there is a clinic in Novara where two thirds of the doctors are Romanians).

However, there are also some negative effects of the Romanians' coming to Italy. In 2007, 16% of the total crimes were reported to have been committed by Romanian immigrants (<http://www.muncainstrinatate.anofm.ro/anuarul-statistic-imigrare-2007-elaborat-de-funda-iile-caritas-i-migrantes-din-italia> May 10, 2008). In addition, there are also illegal immigrants who work on the black market and therefore do not pay taxes to the Italian state. Moreover, as more and more Romanians want to definitively establish themselves in Italy, the Italians fear a Romanian "invasion" which is bound to cause a demographic imbalance.

#### **4. The community of Romanians in numbers**

- The largest immigrant community (555.997 persons, representing 15.1% of the total number of immigrants).
- Romanian immigrants are to be found especially in Lazio, Piedmont, Sicily and Apulia (Puglia), especially in Northern and Central regions (28.8%) and less in the Southern ones (only 4.4%).
- About 58% of the Romanian workers are men.
- 15.6% of the employment opportunities in 2007 were allocated to Romanian immigrants in sectors such as: constructions, agriculture and domestic services.
- Romanians occupy the third place in foreign direct investments in Italy, more than 72.6% in the constructions sector.
- The number of Romanian children enrolled in public schools (68.446 pupils) situates Romania on the second place (after Albania).
- About 50% of the immigrants' demand for a home in 2007 came from Romanians and the Albanians.
- Romania is the first destination country for large transfers of money (777 million euros in 2007). (<http://www.muncainstrinatate.anofm.ro/anuarul-statistic-imigrare-2007-elaborat-de-funda-iile-caritas-i-migrantes-din-italia> May 10, 2008).

#### **5. The EU legislation regarding the right of citizens of the Union to move and reside freely within the territory of the member states**

Italy is one of the founding member states of the European Union. Therefore, the EU legislation regarding the right of citizens of the Union to move and reside freely within the territory of the member states has a primacy on the Italian legislation in this matter. The European Parliament and Council Directive 2004/38/EC guarantees European citizens both the right to move and the right to residence for up to three months by virtue of having either an identity card or a valid passport. The right to residence for more than six months remains subject to certain conditions. Applicants must:

- either be engaged in economic activity (on an employed or self-employed basis);
- or have sufficient resources, as well as health insurance in order to guarantee that they do not become a burden for the social services in the host member state during their stay;

- or be following vocational training as a student, as well as have sufficient resources and health insurance in order to guarantee that they do not become a burden for the social services in the host member state during their stay;
- or be a family member of a Union citizen who falls into one of the above categories.

The European Parliament and Council Directive 2004/38/EC also guarantees the right of permanent residence in the host member state after a five-year period of uninterrupted legal residence, provided that an expulsion decision has not been enforced against the immigrant. This directive explicitly states the conditions under which Union citizens or members of their family may be expelled from the host member state: public policy, public security or public health. **Economic reasons, previous criminal convictions, expiration of entry documents do not constitute sufficient solid grounds for expulsion.** (see <http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l33152.htm> May 10, 2008)

## **II. The Italian Mass Media and its Perception of the Immigrants' Situation**

### **1. The Italian legislation regarding the mass media**

A **Constitutional Court Decision**, made in **1976**, abolished the Italian state monopoly on local radio and TV broadcasting. **Law 416/1981** firstly introduced antitrust measures concerning the press. In addition, **Law 223/1990** finally regulated the public/private radio-television system by introducing antitrust measures for preventing the abuse of dominant positions in the Italian mass media. According to this law, publishers in control of more than 8% or 16% of circulating newspapers were not allowed to own, respectively, more than one or two TV licenses.

Moreover, **Law 249/1997** stipulated the creation of a Supervisory Authority for Guarantees in Communications: a public autonomous agency, linked to the Ministry of Communications and endowed with supervising powers on the whole information and communication system (the press, TV, radio and telecommunications). The law also outlined additional antitrust measures stating, in particular, that no entity operating in the radio-television and in the publishing industries should control more than 20% of the total financial resources flowing to the field, namely advertising, sponsors,

license fees, etc. However, this piece of legislation did not turn out to be very effective, as both RAI and Mediaset were fined in July 2005 for over-reaching the 20% threshold in the previous years.

Although **Law 416/1981** and **Law 488/1999** introduced further antitrust measures in the press industry and established tax incentives for capital investments, loans, grants, and, mainly, postal tariff facilities, the Italian press industry remains the most heavily subsidised in Europe. The state subsidies allocated to the press industry increased from 439 million euros in 2000 to 492 million in 2006. As a consequence of this fact, the Council of Ministers requested a deep reorganisation of the Italian state's regulatory functions of the publishing sector and a significant cut in direct and indirect state subsidies.

The so called "**Gasparri**" **Law (Law 112/2004)** was officially aimed at preparing the changeover to digital terrestrial television and RAI's partial privatisation. However, in practice it implied a reform of anti-trust limits and actually allowed cross-media ownership. The new law lifted the ban on anyone owning more than two national broadcast channels and consequently served the interests of the Mediaset group owned by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi - who would thus be able to continue owning his three terrestrial broadcast channels (Italia 1, Canale 5 and Retequattro). By lifting the ban on holding interests in more than one news media category, the new law would also allow those who owned TV channels to acquire newspapers and vice versa. In fact, Berlusconi was already the owner of Mondadori, one of Italy's biggest print media and publishing groups. (see <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/italy.php?aid=538> May 10, 2008)

## **2. The Italian mass media and the Romanian immigrants**

The Italian mass media has generally promoted a negative attitude towards the communities of immigrants. This is partly due to the fact that some immigrants enjoy an illegal and free-of-charges stay in Italy. Moreover, a number of immigrants are indeed responsible for bringing their contribution to increasing criminality. However, the Italian mass media should not neglect the important contribution made by legal immigrants to the Italian GDP, by paying taxes and accepting low paid jobs with low or no attractiveness for indigenous people: agriculture, constructions and domestic services.

Another explanation for the media's negative perception of the immigrants lies in the well-known connection between politics and the media sector in Italy. About 50% of the Italian mass media is currently owned by Silvio Berlusconi - the Prime-Minister, despite the antitrust laws introduced since 1976. Politicians looking for a scapegoat for their ineffective governance, assisted by the mass media, usually find it in the communities of immigrants, who are made responsible for everything that goes wrong, ranging from crimes to lack of jobs for the indigenous people.

The case of Nicolae Romulus Mailat, a Romanian immigrant who violently assaulted a 45-year-old Italian woman, Giovanna Reggianni, was brought into light by the Italian mass media. After the Italian woman's death in hospital two days after the incident, the entire event was transformed into a national tragedy and the whole community of Romanians into criminals. Despite the gravity of the incident, this is not a viable reason for transforming one crime into a phenomenon of criminality and the Romanians into criminal scapegoats.

The aim of my paper is to find out whether the community of Romanians in Italy was subjected to a manipulative and discriminatory press campaign following the notorious case of Nicolae Romulus Mailat, as well as other several isolated cases brought into light by the Italian mass media. As I was in Romania at that time, what I did was a quantitative research analysis on the number of news on that topic. At the same time, I also elaborated a content analysis of the news posted on the websites of the two trusts which form the media duopoly in Italy: Mediaset and RAI ([www.mediaset.it](http://www.mediaset.it) and [www.international.rai.it](http://www.international.rai.it)).

The counting of the news on the case of Nicolae Romulus Mailat revealed a number of 25 negative news and 5 impartial ones out of 30 results for Mediaset, and a number of 18 negative news and 6 impartial ones out of 24 results for RAI. The negative perspective over this case was prevalent for both the private and public sector of the Italian mass media.

The content analysis of the news offered me further reasons to believe that the case of Nicolae Romulus Mailat was the triggering event of a discriminatory press campaign launched against the community of Romanians present in Italy. A simple search into the content of the news by "the keywords" "criminal" and "dangerous" revealed the fact that they were used more than twice in 23 news out of 30 in the case of Mediaset, and more than once in 15 news out of 24 in the case of RAI. Moreover, the negative perception of the Romanian community as THE OTHER was induced by means of using other strong classifying adjectives such as: "depraved", "illegal", "dirty", "poor", as well as consequent images in order to enframe the entire community into the category of criminals. Using the case of Nicolae Romulus Mailat as a pretext for creating a national stereotype, the Italian media duopoly abusively identified the community of Romanians with criminals, by means of extrapolating the number of crimes produced by some representatives of the community. Furthermore, there was a chain effect: the Italian television, radio and press, which are known for sustaining the officials' point of view, joined their efforts in order to proliferate a negative image of the community of Romanians, while the Italian citizens were left the duty to spread the bad news by word of mouth.

Therefore, the Italian mass media was guilty for the promotion of a subjective perspective on the case of Nicolae Romulus Mailat, thus neglecting the Romanians' important contribution to the Italian GDP, as well as the social consequences of their discriminatory press campaign upon the Romanian immigrants. The repeated invocation of criminal acts committed by Romanians induced a feeling of dealing with a serious and growing problem, which required an immediate and violent response in order to tip the balance in favour of the indigenous people.

In addition, the agenda setting highly influenced the Italians' perception on what can be regarded as an invented problem with the Romanian immigrants. By placing this subject on the top of the news' hierarchy and in prime time (the 8 o'clock news) for about two weeks (October 30, 2007-November 15, 2007) the most important Italian TV channels (Italia 1, Canale 5, Retequattro, Raitalia 1, Raitalia 2 and Raitalia 3) instilled the feeling that that was the most important subject to which the Italians should pay maximum attention.

Taking into consideration the results of both the quantitative and the qualitative research analysis, I may conclude that the case of Nicolae Romulus Mailat was indeed the triggering event of a discriminatory and manipulative press campaign against the community of Romanians between the above-mentioned period of time.

### **3. The consequences of the discriminatory and manipulative media campaign**

against the community of Romanians in Italy made themselves noticed immediately. Firstly, this negative media campaign caused a deepening of the social gap between the community of Romanians and the Italians by bringing into light the differences between the two peoples, despite their common Latin background.

Secondly, there were several violent responses on the part of certain Italians who decided to make justice for themselves by attacking innocent Romanians, residing legally on the Italian territory, in public places such as supermarkets.

In addition, the Italians' reluctance when dealing with Romanians, as well as those several cases of violent assaults against the Romanian immigrants, played an important role in Romanians' decision to come back home. After such violent incidents, one out of three Romanians declared that he/she will come back home in the following two years.

Moreover, due to a piece of legislation passed by the Italian Parliament, the local authorities were left the freedom to resort to expulsions of Romanian immigrants who either lacked any economic

means for sustaining themselves or had previous criminal convictions - which was against EU legislation.

Furthermore, this media campaign presenting the Romanian immigrants as dangerous criminals had a negative effect on Romania's external image as a new member state of the European Union.

All things considered, it was only the involvement of the European Parliament which temporarily put an end to the wave of Romanians' abusive expulsions from Italy.

#### **4. What can the EU do in order to avoid creating a precedent?**

In my opinion, I think that the EU should take into account the possibility of heavily fining Italy if the latter refuses to adopt a legislation guaranteeing the development of a pluralistic media environment and a ban on cross-media ownership, even if this might hurt the prime minister's private interests in the media sector.

In addition, I believe that the European Union should try to avoid abusive expulsions of European citizens of one of its member states by introducing a Common Immigration Policy aimed at reducing the gaps between the various national immigration policies, and, the same time protecting the rights of immigrants, regardless of their nationality.

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