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Online media representations of Chinese investments in Romania:
a Faircloughian critical discourse analysis

Master's thesis

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. Any ideas or data taken from other authors or other sources have been fully referenced.

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Abstract

This paper examines the representation of Chinese investments in online Romanian newspapers. It explores how online media in Romania covered topics regarding certain infrastructure and energy projects that would be funded and developed by Chinese investors and contractors. 12 sources published in Romanian from 2013 to 2021 were selected from different online news outlets and categorized into two time frames. The data was analysed and interpreted according to Norman Fairclough's three-layered critical discourse analysis model. Results of this qualitative research show that between 2013 and 2021, Romanian online media representations of China have gradually become more hostile and more negatively critical. This shift in media discourse matches the timeline of changes at a governmental level, which in turn is linked to anti-China hegemonical European discourse.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, ideology, China, Romania, media representations
CERCS Field of Research: S265 - Press and Communication Sciences

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore discursive changes in Romanian online news reports on Chinese investment projects. The analysis is set on two major time frames, critical in showing the development of Chinese-Romanian relations and the social context which embeds and drives any discursive change. The research method and theory are based on Norman Fairclough's three-layered model of critical discourse analysis, which allows for a thorough qualitative analysis of the data on three levels: textual, discursive and sociocultural.

The research takes place in the context of China's political and economic expansion into Europe, as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. In Europe, this initiative led by the Chinese government proved to be popular among Eastern European countries, who sought to bolster their infrastructure and energy capabilities, in an effort to reach a higher European standard of development. Among many countries in Eastern and Southern Europe is Romania, which shares the same determination for economic improvement and a long history of cooperation with China. At the beginning of talks for investments in Romanian, both parties agreed on a large number of developments in the infrastructure and energy sector. However, most of the plans between the Romanian and Chinese side eventually failed to deliver its promises, as the country adopted a more pro-European stance and began restricting access to Chinese companies. Likewise, the Romanian online media presented the beginning of a more active Romanian-Chinese cooperation with varied opinions ranging from exceptionally optimistic to harshly negative. Eventually, as time went on, media reporting of China and Chinese investments became more negative, thereby reflecting the political stance taken by the Romanian Government against China.

The evolution of Chinese plans and negotiations in Romania starts with explaining the historical context of Romania-China relations and how they progressed from the middle of the 20th Century. Next, I present the theoretical framework, which includes a brief theory of discourse, power, ideology, hegemony, media representation and critical discourse analysis. The study continues with detailing the applied methodology and identifying possible limitations. The data analysis is divided into three parts structured according to Fairclough's three-layered model of analysis: description, interpretation, and explanation. Finally, I discuss the findings of the research, link them to the theoretical framework and propose certain possible solutions to the issue of negotiation breakdown between Romanian and Chinese officials.

1.1. Historical Context

Relations between Romania and the People's Republic of China officially started in 1949, at a time when the Communist governments of both states had just taken control of power. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, more precisely during Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime between 1967 and 1989, the two countries found themselves ideologically similar, because both Romania and the PRC were part of the same communist bloc, and both desired full autonomy from the Soviet Union. (Brînză & Popescu, 2018) At the same time, Romania acted as mediator in talks between the United States and China, during the Nixon administration, which overall improved relations between the three parties. (Deseret News, 1989) Romanian-Chinese relations experienced a period of stagnation in the 1980s, as China's foreign policy favoured opening to other countries, while Romanian policy focused more on isolationism and austerity measures.

After the Romanian Revolution of 1989, diplomatic relations were resumed, while the number of important bilateral visits of heads of state of both countries started to increase. However, Romanian leaders had different opinions on the degree of cooperation with China and how much would China be allowed to become involved in economic and investment activities. At the beginning of the 1990s, Prime Minister Li Peng arrived in Bucharest for a state visit, during which he mentioned the "profound friendship between China and Romania". (Bridge, 1994) At the same time, Romania was the only Central and Eastern European country to be visited by Prime Minister Peng during his itinerary. Both Romanian Presidents Ion Iliescu and Emil Constantinescu would conduct visits to China, as well as receive numerous Chinese delegations, in order to maintain cordial and cooperative relations. (Brînză & Popescu, 2018) Furthermore, having chosen a path closer to maintaining the former socialist economy instead of Europeanization, Romania viewed China as a major business partner and a potential source of foreign direct investments. (Soare, 2015)

On the other hand, keeping the old economic structure intact triggered hyperinflation, massive unemployment and, overall, a deep economic crisis. This prompted Romania to start its process of Europeanization and adopt a liberal market economy and a democratic governing system. (Soare, 2015) Such conditions, including the need for a guarantor of security and the adherence to European values, shifted Romanian foreign policy towards closer cooperation with NATO and EU countries, and away from a closer cooperation with China. (Brînză & Popescu, 2018) Following the creation of the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2003, China focused more on approaching EU countries as a whole bloc and less in a separate

manner. In addition, the administration of President Traian Băsescu clearly favoured Romania's association with NATO and the US (Digi24.ro, 2014), which in turn led to little progress in Sino-Romanian relations.

The turning point eventually emerged during the 3rd China-Central and Eastern European Summit, when the Chinese delegation led by Li Keqiang negotiated several projects and investments with the Romanian side. Both sides signed a series of agreements concerning investments in the energy sector, as well as cooperation memoranda on nuclear energy, telecommunications, economic cooperation, technology, and culture. (Străuț, 2013) Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta adopted a change of attitude by Romanian authorities towards Chinese investors, and envisioned Romania as "China's best friend in the European Union, a political, economic, trade, cultural and artistic gateway". (2013)

Soare (2015) argues that China considers Romania to be an ideal entry point for Chinese trading and businesses, thanks to its potential for energy independence and having the fastest growing economy in the EU. Another important aspect is China's plans regarding the Belt and Road initiative; Romania represents China's gateway to the rest of Europe, thanks to its Romania's access to the Black Sea through the port of Constanța, the largest in the region, and its position on the Danube river. From the Romanian side, authorities were initially eager to have China invest in local projects, while also benefiting from EU funds. Some of the projects that required attention included the construction of reactors 3 and 4 of the Cernavodă Nuclear Plant, the construction of a pumping system for the Tarnița Hydropower Plant, the building of a new generator at the Rovinari Lignite-Fired Plant and the modernization of Mintia Thermal Power Plant, as well as signing certain agreements for exporting livestock. The estimate cost of these initiatives is estimated at around 8.5 billion euros. (Dumitru, 2013) Romanian authorities pointed out that they more interested than Chinese authorities to initiate these investments. Furthermore, the Minister of Transport, Ramona Mănescu stated:

“[t]he investments that can be done by the Chinese are a source of developing our infrastructure in areas where there are no European projects: railways [...], highways and bridges that have to be built, but cannot be all done using European funds because those are limited too” (Vlad, 2013).

From the Chinese side, Premier Li Keqiang considered that “Romania will become Europe's tiger, and if all tigers join and communicate, a huge market will develop.” (Actmedia, 2013)

Nevertheless, despite the initial openness coming from both parties, Sino-Romanian relations never achieved their promised potential. The initial memorandum concerning the investment in nuclear power got bogged down by difficulties in negotiations, as well as by political instability in Romania. On top of that, the company responsible for conducting the investment, China General Nuclear Power Group came under fire after being accused of espionage by the US Government, which led to its blacklisting by the Federal Bureau of Industry and Security (2019). All hopes were eventually disbanded by the Orban administration in 2019, which showed no interest in Chinese investments and adopted a more pro-US stance. The plans regarding the Tarnița Hydropower Plant were also dropped, as they were dependent on the possible investment at Cernavodă.

Due to the US-China trade war, Huawei operations in Romania came under scrutiny by the Romanian government and media. In 2019, President Klaus Iohannis and US President Donald Trump signed a memorandum which states that Romania is committing to barring untrustworthy foreign companies with 5G technologies from entering the Romanian market. This agreement has been described as an “anti-Huawei memorandum” (Brînză, 2020), even though the company was never mentioned in the official documents. Such an action is meant to hinder Huawei participation in the biddings for the implementation of the 5G network in Romania.

More recent events have shown that prospects of improving Sino-Romanian relations are not quite optimistic, as Chinese companies were denied participation in construction biddings for several infrastructure projects by Romanian authorities. The current government signed a memorandum which excludes non-EU companies that do not have public procurement accord signed with the Union, thus including Chinese companies. At the same time, Romanian officials explained that Chinese companies have also been excluded due to lack of compliance with European standards, disloyal competition caused by direct Chinese government support and poor quality of their works. (Cicovschi, 2021)

Bilateral relations between Romania and China are not bound to fail completely in the future. The two countries still maintain economic and especially cultural ties. A number of Chinese institutes and university departments have been inaugurated in the last decade, as well as several inter-university agreements. (Ministry of External Affairs, 2021) Since 2013, Romania has been the main recipient of Chinese FDI stock in the Balkans (Leonte, 2020), but still behind countries like Hungary, Poland or the Czech Republic. In February 2021, Romania along with Bulgaria, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia decided not to send their top-rank

leaders to the 17+1 China – CEE Summit, despite China's request for all participant countries to send their presidents or prime ministers. (Lau, 2021)

Such a change in attitude over the years shows that Romania entered the newly established cooperation agreements with China with certain goals and expectations in mind. The fulfilment or unfulfillment of promises and plans, as well as political actions conducted by Romanian authorities have been covered by the local media, which has constructed its own discourse when tackling this topic.

The study of Romania's case is relevant in relation to China's goals of economic development. Romania and other Eastern and Central European countries are seen as a gateway to China (Matura, 2012), mainly due to the flexibility in policy making and the lack of a single regional policy regarding receiving Chinese FDI. At the same time, it could be argued that Central and Eastern European countries are more welcoming towards any type of investments as long as it is done in the interest of the country's development. When the 16+1 project was first announced in Budapest in 2011, reception was overall positive as all member states of the initiative agreed to annual summits and constant communication. However, reports show that the implementation of investments and projects by the Chinese did not go as planned in most of the CEE countries. (Góralczyk, 2017) The main obstacles behind this were a lack of mutual trust and the set of regulations that could have interfered with China's plans.

Countries like Greece and Albania failed to finalize all the projects that are tied more or less with Chinese investors. In the case of Albania, no Chinese project was reported since 2016, as a result of pressure on Chinese companies by the Albanian government which came in the form of successive inspections and strict regulations. Further breaking down of trust between European countries and China came with Montenegro's inability to pay back one of its loans from China, which by 2021, led to a national debt of 103% of the country's GDP. (Vadislavjev, 2021)

Bulgaria's case is similar to Romania's in the sense that investment projects that were announced by Chinese investors did not reach their expected potential. The most prominent example is Litex Motors, a Bulgarian automotive company that partnered with Great Wall Motors to begin the production of a low-cost type of vehicle for Southeastern Europe. However, the vehicles produced proved unpopular for Bulgarian consumers and the project did not achieve the expected profitability. Overall, similarly to Romania, a large number of projects stalled or failed to materialize despite an overwhelming pro-China sentiment shared by the Bulgarian media.

1.2.Theoretical Framework

1.2.1. Discourse

Sociologically, any practice by which individuals imbue reality with meaning can be defined as discourse. (Ruiz, 2009) Similarly, Locke (2004) describes discourse as a means of signifying the world. The study of discourse is based on the theory that every social action has a meaning because individuals attach meaning to these actions according to their individual viewpoints and beliefs. Therefore, every action is driven by the subjectivity of its actors. (Ruiz, 2009)

However, meaning is not just the sole product of the individual, but it is rather shared by society and is linked to other individual viewpoints. Schutz (1962) argues that communication is only possible when communities of people agree on a shared system of values and meanings. The size of these communities can range from small groups or families to entire nations and transnational cultures and beliefs. As a result, since successful communication is dependent on intersubjectivity, in the same manner discourse relies on it. With this in mind, it is safe to argue that discourse analysis facilitates the understanding of social intersubjectivity because discourses are created and create shared meanings, which represent the foundation of our social reality.

1.2.2. Power

Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines power as "the ability to control people or things". (Power, n.d.) However, this is just a mere simplification, as power regulates every aspect of society. Moreover, it represents the key element in any theory of action and domination, especially in the realm of International Relations (Guzzini, 2017). Bertrand Russell (1938) states that power is "the production of intended effects", basically meaning that power and causality are intertwined. Dahl's famous definition on power argues that "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (1957).

Oppenheim (1981) extends Dahl's view and considers power as the relation of causality between one action and the other. At the same time, he also states that not doing an action can also show the presence of power. Furthermore, Oppenheim points out that explaining why an action happens should not be centred on the actor by analysing the action itself or the intentions

of the actor, but also the influence that the target casted upon the actor. The exercise of power can only be possible if a number of conditions are met all at the same time.

The causality of power shown by Dahl, Oppenheim, Guzzini and many others prove that an agent cannot just simply be possessed by an actor, but rather it exists through the relation with other actors. This means that, in order to grasp the power relations between two actors, one must be aware of their expectations, intentions and preferences, as well as of beliefs and shared norms (Guzzini, 2017).

1.2.3. Ideology

The conjuncture between discourse and power is represented by ideology (Eagleton & Eagleton, 1991), which represents a set of normative ideas that formalize an identity and offer legitimacy to a dominant power. The concept of ideology can be used outside the political realm, as its meanings of worldview or belief system transcend into other facets of life. Other definitions (James & Steger, 2010) state that ideologies are nothing more than patterns of prescriptive norms and renditions of power relations. The difference between belief and ideology is that belief is always individual, while ideology represents a set of shared beliefs in a group of people. Every group or organization must have a series of shared belief, which in the absence of, would prevent the group from forming in the first place. Ideology represents a “shared mental phenomenon” (Van Dijk, 1998) and another realm of existence, like any other social structure.

The qualities of ideologies can be categorized as such (van Dijk T. A., 1995):

- Cognitive – an ideology is a socially shared mental representation formed out of abstract constructions like ideas, beliefs, and values.
- Social – ideologies are constructed based on group interests or group conflicts, power, influence, domination or solidarity.
- Sociocognitive – ideologies represent the bridge between the cognitive and social realm, thanks to their character of being part of the ‘common-sense’. Individuals sharing an ideology also share the same type of judgement, knowledge, perception and ‘interpretative frameworks’.
- Absent of veracity – ideologies cannot be true or false, because each ideology claims to be the truth for the group that adheres to its precepts.
- Degrees of complexity – the levels of intricacy that an ideology possesses may vary, as well as their level of organization or consistency.

- General – ideologies are abstract constructions which are not dependent on location. Local variations of ideologies may be expression of a set of beliefs, but they cannot “account for context-independent similarity of discourse and action of many group members” (van Dijk T. A., 1995).

Van Dijk (1998) further points out the negative and positive aspects of ideologies. When it comes to negatives, because ideologies legitimate power, they also legitimate inequality. In addition, ideology creates a social truth that conceals or modifies objective conditions of reality. At the same time, the positives are identified in the case of the dominated group. More precisely, the reaction of the dominated to inequality is solidarity and opposition to the dominant group.

Van Dijk’s brief analysis over the positives and negatives of ideology brings to the Marxist view on ideology, which viewed it as a mechanism of control in a society. For Marxists, ideology is synonym to ‘false consciousness’ and should be understood in economic terms: the ruling class exhibits an ideology of accumulation and exploitation of the working class, while the working class’ responds with the restructuring of the hierarchical order of society by social revolution. However, contemporary study of the concept of ideology strives to look further than just the Marxist idea that ideology must be inherently ‘false’. One concept related to the Marxist theory and which is still in debate (Croteau & Hoynes, 2013) is the connection between ideology and hegemony.

1.2.4. Hegemony

According to Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci (1971), the concept of hegemony connects the notions of power and ideology by explaining how a group can maintain power and achieve predominance over others. Aside from Gramsci’s association of hegemony and a ruling class monopolizing and controlling by forceful actions against a lower class or an obedient group, Gramsci also argued that power inside a hegemony can also be wielded at a cultural level. Croteau and Hoynes (2013) refrain from labelling it ‘cultural hegemony’ due to its Marxist connotations, and instead name it ‘cultural leadership’. It refers to the acceptance of ‘common sense’ values and assumptions as natural principles of life. The integration of every-day assumptions, regardless of their nature, into an individual’s set of values, leads to the acceptance of a set of beliefs – and ultimately, of ideology. By accepting an ideology as representing normality, a hegemony based on that specific ideology can hold on to power or

influence in the absence of opposition. This type of hegemony dominates not through force, but through consent.

1.2.5. Media Representation

The popular consensus is that news represents snapshots of reality, with a higher or lesser degree of bias. However, van Dijk (1988) points out that news is a means of constructing the social world. At the same time, media messages always contain an ideological element within them, because the media itself cannot be neutral, nor act as “a rational mediator of social events” (van Dijk T. A., 1988). The same opinion is shared by Stuart Hall (1982) who believes that due to its ideological nature, the media successfully applies the concept of cultural leadership, thereby re-producing common-sense assumptions and exercising the same mechanisms of a hegemony. In other words, the media engages in “the politics of signification” (Hall, 1982), basically giving events particular meanings.

The analysis of media representations of the world through discourse analysis does not concern whether the reports match reality or not or whether they contain bias. Instead, the focus stands in the ideological construction embedded in the news, which constitutes the ‘real’. (Croteau & Hoynes, 2013) Furthermore, language is crucial in the analysis and represents its first level, since it externalizes the meanings and understandings of the world.

1.2.6. Critical Discourse Analysis

Teun van Dijk (2015) defines critical discourse analysis, also abbreviated as CDA, as a type of discursive research that studies how power, control and inequality dynamics are reproduced and legitimized in linguistic structures of text. The theoretical foundation of CDA is influenced by Marxist methodology and dialectics. Methodologically, the objective is to reveal ideologies and hidden structures of power. Dialectically, the goal is to expose inequality, ideology and hegemony manifesting themselves in discourse. (Xingwei & Junfang, 2016)

Van Dijk’s outlook considers ‘power’ as a central notion in critical discourse analysis. More specifically, he refers to the ‘social power’ of institutions and social groups which enforces control over individuals and discourse structures. The use of language varies depending on the speaker and receiver’s positions and relative to each other, as well as their identities, goals and level of knowledge. (van Dijk, 2015)

According to linguist Norman Fairclough (1995) critical discourse analysis, also abbreviated as CDA, is described as an “analysis of how texts work within sociocultural

practice.” According to this theory, discourse is analysed on three levels: the text itself with its lexical, morphological, syntactical, and semantical features, discourse practice, which refers to how the analysed communication is developed within a certain discourse, and social practice, which encompasses the norms, traditions and forces that represent the foundation and ultimately the main drive for the existence of the discourse. An analysis on Fairclough’s theory (Nielsen & Nørreklit, 2009) reveals that social identities and relations, as well as human understanding of the world with its system of meanings are considered products of discourse.

Fairclough’s approach on discourse analysis is based on Michael Halliday’s model of systemic linguistics, demonstrating the multifunctionality of language. In Halliday’s view (1978) language is used for representing the world, the experiences and interactions between individuals living in the world translated into a type of discourse and finally the situational contexts that help personal experiences and interpersonal interactions combine freely.

In Fairclough’s view (1993), CDA is valid as a multidimensional perspective provided that the following minimal conditions be fulfilled:

- it must be incorporate a multidimensional analysis of the relationship between social and discursive changes, as well as the relationship between text properties and discursive events.
- it must allow for multifunctional analysis. This criterion is based on Halliday’s conception of language (1978). Since language, and implicitly the text, are tools for representing the world, changes in discourse practice reflect changes in social relations, social identities, and knowledge. (Fairclough, 1993)
- it must be directed towards historical analysis – that is, it should focus on intertextuality and interdiscursivity, or in other words, on how texts have been configured over time depending on the evolution of discourses in an institution or a society.
- It must remain a critical method, whereby critical refers to uncovering hidden causes and connections behind linguistic structures. In other words, critical analysis explains why agents communicate and act in a certain manner.

At the same time, CDA explores the relation between language and power, thereby meaning that language is not autonomous or independent from the way it is used. The use of language depends on the speaker’s social position and power in a social structure. Analogously, language itself exists and depends on its function in a social structure. (Halliday, 1973) The choice of using certain grammatical features or styles is not completely ad-hoc, but rather

validated by social circumstances. Halliday further argues that critical analysis of linguistics differs from other theories of linguistics, due to its emphasis on how grammar and vocabulary is used in a text, as well as regarding the degree to which these choices are ideologically relevant.

Fairclough's model of CDA does not come with its share of criticism; Authors like Stubbs (1997) argue that critical discourse analysis may often be conducted according to a "political agenda", and less from a linguistic point of view. In other words, it is very likely that textual analyses are conducted in a fragmentary and arbitrary manner, thereby allowing the critical theorist to pursue their own interests when analysing. Other scholars like Widdowson (1995) criticize CDA for it assuming that ideology can be found in the language in a fixed form and that the analysis is not much about the interpretation of the discourse and its ideological determinants, but rather about the ideologically-biased perspective of the analyst. In response to Widdowson's critique, Fairclough argues that critical discourse analysis does not impose a single worldview but allows for multiple interpretations, which does not invalidate the use of CDA. Furthermore, he further points out that every method of discourse analysis is directly influenced by the analyst's beliefs or ideological convictions which does not allow for neutrality. Such an argument in favour of Fairclough was also asserted by Wodak. (2006)

To sum up, critical discourse analysis studies social and political issues within their social and political context. Rather than just simply being described, discourse structures are meant to be explained as products of social interactions and social interactions themselves, as well as the foundation of power structures. Moreover, CDA is concerned with relations of dominance in society (van Dijk, 2015), reflected in the use of language.

2. Literature review

2.1. Media discourse

Media discourse came into the attention of critical discourse analysts in the 1970s, when media representations and coverage became much more diversified. In 1974, a group of researchers from Glasgow University conducted a series of investigations titled *Bad News*, with the intent on analysing media reports on important issues in society. Some examples include the Falkland War, the Israel/Palestine conflict, the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the wars in Rwanda and Zaire and the AIDS epidemic. (Glasgow Media Group, n.d.)

One of the group's authors, John Eldridge (2000) argues that the goal of Glasgow Media Group is to prove that journalism, specifically television journalism, delivers news that are far

from neutral. In order to conduct their critical analysis, the authors started from the assumption that the myth about the impartiality of television news might not be true, as it had been popularly claimed. The group revealed that media reports are bound to be biased, as they represent “sequence of socially manufactured messages, which carry many of the culturally dominant assumptions of our society” (Glasgow Media Group, 1976). The focus of the GMG was not on the differences between news reports, but rather on similarities and patterns shared by them. For instance, the group found out that BBC and ITN news bulletins shared similar language, sources, ordering of news and expressed values (Eldridge, 2000).

Soon after, media experienced much more serious scrutiny, and the myth of media objectivity and untouchability started falling apart. In other words, news reports were being analysed for what they were and not for what they claimed to be. (Glasgow Media Group, 1985) Up until the end of the 1990s, media discourse analysis methodologies were restricted to television, and written articles in newspapers. However, with advancement of technology and introduction of the internet and social media, the public gained a higher degree of participation and spontaneity to new reports. O’Keefe (2011) argues that written and spoken media share a higher degree of intertextuality, as well as a shorter time span between publishing, reading and audience reacting. Articles link much more to each other, they are published at a faster rate and contain a much more diversified language, which ultimately leads to a higher level of media discourse diversity.

Mass-media entails fast communication of large amounts of information, in order to deliver a message to certain audiences. These messages are part of the media discourse, which is crafted deliberately by specialists in order to elicit certain emotions or opinions from the audience. But apart from framing information and sharing it, mass-media also helps form the public opinion on different topics. Foreign policy can also be shaped by public opinion, especially the way in which media outlets report on affairs concerning this topic. In this case, media reporting has a significant influence on the audience’s reception of foreign affairs, because it represents the only source from which the audience can learn about international relations, and not through their personal experience. (Soroka, 2003)

2.2. Media reports on Chinese investments

Chinese leader Xi Jinping presented the Belt and Road Initiative during his visit in Kazakhstan in September 2013. The priorities of the project consist of connecting the Asian and European economic circle through investments in transportation infrastructure, ensuring

cooperation in finances and trading and increasing the number of cultural exchanges. (Xinhua News Agency, 2016) This initiative was set to include around 70 countries with a population of 4.8 billion people and economies worth a total of 21 trillion US dollars, which represents 62% of the world's GDP. (Belt and Road Initiative Forum, 2019)

News about new ways of cooperation and investments in the countries included in the project soon spread and were broadcasted internationally by the media of each country, all expressing different opinions. Lejin and Wu's comparison of articles reporting on Chinese investments in China Daily and Financial Times (2017) reveal that China Daily tends to emphasize on the positive aspects of the initiative, while Financial Times adheres to a more neutral or slightly negative outlook on the project. By employing critical discourse analysis combined with corpora-assisted methods of analysis, the authors established that China Daily builds China's image as a peaceful and responsible international co-operator. On the other hand, the image constructed in articles from the Financial Times show China as an authoritarian and hegemonic state.

A more recent study (Arifon, Huang, Yue, & Yue, 2019) covers comparisons between Chinese and European discourses regarding the BRI, including discourses found in the press. The terms used to describe Chinese investments by the European media carry the same negative connotations as in Lejin and Wu's study:

“Articles use terms such as ‘wary’, ‘concern’, ‘suspicion’, revealing a long-installed fear of the initiative, partly due to its inaccuracy and unpredictability, and partly to China's new global stance. Keywords such as ‘strategic’, ‘influence’, ‘power’ and ‘shift’ also indicate a general sense of concern at the BRI's global impact on multiple levels.” (Arifon, Huang, Yue, & Yue, 2019)

A paper concerning reception of Chinese investments in Chinese, African and Western media (Matanji, 2019) analysed news articles from Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, and using the framing theory, took a more statistical approach. In terms of used tones, Chinese and African ones are overwhelmingly positive, while tones in American and British news reports are negative or mixed. The author also notes that attitudes in the media seem to match the public opinion, which views China political and economic influence as more meritorious than demeritorious. The results concerning media in the United Kingdom and the United States follow the same patterns of aforementioned studies: because of its perceived role as a competitor, China and Chinese influence are presented in a negative light. The idea of

‘colonialism’ is attributed to China, often being referred as “new colonial power” (Matanji, 2019).

Huang’s paper (2018) deals with comparing Pakistan and India’s image of China’s Belt and Road Initiative in the mentioned countries. The method employed in the study Fairclough’s model of critical discourse analysis along with the study of word and phrase frequencies. Results show an ambivalence of attitudes coming from Pakistani media, with news articles expressing both hope for future cooperation based on the already good relations between Pakistan and China, and concerns of China taking advantage of Pakistan. The author highlights three main Pakistani perspectives on Chinese investments: a trustful win-win situation, a plan that requires caution and financial risks, and a threat to the country. On the other hand, India’s media exhibits a very negative attitude towards the BRI. Most concerns are related to the possible military threat or the possibility of investments representing a financial trap. Nevertheless, the perceived image of China in the two Asian countries is either of positive contributor or negative hegemon.

Regarding Chinese-Romanian economic relations, few studies have been conducted from a political or statistical perspective. There have been outlooks on the Sino-Romanian relations in regard to the BRI (Brînză & Popescu, 2018) and comparative analyses on the number of Romanian media representation of East Asian countries. (Marinescu, 2020) Other research (Ciurtin, 2019) tackle the political implications of Chinese investment in Romania in the last decade. It is clear that a critical discourse analysis of the Romanian media reporting on Chinese investments as part of the BRI is lacking. Therefore, such a topic needs to be addressed, in order to track the motivations and power dynamics that sustain the current media discourse in Romania.

3. Aims of the study

As shown previously, controversies regarding investments planned by China in Europe are prevalent in many countries and they have been part of societal and international debates in the recent years. In Eastern and Southern Europe especially, this has been a major issue as China considered these regions as its priority for economic expansion. Studying the case of Romanian online media representations of China could help at explaining the regional response to Chinese investments, first at the level of media and then on a political and ideological level. In order to show and explain this change in discourse, I will be applying Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis on Romanian online newspaper articles presenting news about Chinese investments in Romania. First, it explores the language used in

the texts and the terms mostly associated with ‘China’ and ‘Chinese investments’. Then, the paper investigates the level of text production and interpretation of present discourses as well as determining positive and negative interpretations of Chinese economic influence. The last level of analysis consists in explaining the social implications of the discovered meanings and possible ideologies. The current research can be addressed by pursuing the primary research question:

- How does Romanian online media represent Chinese investments in newspaper discourse at different times by different media outlets?

The main research question is consolidated by the following secondary points that are addressed in this research paper:

- What terms are mostly used to describe China and Chinese influence in Romanian media and how do they differ in each analysed time frame?
- How does ideology shape online media representations of Chinese investments in Romania within the analysed time frames?

4. Methodology and data

In this present paper, qualitative research was employed, which means that the aim of the research was focused on understanding the nature of the problem, rather than the number of characteristics that define it. (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) Within this research type, the data is selected with the purpose of better understanding the research problem.

The research follows the qualitative analytical approach of critical discourse analysis, which seeks to assess the relations of causality between discursive practices and social and cultural structures, in order to determine the influence of ideology and power struggles within reflections of social realities. (Fairclough, 1995) For this type of research, a more qualitative approach like critical discourse analysis was preferred thanks to its focus on the study of natural language and the context in which it is produced. A quantitative approach like content analysis would restrict the scope of this research had been the extraction of specific patterns and trends from a set of documents, relying mostly on analysing a large amount of data and establishing word frequency. However, the current research analyses a small number of samples, insufficient for large data analysis. Furthermore, the current research strives to establish not just word frequency within the samples, but also meanings attached to them and the social contexts in which they occur.

The analysis is based on Fairclough's model of CDA which surveys three levels: text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice. For these three levels of analysis, there are three other corresponding stages in conducting CDA on the selected texts: description, interpretation and explanation. (Fairclough, 1989) For the scope of this research, this method allows for a structured and thorough analysis of the selected online media content, and it explains the underlining social context and ideological struggles that influence the Romanian media discourse. Based on Fairclough's structure of conducting discourse analysis, this research follows the following framework in its analysis of the selected online media texts:

- 1) Description
 - i) Vocabulary
 1. Experiential values of words
 - i. Rewording/Overwording
 - ii. Synonyms/Hyponyms/Antonyms
 2. Formal/informal words
 3. Commonality of values
 4. Euphemisms
 - ii) Grammar
 - (a) Experiential values of grammatical features
 1. Agency
 2. Positive/negative sentences
 3. Active/passive sentences
 - (b) Relational values of grammatical features
 1. Modes
 2. Pronouns 'we' and 'you'
 - (c) Expressive values of grammatical features
- 2) Interpretation
- 3) Explanation

4.1. Selection of media texts

This paper analyses online media reporting for two major events in post-1989 Romania-China relations. The first event occurs in November 2013, when the China-Romania Economic Forum took place and the two countries signed a cooperation memorandum for the facilitation of Chinese investments. The second event is represented by the Romanian government blocking further Chinese companies and investors in infrastructure from participating in construction biddings and technology development agreements. Articles discussing these events were published between April 2020 and April 2021. Two online articles were selected from each of the three most accessed online media outlets in November 2013 and April 2020-2021 respectively. These are the two time frames in which the articles are categorized, and throughout this paper they are labelled as 'first time frame' and 'second time frame'

respectively. A total of 12 online articles were selected and analysed, from the following online media outlet: *adevarul.ro*, *bzi.ro*, *evz.ro*, *digi24.ro* and *libertatea.ro*. The articles were selected according to the average number of unique visitors in the researched periods of time. The term ‘unique visitors’ refers to a person who has visited a website only once during a reported time frame. In the case of the December 2019 – April 2021 time frame, the articles describe one event, but are published within the span of 16 months. The reason for this is that certain researched media outlets did not report on the blocking of Chinese investments in April 2021, but did report on talks prior to this decision, which took place in April 2020. The table below shows the number of unique visits of the three media outlets in November 2013, and the average number of unique visitors per month between December 2019 and April 2021.

November 2013		December 2019 -April 2021	
Media outlet	Unique visits	Media outlet	Unique visitors (avg.)
<i>adevarul.ro</i>	3,605,742	<i>digi24.ro</i>	9,757,700
<i>bzi.ro</i>	2,599,932	<i>adevarul.ro</i>	7,605,200
<i>evz.ro</i>	2,061,538	<i>libertatea.ro</i>	7,163,400

Table 1: Headlines of analyzed articles¹

The tables below list the headlines of all twelve articles that are part of this research, categorized into two time frames, the media outlet that they belong to and the date of publication. The headlines are originally in Romanian, but have been translated by me in English for ease of comprehension.

The visit of the Chinese PM looks like a strategy of dividing the EU – European diplomat	Bună Ziua Iași	21.11.2013
Chinese PM in Bucharest – victory or disaster?	Adevărul	22.11.2013
Mănescu, Minister of Transportation: Chinese Investments can be a source for developing infrastructure in Romania	Adevărul	25.11.2013
The stakes of the Economic Forum that will take place in Bucharest	Bună Ziua Iași	25.11.2013
China, the billion-dollars investor, comes to Romania	Evenimentul Zilei	25.11.2013
A Victor Ponta-type hysteria: The Chinese are coming with pretzels in their tails!	Evenimentul Zilei	26.11.2013

Table 2: Headlines of firsttime frame (2020-2021)

¹ See APPENDIX 2 for additional notes

LNP deputy announces a law project for blocking Chinese investments in strategic domains in Romania	Adevărul	02.04.2020
Vice PM Barna contradicts PM Cîțu regarding companies from outside the EU which do not have access to public biddings	Digi24	01.02.2021
The Government will forbid the participation of companies from China in public biddings. Drulă: It will be applied for future procedures.	Digi24	17.03.2021
The 5G law – approved by the Government. The Chinese group Huawei is one step from being blocked in Romania	Libertatea	15.04.2021
INTERVIEW. Romanian university academic: “When China will invest a lot in Romania, it will end up controlling the politicians as well, and that will have repercussion into the fate of the country.”	Libertatea	21.04.2021
The Chinese – officially excluded from biddings for infrastructure in Romania. Which countries can participate	Adevărul	03.05.2021

Table 3: Headlines of second time frame (2020-2021)

For this research, online media was preferred over the print media. In the case of Romanian press, printed newspapers are far less popular than their online format. For instance, in January-March 2018, the newspaper Adevărul registered only 5,890 issues being sold daily on average. (Bunea, 2018) According to the same source, the most popular types of printed media are tabloids and religious-affiliated newspapers, whereas daily newspapers rank lower in popularity. On the other hand, in January 2018, the website of the same media outlet, adevărul.ro, registered 9,255,369 unique visitors. (trafic.ro, 2018) Such a stark difference shows that when it comes to daily newspapers, the online format is preferred over print. In addition, difficulties brought by the ongoing pandemic have been forcing Romanian media holdings to cancel printing newspapers and publish all their content on the internet. (Europa FM, 2020)

4.2. Limitations

The first limitation is that following research does not account for all articles written on the topic of Chinese investments in Romania in Romanian media. The number of articles on

the mentioned topic is presumed to be far larger, and time constraints limit the ability to analyse all sources. The articles selected in this research should serve as a snapshot of the Romanian online media in two different time periods. At the same time, there is a high possibility that certain key articles from printed sources have not been indexed into electronic format. Furthermore, the inability to access printed sources also represents a major limitation, due to the lack of physical access to Romanian academic databases.

Second, the language of sources is Romanian, while the text of this paper is written in English. Some of the expressions that are best expressed in Romanian may lose their meaning when translated into English.

5. Data analysis

The following chapter will analyse the twelve articles using Fairclough's three-layered method of critical discourse analysis. The first stage is description in which analysis takes place at a textual level. The second stage is interpretation, which seeks to analyse text production and meanings carried by textual elements. The third stage is explanation, which dwells into the social analysis and social context of the text utterance.

5.2. Description

5.1.1. Headlines

The table below lists the translated headlines of articles from the first time frame:

The visit of the Chinese PM looks like a strategy of dividing the EU – European diplomat
Chinese PM in Bucharest – victory or disaster?
Mănescu, Minister of Transportation: Chinese investments can be a source for developing infrastructure in Romania
The stakes of the Economic Forum that will take place in Bucharest
China , the billion-dollars investor, comes to Romania
A Victor Ponta-type hysteria: The Chinese are coming with pretzels in their tails!

Table 4: Headlines of analyzed articles in the first time frame

For the first period described (articles from November 2013), agency of China was detected in 5 of the 6 articles. In other words, China is regarded as the active party in Chinese-Romanian relations around the event of the Economic Forum, while Romania – as a passive

actor. Although not mentioned directly, China is represented by terms that designate its representatives ('Chinese Prime Minister'), actions ('Chinese investments'), and people ('The Chinese').

Five out of six articles use headlines characterized by formal style of writing. Only one headline appears to be informal, by making use of a Romanian idiom: dogs are roaming with pretzels around their tails [umblă câinii cu covrigi în coadă]. This phrase is used to describe a state of false prosperity and wealth (Paraschivescu, 2018), and is mostly used in ironic statements.

LNP deputy announces a law project for blocking Chinese investments in strategic domains in Romania: "I hate communism with all my being!
Vice PM Barna contradicts PM Cîțu on the topic regarding companies from outside the EU which do not have access to public biddings
The Government will forbid the participation of companies from China in public biddings. Drulă: It will be applied for future procedures.
The 5G law – approved by the Government. The Chinese group Huawei is one step from being blocked in Romania
INTERVIEW. Romanian university academic: “When China will invest a lot in Romania, it will end up controlling the politicians as well, and that will have repercussion into the fate of the country.”
The Chinese – officially excluded from biddings for infrastructure in Romania. Which countries can participate

Table 5: Headlines of analyzed articles in the second time frame

In the second table, which shows the headlines of the articles from the December 2019 – April 2021 time frame, China is again portrayed through its hyponyms: ‘Chinese group Huawei’, ‘the Chinese’, ‘Chinese investments’. Contrary to the first time frame, headlines from the second time frame portray China as passive, and Romania, identified through its counterparts like ‘the Government’, ‘LNP deputy’ and other mentioned members of the Romanian government. In five out of six examples, agency is assumed by the Romanian government. Furthermore, the use of passive voice is preferred when referring to China: ‘excluded’, ‘blocked’. At the same time, the action of blocking, excluding or forbidding any further action of China is expressed in five out of six headlines.

Headlines 1, 3 and 4 report on the topic of blocking Chinese business entities: Chinese investments, companies from China, Chinese group Huawei. Headline number 2 does not mention China directly, but it refers to it indirectly through the structure *companies from outside the EU*. Unlike the rest of the headlines, number 6 states that *the Chinese* are officially excluded from public biddings. Although later in the article it becomes clear that the use of *the*

Chinese refers to companies, and not the people group, such a choice of words shifts the focus of interdiction from businesses to an ethnicity, at least in a figurative manner.

Headline number 1 is accompanied by a quote from LNP deputy Pavel Popescu: “I hate Communism from all my being!” [Urăsc comunismul cu toată ființa mea!]. This quote can later be found in the article, among an entire fragment clipped from the deputy’s Facebook post. The author of the article creates an emotionally charged headline by bringing up the statement about strong feelings of the deputy’s position towards Communist ideology. Furthermore, it creates an association with Chinese investments, thereby implying that Communism is the cause for drafting the mentioned law project.

Similarly to headline number 1, number 5 also employs a quote from the article’s interviewee. However, the subject ‘China’ is replaced in the headline, instead of ‘the Chinese’, as it is found originally in the article. It introduces an adverbial clause of time – “when the Chinese will invest” – which shows when the action is going to occur. (2013) This instance of expressing this clause signals a state of certainty compared to the implied meaning of a conditional clause. Furthermore, the author of the quote, Șerban Cioculescu, is mentioned in the headline as “Romanian academic”. The entitlement of ‘academic’ - *universitar* in Romanian - offers a much stronger relatability than just the name of the specialist, as a result of a more prevalent trust in specialists in universities. (INSCOP, 2015)

5.1.2. Images

Among all twelve articles, ten of them have images set under the title, with five images in each time frame. The content of the images differs in each time frame:

Articles in first time frame	Photo description	Articles in the second time frame	Photo description
The visit of the Chinese PM looks like a strategy of dividing the EU – European diplomat (Image 1)	Chinese PM Li Keqiang waving and smiling towards the camera, with Chinese flag in the background	Vice PM Barna contradicts PM Cîțu regarding companies from outside the EU which do not have access to public biddings (Image 6)	Photo of Vice PM Barna and PM Cîțu inside the Parliament
Chinese PM in Bucharest – victory or disaster? (Image 2)	Chinese PM Li Keqiang speaking to an audience	The Government will forbid the participation of companies from China in public biddings. Drulă: It will be applied for future procedures. (Image 7)	Construction site at the side of a road

The stakes of the Economic Forum that will take place in Bucharest (Image 3)	Stacks of euro coins, on a surface covered with dollar and euro banknotes	The 5G law – approved by the Government. The Chinese group Huawei is one step from being blocked in Romania (Image 8)	The storefront of a Huawei shop in China
China, the billion-dollars investor, comes to Romania (Image 4)	Romanian PM Victor Ponta shaking hands with Chinese PM Li Keqiang	INTERVIEW. Romanian university academic: “When China will invest a lot in Romania, it will end up controlling the politicians as well, and that will have repercussion into the fate of the country.” (Image 9)	Interviewee holding a presentation for a book launch
A Victor Ponta-type hysteria: The Chinese are coming with pretzels in their tails! (Image 5)	Image of author Ion Cristoiu raising his right hand and holding a smoking pipe in the other	The Chinese – officially excluded from biddings for infrastructure in Romania. Which countries can participate (Image 10)	Construction site on a road in Romania

Table 6: Description of images in analyzed articles

Three articles in the first time frame contain images depicting PM Li Keqiang, either alone or with Romanian PM Victor Ponta. The image depicting Keqiang smiling and waving towards the camera appears to be contrasting with the assertion in the headline – that the visit is a deceiving strategy. Therefore, instead of depicting a serious or threatening pose of the Chinese prime minister, the author chooses an image where his behaviour can be interpreted as purposefully misleading, as if the positive facial expression is part of the ‘divide and conquer’ strategy.

Other more articles depicting topics like the assessment of the Forum’s success and its advantages, or the economic prospects of China’s investments depict the Chinese PM as more serious while delivering a speech or meeting with a fellow politician. In these cases, the image does not correlate with formal or informal nature of the text, but rather with its topic. Another example of correlation between image and text is the article *The stakes of the Economic Forum that will take place in Bucharest*. The depicted pile of money constitutes a representation of the ‘stakes’ concerning the economic forum, which is basically monetary help.

In the second time frame, the selected images are more generic and less diversified. Two articles include images depicting certain people whose statements can be found the main part of the texts, while others refer to investments in infrastructure and technology.

5.1.3. Modes

Imperative sentences are completely absent in the second time frame, while in the first they occur in two articles. Likewise, imperative sentences are also found in the first time frame, intertwining with exclamatives and declaratives:

a) *In other words, not only that this visit is not useful, but it would hurt Romania!* -

Exclamative

b) *A typical Romanian jump from one extreme to the other!* - Exclamative

c) *Romanians, watch out for the Chinese communists that make eyes at you!* -

Imperative

Sentences such as the ones mentioned reveal the author's affective response towards certain ideas and the ones producing them. The exclamation in sentence a) is meant to mark irony and ridicule the producer of this intertextual content. In sentence b), the exclamation works in the same manner, only it relies on the reader's knowledge of the Romanian people's psychology. Furthermore, in the context of the Romanian spoken language, the use of the word '*tipic*' is mostly present in exclamative ironic sentences. Sentence c) is an imperative as it starts with the word Watch out – *Atentie din Romanian*. It establishes a direct relationship with the readership, which the author addresses.

5.1.4. Agency

Unlike in the headlines where there were instances of unclear agency, in all analyzed texts, overall agency is clear and all actors are identified. However, there are examples in which agency appears to be obfuscated: "I read in dismay how the idea that the Government is playing the game of the communists from China winds up in the press". (Sultănescu, 2013)

The choice of the reflexive voice allows for a lack of agency in regards to the negative attitude towards the Chinese government, as no perpetrator of said idea is identified in the phrase. Later in the text, the author makes a reference to the anti-Chinese ideas as "fears of some Talibans from our press". The designation of Taliban does not indicate a specific actor in the media debate about China, but rather a feeling of ideological extremism that the author alleges to be shared among some people in the media.

The reflexive voice is also present in another article from the same time period, regarding the EU-China summit: *At tomorrow's Summit, Romania-China relations will be discussed*. While the topic of the discussions is present, no clue is given about the initiator of the talks. Therefore, it is unclear whether it is Romania or China who have the main interest for Chinese investments in Romania.

5.1.5. Formal/Informal

The large majority of the articles are written using formal words, thereby implying a sense of professionalism and neutrality. Two articles from the first time frame were identified as containing a significantly larger amount of informality compared to the others. These articles happen to be editorials, which are more personal by nature in expressing individual opinions and reflecting the author's personal beliefs. (Rupar, 2007) The articles are Dan Sultănescu's *Chinese PM in Bucharest – Victory or disaster?* And Ion Cristoiu's *A Victor Ponta-type hysteria: The Chinese are coming with pretzels around their tails!* Some of their informal characteristics are the following:

- Both articles are written from the perspective of the author, which is first-person: “I read”, “I denounced”, “I wrote”;
- The presence of exclamative and interrogative statements;
- Use of slurs and pejorative terms: “Talibans from the press”, “watch out for the Chinese communists that make eyes at you! They might be slanted, but they are still interested!”
- A series of contractions: “n-a” instead of “nu a”, “nu-mi” instead of “nu îmi”;
- Verbal tics that are characteristic of oral speech: “mă rog”, “tare”;
- Use of short simple sentences

In addition, the articles employ a variety of words and devices that mark subjectivity in speech, thereby revealing the authors' opinions on the discussed topic: “I read dismayed”, “Why would this be a bad thing?”, “pro-Chinese paranoia.” Meanwhile, some articles an overall formal and impersonal style, while at times shifting to a more subjective and personal style: “Even though you may not believe it.”

Another aspect that has been observed is the disproportionate use of formal/informal words over the two studied time frames. Within the first time frame there are three out of six articles that display a subjective and informal style. On the other hand, the second time frame presents no signs of informality in speech.

5.1.6. Expressive value of words

One recurrent pattern of the choice of words when describing China or China’s actions in Romania is the use of military terms. Some of the words used are battle, confrontation, Chinese landing troops, offensive and flagship. The use of military glossary is preponderant in the first time frame, rather than in the second time frame where only one word was used – flagship.

The tables below shows positive and negative connotations associated with China in the first and second time frames:

First time frame	
Positive connotation - China	Negative connotation - China
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The state with the largest foreign exchange reserves in the world</i> • <i>The billion-dollar investor</i> • <i>One of the greatest opportunities</i> • <i>The Chinese are a source</i> • <i>The opportunity of new Chinese investments</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Asian state is also facing serious issues, like the fact that 13% of the population lives below the poverty line</i> • <i>The visit [...] caused worry</i> • <i>‘Divide and conquer’ strategy</i> • <i>After all, China is a communist country</i> • <i>Pro-Chinese paranoia</i>

Table 7: Positive and negative connotation associated to China in the first time frame

Second time frame	
Positive connotation - China	Negative connotation - China
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Chinese, officially excluded</i> • <i>Chinese companies [...] distort competition</i> • <i>The Chinese do not have certificates</i> • <i>China was criticized for its management of the pandemic start</i> • <i>Fluctuating relations with China</i> • <i>This authoritarian regime</i> • <i>Watch out for the quality of Chinese products</i>

Table 8: Positive and negative connotation associated to China in the second time frame

In the first time frame, words and structures of words with positive and negative connotation are relatively balanced when it comes to occurrences in articles, whereas in the second time frame, no positive connotations could have been found in any of the six analysed articles. On the contrary, negative connotations are far more prevalent and refer to a wide range of elements representing China such as Chinese companies, the Chinese as a people, the Chinese government and Chinese products.

Another recurring pattern is the use of adjectives “chineze” and “chinezesti”. While both terms designate the quality of something to be of Chinese origin and can be used interchangeably, the term “chinezesti” or “chinezesc” appears to occur predominantly in negative connotations. One possible explanation is that in spoken language, “chinezesc/chinezesti” alludes to something being of weak quality and often mass produced.

A major point is given to the importance and scale of this visit, being described as the first visit of a Chinese PM in Romania after nineteen years, while having the largest delegation in Central and Eastern Europe. Four out of six articles bring forth details about the nature of the visit, which are described using superlatives like “the largest delegation”, “the most important visits”, as well determiners like “more money”, “more influence”, “more solid interest”.

5.1.7. Metaphors

The metaphorical representation of China as an invading force is recurrent among articles from both time frames. More precisely, it describes the action of invasion, trespassing and forcing the invaders will onto the invaded without consent. When referring to the opportunity of Chinese investments, one of the authors in the first time frame describes the arrival of Chinese investors as “desantul chinez”. “Desant” is described by the Romanian Dictionary as “specially-trained units that are parachuted or debarked on enemy territory.” (Academia Română, 2009) The choice of this term is unusual giving the fact that the article is overall positive towards the prospect of Chinese investments in Romania.

Another example comes from the second time frame, where tech companies like Huawei are referred to as “flagship-companies”. However, there is a substantial difference between the English and Romanian meanings. In English, flagship refers to a naval vessel, while in Romanian the meaning is linked to signalling, usually in a military context. Although there are eight years separating the two articles, the metaphorical representation of Chinese actions remains close to the idea of military operation.

5.1.8. Structure

Nine out of the twelve articles follow the traditional journalistic structure of the inverted pyramid, which is a method of relaying the most important information at the beginning, usually called the lead, then following with the most important facts of the story and finally leaving the least newsworthy information towards the end. (George Mason University, 2014)

The background information is different in each time frame. Most of the background information in the first time frame presents details concerning the EU-China forum and statistics concerning either Romanian-Chinese trade relations or EU-China relations. More precisely, there is an emphasis on the value of imports and exports between Romania or the EU, and China, and the participants and goals of the economic forum. In the second time frame, there are far fewer mentions of economic figures, but such information wanes compared with other mentioned topics like the list of countries who ratified agreements blocking certain Chinese companies, the fact that Chinese companies with ongoing projects will continue to operate despite restrictions and information about the history and controversies of Huawei. For example, the article *The 5G law approved by the government. Chinese group Huawei soon to be blocked in Romania* uses the same principle in storytelling. The difference from the previously mentioned article in the first time frame is the content of the background information, which contains information about the past controversies of Huawei.

5.1.9. Pronouns we and you – positioning

In the Romanian language, pronouns can be omitted from speech because verb conjugations alone can determine the grammatical person and number within the relation between speaker, the addressee and others.

The article *The stakes of the Economic Forum that will take place in Bucharest* uses the personal pronoun we in the sentences concerning values of imports and exports with China; for example, in the sentence: “Last year, we exported meat and meat products to China that were worth 900.000 euros.” However, later in the same paragraph, while staying on the same topic, the author addresses the readership directly: “In the top of agrifood exports, on the second place were coffee, spices and, even if you may not believe it, tea”. The author assumes that the readership may not believe that tea is one of Romania’s top exports to China. This passage reveals the presupposition that the Romanian readership would consider tea as mainly a Chinese good or that the Chinese would have no reason to import Romanian tea.

5.1.10. Negation

Although most of the sentences from articles of both time frames are positive, the instances where negation appears prove to give additional significance to their respective texts. One example from the first time frame is in *Chinese PM in Bucharest – Victory or disaster?*. Negation is used in order to change the overall tone of the text and establish a relationship

between the author and the reader. In other words, the text hints at intertextuality through the use of negation. The ‘dialogue’ that appears to be constructed with the help of negation, but also with the help of modes like imperative or grammatical question becomes a dialogue with producers of other texts who claim the following presuppositions:

- “The EU does not agree.”
- “The action is not just initiated by the Romanians.”
- “The Economic Forum is not a Romanian invention.”

In these cases, the author challenges the claim regarding the role of actors in the EU-China economic forum and assumes that the reader is also aware of these differences. Furthermore, negation carries the role of underlying the author’s challenging rhetoric against the presuppositions that they list:

- “E bine ca n-a fost niciodata invitat in Romania un premier chinez in ultimii 10 ani? Eu cred ca nu.”
- “Toate acestea ar putea insemna, in viitor, bani mai multi pentru Romania, influenta mai mare, interes mai solid pentru investitori. Este rau? Eu cred ca nu...”

The two negations are preceded by the rhetorical questions Is it good? and is it bad which reveal a contrast between the two devices. On top of that, the sentence “Eu cred ca nu” emphasizes on what is not the case, rather than the author’s opinion, if we compare it to “Eu nu cred asta” – “I don’t think so”.

The second time frame also contains instances where negation is used and intertextuality is implied, like in the article *The Government will forbid the participation of companies from China in public biddings*: “According to the minister, companies from the United States, Japan, Canada or Turkey will not be excluded from the biddings.” In this instance, the author assumes that the reader has knowledge of the document that has been signed and that these are countries with significant importance to the reader.

5.3. Interpretation

As it has been previously mentioned, the analysed articles from each time frame offer two main contexts of discussion: for time frame one it is the prospects of investments done by Chinese investors in Romania, and for the second time frame – the discussion around the blocking of said investments in Romania, 5-8 years after initial discussions. In addition, the two contexts are related to three governmental agreements signed in the two time frames: one

in the first, and two in the second. Articles in the first time frame write about events concerning the signing of cooperation agreements between Romania and China, as part of the Economic Forum of 2013. On the other hand, articles in the second time frame focus on the ratification of EU-third countries accords on public acquisitions, as well as the US-Romania memorandum on the security of 5G networks.

5.3.1. Text production

The analysed texts come from five online news media outlets: Adevărul, Bună Ziua Iași, Evenimentul Zilei, Digi24 and Libertatea. During the time frames that underwent analysis, these outlets registered the most unique visits.

Adevărul is a daily newspaper and is one of the oldest news publications still in circulation in Romania. First founded in 1871, it was mainly a left-wing publication, against the monarchy and pro-democracy. (Tone, 2008) It was taken out of print in 1951 by the Communist regime, and then re-established in 1989 following the Romanian Revolution and replacing the official Communist newspaper Scînteia. Evenimentul Zilei and Libertatea are also daily newspapers founded in 1992 and 1989 respectively, among the most well-known news media outlets in the country. The latter, Libertatea, was for a long time a tabloid reporting on various themes from general news to news about celebrities. Only in 2014 did Libertatea renounced the tabloid genre and switched to a more classical and generalist approach to national and international news reporting. (Ringier, 2014) Bună Ziua Iași is a regional newspaper which covers mostly news from the Iași area and the province of Moldova. Digi24 is the only online media outlet that does not fall under the traditional newspaper category but is instead a television channel. It was founded by the telecommunication holding company Digi and is generalist by nature. (mediafax.ro, 2012)

The legislation in Romania allows political parties to allocate funds from the state budget, to media outlets for promotion and propaganda. However, information regarding the beneficiaries of these funds is sometimes hidden due to lack of transparency from political parties. What is known is that the parties who fund the Romanian press the most are the SDP and the NLP, who have allocated more than 50% of their promotion budget for propaganda purposes. (Andrei, 2021) For example, in 2021, the SDP offered approximately 32.4 million lei to media outlets, while the NLP only offered around 19 million lei. (Andrei, 2022) Up until 2021, political parties were not forced by law to release information about the beneficiaries of these funds for the press. But from 2021, the Permanent Electoral Authority mandated that

every political party must publish a monthly report containing details about every expenditure. Regardless, parties like the SDP or the NLP either do not release any information, or they just release partial data concerning the destination of the funds. (Andrei, 2021). As a result, it is difficult to pinpoint which online media outlets are the beneficiaries of each party based on these monthly reports. The only connection between the two actors is based on correlations between certain actions of the media outlets, in relation to some political parties.

For example, *Digi24* has been accused several times of promoting the NLP in their news coverage, without disclosing it to the public. Several articles were signed at the end as “Supported by the NLP”, although such articles are of public interest and are not supposed to contain any political promotion. (Obae, 2020)

Evenimentul Zilei also came under serious criticism, especially concerning its executive director Dan Andronic and his charges of corruption and money laundering. Andronic was for a long time directing the political campaign of NLP presidential candidate Adrian Năstase in 2004, and later worked for president Traian Băsescu’s political promotions. In 2016, journalist Ion Cristoiu announced that he quits his position of honorific director of *Evenimentul Zilei*, due to the staff’s implication in political campaigns, in favour of certain political parties. (Bunea)

5.3.2. Text consumption

In regards to the study of readership profiles for each online news media outlets, no actual studies were found that would identify a typology of reader for any of the analysed newspapers. However, a more generalist study was conducted, thereby revealing some features of Romanian newspaper readers.

Following the popularization of the internet among the general population, Online newspapers have the advantage of encouraging interactions between readers and media outlets through forums and comment sections. The reader can engage in a dialogue with other readers, express their opinions on the discussed topic and even reach out to the author of the article. (Schifirnet, 2011) Nevertheless, in terms of the presented content, online and print newspapers are very much alike. This means that media outlets prefer to standardize their news production by writing the same content for all platforms, which in turn allows reaching out to a larger public. (Ghersetti, 2014)

In his analysis, Schifirnet (2011) points out that the Romanian mass-media is inclined to report on stories that bring the most audience, and neglect stories that may not be of interest, even though they might be objectively important like the political development of European

countries and institutions. References to European norms or the European style of democratization remain marginal, even in a post-2007 journalistic environment.

5.3.3. Topics and their interpretation

After analysing the twelve articles, it becomes clear that within each time frame, authors give a different interpretation to the reported events. Four out of six articles from the first time frame are presenting China in a positive light. On top of that, the positive representation of China is meant to fit the image of a welcoming Romania:

China, the state with the largest foreign exchange reserves in the world	Romanians want to collaborate with their Chinese counterparts
China, the billion-dollars investor, comes to Romania	Romania, the destination of Chinese investments
The Chinese are a source that can help us develop the infrastructure	The greatest interest is ours
[The visit] could bring billions-worth investments in the following years	Romania's image in the world will benefit greatly

Table 9: Positive representations of China and Romania in analyzed articles

On one hand, media reports on the visit of the Chinese delegation to Romania focus exclusively on the value of future investments and the financial capabilities of China. At the same time, the authors are also touching upon the willingness of Romania to receive such investments. For example, in the article *China, the billion-dollar investor, comes to Romania*, the author states that:

“The opportunity of new Chinese investments in Romania arrives in the context of the improvement of our country's image in the eyes of investors. The most important rating agency, Standard&Poor's, increased our score from 'stable' to 'positive'.” (Florescu, 2013)

Such a statement reveals the writer's presupposition that China is likely to invest in Romanian projects mainly because of Romania's improving economy. The topic of Romania's image in the world is a recurring one and appears again in *Chinese PM in Bucharest – victory or disaster?*. The author writes: “Romania's image in the world will benefit, as long as there will be news about these actions reaching everywhere.” The actions that the author refers to events like the visit of Chinese investors, whose news reports would automatically improve Romania's reputation worldwide. Furthermore, the assumption is that negative news reports on the event will not be taken into consideration, as they are seen as a symbol of extremism.

The other two out of six articles present some sort of concern regarding the Economic Forum and the subsequent implication of Chinese investors in local affairs. The first article reports on the declaration of an anonymous European diplomat. However, the author

extrapolates and states that the visit caused worry among more diplomats, even though only one individual is quoted.

The second article in this category, A Victor Ponta-type hysteria: *The Chinese are coming with pretzels in their tails!* portrays the visit and the Chinese more negatively than all others in the first time frame. The author describes the current attitude of the government as “pro-Chinese paranoia”. By linking the policy of governmental actors with paranoia, which is a symptom of psychosis and proof of an abnormal condition of mind, the author establishes authority in discourse and diminishes the credibility of his opponents in discourse. At the same time, China and anything related to China is associated with the term communist: communist leader, communist country, communist China, the communist regime, the communist Chinese. This association is meant to be a negative one, appealing to an audience with anti-Communist sentiments.

The article also presents certain racist statements in regard to Asian physical traits: Romanians, watch out for the communist Chinese who make eyes at you! They might be slanted, but they are still interested! Furthermore, the use of the metaphor The Chinese are coming with pretzels in their tails! Indicated a likening of Chinese people with dogs, as well as a lack of trust.

Authors of articles from the second time frame depict China in a different light, with all the articles discussing some negative topic regarding China. These topics include the public criticism of Chinese investors, the blocking of Huawei operations and the exclusion of Chinese investors from participating in construction biddings. Below is a timeline of actions in which China is either an active or passive actor and which have to do with the blocking of investments:

- 1) “Law project against Chinese businesses in Romania”
- 2) “Companies from China could be excluded”
- 3) “The Government will forbid the participation of companies from China”
- 4) “The Chinese group Huawei, soon to be blocked”
- 5) “The Chinese announced investments [...] but plans were left on paper”
- 6) “The Chinese, excluded officially”

The first selected phrase is a nominal sentence and does not describe an action determined by a verb, therefore shifting focus to the subject – the law project. What follows is a gradual increase in the certainty of the actions, visible in the tenses and moods of the verbs:

- could be excluded – conditional mood
- will forbid – future tense

- to be blocked – progressive tense
- excluded – past tense

Similarly to the first time frame, China as a social actor is labelled as ‘communist’, and it is used in contexts that are meant to criticize China’s actions. When quoting an NLP deputy’s negative statement regarding the blocking of Chinese investments, the author chooses to extract one single phrase from the entire fragment, and that is “I hate communism with all my being!”. In relation to the rest of the text, the political ideology of the China is regarded as the main reason for the initiating the blocking of Chinese companies.

The topic of economic benefits from Chinese investments is left out of the general media discourse in the second time frame. It is mentioned only marginally as “plans that remained on paper.” One article, the interview with professor Cioculescu, makes a reference to the Economic Forum of 2013 in order to explain why inter-state negotiations between Romania and China stalled. Apart from this reference, the Memorandum is never mentioned again, while agreements signed with the US and the EU are given much more importance.

5.4. Explanation

At this level of analysis, we look further into how the media discourse portrayed as a social practice, determined by power relations at institutional, situational and societal levels, and ideologies. At the same time, explanation also dwells into the effects that this discourse might have on institutional, situational and societal levels.

From 2013 until 2021, media outlets have presented various representations of China and its initiatives in Romania. The lack of information on links between the selected media outlets and political structures in the country makes it difficult to establish a relationship of causation regarding what is the ideological drive behind discourse in the media. At best, only correlations can be determined for certain instances. For example, the allegations of dishonest sponsorship of *Digi24* coverage by the NLP can be a sign that political influences may extend beyond the scope of their controversial articles and could influence media reportings on China.

The attitude of the media in the first time frame in regards to the prospects of Chinese investments can be described as mixed, ranging from positive to negative. Media discourse has been centred around the financial benefits that could be earned in order to accomplish several projects in energy and infrastructure, and less on the geopolitical or social implications.

Because of its average low absorption rate of EU funds (Antohi, Ionescu, Zlati, & Constantin, 2020), Romania has been looking for any source of capital for its development, as

well as development projects from foreign investors. At the same time, having been admitted to the European Union only in 2007, Romania has had a slow start as EU member, doubled by the economic recession of 2008 and one of the highest rates of corruption in Europe. (Baicu, 2017) (Transparency International, 2008) Meanwhile in 2013, as the financial crisis ended in Romania and other European countries, Xi Jinping became leader of China in 2013 and initiated the One Belt One Road project in Europe. For Romanian officials, such a project could become a source of development where European funds cannot reach, especially for politicians of the Social Democratic Party.

The issue of poor infrastructure exists since the late years of the Communist regime when fewer funds were allocated for maintaining the network of roads and railways throughout Romania. After the Revolution, the lack of infrastructure remained a serious blockage in the development of the country, which prompted several companies to even withdraw their operations from Romania or cancel plans to relocate to the country. (Ilie, 2011) Infrastructure development has been a topic of interest in the post-1989 media discourse for many years, and has become a recurring theme in political discourse, as well as a measure of the country's overall level of development. As a result, it should be no surprise that the topic of infrastructure development should be one of public and political interest. Even among colloquial conversations between people, the lack of roads and road quality is often brought up as one of the main reasons why Romania is lagging behind other European and non-European countries. The Romanian media capitalized on the public need for information concerning possible developments of infrastructure, a fact that is strengthened by the multitude of articles published in a relatively short span of time – 5 days – , and all covering the same topic.

SDP's political discourse is not driven by a strong anti-European ideology and open pro-Chinese narrative. Furthermore, none of the analysed articles imply a rejection of European values or criticism against the EU or the United States. At best, media discourse in relation to Western organization is neutral. However, the predominant political discourse reflected in the media is one of soft Euroscepticism, which is embraced by SDP politicians. (Şcheul, 2020) In 2014, the SDP led by Victor Ponta, who also was the main figure during the negotiations between Romania and China one year before, participated in the presidential and EU parliamentary elections with a more nationalistic-oriented discourse.

One finding is the contrastive image of China, portrayed by the Romanian media in articles within the first time frame. On one hand, China is seen as an 'opportunity' and financial 'source' for development, but on the other hand it is still represented as somehow invading,

with its actions resembling the thoroughness of a military operation. China is also viewed as the active actor in negotiations

The closeness between Romania and China in the political discourse is more situational rather than ideological. Of course, the SDP's stance on Romania-EU relations may incline more towards a nationalistic and populist attitude. Given that elections were planned to be organized the next year and that the topic of infrastructure is indeed a sensitive one, it can also be assumed that the SDP's openness to China could serve as an opportunistic strategy to gain political support from voters.

Online media in the second time frame portrays China generally more negatively, focusing on setting limits and focusing on excluding China from the initial plans of cooperation. The discourse still retains elements of representation from the first time frame, like the portrayal of China as an invading force. The difference is that China is no longer represented as an active actor, with power dynamics shifting in Romania's favour. Although the resolutions to block Chinese companies are not specifically against China, but against companies from more countries, media discourse shows how heavily influenced it is by the anti-China attitude prevalent in European institutions and singles out China as the one and only threat to the security of the state and the EU.

6. Discussion

It has been reported (Miroiu, 2012) that the 2008 economic recession caused a significant increase in democratic decay, making countries around the world to rank lower in terms of how democratic they are. Romania, along with other Eastern European states, experienced the same phenomenon, losing nine positions in the world ranking of democracies. Compared to other EU member states, by 2012 Romania was reported to be the lowest ranking democracy in the European Union. (DI, 2011) By the end of the recession and beginning of the 2012 electoral campaign, the main attitudes of the people were described as "disappointment" and a "a lack of trust in democratic institutions, especially in the Parliament and political parties." (Miroiu, 2012) Such was the rationale behind the victory of the SDP in 2012 after eight years of opposition.

Three years before the signing of the memorandum, China is mentioned several times in of the SDP's political projects titled *The Right Romania – The Social Romania* (2010). The project underlines the political vision, as well as actions that the party would prioritize in order

to bolster economic recovery. One of the subchapters is dedicated to flourishing inter-state opportunities between Romania and ‘emerging powers’ – China, Brazil and India.

China appears to be the main focus of establishing relations with BRICS countries, as it is mentioned in the project. More specifically, Chinese investments are described as a distinct to be completed in the near future:

“To attract Chinese investments, considering that the Romanian economy will be revitalized in the upcoming years. Given the Chinese experience of recent decades, the main investment areas are construction and infrastructure, with an emphasis on developing highways.” (Partidul Social Democrat, 2010)

The SDP’s statement shows a high degree of certainty that the Romanian economy will improve in the future, and that the possibility of strengthening relations with China will contribute to an even stronger economy. The relation between Romania and China is also described as “a factor of utmost importance”, which means that the SDP’s policy in regards to external affairs will prioritize communication with China over other countries. Furthermore, the document only briefly mentions of cooperation plans with other countries like South Korea and Japan, in one sentence and with no additional details. (Partidul Social Democrat, 2010).

A closer look upon documents of the NLP shows a lesser preoccupation with Chinese cooperation, compared to the discourse of the SDP. In terms of its policy towards foreign affairs, the NLP perspective states that

“...at a global level, a consistent value added to our allies and partners could be the reconsolidation of bilateral relations with new and relevant emergent actors like China, India, Brazil and South Africa, based on the traditionally good relations of Romania with these states.” (Partidul Național Liberal, 2012)

Both political parties share their interest in cooperating with China. However, the NLP imagines its Romania’s cooperation with China as an asset in future foreign affairs with other countries. In other words, the relationship with China is used as an instrument in gaining favour with Romania’s allies. The structure ‘our allies and partners’ is a recurring pattern in the NLP’s discourse, and it is emphasized several times in the document, signifying that one of the NLP’s central ideological tenets is improving its relations with international actors that it identifies with. Some of the actors mentioned are organizations like NATO, the EU and OSCE.

Later documents from 2017-2020 show that both the SDP and the NLP share the same idea of continuing the projects established with China during the 2013 memorandum. Nevertheless, the NLP believes that any form of cooperation between Romania and China should follow national interests and compliance with European regulations. (Partidul Național Liberal, 2021) Such a condition is missing from the SDP's vision on foreign affairs.

The study of media representations of Chinese investments is important for understanding support of a foreign policy over another by the population. Regardless, it is safe to say that people's perception on China has changed drastically over the years, in line with the shift in discourse. In 2010, Romania was one of the European countries that viewed China mostly in a positive light, with 67% of Romanians reporting favourable views. (Mixich, 2010) At the same time, only 27% reported concern over a potential Chinese economic threat. During the following years, the positive outlook on China waned and reports show a decrease in favourable opinions from 67% in 2010 to 62% in 2012 and 45% in 2013. (GMF, 2013) One possible reason for the decrease of trust in China among the population could be correlated with the shift in the discourse of China related-topics in Romanian online media. Such a connection could rather represent a correlation, as there could be many other factors influencing popular opinion. However, media representation is one of them. (Krings, 2018), especially considering the fact that foreign policy is a topic that can only be explored through news sources, as demonstrated by the theory.

As shown in the theory, discourse is a tool that helps with signifying actions in the world and conferring them meaning. Therefore, within discourse the ideological and hegemonical dynamics between actors can be examined and explained. Within the scope of this research

In both analysed time frames, there has been a match between the political discourse and the media discourse. In the first time frame, a central part of the media representations is financial benefits, especially the importance of China's visit to Romania and the magnitude of planned investments. At the same time, the political discourse mainly driven by SDP politicians of which the most important is PM Victor Ponta, described the topic of Chinese investments in a similar manner (gov.ro, 2013), according to their governance program. Hence, the positive stance of the SDP in relation to China can be traced back to party ideology and self-interest.

As in the case of other Eastern and Southern European countries, by 2013 the Romanian political discourse followed the narrative of distancing itself from the concept of a unitary European voice in negotiations with China. Within the analysed articles in the first time frame,

more importance is given to economic benefits than to security concerns at a European level. In other words, Romania and other countries in the same region push for a multi-layered approach to China, one that is less centralized and less hegemonical. Of course, such an approach is conducted within the limits of EU legislation, which means that the wave of In the second time frame, much of the media discourse focuses on the restriction imposed against Chinese businesses and is constructed around enforcing compliance with European standards. Similar to the political discourse mostly shaped by NLP ideology, the online media employs a discourse that is favouring the othering of China and draws the alliance with the EU/US closer to the self. Conversely to the first time frame, Romania's political discourse shifts to an approach in line with European discourse, which pushes for a unitary voice against an alleged 'Chinese threat'. (Rogelja & Konstantinos, 2020)

The idea that Chinese FDI can represent a danger for European countries has its roots in anti-communist ideology, which is especially embraced by states that used to be part of the Eastern Bloc, but renounced Communism after the late 1980s. European institutions started to formally condemn Communist ideology and compare it to Nazism in mid-2000s. (Neumayer, 2020) In the case of Romania, after the 1989 Revolution, any link to communism has been given strong negative reactions from the political structure, as well as from the media and the general population. This phenomenon was visible in both the first and second time frame when negative stances towards China were tied to Communism and totalitarianism, which invalidated any argument in favour of Chinese investments. Such ideological hegemony found its way in Romanian political and media discourse with much more ease than in Western Europe and, as observed in the analysed articles, is still a major influence on representations of China.

There are other factors that led to the degradation of Romanian-Chinese relations; for example, it is believed that political instability attributed due to change of governments over the years in Romania made the memorandum to lose much of its importance (Brînză & Popescu, 2018) , and the Chinese business officials to lose authority in negotiations. However, findings in the analysis of the articles show slight prejudice against the Chinese as a people, shown by the use of derogatory terms and descriptions. It is unlikely that this type of prejudice and othering of the Chinese people in Romanian media is systematic and conscious. However, it still becomes an obstacle in achieving progress in negotiations.

The results of this study should not constitute a sign that Chinese investments will cease to exist in the future in Romania. For the last few years, the country has been having the highest

economic growth in Europe, despite the recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Energy Industry Review, 2021). This means that Romania will still represent a suitable ground for foreign businesses wishing to expand in Europe. The only concern is that Chinese companies will be barred from engaging in strategic investment projects such as roads, railways, and energy production. Romanian politics and media will continue to be influenced by the hegemonical European discourse, which means that Romania is not likely to experience a second opening to China as it was in 2013. However, cooperation between the two countries can still work at a smaller scale if both actors learn from their mistakes.

Perhaps one of the greatest errors committed by Romanian politicians and the media was the wrong framing of investment prospects by the Chinese. Specifically, the political structure promised too much and delivered too little, which led to disappointment and loss of trust not only in the government but also in Chinese investors. A more responsible and realistic approach should be taken in negotiations by both sides. This means that for the future, both the Romanian officials and Chinese investors should be aware of their own resources and possible obstacles that they might encounter. Furthermore, in their representations of China and the Chinese, the media should refrain from using textual structures that use slurs or describe people using derogatory terms. In the end, the use of such epithets does not serve any purpose other than to show power over the target of these insults.

7. Conclusion

By applying Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis, it has been shown that Romanian media discourse has been swaying over the years, oscillating between reluctance, optimism, and mistrust. Romania has been finding itself in the position of having to choose allegiance to one hegemony over another. In this case, cooperation with the European Union and respecting EU standards trumped over possibilities of accepting closer relations with China. Although Romanian authorities did accept some Chinese investments, their success rate was low, which was highly reported in the media.

Such ideological constraints prevented the media from creating an even more positive representation of China in the first time frame, at the beginning of negotiations, due to the hegemonical nature of anti-Communist ideology prevalent throughout Europe, which in turn reflected in controversies regarding state security, access to technology, human rights and compliance to national and European regulations. The European hegemonic discourse was also the main element that prevented the SDP and the Chinese investors from advancing in

negotiation. Although slightly Eurosceptic, the SDP still values itself as a pro-EU and pro-NATO political party, which in turn does not allow for much room in negotiating the terms of Chinese FDI in strategic domains like telecommunications or infrastructure. On the other hand, the NLP's governance plan and party ideology matches European hegemonic discourse to a higher degree. Media discourse changed as well, at the same time with political discourse. However, it is difficult to determine a causal relationship between the political and media discourse. Certain reports could indicate a politically-driven media representation of China by media outlets sponsored by the NLP, but such a claim requires further investigation.

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APPENDIX 1

Image 1



Source: <https://www.bzi.ro/vizita-premierului-chinez-in-romania-pare-a-fi-o-strategie-de-divizare-a-ue-diplomat-european-402959>

Image 2



Source: https://adevarul.ro/economie/stiri-economice/premierul-chinez-bucuresti-victorie-dezastrut-1_528f729bc7b855ff562711d9/index.html

Image 3



Source: <https://www.bzi.ro/miza-forumului-economic-care-va-avea-loc-la-bucuresti-403599>

Image 4



Source:
<https://web.archive.org/web/20131126150507/http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/china-investitorul-de-miliarde-de-dolari-vine-in-romania-1069184.html>

Image 5



Source:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20131128190137/http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/romania-lui-cristoiu-o-isterie-de-tip-victor-ponta-vin-chinezii-cu-covrigi-in-coada-1069368.html>

Image 6



Source: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/vicepremierul-barna-il-contrazice-pe-premierul-citu-in-privinta-companiilor-din-afara-ue-care-nu-au-acces-la-licitatii-publice-1444287>

Image 7



Source: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/economie/transporturi/guvernul-va-interzice-participarea-companiilor-din-china-la-licitatiile-publice-drula-se-va-aplica-pentru-procedurile-viitoare-146969>

Image 8



Source: <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/legea-5g-pe-agenda-sedintei-de-guvern-grupul-chinez-huawei-risca-sa-fie-blocat-pe-piata-echipamentelor-pentru-telecomunicatii-din-romania-3503270>

Image 9



Source: <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/interviu-universitar-roman-cand-china-va-investi-mult-in-romania-va-ajunge-sa-controleze-si-politicieni-iar-asta-se-va-repercuta-si-in-destinul-tarii-2961682>

Image 10



Source: https://adevarul.ro/economie/stiri-economice/chinezii-exclusi-oficial-licitatiile-infrastructura-romania-tari-vor-putea-participa-1_608fe40f5163ec4271a6a83a/index.html

APPENDIX 2

Note: The data from November 2013 are recovered from an archived web page of [traffic.ro](http://www.traffic.ro), which aggregates internet statistics about Romanian websites:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140102184007/http://www.traffic.ro/vizitatori/luna-pg1>.

Data from December 2019 and April 2021 are from Pagina de Media, an online newspaper dedicated to reports about television audience numbers and online traffic. The numbers represent the mean average of all unique visitors in a month during the aforementioned period of time.

Online traffic for December 2019-January 2020

<https://www.paginademedias.ro/2020/02/trafic-site-uri-luna-ianuarie-vs-decembrie/>

Online traffic for September-October 2020

<https://www.paginademedias.ro/2020/11/trafic-site-uri-octombrie-2020/>

Online traffic for November-December 2020

<https://www.paginademedias.ro/2021/01/trafic-site-uri-decembrie-2020/>

Online traffic for January - February 2020

<https://www.paginademedias.ro/2021/03/trafic-site-uri-februarie-2021/>

Online traffic for March - April 2020

<https://www.paginademedias.ro/2021/04/trafic-site-uri-martie-2021/>

Online traffic for December 2019-January 2020

<https://www.paginademedias.ro/trafic-online/trafic-site-uri-mai-2021-20226957>

Resümee

HIINA INVESTEERINGUTE KAJASTAMINE RUMEENIAS ONLINE-MEEDIAS: FAIRCLOUGHI KRIITILISE DISKURSUSE ANALÜÜS

Liviu Pintilie

Käesoleva artikli eesmärk on uurida diskursiivseid muutusi Rumeenia online-uudistes Hiina investeerimisprojektide kohta. Analüüsi aluseks on kaks peamist ajavahemikku, mis on kriitilise tähtsusega Hiina ja Rumeenia suhete arengu ja sotsiaalse konteksti näitamiseks, mis hõlmab ja juhib kõiki diskursiivseid muutusi. Uurimismeetod ja teooria põhinevad Norman Fairclough' kriitilise diskursusanalüüsi kolmekihilisel mudelil, mis võimaldab andmete põhjalikku kvalitatiivset analüüsi kolmel tasandil: tekstiline, diskursiivne ja sotsiaalkultuuriline.

Uurimus toimub Hiina poliitilise ja majandusliku laienemise kontekstis Euroopasse, mis on osa vöö ja tee algatusest. Euroopas osutus see Hiina valitsuse juhitud algatus populaarseks Ida-Euroopa riikide seas, kes püüdsid tugevdada oma infrastruktuuri ja energeetilist võimekust, et saavutada Euroopa kõrgemat arengustandardit. Paljude Ida- ja Lõuna-Euroopa riikide hulgas on Rumeenia, kes jagab sama otsustavust majandusliku arengu suhtes ja kelle koostöö Hiinaga on olnud pikaajaline. Rumeenia investeringute üle peetavate läbirääkimiste alguses leppisid mõlemad pooled kokku paljudes infrastruktuuri- ja energiasektori arengutes. Kuid enamik Rumeenia ja Hiina poolseid plaane ei suutnud lõpuks oma lubadusi täita, kuna riik võttis vastu Euroopa-meelsema seisukoha ja hakkas Hiina äriühingute juurdepääsu piirama. Samuti tutvustas Rumeenia online-meedia Rumeenia ja Hiina aktiivsema koostöö algust, kusjuures arvamused varieerusid erakordselt optimistlikest kuni karmilt negatiivseteni. Lõpuks muutusid aja möödudes meediakajastused Hiina ja Hiina investeringute kohta negatiivsemaks, kajastades sellega Rumeenia valitsuse poliitilist seisukohta Hiina suhtes.

Hiina plaanide ja läbirääkimiste areng Rumeenias algab Rumeenia ja Hiina suhete ajaloolise konteksti selgitamisega ja nende arenguga alates 20. sajandi keskpaigast. Seejärel tutvustan teoreetilist raamistikku, mis sisaldab lühikest diskursusteooriat, võimu, ideoloogia, hegemoonia, meedia representatsiooni ja kriitilise diskursuse analüüsi. Uurimus jätkub rakendatud metoodika üksikasjaliku kirjeldamisega ja võimalike piirangute määratlemisega. Andmeanalüüs on jagatud kolme ossa, mis on struktureeritud Fairclough' kolmekihilise

analüüsimudeli järgi: kirjeldus, tõlgendus ja seletus. Lõpuks arutlen uurimistulemuste üle, seon need teoreetilise raamistikuga ning pakun välja teatavad võimalikud lahendused Rumeenia ja Hiina ametnike vaheliste läbirääkimiste katkemise probleemile.

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