

interview

Interview: Ambassador Luminița Teodora Odobescu, Permanent Representative of Romania to the European Union

The European Union has progressed from managing the effects of the 2020 pandemic to managing a pandemic exit strategy, which also includes the vaccination campaign coordinated at EU level. Could you please offer us a European perspective on the vaccination campaign so that we could better understand the efforts made to provide Member States with equal, coordinated and immediate access to the existing vaccines?

In 2020, after a difficult start, the European Union managed to mobilise and adapt on the go to the multidimensional challenges posed by this unprecedented pandemic in the recent history. Both the European institutions and the Member States quickly realised, that we needed solidarity, coordination and a European approach, not only to prevent the spreading of the virus, but also to cope with the economic and social consequences of the crisis.

After some hard months of huge efforts, which involved constant coordination, political will and a lot of resilience from all the actors involved, this extremely difficult and complicated year came to an end with a host of good news: the authorisation of a vaccine and the launch of the vaccination campaign, as well as reaching an agreement regarding the EU budget for the next period and the recovery and resilience package, known as Next Generation EU.

The role played by the European Union, through the European Commission, in the development of the vaccine, its production and ensuring an equal, non-discriminatory access to the vaccine for all European citizens is undeniable. The EU succeeded in reuniting all the Member States at the negotiation table with the vaccine manufacturers, thus winning a great victory in the fight against the coronavirus on the European continent.

The proposed approach, endorsed by all Member States, meant that the European Commission assumed the negotiator role and signed a series of pre-acquisition agreements with the companies involved in the research work to ... p. 2



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Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union

- Time to deliver: a fair, green and digital recovery -

Portugal took over the presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1 January 2021 from Germany, and the “rallying cry” for the six-month mandate calls for a fair, green, and digital recovery. In a pandemic context, where the good news still comes from the procurement and distribution of vaccines throughout the European Union, Portugal aims to pursue three priorities for the first half of this year: supporting recovery in the context of digital and climate transitions, implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights to ensure a fair and inclusive transition in the digital and climate fields, strengthening the Union’s strategic autonomy while remaining open to the world.

With regard to the priority of economic recovery and resilience, Portugal aims to ensure the rapid operationalization of the new multiannual financial framework 2021-2027 together with the development of a series of related instruments and facilities, to advance the implementation of the European Green Deal (by securing a common agreement regarding the reduction of CO₂ emissions by at least 55% by 2030,... p. 5

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Interview: Ambassador Luminița Teodora Odobescu, Permanent Representative of Romania to the European Union

[continued from page 1] develop a Covid-19 vaccine. We should not forget that we have managed to obtain a vaccine in approximately 9 months, as a result of a huge mobilisation, both in terms of research resources and of EU financial support.

We have to underline that, when signing these agreements, no one knew which vaccine would be first approved and which one would give the best results. By ensuring access to a wide portfolio of vaccines, the EU made sure, from the very beginning, that the Member States would get efficient vaccines as soon as possible.

It is the European Medicines Agency that approves the vaccines, which offers us a solid guarantee that approved vaccines are safe. The safety of vaccination is thus guaranteed by multiple control stages, studies underlying vaccine licensing and side-effects monitoring systems.

At the time of this interview, the EU portfolio counts about 2.3 billion potential doses, based on the agreements concluded with 6 different companies (BioNTech-Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Sanofi-GSK, Janssen Pharmaceutica NV/J&J, CureVac). There are also advanced negotiations with other two companies. The vaccines produced by the first two companies mentioned above have already been approved. Two other vaccines might be authorised by mid-February, which will lead to an increase in deliveries and will speed up the vaccination process.

The vaccination campaigns started simultaneously in almost all the EU Member States - on 27, 28 and 29 December, with a symbolical number of doses. It was only natural to launch the vaccine - a symbol of joint solutions based on sustained efforts - at the same time in all the Member States. We thus reaffirmed our confidence in the European project and in the capacity of the European Union to find sustainable solutions to common challenges.

Over 13 million doses have been delivered across the EU by now, with a distribution rate of about 3.5 million doses per week. Considering the Member States' high interest in the vaccines, the possibility to increase production capacities is currently analysed.

Negotiation through the European Commission made it possible for all the Member States to have an equal, coordinated and immediate access to available vaccines, at the most convenient price. Any other approach would have generated gaps between the Member States, postponed the vaccination start in some countries and increased prices, leading to significant disparities. The common approach was beneficial to all the Member States, also taking into account the features of the single market and their degree of interconnection, which means that we will not be able to return to normality anywhere in the EU as long as the virus is not eradicated across the entire European continent. Only by continuing to work together will we be able to attain the required immunity that will allow returning to a normal life.

*One of the legislative priorities of 2021 relates to the **promotion and strengthening of democracy**, and the protection of the European values, respectively. Which would be the legislative steps to be made in 2021 so that the European democracy be less vulnerable to internal and external risks?*

The European values provide the very identity axis of the Union, its strongest binder. The EU's programmatic priority is thus to protect and strengthen democracy, as well as to defend these common values.

The particular importance of some protection mechanisms has been all the more obvious during this crisis year. Indeed, defending the European values is now one of the European legislative priorities for 2021, amongst the six major priorities that the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Council agreed upon in their Joint Statement made at the end of last year.

This is also a subject matter thoroughly analysed by the Commission in its European Democracy Action Plan, launched in December. The document includes a set of announced measures (including legislative proposals), which respond to a real need for strengthening the European democratic system, in the context of the growing challenges that European democracies have to face.

Disinformation, for instance, is such a highly topical challenge with a strong impact, whose toxic consequences have been deeply felt during the current pandemic. We have all witnessed that the spread of inaccurate or downright false information could be more than a targeted attack to European unity and our common values, and could turn into a real threat for people's lives. Used blindly or in bad faith, information can have devastating effects. That's why the EU institutions and the Member States rightly attach very much importance to countering disinformation.

Complementary to disinformation, there is the threat of foreign interference in the EU and the Member States' decision-making systems - two aspects often interrelated. It is not by chance that a special committee was established at Parliament level last autumn, exclusively dedicated to this phenomenon. The activity of this committee mirrors the action lines promoted by the Commission in its European Democracy Action Plan, as there is a close cooperation between the two European institutions on this matter. Of course, the EU Council has an important part to play in this respect as the legislative proposals set forth in the Action Plan will have to get its approval.

It should be said that the German Presidency of the EU Council (which came to an end in December 2020) has already made some important steps towards the defence of the EU democratic values by linking EU funding to the respect for the

rule of law. As we know, Romania supported this initiative, but also called for equal and non-discriminatory monitoring of the respect for the rule of law in all Member States.

Among the legislative proposals envisaged for the current year, there is a review of the rules applying to European political parties and foundations, as well as to political and election advertising, an institutional ambition particularly relevant in the light of the next European Parliament elections from 2024. Of course, we must say that the EU can only adopt measures to a limited extent, as the organisation of national elections falls within the competencies of the Member States. But the EU can make recommendations, meant to guide the Member States through the implementation of the necessary measures at national level.

Moreover, certain horizontal issues are also tackled in the Digital Services Act, launched by the Commission at the end of last year, which envisages the adoption of some complementary measures to the European Democracy Action Plan, with special focus on the role of online platforms.

Therefore, the various recently launched initiatives - mentioned above just by way of example - demonstrate the serious intent of the EU institutions to put forward the objective of protecting and strengthening the EU democratic system.

Active both internally and externally, in its relations with the third countries and multilaterally, the European Union emerges as an actor of growing prominence in the promotion of democracy and related values. I would also mention that, on 17 November 2020, the Council of the European Union approved the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for the period 2020-2024, laying down the EU and the Member States' priorities regarding human rights and democracy in external relations.

*The Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which started on 1 January 2021, has set the **strengthening of the EU strategic autonomy** as a priority. Could you please tell us what is Romania's position on strategic autonomy and which are the main topics on the Brussels agenda?*

As a Member State having consistently supported the deepening of European integration and the strengthening of the EU's role as a credible global player, Romania has participated and will continue to play an active part in the European debate on strategic autonomy, while prioritising a comprehensive understanding of the concept, able to cover the fine specificities of the various sectors, from the internal market to industry, health or digital.

Beyond any semantic misunderstandings, sometimes reflected in the public agenda of the last months, this concept, far from being new, renders - to put it simply - the Union's ambition to effectively strengthen its capacity for action in support of the Member States and of the European citizens, whenever necessary - for instance, in situations like the ongoing crisis, that has made us painfully realise the dependencies limiting our capacity for action in different areas.

From Romania's perspective, it is important to mention that a stronger Union is by no means an isolated fortress, on the contrary. "The strategic autonomy of a European Union open to the world" (a key take on the matter from the Portuguese Presidency's programme) has as natural consequences securing some functional global partnerships and promoting multilateralism - a highly important issue for us. Internally, but not only, this concept is closely linked to resilience, which is, for its part, supported by the common values representing the very foundation of democracy as we know it, within the Euro-Atlantic area.

*In accordance with the agreement concluded between the European Union and the United Kingdom, the type of relations between the two entities and the end of the transition period have been formally settled. Also, the European Commission has proposed a **Brexit Adjustment Reserve** in order to support the Member States and the sectors worst affected by the withdrawal. Could you please tell us what this reserve means for Romania and how related funds could be accessed?*

The proposal of the European Commission regarding the Brexit Adjustment Reserve comes at the end of the transition period stipulated in the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union and also meets the task set by the European leaders in July, last year. This instrument is unique, considering its well-defined purpose, i.e. allocation of funds to support the Member States, regions and sectors worst hit by the consequences of the United Kingdom's withdrawal. From Romania's perspective, it is particularly useful that the fund - with a total value of EUR 5 billion - can be accessed by each and every EU Member State. This aspect fulfils the vision of unity and strategic solidarity promoted by our country as a general EU principle during the entire Brexit process. Regardless of the different effects of Brexit on the Member States (depending on their UK trade exposure or the impact on fishing industries), Brexit is affecting us all.

Another useful aspect from our perspective refers to the high degree of flexibility of the instrument, allowing us to channel funds to a wide range of measures in order to mitigate the effects of the UK withdrawal at the level of each Member State. I am referring now, by way of example, to the support measures for businesses and local communities, for the worst affected economic sectors and for employment, including the reintegration of citizens returning from the United Kingdom.

This flexibility also makes it possible for each Member State, including Romania, to tailor its efforts and to adopt the most appropriate measures for their own reality, according to their own needs, given that the impact of Brexit is felt

differently in various Member States due to objective factors, such as geographical proximity or the interdependence of their economies.

We also support the Brexit Adjustment Reserve in terms of making the funds available for the Member States as soon as possible to assist them during the process. Thus, the first step envisaged involves a pre-financing granted to the Member States in 2021 (also depending on when the Regulation enters into force), followed by a second instalment to be made available in 2024, after an assessment of measures taken and of expenses committed by each state. In the pre-financing stage, the Member States shall request the effective application and notify the Commission on the responsible bodies at national level to ensure the proper management of the funds.

The Commission's proposal is currently under discussion in the Council and the European Parliament. In this respect, additional debates regarding the precise amount allocated to each Member State, as well as other technical details, are needed. The shared objective is to adopt the Regulation as quickly as possible, in order to allow the start of the pre-financing procedures.

In the end, I would like to mention that the Brexit Reserve is just a limited measure meant to mitigate the harsh effects of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU. The agreements concluded on 24 December and signed on 30 December 2020 between the European Union and the United Kingdom are, in fact, the main contingency factor for the natural disturbances (economic, social) caused by the withdrawal of the United Kingdom, starting with 1 January 2021, on the EU single market and the Customs Union, as well as on all EU policies. These turbulences would have been even more striking if no deal had been reached by the end of 2020.

The aim of the Conference on the Future of Europe is to spark debate on possible ways to reform and to upgrade the existing European mechanisms. Although the Conference preparations have not registered much progress due to the pandemic (so far, at least), could you please tell us what is Romania's position on the topic in Brussels and what are the main lines of action we intend to promote in the future debates?

The Conference planning has indeed been subject to several postponements, mainly because of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic - which have in fact taken its toll on the entire European agenda. However, discussions on the topic have continued since the need for such a forum, meant to explore new action lines for Europe, fit for the new realities, is becoming ever more obvious in the context of the current crisis.

The subject of the actual launch of the Conference has resurfaced lately - also against the background of the new hope instilled by the start of the vaccination campaign, which is the first step towards a return to the normality from before the pandemic outbreak.

Romania is engaged in these discussions, and our declared (and also actively pursued) objective is for the event to reach a broad consensus, capable of strengthening the European unity.

In this respect, we believe that, during the first stage, we should identify those areas where European integration could be accelerated, deepened, as well as those sectors requiring better coordination at European level, based on the principle of subsidiarity. We support the streamlining of the EU institutional system, by tapping into the full potential of the existing legal instruments and frameworks and also by learning the pandemic lessons at institutional level, especially in terms of EU coordination and rapid response capability.

Therefore, we support any approach increasing the efficiency of the EU institutions, so that they become more democratic and more representative in relation to the European citizens. We have to work together to strengthen the link between the EU and its citizens. After all is said and done, this remains our core objective.

Interview by **Eliza Vaş**
Editor-in-chief EIR Newsletter

Biography

Luminița Teodora Odobescu, ambassador and career diplomat, has been the Permanent Representative of Romania to the European Union since 2015. She led the Permanent Representation in Brussels during the first Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (January-June 2019). Between November 2012 and August 2015, she was State Counsellor for European Affairs and Foreign Policy, at the Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

Previously, she was Secretary of State for European Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from February to November 2012, and between 2008 and 2012 she served as Director General of the European Union Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, being responsible for managing all EU issues and bilateral political dialogue with EU Member States, EFTA and Turkey. Between 2002 and 2007, she held various positions at the Romanian Mission to the European Union, managing a series of chapters in the negotiations for Romania's accession to the EU (energy, economic and monetary union, taxation, trade, etc.). She was also responsible for managing trade relations between Romania and the EU and trade defense measures. Following the signing of Romania's EU Accession Treaty, Luminița Odobescu ensured the coordination and preparation of the meetings of the Committee of Deputy Permanent Representatives (COREPER I), participating, in

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parallel, in a series of working groups of the Council and the European Commission.

In 2007, she received the “Diplomatic Merit” (Officer rank) for her contribution to the successful accession of Romania to the EU. Also, she was decorated with the National Order “Legion of Honour of France” (Knight rank) in 2015. For her exceptional contribution during the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, she received the National Order “Steaua României” (Knight rank) in 2019. In December 2014, she was awarded the diplomatic rank of Ambassador.

Luminița Odobescu was born on 3 May 1969, in Reghin, Mureș district. She is fluent in English and French. She is married and has two sons.

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Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union

- Time to deliver: a fair, green and digital recovery -

respectively on promoting the [continued from page 1] conservation and the sustainable use of resources from oceans and seas), to support the digital transformation for citizens and the business environment (during the Presidency the *EllaLink* project will be inaugurated, which will connect Europe, South America and Africa in terms of data infrastructure).

The focus of the “Social Europe” course of action is the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which should have “a concrete meaning in the lives of citizens”. To this end, a summit will be organised in Porto in May to discuss the role of the Pillar in the context of the recovery programs and the plan for climate, digital and demographic transitions. A high-level conference on digital education will also be held in the same month.

The Portuguese Presidency will also support the strengthening of cooperation between Member States in the field of health policies and the promotion of the Union’s role as a global player in the field of health.



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Strengthening the strategic autonomy will be done in such a way that Europe remains open to the world, advances as a promoter of multilateralism and as a key player on the international agenda. One of the measures envisaged for this objective is to support the rules-based international trading system, given the modernization of the World Trade Organization. Another measure is focused on the relationship between the European Union and Africa, for which a high-level forum on green economy and investments will be held together with the European Investment Bank. Portugal also aims to strengthen relations with the United States, by putting an emphasis on security and defence cooperation, multilateralism, and climate. It will also support strengthening relations with India (including by facilitating an official meeting of the Prime Minister of India with members of the European Council in May). Furthermore, the relationship with the United Kingdom remains a priority on Portugal’s agenda.

The programme of the Portuguese Presidency to the Council of the European Union is available here: <https://www.2021portugal.eu/en/programme/programme-for-the-portuguese-presidency-of-the-council-of-the-european-union/>.

Eliza Vaș
European Studies Unit

publications

Romanian Journal of European Affairs - Winter 2020 edition

The winter edition of the *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* brings to the attention of its readers topics of great interest, such as: the relation between the European Union and NATO, the EU Hydrogen Strategy, the role of the EU in regulating the digital space, the energy projects supported by China in the Western Balkans, the EU’s Strategy in Central Asia, the theoretical projection regarding the future of the European integration project, etc.

Ramon Loik (Research Fellow at the International Centre for Defence and Security - ICDS) opens this issue with an analysis on the European internal security, in the context of Brexit, concluding that it is in the best interest of both the European Union and the United Kingdom to continue to coordinate in key areas, such as the judiciary and police cooperation, even if a revision of existing agreements will be necessary. It would be a rational decision of the United Kingdom to establish close bilateral relations with one or more EU Member States in these key areas.



The next article, published by **Michał Piechowicz** (assistant professor in political science at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun) and **Justyna Maliszewska-Nienartowicz** (head of the Department of European Studies at the Faculty of Political Science and Security Studies at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun) investigates the relation between the EU and NATO, by looking at their respective strategic documents. The authors argue that the two organisations need complementarity, not competition or strategic decoupling. The cooperation between Brussels and Washington is described as having three levels: intergovernmental, transgovernmental, and transnational. In this sense, the relation between the two organisations can be described as “a laboratory for new forms of governance”.

Florin Bonciu (Professor with the Romanian-American University in Bucharest and Senior Researcher with the Institute for World Economy in Bucharest) points out that a transition of the EU economy to a hydrogen-based system is feasible. Even if there are still several important challenges, the EU is well positioned to take this step, having both the vision, as well as the required technological and financial instruments. A hydrogen-based economy would represent an important step towards mitigating the effects of climate change, as well as achieving a true circular economy.

The research authored by **Radu Magdin** (consultant) is focused on disinformation and the lessons learned in Romania during the 2019 European elections and the COVID-19 infodemic. Fighting against disinformation requires real measures from the EU and the Member States, as the author recommends six directions of action in this sense, such as monitoring state or media actors that deliberately use disinformation, discursive harmonisation between political leaders, or increasing the level of strategic thinking in this topic.

The article published by **Nicoleta Corbu** (professor at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration), **Mădălina Boțan** (lecturer at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration), **Raluca Buturoiu** (lecturer at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration), and **Alexandru Dumitrache** (M.A. student at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration) focuses on the youth behaviour on the digital communication platforms, suggesting the need for further research on this topic in order to better understand how these patterns affect the users. The digital interactions can have real world consequences, and for this reason youth behaviour in the digital world is very relevant.

Continuing with another digital-related topic, **Mirela Mărcuț** (Assistant Lecturer, Faculty of History, International Relations, Political Sciences and Communication Sciences, University of Oradea) evaluates the EU's Digital Strategy. The Digital Single Market gives the EU authority in the digital spaces, becoming as a consequence a *de facto* and *de jure* actor in digital regulations. Even if there is still a high level of reluctance to use the “digital actor” concept at the official level in order to describe the European Union, it is clear that the EU is on a clear path to digital transformation. The “Brussels effect”, as it is many times called, made the UE one of the global promoters of digital standards.

Dimitar Hadjinikolov (Professor at the University of National and World Economy in Sofia) examines how much the objectives of the Cohesion Policy were achieved in Bulgaria, by using a case-study on the intra-regional economic disparities. Economic data proves the national economic development of Bulgaria, even if the economic progress was not shared uniformly from an intra-regional point of view. This was a consequence of the economic development strategy employed by Bulgaria, focusing more on the national economic progress rather than on regional or local perspectives and improvements.

The economic analysis proposed by **Dániel Gábor Csapó** (PhD student at the University of Pécs) is focused on the energy projects supported by China in the Western Balkans region. The political risks are significant, and if the probability of European integration would decrease, the influence and involvement of extra-European actors would increase in this region. Countries from the Western Balkans need a “grand strategy” in order to enhance their energy infrastructure, and China may seem like an acceptable solution.

Underlining the importance of Central Asia for the EU's external initiatives, **László Vasa** (research professor at Széchenyi István University and senior researcher and chief advisor of the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade) has a critical tone regarding the fact that the European Union does not seem to have a coherent policy regarding this part of the world, and, as a consequence, is not able to fully exploit the potential of economic cooperation with countries from Central Asia. The EU should focus more on the importance of economic diplomacy, and less on the political aspects, as well as enhancing regional cultural cooperation.

Proposing a theoretical perspective, **Janusz Ruszkowski** (Jean Monnet Chair *ad Personam*, Institute of Political Science and Security Studies, University of Stettin) looks at the transition from a single *finalité politique* to a *multifinalité* approach when describing the future of the European integration project. Noticing that these theoretical debates are not necessarily put into practice perfectly, the author underlines that this transition towards multifinalité as a future projection of the European project was influenced very much by the Lisbon Treaty.

The full issue and articles are available at <http://rjea.ier.gov.ro>. Our readers are also invited to access RJEa's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/romanian.journal.of.european.affairs/>.

Ionuț Marcu
European Studies Unit

Communication in European Affairs in 2020

The state of emergency issued on the territory of Romania on 16 March 2020, in the context of the ongoing pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2, led to the suspension of all in-person events (standard format). We were thus faced with a real challenge: try to keep on bringing topical EU-related issues to the attention of our target audience, while fully respecting the new regulations on safety and protection from the novel coronavirus. As the online format also fitted the activities carried out by our colleagues in the Training Unit, purchasing two Zoom licences proved to be beneficial for both the organisation of training courses, and the management of online events and virtual meetings.



Looking into our communication activities carried out in 2020, we can see a clear focus on the projects implemented by the European Institute of Romania (EIR). Thus, by the 16th of March, we had already organised a *standard format* debate on the *New challenges regarding the quality of jobs* (12 February, under the project funded by Eurofound), and *five thematic workshops* (February 2020) within the project “*Consolidating and promoting Romania’s position as a relevant actor in the decision-making process at the European level*”, funded by the Operational Programme Administrative Capacity (POCA).

In 2020, *Europe Day* (9 May) was once again an opportunity for us to organise a special event under the EDIC Bucharest project. Thus, under the slogan “*One for all, all for Europe!*”, the EDIC team (also including experts from the Communication Unit) was live on Facebook for three hours, with messages for Europe, videos and photos taken at previous in-person events, a drawing and digital poster competition, an EU-related quiz, etc.

The series of events continued with the *online public debates* (five debates during May - June) organised under the above-mentioned project funded by POCA. Moreover, the economic and social constraints caused by the deepening pandemic made us bring to the attention of interested stakeholders’ other topics such as the *Minimum wage and the consumer basket for a decent standard of living* (29 June) and *Teleworking and the digitalisation of employment relationships in the context of CoVid 19 crisis* (9 July), in the framework of several debates organised under the aegis of the Eurofound-financed project.

EIR’s Annual Conference, a communication project launched in December 2010, took place on 16 December 2020, also online, and focused on *EU facing the challenges posed by the pandemic. Response measures and future scenarios*. Well-known experts participated in the event, whose addresses created an excellent opportunity to analyse the context of the pandemic year 2020 from a twofold perspective: first, the challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic on both the European Union (EU) and Romania, and second, the actions taken by the European Union to tackle these challenges, as well as possible future scenarios.

Even if afflicted by the lack of face-to-face meetings due to the pandemic, partnerships continued to be a key element in the promotion and building of EIR’s institutional image. Thus, we carried on our collaboration with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Romania within the project *Promoters for European Democracy*, in the framework of which *two experts from the Communication Unit were part of the Committee for the selection of the 20 participants in the project* (April 2020), attended the dedicated *workshop* on how to acquire good writing and communication skills (14-17 September), as well as the *European Democracy Forum* (27 November).

As for our relationship with the Institute for Eastern Studies in Warsaw, the existing pandemic-related restrictions made the main organiser of the events having EIR as a partner, i.e., the *European Congress of Local Governments (ECLG)* and the *Economic Forum (Krynica)*, either postpone or organise these events online, while local partners were given priority. Hoping for things to settle down and for events to revert to their usual format, we keep in touch with our colleagues from Poland to map out EIR’s contribution in the joint events of 2021.

Regarding EIR’s promotion and visibility, our Institute was well-represented, at both management and expert levels, in a wide range of international and local events, most of them happening online. Furthermore, all activities carried out in 2020 were promoted on the EIR webpage and social media (Facebook, LinkedIn).

For more information about the activities and instruments used for communication in European affairs, please visit <http://ier.gov.ro/en/>.

Florentina Costache
Communication Unit

Research in European Affairs at EIR in 2020

The year 2020 was a year dedicated mainly to the development and finalization in good conditions of the project “Consolidating and promoting Romania’s position as a relevant actor in the decision-making process at the European level” SIPOCA code 400 / code SMIS2014 + 115759, temporarily replacing the annual Strategy and Policy Studies (SPOS) project.

The European Institute of Romania had the capacity of partner in the project and carried out, through the European Studies Unit, all the necessary activities to facilitate the realization of five thematic analyses, as following:

1. *The role and relevance of impact studies in defining the national positions at the EU level*, coordinated by Iordan Bărbulescu;
2. *The simplification of the cohesion policy for the post-2020 period: possible solutions for streamlining the implementation*, coordinated by Dumitru Miron;
3. *The impact of digitisation on the architecture and implementation of the European policies designed to strengthening the internal market*, coordinated by Adrian Curaj;
4. *Artificial intelligence - the impact at the EU level on the productivity of the companies and on the labour market (Case-study: Romania)*, coordinated by Adina Florea;
5. *Ways of deepening the Eastern Partnership for 2020 and beyond*, coordinated by Mircea Brie.

The actual activity of the selected teams took place against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the extension of the implementation period and the adaptation of the initially planned activities. This activity included actual research, and taking part in thematic workshops and public debates in online format with the final objective of ensuring the highest scientific standards for the dedicated reports. At the end of the activity coordinated by EIR, the final deliverables were sent to the project leader (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) - both in the Romanian and English languages.

Besides these research projects, the members of the European Studies Unit were actively involved in the publication of the academic journal of EIR, in writing articles and analyses on current events at EU level, as well as in the publication of EIR’s Newsletter.

During 2020, the **Romanian Journal of European Affairs**, the academic journal of EIR, brought to its readers’ attention topics such as: tackling disinformation in the digital space; EU’s position as a global actor in the post-Brexit era; the Europeanisation process in Ukraine and Armenia; the behaviour of the actors involved in the decision-making process at the EU level; free trade agreements between the EU and Southern Mediterranean Countries; Albanian higher education system; findings about the Hungarian labour market; European internal security interests and Brexit; EU-NATO relations; the European Union Hydrogen Strategy; disinformation campaigns in the European Union; patterns of digital behaviour on instant messaging platforms; the EU’s role as a global actor in the digital space; the case of intra-regional disparities in Bulgaria; Chinese-backed energy projects in the Western Balkans; the European Union Strategy on Central Asia; theoretical basis explaining the turn in the process of defining the future of the European Union.

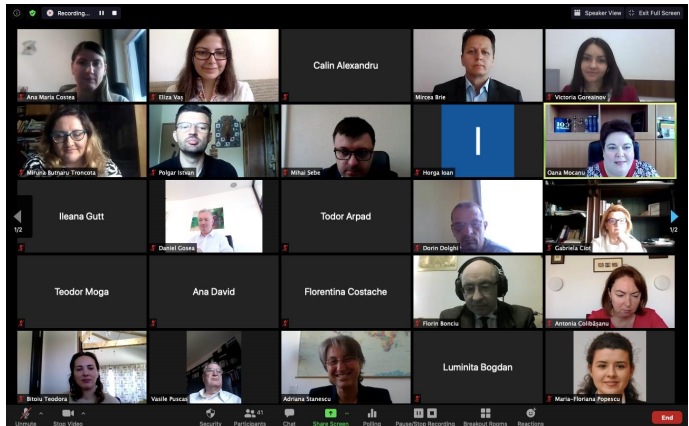
Included in various international databases, the journal has also been indexed, starting with 2020, in the **Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL)** and in **ERIH PLUS**. Also, [the dedicated Facebook page](#) of the journal continued to constantly grow in 2020, reaching 1 151 likes.

The six numbers of EIR’s **Newsletter** hosted pieces of news and opinion articles on topics such as: the European Union’s response to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, EU public diplomacy during the pandemic, the creation of a European data space in the Zettabyte Era, overview of the activities organized by EIR, etc. Also, the September edition of the IER Newsletter included an interview with H.E. Mr. Philippe Benoit, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium to Romania, and the November edition an interview with Mrs. Iulia Matei, Secretary of State for European Affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and an opinion article signed by Mr. Daniel Dăianu (President of the Fiscal Council).

The **micro-studies collection of EIR** published new titles, among which we mention a material within the Policy Briefs collection, dedicated to the measures taken by the European Union in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, elaborated by Oana-Mihaela Mocanu and Eliza Vaş, respectively a paper titled “The spectre of disinformation in the European Union and the COVID-19 infodemic”, written by Bogdan Mureşan.

Besides all of these, within the framework of **EPIN project Towards a Citizens’ Union (2CU)**, co-financed through Erasmus+ (Jean Monnet Networks), in which EIR was a partner, three members of the Unit published a chapter focused on the ways in which the new technologies and the digital revolution can facilitate the deliberative process and citizen participation in the project’s third and final volume called “Deliberative Democracy in the EU: Countering Populism with Participation and Debate”.

The Unit has also been involved in the running of the **EUREKA - A Key Access to EU Right** project, which aims to facilitate the exercise of the rights of freedom of movement, inclusion and participation of European citizens in the host



Member States. Also, unit members wrote news for the EuranetPlus project, in order to promote, for the Radio Romania International page, current European topics, as well as news connected with the activities of the European Institute of Romania.

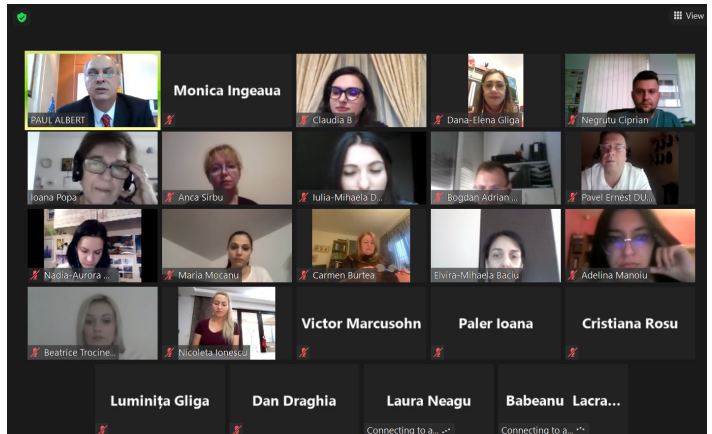
Last, but not least, the European Studies Unit members had appearances in a number of academic events, at the national and international level, presenting the results of their research and the activity of EIR. Also, they published on different occasions informative materials on European topics.

Mihai Sebe
European Studies Unit

A year of change for the Training Unit

The year 2020 has been a challenging year for everyone. At the beginning of it, we aimed to organize around 15 learning events, out of which a third consisting of paid courses, and to reach around 200 participants.

The beginning looked promising. The first subsidized course, organized in February, was attended by 18 participants, and for the first paid course of the year, “Diplomacy and Protocol”, 26 paying participants had registered. At the same time, in March 2020 we went on organizing the first customized training program for an institution. Unfortunately, the state of emergency was declared, and all subsequent EIR programs were called into question. Like everyone else, we had to adapt. We started by introducing the “5 European minutes” program, small videos presented by EIR experts on various topics of interest. At the same time, we concentrated our effort into transitioning our courses to the online environment. We had to cancel some of the courses planned, but in May we were able to offer our participants the first course through the Zoom platform: “The normative system of the European Union”. Encouraged by the positive feedback, 33 participants and a grade close to “Excellent”, we continued to adapt and transition the courses originally scheduled in physical format to the online environment.



After a first period in which we did nothing but adapt our old programs to the new framework, we decided it was time to move on developing new titles, designed from the start to take place virtually. Thus, in October and November we organized pilot courses for “Integrity Warning in Public Administration” and “Cyber Security Challenges in European Affairs”. These courses benefited from a total number of 51 participants and compiled a very good feedback, both being classified as extremely interesting and useful events. Considering the way they were received by the public, we decided to include both courses in the EIR training offer for 2021.

For paid courses, 2020 was not a very promising year. The budget cuts of state institutions and insecurity in the private sector have led to the cancellation of most of the scheduled courses. However, the end of the year marked a turning point in this direction as well, with the “Diplomacy and Protocol” course gathering 24 participants, even if the delivery method was virtual.

In terms of the number of courses delivered, we did not reach our goals in 2020, as we have organised 11 instead of 15 courses. But the fact that these courses were attended by 279 people instead of 200 originally planned and the fact that 10 of the events were organized online, entitle us to enjoy our professional success and the ability to react quickly to an unpredictable environment.

In 2021, we will continue with the online courses, by offering to the potential participants a number of seven subsidized and paid course subjects, and we hope to be able to complete our offer with at least one new subject.

Monica Ingeaua
Training Unit

Projects implemented by EIR in 2020

In 2020, the Projects Unit of EIR was instrumental in implementing, together with other departments, a series of projects with funding from the previous years or confirmed in 2020.

Thus, the project ‘Network of Eurofound Correspondents: Romania’ (2018-2022) was ongoing last year. During 2020, 28 resulting deliverables including various case studies, reports and factsheets for Romania were uploaded into the Eurofound database. Among the activities carried out in 2020, it is worth mentioning the dissemination of the project results and the Eurofound publications, by online promotion actions and through debates. In 2020, three dissemination sessions were organized with the following themes: *Telework and the digitalization of employment relations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic*, *Minimum wage*, and *the consumption basket for a decent standard of living and New challenges for workplace quality*. The events were organized both in a face-to-face and online format on 12 February, 29 June and 9 July 2020 with the participation of over 75 people together with speakers from the “Cartel Alfa”

Trade Union, The Romanian Association of Businessmen, The Ministry of Work and Social Protection, The Center for Public Innovation, Romanian Parliament, The National Trade Union, The National Authority for Qualifications, Bucharest University of Economic Studies and National Council for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises.

The European Institute of Romania has implemented, starting with 15 July 2019 the project 'A Key Access to EU Rights - EUREKA'. The project was co-financed by the European Commission under the European Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme and implemented by IDOS and 10 partners from 6 EU Member States (Romania, Germany, Italy, Portugal, France, and Croatia). The purpose of this project was to help enable the use of the EU mobile citizens' rights to free movement, inclusion and participation in the host Member States, through a common local, national, and transnational capacity/expertise and increased access/usage of digital information.



The activities implemented during 2020 were focused mainly on the first two work packages of the project: project coordination and collecting, exchanging, and disseminating good practices. For the first work package, the effort of the EIR project responsible (Iulian Oneaşcă, Expert IA) and his colleagues from the participating states ensured a smooth running of the project activities through online meetings in the context of the pandemic. The collection, exchange, and dissemination of good practices were developed through the creation of the country report for Romania about inclusion and free movement rights for EU mobile citizens. The document, published in March 2020, was created by EIR with the support of the other Romanian partners - Novapolis Association and Cartel Alfa by using the structure recommended by the IDOS coordinator.

Through centralizing country reports developed by the project partners a *Comparative document about inclusion and free movement rights for EU mobile citizens* was created. EIR contributed through implementing a quality standard (the country report) and also by ensuring scientific criteria were applied on the data collected by partners and used by IDOS. The report was disseminated starting from August 2020 ([link](#)).

The **EuranetPlus** project consists of a series of international radio broadcasts made in co-production and focusing on European topics, with the financial support of the Directorate-General for Communications Network, Content and Technology of the European Commission. Under this project, as per the partnership agreement, EIR (as partner of the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Company/SRR), publishes on a weekly basis on its websites two articles on European topics produced by SRR (RRI) under the EuranetPlus editorial project, and sends on a weekly basis to SRR (RRI) the links to one article on European topics. Under this partnership, EIR has sent SRR (RRI) a number of 71 articles to be published and has received for publication 105 articles produced by RRI. December marked the renewal of the partnership agreement between EIR and the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Company, valid during the new implementation period of the EuranetPlus project: 2020-2021.

The Projects Unit has also provided technical support to the Translation and Coordination Unit of EIR for work on a translation and interpretation request for proposal (RFP/2020/001) organized by UNHCR Romania Office.

By identifying new funding sources, the projects to be submitted during 2021 will continue to be closely related to EIR's expertise in the field of European Affairs.

Tiberiu Nica
Projects Unit

Activities of the Translation Coordination Unit in 2020

In 2020, the Translation Coordination Unit (TCU) continued to enhance its more than a decade long experience in translating and revising the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), of which over 40 000 translated and revised standard pages are currently available on the website of the European Institute of Romania (EIR) from this area alone.

These activities were carried out based on the EIR's statutory documents and under the Trilateral Collaboration Protocol between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM) and EIR, signed on April 6, 2011. This protocol replaced the Bilateral EIR-SCM Protocol signed on 17 July 2008.

Ensuring better access to ECHR case-law, one of the EIR's objectives, is achieved especially by means of translating and then revising and indexing the ECHR cases, by means of terminological research, writing articles in this field and disseminating the results on the EIR website and elsewhere.

Last year we paid more attention to the need to promote more and make better known the ECHR case-law. Thus, a new section, [“Buletinul jurisprudenței CEDO”](#) (the ECHR case-law newsletter, available only in Romanian), was introduced in the Publications menu on the EIR website. The initial content of this section included the summaries of ECHR judgments and decisions against Romania in 2019 and was expanded to include the summaries of those from May, June, July, September, October and November 2020.

Through a series of articles or news, we have also drawn attention to certain documents of interest not only to specialists, but also to the general public, such as:

- Rules of Court (updated on 1 January 2020)
- Practical Guide on Admissibility Criteria (updated on 30 April 2020)
- Guide on Article 13 - Right to an effective remedy
- Guide to Article 1 of Protocol No 1: Protection of property
- Factsheets and Country Profiles



Under the Bilateral cooperation protocol between the MFA and the EIR, signed in February 2020, the TCU translates and revises certain documents necessary for Romania to fulfil the obligations undertaken as a member of the United Nations (UN) and as party to the fundamental conventional instruments adopted within it. These documents, generally regular reports on Romania, are available on the EIR website, section [“Mecanisme de monitorizare ONU”](#) (UN monitoring mechanisms, available only in Romanian).

The TCU’s team members have also been involved in other EIR activities, not only administrative, but also specialised, such as replying to questions addressed to the Europe Direct Centre by various citizens and promoting the TCU’s activities and products by writing articles or news included in the EURANET Plus project, as well as the EIR Newsletter, website or Facebook page.

In order to keep up to date with what we translate and revise, we invite you to follow both the Human Rights section of the EIR website and Facebook page.

At the same time, we invite you to consult more than 33 500 terminological entries that were validated over the past 20 years and are available free of charge in the Terminology section: <http://ier.gov.ro/traduceri/terminologie/>.

Laura Mihăilescu
Translation Coordination Unit

The main activities of Europe Direct Information Centre Bucharest in 2020

In 2020, the Europe Direct Information Centre Bucharest mainly aimed to raise the awareness of our target public in Bucharest-Ilfov Region regarding the 6 European priorities of the Von der Leyen Commission and to foster dialogue with local citizens by organising various non-formal events. The COVID-19 pandemic made impossible the implementation of the Annual Communication Plan as initially designed and, considering the national measures taken to prevent the spreading of the Novel Coronavirus infection, EDIC Bucharest revamped some of its actions and turned them into online events.

The most important part of EDIC Bucharest activities carried our last year lies in the organised events, both face-to-face and online: 22 events attended by 807 participants. Moreover, we can mention the participation of our team members in 4 additional activities organised by our partners.



Thus, in February 2020, the third edition of the Forum Theatre Road Show “It’s up to you to make a change!” was launched. The general objectives of the action were to inform young people about their rights as European citizens and to engage them in debates and activities meant to highlight the importance of their participation in the life of their respective communities. The Forum Theatre Road Show involved the organisation of **8 performances** on the theme of discrimination, played by our young volunteers from three Bucharest high schools, 5 in standard format (face-to-face) and 3 online viewings.

The virtual environment was also an excellent host for our **four online world café events**, organised throughout the year in partnership with other EU information and assistance networks. Thus, at the end of June, EDIC Bucharest organised the online world café event called **“Promote yourself as a young entrepreneur!”**, which focused on a topical issue: youth entrepreneurship. After just one month, we reunited at the online world café called **“From Grey to Green!”**. This time, we talked about climate change, the impact of pollution and global warming on the quality of our lives, as well as raising awareness of more or less visible dangers threatening our environment. The third event in the series was called **“Invest in your future!”**, and represented a good opportunity for our young participants to find out information about the multiple opportunities for learning mobilities at EU level, EU volunteering and traineeships, and how acquired knowledge could be capitalised on the Romanian labour market by using the existing online services for the recognition of studies abroad. The last online event of this type took place under the umbrella of the project *European Researchers’ Night 2020*, at the end of November, and focused on the **“Risks and benefits of the digital world”**. It was a non-formal debate regarding the European Commission’s priority **“A Europe fit for the digital age”**, aiming to raise awareness of online safety and cyber threats.

In August 2020, in partnership with EDIC Argeş and EDIC Bistriţa, we organised the **Online Summer School “Dialogues for the future!”**, on the Cisco Webex platform. The theme of the current edition focussed on ethics in Artificial Intelligence, while the method used was the debate. The young volunteers of the 3 Europe Direct Centres had the opportunity to improve their debating skills, and to deepen their knowledge in the field of Artificial Intelligence.

Despite of the travel restrictions imposed by the SARS-Cov-2 crisis and in full respect of the social distancing rules, our Centre, in cooperation with EDIC Târgovişte and EDIC Vâlcea, managed to organise, in September 2020, **an experience exchange and an online dialogue with the Europe Direct Centres from Madrid and Castellón, Spain**. The main objective of this exchange of good practices on the Cisco Webex platform was to ensure an active cooperation with other Europe Direct Centres at national and cross-border levels, in order to train and to inform the young volunteers performing in our forum theatre shows. September ended with the **online human library event called “Stories with and about translators”**, meant to celebrate the *European Day of Languages* (EDL) and organised by EDIC Bucharest, in partnership with the European Commission Representation in Romania. The activity aimed to depict a vivid image of the translation profession, with its related perks and challenges, and to trace some possible career paths in the field.

The good cooperation with our colleagues from EDIC Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, also materialised in 2020 into **two online simulation sessions of the decision-making process in the EU “Be a MEP for a day!”**. The activity was carried out in the framework of our partnership with two educational establishments from Romania and two others from Bulgaria. Its main objective was to increase the knowledge of the young participants about the importance of the European Union and its values, as well as to foster dialogue on the European flagship initiatives through the simulation of the decision-making process in the European Parliament.

9 May 2020 came with many digital surprises! Given the COVID-19 pandemic, the EDIC Bucharest team and our fans celebrated Europe Day by the online event **“One for all, all for Europe!”**, on the Facebook account of EDIC Bucharest. Our agenda was comprehensive, from videos about the history of the European Union and artistic moments with songs and dances showcasing the EU multiculturalism to short messages from the Centre’s volunteers and social media interns and online interactive games.

We also carried forward the tradition of organising the **“Europe Direct Clubs”**. Among these, we can mention: **EDIC Bucharest Interns’ Gala**, the tree-planting activity **“Education for the environment - education for life!”**, the event **“A Magical Christmas in online”**, etc.

Bottom line, despite all the hardships, 2020 was an extremely active year. We are looking forward to implementing the planned activities for the current year. So, keep an eye on us as we’ve got plenty of surprises for you!

Loredana Licuța
Europe Direct Information Center Bucharest

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