ROMANIAN COMMUNITY IN ITALY: FORMS OF INSTITUTIONAL ORGANIZATION TO PROMOTE ROMANIAN CULTURE

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Abstract. *Communities play an important role in preserving a sense of root awareness for the generations of immigrants. At first immigrants rediscover their cultural values and nurture feelings of belonging, then feel attachment to the community which they belong to. The rapid growth of the number of Romanians who immigrated to Italy, but also the need to establish institutions to protect their rights and interests have led the Romanian to organize themselves in various regional and national associations, to build churches and found parties as well, and to establish their own mass media.*

Keywords: *identity, communication, intercultural dialogue*

Introduction

Romanians in the Peninsula take various national and regional organizational structures: churches, cultural centres, newspapers, TV stations, associations, parties etc. These organizational structures of the Romanian community play a crucial role in the process of disseminating culture, in transferring and preserving traditions, customs and national values as well as in integrating Romanians in Italy, provided that such programmes to open up to the Italian society are brought about.

Usually, the members of a community share the same values and beliefs. A community is real "to the extent in which individuals are part of the same spiritual learning process, of the same myths, the same visions, the same feelings and the same representations" (Badescu, I., 2012, vol. II: 158).

Tudor Pitulac (2009: 38) refers to Amitai Etzioni who believes that communities rely on the interpersonal relations that encourage respect toward common values and eliminate disrespect. They will seek out the State authorities (courts, police) only when all other measures failed.

The Romanian Orthodox Community

In a community, church is the benchmark for an authentic spiritual life, but also a support helping to face daily difficulties that people encounter, by means of the moral and spiritual authority of the priest. A person's involvement in the religious life strengthens his/her community by means of faith and fundaments the underlying details of nationality and patriotism.

Italy's Romanian Orthodox Church includes all the Romanian Orthodox believers throughout Italy. The Diocese resides in Rome and it currently has 160 parishes, reuniting 16 Archpriestships, 4 convents and 2 hermitages (http://roma.mae.ro/, accessed at 08/10/2012).

The Romanian community in Italy makes significant efforts to create new Romanian parishes and to come together in solidarity by building churches as new

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members of the community grow into stronger groups. The pastoral activity of the Romanian priests in Italy does not just resort to sermons, but it also focuses on the actual problems that the community is facing: jobs, accommodation, mutual help, the relation with Italians, visits to hospitals and prisons, organizing cultural events.

Culturally speaking, most Romanian parishes in the Peninsula own publications with studies and literary works, as well as websites providing information about Romanian history, traditions and values. In addition, they organize traditional or modern sacred art exhibitions, icon exhibitions, book launches, literary clubs or concerts and shows to promote Romanian traditions and spirituality. All in all, the Greek Orthodox Church in Italy brings together Romanian communities both in prayer and in the various social and cultural activities it promotes.

In an interview granted to the Romanian journalist Alina Harja and to the Italian professor Guido Melis, His Holiness Siluan emphasized on the fact that church in the Romanian communities "makes it easier for the immigrants, encourages virtuous behaviour, acts as a symbiosis with a positive effect of Romanian self-awareness" (Harja, Melis, 2011: 50), being a great cohesion factor for the community.

Romanian newspapers and TV stations

An essential role in informing the Romanian community in Italy on the main events in the cultural, social and political life of the community is played by the Romanian publications and TV stations in the Peninsula. These institutions contribute to preserving the Romanian identity by acknowledging cultural and artistic achievements, educational, literary, musical or theatre events.

Romanians in Italy have tried countless times to launch magazines and newspapers for their community, some with a short editorial life, others that managed to earn a spot in the market and to be the voice of Romanians for many years. Among the publications with a short life, we mention *Jurnalul Romanesc* (translator's note: *The Romanian Journal*), *Milenium*, *Noua Communitate* (t.n.: *The New Community*), *Marche-Romania*.

The objectives were to promote the Romanian culture in Italy, to present the events occurring in the Romanian community, successful Romanians etc., but either due to lack of funding or to lack of a marketing strategy, these publications were cancelled.

Among the Romanian publications that faced the challenges of the market, we can mention *Gazeta Romaneasca* (t.n.: *The Romanian Gazette*) (in Rome), *Adevarul.it* (t.n. *TheTruth.it*), *Actualitatea Romaneasca* (t.n.: *Romanian News*), *Ora Romaneasca* (t.n.: *The Romanian Hour*). Moving forward, I shall briefly present one of these newspapers which is currently fully active in Italy and which contributes greatly both to keeping Romanians updated on the challenges faced in a foreign territory, but also to preserving the national consciousness and cultural identity.

Gazeta Romaneasca is considered to be the foreign publication with the largest number of copies in Italy, and starting with 2009 it can also be read online, at www.gazetaromaneasca.com. Although the first copy came off the print in December 2001, with a monthly frequency and with information focused on legislation so as to support Romanian immigrants, it only truly became a newspaper in 2003. In April that year, it started to have a bi-monthly frequency and since March 2004 it has appeared weekly (www.gazetaromaneasca.com, accessed on 06/26/2013). The main theme is immigration, but topics covered provide information about community life - famous Romanians, but also infamous ones, about integration programmes, intercultural dialogue, promoting cultural and artistic events so as to preserve the Romanian identity,

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presenting the activities of Romanian associations in Italy etc. Alongside other Romanian publications and associations, the newspaper got involved in numerous projects to support the community, to improve the image that Romanians have, both among the general public and local authorities, in campaigns to fight against racism or illegal labour.

Romit TV is a TV station in Romanian broadcasting in Italy since 10/01/2011, having the trademark since 1937 consequent to an agreement between the Italian and the Romanian state in the field of cinematography (www.mediafax.ro, accessed on 06/26/2013). The TV station is regarded as an important source of information for the Romanian immigrants, but also as a bridge between the Romanian and the Italian viewers. The project aims to socially and culturally integrate the Romanian community in Italy so as to preserve the national identity. Under the motto "Together to Know Each Other Better", the TV station is coordinated by Eugen Tertelac, Chairman of the Romanians in Italy Association. It was officially launched in May 2012 and it is meant to be a station for the Romanian community in the Peninsula. The station was acknowledged by the Italian, Romanian and Moldavian authorities as the main national channel aiming to inform Romanians in the Diaspora. Initially, *Romit IT* only broadcasted in the Lombardy region, shortly afterward expanding to Lazio, where a strong Romanian community is living currently, and in the Piedmont region (www.romeninitalia.com, accessed on 07/26/2013). The project plans to expand broadcasting in all the Italian regions. Moreover, on the www.romit.tv one can access the first online Romanian TV station dedicated to the Romanian Diaspora. Viewers can watch live Romanian news broadcasts, historical and Italian movies, cultural and entertainment shows, while the young viewers can also watch cartoons in Romanian.
CasaMia TV is another TV station for the Romanian community abroad, broadcasting shows of the Romanian TV stations, but also own productions. Launched at the end of 2009, it broadcasted until January 2013 solely for the Romanians in Italy, and it than expanded in the other Romanian communities in the Diaspora (www.casamiatv.com, accessed on 07/28/2013). *CasaMia TV* is an integrated communication platform promoting Romanian traditions and values.

In addition, I also find the Italian-Romanian TV Station *Romania TV*, targeting completely the Romanian community in the Peninsula. It was founded in 2012 and it is currently broadcasting in digital terrestrial format in the Emilia Romagna, Lombardy, Piedmont and Veneto regions.

Academia di Romania

Academia di Romania is a cultural institution in Rome, under the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and coordinated by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Research (with education and research activities) and by the Romanian Cultural Institute (with activities focused on promoting culture) (www.accadromania.it, accessed on 07/14/2013).

The Romanian Academy Library in Rome has the richest heritage in the network of Foreign Romanian Cultural Institutes, with 33,230 volumes in various fields: history, archaeology, Romanian and universal literature, music, art history, mostly focusing on topics about Eastern Romanity. In addition, the library also has an impressive collection of periodical publications.

The Academy organizes various cultural activities and hosts numerous annual art exhibitions, conferences, concerts and shows. Furthermore, it supports young

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Romanian researchers by granting post-graduate and post-doctoral scholarships in Italy. The Romanian Academy in Rome is also a facilitator between the Romanian academic and scientific world and the one in Rome, by organizing conferences, seminars or national and international colloquia. As a recognition of the common identity of Italians and Romanians, the Romanian Academy in Rome has in its yard the statue of Emperor Trajan, masterpiece of the sculptor Vasile Gorduz (identical to the one in Bucharest) and, right across from it, a bronze cast statue of the head of Decebalus, masterpiece of the sculptor George Dumitru.

Romanian Identity Party (RIP)

The Romanian Identity Party joins the Romanian organizations, associations, churches and others in supporting the Romanian community present in Italy. Established in Rome in 2006 by the Italian attorney Giancarlo Germani, RIP aims to represent the interests of almost one million Romanians living in the Peninsula.

The main objective of the Romanian Identity Party, as the platform states it, is to promote and support the social and cultural integration of Romanians in the Italian society. To this end, RIP wants to advocate for the recognition of moral and religious principles; the recognition of the Romanian Orthodox Church by the Italian State; the development and social-cultural integration of the Romanian community by establishing kindergartens and schools teaching both in Italian and in Romanian; the validation of education degrees granted in Romania; better consular services in Italy and Romania; protection for the Romanian workers by ensuring legal and political assistance in order to be integrated on the Italian labour market and to observe the rights of Romanians but also to avoid labour exploitation; access to social housing for Romanian; the right to candidate in local institutions (www.identitatearomaneasca.it, accessed on 06/11/2013). RIP also includes Italians alongside Romanians, thus being an integrating party, involved in various projects along with other political parties: building a Romanian House in Rome (a space with a library, for teaching various courses to Romanians, including Italian, for an easier integration in the host country); including Romanian grammar classes in Italian schools in areas with a strong Romanian majority; eliminating obstacles for Romanian workers in various areas of activity; upholding the image of the Romanian community. This party is an interface between the Italian civil society and the members of the Romanian community in Italy that wants to set the foundation for integrating them in the domestic realities of their adoptive country.

Romanian Social-Cultural Associations in Italy

There are currently approximately 100 associations representing the Romanian community in Italy. Although the number of associations is officially high, most are in a shadow cone, with occasional activities or with an almost invisible social-cultural involvement. Following up on their actions, I notice that the associations' agendas include cultural events that contribute to preserving the Romanian ethnicity and to integrating Romanians in this new society. Among the activities carried out, I mention book launches, meetings with Romanian writers and artists, conferences and symposia on Romanian Identity and Intercultural Communication, festivals with traditional products, Romanian courses for children born in Italy that do not speak well their mother tongue, Italian courses to help Romanian immigrants integrate in the Italian society etc. Therefore, one of the most important roles of the Romanian associations in

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Italy is to create within the community an awareness environment toward one's culture and also that promotes traditions, customs and values of the country of origin.

Associations have different activities, mostly depending on the interest and commitment of the members, with a wide range of event frequency and quality. Although I might be tempted to believe that there is a good collaboration between Romanian associations, they are not strangers to conflicts and disputes, leading to the creation of new associations due to disagreements occurring within existing associations. A *casus belli* example consists in the involvement of certain members/association chairmen in the political life (see in detail Harja, Melis, *op. cit.*: 109-127). However, beyond these quarrels that do not favour one bit the image of the Romanian community, there are also devoted people that voluntarily give their time, skills and knowledge so that Romanians in Italy preserve their national identity and so that they take pride in their national culture and values. As Selznick (2002: 16) stated, "An organization built to reach a certain goal can become a community or something resembling a community, but its reason relates mostly to orderly channelling human energies so as to reach certain goals".

Conclusions

The point of establishing these organizations is to preserve the cultural and linguistic identity of Romanians, to promote national values, but also to create Romanian-Italian intercultural relations via Romanian courses for Italians, painting exhibitions, book presentations with Romanian authors, conferences on various topics or cultural evenings.

Therefore, the institutions presented above have a rich cultural agenda, with various initiatives involving both Romanians and Italians for mutual knowledge and acknowledgement. Their activities are often posted on their websites, but they are also promoted in the Romanian newspapers in Italy.

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