

THE BATTLE FOR THE “ROMANIAN AUTUMN” – GOOD GOVERNANCE VERSUS ANTI-CAPITALIST DISCOURSES IN THE ROMANIAN 2013 PROTESTS

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Abstract

The article explores how different actors had tried to frame and to appropriate the meaning of the anti-mining protests that started in September 2013. The analysis focuses on two discourses that had disputed the construction of the protest' knowledge: the “good governance” discourse versus the “anti-capitalistic” discourse. This confrontation is described as an attempt to establish a different “regime of truth” by the anti-capitalist narrative proponents. The assumption of the article is that the protests from 2013 had marked a return to “real politics”, by re-politicizing the Romanian realities and disrupting the post-communist consensus. However, it argues that keeping the claims in the good governance framework had minimized the re-politicization potential of the social movement emerging from the protest (#UnitiSalvam), by obscuring some of the latent conflict that undercrosss the Romanian society. The article also explores the factors that contributed to the anti-capitalist discourse's failure to impose a different rhetoric of the protest, by looking into the “good governance” discourse trajectory in the post-communist Romania and observing how it established itself as a hegemonic discourse.

Keywords: Romanian Autumn, anti-mining protests, politics, hegemonic discourse, good-governance, anti-capitalism.

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Context

On 1 September 2013, the streets of Bucharest and other Romanian cities had been taken by thousands of people, resulting in the largest mass-protests that Romania faced after 1989. The protests had been caused by a draft law elaborated by the Romanian Government that would have given green light to a very controversial mining project in a remote Romanian village, Rosia Montana. The protests lasted until December 2013 and have been labeled as the Romanian Autumn, alluding to the Arab Spring and the revived democratic participation of the citizens. Aside from the concrete, short term political gains, such as the draft law rejection by the Parliament, the protests generated a network of activists - #Unitisalvam - that continued its existence after the protests ended and had become a significant political actor, despite the informal character of the network.

Rosia Montana is located in an old mining area, but also holds a strong historical/archaeological importance. The dispute over the mining project goes back to 1998, when the Romanian state company Minvest Deva, a co-shareholder in Roşia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC), next to the Canadian company Gabriel Resources obtained the concession on the exploitation license from the Romanian National Agency on Natural Resources. From the very beginning, the exploitation was contested by a large informal coalition of NGOs and academia members whose efforts concretized in awareness campaigns, studies and reports emphasizing the risks and dangers associated to cyanide use in the gold exploitation process.

While being in opposition (2009-2011), the Social Democratic Party (PSD) had promised that it would stop the mining project if elected. In November 2012, the PSD won the legislative elections, but in August 2013 it issued the draft law allowing the mining project. The law was designed in the benefit of one specific company (RMGC) - as the law's title was indicating - and gave to RMGC the permission to proceed to the expropriation on the site, in Rosia Montana village.

The protest that started on the 1st September 2013 brought together, into a common fight, a large variety of actors, with very different ideological background and different reasons for getting engaged into the protest. They had had different motivations and different political visions. None of the ideological positions were dominant in the protest and it is difficult, if not impossible, to assess which groups were more numerous in the protest due to the fact that often small groups were more vocal or had more exposure in the online space than other, bigger groups. Some of the protesters' claims were present for a long time on the public agenda, but they played a marginal role in the political debate, like the environmentalists. They had a long standing experience in opposing the mining project by carrying the Save Rosia Montana campaign, conducted by several NGOs and activists. Their main concern was related to the use of the cyanide that would have strong and long lasting consequences on the environment. Due to their long activism in Save Rosia Montana, resulting in powerful, well-articulated arguments, the environmentalists imprinted a prominent environmentalist dimension to the protests, which are often perceived as being an environmentalist movement, despite their much richer and more diversified character. But there were other powerful groups, some of them with deep roots in Romania's post '89 history, such as the nationalists. The nationalists' position was fed by the fact that the royalties which were to be obtained by the state from the RMGC would be extremely low, but it is also enrooted in Romania's transition and the opposition to the privatization of former socialist state companies. The nationalists' slogan "We don't sale our country to the foreigners", as a synthetic expression of economic nationalism was overwhelmingly present during the protests and motivated some extreme right groups to take part in the protest.

There were also more recent actors joining the protests, whose motivations were rather contextual, such as human rights defenders, anti-capitalists or supporters of the rule of law. A special provision of the draft law, allowing to a private company – RMGC – to execute expropriations on behalf of the state displeased human right activists, but also libertarians and liberals foreseeing the risk of power abuses committed by a private company on behalf of the state.

The rule of law supporters and anti-corruption activists, mostly concentrated around well-established NGOs, were very vocal in the Romanian political debate, but their interest for Rosia Montana was new and was definitely nourished by the circumstance that the Social-Democrats Government that elaborated the draft law was perceived by many as the symbol of grand corruption and state capture. The corruption allegations and the overnight change of the Prime Minister Ponta from an opponent of the project to a fervent supporter of it triggered the discontent of many people, who did not previously oppose to the mining project, but who were suddenly outraged by the lack of political accountability and transparency of the Government.

Anti-capitalists, anarchists and all kind of leftist groups have joined the protest, dissatisfied with the increasing corporate power at the detriment of common goods and public interest. In 2013, the leftist groups were a relatively new appearance, concentrated around some online platforms, like *CriticAtac* and *Gazeta de Arta Politica*. Their visibility was exponentially increased since the 2012 winter protests, when thousands of people on the streets demonstrated against a draft law aiming to privatize the health care system and which rapidly turned into anti-austerity and anti-system manifestations, similar to *Indignados* movement.

These are just the more visible and relatively coagulated voices present in the protests from the fall of 2013, which remain remarkable by their social and ideological heterogeneity. This diversity offered a productive ground to different camps which tried to define the protest's meaning in accordance with their own ideological views, underlining some characteristics and obscuring the others. Beside the battle line that was opposing the protesters to the Government and, more largely, to the entire political class, another battle field, less visible, but of tremendous importance, was opened among the "narrators" of the protest, who tried to construct the knowledge of the protests' reality. Despite the vast diversity, two main voices have emerged as main narrators disputing the meaning and conceptual framing of the protest: the "good governance" camp and the "anti-capitalist camp". There are particular reasons for which these two camps became prominent, which will be tackled farther on in this article;

they are linked to the specific contest of Romania's post-communist society, but also to media exposure opportunities.

In this article, we will explore how specific actors made sense of Romanian protests from 2013. We will analyse the secondary literature, consisting mostly in articles and texts that appeared in the mainstream and alternative media. We will also look into how their arguments fit in the wider social context and how do they impact the protest's outcomes and practices. We will focus on two main discourses about the protest: the "good governance" narrative and the "anti-capitalist" narrative, as they had imposed themselves as being the most significant confrontation lines since the very beginning of the demonstrations. After describing their logics, argumentation and impact, we will try to identify those factors that led to an increasing marginalization of the anti-capitalist narrative and, to some extent, to their failure to frame the protest in their own terms and concepts.

Apolitical protests or a return to politics?

There is one common characteristic that unites all the participants to the Romanian autumn protests: their self-claimed apolitical attitude. This claim persisted in the protests that followed in 2014, 2015 and 2016, which is surprising, if we keep in mind that protesters' discontent was triggered by a draft law that ruled on the power to expropriate, the distribution of national wealth and the access to national resources.

We assume that this a-political claim reveals a linguistic confusion and an interpretation of politics in a narrow sense. Many authors, such as Ricoeur, Nancy, Laclau, Lefort or Rancière differentiate between politics *eo ipso* (the political system and forms of political action) and *la politique*, the "pure" politics. In spite of a plurality of definitions, most of the authors differentiate between the ideal, pure essence of politics and its concrete, factual, empirical occurrence¹. Some of them, like Rancière or Badiou

¹ Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

notice a conflictual relationship between *la politique* and *le politique*. Rancière describes the politics, the representation of the common, as being the disruption of the police order, which is the exercise of power². For Badiou, the state itself – be it liberal, fascist or democratic – is apolitical in its essence and suppresses the real politic³. All the authors mentioned above hold in common a tendency to dismiss as “authentic” the bureaucratic, institutionalized politics that is replacing and displacing “real politics”.

But what is “real politics”? For Rancière, politics is not the exercise of power, neither is it a form of power characterized by its mode of legitimation, but the opposite: it occurs as a provisional accident in the history of domination. “Real politics” is not only different, but also opposes and disrupts the police order (*la police*), which encapsulates the institutionalized forms of doing politics and prescribes our reality in the realm of perception itself. *Le politique* introduces a disruption in this order as its essence is the manifestation of dissensus, as the “presence of two worlds in one”⁴.

Coming back to the Romanian realities, what is to be observed is that despite the multitude of gaps and cleavages that characterized the post-communist period, such as increasing wealth inequality, gender gap, ethnic cleavages, regional discrepancies, none of these had been included and addressed in the political discourse, nor in the political practice. As Boris Buden states, in post-communist societies, the social contradictions remain vacant – they exist, but they are not perceived, a social anesthesia is operated⁵. The result is a de-politicized society, in which the problems lose their collective dimensions and are being privatized⁶. “There is no such thing as society” is probably the best way in which the post-communist Romania can be described. Instead of approaching the real conflicts cutting throughout society, the Romanian post-communist discourse disguised the

² Jacques Rancière, *Ten Theses on Politics*, Theory and Event, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2001.

³ Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

⁴ Jacques Rancière, *Ten Theses on Politics*, Theory and Event, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2001.

⁵ Boris Buden, *Zone des Übergangs (The Zone of Transition. On the End of Post-Communism)*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009

⁶ Zygmund Bauman, *The individualized society*, Cambridge: Polity, 2000.

ever increasing conflicts and replaced them with the narrative of Romania's backwardness and a sort of "exceptionalism" that prevented the systemic analyses of those problems, but also implied that they will be fixed once Romania will become "normal". Moreover, the conflict was evacuated from the society by being located in the communist past - it was transformed in a cultural issue. Blaming the communist past, condemning the communist crimes and universalizing the anti-communist discourse became the way in which the present problems have been obscured, mystified and, in the end, neglected.

The protests from 2013 had marked a breakthrough of this consensus. Some have identified the protest as the end of the conservative consensus, characterized by the nostalgia for Romania's pre-communist past, a strong anti-communism, and sympathy for the historical parties⁷, but we would rather incline to call this disruption the end of the apolitical consensus and the introduction of the dissensus. The specific claim of stopping the mining project became the expression of a wider and more profound opposition against the political establishment, revealing at least one fundamental cleavage between the political class and the rest. The protest had created a window of opportunity for a re-politicization of the present, by revealing one fundamental, but latent and unrecognized cleavage of Romanian society – the opposition between the overwhelming majority and the ruling minority. Far from being "apolitical", it is precisely here, in the people's gathering together, like in the autumn of 2013, that we find real politics. As Žižek affirms, a popular uprising starts becoming political when the particular demand "starts to function as a metaphoric condensation of the global (universal) opposition against Them, those in power, so that the protest is no longer just about that demand, but about the universal dimension that resonates in that particular demand"⁸. In Romania, the specific claim of stopping the mining project became the expression of a wider and more profound opposition against the political establishment, revealing the fundamental cleavage between the political class and the rest. This was the form which the Occupy slogan "We are the 99%" was adapted

⁷ Sorin Cucera, *Destramarea consensului conservator*,

<http://www.romaniacurata.ro/destramarea-consensului-conservator/>, 1 March 2016.

⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, London: Verso, 1999.

to the Romanian context: it opposed the majority to the minority over a multiple distributional conflict of power, privileges and resources distribution.

However, as we will argue further on, the re-politicization potential was not fully achieved: 2013 was just the beginning, when the social movement #Unitisalvam emerged and imposed itself as a significant political actor. Introducing the dissensus and making visible a structural cleavage is already a significant step, but for a real change a more systemic approach, going beyond punctual causalities, is needed – and this change is, first of all, discursive. As we will try to demonstrate in the next pages, the way in which the protests are framed had influenced and will influence in the future the practice of #Unitisalvam, as well as the outcome.

Good Governance versus Anti-capitalism – the battle for the protests’ soul

The confrontation for defining and appropriating the protests’ meaning fits into the framework of the discourse theory, which understands the communication practices as attempts to construct our knowledge of reality. Some of the discourse theories go farther and argue that the discourse not only produces knowledge, but by creating discursive truths, it influences the reality and the social practices⁹. The discursive truths influence people’s habits, behaviors and interactions, which enables Michel Foucault to consider the “regimes of truth” as representing not only one specific form of power, but the power itself. According to Foucault, the power is not represented by the sovereign act of coercion, neither is it an agency or a structure – “power is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere”, it is a kind of meta-power which is in constant flux and negotiation and which is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge¹⁰. The discourse, in its turn, is “both an instrument and an

⁹ Jürgen Link, *Normale Krisen? Normalismus und die Krise der Gegenwart (Normal Crises? Normalcy and the Crisis of our Present Age)*, Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2013.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, London: Penguin, 1998.

effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart"¹¹ Following Foucault, the post-Marxists theorists had further on argued that power is not something that certain people use to dominate others, but is a network of relations and hierarchies that has its own logic, and that no one is consciously guiding or directing¹². The social phenomena are never finished – the “meaning can never be ultimately fixed and this opens up the way for constant social struggles about definitions of society and identity, with resulting social effects”.¹³

Further on, we will analyze how two divergent discourses about the protests from 2013 had been involved in an attempt to produce the knowledge about the reality of the protests, by disputing the meaning of the demonstrations: the anti-capitalist discourse proponents, on one hand, and the good governance proponents, on the other hand. While the good governance approach was well established in the Romanian discourse, providing a dominant grid analysis of the reality due to the conjugated NGOs and academia efforts, the anti-capitalist narrative was new on the scene. The anti-capitalist discourse took shape only few years prior to the protests' start and, despite its relative success, it remained marginal in Romanian discursive landscape. But two specific factors explain why these two discourses came to dispute the framing of the anti-mining protest, despite many other groups and ideologies present inside the crowd. The first explanation is related to the dominant position of the good governance discourse, largely promoted since the beginning of the Romanian transition by the international institutions, as well as by NGOs, think tanks and academia experts. From this well established position, with high media exposure and numerous dissemination channels, its attempt to frame the social unrest in its terms was only natural. But besides being better positioned than the nationalists or the libertarians, the second reason for its dominant role was the lack of contestation by other groups participating in the

¹¹ *Ibidem*

¹² David Howarth, *Discourse*, Buckingham & Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000; Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy – Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed., London & New York: Verso, 2001.

¹³ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, Oxford: Sage Publications Ltd, 2002.

protest, except the anti-capitalists. Many different visions separated the protesters, but there was one common idea that was not rejected neither by the liberals, human right defenders or environmentalists – that the poor governance was responsible for their discontent. The nationalists could blame the politicians who wanted to sell the country’s resources, but they would not deny that less corrupt, more integer and accountable politicians would at least partly fix the problem.

The only voice that would disagree with the good governance remedy was the anti-capitalist narrative, which would describe it as a “pseudo-solution”, as we will further on show. Despite being marginal in the Romanian cultural and intellectual landscape, the anti-capitalist proponents managed to attract the attention – as well as a ferocious criticism - of the intellectual and media establishment via several on-line platforms, such as CriticAtac or Gazeta de Arta Politica. The same on-line platforms have been used during the protests as main channels for reaching the audience. But the attention they have got is also due to the radical difference between their narrative and the good governance narrative: if punctual common issues could be found between the libertarians and the good governance proponents, this was not possible in anti-capitalists’ case, since the concepts they were operating with placed them in a totally different paradigm.

According to the anti-capitalist proponents, people’s discontent is the result of a failed transition, in which the state has constantly acted on behalf of the capital and in the detriment of the citizens and the working class¹⁴. Although the heterogeneity of the protest participants is recognized, it is described as secondary and marginal – it is a sign of ideological confusion, as they put it. Once someone attended the protest, he/she gets “infected” by anti-capitalism, no matter what the beliefs of this person are, since this is the real nature of the protest. They believe the neoliberal and neoconservative narratives will get exhausted, as the protest will disclose its purely anti-capitalist dimension.¹⁵ The anti-capitalist proponents also deny the environmentalist character of the

¹⁴ Vasile Ernu, În fața noastră stă 1907. *Cum procedăm? Să mergem la locul crimei...* <http://www.criticatac.ro/24021/in-faa-noastr-st-1907-cum-procedm/> , 29 February 2016.

¹⁵ Costi Rogozanu, *Cum a fost aseară. 2000 de protestatari fast forward pe străzile din București*, <http://voxpública.realitatea.net/politica-societate/cum-a-fost-aseara-2000-de-protestatari-fast-forward-pe-strazile-din-bucuresti-99219.html> , 29 February 2016.

protest – they discard the ecologists’ demands as being too narrow and too vague, stating they must be circumscribed to the broader, but also more concrete demands referring to the actual political economy¹⁶. The ecological problem cannot be dissociated from the capitalist problem: the capitalism is a specific form of production that transforms the nature into a commodity. As long as we leave in a world that privatizes the nature, the ecologists’ idyllic vision about the nature is a naïve utopia. The environmentalist issue is closely linked to political economy - both are part of the same fight that aims to find a different form of social organization, which will abolish nature’s exploitation and destruction for the sake of accumulation and profit¹⁷. Similarly, other demands, such Government accountability, transparency of law making process, anti-corruption and integrity – unquestionably important – must be understood in the context of capitalist political economy. They are not structural causes, but epiphenomena, for which reason they must not be treated as goals per-se, but as part of a wider problem, which is the dynamic of the capital and the political character of the economy¹⁸. Even more, the legalistic approach and the rule of law concern are illusive – the complicity between the state and the private capital is not a Romanian peculiarity and it is not an accident - it is the rule¹⁹.

This anti-capitalist framing of the protests triggered vivid reactions and accusations of attempts to “confiscate the protest”²⁰. Several answers took shape in reaction to the anti-capitalists’ presence in the protests and their attempt to frame it. Mainstream media, closely linked to the government,

¹⁶ Costi Rogozanu, *Cum a fost aseară. 2000 de protestatari fast forward pe străzile din București*, <http://voxpública.realitatea.net/politica-societate/cum-a-fost-aseara-2000-de-protestatari-fast-forward-pe-strazile-din-bucuresti-99219.html> , 29 February 2016.

¹⁷ Florin Poenaru, *Anti-capitalism ca ecologie*, <http://www.criticatac.ro/23634/anti-capitalism-ca-ecologie/> , 29 February 2016.

¹⁸ Florin Poenaru, *Cateva mistificari ideologice*, 20 September 2013, <http://www.criticatac.ro/23592/cateva-mistificari-ideologice/> , 29 february 2016.

¹⁹ *Manifestul Mâna de Lucru: Roșia Montană e mai mult decât Roșia Montană*, 8 September 2013, <http://www.criticatac.ro/23416/manifestul-mana-de-lucru-roia-montan-mai-mult-decit-roia-montan/> , 28 february 2016.

²⁰ Moromitic, *În care Costi Rogozanu sfârșește un militant ridicol și confuz*, 6 September 2013, <http://lacoltulstrazii.ro/2013/09/06/in-care-costi-rogozanu-sfarseste-un-militant-ridicol-si-confuz/>, on 29 february 2016.

was repetitively showing the image of some protesters carrying a banner with “Stop the capitalism”, pointing to the anti-corporatist and anti-capitalist slogans as a way of discrediting the demonstrations²¹.

Another reaction was minimization - the presence of anti-capitalists in the protest was recognized, but treated as one of the multiple voices present in the square, next to many others²². The anti-capitalists protesters were described as being a ridiculous and confuse minority²³. The excessive focus on the anti-capitalist message risks to substitute an eccentric minority to the majority and to pass up an important stake of the protest, which is rule of law and property rights.²⁴ The fact that the protests have been triggered by a draft law was used as an argument in describing the protests as being essentially about “good governance”.²⁵ It is the opposition against the privatization of the state authority and against special laws, allowing privileges to very few, which is at the core of the protest²⁶. Inasmuch as rule

²¹Vlad Mixich, *Cat de anti-capitalisti, daci, traci sau dreptaci sunt protestatarii Rosia Montana*, 16 september 2013, <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-15586566-cat-anti-capitalisti-daci-traci-sau-dreptaci-sunt-protestatarii-rosia-montana.htm>, on 28 February 2016; Dan Tapalaga, *Ce am vazut la protestul anti-Rosia Montana*, 3 September 2013, <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-opinii-15502279-vazut-protestul-anti-rosia-montana.htm> , 28 February 2016.

²² Vlad Mixich, *Cat de anti-capitalisti, daci, traci sau dreptaci sunt protestatarii Rosia Montana*, 16 september 2013, <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-15586566-cat-anti-capitalisti-daci-traci-sau-dreptaci-sunt-protestatarii-rosia-montana.htm> , on 28 February 2016.

²³ Moromitic, *În care Costi Rogozanu sfârșește un militant ridicol și confuz*, 6 September 2013, <http://lacoltulstrazii.ro/2013/09/06/in-care-costi-rogozanu-sfarseste-un-militant-ridicol-si-confuz/> , on 29 february 2016.

²⁴ Radu Uszkai, *Unde cred că greșește Dan Tăpălagă: despre Roșia Montană, capitalism, partide politice și pantofi*, 20 September 2013, <http://www.academiakatavencu.info/politic/unde-cred-ca-greseste-dan-tapalaga-despre-rosia-montana-capitalism-partide-politice-si-pantofi-27495>, 29 February 2016.

²⁵ Cristian Ghinea, *Adevoărul suprem și ultim despre manifestațiile din Piață*, Dilema Veche, no. 501, 19-25 September 2013 <http://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/editoriale-opinii/articol/adevarul-suprem-ultim-manifestatiile-piata>, 28 February 2016; Ioan Stanomir, *Spiritul critic și baricadele. O scrisoare către Vasile Ernu*, <http://www.lapunkt.ro/2013/09/16/spiritul-critic-si-baricadele-o-scrisoare-catre-vasile-ernu/>, 29 february 2016.

²⁶ Cristian Ghinea, *Adevoărul suprem și ultim despre manifestațiile din Piață*, Dilema Veche, no. 501, 19-25 September 2013 <http://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/editoriale-opinii/articol/adevarul-suprem-ultim-manifestatiile-piata> , 28 February 2016.

of law and transparency are the fundamental premises of capitalism, the protests cannot be anti-capitalist – they are exactly the opposite, they defend a good capitalism which is perverted by Romanian decision makers²⁷. Some argued that the RMGC business model is antagonist to the spirit of capitalist – it is a mix of corruption and speculation, which has nothing to do with entrepreneurship, rule of law and capitalism²⁸, while others claimed that the protests are directed against the corrupt Romanian state, not against RMGC.²⁹

The promoters of the good governance narrative denied the continuity between the 2013 protests and those from the winter of 2012, who had a pronounced social character. Contrary to the anti-Rosia Montana protests, directed against a left wing government, the civic unrest that started in January 2012 was about wages, pensions, health care and had a social dimension. The promoters of the good governance discourse stressed the difference in the social composition of the participants, claims and messages of the two protests, in an attempt to “clean” the actual protest of any social dimension and to circumscribe it solely to the anti-corruption and rule of law sphere of demands. They stressed the middle class belonging of the people taking part in the protest, their young age and high level of education as opposite to the urban working class, low education and old protest participants of the previous year.³⁰

²⁷ *Ibidem*

²⁸ Adalbert Klein, *Un cancer al corupției: Afacerea Roșia Montană e doar un tun speculativ de exportat bani. (Actualizări)*, 11 September 2013, <http://www.contributors.ro/administratie/un-cancer-al-coruptiei-afacerea-rosia-montana-e-doar-un-tun-speculativ-de-exportat-bani/> , 28 February 2016; Dragos Paul Aligica, *Rosia Montana: Nu-i aparati ca nu aveti pe cine*, 3 September 2013, <http://www.contributors.ro/fara-categorie/rosia-montana-nu-i-aparati-ca-nu-aveti-pe-cine/> , 28 February 2016.

²⁹ Sorin Ionita, *Protestele nu-s contra RMGC, ci contra statului; raspuns lui Dragoș Aligică*, 3 September 2013, <http://www.contributors.ro/administratie/protestele/> , 29 February 2016.

³⁰ Razvan Orasanu, *Combustia spontana a guvernării pe motiv de Rosia Montana. Bonus: “Foaie verde premolar/ Ponta este bipolar”*, 16 Septembrie 2013, <http://www.contributors.ro/economie/combustia-spontana-a-guvernarii-pe-motiv-de-rosia-montana-bonus-%E2%80%9Cfoaie-verde-premolar-ponta-este-bipolar%E2%80%9D/>, 29 February 2016.

Both camps are aware of the importance of defining the meaning of the protest. The anti-capitalists accuse the other camp of trying to hog the protest's message and sense³¹. In their turn, the good governance proponents accuse the anti-capitalists of attempting to confiscate the protest³². The confrontation is rightfully described as the battle for "the protests soul"³³ - which reminds us to the Foucault's battle for truth. The two opposing camps realize that imposing a narrative is not just defining the reality, but building the reality itself – discourse produces knowledge and knowledge is always a weapon of power, which in its turn produces reality³⁴. Both sides fear that describing the protest in one way will alienate some groups that would not identify with the respective description of the protest and, by not participating, will leave the protests to the other camp³⁵. The anti-capitalists claim that by denying the anti-capitalist character of the protest, the proponents of good governance narrative sanitized and exorcised the protest, making it accessible to all sort of neoliberals, trans-ideological NGOs, liberals, hipsters, nationalists, etc.³⁶ The dominant narrative, they feared, will influence the protesters' claims – by refusing to

³¹ Ciprian Siulea, *Demisia lui Ponta, o mare greșeală*, 20 September 2013, <http://voxpública.realitatea.net/politica-societate/demisia-lui-ponta-o-mare-greșeala-98374.html>, 29 February 2016.

³² Moromitic, *În care Costi Rogozanu sfârșește un militant ridicol și confuz*, 6 September 2013, <http://lacoltulstrazii.ro/2013/09/06/in-care-costi-rogozanu-sfarseste-un-militant-ridicol-si-confuz/>, on 29 February 2016.

³³ Cristian Ghinea, *Adevărul suprem și ultim despre manifestațiile din Piață*, Dilema Veche, no. 501, 19-25 September 2013 <http://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/editoriale-opinii/articol/adevarul-suprem-ultim-manifestatiile-piata>, 28 February 2016.

³⁴ John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, 4 edition, London: Prentice Hall, 2006.

³⁵ Cristian Ghinea, *Adevărul suprem și ultim despre manifestațiile din Piață*, Dilema Veche, no. 501, 19-25 September 2013 <http://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/editoriale-opinii/articol/adevarul-suprem-ultim-manifestatiile-piata>, 28 February 2016; Radu Uszkai, *Unde cred că greșește Dan Tăpălașă: despre România Montană, capitalism, partide politice și pantofi*, 20 September 2013, <http://www.academiacatavencu.info/politic/unde-cred-ca-greșeste-dan-tapalaga-despre-rosia-montana-capitalism-partide-politice-si-pantofi-27495>, 29 February 2016.

³⁶ Ciprian Siulea, *Demisia lui Ponta, o mare greșeală*, 20 September 2013, <http://voxpública.realitatea.net/politica-societate/demisia-lui-ponta-o-mare-greșeala-98374.html>, 29 February 2016; Florin Poenaru, *Cateva mistificări ideologice*, 20 September 2013, <http://www.criticatac.ro/23592/cateva-mistificari-ideologice/>, 29 February 2016.

understand the protest in the framework of the global and exploitative capitalist matrix, the protesters will engage in a wrong battle, by identifying false targets and advancing false demands. This “ideological mystification” will result in the perpetuation of the problems, of the illusion that a better capitalism is possible with the condition to bring the politicians and corporations under popular control³⁷. Without assuming the radical character, the protest will fail to achieve its punctual goals³⁸. Linking the discourse success to the goals is recognizing that structuring the reality is gaining “deontic power” to reach future goals, as John R. Searle has put it. That means that by constructing the social reality, the actors empower themselves to reach their goals – it is power, because it creates possibilities for achieving the goals and it is deontic because it is driven by a goal³⁹.

After two months of protest, the anti-capitalists narrative proponents’ have admitted the failure to impose their knowledge about the protest. Disappointed by the outcome of this failure – huge presence of right wing groups inside the protest - some of them publically announced their decision not to take part in the protests any longer⁴⁰. Despite admitting the disillusionment with the protests’ turn toward a nationalistic direction, others had opted for continuing to attend the protests, arguing that the long term goals (capitalist eradication) must be sacrificed to the short term goals (stopping the mining project).⁴¹ In anti-capitalists’ view, the failure to frame the demonstration appropriately, mostly due to the demonization of anti-capitalists by their opponents, had encouraged a “dangerous” diversity inside the protesters, culminating with protest’s seizure by extreme right and fascist groups.

³⁷ Florin Poenaru, *Cateva mistificari ideologice*, 20 September 2013,

<http://www.criticatac.ro/23592/cateva-mistificari-ideologice/>, 29 February 2016.

³⁸ Ana Bazac, *E aiurea să vorbim despre „altceva” decât Roșia Montană?*, 12 September, 2013, <http://www.criticatac.ro/23445/aiurea-vorbim-despre-altceva-decat-roia-montan/>, 29 February 2016.

³⁹ John R. Searle, *Making the Social World. The Structure of Human Civilization*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

⁴⁰ Florin Poenaru, *De ce nu mai merg la marșul de duminică*, 25 October 2013,

<http://www.criticatac.ro/24095/de-ce-nu-mai-merg-la-marul-de-duminic/>, 29 February 2016.

⁴¹ Alex Cistelican, *Cu scepticism înainte*, 6 November 2016, <http://www.criticatac.ro/24153/cu-scepticism-inainte/>, 29 February 2016.

Explaining successes and failures

One must admit that the fact that triggered the civic unrest named Romanian Autumn had had all the ingredients for supporting the anti-capitalist discourse. Despite different subjective motivations and local stakes, the protest revealed some fundamental conflicts of the modern capitalism, such as corporate regulatory capture and subordination of law making process to the private interests, opposed to the public interest.

The protests were also about good governance and accountability, but as the anti-capitalist promoters rightfully pointed out, the rule of law and transparency issues could have been very well interpreted in the framework of the political economy of capitalism. Romania's particularism does not exclude the analyses of the local problems – such as political class' corruption and state capture – in the global context of laissez faire capitalism. The draft law on Rosia Montana was about a corrupt government, but it was equally about a corrupt corporation, testifying about an increasing domination of the decision making process by the markets. All these ingredients would had been enough for framing if not a radical anti-capitalist critique, at least a criticism emphasizing on the necessity for a revised version of capitalism at the global level.

Of course, it is unrealistic to expect such an understanding of the Rosia Montana phenomena from people with firm ideological opinions close to neoliberalism, but it is highly improbable that the majority of the protests had such strong views. As many surveys show, Romanians, including youth, have rather diffuse ideological views and the majority prefers to self-position themselves as centrists.⁴² Only tiny minorities, slightly exceeding 15%, consider themselves as being right or left. So, we assume

⁴² Daniel Sandu, Catalin Augustin Stoica, *Romanian Youth : worries, aspirations, values and life style*, Bucharest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Romania, 2014, http://www.fes.ro/media/2014_news/Report-FES-Romanian_Youth.pdf, 2 March 2016; *Partidele politice din Romania: perceptii si reprezentari*, IRES, February 2016, <http://www.ires.com.ro/articol/312/partidele-politice-din-romania---perceptii-si-reprezentari>, 2 March 2016.

that many of the protest participants did not have very strong ideological opinions and one would expect them, at least, to have had resonated more with an anti-capitalist narrative. Instead, the main narrative of the protesters was almost exclusively focused on political and corporate corruption, without going farther with the analyses. As mentioned before, even the nationalistic or ecologist discourses were framed in the good governance terms, as an opposition against corrupt politicians who betray the national interest or destroy the environment. Certainly, the protest had a radical anti-systemic dimension, opposing politics as usual, but even so, the envisaged solutions did not tackle the political economy dimension.

The good governance discourse gained in importance and maximized its influence over the protests that occurred in the following years, whereas the anti-capitalist narrative remained marginal, notwithstanding that the specific of some of those conflicts which triggered new popular uprising would have had been highly compatible with an anti-capitalist interpretation. Still, as one left wing journalist correctly observed in 2016, in the context of a new wave of anti-governmental protests, the left failed to disseminate a minimal anti-establishment vocabulary, keeping the reality interpretation in the limits of the old rhetoric that undermines a real change.⁴³

For understanding this failure, we should look at the Romanian discursive landscape of the post-communist period. The good governance concept had made a long career in the intellectual and public sphere starting with the beginning of the '90s, when Romania signed the first stand-by agreement with IMF that had been followed by other 9 similar stand-by agreements concluded between 1991 and 2015. Good governance had been in discussion primarily because of the importance given to it by many international organizations, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Starting with the '90s IMF has increasingly advanced the concept of good governance as a concept bound up with the normative framework of neoliberalism, equalizing good

⁴³ *Gândul meu*. Costi Rogozanu: *Nu poți schimba realitățile folosind aceeași retorică*, 6 November 2015, <http://www.gandul.info/gandul-meu/gandul-meu-costi-rogozanu-nu-poti-schimba-realitatile-folosind-aceeasi-retorica-14876337>, 2 March 2016.

governance with the technical qualities of the management⁴⁴. Poor governance had been increasingly advanced as representing the main problem of the developing countries, whilst the good governance had become a corner stone of the IMF missions. In September 1996, a declaration entitled partnership for Sustainable Global Growth was adopted by IMF Interim Committee in Washington, stating that good governance should be promoted in all its aspects: rule of law, improved efficiency and accountability in the public sector and eradicating corruption⁴⁵. As some authors have argued, the good governance is just a new form of neoliberal economic conditionality, which is inherently a depoliticizing force⁴⁶.

In Romania, the ascension of the good governance, in the IMFs and World Bank's acceptance coincides with the ascension of neoliberalism as an economic doctrine, public policy agenda, and analytical framework as social discourse⁴⁷. Parallel to the IMF policies, a plethora of think tanks, academics and opinion makers supporting and promoting the good governance had emerged starting with the mid' of the '90s, most of them supported by or receiving educational training from international institutions.⁴⁸ They got involved in developing alliances, guides, roadmaps and all sorts of documents and actions promoting the good governance, such as the Coalition for a Clean Governance (2005), the Coalition for Good Governance (2006), the White Chart of Good Governance (2012).⁴⁹ Their dominant view was that crises were not

⁴⁴ Morten Boas, Desmond McNeill, eds., *Global Institutions and Development: Framing the World?* London: Routledge, 2003.

⁴⁵ Morten Boas, Desmond McNeill, eds., *Global Institutions and Development: Framing the World?*, London: Routledge, 2003.

⁴⁶ Jolle Demmers, Alex E. Fernández Jilberto and Barbara Hogenboom (eds.), *Good governance in the era of global neoliberalism: Conflict and depoliticisation in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa.*, London: Routledge, 2004.

⁴⁷ Philip G. Cerny, "Embedding Neoliberalism: The Evolution of a Hegemonic Paradigm", in *The Journal of International Trade and Diplomacy*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2008.

⁴⁸ Cornel Ban, *Dependență și dezvoltare. Economia politică a capitalismului românesc*, Cluj Napoca: Tact, 2014.

⁴⁹ <http://sar.org.ro/coalitia-pentru-o-guvernare-curata-cgc/>;

http://www.ce-re.ro/upload/Buna_guvernare_la_romani-ghid_de_bune_practici.pdf;

<http://www.romaniacurata.ro/pentru-o-romanie-curata-semnati-aici-carta-alba-a-bunei-guvernari/>

produced by external economic/natural events, but by the failure of domestic governments to adopt right policies.⁵⁰ The problems which Romania faced in the post-communism were regarded strictly as the result of Romanian politicians' failure to take the right decisions and to act responsibly. Romania's role in the world capitalist economy, the deindustrialization process that started after 1990, leading to massive hidden unemployment, the country's dependence on foreign capital were not included in the analyses or treated as marginal. The output was the establishment of the good governance as a key concept in thinking the society and politics. Although these think tanks and NGOs are legally neutral and operate without sanctions or compulsory obligations, they obtained "objective results in the in the evolution of customs, ways of thinking, morality", as Gramsci put it referring to the activity of civil society institutions.⁵¹

Good governance principle became the common sense of Romania's opinion makers, but also a cultural hegemonic paradigm, in Antonio Gramsci's terms: a universally dominant ideology that justifies the status-quo and hides the artificial character of social institutions⁵². These principles had been internalized as a Weltanschauung by the society, not only obscuring the capitalist political economy relationships, but making individuals/protesters to seek solutions inside the same analytical framework that was perpetuating the problems which produced people's discontent. It must be noted that for Gramsci, hegemony is not always a unified system, nor are hegemonic values always coherent - it is a diverse assemblage of values that can be both contradictory and complementary⁵³. From this perspective, we can consider all variations existing inside the 2013 protests – liberal, neoliberals, and nationalists - as variations of the dominant hegemonic discourse, variations which are contradictory, but also complementary. Except the anti-capitalists, none of the groups present

⁵⁰ Surendra Munshi, Biju Paul Abraham and Soma Chaudhuri, *The Intelligent Person's Guide to Good Governance*, Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2009.

⁵¹ Antonio Gramsci (Joseph A. Buttigieg, ed.), *Prison Notebooks*, New York City: Columbia University Press, 1992.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ David Kreps (ed.), *Gramsci and Foucault: A Reassessment*, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2015.

in the protests have challenged the good governance principle in a real, radical manner. The hegemony does not exclude resistance – by contrary, it can incorporate attempts of resistance by depriving them of their force and transforming them into a reinforcement of status-quo. It is too early to assess whether this is the case of #UnitiSalvam – there was a *momentum* in 2013, when the consensus disruption marked an important attempt towards contesting the discursive hegemony, but no other progress had been made since then.

This is why we argue that the anti-capitalist discourse was a radical form of resistance to the dominant hegemony, because it offered the parameters and instruments for a systemic analysis, disentangling the existing consensus in a more profound manner. As Gramsci has shown, even when individuals are subjected to a strong disciplinary apparatus, they may be able to exercise power through collective action⁵⁴. The anti-capitalist discourse was an attempt to establish a counter-hegemony and to replace the hegemony (although Gramsci was envisaging a collective actor - the political party - carrying on this task). In Foucault terms, this was an attempt to establish an alternative regime of truth by critically assessing the regime of truth responsible for the actual power relations and by creating new discourses that remake the power relations in more liberating ways. According to Foucault, truth is culturally and historically relative; through the practice of discourse, societies construct regimes of truth, which a considered, in a specific context and time, as *the truth*. Foucault links the notion of truth to the explicitly political notion of regime; truth is linked "by a circular relation to system of powers which produces it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it"⁵⁵.

The good governance narrative was too well-established for allowing the construction of a new regime of truth. The anti-capitalists effort had failed; although there is no doubt that they had some success and that some people have embraced the anti-capitalist interpretation. And it is worth mentioning that despite the anti-capitalists' failure, a breach in the hegemonic discourse was made, by contesting the post-communist

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, "La fonction politique de l'intellectuel", in *Dits et écrits*, II, 1976-1988, ed. D. Defert and F. Ewald, Paris : Gallimard, 2001.

consensus and making visible some of the latent conflicts. But whether this breach will entail a more systemic deconstruction of the hegemonic consensus, as well what would be the terms in which the eventual disruption will be framed – anti-capitalistic or others - remains to be seen in the future.

Conclusions

The protests from 2013, generically known as the “Romanian Autumn”, had had a strong anti-systemic character, rejecting the political establishment and seeking new forms of political participation. The self-proclaimed apolitism is an obstacle in advancing further with the re-politicizing process. It is produced by the hegemonic neoliberal and good governance discourse, obstructing the political character of everyday life acts, transforming them into private affairs that require private solutions. The outcome is the de-politicization of social and economic relations, regarded as natural, as matters-of-course, while politics is demonized.

Nevertheless, in spite of their narrative and the self-proclaimed apolitical character, there are solid arguments to consider this kind of protests as being the “real politics”, as opposite to what Rancière called police order, that encapsulates the institutionalized forms of doing politics and prescribes our reality in the realm of perception itself⁵⁶. The protests created a new democratic dynamic that implicitly discloses a fundamental social antagonism of the Romanian society and a dynamic that disrupts the distribution of the sensible.⁵⁷

While disrupting the post-communist consensus, most of protesters’ demands remained circumscribed to the good governance narrative. Instead of searching for systemic causes of the discontent, the protesters identified direct, immediate causes, in line with the good governance

⁵⁶ Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics”, in *Theory and Event*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2001; Simon Tormey, *The end of representative politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015.

⁵⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Le Partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique*, Paris : La Fabrique-Éditions, 2000.

narrative, such as one or another politician's corruption or the entire political class' lack of integrity. The disruptive character of the movement is not only obscured by the subjective narratives of the participants, which are entangled in the dominant good governance and neoliberal discourse, but it could, eventually, be annihilated if the breaches created inside this hegemonic discourse are not strong enough to resist and to increase over the time. Since the protests from 2013 had generated an informal activist community - #UnitiSalvam – that in the next years was at the origin of several social mobilizations and that is still active, it remains to be seen how the movement will evolve. Will it accomplish its re-politicizing potential, will it expand its disruptive capacity by developing an alternative framing of the reality and conflicts? Or will it entirely succumb to the good governance narrative and reinforce the status-quo in spite of its contestation character? This shall be the focus of further research, aiming to monitor and to explore the evolution of the #Unitisalvam's discourse and practice and the way in which it interconnects to the dominant discourse.

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