

‘Netizenship’ and migrants’ online mobilisation: transnational participation and collective action in the digital era¹

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For the last two decades, the information and communication technologies (ICT) shape new spaces for transnational interaction between migrant and non-migrant populations, enabling ubiquitous ‘ways of being’ (Nedelcu, 2009a, 2010a). Moreover, ICT allow the migrants to multiply their belongings, to mobilize and defend particularistic values and to claim a particular belonging while living the world and developing transnational habitus (Nedelcu, 2010b). Facilitating the co-presence of mobile actors in multiple locations, Internet provides space of collective action for dispersed population. This chapter explores the potential of Internet as a new transnational public sphere in migratory context. First we discuss national belonging, (political) participation and (flexible) citizenship in a transnational perspective. Then we analyze two case studies of online mobilization of Romanian migrants. One concerns a community website of Romanians in Switzerland and it is based on a content analysis of webographic data and few comprehensive interviews. In February 2009, the Swiss people took a referendum voting for the extension of the free movement agreements within the EU to Romania and Bulgaria. The opponents to this extension promoted in mainstream media a denigrating campaign which emphasized the risk of a ‘Romanian invasion’, mostly by Rom’s minority. The website www.casa-romanilor.ch played a key-role for the mobilization of Romanian immigrants into an online campaign aiming at a better image of the Romanian community in Switzerland. The other case-study emphasizes the role of Internet and online networking for transnational political mobilization of Romanian migrants towards their country of origin. Based on a netnographic analysis of few online campaigns of electoral

mobilization, it shows that ICTs enhance web-based forms of citizenship and participation beyond borders and contribute to social and political change in the origin country.

In conclusion, this chapter underlines the impact of the ICTs on the civic and political mobilization of the (trans)migrants. It points out that on the one hand, Internet offers space for democratic expression of migrant minorities. In particular, it allows the emergence of a collective 'voice' able to defend the interests of migrant populations both in host and origin societies. On the other hand, Internet and its communication platforms create basic conditions for collective transnational agency and generate participatory patterns articulating local and global resources and dynamics.

Migrants' transnational participation and flexible citizenship at the digital era: a theoretical overview

Transnational studies extensively diversified and transnationalism became a major paradigm in migration studies during the past twenty years (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992; Portes et al., 1999; Vertovec, 2009). Although many migration scholars acknowledge transnational dynamics as not being a feature of modernity (Schnapper, 2001; Vertovec, 1999; Portes et al., 1999), the transnationalism is entering a new qualitative phase within the digital era (Nedelcu, 2009a; Vertovec, 2009), characterized by "the scale of intensity and simultaneity of current long-distance, cross-border activities" (Vertovec, 1999), the emergence of transnational habitus and a deep transformation of the national nature of the social structures (Vertovec, 2004; Nedelcu, 2009a, 2010a, 2010b). The time-space compression enhanced by the ICT dramatically intensifies the networking of various spaces, geographically distant but culturally synchronized. The migrants function as key agents of these connections, generating various transnational exchanges (economic, social, cultural,...) which span borders, according to their

own networks. Furthermore, the *online migrant* – quintessence of *homo mobilis* and *homo numericus* – reflects the social mutations generated by two main driving forces behind our day's social worlds: mobility and technology (Nedelcu, 2009a). Able to build new bridges between the local and the global, he invents new ways of being and belonging, as well as new patterns of long-distance participation. Thus, he creates new geographies of the social and the politic, masters transnational social fields and reshapes power distribution within the States³.

Migrant transnationalism and transnational projection of the nation-state

Both host and origin countries' governments are increasingly concerned by the double or multiple belongings and loyalties that the migrants deploy through banal everyday transnational practices. Politically, the transmigrants are exposed to various regimes of citizenship and participation; thus they are dealing with different policies and ideologies shaping their sense of belonging and responsibility within the Nation-state(s) (Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2003). Many transnational studies have revealed the complex situations of double political allegiances when the migrants are identifying themselves to more than one Nation-State, irrespective of their legal status and recognition. Often the transnational orientations develop a dual frame of cultural and political references and reinforce democratic values. However, the migrants' transnationalism is rather national-oriented (Fitzgerald, 2002) and the mobilization for the country of origin is considered as an explicit expression of long distance nationalism (Glick-Schiller and Fouron, 2001).

The host states persistently perceive the migrants' transnational orientations as a threat for their economic and political stability as well as their cultural homogeneity. Sceptical in front of the dialogic effects of migrant transnationalism, they are failing to positively take into account the complexity of the plural identities of the transmigrants (Glick-Schiller and al., 1995) as well as the richness of their transnational ties. The policies of integration and

migration are still based on an unquestioned opposition between integration/assimilationist/multicultural patterns and transnationalism (Vertovec, 2004; Portes, 2001). Although some host states are gradually opening towards a multiculturalist vision recognizing basic rights to cultural difference, this reality calls for discussion of their integration patterns and expectations, by pointing out contradictory situations and ambivalent arrangements. For instance, on the one hand, most of the host nation-states strengthen migration control within their territory and continue to reinforce integration and cultural assimilatory processes. On the other hand, as sending states, sometimes the same nation-states are adapting to the transnational fact by reinventing their cohesive role outside their territorial frontiers (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2003); in this case they are enabling double citizenship regimes, social security reforms and incentives to attract nationals from abroad (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998). By valuating the positive consequences of emigrants' participation – mainly for economic health and development – the governments of the sending countries are increasingly encouraging remittances, entrepreneurship, lobby and political representation abroad. The policies developed within this inclusive logic are qualified as “globalization of domestic politics”, “globalization of grassroots politics” or “deterritorialized nations politics” (Glick-Schiller and Fouron, 2001; Vertovec, 2001; Smith, 1994; Castells, 2008).

The nation-state is thus reformulating its prerogatives as “it assumes new functions, abdicates responsibilities for others, and redefines who its members are” (Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2003: 16). This reformulation appears at various levels, varying in intensity. First, *legally* an increasing number of states are admitting dual citizenship, allowing partial or full political rights to their nationals abroad. But dual citizenship regimes do not automatically enhance equal treatment within the both states. They have to come along with social rights' adaptation (inheritance rights, social security and pensions, military service, taxation, access to

education, equal access on the labour market, etc). Then, new *public policies* target the nationals abroad; they translate into consular and ministerial reforms, fiscal incentives directed to attract migrant remittances, new public services and state protection for their nationals abroad, new regimes of symbolic rights' and so on (Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2003). Finally, on a *rhetoric* level, the nation-states are transforming themselves in promoters of a "long distance nationalism" (Glick-Schiller and Fouron, 2001), by redefining their sphere of influence outside the national territory, in order to include the nationals living abroad.

This state's trend to enter the logic of "global nations' policies" is far from reflecting a dilution of the nation-state power. While expanding its prerogatives beyond national borders, the state "subvert its own regulatory mechanisms in order to compete more effectively in the global economy" (Ong, 1999: 130) and reframes the traditional understanding of sovereignty, nationality and citizenship (Levitt and Dehesa, 2003). By defining new "graduated sovereignty zones" (Ong, 1999), it reinvents its role within the complex process of politic governance and government in a world made by multiple local-global interconnections.

Understanding citizenship in the digital era: combining a state-related status with a web-based practice

Whereas the nation can overcome the dispersion of its nationals through a nationalism spreading beyond the state, and nationality goes beyond national borders becoming transnationality, what become citizenship in a globalizing world shaped by complex processes of "denationalization" (Sassen, 2003), "internal globalization" (Beck, 2006), "glocalization" (Robertson, 1994) or "cosmopolitanization" (Beck, 2006)?

At a first sight, this question could be quickly answered as "political citizenship is typically circumscribed, bounded and regulated within national borders, even though in its juridical-

legal sense it can be dual or multiple” (Labelle et Midy, 1999 : 221). The states remain constrained in the exercise of their authority by the territorial limits of their political power, even when they are aware of – and sensitive to – transnational challenges.

However, different arguments could be easily raised by taking a look at the migrants’ citizen mobilization and participation. The national belonging can express apart from the political regulation mechanisms, as “persons living within transnational social fields make claims to states as legal or substantive citizens” (Levitt et Glick-Schiller, 2003: 24). As Roger Brubaker stated, what constitutes citizenship “the array of rights or the pattern of participation – is not necessarily tied to formal state-membership. Formal citizenship is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for substantive citizenship” (Brubaker, 1993: 36). Moreover, “transnational migrants often live in a country in which they do not claim citizenship and claim citizenship in a country in which they do not live [...] Alternatively, they may claim membership in multiple polities in which they may be residents, part-time residents, or absentees” (Fitzgerald, 2000: 10). Thereby, non-citizen migrants can engage in various activities of lobbying, public demonstrations, information and organization aiming at exerting pressure on host or origin country’s governments and state institutions (Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2003).

Through these processes, the boundaries of national citizenship are becoming blurred and “citizenship institutions seems to be today in a somewhat dilemmatic situation” (Gerdes and Faist, 2010: 23). Yet, the argument that citizenship transcends the national concept is not easy to make. Although the citizenship’s practices are increasingly diversifying and disembedding from a nation-state territory, its institutional dimensions remain close-related to the nation-state(s).

These considerations bring to light that the analysis of the “transnational transformations of citizenship” (Gerdes and Faist, 2010) need to move a step forward, “beyond the idea of citizenship as a protected status in a nation-state, and as a condition opposed to the condition of statelessness” (Ong, 2006: 499).

When looking at citizenship not as a status but as a practice, i.e. as an expression of activism by citizens, the field of ICTs can be use to bring in the perspective of a web-based citizenship. In the digital age, the relation between legal/substantive citizens and states is reshaped by the emergence of new deterritorialized agora. The question is to what extent Internet is changing patterns of political activism of migrant populations? Two different perspectives can be adopted when answering this question. First, some authors suggest that ICTs reinforce the exercise at a distance of traditional political engagements and activities. Within this approach, online forms of political participation are rather complementary to, then substitutive of, traditional political meetings, demonstrations, roundtables, etc. As “immigrants can cost-effectively and easily contact one another to advocate their interests regarding their country of residence or their country of origin” (Kissau and Hunger, 2008: 6), the practices of dual citizenship can thus become more effective and more people feel encouraged to express openly their political rights, skills and interests over the borders. Second, ICTs enhance new transnational public spheres in which dispersed, migrant and not-migrant populations share interests and values and mobilize around common public issues in new spaces of collective action. Although Internet could be a “space of government surveillance” (Ong, 2006), it creates also a space of (pro-)democratic expression. It can become “the site for the articulation of overweening ethnic power that exceeds the nation-state”, as well as the main tool “to construct a web-based ‘global citizenship’” (Ong, 2006: 503). This perspective gives

prominence to the potential of ICTs in general, and Internet particularly, to enable new forms of political mobilization characterized by quick transnational/global spread.

In both cases, Internet appears – at different levels – as an environment conducive to the crystallization of various points of view in a *collective voice* defending the interests of (migrant) minority groups (Mitra, 2005). This way, Internet stimulates migrant mobilization and “might enable migrant voices to be heard where political participation is otherwise scarce” (Kissau and Hunger, 2008: 6). As a “space where people come together as citizens and articulate their autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society” (Castells, 2008: 78), Internet encourages the development of common points of view and dominant trends of public opinion, creating a public visibility of the migrant community. The emergence of an Internet-mediated transnational public sphere reflects a shift from a public sphere “anchored around the national institutions of territorially bound societies to a public sphere constituted around the media system” (Castells, 2008: 90), and which is often strengthened by the migration of virtual social dynamics towards the public space. Networked resources are then the key to enhance civic responsibility exercise and participation within a “network society” (Castells, 1998) which “organizes its public sphere, more than any other historical form of organization, on the basis of media communication networks” (Castells, 2008: 79). Thereby, Castells coins the notion of “new global public sphere” to refer a “multimodal communication space”, built on Internet networks and communication systems. Thus, come up a new “democracy of communication” based on the emergence of a media of the masses which is different in its essence from mass-media (de Rosnay, 2006) since it is based on horizontal networks of communication. However, although horizontality allows better opportunities for civic engagement and participation, it also generates “greater fragmentation and pluralism in the structure of civic engagement” (Bimber, 2000: 332). In

fact, ICTs facilitates more targeted but punctual civic actions, as well as the emergence of “novel groups and organizations formed only for the duration of a single political effort or civic event” (Bimber, 2000: 332).

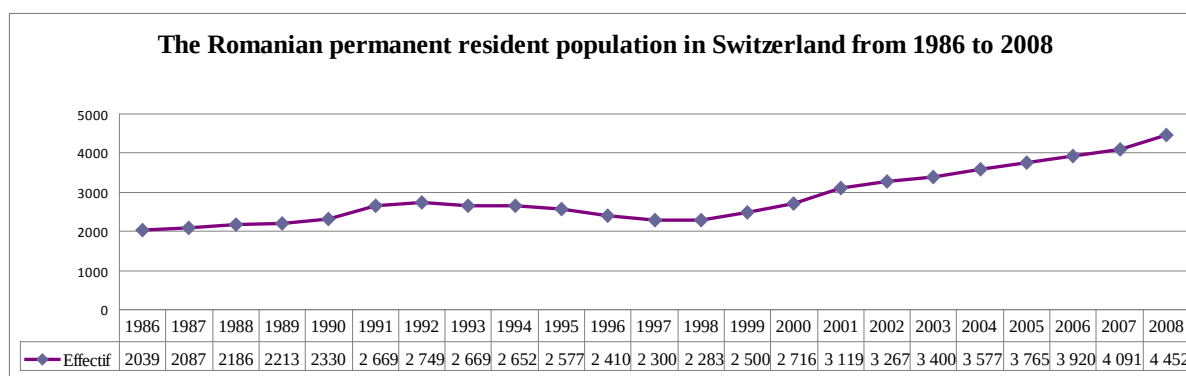
Grounded on two different case-studies⁴, the next section analyzes these social transformations and their impact on the mobilization of Romanian migrants within two different migration contexts.

Netizenship: new patterns for migrant mobilization and collective action

www.casa-romanilor.ch: giving voice to a minority migrant group in Switzerland

Switzerland – which is not an EU member state – is not a traditional target destination for Romanian migrants for different reasons. The Swiss migratory policy is based on a model of “two circles”, defining legal preference on the labour market for Swiss nationals and then nationals of EU countries (1st circle) before other countries’ nationals (2nd circle). It discouraged labour Romanian migration until recently, when a protocol regarding the extension of the free movement of the persons within the EU to Romania and Bulgaria was adopted at 1st of June 2009. Still, the Romanian migration is strictly regulated until 2016 by “contingent” quotas for Romanian and Bulgarian workers within the Swiss labour market. In absolute numbers, in 2008 the total Romanian permanent resident population in Switzerland⁵ limited to very few 4’306 persons, while in 1989 it concerned 2’213 people. One can notice an ascendant trend, reinforced a bit more since 2000 (Table 1).

Table 1: The evolution of the Romanian permanent resident population in Switzerland since 1986 (based on data from the Federal Office of Statistics)



This evolution is rather singular within European countries which attracted ample flows of Romanian regular and irregular migrants. In particular Italy and Spain witness a remarkable increasing of Romanian immigration since 2002, respectively 2007 (Sandu, 2006).

In early 2000, Switzerland and the EU negotiated and signed a bilateral agreement including a free circulation accord (among seven different issues). Validated by popular referendum, this agreement “Bilatérales I” has been in effect starting with 1st of June 2002 and included a probationary clause of 7 years that allowed the possibility to be abrogated or indefinitely prolonged. In 2009, Switzerland was expected to take position on this issue. As Romania and Bulgaria accessed to the EU at 1st of January 2007, Switzerland had implicitly to consider the extension of the negotiated rights of free movement of the labour force to the nationals of these two new EU member states. The Swiss parliament regrouped the two issues (EU bilateral agreements renewal and their extension to RO and BG) in a unique “federal decree” aiming at equal treatment of all the 27 EU members.

Certain right-wing political milieus⁶, opposed to the renewal of the agreement but mostly to its extension to Romania and Bulgaria, have decided to launch a referendum⁷ against the decree. On February 8th 2009, the Swiss people took this referendum voting in the favour of the renewal of the bilateral agreement and implicitly the extension of the free movement agreements within the EU to Romania and Bulgaria.

Among the arguments vehemently defended by the initiators of the referendum, one can notice: the syndrome of the “Polish plumber”, the fear of a “wage dumping”, the risks related to an increasing criminality, etc. The UDC party initiated then an offensive media campaign and published a poster showing three black ravens voraciously consuming the healthy resources of Switzerland. This poster dominated public spaces in big and small cities all over the country, as well as publicity pages of mainstream newspapers (Figure 1).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

In parallel, the same party representatives launched in mainstream media a denigrating campaign that emphasized the risk of a ‘Romanian invasion’, mostly by Rom’s minority. The national and regional television broadcasting organized numerous and regular debates in which very contradictory arguments were raised, with notable differences between the linguistic regions of Switzerland. However, the public discourse was dominated by a persistent amalgam between “Rom criminals” and “Romanian workers”, and in the common imaginary the “black ravens” were indistinctively associated with future Romanian immigrants (assimilated to Rom populations coming from Romania). The poster provoked a scandal in Switzerland, and the debate largely spanned the Swiss territory. The Romanian state used diplomatic channels to express its indignation, and the Swiss ambassador to Bucharest was invited by the Romanian ministry of external affairs to give an explanation about this campaign. In Bern, Romanian representatives silently worked to create favourable opinion within the politic and economic Swiss milieus.

In reaction to this situation, many Romanian immigrants in Switzerland felt hurt. Some of them have started self-consciously to take position within the debate. Although Romanians lack solid territorial community-structures in Switzerland⁸, the website www.casa-romanilor.ch⁹ assumed a key-role in creating a “community mobilization” on the referendum

issue. The owner of the website used the networks created through this virtual agora to launch a contra-campaign aiming to better the image of the Romanian community in Switzerland and give it a “voice”. In early December 2008, he posted on the main page of the website a call to collective action and initiated an “image campaign” entitled “Switzerland vote for us too”, directed to all the Swiss voters. The initial idea was to send a clear message to Swiss people that there is any reason to fear the Romanian immigrants. The senders of this message was supposed to be prominent Romanian migrants in Switzerland, Swiss nationals involved in economic, humanitarian or cultural activities in Romania, other Romanian personalities or potential migrants from Romania. Furthermore, the campaign aimed at raising awareness and stimulating participation to the vote among double nationals and Romanians naturalized Swiss.

Although the *Casa-Romanilor* website hosted the campaign, various Internet channels were targeted in order to promote it. The time was short to develop a strong strategy and implement this campaign; however the initiative had a great echo within the Romanian community. Some tens of people (both of Romanian and Swiss origin) took position publically and sent messages to be published on the website, developing positive arguments such as: the diversified profile of Romanian immigrants in Switzerland, their contribution to economic growth and innovation, historic and cultural evidence of Swiss-Romanian friendship, concrete projects of intercultural dialogue, objective facts about Romanian migratory flows within Europe and Switzerland, more subjective and affective experiences of mutual solidarities, etc. An alternative poster was designed by a Romanian artist living in Zurich and was adopted as official logo for the Romanian campaign (Figure 2).

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

The forums of discussion related to the *casa-romanilor* website became a democratic arena in which Romanian citizens living in Switzerland and Romania, but also Swiss citizens of Romanian or other origin confronted their opinions and where pro and contra arguments were addressed.

An *ad-hoc* “movement of action against the UDC defamatory poster” resulted in an open letter addressed to the Confederation Presidency and the Swiss government.

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

This letter was “signed” online by 512 persons¹⁰. While a majority were Romanians living in Switzerland and Swiss pro-Europeans and Romania’s sympathizers, few tens were Romanians living in France, Germany, Romania, United States, Italy, Spain... Very few Bulgarians showed interest in the issue and signed the letter.

As what was at stake in the referendum vote was of crucial importance both for Swiss and Romanian governments, *Casa-Romanilor*’s initiative was quickly noticed by political milieus and the national media, both in Romania and Switzerland. On the one hand, the Romanian public sphere showed great interest for the issue and Romanian media largely debated it, taking up the arguments of the *Casa-Romanilor* campaign. Romanian newspapers of national impact reproduced some of the articles published in the website pages. On the other hand, Swiss media looked for objective facts and informed opinions about the Romanian community in Switzerland. Thus the “virtual voice” of Romanians penetrated into the public space of the mainstream media¹¹.

Some of the campaign participants – identified as opinion leaders – were approached by Swiss radios and televisions and invited to give their opinion in public (televised) debates¹². In addition, few Romanian journalists living in Switzerland played a key-role as a turntable

relating *Casa-Romanilor*, Swiss and Romanian medias. Other people encouraged by the snowball effect of the campaign and the feeling that their voice can be heard, took private initiative and addressed regional newspapers and associations or acted as promoters of the ‘Romanian cause’ within their immediate social environment (colleagues, neighbours, etc.).

While it is difficult to measure the real impact of this campaign and its influence on the final result of the vote¹³, one can nevertheless notice the crucial role of the *Casa-Romanilor* website in bringing into balance a minority discourse and interests. Internet thus generated on the one hand a horizontal participation and organization within the Romanian (transnational) community. On the other hand, it enabled a bottom-up dynamic that got in the mainstream debate and made a minority’s voice heard.

“Mergi la vot !”: an online transnational mobilization of Romanian voters abroad

Dual citizenship¹⁴ allows Romanian migrants to participate in the political life of the country of origin, mainly exercising their right to vote. According to the estimates of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, about 10% of the Romanian voters are living abroad. Internet affords migrants to inform their own political opinion as well as to debate, confront and compare the political options they have, in relation with one or more nation-state’s memberships. At the digital era, finding information, taking a stand and mobilizing to vote is not difficult as communication and information channels are constantly extending. In the same time, this population becomes a target for the Romanian political parties. Electoral campaigns are also increasingly using ICTs, directing specific electoral messages towards migrant populations. The candidates enhance dialogue with their potential (transnational) voters via their blogs and mainstream media electoral debates are spread online. Communication teams specialized in new media become today major players within the complex election gears working towards the political success of parties and candidates¹⁵.

This subsection examines the role that Internet websites of Romanians abroad play in the political mobilization of migrant populations. For instance, pioneering as a migratory networks' generator¹⁶ in the late nineties, the website www.thebans.com committed to promote a vote for political change in Romania at two particular moments: first, the 2000 presidential and parliamentary elections; and second, in November 2003, at the time of a referendum aiming at the modification of the Romanian constitution in order to grant extended rights to double nationals. In 2000, the vote campaign triggered by Thebans.com enabled numerous and virulent reactions within the discussion forums. Many migrant cybernauts participated to the debate through a critical analysis of the economic and political milieus in Romania. Although divergent arguments polarized the discussion, a solid position against the candidature of the ex-president Ion Iliescu¹⁷ clearly emerged. It is however impossible to measure the impact of this first online campaign on the vote orientations of the migrant online participants or passive observers of the debates. In 2003, what was at stake in the referendum vote directly concerned the right of migrants to participate within the Romanian institutions of public administration. More concretely, the referendum aimed at the harmonization of the Romanian constitution to the European legislation, by introducing the possibility for any person that owns the Romanian citizenship (regardless to the possession of a second one) and lives in Romania to access to the public function. In Canada, two community websites (www.thebans.com and www.arcweb.com) actively involved in a campaign addressing Romanian potential voters from Toronto. By providing complete information about the vote object and procedure to vote from abroad they aimed at stimulating the interest of their forums' members in this referendum. The Romanian consulate in Toronto showed high interest for this initiative and invited the webmaster and owner of

www.thebans.com website to sit as an observer of the vote process, besides the representatives of traditional mainstream media.

These examples suggest that Internet could play a crucial role in the processes of transnational political mobilization when key political issues are at the stake. However, the mobilization often concerns short term aims and targeted events (Bimber, 2000). In 2004, at the time of the new presidential elections and after a third mandate of Ion Iliescu as a president, a large-scale coordinated online mobilization was set up by a network of migrant webmasters of Romanian migrant websites. Initiated by the owner of the swiss www.casa-romanilor.ch website, this campaign called on solidarity and civic responsibility within Romanian transnational communities. While in 2000 this kind of initiative stayed punctual, the campaign “Go and vote!” / “*Mergi la vot!*” had a broad transnational echo. 42 websites of Romanians abroad and 17 websites of traditional media (newspapers and television broadcasting) as well as number of representatives from the Romanian civil society gathered together in order to encourage people to take position and vote for change. They all made efforts to provide an up-to-date information about electoral programs and political platforms of the candidates, disseminated press releases and enabled online and offline forums, round tables and debates. Each website informed migrant voters about vote centres in host countries, reported about the vote process, results or potential incidents. In addition, ad-hoc virtual groups have multiplied and have intensely encouraged Romanian citizens from abroad to take position in regard to the political situation in the country.

This time, online initiatives were fruitful. The vote of Romanian citizens abroad was not only particularly massive, but it has largely sanctioned the reform failure as well as the inertia of the social democratic party and the president Iliescu. During the second round of election, the ‘diaspora vote’ was decisive to take direction for change and new democracy. With a large

majority for the political alliance D.A.¹⁸ between the National Liberal Party and the Democratic Party, and its candidate for the Presidency, the Romanians abroad have been able to propel Traian Basescu as a president. Thus, Basescu surprisingly surpassed Adrian Nastase, his competitor and successor of the former president Ion Iliescu at the leadership of the Social Democrat Party. Nastase has been taken a comfortable lead after the first round (41% of the votes, compared to 33% for Basescu). However, final results have been very tight (Basescu 51,23%; Nastase, 48,77%). More than 80% of the Romanians abroad expressed their preference for Traian Basescu (81,86 % in France; 95% in Canada; 83% in the United States,...). Furthermore, in his investiture speech, the elected-President warmly acknowledged the 'Romanians from diaspora' for their 'trust' and 'responsible vote'.

In April 2007, the online campaign "*Mergi la vot !*" has been relaunched when the Parliament has set in motion a referendum procedure for the suspension of the President. The website www.voteaza.org was the main centralizing platform for information and communication between diaspora websites and webmasters. The same pattern was developed as in 2004. Again, within the 178 vote centres abroad, 93% of the 75'027 votes were against the President resignation. Punctually, few websites and diaspora associations went further by initiating protest movements. For instance, the association of Romanian Canadians (ARC) took position publically and launched through the www.romanianstoronto.ca website a petition disagreeing with the Romanian parliament decision to suspend the President mandate. Signed by 950 Romanians living in Canada, this petition has been sent to the presidents of the two chambers of the Romanian Parliament before the referendum vote, expressing a deep concern regarding the depreciation of the political environment and democracy in the country of origin.

These various examples show that politically engaged webmasters can take civic leadership and play a key role as transnational political activists. As engaged netizens, they creatively

combine technological skills, online social capital and activist orientations, thus generating web-based transnational civic movements.

Conclusion: Netizenship as a new form of citizen participation

This chapter underlines what ICTs bring in the discussion of the civic and political mobilization of (trans)migrants. It points out that on the one hand, Internet offers space for democratic expression of migrant minorities. In particular, it allows the emergence of a collective ‘voice’ able to defend the interests of the minority migrant populations in host societies. Moreover, it enables new forms of ‘public diplomacy’ or ‘diplomacy of the public’ (Castells, 2008), aiming to “harness the dialogue between different social collectives and their cultures in the hope of sharing meaning and understanding” (Castells, 2008: 91). On the other hand, Internet and its communication platforms create basic conditions for collective agency gathering migrant and non-migrant populations over the borders. In particular, it can be a catalyst for transnational political mobilization transforming migrant population into a potentially significant actor of political change in origin countries. However, the mobilization gains momentum with specific and focused aims and actions.

In conclusion, *netizenship* appears as a new horizontal form of participation and active citizenship. Internet creates new mechanisms of (deterritorialized) interaction of migrant minorities with the civil society and the state and generates a new equilibrium of power relations within a transnational public sphere. It generates new participatory patterns articulating local and global dimensions and dynamics.

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³ These observations are not meant to deny limits of ICTs effects. In spite of an undeniable democratization during the last couple of decades, numerous access inequalities (in terms of region, country, gender, generation,...) still persist (Dewan & al., 2005). Moreover, ICTs impact migration in dialogical way (Nedelcu, 2009a) and the functional differences and the rapid "integration of technologies" (Bimber, 2000) increase fragmentation of civic engagement and political participation.

⁴ Both case-studies are based on netnographic observation of migrants' online campaigns. The www.casa-romanilor.ch was systematically observed during five months (from November 2008 to March 2009) as part of a postdoc research ("State logics and migrant transnational practices. The Romanian migrants in Switzerland") within the MOVE (Mobility for excellence) program funded by the Swiss University Conference. The content analysis of a corpus of online forum-based discussions, open letters and Swiss and Romanian newspapers was completed by comprehensive interviews with 5 key-actors of the campaign (the owner of the website, journalists and other community informal leaders). The second case study is based on a long-term study of the Romanian migration to Canada and the impact of Internet on transnational processes (Nedelcu 2009). It is

informed by about twenty semi-structured interviews with both key-actors and ordinary users of the campaigns' websites, as well as content analysis of webographic data.

⁵ This category includes three different types of residence permits (L- short work permit, B – work permit for at least 1 year, C – permanent residence permit). It excepts Romanian migrants naturalized Swiss.

⁶ Mostly Lega dei Ticinesi, the young wing of Democratic Christian Union Party (UDC) and the Swiss democrats.

⁷ According to the Swiss constitution, a question can be submitted to the popular vote by referendum if at least 50'000 signatures are supporting such an initiative.

⁸ With one exception among seven Romanian cultural associations spread in French and German speaking cantons, all these groups are rather very young and yet unable to function in network.

⁹ This website was created in 2003 by a young IT professional resident in Zurich with the aim to offer a community-platform that could lately serve at the creation of a Romanian association at national level. Its name "casa-romanilor.ch" has a strong symbolic significance: "the Romanians' house" in Switzerland.

¹⁰ That means that about 10% of the Romanian residents in Switzerland have participated.

¹¹ The mechanisms through which this debate gained such a great audience are related to the swiss political system of direct democracy and the importance of the public debates where civil sphere actors play a key role.

¹² Although the audience of the website was rather large and transnational, one should notice that the promoters and key actors of the campaign are mostly highly skilled young middle class Romanian migrants in Switzerland, arrived after 1990 as economic migrants. Interestingly, older highly skilled refugees arrived during the communist period have rarely taken publically position within the debate, and when they did they have rather criticized this kind of mobilization who goes – according to them – against the principles of the direct democracy. "Romanians don't have enough exercise of democracy and don't have to give lessons of democracy to the Swiss people" said one of them during an interview.

¹³ The national interest of the Swiss confederation was definitely in the favour of the EU bilateral agreement renewal. Thus, it is supposed that this argument prevailed on the agreement regarding its extension to Romania and Bulgaria which was much more controversial within the Swiss electorate.

¹⁴ According to the Romanian constitution and the law of citizenship 21/1991 adopted after the fall of the communist regime, Romania accepts double citizenship.

¹⁵ In 2008, the Barack Obama electoral campaign represents the starting point of a new pattern based on an efficient nesting of online and offline strategies, which increased feelings of citizen efficacy in the political process (Kirk and Schill, 2011). The Barack Obama's supporters' team set up a website and has used social networks to recruit new volunteers. *The Movement* constitutes as "a task force on Internet and on the ground". Cybernauts converted in field volunteers. Obama online campaign met an unprecedented success. American students have created groups of support in each university, mainly using Facebook and MySpace. Thanks to these two networks Obama had succeeded in bringing together more than one million "friends", while Hilary Clinton only accounted 300'000 and John McCain 140'000. Later on, the website My.barackobama.com known as "MyBo" took over these social networks. Source: www.politique.net, referred January 10th, 2009.

¹⁶ This website played a crucial role in providing Romanian newcomers to Canada, and particularly to Toronto, with migratory and social capital. It functioned as a social and community glue and generated an innovative migratory dynamic that was analyzed in detail in the previous work of the author (see Nedelcu, 2002, 2009a).

¹⁷ Former member of the communist nomenklatura, Ion Iliescu was propelled as a revolutionary leader in December 1989. President of the "National Salvation Front", first revolutionary government that transformed subsequently in the "Social Democrat Party", he cumulated three mandates as a president of the Romania (1990-1992; 1992-1996; 2000-2004). He is a highly controversial politician and opposition parties as well as the Romanian civil society blame him for the backwardness of economic and politic reforms in Romania, as he tried to implement a kind of *Perestroika*-style reform without a veritable shift to effective democracy and capitalism during his (first) presidencies.

¹⁸ « Dreptate & Adevar » - « Justice & Truth »