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In the realm of Romania's post-communism

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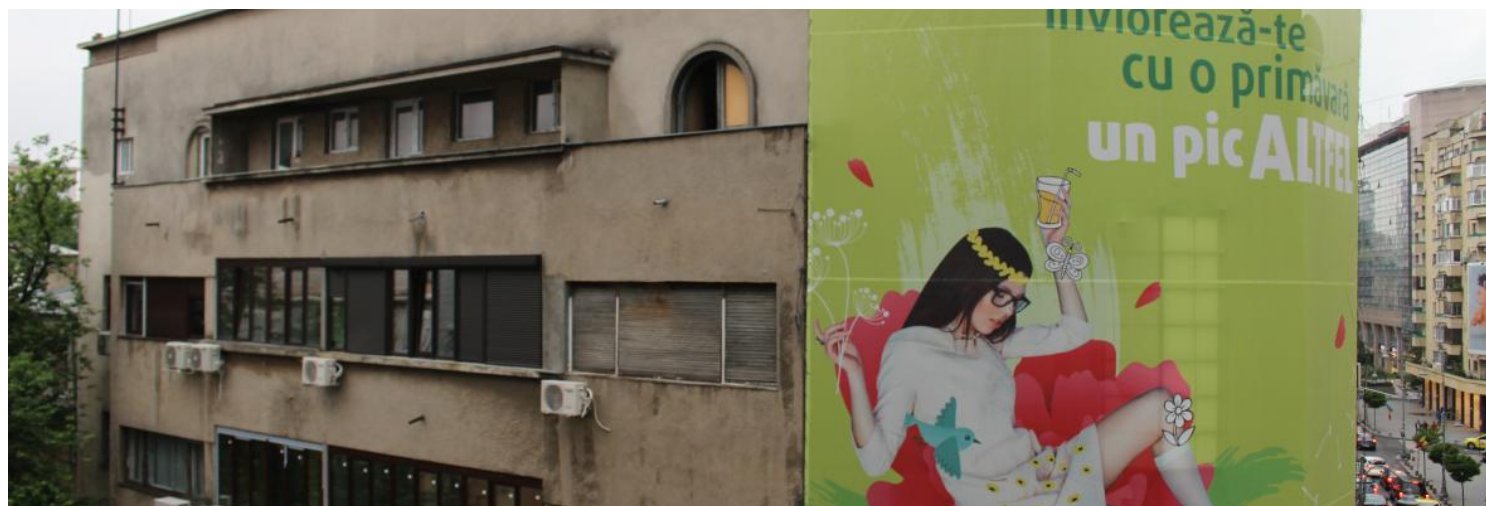
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[Raluca Bejan \(/category/bios/raluca-bejan\)](#) May 15, 2019

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Outside my window, in Amzei Square in Bucharest, a vivid photo of a woman sits on a large banner over an old building's external wall. The background is green, colourful, and the banner seems to advertise a shopping mall. As the poster rolls around the building's corner, it becomes impossible to distinguish, from such a narrow frame, the nuances of its text. Some of the words indicate something about a "little bit of freshness." The "little bit" diminutive is a Romanian linguistic trait. A coffee becomes a little coffee, a receipt a little receipt, hence, whatever this banner advertises will subsequently turn out to be abbreviated. The woman, who could easily pass for a girl, definitely catches your eyes. She is colourful, bright and surrounded by spring-infused elements: birds, flower, petals and trees.

A few blocks south, on Nicolae Bălcescu Boulevard, my eyes encounter a large Sarah Jessica Parker. She is also on a banner. Sarah advertises the new triangle bra for Intimissimi, an Italian lingerie brand. The **triangle bra** (<https://world.intimissimi.com/thumbnail/women/bras/triangle-bras/pc/4803/c/4878.uts>) seems to be the complete deal: padded balconette, bralette, push-ups, super push-ups, non-padded balconette and strapless versions, all made of different colours and several -- satin, lace or cotton -- materials.

A Huawei sign rests above Sarah Jessica. The banner, in turn, covers a former ex-communist flat. It's the type of flat that makes a Westerner cringe at first sight.

Having Parker pose for an Italian brand -- Romania historically embodies the aspiration, desire and fetishism towards everything deemed Italian, fuelling in turn its strong inferiority complex, since despite Latin dialects, Romanians will never be Italians -- with a Huawei sign broadcast above, on one of the city's hundreds of ex-communist flats, perfectly fits the representation of Romanian society today. It's a



conditions in Romania. The country privatized most of its public sectors, strongly supported foreign investment, and liberalized trade, all in the name of European integration. In fact, about **84 per cent** (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0147596709000900>) of the total share of state capital was sold to foreign investors between 2001 and 2004. Coupled with a public mishandling of EU funds and a politically corrupt environment, these changes led to the disappearance of previously state-based, stable and secure jobs. For decades, the **minimum wage** (<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/article/2019/minimum-wages-in-2019-first-findings>) was below 200 euros a month. It slightly increased to 218 euros by 2015 and reached 408 euros by February 2019. The rate, however, is still amongst the lowest in the Union (underperformed only by Lithuania, at 400 euros a month).

Until the last couple of years, which have seen a steady increase in GDP levels and lower unemployment rates, the country's economy functioned for long stretches of time on money transferred from abroad. Official statistics of **remittances** (<http://prodiasporaromana.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Culic-2012-One-Hundred-Years-of-Solitude.-Romanian-Immigrants-in-Canada.pdf>) sent to Romania showed these to amount to two billion euros in 2002, comprising 44.3 per cent of the foreign currency reserve and 10.3 per cent of national exports. Figures from the **Romanian National Bank** (<http://www.bnr.ro/SearchResult.aspx>) show that amounts went up to about four billion a year between 2006 and 2013.

And what better use for these remittances than spending them at a "fresh" mall? On some triangle bra lingerie while also buying a smartphone? Several other examples come to mind. Large Coca Colas commercials at Romana Square; an oversized Hornbach poster a few metres down from the Parliament Palace; a multicultural TopShop for a non-multicultural clientele; and an unprincipled banner for **credius.ro** (<https://www.credius.ro/credite-pentru-pensionari>), a private lending company, which uncoincidentally publicizes in working-class neighbourhoods, credits at an annual interest rate of 80 per cent. This is the type of rate that would exceed the rightful borrowing limits anywhere in the West.

Back to my neighbourhood and the multi-coloured girl. "Freshen yourself with a little bit of spring," states the other part of the rolled-down banner. And go to the mall.

Raluca Bejan is an Assistant Professor at St. Thomas University, Fredericton, where she teaches courses in social policy and social movements.