

## **MIGRANT WAVE: DEMYSTIFYING ROMANIAN AND BULGARIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE BRITISH PRESS: DAILY MAIL AND THE GUARDIAN (2013-2014)**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*IN RECENT YEARS, THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND HAS BEEN CONFRONTED WITH MASSIVE IMMIGRATION FROM FORMER COMMUNIST COUNTRIES, WHICH HAVE RECENTLY ASCENDED INTO THE EUROPEAN UNION. THE REACTION OF THE PRESS HAS BIRTHED THE IDEA OF A WAVE OF ROMANIANS AND BULGARIANS, WHOSE ARRIVAL WOULD HAVE BEEN DETERMINED BY THE LIFTING OF WORK RESTRICTIONS. THIS STUDY AIMS AT ANALYSING THE REACTION OF TWO OF THE MOST IMPORTANT BRITISH NEWSPAPERS, DAILY MAIL AND THE GUARDIAN. THE FIRST'S ATTITUDE WAS MOSTLY HOSTILE, FREQUENTLY BEING CHARACTERIZED AS SOMEWHAT XENOPHOBIC. THE SECOND ONE'S APPROACH WAS MORE BALANCED, TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE PHENOMENON THROUGH ITS CAUSES AND EFFECTS. BETWEEN 2013 AND 2014 THE DEBATE TENDED TO HEAT UP, LEADING TO SOME INTERESTING IDEAS.*

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**KEY WORDS:** IMMIGRANT, ROMANIAN, BULGARIAN, XENOPHOBIC, NEWSPAPER

### **INTRODUCTION:**

In recent years Great Britain has been confronted with massive immigration from former Communist countries, recently turned members of the European Union. The idea of a new wave, this time comprised of Romanians and Bulgarians, as a result of lifting work restrictions, is the creation of the press. *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* have been at the heart of the debate. The first one, has shown a primarily hostile attitude, often border-line xenophobic. The second, has adopted a more balanced stance, trying to understand the phenomenon. The situation degenerated between 2013 and the beginning of 2014.

The debate is grounded in three major fears. Firstly, a human wave, which would put an enormous strain on the existing system, this in relation to what happened in 2004, when the Polish "invaded" Britain.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the belief that immigrants will most likely abuse welfare benefits (housing, and health services), guaranteed by the state. Lastly, the issue of Romanian racism against ethnic Roma is also overly present in the press.

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<sup>2</sup> "The Polish paradox", , *The Economist*, accessed 17.01.2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21591588-britons-loathe-immigration-principle-quite-immigrants-practice-bulgarians>.

## SOURCES:

Some articles and reports dating from the 2000s focus on migration from the European Union to the United Kingdom. In *The Fiscal Effects of Immigration to the UK*, Christian Dustmann and Tommaso Frattini<sup>3</sup> attempt to prove that immigration has positive economical effects. On the other side there is Robert Rowthorn, who wrote an opposite opinion in his article, *The Economic Impact of Immigration*.<sup>4</sup> Both sides make solid arguments, but second seems to avoid making a clear distinction between permanent and temporary migration, as each has different consequences for the economy and society.

Arthur Marwick's book, *A British History of the Modern British Isles, 1914-1999: Circumstances, Events and Outcomes*<sup>5</sup> offers a wide perspective of British society as a whole, including the issue of multiculturalism and race in 20th Century Great Britain. It helps the placing current attitudes and behaviours in the context of historical inheritance.

*Daily Mail* and *The Guardian*, both are influenced by their political affiliations. The first one, has mostly been a firm supporter of the Conservatives, even though in 2001 it supported Tony Blair and his New Labour policies. The other one has always promoted Liberalism or Labour, depending on their readership.<sup>6</sup> As Marwick aptly points out the Conservatives have mostly been opponents of the European Project (even though integration took place in 1973, when Edward Heath was Prime-Minister), in its present form, while Labour and the Liberals have shown themselves to be far more open towards the continent.<sup>7</sup>

## MIGRANT TSUNAMI:

One of the most pressing issues has been that of the number of people who are about to go and work in the United Kingdom, after lifting work restrictions for Romanians and Bulgarians. *Daily Mail* over-emphasized comparing what happened in 2004 and what could happen in 2014, arguing that this analogy was valid.<sup>8</sup> In support of such allegations, they tended insisting on the large number of people already working abroad, and linking this to Romania's shrinking population.<sup>9</sup> They took interviews with disadvantaged people, who expressed their wish of moving to Britain in the hopes of finding a better life for them and their families. It has been suggested that they will not migrate alone, and that they would shortly be joined by relatives, putting an enormous strain on welfare resources.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Christian Dustmann, Tommaso Frattini, "The Fiscal Effects of Immigration to the UK", *Discussion Paper Series*, No. 22 (November 2013), Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Rowthorn, "The Economic Impact of Immigration", *A Civitas Online Report*, April 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Marwick, *A British History of the Modern British Isles, 1914-1999: Circumstances, Events and Outcomes*, 2nd Edition, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> David Lancaster, "Which political parties do the newspapers support?", *Supanet*, accessed 17.01.2014, <http://www.supanet.com/business--money/which-political-parties-do-the-newspapers-support--25923p1.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Marwick, *A British History of the Modern Isles*.

<sup>8</sup> Matt Chorley, Gerri Peev, "Government has a figure for how many people will come to the UK from Bulgaria and Romania but won't tell the rest of us", *Daily Mail*, accessed 10.01.2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2261705/Government-figure-people-come-UK-Bulgaria-Romania-wont-tell-rest-us.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Jaymi McCann, Steve Doughty, "How 1.5MILLION Romanians have left their homeland in a decade as immigrants head west in droves", *Daily Mail*, accessed 13.01.2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2356171/How-1-5MILLION-Romanians-left-homeland-decade-immigrants-head-west-droves.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Guy Adams, "We want to get into your country before someone locks the door": Shocking investigation into the coming wave of immigration from Romania and Bulgaria", *Daily Mail*, accessed on 10.01.2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2279419/We-want-country-locks-door-Shocking-investigation-coming-wave-immigration-Romania-Bulgaria.html>.

*Daily Mail* expressed its dissatisfaction with authorities, which hesitated to make estimates of the number of people expected to arrive after 1st January 2014.<sup>11</sup> In a similar manner, on the 4th of March 2013, it implied the existence of a secret agreement between the British and Romanian governments, allowing immigrants access to social benefits, thus contradicting the official position of the Conservative-Liberal cabinet.<sup>12</sup> In fact, *Daily Mail* said that so-called measures are nothing else but smoke and mirrors, very little being done to limit the access of foreigners to jobs and welfare.<sup>13</sup> They also accused the authorities of being incapable of solving the problem, for which they called down upon a so-called official study, which failed offer conclusive results regarding the number of future immigrants.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, *The Guardian* has a much more balanced and analytical perspective, attempting to help the reader understand what is happening. They emphasized the fact that migration hysteria is sponsored, and popularized by the far right. Writing after the lifting of work restrictions, they point out that the so-called human wave has yet to make an appearance.<sup>15</sup> The topic came up again when two British MPs went to Luton Airport on 1st of January to welcome Romanian immigrants, but the plane was only partially boarded.<sup>16</sup>

In an article from April, *The Guardian* argues that the migratory tendencies of Romanians are not aimed at the UK, and that there is a tradition tying them to Spain, Italy or Germany.<sup>17</sup> According to an Italian demographic report, around one million of the population are Romanians, making them the most numerous minority.<sup>18</sup> The situation in Spain is similar, with no less than 868,635 living and working there.<sup>19</sup> The Guardian compared 2004 and 2014, arguing that ten year ago the UK was one of only three countries to open their borders

to East European workers, turning it into their target. Now there will be eight countries doing this, which means that any migratory tsunami would dissipate amongst them.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Matt Chorley, Gerri Peev, "Government has a figure for how many people will come to the UK from Bulgaria and Romania but won't tell the rest of us".

<sup>12</sup> Matt Chorley, Daniel Martin, "Romania says British ministers have agreed secret deal to ensure migrants receive benefits despite coalition claims of a crackdown", *Daily Mail*, accessed 10.01.2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2287903/Romania-boasts-secret-deal-UK-benefits-migrants-ministers-plan-ID-cards-free-NHS-care-curb-welfare-tourism.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Jason Groves, "Migration crackdown 'is smoke and mirrors and will do little to curb expected influx of migrants from Romania and Bulgaria'", *Daily Mail*, accessed 10.01.2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2298561/Migration-crackdown-smoke-mirrors-little-curb-expected-influx-migrants-Romania-Bulgaria.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Jack Doyle, "'Whitewash' on influx of Romania migrants: Official study fails to reveal how many will arrive next year", *Daily Mail*, accessed 10.01.2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2304226/Whitewash-influx-Romania-migrants-Official-study-fails-reveal-arrive-year.html>.

<sup>15</sup> "Bulgarian and Romanian immigration hysteria 'fanned by far-right'", *The Guardian*, accessed 13.01.2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jan/03/romanian-bulgarian-uk-immigration-hysteria-far-right>.

<sup>16</sup> Caroline Davies, Shiv Malik, "Welcome to Luton: Romanian arrival greeted by two MPs and a media scrum", *The Guardian*, accessed 13.01.2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jan/01/luton-romanian-arrival-mps-media>.

<sup>17</sup> Alan Travis, "Romanian and Bulgarian migrants 'unlikely to head for UK' – report", *The Guardian*, accessed on 13.01.2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/apr/05/eastern-european-migrants-report>.

<sup>18</sup> *Indicatori demografici Anno 2010*, accessed 17.01.2014, [http://www3.istat.it/salastampa/comunicati/in\\_calendario/inddemo/20110124\\_00/testointegrale20110124.pdf](http://www3.istat.it/salastampa/comunicati/in_calendario/inddemo/20110124_00/testointegrale20110124.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> "Mai puțini români în Spania", *Ziare*, accessed 17.01.2014, <http://www.ziare.com/diaspora/romania-spania/mai-putini-romani-in-spania-1235139>.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Travis, "David Cameron's migration plans are impractical, inequitable or illegal", *The Guardian*, accessed 13.01.2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/nov/27/david-cameron-migration-plan-bulgaria-romania>.

*Daily Mail* opted for a more offensive attitude towards Romanians and Bulgarians, and their own government, which they portrayed as being part of a conspiracy. On the other hand, *The Guardian* made use of reports and cultural analysis, trying to understand those who they wrote about.

### INVASION OF ABUSES:

One of the greatest fears of the British public is that the newcomers will abuse social benefits, putting pressure on the job market. These concerns are not new or unfounded, they are based on a certain type of rationality. There are two sides, those who believe that immigrants contribute and those who see them as having a negative effect on welfare.

The roots of the British medical system can be dated back to 1946, when the National Health Service Act was voted and adopted in 1948. It works on the principle of universality, all citizens are entitled to it, regardless of their social status.<sup>21</sup> In 1986 the Social Security Act is adopted with the aim of simplifying the list of subsidies and benefits, which also brought a shrinkage of the medical system.<sup>22</sup> Despite this, it remains very well financed and covers the entire population. In this context, accusations of abuse by immigrants is not that far fetched.

One mechanism for helping the destitute is *The Big Issue*, by selling it the poor are ensured a minimum income. *Daily Mail* presented how Romanian immigrants have abused it so they can access services and get rich. One in three newspaper sellers are from Romania, and the majority of them are ethnic Roma. In the same article, it is said that approximately one million pounds leave Britain every year for 40,000 children who do not live there.<sup>23</sup>

In January 2014, *Daily Mail* attempted to prove that Bulgarians and Romanians migrate in order to have access to the medical system, citing the person who asserts this.<sup>24</sup> To emphasize the negative aspects they recourse to presenting the example of Germany, where there have been certain concerns regarding potential abuses of their social system.<sup>25</sup>

The housing issue is also very pressing, and the *Daily Mail* has not forgotten it. They explained the method through which immigrants could, quite easily, have access to cheap homes. Still they do admit that the criteria for applying are harsh, and thus the abuse could not be inordinate.<sup>26</sup>

These pressures are recognized by *The Guardian*, but there is a difference of approach and tone. They emphasize that Armageddon was not coming, and that coherent, firm, and pragmatic policies could change the terms of the issue, thus avoiding considerable

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Marwick, *A British History of the Modern British Isles*, 179.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Marwick, *A British History of the Modern British Isles*, 319.

<sup>23</sup> Guy Adams, "We want to get into your country before someone locks the door".

<sup>24</sup> Francesca Infante, "I'm from Romania, I came to Britain for the hospital: Beggars sleeping rough around Marble Arch are arrested by UK Border police just a day after immigration laws are relaxed", *Daily Mail*, accessed 10.01.2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2532613/Beggars-sleeping-rough-Marble-Arch-arrested-UK-Border-police-just-day-British-immigration-laws-relaxed.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Alan Hall, "Germany rejects Romania and Bulgaria's bid to roam Europe without passport amid fears of 'immigrant invasion'", *Daily Mail*, accessed 10.01.2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2287852/Romania-Bulgaria-WONT-join-EU-passport-free-zone-Germany-vows-veto-Schengen-bid-corruption-fears.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Daily Mail Reporter, "Even EU immigrants can use Help to Buy: Government is powerless to stop migrants from using scheme to get on housing ladder", *Daily Mail*, accessed 13.01.2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2375699/EU-immigrants-use-Help-Buy-Government-powerless-stop-migrants-using-housing-scheme.html>.

losses.<sup>27</sup> Even though this view is balanced, it does not make them supporters of immigration. They talked about the problem of children left behind by their parents who went abroad to work. *The Guardian* criticized the Romanian state's inability to find solutions for these cases, even though this life-style had very negative consequences for the development of the children.<sup>28</sup>

*The Guardian* seems to have the warmest of positions regarding the European Union, at least when compared to *Daily Mail*, in an article from November 2013 they launched an attack against David Cameron, who wanted to make it harder the access of foreign nationals to social benefits. The newspaper characterizes the prime-minister's ideas as lacking practicality, or being inequitable or even worse, illegal.<sup>29</sup>

Both *The Guardian* and *Daily Mail* are against the abuse of the medical system by immigrants, but the difference is in the manner they express it. The tabloid has more of an alarmist tone, while the Berliner attempts to explain its ideas and find a middle-way. Obviously, there is a concern of the public regarding this issue, which is indeed real for British citizens.

Robert Rowthorn asserts that the impact of modern migration is a negative one. He argues that in the fiscal year 1999/2000, profit brought by immigrants was of just 0.4 billion dollars, and costs of keeping the programs dedicated to them operational were far greater, which would mean that Britain loses.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, Christian Dustmann and Tommaso Frattini believe that immigrants contribute to national income through the taxes they pay, as the expenses they require are in fact quite low. Those who are only temporary residents of Great Britain do not require education, and show a very limited interest in welfare. The ones who have moved permanently become citizens, as their goal was to change their residency. Education offers the best example of how this works, as an immigrant's child will be educated in Britain, but the costs will be amortized because in their turn they will enter the work market and they will pay taxes.<sup>31</sup> Thus the debates from the press are also reflected in academic work, as the source inspiration material is the worries of the population. As people are very different in their opinions, so are the reactions one can find in the press.

### **ROMANIAN RACISM VS. BRITISH DISCRIMINATION:**

The Romanian press has put an emphasis on British discrimination of Romanian and Bulgarian citizens or of a confusion with ethnic Roma. A close read of foreign newspapers and tabloids, that they have a tendency of racism accusations brought to Romanians, for their mistreatment of Roma citizens. The distinction is clear and they even stress out this point, at least in the British press, even going as far as presenting the situation similar to that of the World War II Jewish ghettos.

In February 2013, *Daily Mail* sent a reporter to the Bucharest neighbourhood Ferentari, and the image he described was one similar to a war-zone. According to his view, Roma are running from Romania so as to escape their terrible life-conditions and to attempt and build a better life. Thus the possible migration wave would be caused by racism and

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<sup>27</sup> Hugh Muir, "Immigration from Romania and Bulgaria will lead to new pressures - but not Armageddon", *The Guardian*, accessed 13.01.2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jan/01/immigration-romania-bulgaria-britain-migrants>.

<sup>28</sup> Kit Gillet, "Thousands of Romanian children stay at home while parents work abroad", *The Guardian*, accessed 13.01.2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/30/romanian-children-home-parents-work-abroad-eu>.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Travis, "David Cameron's migration plans are impractical, inequitable or illegal".

<sup>30</sup> Robert Rowthorn, "The Economic Impact of Immigration", 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> Christian Dustmann, Tommaso Frattini, "The Fiscal Effects of Immigration to the UK", 4, 6-7.

discrimination.<sup>32</sup> The idea had already been furthered at the end of the previous year, when a team travelled to Ponorota, an isolated settlement where no less than 500 Roma live. Conditions there were compared to those of the Middle Ages. They have brought into focus on marginalization, arguing that there are frequent conflicts with neighbouring Romanian villages who look at them with suspicious eyes. Also they harshly criticize the crude indifference of local and national authorities who could not care less of these people's destiny.<sup>33</sup>

A video coverage of recent events in Baia Mare, has shown the British public, how the mayor has built a wall around an area inhabited by ethnic Roma. This is where the first comparison with the Nazi ghettos made its appearance.<sup>34</sup> In February 2013, the rising popularity of Cherecheş, after the enclosing action, came under scrutiny from foreign press. Thus it was suggested that racism is deeply rooted in Romanian culture, but *Daily Mail* argues that this phenomenon cannot be restricted to just one country, but rather it is common to this part of the continent.<sup>35</sup>

In a report done by Delia-Luiza Niță, it comes to light that the most frequent victims of racism in Romania are the ethnic Roma. She argues that they are the captives of a vicious circle of poverty, enforced by discrimination and social exclusion. The blame is put on authorities for ignoring or just for being just plain incapable of finding viable solutions.<sup>36</sup> Thus as painful as these accusations are, they are based in the cruel reality of the facts.

### CONCLUSION:

Concerns caused by the perspective of a migratory wave, starting from 1st January 2014, generating a lot of types of reactions from British society. On one side, *Daily Mail* has been the flagship for euroskepticism and isolationism. On the other, *The Guardian*, has mostly looked forward towards a more open world, and opted for a more balanced and even slightly academic perspective. There was nothing in the lines of a media war between the two, but the tabloid has attempted to inflame and agitate the population, while the newspaper has been more responsible and has attempted to explain reality to the readers.

The three issues were: a human tsunami putting pressure on society, the abuse of benefits (NHS and housing), and Romanian racism, which puts Roma on the move, in search of a better life. Each of them is rooted in reality and even though some traits have been exaggerated, they are not the result of pure fiction. In 2004, the Polish flooded Great Britain, becoming a sizeable minority. Cases of people taking advantage of loop-holes in the social system are real and sometimes quite visible. And lastly, racism is indeed a big problem in contemporary Romania. All of these, presented in the press seem to receive a certain aura, which can positively or negatively influence public opinion. *Daily Mail* writes for those who look at the European Union and foreigners with suspicion. *The Guardian*, being more liberal,

<sup>32</sup> Guy Adams, "We want to get into your country before someone locks the door".

<sup>33</sup> Damien Gayle, "At home with the Roma: Barefoot but still beaming, the poverty-stricken families who eke an existence in remote villages of Romania", *Daily Mail*, accessed 10.01.2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2424296/At-home-Roma-Remote-villages-people-struggle-terrible-poverty-continue-traditional-way-life.html>.

<sup>34</sup> "This is what it's like for Roma gypsies forced to live in ghettos in Romania", *Daily Mail*, accessed 10.01.2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/video/news/this-is-what-its-like-for-roma-gypsies-forced-to-live-in-ghettos-in-romania/video-1051720/index.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Keith Gladdis, "Life inside the Romanian gypsy ghetto that is so grim the town mayor sealed it off behind a wall", *Daily Mail*, accessed 10.01.2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2285796/Romanian-gypsies-living-condemned-ghetto-mayor-built-wall-around.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Delia-Luiza Niță, *Racism in Romania*, ENAR Shadow Report, Center for Legal Resources, 2008.

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writes for a more educated readership, the middle class, and thus it must be more neutral, leaving it up to the reader to interpret the information.

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