

Editorial

Vlad VISKI

Independent researcher

vladviski@gmail.com



Foto: Daniel Vegel, Budapest

July 2007: the image of a brutally beaten gay couple during clashes between Budapest Pride participants and neo-Nazi groups makes waves throughout the world. The 12th edition of the gay pride parade in the Hungarian capital was the first to witness the violence of the extreme right wing, owing to a tensed political environment. Earlier that year Gábor Vona, the leader of the fascist party Jobbik had just registered the so-called “Hungarian Guard”, the paramilitary wing of the party, which “orchestrated a series of anti-Roma demonstrations, including marches through the village of Tatárszetygyorgy where violence later took Roma lives.”¹ It was one year after a secret audio tape of then-Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, in which he admits lying to citizens about progress made by the economy, got public

and led to mass, violent protests in Hungary, paving the way for the second rise of illiberal Viktor Orbán. Since 2010, for the Hungarian Government the issue of ‘traditional values’ and ‘traditional family’ became one of the bedrocks of its illiberal regime. The 2011 Constitution defined marriage in heterosexual terms “while implying that a family based on marriage is the only type protected by the state,”² and in 2017 Budapest hosted the World Congress of Families.³ These recent

¹ William Downs, *Political Extremism in Democracies. Combatting Intolerance*, I (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 191.

² “Hungary: New Constitution Enshrines Discrimination,” Human Rights Watch, April 19, 2011, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/04/19/hungary-new-constitution-enshrines-discrimination>.

³ “World Congress of Families XI, The Budapest Family Summit, To Be Held in Hungary, May 24-28, 2017,” accessed August 13, 2018, <https://profam.org/907>.



developments come after a few decades in which Hungary has been a frontliner of LGBT rights in Central and Eastern Europe (‘CEE’). Just to give a few examples, the first officially-registered LGBT organization in CEE, Homeros Lambda, was founded in Hungary in 1988, and civil unions for same-sex couples were legalized as early as 2007.⁴

When it comes to LGBT rights, CEE countries have followed an uneven and often surprising road. Contrary to popular belief, the region has not experienced a linear path in terms of the advancement of LGBT rights, and intra-regional differences are considerable. If Czechia has long been considered a champion of equal rights for sexual minorities,⁵ countries such as Poland,⁶ Slovakia,⁷ Bulgaria⁸ or Romania⁹ have struggled with the issue of LGBT rights. Moreover, the accession to the European Union (‘EU’) did not provide a uniformization of state attitudes towards LGBT subjects. While in Romania the EU accession led to decriminalizing homosexuality in 2001,¹⁰ in Poland the EU accession had clear negative effects on LGBT rights. As a backlash to EU’s liberal agenda, conservative forces joined hands with the powerful Catholic Church and blocked the advancement of gay and lesbian rights, such as legalization of civil unions.¹¹ Moreover, both in 2004 and 2005, the mayor of Warsaw, Law and Justice Party’s Lech Kaczyński, banned Parada Równości, the city gay pride parade.¹² A similar move was attempted

⁴ See Hadley Renkin, *Ambiguous Identities, Ambiguous Transitions: Lesbians, Gays, and the Sexual Politics of Citizenship in Postsocialist Hungary* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

⁵ See Long, Scott, “Gay and Lesbian Movements in Eastern Europe. Romania, Hungary, and the Czech Republic,” in *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics. National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999)

⁶ See Chetaille, Agnes, “Poland: Sovereignty and Sexuality in Post-Socialist Times,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Movement and the State. Comparative Insights into a Transformed Relationship*. (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2011)

⁷ See Krošlák, Daniel. “The Referendum on the So-Called Traditional Family in the Slovak Republic.” *Central and Eastern European Legal Studies* 1 (2015).

⁸ See Roseneil, Sasha and Stoilova, Mariya “Heteronormativity, Intimate Citizenship and the Regulation of Same-Sex. Sexualities in Bulgaria” in *De-centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European perspectives* (Ashgate: 2011)

⁹ See Nachescu, Voichita, “Hierarchies of Difference: National Identity, Gay and Lesbian Rights, and the Church in Post-Communist Romania,” in *Sexuality and Gender in Postcommunist Eastern Europe and Russia*, ed. Štulhofer, Aleksandar, and Sandfort, Theo (Philadelphia: Haworth Press, 2005)

¹⁰ See Carl Franklin Stychin, “Ch. 6 ‘We Want to Join Europe, Not Sodom’: Sexuality and European Union Accession in Romania,” in *Governing Sexuality: The Changing Politics of Citizenship and Law Reform* (Hart Publishing, 2003), 115–38.

¹¹ See O’Dwyer, Conor, “Does the EU Help or Hinder Gay-Rights Movements in Postcommunist Europe? The Case of Poland.” *East European Politics*, Vol. 28, Issue 4, 332-352.

¹² “Gay Rights Activists Abandon Poland Pride Parade after Mayor’s Ban,” *The Advocate*, June 8, 2004, <https://www.advocate.com/news/2004/06/08/gay-rights-activists-abandon-poland-pride-parade-after-mayors-ban-12680>.

by Budapest authorities in 2008.¹³ In Romania, in 2005, the mayor of Bucharest, Adriean Videanu, banned the proposed gay pride parade, and reversed his decision only after public backlash from the Romanian President, Traian Băsescu.¹⁴

More recently, the CEE region has been a fertile ground for conservative movements to advance their cause, using LGBT rights as the catalyst for bringing together groups of different religious backgrounds.¹⁵ Indigenous movements received important support from American Christian groups decided to block any gender and sexual liberation.¹⁶ Croatia, Slovakia and Romania are the most relevant examples when it comes to showcasing the recent developments in CEE. All three cases underline the different attitudes and tools the EU has when dealing with Member States and their attempts to ban gay marriages. In 2013, right after joining the EU, Croatian conservative groups gathered signatures and pushed for a referendum to ban gay marriages in the Constitution. Despite strong opposition from major party leaders, the referendum passed with a large majority of over 65%.¹⁷ Given Croatia's EU accession model, in which LGBT groups were able to incorporate their activism, and their requests, as part of the larger accession framework,¹⁸ the political elites showed stronger commitment to LGBT rights. Right after the passing of the referendum for enshrining the 'traditional family' in the Constitution, the country witnessed a strong and successful push for legalization of civil unions, granting rights to gay couples.

In Slovakia, on the other hand, in 2015, a similar process was started, in which the so-called 'Alliance for the Family' gathered over 400.000 signatures in order to trigger a referendum

¹³ "Tóth Gábor Betiltotta a Melegfelvonulást," *Index.Hu*, June 12, 2008, <https://index.hu/belfold/melmelt0612/>.

¹⁴ Viski, Vlad Levente, "'An Army OF Generals Without Rank-and-File': Building a Gay and Lesbian Social Movement in Romania After 2001" (Unpublished MA Thesis, Central European University, 2015), 42.

¹⁵ Kuhar, Roman and Paternotte, David, eds., *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. Mobilizing against Equality* (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017).

¹⁶ See Vlad Levente Viski, "American Dollars Sponsor Anti-Gay Movements in Europe (Dolarii Americani Sponsorizează Mișcările Anti-Gay Din Europa)," *Adevarul.ro*, March 20, 2017, accessed August 13, 2018, http://adevarul.ro/news/societate/dolarii-americani-sponsorizeaza-miscarile-anti-gay-europa-1_58cfb73c5ab6550cb88247b3/index.html.

¹⁷ See Sloopmaeckers, Koen and Sircar, Indraneel, "Croatia, the EU, and the Marriage Referendum: The Symbolic Case of LGBT Rights" (ECPR General Conference, Glasgow, 2014), <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/f3af562f-e97a-4143-8292-ac4d2150062f.pdf>.

¹⁸ Sloopmaeckers, Koen and Touquet, Heleen, "The Co-Evolution of EU's Eastern Enlargement and LGBT Politics: An Ever Gayer Union?" in *The EU Enlargement and Gay Politics. The Impact of Eastern Enlargement on Rights, Activism and Prejudice*, ed. Sloopmaeckers, Koen, Touquet, Heleen, and Vermeersch, Peter (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 25-26.

on gay marriage, adoption rights and sexual education in schools.¹⁹ A fourth question concerning recognition of any form of cohabitation for same-sex couples was rejected by the Constitutional Court of Slovakia in 2014. Despite strong opposition from the President of Slovakia, Andrej Kiska, both the Social-Democratic party, led by Prime Minister Robert Fico, and the Christian Democratic Party joined forces and reviewed the Slovak Constitution via the Parliament, effectively defining marriage in the constitutional text as the marriage between a man and a woman. The referendum issue was not settled following this move, and Slovaks were called to vote on the aforementioned questions. Due to a massive boycott by civil rights groups, the referendum only brought out 25% of registered voters, not enough to pass the mandatory threshold of minimum 50%.²⁰

When it comes to Romania, the story of the referendum to prevent the legalization of same-sex marriages is far from over. Back in 2015, a group of conservative organizations formed the Coalition for Family, whose purpose was to gather enough signatures to enshrine the heterosexual marriage in the Constitution. In less than six months, with support from the powerful Orthodox Church, they were able to gather 2.6 million signatures for their cause, way above the minimum 500.000 required.²¹ In July 2016, the Constitutional Court of Romania in a poorly motivated judgement²² green-lighted the initiative,²³ deeming it within constitutional boundaries. On May 9, 2017, the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Romanian Parliament approved the initiative to review the constitutional text with a large majority of over 70 points.²⁴ As of now the citizens' initiative lays in the Romanian Senate, where a vote is expected soon. Should it pass the Senate, the initiative ought to be once again approved by the Constitutional Court (to check the constitutionality of eventual amendments of the initiative), and will be followed by a national

¹⁹ Sekerák, Marián, "Same-Sex Marriages (or Civil Unions/ Registered Partnerships) in Slovak Constitutional Law: Challenges and Possibilities," *Utrecht Law Review* 13, no. 1 (2017): 34–59.

²⁰ "Slovakia Referendum to Strengthen Same-Sex Marriage Ban Fails," *BBC News*, February 8, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31170464>.

²¹ Decizia nr. 580 asupra initiativei legislative a cetatenilor intitulata "Lege de revizuire a Constitutiei Romaniei" (Curtea Constitutionala a Romaniei July 20, 2016).

²² Vlad Perju, "The Lack of Professionalism of the Constitutional Court: On the Positive Opinion Regarding the Initiative to Modify the Definition of Marriage in the Romanian Constitution (Neprofesionalismul Curtii Constitutionale: Despre Avizul Pozitiv Dat Initiativei de Modificare a Definitiei Casatoriei in Constitutia Romaniei)," Contributors.ro, October 16, 2016, <http://www.contributors.ro/cultura/neprofesionalismul-curtii-constitutionale-despre-avizul-pozitiv-dat-initiativei-de-modificare-a-definitiei-casatoriei-in-constitutia-romaniei/>.

²³ Citre, Cristi, "Curtea Constituțională a Dat Undă Verde Propunerii de Revizuire a Constituției Privind Căsătoria," *Mediafax*, July 20, 2016, <http://www.mediafax.ro/politic/curtea-constitutionala-a-dat-unda-verde-propunerii-de-revizuire-a-constitutiei-privind-casatoria-15534142>.

²⁴ Ion, Raluca, "Camera Deputaților a Votat Pentru Schimbarea Definiției Familiei În Constituție. Doar 22 de Deputați Au Votat Împotriva," *Republica.Ro*, May 9, 2017, <https://republica.ro/camera-deputatilor-a-votat-pentru-schimbarea-definitiei-familiei-in-constitutie-doar-22-de-deputati-au>.

referendum, where over 30% of registered voters must cast a valid vote in order for it to become law.

Romania's relationship with sexual minorities is a rather sinuous one; the country is one of the last states in Europe to decriminalize homosexuality as late as 2001, after over three decades of harsh penalties for engaging in homosexual acts.²⁵ When it comes to anti-discrimination legislation, Romania adopted in 2000 a rather progressive anti-discrimination law prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in the fields of labor force, healthcare, education, judicial system²⁶ and was the first state in CEE to establish an equality body with competencies in finding and sanctioning acts of discrimination. Almost two decades later, Romania finds itself in the position of being one of the last countries in the EU that, except protecting them from discrimination in the public sphere, does not grant any other legal rights to same-sex couple (not even civil unions) next to Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia.²⁷

The issue of the referendum for 'traditional family' in Romania was somewhat complicated by a recent case brought forward to the Constitutional Court concerning the legal recognition of a gay marriage officiated outside Romania, in a EU-member state that recognizes such unions. The *Coman* case was brought forward to the Constitutional Court of Romania in 2015, and concerned the freedom of movement of EU citizens.²⁸ Adrian Coman, a Romanian citizen married Claibourn Hamilton, an American citizen in 2010, in Belgium. Romanian authorities refused to grant Claibourne Hamilton residency rights, based on a ban on recognition of foreign-officiated gay marriages from Article 277 of the 2009 Romanian Civil Code. Given the fact that the issue concerned the EU directive on freedom of movement of EU citizens, the Constitutional Court of Romania sent a series of questions to the Court of Justice of the European Union ('CJEU'),²⁹ the highest court regulating EU legislation, in order to clarify the meaning of the word 'spouse' from

²⁵ Viski, Vlad Levente, "An Army of Generals Without Rank-and-File': Building a Gay and Lesbian Social Movement in Romania After 2001."

²⁶ Ordonanța nr. 137/2000 privind prevenirea și sancționarea tuturor formelor de discriminare (2000), <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gezdiobqgu/ordonanta-nr-137-2000-privind-prevenirea-si-sanctionarea-tuturor-formelor-de-discriminare>

²⁷ Boffey, Daniel, "All EU countries must recognise rights of gay spouses, ECJ rules," Politico Europe, June 5, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/05/eu-countries-recognise-rights-gay-spouses-european-court-of-justice-ecj>

²⁸ Asociația ACCEPT, "Cazul Coman va Ajunge La Curtea de Justiție a Uniunii Europene," <http://coman.acceptromania.ro/cazul-coman-va-ajunge-la-curtea-de-justitie-a-uniunii-europene/?lang=ro>.

²⁹ Curtea Constituțională a României. 2017. *Comunicat de presa*. <https://www.ccr.ro/noutati/COMUNICAT-DE-PRES-257>.

the aforementioned EU directive. In June 2018, the CJEU released its decision,³⁰ stating that when it comes to freedom of movement of EU citizens, the term ‘spouse’ refers also to partners who find themselves in a legally recognized same-sex union. In July 2018, the Constitutional Court of Romania released its own decision on the *Coman* case, declaring Article 277 of the Romanian Civil Code as constitutional, as long as it respects the CJEU earlier decision.³¹

In all of the presented cases, of Croatia, Slovakia, and Romania, American-based conservative groups’ involvement can be traced. Two of these groups are Alliance Defending Freedom (‘ADF’), and Liberty Council (‘LC’), organizations involved in drafting constitutional bans on gay marriages³² and transgender bathroom ban bills³³ in a series of American states or submitting positions to the Supreme Court of the United States in cases such as *Lawrence v. Texas*,³⁴ which completely decriminalized homosexuality in the US, or *Obergefell v. Hodges*,³⁵ which legalized gay marriages throughout the US. In Europe, ADF got involved in defending in front of the European Court of Human Rights Ireland’s ban on abortions,³⁶ worked with Croatian conservative groups to ban sexual education in schools, openly supported Croatia’s ban on gay marriage referendum, submitted an *amicus curiae* to the Constitutional Courts of Slovakia³⁷ and Romania³⁸ in the cases concerning the proposed referenda to define marriage as between a man and a woman. As for Liberty Council, they also submitted an *amicus curiae* to the Constitutional Court of Romania in the case concerning the referendum.³⁹ In this brief, LC stated that “engaging

³⁰ Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 5 June 2018, *Coman*, C-673/16, EU:C:2018:385.

³¹ Curtea Constituțională a României. 2018. Comunicat de presa. <https://www.ccr.ro/noutati/COMUNICAT-DE-PRES-319>.

³² Peters, Stephen, “10 Shocking Facts About the Alliance Defending Freedom,” *Human Rights Campaign (blog)*, October 15, 2014, <https://www.hrc.org/blog/10-shocking-facts-about-the-alliance-defending-freedom>.

³³ O’Hara, Mary Emily, “This Law Firm Is Linked to Anti-Transgender Bathroom Bills Across the Country,” *NBC News*, April 8, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/law-firm-linked-anti-transgender-bathroom-bills-across-country-n741106>.

³⁴ Maza, Carlos, “This Right-Wing Legal Powerhouse Wants to Make Gay Sex Illegal,” *Huffington Post (blog)*, November 19, 2014, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/carlos-maza/this-right-wing-legal-pow_b_6185878.html.

³⁵ Eckholm, Erik, “Legal Alliance Gains Host of Court Victories for Conservative Christian Movement,” *New York Times*, May 11, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/12/us/legal-alliance-gains-host-of-court-victories-for-conservative-christian-movement.html>.

³⁶ The ban has been meanwhile overturned following a national referendum in 2018.

³⁷ Kiska, Roger, “Stanovisko k návrhu na začatie konania o predmete referenda vo veci PL. ÚS 24/2014,” 2014, <http://www.adfmedia.org/files/SlovakBrief.pdf>

³⁸ Portaru, Adina, “Intervenție privind propunerea legislativă de revizuire a Constituției României, publicată în Monitorul Oficial, Partea I, nr. 883/25.11.2015, înregistrată la Senat cu nr. b293/2016,” 2016, <http://adflegal.blob.core.windows.net/international-content/docs/default-source/default-document-library/resources/media-resources/europe/interventie-constituționala-adf-international.pdf>

³⁹ Staver, Matthew, Staver, Anita, and Mihet, Harry, “In re: The Legislative Proposal To Revise The Constitution Of Romania, Published In The

in homosexual conduct is dangerous, and endorsing and subsidizing same-sex unions and treating them as marriages is an endorsement of conduct that does not benefit society, but rather harms it by creating irresponsible and unhealthy people.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, in October 2017 LC brought infamous Kim Davis, the US county clerk who refused to perform same-sex marriages after *Obergefell v. Hodges* became the law of the land in the US, to tour Romania and convince Romanians about the dangers of same-sex marriage.⁴¹

The literature on LGBT rights in Central and Eastern Europe stands proof to the regional differences and nuances presented above. Some of the studies focus on the referenda taking place in recent years,⁴² the ways in which EU integration affected LGBT rights,⁴³ the different efforts to mobilize the LGBT community on issues such as HIV,⁴⁴ Pride events and the way they influence public opinion,⁴⁵ the use of transnational networks in order to advance LGBT rights,⁴⁶ the rise of right-wing movements using LGBT rights as a catalyst,⁴⁷ LGBT rights in CEE in the context of internationalization of gay rights,⁴⁸ visibility as a tool to advance the LGBT cause⁴⁹ or using courts as a means to advance equality.⁵⁰

Official Gazette, Part I, no. 883 / 25.11.2015, Registered At The Senate No. b293 / 2016,” 2016, <http://lc.org/072016RomanianMarriageAmicusBrief.pdf>

⁴⁰ See <http://lc.org/072016RomanianMarriageAmicusBrief.pdf>, p. 32.

⁴¹ Stack, Liam, and Gillet, Kit, “Kim Davis, Once Jailed in America, Campaigns Against Gay Marriage in Romania,” *New York Times*, October 12, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/12/world/europe/kim-davis-romania.html>

⁴² Krošlák, Daniel, “The Referendum on the So-Called Traditional Family in the Slovak Republic”; Slootmaeckers, Koen and Sircar, Indraneel, “Croatia, the EU, and the Marriage Referendum: The Symbolic Case of LGBT Rights”; Sekerák, Marián, “Same-Sex Marriages (or Civil Unions/ Registered Partnerships) in Slovak Constitutional: Challenges and Possibilities”

⁴³ Slootmaeckers, Koen, Touquet, Heleen, and Peter, Vermeersch, *The EU Enlargement and Gay Politics. The Impact of Eastern Enlargement on Rights, Activism and Prejudice*.

⁴⁴ Viski, Vlad Levente, “‘An Army OF Generals Without Rank-and-File’: Building a Gay and Lesbian Social Movement in Romania After 2001.”

⁴⁵ Woodcock, Shannon. “Gay Pride as Violent Containment in Romania: A Brave New Europe.” *Sextures* 1 (2009). <http://sextures.net/woodcock-gay-pride-romania>

⁴⁶ Binnie, Jon and Klesse, Christian, “Researching Transnational Activism around LGBTQ Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Activist Solidarities and Spatial Imaginings,” in *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, by Kulpa, Robert and Mizielinska, Joanna (Routledge, 2016), 107–30.

⁴⁷ Bob, Clifford, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴⁸ Kollman, Kelly and Waites, Matthew, “The Global Politics of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Human Rights: An Introduction,” *Contemporary Politics* 15, no. 1 (2009): 1–17; Stychin, Carl F., “Same-Sex Sexualities and the Globalization of Human Rights Discourse,” *McGill Law Journal* 49 (2004): 951–68.

⁴⁹ Ayoub, Phillip M., *When States Come Out. Europe’s Sexual Minorities and the Politics of Visibility* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁵⁰ Helfer, Laurence R. and Voeten, Erik, “International Courts as Agents of Legal Change: Evidence from LGBT Rights in Europe,” *International Organization* 68, no. 1 (2014): 77–110.

The current issue of this journal aims to complete the current literature on LGBT rights in CEE with new information, methodologies, and points of analysis, proving once again the complexity and the differences among the CEE countries. Andrada Nimu's book review of Lukasz Szulc's *Transnational Homosexuals in Communist Poland*, underlines the aforementioned differences and goes even further, shedding light on Szulc's thesis about the myths concerning the CEE region, both in relationship with the socialist past and its more recent developments.

I have chosen to open this issue with a reediting of Shannon Woodcock's excellent 2009 chapter in Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielinska's *De-Centering Western Sexualities, A short history of the queer time of "post-socialist" Romania, or, Are we there yet? Let's ask Madonna!*, a provocative and innovative analysis of the ways in which queer identity was built in Romania, mirroring the rampant anti-Roma racism in both the Romanian society at large and the local queer community. A strong critique of identity politics and the relationship between Europeanization and modernization temporality, the article fits perfectly, almost like a puzzle with Nimu's review of Szulc's *Transnational Homosexuals*, underlining the effects of homonationalism in CEE, and particularly in Romania.

On the other hand, Viviana Andreescu's article *Sexual Minorities, Civil Rights, and Romanians' Resistance to Social Change*, can be read mirroring her 2011 article on the same topic of Romanians' attitudes towards homosexuality, *From Legal Tolerance to Social Acceptance: Predictors of Heterosexism in Romania*. Her in-depth analysis of the statistical data from 2015 Special Eurobarometer brings forward surprising results and will, most certainly, provide important tools for activists and policy-makers alike.

Mihai Tarța's *The Traditional Family Versus Equal Rights Supporters Rhetoric In Romania* provides us with a much awaited look into the Coalition for Family's relations with transnational entities and uncovers in a systematic manner the ways in which the Christian Right has originated and developed in Romania, using culture wars rhetoric and American-inspired tactics. In the context of the proposed referendum for 'traditional marriage' in Romania the article's contextualization of the main processes taking place in the new Romanian social realities represents a fresh and engaging take.

Having participated in Alice Venir's journey towards researching the LGBT community in Bucharest, Romania, its strategies and mobilization choices, awaiting the constitutional referendum, I can only say that her article *2016, a Visible Year: discursive uses of visibility in*

LGBT activism in Bucharest, Romania unveils, in an original and methodologically sound manner, a rather under-researched area, providing valuable information on the ways in which discourse is developed, planned and performed.

Roxana Marin's essay, *Exploring Experiences of Transgender Identity Development in Romania* is one first attempt to present a missing piece from the literature, which often concentrates on gay and lesbian's battle for equal rights, ignoring the T from the LGBT. For sure, her essay stands to open a conversation about transgender issues in Romania, on which future researchers can build. Paul Golban reviews *Love Through The Looking Glass: An Open Dialogue in Romania*, a book edited by Tatiana Niculescu Bran, which contains different perspectives on homosexuality in the Romanian context. Given the novelty of the topic in the Romanian essayistic landscape, Golban's review is welcomed.

Finally, I would like to offer my warm greetings and thanks to the contributors, reviewers, editors and everyone who made this much-needed number possible. Special thanks go to Diana Neaga, for her constant guidance, Ana Maria Despoiu for her hard work and patience, and to Laura Grünberg for her valuable input.