

ROMÂNIA

a second home

stories of new beginnings



Radio
România

R o m a n i a **a second home**

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Instead of an ending

Foreword

Radio Romania is one of the oldest media institutions in Europe and, for almost a century, a barometer of Romanian society. From the great historical moments to the social and cultural transformations after 1989, to the fragmentations and challenges of the present, our role has remained the same: to cultivate understanding and keep collective identity alive.

Today, in a Europe marked by migration, polarization and geopolitical tensions, the theme of coexistence and identity is no longer just a cultural issue, but one of democratic stability. Romania is, at the same time, a country of emigration and a country of immigration. In the last three decades, millions of Romanians have left for the West in search of a better life, facing barriers of acceptance and recognition. At the same time, new communities of foreign workers have begun to settle here, bringing with them other traditions, other languages, other ways of being.

In the face of these transformations, multiculturalism is no longer a fad or a festive rhetoric, but a gateway to otherness, to understanding and to cooperation. Where there is the temptation of closure and division, multiculturalism becomes an infrastructure of resilience. In game theory, John Nash demonstrated that equilibrium is achieved not through permanent conflict, but through cooperation. In an increasingly fragmented world, this remains perhaps the most powerful truth: cooperation is always superior to isolation.

As a public media institution, Radio Romania has the responsibility to make these dynamics visible and to create spaces for dialogue. With over 3.5 million listeners daily, through the 17 national, international and regional programs, the Concerts of Radio Bands, the Gaudeamus Book Fairs, the Casa Radio Publishing House and the broadcasts dedicated to the 20 national minorities, we not only inform, but also offer society benchmarks for coexistence. We are a witness and active participant in the construction of an identity that is nourished by diversity and strengthened through dialogue.

Recent projects, such as the portal **www.workandlive.ro** or the “**Romania, a second home**” initiative, represent a step towards a society that understands that identity is not lost through encountering otherness, but is clarified and strengthened.

I invite you to browse this eBook as a map of human diversity in Romania today. Beyond individual stories, you will find here a plea for cooperation, balance and shared responsibility. In the new mental order we are entering, Romania will be called upon to practice acceptance and tolerance towards a sea of foreigners.

It is our duty not to repeat the mistakes that others made when millions of Romanians sought, two decades ago, to find a place in Europe. We have the chance to rewrite the logic of the “foreigner” and transform it into a logic of closeness, respect and coexistence.

I believe that the true measure of a society is how it prepares for its future. If we learn from the mistakes of the past and cultivate dialogue and solidarity, then future generations will no longer talk about differences as barriers, but as resources.

This is the mission of Radio Romania: to be a link between people, cultures and times

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Razvan-Ioan Dincă
President-CEO
Romanian Broadcasting Society



Bangladesh

Dhaka

**Advice for those coming to Romania: Learn Romanian!
Second, update your documents. And third, simply visit
many places, different cities...
I think that after that, no one will leave Romania.**

Raju Sheikh (Bangladesh)

Iulia Hau: Hello! With us is Raju Sheik from Bangladesh. He has been living in Romania for five years. And we will have a discussion about his experience here. Can you tell us when and how you arrived in Romania, five years ago? It was 2020, right?

Raju Sheikh: Yes, 2020. It was February 28, 2020, before Corona.

IH: You told me you're not from Bangladesh, right?

RS: Yes, I am coming from Dubai. I've been in Dubai for 11 years and then I came to Romania.

IH: What was the story? What made you move here? How did you hear about Romania? Did you know anything about Romania before?

RS: No, I didn't know before, but I saw some videos on Youtube. One of the bloggers from Bangladesh made videos. And then I got interested in Romania. And then I decided to... it wasn't about Romania. I saw videos of many European countries. And I decided that I had to go there because Romania and Europe are very beautiful, that's why.

IH: But you haven't heard anything special about Romania before?

RS: No, I haven't heard anything before.

IH: Can you tell me a little about the process, the recruitment agencies, the job, what it was like...

RS: I have a friend, we work together in Dubai. So we are trying to find a way to go there. By the way, on the internet, I found a link - a lawyer from Bucharest. Her name is Claudia. And I talked to her and they needed workers in a warehouse. So, after I called her and communicated with the clients who needed workers, I gave the phone interview. After I decided, okay, we can go. After I gave her the documents, like the work ID, passports and photos, then they made the work permit from the Romanian Immigration. After we made an appointment in Dubai, at the Romanian embassy, then we got the visa. And after that, I came here, to Bucharest.

IH: So, everything went smoothly with the bureaucratic process, with...

RS: Yes, it was a very easy process. There was no difficulty, nothing. They didn't even ask us for money. And there are five of us in total.

IH: Now that you say you arrived here in 2020. Back then, there weren't many Asians in Romania, right? You were one of the first.

RS: I think back then... I think there were only five or six people here from Bangladesh.

IH: Throughout the country?

RS: All over the country, at that time. You know them. And when I get information that there are some Bengalis here or some Indians here, you know, we try to contact them. And at that time, the pandemic situation before, we were very scared, because we are here, and Corona is too much. At that time there was panic for us. But there were no Bengalis.

IH: But what was it like feeling like you were one of the few people from your country in a country you just moved to?

RS: We have a custom like that in Dubai. But Dubai is like India. You know, for Bangladesh, we have, I think, 1.5 million people from Bangladesh living in Dubai. I think 3.8 million people living in Dubai from India, also Pakistan... like that. So, we are like in our countries. We feel like that. But when we came here, the problem was there, the language problem. I didn't know Romanian. And most of the people don't know English. So, a little problem! But luckily, our boss is Arab. His name is Juma, Smart

Expo — the name of his company. So, we know Arabic. So, it's not very difficult for us, because my boss, my colleague, we all speak Arabic and we are five people together, we came here. So, with each other, we know our language.

IH: So, you learned Arabic in Dubai?

RS: Yes, in Dubai.

IH: You said you spent 11 years in Dubai. And why ... how old were you when you first left the country?

RS: 22 years old.

IH: What made you leave the country in the first place?

RS: I stopped my studies when I was 19. And after I decided that I had to work for my family, I came to the city, to Dhaka city, but there is very little money that I can earn at the end of the month.

IH: That's the capital, right?

RS: Yes, the capital of Bangladesh. After that, I decided that I had to go abroad. Then we decided to go to Dubai. Then I came to Dubai when I was 22. For my family, you know, back then.

IH: What was your job in Dubai? Did you have more than one?

RS: As a security guard job. I mean security guard.

IH: Have you always worked in the security field?

RS: 11 years, I was in ... I worked in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. I mean in the security field. In Dubai, security is also very strong and it's a good job.

IH: Have you ever regretted leaving Dubai to come to Romania? What are the working conditions between the two countries?

RS: You know, in Dubai, we feel like it's my country because there are a lot of Asians. In Dubai, the locals, the Arabs, not too many. So, it's like it's our country. We feel like... we don't feel like we're abroad. But, when I come to Romania, I feel like I'm abroad because there's no problem with the Asian language. When I go to a shopping mall to buy something... at that moment, the Romanian locals think that maybe we're bringing Corona to Romania.

IH: Did anyone tell you that?

RS: I don't say, but... I don't say. Because when I go to a mall or somewhere to pay a bill or something, people...

IH: I'm distancing myself.

RS: Far away. When we go there, the people, you know, are far away from us. But they are together. Then, we feel like we are abroad. Yes, yes, yes, yes. I understand.

IH: But after the coronavirus pandemic is over, are you finally happy with the decision to leave Dubai? It's... I don't know, in terms of the pay, the conditions, your lifestyle.

RS: Actually, Europe was my dream back then. You know, I get a big salary in Dubai, but before I dreamed of coming to Europe. So when I made the contract with my lawyer, it was a lower salary than in Dubai. So for me, especially in Dubai, security has a good salary, but not in other fields, it doesn't have a good salary in Dubai. So when I come to Romania, I get a lower salary, but I know I'm making a contract for this, so I get this. So, it's not just difficult, but I'm fulfilling my dream when I come to Romania, it's a European country.

IH: And how does reality compare to the dream?

RS: Now, it's okay, because when I come, at that moment, it's a little difficult, a little, but...

IH: What was difficult?

RS: No, because of the language problems, because, you know, if I'm a little sick, if I go to hospitals, you know, I can't explain to the doctor... I have this problem. I have this... you know, I feel like maybe they didn't treat me well. So, it's a little difficult. And after that, you know, we work hard in my company and they increased our salary. And two and a half years later, I changed companies. So when I come

to a new company, I get a higher salary. So, now it's okay. Now, Dubai and Romania, I can say, it's the same for me.

IH: Same in terms of salary?

RS: Yes.

IH: But in terms of your life, how do you spend your time, how comfortable do you feel in life?

RS: In Romania, now it's ok. I feel better than in Dubai, now, because I have some friends, and my colleagues. I know many places, I visit many cities, now I feel good. And also, now I know a little Romanian, so I can speak anywhere, at least a little. So, now I feel good.

IH: You said you had two jobs in Romania. Can you tell me a little about your work?

RS: I came here as a warehouse worker. But when I came to Romania and joined the company, I only worked for a month in the warehouse, after the coronavirus pandemic hit, then everything closed down. So, my company, they offer us, but because we have no sales, what will we do for the workers? Can you go back to your country. Otherwise, we have a construction site, we can work in construction... According to the contract, we were supposed to have work. We think, we don't know about Corona... We think, right?, to go back to Bangladesh, it's not good for me, it's not good for my family. So, after that, I started in the construction field. So, two and a half years, I worked there.

IH: Was it hard work, in construction?

RS: A little hard, but for me, okay, because I was working as a construction helper. And I have a good friend, he's a professional builder. His name is Isa Balakale.

IH: Also from Bangladesh?

RS: No, he's from Nigeria. We all came from Dubai together. So, it's good, that time. After two and a half years, after I got a job at a hotel, Hotel Duke, and my boss was very kind. So I worked and now I work there, at Hotel Duke.

IH: Tell me a little about your family situation, if you feel comfortable telling me.

RS: Yes, no problem.

IH: About your family situation, your parents, when you decided to leave, you told me that you studied, how many years did you study? You explained to me a little about the school system in Bangladesh....

RS: In Bangladesh, I, I did primary education up to the fifth grade, fifth grade.

IH: So, five years.

RS: Yes, five years. And then, tenth grade, that's middle school. And, up until twelfth grade, it's high school.

IH: Okay. So, I started up until high school, that's 10 plus two. So, 12 years.

RS: 12 years. After that, some family problems arose, you know, my family, my father doesn't have much income... And I'm the eldest son in the family. After that, I decided that I had to work. Then, I left my family. I came to the city to work. I worked there for four years. But, I see that there is not enough money to meet my family's needs. After that, I decided to go abroad.

IH: So, all this time you were sending money to your family?

RS: Yes.

IH: Every month?

RS: Every month I send money to my family. To my father, to my mother. Now, you know, I've been married for eight years. Now, I send it to my wife. But, still, everything is the same.

IH: Tell me a little bit. I know you married your wife when you were in Dubai. So, on one of your trips back, you met your wife.

RS: Yeah, yeah. I was in Dubai for about eight years... like that. Then, I was 28 at the time. So I decided we had to get married. Then, my dad, my mom, my family decided to get us married. When I go on vacation, just that time. It was an arranged marriage.

IH: Yeah, can you tell me a little bit about that? Because, you told me last time, they're arranged, but they're half-arranged. You meet and you get married if you agree, if you want to. In general, not you specifically, but the culture in general.

RS: In Dubai, I was working 12 hours. And, every day, two hours for transportation. That means one hour to go to the destination, to come back - one hour. So 14 hours are spent on work every day.

IH: For 11 years.

RS: 11 years. So when we come to our rooms, we have to cook, wash clothes, take a bath, iron. It takes about two hours. The other hours we just sleep. So we don't have enough time to make a girlfriend or other things in Bangladesh. But I have a good family. My father, my mother, my sisters and also my other relatives. So I choose a girl. And also when I went to Bangladesh, I met her.

IH: How old were you at the time?

RS: Oh, I'm less than 12 years old. 28 years old. And after that we ... my family decided: okay, you can see, you can meet the girl. Then, we talked to her, about different things. After that, we decided that we can get married.

IH: What's the conversation like when... I mean, what's the topic? What are the questions? What are you talking about?

RS: You know, in Bangladesh, most of them are Muslim... I think 95% of the people are Muslim. And others, just a few people, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist. So, in Muslim culture, most of the marriages are arranged marriages. The family decides, yes, so this is a normal thing. We talk among ourselves my family is like this, I am like this... my education level is like this, my income is like this. And she also said things related to her family, like her father's condition, her family's condition. Then we decided: okay, we can talk, we can tell our parents or our guardian to continue the process.

IH: How would you see yourself and your family in, say, five or ten years?

RS: Ok, our plan... My age is now 39 years old, almost 39 years old. And I planned to bring my family in a year, with my son, here. I think my son will start Romanian school. And I will stay with my son, my wife. This is my plan at this moment. Maybe my son will get an education from here. Maybe, maybe Romania, Europe, other countries, maybe this could be Germany. The education system in Germany is very good. And I am trying to bring my family to settle here. This is my plan, my plan for the future.

IH: Do you think the Romanian authorities should organize free foreign language courses?

RS: Indeed, this is very important for us. And I ask the Romanian authorities to open a school — like for foreign workers. There are Nepalese, Indians, maybe Sri Lankans, maybe Africans, from Bangladesh. They can go to school to learn Romanian.

IH: I agree.

RS: And also from this school, workers can learn what the laws are in Romania. And if they do, maybe... I'm sorry to say, not all companies are good.

IH: I know. No problem.

RS: Fortunately, at my company, I have experience in two companies, two very good companies. I'm lucky, because I have so many friends, I hear their story and their company is not very good. So, if the workers, the foreign workers, know their rights... If there is any problem, let it be like a helpline: you can... any problem, you can call this number, you can speak in your language. We face this problem, what should we do? The Romanian government or a specific organization can give advice: you have to do this, this, this, this, this. So, sometimes, you know, people are confused. When people, I tell you, spend seven thousand euros, eight thousand euros, ten thousand euros, after they come to Romania, and when they work for a whole month, but they don't pay...

IH: ... I practically don't receive a salary.

RS: Yes. And even some companies like that, they made a little mistake, they cut their salary, their full salary.

IH: I know.

RS: Three, four months, they don't pay. So, in these cases, people are confused... what should we do? And also, they haven't talked to the police they're going to, maybe they're thinking maybe it's my mistake, maybe the company, the boss is very powerful... Maybe the police will catch them and send them to Bangladesh. It's this fear, because you don't know... You don't have any relationship with the authorities. You don't know where to go, what to ask. And they can... the authorities never give wrong information. But lawyers, maybe some companies, some friends, can give wrong advice, and people flee Romania, people go to other places... maybe it ends up being other things...

IH: I know what you mean. Let's hope, I hope — it's a good idea with the helpline and it's not very expensive to implement...

RS: One person, maybe there is an immigration office, for example, I forgot the mall. Mall Arena? Yes, Mall Arena. So, from there, I can make an office. Every... no need, every day, maybe every week, one day or two days, there should be an officer there. And we have a problem with companies, can we go there. Madam or Sir, please, I am facing this problem, so... what should I do?

IH: I think with the phone line it's easier, because a lot of people don't work in Bucharest. Maybe they live 50 kilometers away, it's very difficult to...

RS: They should also have phones. And Bucharest people can visit there, maybe someone can call ... for good advice. If I have a problem, a problem with my company or other problems ... I can call. But in Dubai, you know, we can! And we can use my language, there is no need for Arabic. Even if I am new, maybe today I visit Dubai and I have a problem, I can call the police station. They have a person who knows Bengali and Arabic very well. I can call: I have this problem, what should I do? Then the police give me advice, to do this or that. And also, if I take the example of the telephone company, if they give telephone services in Romanian, only in Romanian, there is not even English.

IH: I know...

RS: Dubai has Bengali, Urdu, Hindi, Malayalam, they have some African languages. And that's not very expensive, I think. In the whole country, you only need one person.

IH: Yeah, I know what you mean. Also, in Dubai, it's more of a tradition of immigration. They've been doing this for a long time, many years, so they've had time to adapt their system. For us, it's quite recent. It's been three, four years at most, since so many newcomers have been arriving here. Let's hope so.

RS: No. Let me finish. Dubai has some negative aspects. If I stay in Dubai for 30 years or 50 years, you never get your documents. I will never get my documents. I have to, eventually, I have to go to my country. But in Romania there are good things! Or in Europe... If I stay, maybe, 10 years, for example, maybe some countries have less than 10 years, it is possible to get the documents. If I meet their requirements, like language, all the things. These are the good aspects of Romania. That is why our Asian people, mostly the younger generation, dream of coming to Romania. Believe me! Some people get the visa legally. That is how I can do it. Some people, maybe... Some people spend two, three years, but they reject their visa. Three years, others. Some people stay there, try to go to Europe, five years, but still don't get the visa. I understand. It is very difficult. Those people came here, maybe they spent ten thousand euros, but you don't know. Thousands of people from Bangladesh spent five thousand euros, but they didn't get the visa. I'm crying there. I have so many family members, some relatives... They try, but they don't get the visa. That's it.

IH: My last question would be: What advice would you give to someone from Bangladesh who has recently arrived in Romania?

RS: It's a very good question and, indeed, I like to advise them. Those who come to Romania, please start learning the language. These are fast things. You have no way, because the government doesn't offer you any place for that... But you will find a way to learn the language. I said that if someone wants to, maybe from applications, maybe if someone tries from the beginning, if they used English, it's difficult. Because after that it's very difficult to learn Romanian. When they come to Romania, at the beginning, they should start learning Romanian.

IH: One thing, just to say that the IOM organizes free language courses. You have to go there. I

mean, subscribe. And they organize three-month modules for foreigners, if you're interested. And they're free. I don't know the program for sure...

RS: So, for a newcomer, they have to learn Romanian. Because if we learn Romanian, Romania is a good thing. There are a lot of job opportunities for foreigners. If they are a good worker... many jobs, believe me. So, if they know the language well, they are also well paid. A bartender or a waiter in the hotel industry, maybe a shopping center, like Mega Image, Carrefour, but they need language skills. So, for a newcomer, it is very important to learn the language. And secondly, a piece of advice for new employees: they need to update their documents, like the resident card, the contract, the health insurance. And other things are that before signing, they need to understand very well, because Romanians do not trust everyone. Before signing any document, maybe you don't know... it's the Romanian language. And the boss said: Please, sign this! And they gave me maybe two, three minutes, five minutes. I want to check with my mobile phone, maybe translate. Five minutes is not enough. And he is in a very big hurry. So you should not sign anything that you are not sure about. These are normal things. In general, that is the case. But especially for new employees, when they come, they do not understand. They say: Okay, no problem! But after they finish their contract and go on leave, they face problems.

IH: And what do you mean by updating the documents?

RS: Updating means... maybe some people change jobs. When they change jobs, the new company signs the contract, but they don't update it. They just sign it. So they have to... they should always be careful, they should be careful to update their documents. They have to press the lawyer or the company: Please show me the documents. What is my work permit? And if the residence permit expires before three months, they have to inform. The company will not warn you. You have to warn the company. Because if I become illegal, it's very difficult. Believe me, it's very difficult. If I see the police, I have to run. If I go, for example, to a shopping mall or somewhere, and there are immigration police. And if you don't have documents, it's very difficult. But I'm not, it's not my mistakes, maybe it's the company's mistakes, but, in the end, I have to suffer. The company will never suffer. And this happened to a person. You know, he wanted to visit Italy, but he knew that his old document was fine. But when he went to the airport and discovered that his document was not up to date. Then the immigration police calls his boss. Then his boss asks him: Okay, I will do it tomorrow, please don't send or do anything!. Then he comes back. This also happened. Some people don't have insurance, health insurance. When something happens, they go to the hospital. And the hospital charges a lot of money. And it's very difficult for him to pay this money.

IH: Yes, because many people don't know that they have the right to a family doctor, to health insurance.

RS: Yes, yes. I really don't know. These are the things for new people, to think about their mother tongue, to learn the language. Secondly, to update their documents. And thirdly, to simply visit many places, like different, different cities, like Timisoara, Brasov, Constanta. And there are so many cities that they can visit, they can learn about Romania. I think that after that, no one will leave Romania.

IH: Okay. Thank you very much.

RS: Thank you.

**An interview by Iulia Hau - Radio Romania Regional
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)**



**In Romania, when I was about to cross the pedestrian crossing,
the car stopped and let you cross first! That's very nice! In
China, cars are very rude!**

Yifan Wang (China)

Mirela Velțan: We will talk to a person who made Chinese seem easier to learn than math. Yifan Wang is a Chinese language teacher at the “Elena Cuza” National College in Craiova. Arriving here after concluding a contract in the UK, recommended by a partnership between the Chinese University of Political Science and Law and the University of Bucharest, he found his place in the Confucius Class of the “Elena Cuza” National College. Mr. Wang told us that his experience in Craiova has been amazing so far, that he is very happy with the beautiful weather that our country offers, that he has found many similarities between China and Romania in terms of family relations and cuisine, and that he has been well received everywhere he has gone, from hospitals, to markets, to schools.

Hello, Mr. Wang, nice to see you.

Yifan Wang: Nice to meet you.

MV: How are you doing?

YW: I'm fine, yes. You know, I just got back from China with a project. I took some Romanian students to China for a month and I got back three days ago.

MV: I would like to start by asking you a few questions about yourself, so we can get to know you a little better as a person. What is your name? How old are you? Do you have any brothers, sisters? Pets?

YW: Yes. First of all, my name is Wang Yifan. You know, my last name is Wang, and my first name is Yifan. I also talked to my Romanian students. They told me that in Romania, you also put the last name first and then the first name. So, it's the same as Chinese names. And I'm 30 years old now, this year, and I'm the only boy in my family. And I know that both Romanians and Chinese people pay a lot of attention to family. As for pets, when I was a boy, I had a dog, but now I only have myself.

MV: I think it's complicated to have a pet here. How was your adaptation process in Romania?

YW: Before Romania, I had two years of experience in the UK, also as a Chinese teacher, so... I think I can adapt here very easily because of my experience in the UK, but I still feel some differences between Romania and China or between Romania and the UK, especially in terms of students. I think we can talk about that later.

MV: What were your first impressions when you arrived here in Romania?

YW: So, first of all, I can feel the big difference between the UK and Romania: here, people are more friendly, because they help you and always have a smile on their face! I don't know why. And I feel a kind of ... feeling of relaxation, because people, just ... How to say ... the students and the people here have an attitude of “taking life for granted”, of ease, of comfort ... I think it's very good, because, you know, in China, honestly, people and students ... we have a lot more pressure at work, at studies, so I feel it's very nice in Romania.

MV: Did you experience any culture shock when you arrived here?

YW: Like I said, because I have experience in the UK, I don't think it was a huge culture shock, but I still had a few, like... what I encountered in class... For example, I don't know, I'm sorry for the story, but I'll tell it. So, at the beginning, I went into a class of students and I was talking about something with the students before class, and then I told a little boy that he should lose weight. And all the students started laughing. What happened? They told me that it's rude, in Romania, to say you should lose weight. I said I'm sorry, I didn't know that! Because, you know, in China, especially for children, parents and especially grandparents, we think that being fat is not a bad thing, because it means you can eat, and you eat a lot, and that will make you healthier.

MV: Yes, you will grow up healthy...

YW: Yes! And so teachers, and especially for boys, it's okay to say Oh, you should lose weight, You should control yourself or something like that... it's normal. And, you know, for grandparents, for grandparents generation, if you say The boy is fat or The girl is fat it's kind of a compliment, not a criticism, so I feel the difference. But in the end, the students explained to me and I also apologized to the boy, and everything was fine. So, I think culture shock is there, even though I prepared myself with a few ... to say the differences between the two countries, but we still make little mistakes.

MV: Everyone makes mistakes. As long as we learn from them and learn to adapt...

YW: Yes...

MV: Everything is fine.

YW: Yes.

MV: How long did it take you to adapt to Romania?

YW: I don't think for a long time, because, you know, my accommodation is in the school, so I live with my students, my colleagues and the staff from, you know, the college. I think it's okay, but as for the food... it's acceptable, but sometimes it's a little different from China. For example, you know, in China we like rice, but in the canteen in Romania, at "Elena Cuza", we have rice, but rice with milk.

MV: Yes... We also have normal rice, with vegetables or meat.

YW: Yeah, I like that one, but sometimes the cafeteria only offers, you know... It only has dessert...

MV: Yes, rice pudding!

YW: And I talked to my family, saying How is that possible?!. Yeah, something like that. But I know it's a cultural difference and I tasted it, it's a little sweet... Yeah, I think it's okay. But for the first... how to say... experience of a Chinese person, it's a little strange, but I think it's okay. It's not a big culture shock issue.

MV: Speaking of people... How were you received when you arrived in Romania? Were the people welcoming or discouraging?

YW: Yes, they are very good. As you know, I am the only Chinese teacher at "Elena Cuza", so the principals and the other teachers are very kind to me, they help me in my daily life and tell me where the mall is, where the supermarket is, where the restaurant is, and my students also recommend various things to me. For example, they told me You can go to the market, buy fruits and vegetables, it's cheaper there! So I went there too. Honestly, I like going to the market because in China too, in daily life, we go to the market to buy vegetables, fruits... Because, through this kind of experience, I feel like it's a kind of being like in China, a good way to relieve my homesickness.

MV: That's good... Yes... Have you made any Romanian friends?

YW: Ah, you mean Romanian friends? Yes, Romanian friends... Honestly, you know, I only speak English and a little Romanian, so... I mean, it's hard for me to talk to Romanians who don't speak English, but I have some Chinese friends here and they, very kind, introduced me to their friends. For example, I still remember, in the first year, 2023, the first year I came to Romania, for Christmas, the Romanian friend of one of my Chinese friends invited us to his house and they served us traditional Romanian barbecue and it was a soup, very good, I still remember... with chicken wings and you could mix bread with the soup. Yes, very good. And they also showed us some... how should I say... traditional Romanian pickles, right? Yes, in China, we have something like that too, but with different vegetables, but the taste is very similar. It's nice.

MV: What were your first interactions like with neighbors or maybe vendors or... coworkers?

YW: As for the neighbors, as you know, I live at school, so I can't say I have neighbors, but, as I said, I always went to the market, I went to the shawarma shops, and they are very friendly. They would ask me where I was from, and sometimes they are very kind. For example, I still remember a shawarma shop where, after they found out that I was from China, the sellers, for others, weighed, for example, 500 grams, but for me, they didn't weigh, they simply put more on me. Yes, I feel that most of you are very kind ... especially in Craiova, yes. And the weather is good, the people are nice. Honestly, I

would really like to stay here longer.

MV: So you've been to other cities too?

YW: Yes, yes, I've been to other cities too. For example, I've been to Sinaia twice. I liked it there and, you know, in Sinaia, the feeling in winter and summer is totally different. Yes, very beautiful. And there's a palace, I think... yes, there's a palace there. Yes, and I've been to Braşov too, and Sibiu ... You know, in Sibiu, the roof impressed me the most. There's an eye on the roof. It's very beautiful, but it's a bit of a shame that I haven't been to Constanţa, because they told me it's very beautiful, but I should save that for when I visit Romania again, maybe... Yes.

MV: We hope you'll go see the beach too, it's...

YW: Yes, I know it's beautiful and famous, but it's maybe a little far from Craiova, so...

MV: A little far, but now that we have the new expressway, yes, you can get there a little faster.

YW: Yes, I know, because, you know, three days ago I came back from China and I took the bus transfer from Otopeni Airport to Craiova: only three hours. It's very beautiful. Yes, it's beautiful.

MV: Has anyone in particular helped you at any point?

YW: Yes... Also in the first year when I came to Romania, you know, I was bitten by some insects on my leg, I don't know what they were, unfortunately, but maybe my blood tastes different from Romanians'. So they bit me and I had a lot of, like... red... how to say... something bad, then I went to the hospital, it's a hospital – the Infectious Diseases Hospital, in front of Lidl, and the doctors... they were very kind, they gave me a prescription and then I went to the pharmacy to buy medicine. Then they suggested I go to a private hospital. So, two days later, I went to the private hospital and I had a consultation. After the consultation, they said: Ah, it's okay, you can take the medicine you bought and if it's not okay after a week, you can come back. And, you know, at the end I asked how much I should pay for it and they said No, it's free! Because we just talked, we had a consultation, it's okay. So, at that moment, I was amazed... shocked, because in China, you have to pay at least, a small amount of money for the consultation. But in Romania, no. I don't know if they are friendly to me or if it's the normal situation, but anyway. I think it's very good. It's a good system and people are also very kind to me, because they know me, they know I can't speak Romanian, so they just say to me Oh, come, come! Maybe I skipped the line, but they were kind to me anyway.

MV: I'm glad to hear that you had good experiences in the hospital system and the medical system in general, and I'm glad to hear that you had great experiences with people in general. Did you discover anything surprising about Romania?

YW: Honestly, every day I have a... every day I can feel something. Last month, I told you that I took Romanian students to China, the big difference is that on the road, cars will let you pass first, right? But in China, no! Cars... how to say... are very rude, yes. So, the first time I came to Romania and I was actually going to cross the crosswalk, the car stopped and then let you pass first! That's very nice! But in China, no. Maybe we have too many people and too many cars.

MV: Maybe, yes. Everyone is in a hurry and trying to get from point A to point B, quickly.

YW: That's very nice. In terms of that, I think now, the Chinese government is also promoting that you should let people pass first and then cars, but ... we should ... work hard on that. Yes, people are still adapting to that recommendation.

MV: Yes. But in Romania it is very beautiful. Were there any customs or social norms that seemed a little unusual to you?

YW: Customs? ... Hmm ... How should I say ... I think every culture, every country, has its own customs, but what I find really beautiful is that my students told me that on Christmas Eve, that is, before, maybe that night, people will hold candles at the church to celebrate ... like New Year ... the rebirth of Jesus, I think? I'm not sure if that's right.

MV: Yes, Christmas is the birth of Jesus and Easter is the death and then resurrection of Jesus Christ.

YW: Ah, so people will hold candles to celebrate and to ... maybe, bring light ... to bring, how should

I say ... Anyway, it's a New Year, right? It contains people's hopes and desires, I think it's very beautiful. And, you know, in Craiova, I also know that in these years, the Christmas Fair was very beautiful and I experienced that, it's very, very beautiful. And there ... some meats, I also tried some meats at the Christmas Fair, yes.

MV: What does your daily life look like in Romania?

YW: Ah ... Honestly, I'm not a person interested in traveling or anything like that, I mean, I can travel, but I can't travel alone, so I always travel with my friends, like to Sinaia, Braşov, I always go there with my friends. And for everyday life, I have a subscription to the Stay Fit gym, so I go to the gym ... I can't say every day, but most days, yes. And it's also very nice, because some of the ... how to say ... some of the Craiova people, at the gym, also ask me where I'm from, they talk to me, and when I told them that I'm the Chinese teacher at "Elena Cuza", they were shocked! And I said to them Yes, you're welcome if you want to learn Chinese. Something like that. It's very nice, too, yes. And I also want to say that, you know, in China, these years, more and more teenagers choose to go to the gym. But, you know, it wasn't like that before, so I think it's very... it's influenced, I can't say by Romania, but by Europe, because people here are very passionate about the gym, not only, but also outside: you run and it's very beautiful. And now, the Chinese pay more attention to their health, the health of their body and the gym, too.

MV: Yes, it's good to move your body, because there's the saying "A healthy mind in a healthy body."

YW: Yes.

MV: So, practicing any type of sport, at any time in life, is very beneficial for mental and physical health.

YW: Yes.

MV: And I'm glad to hear that people in China are taking up this trend, let's say... How are your relationships with colleagues?

YW: As I said, I'm the only Chinese teacher in the school, so honestly, my colleagues have always helped me, because I'm new here, so they're very kind and I still remember, two months ago, it was the "birthday" of the National College "Elena Cuza", so we had a party, and the principals and the other teachers invited me to the party. And we... that was the first time that... how to say... I attended a Romanian party, from start to finish. You know, we went there from seven in the evening, and then we ate, danced, ate, danced, until about two in the morning. It's very nice. But, you know, all the teachers and principals and staff get together and we just dance. I also learned some Romanian dances. It's very nice. So, I think my colleagues are very kind to me and I also have a very good relationship with them, yeah.

MV: Speaking of activities... Were you included in certain activities or...?

YW: Yes, honestly, at the beginning, and I mean the first year, because I wasn't very familiar with all the students and teachers, but from the second year they invited me, all the students and teachers invited me to activities, like, what I just said, our school's "birthday", they invited me and, you know, in Romania, to the graduation ceremony of the students, right? They have a party too. I went to that too, a couple of times. It's really nice! The students will invite the teachers to go. It's really nice. In China, honestly, we don't... between the students and the teachers, we don't have such a, how to say, such a close relationship, I can say, but we don't have such things, like dancing together, it's really nice.

MV: It's a little bit stricter, let's say. There's a line between... In that sense, have you ever had any difficulties in terms of communication or maybe collaboration, because of language differences or cultural differences?

YW: Honestly, not much, but like I said, I prefer to go to the market, but at first I didn't know the numbers in Romanian or much of the language, so after that I thought I should learn some basic Romanian, and then I can manage on my own to, how to say, be more in harmony with the community. So I learned the numbers in Romanian: "one", "two", "three", "four", "five", "six", "eight", "nine", "ten", and even higher, I can say. So I would go to the market and when I paid, I would say "Twenty". And

for some fruits, if I liked them, I would learn: “pineapple” or “strawberries” or “apple”. Something like that, so I think it’s okay for me to manage in everyday life, yeah.

MV: Were there any funny misunderstandings in your experience?

YW: Yes, I think so. Okay, I want to share two, which are very interesting. The first one is in class, because there was one time, you know, before class the students are talking, and then a boy, honestly I thought he was a good boy, but he said something like “F**k”. I said “No, you can’t say that”. And all the students were amazed too! I said “You can’t say f**k, it’s not a nice word!” But, in the end, they told me that it’s a Romanian word and it means “to do” something. Really?! So strange...

MV: There is confusion between the one in English and the one in Romanian.

YW: And then I asked some of my colleagues, other teachers... I thought maybe they were fooling me, but in the end, they said “Yes, it’s real”, because you have a word with a very similar pronunciation to “F**k”, so... I don’t know if it’s okay to share this. Okay, and another thing is that in the market, some seniors ... call me “mami”... Oh! And in the end, I only understood “mommy”, and they said... “Mami, blah blah blah blah...”. I didn’t know what the other words meant, but in the end, I asked my students and they said “Ah, ‘mami’, it means they want to get closer to you, maybe.”, because they told me that sometimes their parents also call them “mami” to show their love or something like that, but for me I think...

MV: It’s a term of endearment, like “darling” or “my dear” or things like that.

YW: Yes... “moms”, “dads”... And finally, my students said that “Maybe they want you to buy something from them”, so...

MV: Or maybe they just like you.

YW: Yes, I think so, yes.

MV: Can you tell us about certain traditions in your country?

YW: Ah... Honestly, you know, Christmas is like New Year for Romanians, but in China we celebrate Chinese New Year. We also call it Spring Festival. So, in our traditions we also have some similarities, for example, we get together with family, we enjoy food, but we also have something different. For example, we will write Chinese characters on a red paper and then we will stick it in front of our doors, because we believe that this kind of red paper with characters will scare away bad things, animals or beasts, and will bring us luck. And also we will clean our house before New Year, I think in Romania the same.

MV: We also clean.

YW: Yes, do a general cleaning, yes, yes, to celebrate...

MV: Let’s drive out evil spirits... Let’s start with the right one, evil spirits.

YW: Yes, yes, so similar... So I think that in most situations we are similar. And, you know, in China, we also like pork. And in Romania you have “sarmale”, “mici”... I think most Chinese would love them, yes. I love them too, but with “mici”, I know that there are different types of meat: pork, mutton, beef...

MV: Yes... You can also combine them.

YW: Ah, yes, but for me, I prefer the pork ones.

MV: About religious culture, what kind of similarities or differences did you find between China and Romania?

YW: Yes, from ... from, how should I say, my discussion with my students, I know that in Romania, you believe ... in Orthodox Christianity. And also, some students always ask me about religious belief in China, but, honestly, we don’t have ... Nowadays, most Chinese people don’t have an exact religious belief. But what we believe is our ancestors. But after talking to my students, I think we have a lot of similarities between our beliefs as well. For example, we believe that if we do something good, then we will get good things back, and that we should be good, we should be friendly, respect others, respect different opinions, something like that. But ... but what I want to say is that, in China, in what we believe is our ancestors, yes. I think that’s the big difference. But in this big difference, we

have a lot of similarities, in what we believe exactly, yes.

MV: Speaking of educational systems, since you are a teacher... Have you found any similarities or differences between the educational system in China and the educational system in Romania?

YW: I think that ... Regarding this topic, I also had a very, very ... long discussion with many students. So, in the end, I came to the conclusion that because, you know, in China, as I said, we have a lot more pressure on students. Because in China, there is a kind of examination-oriented educational system. For example, in the exam, we have mathematics, so students study mathematics a lot. And if we don't have music, then students may not pay much attention to this subject. But, in Romania, I know ... the school, this educational system, has given quite a lot of freedom to students, they can learn whatever they want. But in China, you know, nowadays, we have much more, so to speak, openness, but compared to Romania, to Europe, there are still many differences, especially in terms of the exam, because in the college entrance exam in China ... all students in the country will take the exam and, depending on the score, from top to bottom, the best ones can choose the university first, and then, yeah ... But I know that in Romania, maybe the university can organize an additional exam. You have the first ... I mean, the selection is much better for different types of students, or if some students want to study a certain specialization, but in China everything depends on the final exam. So, in China, there is a saying that "One exam decides your whole life". Even if it is not, how to say ... it is not a fact, but in most situations it applies. For example, like me, if I had not passed the exam, it would have been quite difficult. Before coming to Romania, I had to pass a lot of exams ...

MV: That's... that's a lot of pressure on Chinese students... Do you have any recommendations for the authorities regarding the adaptation process of foreigners in our country? Do you have any message for them?

YW: Honestly, as I said, I felt a lot of kind and warm things in Romania, in Craiova, especially. Regarding the suggestions... At first, honestly, for me it was okay, because I could learn a few sentences in Romanian from my students, but some of my Chinese friends told me, in Romania, that maybe it's hard for them to learn the language. If there could be an organization or a project for them to learn Romanian at... school or at an organization, it would be much better. And one more thing... I can't say it's a problem in Romania, I think it's in most European countries: the train is always late. Because, you know, I have some friends in Bucharest and colleagues in Bucharest as well, so sometimes I have to take the train from Craiova to Bucharest. But it's always late... You know, there was one time when I came back from Bucharest to Craiova: the train was an hour and a half late. Yeah, it's crazy! But, you know, I was in the UK... I think sometimes it was the same: they would cancel trains that were late...

MV: Things can happen...

YW: But I mean, in China it happens too, but not as often. So in the future, if we could have an improvement in rail transportation, it would be much better, yes.

MV: Okay... So, that was Yifan Wang. Thank you so much for sharing your story with us today! And I just want to say that your story reminds us that beyond our differences, I believe we all share the same human need for connection, respect, and communication. May we all strive for a more peaceful and tolerant world, where differences bring us together, not divide us.

YW: Yes... Thank you! Thank you!

**An interview by Mirela Velțan- Radio Romania Oltenia Craiova
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)**



Seoul

South Korea

**Hospitality is the most developed quality of the Romanian people.
You welcome any nationality with great care and warmth.**

Lydia Shin (South Korea)

Adelina Tocitu: Welcome! Today I invite you to meet Ms. Lidia Shin. She arrived from South Korea, in Bucharest, in June 1998, when she was a student missionary. She taught Korean at the Korean School in Bucharest, then attended the Faculty of Letters of the University of Bucharest, her master's and doctoral studies at the same institution. She is currently a professor of Korean language and Korean culture, Hangeul calligraphy, at the King Sejong Institute in Bucharest, within the "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University. This interview is conducted in Romanian and I want to thank you, Ms. Shin, for giving us the opportunity to get to know you and for agreeing to share your story with us.

Lidia Shin: Hello! Thank you for this chance to tell about my life or experiences in Romania. Thank you!

AT: Ms. Shin, you were a student when you came to Romania as a missionary. What were your first impressions of Bucharest back then, in 1998?

LS: When I landed in Romania, in 1998, you realize that the city of Bucharest was not included as a city in the European Union. It was not luxurious, the colors of the buildings were darker, there were more Dacia cars on the streets, it was popular and, yes, but I felt the warmth of that city that came from the hearts of the people of Romania.

AT: What were the first differences you felt between Romania and South Korea? Because the moment you arrive in a new place, I am convinced that, in one way or another, there is a term of comparison.

LS: Yes, life was not easy with shopping, Koreans eat every day, at the main meal, the main food is rice. It was a bit hard to find rice, and the ingredients that make up their favorite dishes. And there weren't many stores at that time and the stores closed very quickly, around 5:00, in the afternoon, and I had nowhere else to go to shop. And on weekends most of them were closed. Those were my impressions of the first few years.

AT: But why did you choose Romania and not another country to come to?

LS: When I married my husband, we had a common goal of going to Romania, we were kind of the first Protestant missionaries, but at the same time I came as a student, studying in that country, to learn, to live with the young people, with the students, to learn Korean and to study the Bible. So we got married, we prepared ourselves and after two years, we came to Romania with this goal.

AT: How has Romania changed you as a person after so many years spent here? We were doing the math, it's been 27 years now.

LS: Yes, that's right. As these years passed, and whether I liked it or not, I became like a Romanian, similar, open, friendly, warm and talkative. And because I was a true Korean, a person with a tempered character, quieter, more reserved and shy. But the country of Romania gave me the gift of communication and transformed me.

AT: You taught Korean at the Korean School in Bucharest, after which you enrolled in college, pursued your master's degree, and also pursued your doctoral studies at the University of Bucharest. How did the training and learning process go, because it was a long one?

LS: Yes. I had a desire, as I explained to you, the reason why I came to Romania, to study and live together, among the young people of that society, and having a reason, a purpose, a desire, coming to Romania, to learn and live among and among the young Romanians. And, nevertheless, this reason lived in my heart and I met and talked to people from the faculty. I met a person, the former vice-rector of this university, who had the desire to open a cultural institute of Korean language and culture. And together, we submitted documents to do this. Every year, three years in a row. In the first two years, we did not succeed. However, we persevered and continued. In the third year, in 2022,

we managed to establish the King Sejong Institute. After which, unexpectedly, many students also signed up to learn the Korean language. The first year, 150 Korean language learners signed up to also learn Korean culture, with another 100 students after that.

AT: How long does it take to learn Korean? We know that Romanians are increasingly attracted to the Korean language, but what about Hangeul calligraphy? Is there interest? Is there curiosity? How long does it take?

LS: A! First, how long does it take to learn Korean? We have eight textbooks to learn from beginners to intermediate. And each textbook has a 60-hour learning regimen, three and a half months if you study four hours a week, standard, in classes. Calligraphy for beginners - nine weeks. I mean how to hold the brush, how to learn traditional Korean styles and then, not only that, and find your own writing style, but also to feel and find. And after that I do some personalized things, with glasses, with candles and all sorts of things, so that it is a real hobby... A few weeks, about nine weeks for beginners and, after that, for advanced.

AT: Do you think that the popularization of Korean culture in Romania has opened up Romanians' interest in knowledge and intercultural dialogue?

LS: Yes, in my opinion.

AT: There is an active Korean community in Bucharest, Romania. How does this manifest itself?

LS: Yes, there is. Although, in the '90s, Koreans started coming, living in Romania and even my friend, she is the first Korean and who has lived in Korea since then and started to form. Now it is an organization under the name Association of Koreans in Romania. We have beautiful, periodic events with Koreans. The big one takes place every year, we all meet, we all gather, together, in December.

AT: What similarities have you discovered between Korean and Romanian culture, between the Korean and Romanian languages?

LS: Yes, the similarity is that Romanian and Korean are phonetic languages. This similarity helped me a lot, as you write, so you read. And each letter is the original sound, unique and easy to read. And this, reading, reading those phrases, the sentence structure, enters my mind and helps me with speaking.

AT: But between Romanian culture and Korean culture?

LS: And Romanian culture and Korean culture? Yes, yes. Romanians like to decorate their clothes and things, with little hands and fabrics. It seems to me that they are quite similar, yes. They like to dance Romanian dance and Korean dance, you hold hands and go around the yard and the house. Yes, I saw that they are similar.

AT: Is there any culinary dish from Romania, that you enjoy, that you like?

LS: Yes, "sarmale". And I, I haven't seen a Korean living in Romania who doesn't like "sarmale". I really like "sarmale" and "papanasi" and soups. In Korean food, we have similar sour soup, that is, with cabbage juice, we also have soup, kimchi, which is a little sour. Yes, I also like tripe soup, all soups. Yes, I like them.

AT: I have to admit that kimchi is one of my favorites. I mean, I eat it whenever I get the chance, I'll admit that with great pleasure. But, coming back to our discussion, have you ever had a hard time and wanted to go back to South Korea?

LS: It's strange that I haven't had so many moments... those moments when I wanted to give up staying in Romania. If I have, I don't know, I think the country Romania, I, as they say in Romanian, bewitched me to stay in Romania, I love it. If I have the moments with the visa, with all the processes to obtain the visa, there are many documents required. Yes, it was a little difficult. But I wasn't rejected because now I would have been in Korea. But, still, in the end, I was accepted, it was extended. And after that, in the first years there were some financial problems, not having a job, I was a missionary, through my own sources and I had to work. In the first years, I didn't have a job, but by a miracle, with God's help we still had a job for a while. Yes, it's ok.

AT: But, if we were to talk about longing, what do you miss the most when you think of South Korea, your first home?

LS: My mother, my brother and my close relatives. And my friends from college are in Korea and I miss them. And especially during the big holidays in Korea and I miss them, the Korean food. Yes, and it's hard for me to find it in Romania. However, I adapted with my family, here in Romania and with my friends, who also know Korean food very well, I shared the joy with them.

AT: I was saying that you are a professor of Korean language and Korean culture in Hangeul calligraphy at the King Sejong Institute within the Christian University "Dimitrie Cantemir". And I would like to ask you how Romanian students inspire you? What exactly have you learned from them? What are Romanian students like?

LS: They learn with passion, they learn with great interest and their eyes are already very bright and they accept to listen to anything in order to learn it. And even to my surprise, for example, a language, the Korean language, however they are different, the alphabets are different, there is no similarity between the words in the Romanian and Korean languages, however, they learn well. I mean, in three weeks they start writing, they start reading, anyway the Korean language from a phonetic point of view is not difficult to learn. However, they have a talent for learning. I really appreciate the talent of Romanians to learn Korean culture and calligraphy and, however, they admire the artistic beauty of writing and appreciate writing. By writing, they enter into peace and tranquility of the heart. Because for Romanians it is a valuable thing! After that, they are familiar with writing with a brush, from movies series, and yes, they are happy to experience that thing.

AT: Do you have any experience you can share with us now, with students, or a memory?

LS: Yes. I think a lot. I don't think there's enough time if we finish the interview in half an hour. A lot. I mean, even though it's work sometimes, because I work in the evenings, four hours, six hours, and I teach Korean language and culture, it still gives me joy, when I see their passion, they always bring me homework done with their hands and so beautifully written. And after that, they bring me a video, in which they read from textbooks and sing in Korean. Yes, very beautiful. And the things done in calligraphy are more beautiful than how Koreans write in Korean. Yes, it's my joy that they learn and enjoy a culture other than theirs. And they bring me proofs and joys, and they love me very much, and they always bring me many bouquets of flowers, candies for my birthday... I mean, I don't miss those gifts from them. I have great joy!

AT: If there are people who would like to learn Korean, but don't have the courage, maybe they find it difficult, maybe they don't know how to approach it... What message would you send them?

LS: For the first step, it is enough to be open to a new experience, to another culture. And the joy will be greater, as you enjoy Romanian culture. If it is a step taken with curiosity, it will open up another immense joy for you, as I have observed from my students. Some start with a book and think that it is enough to experiment, but they have been learning now, for two years, three years... some even for five years, regardless of the age of the students, some younger, some older... and the older ladies, many ladies in their 50s, 60s... The idea is to open your heart and the possibility is there for every Romanian, yes.

AT: What is the most valuable thing you learned in Romania, that you learned from here?

LS: Yes, yes, it is, the most valuable thing is communication. Communication for me was a big challenge, communication in Romanian. And mutual understanding was the most valuable thing, also for my own peace of mind.

AT: If you had to describe Romania in one word, what would it be?

LS: Hospitality. Did I say that right?

AT: You said it very well.

LS: It is a very high quality, what I felt, what I experienced while living in Romania, and valuable, through which the community in Romania also develops, that you welcome any nationality, in Romania, with a lot of, yes, care and warmth.

AT: What message would you send to Romanians, who are watching us now, about those who come from other countries, to work here, to study? What would you tell Romanians about them?

LS: Yes. Yes. And, yes, I still stand by what I said about hospitality and the more efficient process with documents, visas... You also have many wonderful talents, to learn a language, and welcoming guests, means more development in the country of Romania, together with many kinds of people of other nationalities, and the country, for sure, is developing a lot.

AT: Because you mentioned bureaucracy several times throughout our discussion, I ask you what the Romanian state could do better for the integration of foreign citizens who choose Romania to become their second home?

LS: Yes. The country is accessible and it's easy to integrate and it's ... the first step is the visa. Let the process be more digitalized. For example, as I noticed in the country of Korea, the Korean people or foreigners have the opportunity to submit all the documents online and through e-government, and it's easier at home to submit all the documents, and to check the answers on time. After that they offer a Korean language learning course, also from the government and everything is ... most of them are free, and learning a language is easier, and the type of language for work, for different jobs, and there's a system that helps, I think, to learn a Romanian language.

AT: At the end of our discussion, I would like to ask you, what advice would you give to Romanians who would like to discover, are thinking about discovering South Korea? What would you tell them? What message would you convey to them?

LS: The country of Korea, from a historical point of view, has many similar moments: invasions and then independence, fights with other countries, the colonial period, then the rediscovery by the people. It was also in Korea. I noticed that the two characters, the Romanian and the Korean, are partly similar and understand very well the hard moments, how it was and what is valuable about your unique, independent country. So it is worth finding out the similarities and differences between the countries. And then your joy will be greater, becoming two friendly countries. After that, Koreans want to come to Romania for business, to find friends. So the society will develop those business things, with entertainment and Korean food. Let it happen, learning from each other. Learning together.

AT: Thank you for talking to us today, for sharing your experience with us, for choosing Romania, for Romania to become your second home, and for opening your soul to us.

**An interview by Adelina Tocitu - Radio Romania București FM
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)**



Cairo

Egypt

The future of children is here. They speak Romanian, Arabic, and English and I think they will do well here.

Tarik Abou (Egypt)

Emanuela Aranyos: Mr. Tarik, what led you to leave an already consolidated career in Egypt to start a new path in Romania?

Tarik Abou: First of all, thank you very much for your invitation to this interview. Indeed, I had no great intention of leaving my career in Egypt and staying here for the rest of my life, but we can say that fate played its role in this matter.

My story begins in 2019, when I was invited to a three-day theater studies workshop at the University of Arts in Târgu Mureș with the French playwright Patrice Pavis. After participating in this workshop, the rector of the University of Arts in Târgu Mureș, Mr. Sorin Crișan, suggested that I do a second doctorate here in the field of theater, but I didn't have the chance to do this doctorate because it was the COVID period and I wasn't able to come back.

But in 2021 I returned for the second time to Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași as a postdoctoral fellow for three months and was in contact with the University of Arts in Târgu Mureș, meaning I was traveling back and forth between Iași and Târgu Mureș every week to attend conferences, workshops, etc.

During this period, when I entered the headquarters of the University of Arts in Târgu Mureș, to look for an event or a workshop, I read that there was a position for a third-year researcher and I submitted my application and started my career path here. That's the story in a nutshell.

EA: After how long did you bring your family?

TA: After seven months, exactly. I started my career here in October 2022 and in May 2023 I brought my family.

EA: Was your wife happy?

TA: Sure, sure, yes, my wife and children were very happy, but there were some sacrifices. Let me tell you why I said there were some sacrifices: as I left my job in Egypt, my wife left her job and the children left their friends.

After they adapted to life in Romania, I was unable to get my wife's diplomas recognized because we don't have a permanent residence permit, meaning we have a temporary residence permit, and for the diploma to be recognized, a permanent residence permit is required, which I haven't received yet.

We still need two or three years. And for that, the wife has been at home for three years and we need another three years for her to be able to work, because she is a pharmacist and that is the law.

EA: It wasn't easy for her either.

TA: Yes, it's not easy. You can imagine a law denying a woman the right to work because she doesn't have a permanent residence permit.

EA: And if you allow me to ask the question: what is the connection between the diploma or the recognition of the diploma and the residence, for example, what is the connection?

TA: No connection between the two. For example, when we do recognition, we check whether the diploma is appropriate or not, it is not a question of residence. For example, if we now have two women, both Egyptian or from other countries, both married and pharmacists, but one is married to an Egyptian, like our situation, and the other is married to an Egyptian who has a permanent residence permit, we do recognition for one and not for the other. That is not logical, it is not equality. We do recognition because they deserve it or they do not deserve it. That is how it is. And that is why I said that there were some sacrifices: my wife left her job there and so far she is not working. That is the problem.

EA: How was the transition from academic life in Cairo to that in Târgu Mureș? What challenges

and surprises did you encounter?

TA: It was a bit difficult to start here, because of the language, because here I work more with the Romanian language. At first I didn't know a word of Romanian. When I applied for my position as a third researcher, I had to have a Romanian language certificate, so I started from scratch, as a student. Before I got my position, I went to UMFST University and studied Romanian with the students there. In Egypt I was a teacher, and here I started as a student, with homework and everything. It was a bit difficult at first, but after a few months I started to speak and understand. Knowing French helped me a lot, because both languages are close.

EA: How did your children adapt to life in Romania?

TA: They adapted quickly and more easily than I did. After leaving their friends there, they came here and made friends at school. Every day they have many things that help them get used to the Romanian culture and life here. The eldest daughter is in fourth grade. She does her homework with me. It was hard for her, coming from Egypt when she was in second grade and starting third grade straight away, but with patience and time, she managed, understood the language and integrated among the children. Now she speaks better than me.

EA: Children adapt quickly and absorb information. You are very involved in education. What differences have you noticed between the Egyptian and Romanian educational systems?

TA: I can't compare childhood, but there are differences between the Egyptian and Romanian university systems: in Egypt it's based on grades; to get to medical school, for example, a student must have 98% in their high school diploma. Here, the student passes an admission test and chooses their college, which I think is more appropriate and easier for students.

EA: What do you think could be improved in the way your children learn today?

TA: There should be a subject related to bi-culturalism in the school curriculum, especially for younger children, so that they learn to accept children from other countries. And for teachers, to understand how to deal with foreign children who do not have the same linguistic capacity as a Romanian child. At first we had problems, but we hoped that there would be methods that would help Romanian children accept children from other cultures.

EA: How was it to adapt to Romanian culture?

TA: I adapted together with my wife and children. Adaptation means respecting the local culture, even if there are differences. We have to respect Romanian culture and be respected in turn. The people here are very good and kind, so we did not encounter any difficulties.

EA: What do you miss when you think of Egypt?

TA: I miss spending the month of Ramadan there, where the atmosphere is specific, with the calls to prayer, the mosque and the street decorations, it's different in Egypt. I haven't experienced Ramadan there in a long time. Here you can't feel the same experience. Fasting is difficult, from five in the morning to six in the evening every day. It's healthy... It's not mandatory for children. We spend the holidays with Egyptian friends who live here. The connection with the family back home in Egypt is maintained through WhatsApp, video calls, messenger, to make sure that the parents are well and healthy.

EA: How did your parents receive the news of your final departure to Romania?

TA: It was a little hard for them, but they accepted because it's my future.

EA: Have you come to consider Romania your second home?

TA: Sure, yes, I can say that Romania is the first home now; we only go to Egypt on vacation, for a few days or a month, and we come back here.

EA: What does a normal workday look like for you, professionally and family-wise?

TA: I wake up at six in the morning, have breakfast, take the kids to school and come back to the office at a quarter past seven. I don't have a fixed schedule, I have to finish everything I have planned for the day. After I get home, I help the kids with their homework or work on university projects. The day can last until 11 in the evening.

EA: Do you have time for yourself or your passions?

TA: No, my day is very busy between university activities and family.

EA: Why do you really feel at home in Târgu Mureș?

TA: The city is beautiful, clean, organized, the people are kind and friendly. I feel like this is my home and my family.

EA: In addition to teaching, you also write books in French. What themes do you address in them?

TA: In 2023, I published the book “Le roman policier: Art et technique” by Harmattan Publishing House, about the structure of the detective novel, characters, time and space. I also coordinated a paper published in the theater research journal of the Târgu Mureș University of Art, where I reviewed 12 international researches. I also wrote a book on learning French and theater terminology, intended for art and theater students.

EA: What inspires you the most when you write?

TA: The history of theater, whether here in Romania or in another country. History is reality; whoever does not have a past will not have a future.

EA: Do you have a book planned or a project that you are currently preparing?

TA: I am working on a chronological index of Romanian-Arab cultural relations and on translating a book for an Arab playwright into Romanian.

EA: You are a person full of energy and optimism. What is the secret of this attitude?

TA: I have no secret, it's my personal nature. I inherited energy from my father, who is actively working at 65 and refuses to stay at home.

EA: If you had to send a message to those who want a life change similar to yours, what would you tell them?

TA: They need to be patient, understand that big changes take time and challenges, and be prepared for any obstacles.

EA: What traditional Romanian dishes do you like?

TA: I prefer to eat at home; I try at restaurants, but I choose what I know well, for example fish.

EA: How do you see your future in Romania?

TA: Optimistic, focusing on personal and professional development, contributing to projects for the Târgu Mureș University of Art and for society.

EA: And the future of the family?

TA: Their future is here. They speak Romanian, Arabic and English and I think they will do well here.

EA: What does the joy of being mean to you?

TA: The possibility of being happy, healthy, and useful to family and community. It is the joy of helping others, not just pursuing one's own happiness.

EA: Thank you so much for sharing all of this with us.

TA: Thanks, too.

An interview by Emanuela Aranyos - Radio Romania Tg. Mureș
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)



Manila

Philippines

I think I'll stay here, for the children. I want to give them a good, life.

Rachel Ann Pamela (Philippines)

Carmen Sas: As lunchtime approaches, we start thinking about what to eat, and in Cluj-Napoca this means, for many of us, food ordered at home or at the office. The platforms are full of offers, some more delicious than others, but today I would like to taste something more ... exotic.

And since this cheerful sun is getting us all out of the house, rather than waiting for an hour for food, I have an even better idea. Wouldn't it be better if I went for it? Especially since today I would like to enjoy an exotic food story and I know exactly the place and the person who can prepare it. Come with me!

In Cluj-Napoca, street food is a success for investors and a joy for consumers, and one of the most requested and consumed dishes is Filipino food, which is prepared in this trailer by Rachel Ann Pamela, a Filipina settled in the city on the Someş River for several years.

I met Rachel after I first fell in love with "adobo". Adobo is a traditional dish from the Philippines, which we will talk about a little later and which is prepared right in this kitchen on four wheels, from which a woman with Asian features serves you, always, always, with a smile on her face, extremely warm and friendly. Bonus to the Filipino menu, Rachel speaks Romanian.

Of course, the first question is related to why a woman crosses a part of the globe, leaving behind family, culture, memories, to come and prepare food for the people of Cluj.

Rachel Ann: I got here with the help of my sister and she said...

CS: She was already working in Romania.

RA: Yes, yes, yes. And he said he had a job for me, as a nanny, and I said okay, let's try.

CS: And what was the first city you landed in when you came to Romania?

RA: I was in Focşani for the first time. I took care of two children.

CS: How long did you stay there?

RA: I stayed there for a year and two months.

CS: What year was that? When did you come?

RA: A... 2014.

CS: And how was your experience there?

RA: Well, harder.

CS: Why? Was it that period of integration? I mean, you didn't speak Romanian?

RA: No! Not at all, not at all!

CS: And did you get along with that family?

RA: With the children's mother, yes, she knew English, but a little. And since I was taking care of the older child and she knew a little English, you know? When we were talking, I would ask what this was in Romanian and then I wrote.

CS: Did it take you a long time to learn Romanian like this? Did you write down every word in a notebook?

RA: Yes, yes, yes.

CS: Wasn't it easy?

RA: No!

CS: What did you find most difficult, about integrating into that family, into that city, into a country you came to for the first time?

RA: In the family where I stayed, because I worked non-stop.

CS: So you were on duty there 24 hours a day?

RA: Yeah, yeah. I woke up at 6 and then I finished at 1 or 2.

CS: Is that every day?

RA: Yes, every day. No days off.

CS: No days off. No vacation.

RA: None. Continuously. Yes.

CS: For years we have been hearing the stories of thousands of Romanian women who went to work abroad and were exploited by their employers. Despite blaming the program they are subjected to or the precarious working conditions, Romanian society today applies the same denigrating and abusive treatments to migrant workers who come to Romania. Have we also caught this disease and are now applying it to women who come to work for us?

And then, from that family, the transfer to Cluj took place. How?

RA: I came here just for vacation, for two days. But when I got here, after one day, already... And I told my sister, but...

CS: Was your sister here in Cluj?

RA: Yes, my sister is here in Cluj. Yes, yes, yes.

CS: How many years has she been settled here?

RA: Now, I think eight or nine years.

CS: Did you come to visit her?

RA: Yes, yes, just visiting. And I told him I didn't want to go back there because I was really tired there and I couldn't take it anymore.

CS: What did you like here, in Cluj?

RA: Here, the people here are like that, as they say...

CS: Hot like you?

RA: Yes.

CS: In the city, when you first came to Cluj Napoca, what did you like? What attracted you? What did you find interesting?

RA: I don't know... I just came here to work, you know? For my family. For the kids, especially.

CS: Let's get to the story of your life and your family. How old were you when you left the Philippines?

RA: 28, like... Or 27.

CS: And what did you leave behind? How many children did you leave behind?

RA: I left four children there, four boys.

CS: How old were they when you left home?

RA: I think the oldest is five or six. The youngest is 11 months.

CS: And did you come to Romania or did you leave home... for what purpose?

RA: The money there doesn't work for four children, you know? And so I could have a better life, that's how I came here.

CS: What did you tell your kids when you left home? What did you tell your parents when you left home?

RA: I said, Mommy, I can't stay here, at home. And I can't stay there. It's hard for me, for the children to hear, for them to see, so to speak. And I want to give life a good, good life.

CS: History has shown us that migration reduces poverty, but in return generates strong social effects on the extended family system. It influences the emotional states of family

life and even the roles within it. Almost 10,000 km away, many tears and pains that cannot be expressed in any language, Rachel left four children at home. Calix Jamil, Forest Galen, Yhuan Edward and Sebastian Aqueel know that their mother has gone to work somewhere far away, for them. And they feel the effects of this sacrifice because every peso sent to the Philippines improves their living conditions.

Do you think you can, through the work you do here, because you also work here from morning until late at night and almost every day, help them have a better life?

RA: Yes, yes! And the salary here is higher than there in the Philippines. And it helps them more.

CS: And now you talk to your children?

RA: Yes, every day.

CS: Life here, in Cluj-Napoca, on the other side of the world, 22 hours away from where your soul is, home to your family and children, can't be easy. And how can you measure or pay for the longing and sacrifice? But the smile and the light in Rachel's eyes show us that she understood and knows the answer.

When was the last time you saw each other?

RA: I went home this year, in January, because my mother is sick. And I stayed there for a month.

CS: And you go once a year? You manage once a year?

RA: No, not really. Because plane tickets are very, very expensive.

CS: For you, family is extremely important. For you, now settled in Romania, you are trying to build a family here, with the family you left behind in the Philippines. How is life, your life story?

RA: It's hard, but... I'm happy.

CS: Are you happy here, in Cluj? Do you have many friends here?

RA: Yes!

CS: How do these friendship stories continue? Over a table of Filipino food or not necessarily?

RA: Not necessarily!

CS: How do you see your future here, in Romania?

RA: I want to bring the children here, to be with me.

CS: Do you think they would integrate and feel very good here, in Romania in Cluj?

RA: I think so!

CS: What would they like?

RA: The first is winter.

CS: Yes?

RA: Yes, because we don't have winter.

CS: Isn't it snowing?

RA: No.

CS: Is it difficult to learn Romanian?

RA: Yes, a little. But it's not impossible! Yes.

CS: But you speak Romanian very well.

RA: Yes, thank you!

CS: What do you think they would like about our traditions? What do you like about the traditions you know? Are we talking about Easter, Christmas or other customs?

RA: Um... Easter and Christmas.

CS: Rachel said she was happy here in Cluj. Well, her happiness has a name! Robert! He is

the man who is her support, friend, lover, family. The man with whom she wants to start a big and happy family. I found Robert, where else?, than next to Rachel's trailer.

Robert: The thing that impressed me the most about her was the fact that she is a heroic mother, from my point of view.

CS: Why do you say that?

Robert: Because she has four children, I'm very far away from her and it takes a lot of strength to be able to be away from the children, not to be there with them, not to be able to help them when they need it, not to be able to hold them in your arms. It seems incredibly difficult to me!

CS: How much do you think your moral support matters to her?

Robert: I think it matters a lot. As far as I know, I say it matters a lot.

CS: Because Rachel comes from a foreign country where the traditions, culture, and education are totally different from what we have in Romania, how did you try, and certainly succeed, to integrate her into our culture, to make this period of adjustment and relaxation easier for her, if you will?

Robert: A 100% accommodation will never exist, because cultures are different and have deep influences on everyone's mind. But I think it helps her a lot that she's with me, one on one, two on one, that she's in a very ok city, the people are quite friendly...

CS: Could the Romanian state do something extra for people who come from other countries, who work here, who want to build a future in Romania?

Robert: There are many, many migrants who come and are abused by Romanian employers. It seems a bit strange to me that, in the past, Romanians complained about being abused when they worked in Italy, in France, in Germany, and look, Romanians do the same. For example, Rachel, when she worked in Focșani, it wasn't very easy, that's why she tried to run away from there. She's not the only one who ran away from that family. You can't hire someone as a nanny and then expect them to clean, and cook for you, and for the whole family, and if they have an extended family, they have to do it for everyone! Certainly, there are many couriers who don't think their rights are respected.

CS: The latest figures published by the General Inspectorate for Immigration show that approximately 13,000 foreign citizens, including those from outside the European Union, have established their residence or domicile in Cluj County. We meet them on the streets of the city on scooters or bicycles as food delivery people, but also on construction sites, as employees of construction companies, in production halls or at fast food restaurants, but also alongside the children they are nannies for.

In February 2025, 7,641 non-EU foreign citizens were registered in Cluj County, holding valid residence permits, of which 4,569 had the right to stay for work purposes. Currently, there are approximately 3,000 Filipino workers in Romania, and their number is expected to double next year, following diplomatic efforts between the two countries.

Rachel Ann Pamela says she is building a success story in the five-star city because she is a full-fledged partner in this Filipino food business. Perhaps that is why her work schedule starts at eight in the morning, although she wakes up much earlier, and ends around 10 p.m. Six days out of seven! And in the trailer, hygiene and food safety reign supreme. Rachel knows that the success of her business depends not only on the location and menu, but also on the quality of the products, the authenticity of their preparation and operational efficiency.

And we have finally reached the moment with flavors and tastes in our story today.

RA: Now I'm making chicken adobo. This is with rice. This is chicken pieces, made with soy sauce, pepper, vinegar, red onion and then I put green onion on top.

CS: What was the first Romanian dish you tasted in Romania? What was the first thing you ate when you came to Romania?

RA: Sarmale.

CS: Sarmale?

RA: Yes.

CS: And what did you think of them?

RA: It's very good.

CS: So... you had never eaten minced meat before?

RA: No, no! Sarmale and polenta and the one with egg... What do you call it?

CS: Stuffed eggs! What's your favorite dish right now?

RA: Sarmale, cold, beef salad.

CS: Do you cook them too? Did you learn to cook them?

RA: I know how to cook sarmale, beef salad.

CS: What do you cook for your friends the most? If they come to eat at your place, what do they want to eat?

RA: With Filipino food, more traditional, that's adobo. Adobo. Yeah. And chicken or pork. Romanian, stew.

CS: And what do you cook the most for your family, here in Cluj?

RA: Especially adobo!

CS: Romanian food, Romanian dish that you cook most often?

RA: Soup.

CS: Soup? What kind of soup?

RA: This with vegetables or chicken.

CS: Rachel's life doesn't just take place in the confined space of the food trailer. She wanted to get to know the country that became her second home better, so, together with Robert, she traveled as much as she could to discover some of the most beautiful places in our country.

RA: I went to Sibiu, I liked the Astra Museum there, the one with old houses and the one with the windmills, in Constanta, that... Black Sea, on the Black Sea.

CS: Did you swim in the Black Sea?

RA: Yes, yes! Because the water there is smooth, without waves, without waves, yes.

CS: So you don't have the thrill of the waves in the Philippines anymore?

RA: Yes, yes, yes! It's even bigger... at Turda Salt Mine, there with that salt.

CS: Do you miss the Philippines?

RA: Yes!

CS: If you had to choose to stay in one country forever, would you return home or stay here?

RA: It's hard! It's hard! I think I should stay here, for the kids.

CS: Rachel Ann Pamela's story is the story of a woman with a heart divided between two worlds: Romania and the Philippines and her feelings, between two states: joy and sadness or melancholy, who is building a new life in a foreign country, where she is developing a small successful business, for which she works over 10 hours a day, who has embraced a culture completely foreign to the "Pearl of the Orient", the archipelago with over 7000 islands where she was born, who still writes words in a notebook, to learn a foreign language, to feel that she is part of the world in which she now lives and in which she wants to integrate as best as possible. Who welcomes each client every day, with a clean smile and with eyes shining with serenity, because politeness is the essential attribute in Filipino culture and who is writing her life story here and now ... with patience, with a lot of work, seriousness and hope.

RA: Ako, si Rachel, inaabetoko ko kayong makita ang Pilipinas sa ng mga haikan aking niluluto. Hi, I'm Rachel and I invite you to discover the Philippines through the Filipino food I prepare here!



New Delhi



India

It was a little more complicated in the first year, but after I learned Romanian, it was super okay. The prejudices disappeared.

Nilima Rajpal Kundnani (India)

Mihaela Ionescu: What made you choose Romania and, in this case, Timișoara for your studies and career?

Nilima Rajpal Kundnani: Since childhood, it was my passion to be a doctor, because I come from a family where there are only doctors. In my family, apart from my father, who is an engineer, we have 47 doctors. And, since childhood, being in a family of doctors, I wanted to be a doctor. When I finished my high school diploma in India, in 1998, it was not possible for me to enter medicine, due to a grade that was lower than the last entrance to medicine. My father looked for options for me and my sister, because I also have a sister two and a half years older than me, and that's when he found the options. They were to go to Romania or to go to Russia. It's just that Russia wasn't that safe for girls, that's what people heard in India. And then we chose Romania, because some articles even appeared in the newspaper that said it was a zero crime country. I knew absolutely nothing about Romania, except that there was no crime there. And my father thought that if we had to send two girls there, abroad alone, it would be better to choose a country that was safer. And so we ended up in Romania and the University of Medicine and Pharmacy Timișoara "Victor Babeș" had the first open English language series, with teaching in English, and we chose to come here, in Timișoara. That's how we ended up in Romania, in Timișoara, in 1998.

MI: It's been a while since then, 1998. How was the impact with another country that you said you knew nothing about?

NRK: We usually learn geography at school more about Asia. We didn't really focus on Europe, so we didn't know what the weather would be like. At that time, there was no Dr. Google to show us all the answers, to help us. And then we didn't know what the weather would be like, because the first thing we struggled with in Romania was the weather. When we landed with Tarom, because at that time Tarom was going directly from India to Romania... when we landed with Tarom, here, we could see from the plane, from the flight, that the land was white and we didn't understand why the land was white. In fact, it was winter, it was November 11, 1998, and it was full winter. Back then, those really hard winters were here and there was knee-deep snow in Bucharest when we landed. And we didn't understand why it was so white. Because everyone was wearing lots of jackets and we arrived with short sleeves, sandals. And right when I put my foot on the ground, my foot went in. And this was the first contact with snow in my life, the first contact with Romania, and it was horror, to be honest.

MI: So Romania awaited you with the white carpet, not the red carpet.

NRK: Yes, it was interesting. That was the first struggle, after which there was the second difficulty that happened: the Romanian language. At that time, being right after that period after communism, not much people knew English. We are English speakers, because English is an official language in India. We did all our schooling in English. But here not much people spoke English. Well, at college, the teachers spoke English, but with the neighbors, on the street, it was very complicated with the language. Those were the two big difficulties, I can tell you.

MI: So, the weather and the language. Those are still both challenges.

NRK: The first challenges and today both remain challenges for me. I can manage with the language, but I still have a hard time with the grammar, with the diacritics, it's horror for me. In winter, I try to avoid leaving the house as much as possible, because winter doesn't really suit me, I mean I'm not really used to winters.

MI: In the end, it's natural, but winters have changed in this part of the world too.

NRK: But still, for me, they are harder, because I come from western India, where the maximum temperature in summer is 50 degrees and in winter it is 25 degrees. For us, below 25 means winter, winter. And here, being minus, it is difficult for me to adapt.

MI: If you remember, how were you received then by your colleagues, by your neighbors?

NRK: The neighbors were very welcoming, to be honest. I was very well received by the neighbors, by my colleagues as well. I had colleagues from the English series who were only foreigners and we got along very well. I had less contact with Romanians at the university, because we were from different series. They studied in the Romanian series, we studied in the English series. But the teachers were super nice, I never felt any discrimination or anything like that. They were very welcoming. The teachers really praised us, they talked about the Indian films they saw in their childhood and so on. I mean, they really liked us, the Indians. There were about 12 Indians in total who came to my series. And, besides that, on the street it was sometimes harder, more complicated, because people thought, being more Creole, like me, they thought we were gypsies and they kicked us out of the stores, because we didn't even know the language and they thought we went into the stores to steal or something. I mean, we didn't know the language and they thought something else. We would make signs to get something, because there were no supermarkets back then, like Auchan, Penny and so on. It was a little more complicated in the first year, but after that, slowly, slowly, as I learned Romanian, it was super ok. The prejudices disappeared.

MI: What did you like the most about the Romanian lifestyle from the beginning?

NRK: In terms of lifestyle, I can tell you that people were very welcoming, very warm. They tried to help us, both with signs and as much as they could. And, apart from that, in terms of lifestyle, if we talk about it, I liked that, at Christmas, at Easter, all the relatives would always come and have a Christmas meal together and invite us too. And I really liked these gestures.

MI: Very, very nice. The studentship, in Timișoara, did you choose to stay here? Was it an option? Your sister, you say, also studied medicine in Timișoara? Did she stay in Romania?

NRK: No, my sister left after she finished. We finished medicine in 2004. After I finished, she went back to India. But, in the meantime, I received a scholarship, because of the very good grades I had in college, I received a scholarship from the Romanian state. I really thank the Romanian state for giving me a scholarship, to do my first specialization, which is pediatrics! My sister returned to India, to my parents, she took the difference exam, there because we have to take an exam, when we return and she stayed there, started working for the state and did her residency there. But I stayed in Timisoara, because I really liked Timisoara and especially if I received the scholarship from the Romanian state, I said that this is a sign from God to stay in Timisoara further.

MI: Here, a very good sign. I know that life has also reserved an obstacle for you.

NRK: Yes, that's right. In the last year of pediatrics, when I was in pediatric residency, in the last year, in 2009, I had a serious health problem, which left me paralyzed for several years. And after that I was on crutches, first in a wheelchair, then on crutches and with impaired vision and so on, I had a lot of health problems. This was another reason, after I had finished my specialty, to stay in Timisoara, because the treatment for my disease, I suffer from multiple sclerosis... the treatment did not exist in India, that is, we give interferon which does not have the same effects. But I thank the doctors in Romania, in Timisoara, who introduced me to the national program of drugs for multiple sclerosis and, thanks to this program, you see that now I am walking and I arrived on my own feet, not in a wheelchair or on crutches, at your studio. So... this treatment really had good effects and this is another reason why I stayed in Timisoara, in Romania.

MI: So coming to Romania was also an extra chance.

NRK: Exactly, yes, I am really satisfied and more than that I want to emphasize that, on this occasion that I am here with you, I want to thank my colleagues, from all the hospitals, who helped me, to all my friends, all my neighbors who helped me, because my parents were not getting a visa to Romania to come and help me for a long time. And all these years when I was with serious medical problems, my colleagues helped me and, especially, Romanians who didn't even know me. When they heard, they jumped to help me.

MI: So, at that time, the family was unable to come because of bureaucratic procedures?

NRK: Bureaucratic, visa-related, yes. Sometimes they succeeded, but they received the visa for a very short period of time and sometimes they didn't. And it was very complicated and very hard for me to survive here alone, but I thank the Romanians, as I said, I repeat, I really thank all my

colleagues, my neighbors who helped me for years to come.

MI: A great example of solidarity. That's right. Are these problems still there? Can your family be with you?

NRK: Now, being a Romanian citizen, that I received citizenship in 2017, finally, after a very hard fight of almost 18 years... I received citizenship and, after citizenship, my parents received permanent residency in Romania which is extended every five years. But during those five years they can come whenever they want and I can stay with me whenever they want. So now I have solved the situation after I received citizenship, but before it was enormously difficult.

MI: Why was it so difficult to obtain citizenship?

NRK: I came on a student visa and, as a student, the years are counted half. Normally, if someone comes for work or through marriage, it takes about eight years, five-eight years to receive citizenship. Me, being on a student visa, it was counted half, so I had to stay here for 16 years. After 16 years, I received permanent residency and then it took two years to obtain citizenship. That's why I waited 18 years. It was a really long wait, but as my neighbor, with whom I get along very well, says, she's like my Romanian mother, that's what I call her... She says with patience, cross the sea and I really did cross this sea.

MI: Look how a Romanian proverb came true. You work at the university, you stayed at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Timisoara, where you work.

NRK: Exactly, yes. Since 2017, when I received citizenship, I have been employed at the "Victor Babeș" University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Timișoara, first as a university assistant and now, recently, this year, I have moved up, I have been promoted to head of works. And I work there with love and enthusiasm, I really like teaching. Since childhood, I have liked both teaching and medicine.

MI: What is it like to be a teacher in Romania? You like it a lot, but what is it like, looking back?

NRK: It's really cool, especially because I feel proud, that now I'm with the same professors who taught me, now I'm also a professor with them and I'm on this side of the table, so to speak. Before, I saw what student life is like in Romania and now I teach and I really like it and, compared to India, here it's more relaxed, it's more ok, there's not that big barrier between student and professor like in India. There it's very hard to talk to professors or raise your hand, it takes a lot of courage, let's say, in India, to ask them something during classes. But here I see that the barrier is not that big and I really like it and I tell them (the students - no) that we're really friends, you can ask me anything! And they really appreciate the foreign students and the Romanian students, because I teach both the Romanian and the English language classes, and they really like me for being so casual, much more casual so that it doesn't become a barrier that obstructs the students from learning. In the end, the goal is for them to learn, not to show that we are teachers or to be arrogant, so to speak.

MI: Yes, because the students invest you with authority and a lot of trust.

NRK: That's right.

MI: You interact a lot with students, both Romanian and foreign. If you see the students who come from abroad to study here now, what is it like for them, compared to what it was like for you?

NRK: Now they have many possibilities. First, as I said, now there is Dr. Google who helps them a lot to have all the information they need and, in addition, I thank the rector and the management of the UMF who opened a counseling center where they had me advise foreign students, which helps foreign students a lot. Before I came here, both parents and students would contact me to find out all the information. I also help with the visa procedure, I also help with banks where they can open a bank account, and small things come up, but which, for them, are a challenge. And, in addition, when I come here I try to be with them day and night, 24 hours, my phone is open in case of any health emergency, anything, they can call me. And that's when I see the difference. If there was a Dr. Nillima at that time, when I came, who could help me, many problems would not have arisen. But now they have these possibilities and anyway now, with the internet, there is a lot of transparency and a lot of information that helps them a lot. And it's completely different.

MI: So the usual issues are the ones they contact you with. Do the parents contact you too,

you said, before they come?

NRK: And when parents come here, some parents come here when their child first comes to university, when they enter UMF, then the parents come and come to see me, they tell me please take care of my child, we leave him in your hands and so on. I mean, it increases trust a little, both for the parents and for the students. And then they don't mind the mental stress so much, let's say. For them it's a big thing. And I'm really happy that I manage to help them.

MI: They don't feel so far away from home anymore. Does it make their lives easier?

NRK: Yes, exactly, yes. It makes it easier, indeed, yes.

MI: It's nice to study in another city, but so far from home, it's thousands of kilometers after all.

NRK: Exactly, that's right. And with the different culture, with the different food, different traditions. It's very difficult. Some have never been allowed by their parents to go to another city, to their country. And here, they come directly into a totally different environment, it's harder to adapt, as was my case. And I understand them perfectly and that's why I try to help them as much as possible.

MI: You mentioned other food as well. How did you adapt to Romanian gastronomy?

NRK: Very hard. The first two years, three years, it was very hard, because back then, at that time, we couldn't find our spices here. Now there are many Indian shops, restaurants open in Timisoara as well. But back then, at that time, we couldn't find spices and we only put salt in our food, because we couldn't find anything else. In addition, we are strictly vegetarians and it was very hard in the first two years, after which, somehow, I started eating chicken and since then I like the schnitzel that you make, it's really good! And the eggplant salad, it's my favorite.

MI: These are at the top of Romanian gastronomy, schnitzel and eggplant salad.

NRK: Exactly. It's just that, at first, it was very difficult to adapt to the food here, but now I see that I really like it. When I go out, I really try to order Romanian food, as much as possible, because I've really gotten used to it, so to speak, and I like it.

MI: Do you have any colleagues you've shown what Indian food is like and they fell in love with it?

NRK: Yes, many of my colleagues, many friends, always ask me to cook something. Many times I have also taken Indian tea to college, to my colleagues, many times I have also brought food, I have invited them to my place, to the table, and on Diwali, which is our biggest festival. I am of the Hindu religion and we celebrate Diwali, like you have Christmas, it is the biggest holiday and then I invite all my colleagues, my dear ones, to my house, and I cook and they really like our food.

MI: And do you like Christmas here too?

NRK: Yes, of course, I also make the tree, I'm not Christian, but I make the tree and decorate the tree every Christmas at my house. And even my colleagues appreciate this one, but it's not for my colleagues, it's for me. And my kitties like to climb that tree! I mean, I really like it. I also studied in a Christian school, in India, I was at the Convent of Jesus and Mary Girls High School in India, I studied in a Christian school all my life and that's why I also read the Bible, so I had the opportunity to know about your religion, let's say. I have full respect for all religions. I am a very open person and I respect all religions. And here, when I feel, like, a little lost or a little left out, I go to the church in the center, to the cathedral.

MI: At the cathedral?

NRK: Yes, and I light candles, I pray, I mean I respect all religions.

MI: Very, very beautifully said, very beautiful and inspiring. Do you consider Romania a tolerant place from this perspective of religion?

NRK: Yes, because you also have a temple made by Romanians, I don't know if you know it's one, in Timișoara, on Ciprian Porumbescu Street, it's made by Romanians who converted to my religion. And I see that other Romanians come there to see what the culture is like, what the religion is like and so on. I mean, I've never felt any kind of discrimination based on religion. I've never felt this. On the contrary, they came to me, to Diwali, as I said, to other festivals. I went to them for Christmas, I was

invited to the Christmas meal, to Easter, to be with them and so I don't see a barrier there, honestly, of religion.

MI: Tell us a little bit about how you managed to adapt your celebration here, in Romania?

NRK: Okay, in our country, we mostly go to each other's houses, like you do, when you give gifts, you go to visit, to colleagues, to relatives. It's the same with us and my mother tries to send some specific things of ours, there are some colored powders that we draw on the ground, we put a drawing in front of the door of the house, my mother sends it to me and I do it here. My neighbors, before, were shocked: what does this do?, does it do some voodoo or some black magic or I don't know what. But after that I explained it to them and they understood, after which they even had me do it at their door when it's my holiday.

MI: They understood the meaning. What is the meaning, actually?

NRK: Let's welcome, let's welcome God into our home, our god into our home on Diwali.

MI: I understand. Yes, it's a kind of welcome decoration, so to speak. How beautiful! If we were to have a retrospective look, what would be the cultural differences between Romania and India that you perceived and impressed you?

NRK: The most, I can say from what I saw and what bothered me at first, was that all the young people leave home when they mature to reach a certain age, they leave home from their parents and live separately in other apartments. I somehow didn't like that very much, because we are used to big families living with our parents, with our in-laws and so on. But what impressed me is, regardless of the differences between them or simply because of the job or something, they live separately from their parents, but when Christmas or Easter comes they come back and the whole family has dinner together and I respect that, I really like that, I really like that gesture. Speaking of cultures, there are a lot of different customs from us, because we have several gods, for example, you have only one God, in the end there is someone supreme, up there, that's what I think, it doesn't matter what religion we are from but I really liked the cultures. The gestures of March 1, for example, March 8, I mean I like them a lot, they impress me a lot, which we don't have here.

MI: It's really, really nice to talk about Romania and Timișoara!

NRK: That's true, I'm not just saying it because I'm in front of the camera or in front of the microphone, no, it's really true what I noticed and that's why I stayed here, that was one of the reasons, I really liked it.

MI: There are more people coming to settle in Romania and maybe some are encountering legislative obstacles and so on, in terms of access to health services. What advice or recommendations, let's say, would you have for the authorities, for the educational institutions, for the health system to better support the integration of students, of professionals who come?

NRK: My recommendations will be, first of all... bureaucracy is killing us in Romania. As much as possible, let's end this problem, that is, reduce bureaucracy as much as possible, make it easy to obtain a visa, first of all. Getting a visa from Romania is harder, plus obtaining citizenship is much harder than in any other country, I'm not just talking about me, I've seen it with other colleagues. My parents are no longer co-insured with me, starting with the new law, with the new regulations, and then it will be a little harder for foreigners. that not everyone has the financial means or the ability to go after the documents. Because each procedure here costs more than time and money, it costs energy to go and stand in line and so on. Here somehow it would be better to ease the procedures.

MI: There are too many counters to wait at, too many notices.

NRK: Yes, too many opinions, too many procedures. For example, I'm talking about my mother, she was co-insured with me and, when she came, she received treatment, it was super ok for her, but now it won't be the same, we have to go to the notary's office to give a declaration that she has no income, she doesn't even have a pension from Romania, for example, and then it will be a little more complicated for me to go to so many places to do her documents and plus I need a translator, an interpreter to say ... my mother is right that she doesn't know Romanian, for example, and then we have many problems related to each other.

MI: Yes, so bureaucracy is a big problem. It is probably for all citizens of the country. What would you say to young people from India who are thinking of coming to study in Romania?

NRK: I was actually sent by UMF to an event, a big educational fair in India in March, at the end of March, to bring foreign students to Romania and there were 17 universities from Romania and over 100 countries participated in this big event, the educational fair in India to bring all the students from Asia to various countries, but also to Romania. I really want as many foreigners as possible to come here because the level of education is very good and in Romania it is somehow cheaper for foreign students to study than elsewhere, in Germany, in France, the fees are enormously high compared to Romania. The level of education, as I told you, is super ok, the standard of living is super cool, well, the standard of living is more expensive, compared to India, but, nevertheless, they have great chances and the diploma here is recognized in all Schengen countries, which is a great advantage for students who want to come here and settle in the Schengen countries or in Romania.

MI: Do they have career opportunities in Romania?

NRK: Yes, they have career opportunities in Romania, but again with the visa... let's go back, because it's very difficult to get a visa and stay and settle here, as was my case. For 18 years I didn't have any salary here, I did all my specializations on my own money as a foreign student. It was incredibly difficult for me financially, I was doing the same thing, but I didn't receive a salary, being a foreigner. Here it was more complicated, honestly.

MI: You did the residency unpaid, without a salary.

NRK: Yes, without a salary. These are the obstacles, let's say for what reason non-EU students don't really want to come here. We're talking about non-EU now. From the EU they can do their residency and maybe receive a salary during their residency. We have a big shortage of doctors, as you know, most of them left, not just because of the system, but they didn't want to stay in Romania. But most of the non-EU students who want to stay and finish their studies here, don't get a visa to continue here or don't get a salary, and then it becomes very difficult for them to pay for their residency and stay here for five years. Another five or six years depends on the specialty they choose, to stay in Romania and work without receiving a single leu in their hand.

MI: Yes, it's a situation you're reporting. What are your plans for the future in Romania and in your career?

NRK: I settled in Romania, as I said, because I had nowhere to go, it's my home now, I don't even have any Indian citizenship left, when I obtained Romanian citizenship, the Romanian passport, I had to give up my Indian citizenship because India doesn't allow dual citizenship, dual citizenship is not allowed in India. And then, this is my home, but, to be honest, I like it myself and I never thought about leaving here. If God has taken these steps for me, I will go as the One Above wants, because all the plans I made didn't work out, but everything He did worked out every time.

MI: Very nicely said and may it turn out well. For your career, what do you want, what do you dream of?

NRK: I want to be promoted more if possible, now that depends on the UMF, it doesn't depend on me, I have prepared the promotion file, now, let's see... It will be sunny there on my street, I am positive that I don't see why not and I also want to be employed as a doctor, to have integration after so many specialties. I really want to have integration at the hospital and now we will see how all the plans will align. With patience, as I said before.

MI: With patience we cross the sea. At the end of our discussion, if you were to describe the new house, meaning it's not so new anymore, the house you have, in one word, what would that be?

NRK: Peace and tranquility.

MI: Thank you very much for our discussion.

NRK: Thank you for inviting me, thank you very much, thank you.



Romania is a place where you can build a family

Montez Liberi (Indonesia)

Mihaela Ioncelescu: Montez, how would you describe Indonesia to someone who has never been there?

Montez Liberi: Indonesia is a beautiful country, there are many people, but still, yes, it is comfortable to live, it is still okay, it is a beautiful place.

MI: What is daily life like?

ML: Daily life is, in my opinion, from my point of view, totally different from that of city people, you know, because I lived on a small island before, so I would wake up a little later than a lot of normal people, I wouldn't go to the office, I would walk as much as I could.

MI: It seems like life is good. Is it harder?

ML: It's a good life. Actually, is it harder? It's harder when tourists don't come, because we have some problems, Indonesia is a land of fire, a lot of things happen, volcanoes, tsunamis, it's like earthquakes, so many times in the past... from 2017 to 2019, there was already a volcano, an earthquake.

MI: God forbid!

ML: Sort of, you know, and then, after that, the last thing, the one that really hit us, was Corona.

MI: And what was life like after that?

ML: I moved here.

MI: You moved here. What do you miss most about Indonesia?

ML: To buy cheap food on the street.

MI: Oh, seriously?

ML: I miss it a lot.

MI: Before coming here, what did you imagine about Romania?

ML: Before I lived here, because I came here in 2015, the first time.

MI: Okay..

ML: Then, after that, the second trip, in 2020. Then, when I moved here, it was already different. When I moved, I was thinking, yeah, I'm a little stressed. I don't know if I'll be able to speak the language, if I'll be able to find a job, anything like that.

MI: Is Romanian difficult?

ML: Oh, yes.

MI: Do you think it is difficult?

ML: Yes.

MI: Why?

ML: I don't know. For me it's difficult, yes, but because we Indonesians don't have grammar, we don't have present tense, we don't have rules, anything like that. That makes it quite difficult to translate into Romanian. You have, you have a lot of...

MI: Many times forms of...

ML: Many, yes. Of verbs. Yes. And then you have feminine, you have masculine. We don't have that.

MI: Oh, that's interesting. What was your first culture shock when you first arrived in Romania?

ML: Just the wind, the weather.

MI: The weather, why? How is it different?

ML: Because our body, you know, our body can't survive. It's like we have different degrees. You have it about every three months, it's different... Between winter and summer, there's almost a 50 degree

difference. We never have that 50 degree difference. With us, the difference is only 5 degrees, 7 degrees, every day, you know? But you in a year, you have from minus 10 to 40.

MI: I understand.

ML: So it's a 50-degree difference. Your body is used to that, but our body isn't, you know?

MI: How are Romanian summers? How do you feel?

ML: It's hotter than here. Many Romanian friends said Oh, Montez, you'll be happy. Summer is coming. It's not true. It's too much for us, you know? Here it's 32, 34 at most. We never get 40. I can't stand it. It's like ... And it's dry weather here. Yeah. Your head hurts, you know?

MI: How was the transition from Indonesia to Romania, especially to Timisoara? How was it for you? The hardest moments, the most beautiful moments?

ML: The hardest part is, yeah, building a company. That's the hardest thing, building a company, doing your own business here. And the easiest part is that it's easy to go out at night, alone, as a woman, it's not a big deal, you know? I don't have to worry about that. In Indonesia it's different, you know?

MI: Do you feel much safer here? In Timișoara?

ML: Yeah. It's a good city, good economy, but not as crowded as Bucharest, you know? And not as cold as Brussels.

MI: Indeed. You run a restaurant. How did this idea come about and what does this restaurant mean to you?

ML: The idea came about because, yeah, I worked in hospitality. In Indonesia I also opened a restaurant for foreigners, as a kind of consultancy, something. So that's what I know how to do, you know? And then, here I saw that you don't have, in Romania there is no Indonesian restaurant. So I thought it was a good market to open a restaurant, an Indonesian restaurant, you know? And people in Timisoara are more, yeah, more attentive, more open-minded. So maybe it's easier to start a business. That's what I thought before.

MI: I see. Can you remember what was the hardest part about bringing the authentic taste of Indonesia to Romania?

ML: The spices.

MI: The spices?

ML: Yes.

MI: Seriously? Aren't we used to them?

ML: Uh, I do some adaptations, but it's not enough, you know? We need a specific ingredient from Indonesia. And then, Indonesian food is not the same as Vietnamese food or Chinese food. Some spices are different, so you don't find them in the market here. For Chinese food, you find a big market here for Chinese, Vietnamese, because they are also famous. But for Indonesian food, no, there is no market for spices.

MI: Mm-hm. So the ingredients and maybe the logistics, bringing them here to Romania from Indonesia?

ML: Uh, now it's quite difficult. You have to have a large quantity, order a large quantity, a container... and documents, something like that. And here it's expensive to have a warehouse to store this amount of things. Then the weather is different, how to store them in winter or summer. We haven't learned about that, so now we only order from Holland. Some spices we can order for four months, we store them. So, yes, it's easier for us like that now.

MI: What about your employees? Are they Indonesian too?

ML: Yeah... uh, there's one, two, three, four, four Indonesians. And one from Myanmar.

MI: Do you prefer working with them? Is it harder to work, for example, with Romanians?

ML: Yes.

MI: And why?

ML: Because they don't eat spicy food. Because, yeah, people work. Yeah, I've known, I've had Romanian employees before, but, uh, yeah, it's difficult. They don't eat spicy food, and then there's, when we're making chili, they can't stay in the kitchen, they have to go outside, it's quite difficult, and communication too. Some of them didn't speak English... or me, I try to speak Romanian. Now I know Romanian, in the kitchen. So, yeah.

MI: Is it difficult to bring Indonesians here to work in Romania? Is it difficult to bring people here?

ML: Yes, it's hard.

MI: Why?

ML: Yeah, because, uh, the documents, you know, from the beginning, we have to do something from Indonesia, but it takes a month, two months to get these documents. I spent about a year, a year and a half finishing the documents, the ones from Romania, from the Romanian government. We started maybe, around 2024, we started for two Indonesians, to come here. And so far nothing has been resolved.

MI: The documents are not ready yet?

ML: Yes.

MI: Oh, so bureaucracy is a major obstacle.

ML: Actually, it's not that difficult, but it takes a long time. And then, it's like, when we do something... We ask is it right? Yes, it's right! but sometimes the government makes a mistake and just rejects our work. Yes, so we have to reapply, start over.

MI: If you could send a message to the local or national Romanian authorities, what would you recommend to them to make integration easier for you, for your workers, for foreigners in Romania? What would you recommend to them?

ML: To make a bigger office, maybe, to put more people in immigration. We see, you know, the immigration office here, in Timisoara, is small, there are not many employees. So people, immigrants, stand in line until they end up sleeping on the stairs at immigration, you know, it's too much, I think, considering that Timisoara is a big city. From what I know, maybe the second largest city, economically, yes, from an economic point of view in Romania, yes?

MI: Indeed.

ML: Yeah, but on immigration, with this economy, and for example, now you have a lot of public construction, you're building a lot, IKEA, a lot of things, right? So you need employees and you're going to need immigrants. So you need a bigger office.

MI: A bigger office.

ML: Yes, a bigger office, more immigration staff, so we can work faster.

MI: I understand.

ML: Because, for example, in Indonesia, I don't want to be arrogant, right? I'm from a small island, it's not that big, it's not that crowded like Bali, right? I'm from the island next door. Our immigration office is bigger, you know? And that's because the number of tourists is not as high as in Bali. But here, in Timisoara, it's so small, and there's only one person at the counter. It's like... we're waiting for hours for something that shouldn't happen, you know?

MI: I know, I understand what you mean. What other types of services would help a newcomer to Romania? I don't know, Romanian language courses, legal advice, doctors, I don't know. What do you think?

ML: I don't know, yeah, it's not a big problem for me, right now. You know, maybe transportation, because now it's quite difficult to take a bus, something like that, because the employee now, it seems to get there faster walking than by bus.

MI: Is walking faster than the bus? In Timișoara?

ML: Yes. Yes. Because before I worked at a restaurant, before I opened Teso Bali, and I used to go by bus, I used to wait 40 minutes for a bus in the city, not outside the city, right? Inside Timisoara. And then the lines are not connected, you know? You have to walk another 200 meters to find another bus if you have to take two different lines.

MI: The connection isn't really...

ML: They are not interconnected. Yes.

MI: Yes, that's a problem. How do you see your future here? Do you plan to stay in Romania long term?

ML: Yes, because I have my daughter here. My daughter is Romanian.

MI: Is your husband Romanian?

ML: Yes. And then the education here is, for me, from my point of view, better than in Indonesia. If you want to have the same quality of education, you have to pay a lot of money there.

MI: Is the education system free here too?

ML: Yes, it's free. And for me it's good. It's, somehow, better. I don't know what other people think, but for me it's better. Yes.

MI: And the healthcare system? What do you think about it?

ML: Yes, he's good too.

MI: Okay. Have you had any problems so far?

ML: I've never had any problems. My husband has a lot.

MI: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. If you could bring one thing from Indonesia to Timisoara, what would it be?

ML: Um, what? Sorry. I don't know.

MI: You have everything you need here. You don't lack anything.

ML: Yes.

MI: That's really nice. What advice would you give to someone from Southeast Asia moving to a small European country like Romania? What advice would you have?

ML: Don't give up. It's like, maybe, if there's a problem with people from South Asia coming, they think this is a small country and they say it's a poor country. So they come with a Romanian visa and move to another Western country, Western Europe, right? Because they think life will be better and there will be more money there. But it's not true. It's easier here. It's not like I'm lazy or ... but it's about comparing lifestyles, because you have to work and there has to be a balance, you know, between lifestyle and work.

MI: I know.

ML: If you're in Western Europe, maybe you can't have a lifestyle. You have to go out for a beer, spend five euros. So you spend your salary, so you don't want to spend it. So you don't go out. You don't have a social life. And then what for? Just work, work, work, work, work. And then you have the money. After that, you come back, you have no friends, nothing. But here, you can work, but you can also have a social life. It's not that expensive. At least you can control your expenses. So don't give up. Stay here. Try a few years, a year, two years, three years. You'll see, you know? That's what I want to tell people in South Asia.

MI: I understand.

ML: Because I see, Romanians appreciate when they see Asians working. So Romania is a place where you can build a family. If not build a family... For life. It's like, if you know, because I see a lot of them, I also talk to people from Nepal, to other Indonesians. I also talked to other people from Bangladesh. They just get a visa here and leave.

MI: In Western countries.

ML: In Western countries, yes. And then they have a problem there because they have to go back

and then your life is harder. Here, it's okay, you get everything, you know, as long as you go with the flow, in the end it gets bigger. You make more money. If you stay longer, I also believe in the Romanian government... Romania will grow. Especially Timisoara.

MI: I understand. So do you think Romania is ready or is it a destination for foreign workers and their families? Yes. Is there anything we are missing to become more open or welcoming?

ML: Not here. I don't know about other parts of Romania. It's okay here. It's open.

MI: Open and welcoming.

ML: Yes.

MI: So a few questions at the end of our discussion. What is your favorite Romanian food?

ML: Tripe soup.

MI: Belly soup?

ML: Yes. I also like "cozonac".

MI: What have you learned about yourself along this journey?

ML: That I'm getting old. That I'm getting tired. That's the only thing I've learned about myself.

MI: How do you see yourself, say, in five or ten years?

ML: I'm going back to Indonesia to my retirement villa there. So I want to spend half the year here, half the year in Indonesia.

MI: You mean living in both countries. I understand. Thank you very much.

ML: Yes. With pleasure.

**An interview by Mihaela Ioncelescu - Radio România Timișoara
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)**



Beirut

Lebanon

I can say that I have two first homes: Lebanon and Romania

Marc Yaacoub (Lebanon)

Silvia Pascale: Welcome everyone! We are in multiethnic Dobrogea, in multicultural Dobrogea, here, in the Tomis Fortress, in Constanta and we are ready to learn the story of one of the most appreciated hair-stylists in Constanta, Marc Yaacoub. He is of Lebanese nationality, but he decided many years ago to come to Romania and find a second home in our country. Welcome! How did your story begin in Romania? How did you decide to leave your native country behind and come here, on the shores of the Black Sea?

Marck Yacoob: It was a ... Hello, first and foremost! It was such a coincidence ... I can't really say that it was planned for a very long time. I came to Romania in 2008. At first it was a little hard to move away from my parents, friends, home, customs, everything was new here. I didn't really have friends, work, home and slowly, slowly I tried to integrate with people, to socialize a little more. I had a little difficulty with the language.

SP: You didn't know the language at first.

MY: Not everyone knew how to speak, I can say that not everyone knew how to speak English, as it is now. And it was a little harder at first. And slowly, slowly I started to learn the key words, which I use most often, like ... To greet, good morning, what the person wants, things that were related to my work. It was a bit of a problem when I would go and, if I wanted, I needed to buy something for the house. I remember, for example, once I was at a mall, a supermarket and I wanted to buy a light bulb. And I went in and told the man, I want a lamp too. I translated it from French, lamp. I said that maybe I'm still around there. He didn't understand anything at all, why I was walking around after him and saying, lamp, light, in English. And after that I got the lamp. At first it was a little hard, but slowly, slowly I started to learn the language and things changed very well.

SP: You not only learned Romanian very well, but you are a perfectionist. You are very interested in knowing all the intricacies of the Romanian language, all the secrets, all the mysteries, all the pitfalls of the Romanian language. Perhaps the education you received at home, especially your grandparents' love for foreign languages, helped you a lot when it came to learning our language.

MY: Yes, probably these things too, because my grandfather, God forgive him, was a translator and spoke many languages. At home, I spoke, my first language was Italian, because my grandmother was Yugoslav, from the Italian side. And the first language I spoke was Italian, but I almost forgot it completely. If I didn't speak it to anyone anymore, I forgot and I spoke French a lot at home. And knowing French, it also helped me a little in Romanian. Sometimes it got me confused, because I was always trying to associate French with Romanian and it didn't always work out. But for the most part, I can say that it helped me. And slowly, slowly I started to learn a little more Romanian. I can say that it was hard in the first three or four years. After that, slowly, slowly it started to be much easier. I started to learn songs, I started to watch movies spoken in Romanian. If I was watching a movie, for example on TV, I always chose to put the Romanian translation so that I could understand certain words. However, it's not always the case. Now, I see that the Romanian translation of American movies is not 100 percent correct. And, since 2017, I moved from Constanța to Lumina. It's where I live at home. And there I have a very, very large group of friends, where I learned very, very many, very few words that are used in Romania. They are probably not, on a daily basis, through my work, through the salon, but there are certain key words that ... There are certain jokes, certain things that a foreign citizen sometimes doesn't understand. There are many more that sometimes someone tells me and he says you didn't get the joke, right? I can't say that I have a very, very dear word. There are many words that have such memories. For example, besides good morning and what are you doing?, the first word I learned was mirror. And I think the day I learned the word mirror I used it about 30-40 times. I was shouting around the living room, mirror, mirror, where's the mirror? Give me the mirror! There are other words, too, that have stories behind them, but they're not stories to talk about like that.

SP: What is your fondest memory from Romania? From the first years when you tried to adapt and transform this place into a space where you felt truly comfortable and happy.

MY: Memories related to what? Memories related to me, my personal life.

SP: About the first clients you had in the salon?

MY: The first clients, the first client I had at the reception. As soon as I arrived from the airport, at half past 10, a quarter to 11, the first client was waiting for me on the chair. I still had my luggage with me, I entered the salon. Hello, hello. Ah, I guess you're Marc! Yes. And she's the first client I had, I remember very well, she still comes to me today. And I really, really care about all of them. Well, I don't even, I can't call them clients anymore. They are clients that I've known since 2008, since I came here. With many, many of them, for example, we go out, come to my house, we talk, we know a lot of personal things, about each other, I mean we've been talking for 17 years. It's not, it's not a little, and I don't have this client connection between me and most of them anymore.

SP: You are friends, you are friends, and all these dear people who came to your side made this stay in Romania more pleasant and more... stable.

MY: Yes, it took a while. It took a while. A little longer. After I came in 2010, I went back to Lebanon for a short period, because I had to get married. I got married. Look, this is a phase where everyone laughed at me. Working with women all the time, I didn't really hear the word "I got married" in the salon. And the clients would always say "I got married, I got married, I got married." And when someone asked me, "What are you doing? Why are you going to Lebanon?", I would say, "I'm going to get married." And they would say, "I got married" is for women, for men, you have to say, "You're going to get married!" So... Yes. In 2010, I got married, I came here with my wife and... in 2011, one of the very important moments that you asked me about earlier was the birth of my first child. And it was hard because I was alone, my wife and I. I didn't really have parents, I didn't really have friends, I went to work, I had to come back home, we couldn't go out almost anywhere because we didn't have anyone to leave the child with, basically. And things started to change in 2017. In 2017, after I moved home, things changed, like a lot. I mean, the oldest child was already six years old. In 2015, I had my second child, Brian, and if I had to go to an event, an engagement, a wedding, a baptism, a baby shower, any kind of event, I had some very good friends who could come and stay at home with the children for a while or sometimes I would take the children and they would stay with their children.

SP: When you arrived in Romania, what did you like the most? And what did you dislike the most about Romanian customs?

MY: What did I dislike? I didn't really dislike anything about Romanian customs. I mean... There are a lot of customs that are probably like that. Well, not necessarily customs, but there are a lot of things that we are similar to. At least here, in Dobrogea, where there are a lot of Macedonians. And we are also like that, I mean... How should I put it? Customs at home, there are several things. I mean, I find myself very, very much in certain customs that, for example, mostly Macedonians have. And there are very, very many Romanians. When it comes to, for example, religion, I am an Orthodox Christian, and this is an Orthodox country... when it comes to religion, for example, holidays, like Easter, like Christmas, like all of these, they are celebrated the same way as we do.

SP: And what dishes do you cook on holidays? When it's Easter, do you make pasca, the cozonac?

MY: I usually cook too. I really, really like cooking. The first part, I don't like cleaning up after it! The first part, I really like preparing food. I usually don't cook for the holidays. We always get together with friends. I only cut a pig at my house once, after I moved in my first year, in 2017. Besides the fun you have when you sit and cut a pig and you also sit with your friends, cold outside, with a brandy, something, it doesn't really make sense to me. Because I don't eat just any meat, because it's pork, because it's ram, if the meat is, for example, very dry, I don't eat it. If they have something I simply eat, I buy it right away and cut the piece I need. This is related to the Christmas pig cutting, for example. There are many things about food that I really like, such as stuffed cabbage. After I eat a plate of boeuf salad and eat another one, about seven, eight sarmales come in. In terms of food... I didn't eat at all before. Two years ago I started eating, I didn't eat cold. Simply, when I looked at it,

how it dances like that from all the gelatin, I did n't want to eat it at first. I started heating it up a little. I liked the taste of the meat, how it's seasoned, all that, but I would melt all the fat and eat the meat. Now I started eating it. Now I actually eat it.

SP: You also like sweets made in Dobrogea, the Dobrogean raisin pie, the "cozonac".

MY: I really like cheese and leek pie.

SP: Still Macedonian! Yes.

MY: And I have a friend in Lumina who makes the best pie I've ever eaten in Romania. Whether it's a holiday or not, from time to time I say to his mother: Please, madam, can you make me a pie so I can eat it too?

SP: And always find understanding.

MY: Yes.

SP: How would you describe the people of Dobruja, how would you describe the Romanians? Do they seem friendly to you, do they seem quick to help you in everything? With their noses in the air... how would you describe them?

MY: There are all kinds of people. There are people who jump in to help without asking, without demanding. There are others that I probably should ask. There are a lot of people who believe in ... Now I'm trying to become that kind of person, if someone doesn't ask for help, don't offer it. Because if they don't ask for it, they don't need it. And the moment I offer them help, it's like it's not really good. And it's something I'm trying to change, for example with me. But there are all kinds of people. There are very kind people, there are very good people, there are bad people, they're like everywhere else in this world, but mostly not. I really like the city. That's why I decided to stay, that's why I didn't ... I had a lot of thoughts about moving, for example, to Bucharest. But no, I simply didn't find myself there. A lot of congestion, probably if I hadn't gone to Lumina, it would have been a little easier for me to go to Bucharest. Because even here, in Constanta, I can't say that I have many friends in Constanta with whom I can go out, do this and that. In Lumina, there, there is a commune. People know each other, children are on the street, playing with bicycles, with balloons. It's different. It's, as you say, for example, someone who lives in the capital and someone else who lives in the country. A child who is six or seven years old and grew up in the country and one in Bucharest, the one from the country doesn't even know what a telephone means and what it means yet, the other one is on the phone all day. And, all the time, children from the country, people, normally, from the country, are much more for me. They are much nicer, they are much more ok, they are much more ... much more sociable. Here, for example, there are many people who are sociable. There are others who come and talk to you, simply, to get certain information and then go on, to gossip further.

SP: You are today, you are currently one of the best hair stylists in Constanța. Please tell me about your beginnings. Who helped you discover this world where you make people look better and happier? Your grandfather, your father?

MY: At the age of one, one and a little when I started to walk a little on my feet and on all fours, I was in my dad's salon. That's where I grew up. And being there all the time, for me, it wasn't even a job, like a second home... and in a second home. At the age of 13-14 I started helping my dad at the salon. Do you want money? Yes, you have to work for money. And I would go and work with my dad at the salon. I can't say that I really liked this field there. It was still like that, a smaller town, the clients were the neighbors, I already knew everyone, I knew all the stories, I was sick of the stories, but I worked there with him simply so that I could make some money too, to enjoy him. When I grew up a little older, I moved and worked with a very good friend in Beirut, in the capital, and there it was completely and completely different. The clients were different, the salons were different, there was a very large salon where we had 36 employees, we had all kinds of services, from washing your hair to the smallest service, to the Turkish bath. We also had a dietician. It was a fairly large center where many, many clients came every day. Many celebrities also came... and with all due respect to everyone. It's different when the neighbor who lives next door comes to a groomer who knows all her stories and when a celebrity appears that you don't see every day, you don't really meet her on the street or in the mall because they don't really frequent these places and she would actually come to

the salon to ask for your help so she could go out to an event. And a lot changed there, and the way of working and everything was more upgraded, it was different. And that's where I started working and I really liked the job. That's where I started learning and I had a place to learn from, because there were some people who worked there with us who were very, very good in this field! And I took a little bit from each one, I memorized them. I thank a person who traumatized me in my childhood when he kept telling me: look, look, look! Because I couldn't take it anymore, I told him: I'm tired of looking! And he told me you have to look, let your eyes get tired! And I said: it's not just my eyes that are tired, I'm tired of everything! I can't look anymore, I want to start working! And I left the salon two or three times. He would come home, pick me up from home, take me back to work, and all the things I saw stayed somewhere in my head, and when the time came for me to be able to bring them out and start working and using them, I used them and they were really useful, and for that I really thank him and appreciate him a lot.

SP: All that advice helped you, all those childhood experiences helped you become the man you are today. Is it hard to find a recipe for success in a foreign country?

MY: Yes. You know, we have a saying, I don't know, I think it probably exists in Romania too. The saying goes: This child, when you throw it, comes back standing! It stands, it doesn't matter which direction you throw it! There are people who can handle it, no matter what, and there are others who you just give them a hard time with, and they just can't handle it. With all the problems, the experiences, all the things that happen to us every day, these are things that harden us, build us, make us move forward, and the more of these experiences, whether they are good or bad, the more experiences we have, the more we can move forward, and it would be good to use them all the time. And that's what I did... that they were good, that they were bad, I used them, I try as much as possible not to take it to heart if I have something, a problem, your Romanian saying is a fait accompli... I have nothing more to do, if it happened, it happened. It's ok, for example, if it would be good for me to say that I made a mistake towards a person, to tell them: I'm sorry. Yes, ok, I say it, but nothing else changes anything, it's something that has already happened, it's already been done and I can't go back so, all the time, after the experience I had, any problem I have, I try to leave it behind. I did it, I try to keep it in mind all the time, not to redo it and to be able to find a better version of myself.

SP: Did your wife adapt more easily than you?

MY: No, much harder!

SP: Much harder?

MY: Much harder, because, first and foremost, she had many years in which she stayed home with the children. When I came to work, we socialized, I had someone to talk to, she stayed, she only talked to the child, who doesn't really talk and to the walls that don't talk either, and she stayed home from morning to night. Our schedule is quite long and, according to her studies, she is a mechanical engineer and she came and didn't really find work here, After a fairly long period, she found a job, but it didn't take long until the company went bankrupt, problems, something, I don't know... I know the company closed. And then she stayed home and now she helps me here at the salon with all the paperwork, primary accounting, she takes care of all of this, I mean, a hard job for me, that's what I consider it! And, if necessary, she also helps me at the salon when needed.

SP: After more than 17 years of living in Romania, can you say that our country is a "second home" for you?

MY: I can say that I have two first homes. I can't even say that it's a second home and the first home is the second, because the house is not stone, the house is people, family, friends, the entourage... This is the home, where a person finds themselves! In Lebanon I still have family, I have parents, I have friends and here I have a lot of friends and I have a lot of friends who have become almost family. And I can't even put them in second place, they are some people who are really, really dear to me, we get along very well, I spend much more time with them than I spend with the rest of my friends in Lebanon or with my parents. I mean, I live here, I have a house here, here I have made my present, probably my future too. I have done absolutely everything here and I can't consider it a second country. At the moment, legally speaking, it's probably not my country yet, I submitted

the citizenship documents, unfortunately, after the problems with the pandemic the schedule has changed a lot and I've been waiting for a year and four months already and absolutely nothing has appeared in the file yet. But anyway, when I submitted, they told me there that I would probably have to wait about two years, at least! But I am a pretty patient person, I work with women after all, and I am waiting. That moment will come! That moment will come, I will go and get my citizenship. The good part here is that a person, whether he is a citizen or not, is treated just as well as any other person, meaning I have absolutely all the rights that any Romanian has, except for the right to vote. Before, for example, I, being a Lebanese citizen, with my passport I could not, for example, travel around Europe, now that Romania has joined Schengen and so this problem no longer exists... and the only thing that remains is, simply, to be able to vote. Politics is not a very ... strong point for me, but, in the future, if I had this right, I would probably go and vote!

SP: Because our show is coming to an end, I would like to ask you if you had to start over, would you take the same path, the road to Romania?

MY: Yes, yes! I would change only one thing, just one. An unpleasant situation that I don't really like to talk about, to change it and fix it, to make it different, so that it doesn't end up where it ended up, to prepare myself in advance, probably to talk, you see if we keep going like this, I've seen the future, and we break up and it's not something I want!

SP: Things can always be fixed! Thank you very much for this honest interview, for opening your heart, for talking about your beginnings in our country and for telling us in detail what it is like to live in a country, initially foreign, but which then becomes your second home, turns into your friend, turns into your home and the place where you can be happy and dream! Thank you!

MY: Thank you too!

**An interview by Silvia Pascale - Radio România Constanța
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)**



Rabat

Morocco

In Romania, there are certain values that no longer exist elsewhere: support between neighbors, people helping each other, and a sense of community.

Zouhair Hary (Morocco)

Adelina Tocitu: I want to introduce you to Zouhair Hary. He was born in Morocco, but moved to Italy with his family when he was a child. Later, he continued his studies in France and eventually returned to Morocco as an adult to work. However, he soon realized that working in the banking sector was not for him. At the age of 22, he joined the French Institute in Morocco and, shortly after, he started teaching management and marketing at a higher education institute. He speaks French, English, Italian, Arabic, and is now learning Romanian. Seven years ago, while looking for new opportunities, he was contacted by L'Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie. He was offered a position and sent to Galați, Romania. And so began his adventure in Romania, with a trip to Galați.

Thank you for this interview here, at the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine.

What did you feel when you first arrived in Romania, more precisely in Galați?

Hary Zouhair: Well, it was a surprising feeling, let's say, because, first of all, I had no expectations. And from the day I arrived, things were really really cool, really good. It was like I had been there for a long time. I was impressed, I was amazed by how quiet the city was compared to the cities I had been to before. And also the lack of traffic noise and the Danube area, so I had a good feeling from the first week.

AT: Did you encounter any adaptation challenges at first?

HZ: Yes, there are definitely many challenges, especially when you change a country or a culture. But I can say that one of the biggest challenges was adapting to the cultural codes, but also dealing with some bureaucracy issues. But, in general, working with my Romanian colleagues meant, in fact, adapting to the way of working and the mentality.

AT: Because you mentioned your colleagues, your Romanian colleagues, how were you received by your colleagues and students there?

HZ: It was a very warm welcome, especially from the students, from the first day. And from my colleagues, who really helped me adapt faster to the environment and the culture.

AT: How was the transition from your professional life in Morocco to your new role in Romania?

HZ: I can say that it was a big step, let's say, and a very hard change, even brutal. And yes, the fact that I am adaptable and can really feel good wherever I go made it a little harder to adapt at first, but overall, I can say that I survived, and the proof is that I am here for the sixth year.

AT: You lived in Morocco, you were born there. You lived in Italy. You went to France for studies, and now you are in Romania. What cultural differences have you noticed between these countries?

HZ: Well, I can say that what has surprised and impressed me honestly, since I arrived here, in Romania, are certain values that, I think, don't exist in other places. For example, the support between neighbors, people helping each other, and also the sense of community, which is quite strong here. And you see that, for example, at Christmas or Easter, when you see that everyone is doing their best to celebrate with family and friends, but especially with family. So, we are noticing this. In other countries, you don't really see such values.

AT: After Galați, after spending a few months in Galați, you came here, to Bucharest. And we are having this conversation here, in Bucharest. Tell us about this new experience in Romania.

HZ: I really appreciate my first month in Galați. I think that after living in big cities, I needed a smaller space where I could feel less stressed and also without noise, either from traffic or people. But later

on, the fact that I have friends in Bucharest... I started coming to Bucharest frequently and I think I'm the type of person who likes big cities, so I like the capital and also I think that in Bucharest there is something for everyone.

AT: So, what does it mean to you to work for L'Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie here, in Romania, here, at this university?

HZ: Well, working for L'Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie means building bridges between cultures through language, through the French language. And Romania, now, is making a lot of efforts and carrying out very important projects to connect with other cultures and, especially, with French-speaking countries and, at the same time, receiving students from different countries or sending Romanian students to different countries. I think it's something that we should really value more.

AT: Since you mentioned culture, what do you appreciate most about Romanians?

HZ: Well, let's say about Romania in general, what I appreciate the most is, as I mentioned, the sense of community and the fact that Romanians are really very welcoming. From the first contact, you don't feel rejected, but rather a certain curiosity.

AT: We are honest.

HZ: Yes. And that's really good. They're here and they're trying to help. And, especially for foreigners who come here, you won't feel alone. So, I really appreciate this human contact, and in terms of Romanian culture, I love the food; Romanian food is really one of the best, let's say, cuisines. And, yeah, when there's a celebration you really feel this... this feeling.

AT: What is your favorite food?

HZ: Uh... I can show you the list, but my favorite, first place, number one on my list, is zacusca. I really, really like zacusca. Especially if it's with bread, homemade bread, it's really delicious. Yes. Zacusca, and then I can also mention sarmale.

AT: I said you know many foreign languages, but now you are learning Romanian. How are you doing?

HZ: I'm doing well. I think I've learned enough to get by with basic everyday things, but I'm still improving my Romanian, especially through interactions with my colleagues, with students, and also wherever I go I try to, even though my Romanian is not, let's say, perfect, but I really think it's a way to respect the country you're in, to try to speak their language. I think it's a form of respect.

AT: Do you think Romania is the second, is it the second home for you? Because I mentioned Morocco, I mentioned Italy, you were in France.

HZ: Well, I think that now Romania, for me, has become, has become a second home, especially after these years. Now I'm in my sixth year and, yes, I can say that it is a second home, a home where you feel truly accepted, you feel safe and respected.

AT: Have you made any lasting friends here?

HZ: Yes, definitely. I have, I've made some good friends, either with Romanians or with international friends who either live here, expatriates who live here, in Bucharest, or are just visiting or come regularly. So, yes.

AT: How has your perception of Romania changed since you first arrived?

HZ: Well, I can notice, especially after the Pandemic, certain aspects that have changed compared to the first time. I can say that many aspects have changed, of course, but, in general, culturally, things have remained the same. Yes, I felt a change, a change for the better. And I hope that Romania, now, if we look at the international geopolitical context of recent times, is facing many, many challenges. I hope that it will remain, that is, Romania will not forget, let's say, the spirit of the Romanian people and of Romanian culture and society. This human interaction and this sense of community. I hope that it will not lose them.

AT: Do you feel unsafe? Do you have moments?

HZ: I feel, I really feel safe here. And compared to all the stereotypes we hear about Romania or other countries, I think Romania is one of the safest countries.

AT: Do you feel unsafe sometimes? Because you mentioned the problems, the geopolitical ones.

HZ: Yeah, I mean, like everywhere, we have moments where we don't really know what's going to happen. But I think if we live in the present and focus on the present and the positive things, rather than worrying about something that we haven't experienced yet.

AT: Would you recommend Romania as a professional or educational destination for young people?

HZ: Definitely 100... let's say 110 percent! I recommend it and, in terms of my work, part of it is also to promote these, these good aspects of the educational system and Romania as a host country for international students.

AT: You mentioned bureaucracy. Do you have any advice for the authorities to improve something?

HZ: Well, I think every country has its share, it's a slice of the "pie" of bureaucracy... And, yes, I would like more flexibility and also more understanding of what we face, as expatriates here. If you are not with someone, for example a person from Romania or a citizen, a person who can help you, you feel lost. And I think Romanians share the same feeling when ... when they are in other countries. So, I think, I hope!, more understanding and also for things to be more flexible and easier for both Romanian citizens and expatriates.

AT: What are your future plans? I know you have some new projects coming out this fall.

HZ: Well, one thing is for sure, I'm staying here. I think it will be hard to send me out of the country.

AT: We don't want that.

HZ: But, yeah, I'm definitely staying here for a few more years. And I don't know, I'm open to other opportunities. Let's see how...

AT: Do you have any wishes related to, I don't know, other countries or new adventures?

HZ: Not yet. For now, I really don't see myself leaving right away. And I think it would be hard for me to find another country to live in, especially after what I've experienced here, I mean the good things I've seen here. It would be hard for me to find another, another country right away.

AT: Do you have a message for Romanians regarding those who come here from other countries, to study, learn, live, start a new life?

HZ: Well, I think, from my experience, I hope that Romanians will be more... let's say not to be too harsh on their country. And also to try to see it in a positive light, and to present Romania in a positive way. Yes, there are many things that are not exactly, "rosy"; life is not rosy here, but problems are everywhere. So, let's show or at least talk about the positive things as we talk about the negative ones, not just show the negative aspects, the negative things.

AT: Can you please tell us about your projects here, about the students you work for?

HZ: So, the main ... my activities here are: part of my mission is to teach French, and the second part is to promote the university I work at as a French-speaking/French-speaking environment. So that international students, especially French speakers, can come and study in programs here, instead of going to, I don't know..., France or Belgium. Romania is part of the International Organization of La Francophonie, and many universities now have programs in French and also teach different subjects in French. We also focus on projects that can help students improve their skills, so that they can more easily find or integrate into the labor market, find a job, if they want to work in a French-speaking environment or go to study or work in a French-speaking country.

AT: And how are they doing?

HZ: Well, from what we all say, I mean me and my colleagues, as expatriates, what we have observed about Romanians: in general, Romanians are very good at learning foreign languages. They have

the ability to speak different languages. So, most of them really speak, they have a very good level of French. And for some, even though they didn't have French in primary school or high school, it makes it quite a difficult task, but the fact that there are centers, we call them Francophone centers, in every university makes it easier for them to improve their French. As for international students, most universities here in Romania host; I will talk about our university. First of all, most of them come from France, French students, who come to study here, opt for some programs in French. We also have from Switzerland, from Belgium, from Italy, from countries in North Africa, also from Cameroon, Senegal, etc. And, yes, there is also the Erasmus program, which can help students come for a short mobility, but now there are also more programs that can help students go for longer mobilities.

AT: What would you say to people, especially those from your country? Because I think you have friends there. If they want to come here, to Romania, what would you say to them?

HZ: Well, I think it's simple, as advice for those who want to come to Romania for the first time, either to visit or to live here, is to leave your expectations at home and come to Romania with an open heart, an open mind and you will definitely not regret it.

AT: Thank you very much for this discussion, for telling us about your experience here, and good luck with all your projects and your life here. Thank you very much.

HZ: Thank you very much.

An interview by Adelina Tocitu - Radio România București FM
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)



If you learn the language, the Romanian government is very good to workers, because we don't have any discrimination here. Learn the language and respect the culture!

Uva Raj Lamichhane (Nepal)

Iulia Hau: Hi! Next to me is Uva Lamichhane. He is from Nepal and today we will have a conversation about his experience here, as a foreigner. So, tell me a little about how you ended up in Romania, was it a difficult process, was it expensive or was it a smooth one?

Uva Raj Lamichhane: I was in Dubai before.

IH: For how long?

URL: I worked there for about two years and I met a Romanian agent. He was in Dubai with his family and I think they were doing this kind of business as a sideline. I mean, they send people to Romania from Dubai.

IH: Did he live in Dubai or was he just passing through?

URL: Yes, he lived in Dubai with his family. And I found them on social media and tried to get in touch with them. That's how I found out about a very good job offer ... I mean, attractive, for Romania. Before that, I didn't know anything about Romania. It was the first time I heard the name Romania. Then I searched on Google. Back then, there was no AI. I mean, ChatGPT didn't exist. So I searched on Google and found out a few things.

IH: But what was attractive about the job offer or did you say...

URL: Both the job offer and the country.

IH: What did you find attractive about the country and the job offer?

URL: Actually, the job offer — the salary was high before, at that time, in 2019.

IH: Was it higher than what you were earning in Dubai?

URL: Yes, what I was earning in Dubai was less than that. That's a very nice point. You know, in Dubai we don't pay taxes to the government. Income tax — nothing. But unfortunately, here we pay more than 45% tax. So, that was the point of confusion.

IH: Because when you heard about salary, you were told the salary before taxes.

URL: Exactly.

IH: So they showed you the gross salary...

URL: ...not the net salary. So I thought that was the net one.

IH: And what was your reaction when you got here and realized that more than 40% of the amount...

URL: I was surprised.

IH: In what way?

URL: Definitely surprised. It's like almost 50% gone.

IH: But is that okay? Was there still a good amount left even after paying taxes?

URL: No, it's better now; it's okay now. I learned a few things and for now I'm able to do my job. So, it's better now. But at that time, as a beginner... what I expected and what I found here was something different.

IH: What was your reaction or what did you say? What did you feel when...

URL: No, I was surprised and checked the Romanian tax system on the internet. And I understood, okay, it was my confusion. And the agents, that agency, didn't mention anything about the tax system.

IH: They... forgot to tell you. So, what was your first job when you came here?

URL: Same type of work, similar. I work in the printing industry.

IH: Have you worked at the same job since you got here?

URL: No, I came to a printing house. Then I worked as a helper. They were printing banners and some kind of sticker paper. And that was before COVID. During COVID, something happened with the company... I mean, they said they were going to phase out the company because of COVID. And during the pandemic, their business went down. And they had some partners. They offered me: We have this situation, we're going to phase out the business because of the pandemic system. So if you want, we'll move you to the partner company. You can meet with them, talk, if you like. You can choose them. Otherwise, you can find other jobs yourself, someone will help you in a positive way. Then I met their partner. They were doing some kind of collaboration. I mean, they had the same business. But they were collaborating. And I liked that guy, their partner. He was very helpful, when I left my first company to get another work permit for myself. Until then, I had to stay home.

IH: For how long?

URL: Then, I think, almost two months. They had already applied for the work permit and it took something like this...: 45 days, more than 45 days. During that time, that guy paid me. He gave me some money while I was unemployed. The thing is, it was the pandemic period. And secondly, he paid me while I was at home. I had a very good impression... I feel that this guy has a soul. He is a kind person. So, I am still with him. I work with him until now. We have almost completed five years together. I am still with him. I am also happy. And they are happy with me.

IH: I know you're going to get permanent residency soon. Probably this year or next year.

URL: I hope, I hope. You know, there are also some terms and conditions. I have to respect them. Unfortunately, I haven't learned Romanian. And this is a barrier for me. I already had the interview to get permanent residency and they asked me a few questions. Unfortunately, I didn't understand. Because I don't know Romanian well, they said: This time we will reject you. Come next time with some knowledge of Romanian, a few words. I hope, I learn something ... I mean, I learn by myself. And I'm also trying to find some teachers who can help me. And I hope that this year I get it.

IH: Do you think the government should have offered you Romanian language classes... I mean - to you, to all of you who come here to work - do you think Romanian language classes should have been offered for free in your program? In some organized form, instead of trying to learn the language on your own?

URL: It would have been better if they had offered. Also, we have to learn, because we have to accept: if I left my country, I have to learn the other language, where I live, and I have to accept that culture. I have to get acquainted with them. I think it is also my negligence. I have already spent about five years here, but I still don't know the language. It is also our weakness. Also, some ... social NGOs that help foreigners — that is — immigrants, migration ... Those who deal with immigration projects. They should offer some kind of courses for them. Maybe some agencies offer. Maybe we don't look hard enough.

IH: I haven't heard... I only know about the IOM (IOM). They offer courses. I don't know if you had time to check with their office.

URL: They offer, but we work almost all week. And on weekends ... I mean, we work all week, and on weekends — they don't offer classes. This is a problem.

IH: They don't have classes on weekends.

URL: Yes.

IH: No. Only during the week.

URL: Yes, they have classes during the week. That's a problem.

IH: But speaking of culture... you would have to learn the culture and how things work in Romania. Were there any differences or anything that was difficult to assimilate in terms of culture when you arrived here? At least at first.

URL: It wasn't hard for me to enjoy this culture. For me, culture is both the food and the language, all

the things are... At first, with the food it was a little difficult for us.

IH: Why?

URL: Because we have some different spices, which were not available in Romania — at that time.

IH: Not even now?

URL: Now, yes. Now, in Romania, there are many foreigners. I think that Romania's economy will grow. I don't know if it's because of that or because there are no people available to work here. I heard somewhere that Romanians are also leaving for other countries, countries in Western Europe, and Asians are coming here. And they come here as workers and, little by little, when they earn some money, when they learn a business idea, they open some kind of Asian stores, Asian restaurants.

IH: Are there already Nepalese restaurants, at least in Bucharest? Or in Romania?

URL: Yes, we have many restaurants in Bucharest. I think about ten.

IH: Ten restaurants? Give me some examples. Where are they?

URL: Some of them are in Victoria Square. There's a restaurant, it's called Machhapuchhre. You know, it's the mountain.

IH: Ah...

URL: And there are some more, near Obor Square. I don't know the exact pronunciation — Obor Square, I think.

IH: Yes, that's good. You need to learn this for the interview.

URL: Everest ... you know Mount Everest ... there is an "Everest" restaurant..

IH: I think I've heard of him...

URL: Isha and Chautari, many...

IH: Would you recommend it to Romanians? Do you think Romanians would like Nepalese cuisine?

URL: Yes, yes, yes. When we visit Nepalese restaurants, the tables are almost full of Romanian customers.

IH: Do they like it?

URL: Yes, they like it. I like Romanian food too.

IH: What do you like?

URL: For me, the best: the sarmales. You know, they're very, very tasty for me.

IH: But was there anything difficult besides the food... our food doesn't taste the same as yours, but maybe something in our behavior, in our way of interacting... Or anything else that you found difficult at first?

URL: At first, only the language was difficult for me.

IH: And... But it's still difficult, right?

URL: It's still difficult. But now, at least, we can understand. I mean, now I know that people will react this way. And when I was in Dubai, when I left my country, when I entered the UAE, it was similar to our country, in Asia. I mean, not all Asian countries, but Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, some of Sri Lanka, they can speak Hindi. So, in most of the countries in the Middle East, like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Dubai, Oman, Kuwait, they can speak Hindi too. For them, the second language is Hindi, not Arabic. If you go to the UAE, if you go into a government office, if you don't know Arabic, they can speak English or Hindi.

IH: So, was it harder for you to adapt to Romanian society than to Dubai?

URL: Yes, yes, yes. It was more difficult. More difficult here. Because of the language, the food, also we have similar food in the UAE and in Nepal, India. Here the food is different. In Nepal, you know, like in Romania, people like to eat bread — something, that's what they call it. We eat rice, sometimes three times a day. At first, they say "rice" ... something, here, and it's not found in stores,

like Mega Image, Lidl.

IH: You couldn't find rice?

URL: At that time, yes.

IH: We have rice, but it's not that popular.

URL: Now they bring different types of rice, such as basmati and...

IH: Ah, it wasn't your kind of rice... Sorry, sorry, okay.

URL: Yes, now it is easy to find, even in Romanian markets you can find rice.

IH: And what do you normally eat? Do you usually cook your traditional food at home or do you eat Romanian food?

URL: Most of the time, we cook at home, to our taste. And sometimes, on the weekend, in the city, we go to a restaurant — sometimes Romanian, sometimes our own, sometimes a Chinese restaurant, to taste from all corners of the world.

IH: I know your wife is here with you. Was the process of bringing her here difficult, the paperwork process? Was it expensive?

URL: You know, it depends on the situation. If you go through agents, it's going to be expensive. They're going to charge a very high commission. If we have a good relationship with our company, if I want to bring my family, not just me, if someone wants to bring their family here, if they have a good connection, a good relationship with their company, and the company also wants to help them, it's going to be easier, right? Because we have to show proof of accommodation, that when your family comes, where they're going to stay. We have to have proof of accommodation. And we have to show a balance... In the account, in the bank account.

IH: How much?

URL: About 20 thousand lei. We have to show our transactions, bank statements, at immigration, IGI. After that, they will approve the family reunification, then we have to go to the embassy to get the visa. For normal people who don't know how to do the visa process, it's hard. And the agent, the mediator, who helps, charges a large amount of money, both in Romania and in our country. Here, too, if we go to an agency, they have a local one, in the local agency, they have a Nepalese agent, a Bengali agent, a Sri Lankan agent, they hire some Asians. I don't know if they charge the fees officially or unofficially, but they charge a lot of money.

IH: So it's easier when you're supported by the company you work for.

URL: Yes, it's very easy.

IH: This is the easier way to do it, easier than on your own.

URL: Exactly. If the company supports it, it's very easy.

IH: And your wife, you said, also works at your company.

URL: Yes, we work together.

IH: And how long has he been here?

URL: Almost two years. It'll be two years old in 2026. I mean, it's still 2025.

IH: Does she also plan to take Romanian classes?

URL: Yeah, because he understands that if we learn the language, it's going to be easier for us. Everywhere, you know, if we travel, if we live in other countries, if we understand the language, we can have a conversation with the locals. You know, we can have fun together.

IH: That's what I wanted to ask you. Do you have Romanian friends or maybe just people you hang out with outside of work?

URL: Yes. We have some colleagues, we work together. And some external ones, too.

IH: Some what?

URL: External friends. I mean, we met somewhere at social activities, during social work, during... we

do some kind of volunteer work.

IH: Tell me more, what volunteer work do you do?

URL: Sometimes our Nepali community organizes festival programs and we also help the community. Then some of our friends also bring their local friends and we meet together at such...

IH: When was the last time it happened in Bucharest — a Nepali festival or gathering?

URL: A few weeks ago.

IH: Where?

URL: In Nepal, we have different castes. We have different languages. And in Romania, too, people have formed their communities based on their culture. Some people look like Mongolians, some people look like... Mongolians mean like Japanese, Chinese, right? They have their own language, they have their own festival. We can also enjoy together, but they focus on their religious things.

IH: And this last festival or celebration...

URL: They had a celebration, I think on May 13th...

IH: On May 13th, what, what did you celebrate?

URL: Do you know, Buddha, the God Buddha? His birthday.

IH: Ah, his birthday...

URL: Last time we celebrated and there were many Buddhists, not just Nepalese, even Romanians. Did you know? There is also an association of Buddhists in Romania. They are the main organizers.

IH: Where did it take place?

URL: The Square ... do you know the Palace of Parliament?

IH: Yes.

URL: In front of the Palace of Parliament.

IH: Okay...

URL: That's where the main place is.

IH: And most people in Nepal are Buddhists?

URL: No, not most of them. But we believe in Buddha, but the main religion is Hinduism. We have a connection, a very good connection, I mean a very good connection between Buddhism and Hinduism.

IH: But most of you are Hindus.

URL: But Buddha was born in Nepal, so we love Buddha. And this kind of event we celebrate together.

IH: And do you volunteer for an association? You said there is an association that organizes these gatherings for...

URL: Not just festivals, not just cultural things. Sometimes they organize music events. We even collaborate, we hire singers from Nepal.

IH: Ah, you bring singers, artists from Nepal to perform here. When will the next concert be?

URL: Maybe in October. Because October is the time of our main festival. And people want to celebrate together. So artists are the ones who can create unity between people. If someone comes from Nepal, all the Nepalese, meaning most of the people who work in Timisoara, who work in Brasov, will definitely come to Bucharest and we can do...

IH: Where do you hold your concerts? I know that the Sri Lankans organize some big concerts at the Arenele Romane. Is that also where you hold your concerts?

URL: Uh, I heard they have a really big space. So maybe the next one will be there. But normally we do programs indoors, in event halls. The last time we did it in Piața Victoriei, it's the Radisson Blu Hotel. Behind the Radisson Hotel ... there's a really big hall, which is called Nora Hall. That's where we did it.

IH: How many people?

URL: Approximately 500 people.

IH: Only from Bucharest?

URL: Yes, only from Bucharest and a few... maybe very few from outside Bucharest or from a city close to Bucharest, like Braşov, somewhere.

IH: You also have a YouTube channel that is quite successful. It has over 40 thousand subscribers. Tell me, when did you start it? What motivated you to start it? And how has this journey been so far?

URL: When I was in Romania — from Dubai at that time there were very few Nepalese here. And I tried to explain about Romania, what it's like here, the weather, the food, the people, the work, the salaries...

IH: So you started it shortly after arriving in Romania.

URL: After I arrived in Romania, and before COVID. During COVID I wasn't working, I was staying at home. And, you know, I was giving updates about COVID, on YouTube, if something happened here or in Nepal. After that, I started giving information to our community, about visa processing and how to get a work permit. For those who want to come here and those who are going to pay a large amount of money to the agent due to lack of information. So, I'm sharing, this is the condition here. So there's no need to pay more money because you'll earn this amount. If you pay... nowadays, people pay more than five thousand euros to agents. To cover those five thousand euros we have to work for more than a year. I mean, to raise that amount of money.

IH: And you informed them about the tax system.

URL: Everything. You know, the main confusion was this.

IH: Taxes.

URL: The employment contract is in Romanian. They will think that this is their earnings. So, this is the little confusion. The main problem. But nowadays, almost all people understand that in Europe taxes are high. So, for sure, it is not the net salary. Back then it was very difficult. Now, people can understand. And at that time, there were very few Nepalese here in Bucharest. Now, we are over 20 thousand.

IH: 20 thousand only in Bucharest or...

URL: Bucharest and nearby cities...

IH: I know that of all the Asians, you are the largest community, right? Do you have any idea how many Nepalese are in Romania at the moment, approximately?

URL: 30 thousand or something like that.

IH: Spread...

URL: Yes. But, you know, we don't have exact data yet. Before Romania entered Schengen, some of our people left the country without informing immigration, somehow. So, we estimate that we are around 30 thousand.

IH: And how was your YouTube channel received? Did you get good feedback? Were people interested? Did they send you messages?

URL: Yeah. They appreciate the things they got. Normally, you know, I don't get involved in any profitable business like agent business to give out misinformation and lure people in. I told them, this is the right thing. If you believe me, that's fine. If you don't believe me, when you come here, then you'll understand and then you'll figure things out. And, at first, if someone doesn't trust what we're talking about on YouTube, when they come here, they'll figure it out: that guy was right. That's the impressive thing: people appreciate it. You know, the thing is, when I was in Nepal, I worked as a radio DJ. I also wrote a book.

IH: What was it about?

URL: Poetry.

IH: When did you have time to do all this?

URL: Oh, back then...

IH: But now, you're doing five things at the same time. You have the podcast, you volunteer, you have a full-time job, you have your wife here, what else do you do?

URL: I like doing things like that.

IH: I understand.

URL: So that's the reason. If people appreciate things, I'd like to do more.

IH: What other topics do you currently cover on your podcast? So, at first there was a lot of information about coming here, but now?

URL: Now, with the podcast, I'm talking to people who have been working here for a long time: what their experience has been like... There are also some Nepali businessmen here, who are running their businesses. They have a shop, they have a restaurant. Some of them even have a recruitment agency. I'm talking to them.

IH: Do you interview them?

URL: Yes.

IH: These are the main businesses that Nepalese have? So, restaurants, recruitment agencies, something else?

URL: For now, just these. Some of them also have cleaning companies. They supply workers to different companies. I mean, they hire people as cleaning staff, not from Nepal. They also have some locals, Romanians, who work with them. But the visible businesses are these: restaurants and recruitment. And some of them hire, I mean, they have a hostel, like a hotel. They provide accommodation, you know. For example, if you have a company, if you have five guys, you can't manage their accommodation, you give them to a hotel, a restaurant. So, some of them also do this business nowadays.

IH: So, my last question: what advice would you give to someone from Nepal who is planning to come or, better yet, who has just arrived in Romania? What do you think is the most important thing?

URL: If they have already arrived in Romania, let them learn the language first. Because if you learn the language, the Romanian government is very good with workers, because we don't have any discrimination here. They get the same salary that Romanians get. I mean, at work, we don't have discrimination here.

IH: In terms of law, you say? I mean, the legislation is the same.

URL: Yes, it's the same. So, if you learn the language, you can also complain to the authorities — in Romanian.

IH: Yes, it's always better to speak Romanian.

URL: If I go with Romanian, they will help me more. If I speak English, definitely less. So, focus on your work and learn the language. First, learn the language and respect the culture, respect the people, do your best, believe in karma.

IH: Thank you very much.

URL: Thank you too. We can share our things, our happiness, our bad things in front of the Romanian community.

IH: I'm very happy to meet you. Thank you!



**Dominican
Republic**

Santo Domingo

There's more bureaucracy here than in other areas, but I feel safe here. I see myself in the future here, in Romania.

Modesta Peralta Sosa (Dominican Republic)

Marian Stoica: Welcome everyone! We have the pleasure at this moment to speak with Modesta Peralta Sosa. She came here to Romania from the Dominican Republic about 11 years ago. She is a nutritionist and researcher and is married to a doctor here, from Braşov, and four and a half years ago she adopted two children. What makes us very happy is that she speaks Romanian very well, so in the next few minutes we will do an interview with Modesta Peralta Sosa. Welcome!

Modesta Peralta Sosa: Thank you! Good afternoon!

MS: Mrs. Modesta or how should I call you?

MPS: Modest, Modest!

MS: Please tell us, almost 11 years ago, why you chose Braşov, why you chose Romania, and if you knew anything about this country before you came?

MPS: To put it briefly, I met my husband through a friend from New York, who was married to a Romanian. Who went to college in Cluj, with my husband. And she introduced us and ... a journey began.

MS: Did you know anything about Romania or Braşov before you arrived here?

MPS: Not much. The truth is that about Romania, to be completely honest... I knew that it was the capital in Bucharest, that it was a communist country, that it is now a growing country, but I didn't know much, to be honest. A Balkan country, but in general I didn't know much.

MS: About Dracula...

MPS: Oh, of course, yes, Dracula! About certain myths, because now I know they are myths... At a certain point, for example, people were scaring us, because I come from America, people were scaring us about the trafficking of women, for example, about negative things, which when I came here, I discovered that it wasn't true.

MS: That's not true.

MPS: But I knew that, at some point, when we met, 13 years ago.

MS: Tell me, please, how difficult was it to adapt here? Did you have the support of your future husband... You said you still had acquaintances here. How difficult was it to adapt in Romania? Did you still have difficulties as a foreigner?

MPS: Yes. When we came, we also had the opportunity to go to the Dominican Republic, to stay in New York or to come here. I came here for several reasons. First of all, my husband already has a job here. His mother, at one point, was quite ill and she only spoke Romanian and Russian.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: And at first there was a moment of, as psychologists would say, honeymoon. It was still beautiful, it was still good, it was still new. We went to several places, we visited. And the process, at first, let's say, the first two months was quite easy. But, when we fall into reality, when we fall into reality and see that we are so far from home, we are a very close family ... We talk every day. Now on WhatsApp, we have technology. With the difference in food, it may be insignificant, but the difference in diet, in food ... Friends, the type of people here, it's not the same type of person. It doesn't mean that they are better or worse. It's a different type of friendship, we are very close, very warm, I mean we are like a family ... And it was a very big contrast. This is the shock stage. The second, after the honeymoon. And there comes a moment of nostalgia, of sadness, of dissatisfaction. And then comes another problem, which is with the language. At first, not speaking or hearing Romanian at all, because it is only spoken here in the Republic of Moldova.

MS: Moldova, at most, yes. The language is unknown.

MPS: And it was hard at first. But I think the personal effort and the help of my husband and friends, and family... It was very, very good.

MS: How difficult was it to adapt?

MPS: Yes, yes, yes. My husband and I did that. When I learned a little, I had a few hours with a private Romanian teacher, and then I integrated into the immigrant center.

MS: Exactly. Our friend, Astrid, helped us a lot. With her help, we were able to reach you too.

MPS: Yes, yes. Very, very helpful. And we integrated and also said: let's do this, we would try to speak between English and Romanian at home. If possible, we would speak Romanian, even if I make mistakes.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: And now I'm wrong. And I don't mind being corrected.

MS: We who were born here are wrong.

MPS: Yes. Yes. And I saw some movies, I read. My mistake was, as a parenthesis, I read some poems by Eminescu and...

MS: Wow. You went straight into...

MPS: Yes, yes! Too much!. And I watched the movies, I could hear a little bit, I really liked that people here are trying to help.

MS: Yes. And explain.

MPS: And he helps you, explains with his hand and teaches you.

MS: They are patient. They show you.

MPS: They are patient, yes. Yes. This is in contrast to other European countries that are less patient with foreigners. Here we had that, satisfaction.

MS: Tell me a little bit about the culture. You said you are a close-knit family. The people in the Dominican Republic are all so... warm and friendly. Did you feel the same way in Romania? Or what is the difference if we are talking strictly about the people in the Dominican Republic and in Romania?

MPS: I can't say it's a 100% difference, but it's a marked difference. We are much more... when we are a family, we are very united, we are very patient with each other.

MS: Yes. You talk a lot, you communicate a lot.

MPS: We communicate, meaning if I don't write to my friend who lives in the country in a week, it's a problem! People there come to visit us. People, for example, when there's a sick person in the hospital, people go, bring food... Here, on the other hand, people are a little more withdrawn, they're more shy, I don't know, a little colder, if the words aren't offensive. A little colder.

MS: They are not as warm as the ones in the Dominican Republic.

MPS: Yes. And friends.... Friends are very close. I mean, going to a friend's house is like staying at your own house. And I miss that. I really miss meeting up without any complexes. If we didn't have the money, when we were in college, neither of us ever had any money... We used to do it like this, we would each put in a few pesos and buy ourselves a soda, buy ourselves some crap and have a party and that's it.

MS: You were feeling good, yes.

MPS: You didn't have to be formal like here, where it's still formal.

MS: It's not really like that here... It's not really like that.

MPS: It's more complicated. I have to do meal prep. People get stressed, I think, more. They get stressed more than enjoying the moment.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: For example, Christmas. Christmas for us is about having a party, dancing, waiting, going to a service, going home after the service, eating straight from the table. We don't stress that much.

MS: With the preparations, how we do it. A week before we start, maybe!

MPS: With Easter cleaning...

MS: This is the first time you've heard this term here. Easter and Christmas cleaning!

MPS: Yes, yes, yes! On the other hand, I like that people here are very patient. But, at the same time, they are very concerned. I say that, I have noticed this after 11 years, people are concerned about things that are not important in life, in my opinion. For example, material things.

MS: Yes.

MPS: Having a latest generation car and not having a house. Having branded clothes and not having quality food.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: And I think that this, the stress, also comes from the influence from abroad.

MS: Yes.

MPS: And a lot of what you are, culturally speaking, is lost. And that's what I've noticed since I came... I think for you the difference is much more marked! Exactly. But, anyway, I adapted very well. Let's say: I have a very good relationship with my work colleagues.

MS: And that's what I want to ask you. How did they receive you? How do you get along?

MPS: Yes. I work at a private clinic and at first they received me a little shyly, but not unfriendly, quite the opposite. Everyone tried to help me, to orient me, to help me even with the language, because I didn't speak it, it was very difficult for me, I read more in English. And the interaction with patients... even the patients were patient enough to listen to me, to understand me, to explain to me in different ways. I am very, very satisfied with the interaction with my colleagues at work.

MS: From a cultural point of view... Like customs, traditions, like the comparison between the Dominican Republic and Romania? I would ask you more what customs do you like the most here? Or are there some traditions that impressed you, liked here in Romania?

MPS: I liked a lot of them! For example...let's say differences, the first time. With us, the first time, the children dance before you give them food.

MS: Yes, there is dancing, I understand.

MPS: When we are born, we start dancing. Here, people don't really dance on special occasions.

MS: Yes.

MPS: Only at weddings or baptisms. And that's contrasting! They go to the table, a lot of food, drinks, but there's less music and ... No, that's the difference. What I liked a lot is your local culture, clothes ... I have some acquaintances who make embroidery and dresses, blouses, etc.

MS: Yes, that's right, Romanian.

MPS: And they gather to do manual things, I really like that. The people who still celebrate. We also went to the area in Maramureş and to the area here, and right here, in Braşov, where they dance to your music and keep the traditions.

MS: Yes, it is preserved, yes.

MPS: Likewise, I like that it's readable. In general, at least, from what I've seen and liked, it's readable a lot.

MS: Yes.

MPS: Many educated people know what I'm talking about, a lot is being done. And I like that and I still like it... you have museums, people are fighting to preserve everything you have here. I like that. The differences, too, are normal, in food.

MS: That's what I was going to ask you.

MPS: That's it. My passion and way of relaxing is cooking. And we have a lot of food in common, for example, we have sarmale, but it's made in a different way. It's made with a different recipe, like in every country.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: But it's very fatty.

MS: Here, in Romania.

MPS: Yes, with a lot of fat. It's understandable, because the climate is cold and you have this culture from before. Here we eat a little more casually, with more fruit. And that's why many of us, from the warmer area, really miss fruit, certain foods, but we adapt. Here there were some supermarkets that bring Latin American products and we immediately run away.

MS: Exactly, take them. I understand. Are you able to bring them from the Dominican Republic as well or not?

MPS: Yes.

MS: Do you still bring, do you still have knowledge that...

MPS: Yes, we are allowed. For example, we are allowed to bring, apart from meat... But there is no need to bring meat. But fruits, vegetables, yes... But, no, let's use them as much as possible.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: A plane ticket, let's say, is an average of 1200 euros per person. And if my husband and I were to go, there would still be enough money. But now there are four of us.

MS: Correct.

MPS: And plus everything that is spent... But we have the possibility to bring them from there. In Bucharest, there are also some products brought from America, from all over Latin America and from Africa.

MS: Yes.

MPS: There are many stores. And when they come, we quickly get there to buy!

MS: Tell me if it was a difficult decision to adopt those two children. I don't know exactly, boy, girl or two...

MPS: They are siblings, boy and girl, yes.

MS: Do you tell them about the Dominican Republic, what they are like? Or do you try to raise them more in the Romanian tradition or in the Dominican tradition as well?

MPS: No, it was a moderately difficult decision. And the adaptation, both for them and for us, was quite difficult at first. And then, slowly, slowly, we ... settled in. We are already like a regular family.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: They speak Spanish. From the beginning, I started speaking Spanish to them, easy words. But now it's quite fluent, because we talk to the family. I mean, I talk to my family on video and they want to say hello and speak Spanish. And they are very stimulated. I want you to notice that it's your habit, that is, ours, that I am already part of Romania.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: But I want you to know that it's a habit. They dance with me, Latin music, music from the Dominican Republic. I also danced at the theater and in the Council Square. And they come with me and I dress them and everything. In the Dominican Republic, they talked to everyone, they ate everything. At home, we eat a combination, we eat Romanian food, because I cook, and Dominican food. I mean, I want them to eat both cultures. Respectively, in religion, I am Catholic. We, the majority of people in Latin America, especially the Dominican Republic, are Catholic. And we got married in the Catholic rite and I want to raise them that way. But let it be their decision. At some point, I raise them and influence them as much as I can. But they choose, of course.

MS: Sure, yes.

MPS: But so far they like it. They like it because life is a little more relaxed.

MS: Exactly. Tell me what you think of Braşov as a tourist attraction. If you had time to visit Braşov or the surrounding area, what did you like? I don't know if you've been to Bran Castle, if you've seen the Black Church around here... What did you like?

MPS: I liked it a lot. I wouldn't have changed Braşov to live in for any city. I like it. I've been almost everywhere here and in the city. Including the newer area, because Braşov grew very quickly, the city grew quickly. We also went through the Bran area, through the Zărneşti area, Stupini, which used to be further away, now it's close.

MS: Exactly. He got close, right.

MPS: Yes. And, yes, I like it a lot. I visited the tourist and cultural sites, such as the castles... I am already a tourist guide, when friends come. I wait for you downstairs, I tell them. I recommend it, I think it is very good. Poiana Braşov, for example, I like it when it is not crowded. I like Braşov, as a tourist and I would have explored it more. I mean, I think it needs to be exploited more. I mean, it needs to be enriched. Because there are such beautiful and cool places, like the Citadel, for example.

MS: Exactly. And they are not ... That's what I wanted to ask you. The authorities, perhaps, should promote them more. They are not promoted enough.

MPS: They are not promoted enough. A lot of people don't know about them, unfortunately. They don't know at all. And a lot of people, even from here, older people, probably know that there's nothing there and they don't go. And it's true, when you go, unfortunately, you don't find anything to do. In other cities with ... I'm not saying by comparison, but in other cities, you go to a less sophisticated place and you find something to do.

MS: Exactly. You find something. It's better highlighted. There's a problem here, from that point of view.

MPS: Exactly. Here we have a situation, I would say, negative. We need more cultural and tourist promotion.

MS: Exactly. Yes. Tell me about the weather. Is there a big difference between the Dominican Republic and Romania? Probably in winter, there really is a big difference. There is no comparison, it is cold...

MPS: Here, winter is cold, we don't have winter. We have, let's say, summer and spring. And winter is quite hard for ... Almost for all foreigners it's hard. We are not used to changing clothes ... to change, to put them aside. And then again ...

MS: Was the first winter here shocking?

MPS: First winter here? The first winter I was a tourist. I came as a tourist. It was very ... It was December 8th and it was... It was ice. It was snowing. It was very cold. And... No, it was a pretty hard feeling.

MS: Yes.

MPS: I stayed home. I don't have the courage to go out. In winter we still have certain nostalgias. But I think it's physiologically normal. I mean, because I couldn't go out very much, because the light goes away... That makes a bit of a difference. With us it's always sunny, it's warm, it's...

MS: The body can and does dispose of that, one way or another, for sure.

MPS: But the world is... The world can also be very poor there.

MS: Yes.

MPS: What if he's poor? You go to his house and he welcomes you. With a glass of water or a coffee. Anything. The people there are very happy. Some are very poor, but they welcome you with joy.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: Because the climate, the sun, helps a lot...

MS: They are optimistic in every way.

MPS: Optimistic, yes. I'm not saying conformists, but I'm satisfied with what they have. Their satisfaction is very beautiful. That's what I miss a lot. To be satisfied with what you have.

MS: Tell me, have you had moments here, in Romania, since you arrived in the last 11 years, when you thought, that's it, I can't take it anymore, I don't like it anymore, I'm going back home. Or were there no such moments?

MPS: Yes, to be honest yes, especially at the beginning. The first year I came, I was struggling with the language, to learn the language. There was no work for a person like me, who did medicine, I finished medicine very young. I was 21 years old.

MS: Yes.

MPS: And I started working right away, doing everything, doing my specialty, doing... And I had three or four jobs. When I came here, I stayed at home, it was pretty depressing. Quite. And there were several times when I thought about what would have happened if I had gone home.

MS: Yes.

MPS: And I proposed to my husband, without thinking, in a moment of desperation... because it is desperation! The truth is that I had nothing to do, I am not the kind of person to sit quietly at home and be done with it. But, in the adaptation process, this is normal and now I feel more comfortable. I go, I know that I am going home on vacation, I know that I have something to do here, I also have children.

MS: Exactly, you have an extra motivation to stay here.

MPS: And the first motivation, after God, is my husband, because he is a person who helped me a lot, a lot to feel good. He listened to me a lot...

MS: Tell me if you manage to go home once, twice? On vacation, in the Dominican Republic...

MPS: Yes, we manage, we manage. But less often. Last year we went, we stayed for a month. This year we are not going, because my sister is coming, she is staying here for two months.

MS: That's what I wanted to ask you, did the family come? Is this the first time a family member has come or have they come before?

MPS: They came too. Another sister came too, friends came too.

MS: And what do they think of Romania? Honestly, first experience. First impression.

MPS: Great, because I also take them to places that I like, for example. We go on a weekday, with some, I don't know, we pack a backpack. With something, we go to Solomon's Stones, we go and travel by bus and on foot, we walk everywhere. Yes, they like it, they can't wait to come again and again.

MS: Yes, very good, from that point of view. Tell me what your plans are here in Romania? Do you want to stay here for a long time, now that you have children, now that you have a stable job? Do you want to stay here or are you still thinking about maybe, maybe you'll go back home or not?

MPS: I think that at some point, we will be able to have a plan to stay at home and here. I mean, for example, like some friends do, they go during the winter, to the tropics there, because it is spring there and we can come back here. Because we already have a house here, thank God, the children will be at school, at a university, at some point. I mean, I see us in the future here, in Romania. And I really think that Romania is growing and we are waiting. No, because we are afraid now with this global situation, everyone is afraid.

MS: Everywhere, exactly.

MPS: Yes, anywhere, but I think it's a growing country.

MS: How difficult was it to find a job, even as a medical graduate? You said that at first, for a short period, you didn't have a job here?

MPS: Very difficult.

MS: How did you manage it?

MPS: And right now, my degrees are not recognized.

MS: Yes, exactly.

MPS: But I did, I had to do here, again, special training to be able to work. But not only doctors, but several professions are not approved according to the laws in Romania, by the Ministry of Education for higher studies and by the Ministry of Health.

MS: Yes.

MPS: I've been there about twice, in each place, but they asked us to do things that are impossible to do. Basically, you start all over again and if you have a life, to go through all of medical school again and do equivalency and do a specialty again, it's a human life. It takes 12-16 years.

MS: Exactly, exactly. What are the patients you work with like? I guess most Romanians, naturally, become patients. How do you get along with them, how do you interact?

MPS: Very good. They are very curious. The world is very curious here. And I like the world. I love the patients, I like working with them. And so far I have not had an uncomfortable situation. I am also very ... I like to get to know the person, to ask about him, so that I can know how I behave: there are people with more humor, there are people who want to know directly, there are people who do not want to know a situation directly. But in relation to the patient I am very satisfied because the truth is that I have a good relationship.

MS: So, in the end, you can say that you understood each other, that you didn't encounter any major difficulties in your relationship with the Romanians. I mean, in any field, you understood each other relatively well.

MPS: Relatively, yes.

MS: The Romanians didn't create any problems for you here.

MPS: No. I'm not going to say that everything is perfect. I mean, for example, there's more bureaucracy here than in other areas. But this isn't just with me, it's with everyone. One person once, I think it was the only time in 11 years, I was at a social gathering and a person said to me, but what? I'm a nationalist. What are you doing here? Taking a job from a Romanian? And I told them, but what have you done for Romania?

MS: Yes, exactly.

MPS: And he remained silent. He didn't know what to answer.

MS: He didn't know what to answer.

MPS: I told them what you have done for Romania? Because, if I do something, being a foreigner, it means that you have to do more, being Romanian.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: But that was the only person. And he was a person that didn't even deserve to be answered.

MS: But otherwise you had no problems.

MPS: Not at all. Not at all.

MS: They really welcomed you very well.

MPS: And very welcoming. Especially my husband's family calls me first, which means cousin in Spanish.

MS: Exactly, exactly, exactly.

MPS: Very good. I feel very good!

MS: Please tell me, how would you characterize, in a few words, Romania and implicitly Braşov? What are the first things you would recommend when talking about Romania to someone... a foreigner who has not yet seen our country? What would you tell them? Why should they come to Romania?

MPS: Yes. I do that. I tell them Romania is a very beautiful place. Many places to visit! Come on time, come prepared with a guide, with some dictionaries of words, in case you need them, have some

change.

MS: That's a money problem, exactly!

MPS: Try to be safe, because I feel very safe here. At least here, in Braşov, it's very safe, but still, we have to be careful when we're with a big group.

MS: Exactly. Yes.

MPS: Try looking at the map to see bus routes.

MS: Exactly, be prepared.

MPS: And I'll say one more thing, that maybe it's really important, not to take a taxi from the train station.

MS: That's never true. Nothing has changed in the last, I'm telling you, 20 years.

MPS: Yes, but not here, you know. Not here. Don't take a taxi from the train station, no. Take a company or something, with an app.

MS: Yes.

MPS: And to enjoy every place... For me, still coming to Council Square in the afternoon and having coffee or a beer or whatever, is very pleasant. To enjoy!

MS: As it turns out, this is also your advice for Romanians, not just foreigners, to enjoy life more.

MPS: Let's enjoy life more.

MS: That's right. From what we have.

MPS: With what we have. This is advice that I give to many, even younger people. Be happy with what you have. It's not that you don't have ambition. We have to have ambition in life.

MS: Yes, correct.

MPS: But be happy with what you have. Sometimes we look for something that is impossible and that has no importance. Because life is short. Life is very short.

MS: I would refer to the fact that the authorities, maybe the authorities in Romania sometimes don't care that much... You also said about promoting Romania, that there are many countries where Romania is not promoted much. Or about documents, there is a lot of bureaucracy. What other things do you think they should do, especially for foreigners who come to Romania? I mean, they should be a little more careful, because there is still a lot to do, I repeat, from the point of view of the authorities that should be in charge.

MPS: Yes. It should make the work easier. Make the papers easier to obtain. Yes. For example, I am a doctor with degrees, several degrees, make it easier...

MS: Equivalence, recognition, yes, recognition, exactly.

MPS: Equivalence, recognition of diplomas. This is a very important point.

MS: Yes.

MPS: Second, to make Romanian language courses easier for foreigners, at everyone's level.

MS: Yes.

MPS: Because there are people who don't even speak their own language very well.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: But it's not right to gather everyone in one group... if people are not at the same level. They should take more Romanian language and culture courses.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: Basically, these are the biggest concerns right now for me, personally.

MS: And there are some problems that you ran into when you came here. I mean, problems that you had.

MPS: Yes. When I came, there weren't many people helping others. And I was there for about three years. I helped Astrid, Astrid Hamberger.

MS: Exactly.

MPS: I helped when a stranger came, they came to me and I told them, look, for medical insurance, for this...

MS: What do you have to do, yes.

MPS: I don't have much time now, but my phone is still on and when someone writes to me, I answer them to help them. It wasn't like that before. But there should be more people here in Romania prepared to help foreigners, because, usually, they come to have a better life and to do something for Romania.

MS: Exactly. To bring a practical plus to Romania.

MPS: To bring a plus, yes.

MS: Thank you from the bottom of my heart. It was a pleasure talking to you. And that's all I want you to say in closing about why we should visit the Dominican Republic.

MPS: Aaa, we have to talk, yes. It would take about three hours... But the Dominican Republic is a very welcoming country, a very beautiful country. You have a lot to see, beaches, mountains, the world. The world is very warm and very welcoming. And I look forward to your visit.

MS: We thank you for coming here and wish you a pleasant stay in Romania.

MPS: Thank you very much, same.

MS: Thank you very much.

**An interview by Marian Stoica - Radio România Braşov
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)**



Syria

Damascus

**I have always been proud to have been educated here.
I thank the Romanian people who welcomed me 45 years ago,
making me feel at home.**

Youssef Tammam (Syria)

Emanuela Aranyos: Professor, doctor, it is a joy and an honor for us to have you with us for a little time out of your busy schedule! Dr. Youssef Tammam is a professor of pediatric cardiac surgery at the Marie Curie Hospital in Bucharest, a pioneer in the medical field, not only in Romania, but also internationally.

I would like to start by telling you a little about the child Youssef, what was it like for you as a child, being in the large family you come from?

Yousef Hammam: First of all, we are a family of 13 brothers and sisters, I am the eldest. We are very happy and joyful with this big family, in which practically all 13 have been accomplished in their lives, all of them have graduated from college and are in very good scientific positions.

EA: Some of your brothers are doctors.

YH: Five of us are doctors, doctors and dentists: my brother, a dentist in Milan and I have a sister who is a pediatric cardiologist, who worked in Italy and now works in Romania with me in the team. I have a sister in Boston, in America, who is a family doctor and another brother who is a dentist who is in Barcelona.

EA: Could we say that they took your example or does this desire to help others come from their parents?

YH: No, in Syria, let's say, it's a habit. Everyone wants to be a doctor and an engineer, it depends on their high school grades. Those who get high grades go into medicine and engineering.

EA: Is there an explanation for that?

YH: No, it probably was. We are, at that time and until now, in the developing country and there were few doctors, few engineers and probably necessity always pushes man or society to progress, in order to survive. And, indeed, Syria had an extraordinarily large number of doctors and engineers who are spread all over the world and with very good professionalism. Wherever they go, they are well seen and well received.

EA: What were you like as a child?

YH: Being the first child in the family, it was clear that I had to be an example, as you said, for my siblings and I didn't really have a childhood. And I didn't regret it at all. Since I was little, my father used to tell me nice things; when I was 15, he told me that I had to be able to do all his chores wherever he sent me, that I was already big. When I was 18, my father told me that there were a bunch of princes, governors and kings who ruled an entire country, that they didn't have anything more than me, so I had to be the one to solve every problem. I had responsibilities to myself, to my family, to my country, to humanity. I had to be at a very high level.

EA: What were your parents' occupations?

YH: My mother was an Arabic teacher, my father was an army officer, and my grandfather was a Sufi sage, poet, respected by people.

EA: Could you describe some images that you fondly remember from your childhood in Syria?

YH: Sure. I come from a very beautiful village, 500-600 meters above the sea; you can see the sea. The sunrise is very beautiful, the moonrise is an unforgettable sight. We would go in the evening to look at the moon, how beautiful it rose and how beautiful the sunset was on winter days, when the atmosphere is clear and very clean, without dust. From the mountain you can also see Cyprus, which is only 100 miles from the coast; you could see the lights of Cyprus on beautiful and clear nights.

EA: What's it like to have so many brothers and sisters, to have a large family?

YH: Very good. My mother never accepted that we have help or a nanny; we learned to help each other, and the older ones took care of the younger ones. It was very good.

EA: Has this spiritual side been passed down from generation to generation?

YH: Yes, our principle is “to be, not to have”. It is a principle similar to that of Eric Fromm. We work for life and for eternity, for the good of others, aware that everything comes from God and we are only channels through which good reaches people.

EA: What is it like to put yourself in the service of people, to be for others more than for yourself?

YH: Life starts here. God says: we created you to see who does the most good. The more you give, the more you become a source of energy and good. The more you give, the greater your value. Our work is twofold: we save children through surgery and we train other people to do the same. Thus, the impact becomes multiplied, and the meaning of life lies in sharing the knowledge and teachings received from God, not just surgical techniques. They say that God’s greatest gift to you is for people to need you. Not how much you do, but how much people need you. To reach out to give, not to take.

EA: Do you feel God’s presence in the operating room?

YH: Sure. Some doctors say 50% God and 50% them. I say 100% God. We are just His instruments. We are the machine, but it is not the merit of the machine that it runs. Whoever is driving has the merit. God opens our eyes and ideas so that we can do what we do. We act, but He is always with us and His will is above any other will.

EA: How did you choose pediatric cardiac surgery?

YH: I realized that saving a child from a few weeks or months of life is the most beautiful professional and human satisfaction, to see them grow up later. Thanks to God, they live, because I operated on them. The development of pediatric cardiac surgery grew with me, following the great teachers of the world. Most of them died, but I knew them all, we were friends, we learned from the founders of the specialty.

EA: How do you prepare for an operation and what is the atmosphere like in the operating room?

YH: Pediatric cardiac surgery is a specialty, it does not depend on one person, but on the entire team: cardiologists, neonatologists, anesthesiologists, nurses and technicians, almost 10-15 people. Everyone must be motivated, they must like it, you do not do this for money. It is a culture, you must have it in your blood. We all discuss the case in detail beforehand, we analyze the indications and the surgical plan. Each intervention is unique, there is no routine, requiring creativity and precise decisions, you have to create certain things, repair some defects.

In addition to prior consultations with other doctors, the day before, I mentally repeat the operation at least 10 times before entering the room, checking every detail, looking in books... It’s never good to be sure of yourself, to believe you’re at the pinnacle of science or that you can’t make mistakes anymore, because a mistake can be fatal.

EA: How do you feel emotionally during the surgery? Are you stressed, quiet, do you have emotions?

YH: Emotions are always present. We know that the child’s life depends on us. You know that you are not a god, you are subject to mistakes because you are human, you are always under tension. There are mistakes that cannot be fixed, very few, but every day you think about the complications that may arise. It is not easy to have a soul in your hands. You have to study a lot. To enter the room with your eyes open, with the eyes of your mind.

EA: How do you communicate with parents or older children before surgery?

YH: We explain to them the need for the intervention, the advantages and the risks. There are congenital diseases or acquired diseases. We try to give them confidence and show them that we choose what is best, using the best team and the best methods. If the advantages are greater than the disadvantages, we do it. If a child has to go up to heaven, we cannot stop it, even if we were the

best doctors.

EA: How do you manage potential losses?

YH: We explain to the parents that sometimes there is a risk and that success cannot be guaranteed 100%. But we do our best and, even if the intervention is stressful, every life saved is worth the effort. And we have saved many cases that did not have a high chance of survival. You get tired sometimes... it happened that we stayed awake for three days fighting for the baby. The parents would say in the corridor: doctor, your life is more important than our child's, go and rest!

EA: Do you meet with the children who have had surgery later?

YH: Yes, I have met patients who were operated on 20-30 years ago. It is an extraordinary satisfaction to see that they are healthy, happy and grateful. It is an immeasurable joy.

EA: Tell us about the rest of your professional accomplishments. You actively train healthcare professionals to do what you can't cover.

YH: In 1993, together with Professor Alexandro Frigiola from Italy, I created the Bambini Cardiopatici nel Mondo Association, to save children and train professionals in over 40 countries. We have operated on over 50,000 children, diagnosed over 150,000 and trained over 1,000 doctors and specialists.

In Romania, Ukraine, Egypt, Tunisia, Senegal, Nigeria, Morocco, Algeria, Cameroon, Peru we collaborate, developing pediatric cardiac surgery and training young doctors who today operate independently, in Romania for example over 80% of cases. The center in Târgu Mureș, led by Professor Suci, was not enough for the whole country, with over 1000 children born annually with malformations. Currently, the pediatric cardiac surgery center for newborns in Bucharest performs about 300 operations annually, a fairly large number, plus minimally invasive interventions, without incisions.

In Romania, we established a school and I am honored to have laid a cornerstone for pediatric cardiac surgery, being a student of this medical school, and I have always been proud to have trained here and we are very grateful. Our professors have played an important role in the development of medicine in the world.

EA: Thank you very much for your time and for everything you do.

YH: Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you to everyone who helped me realize this project in Romania and to the Romanian people who welcomed me 45 years ago, making me feel at home. I hope that God will give me strength and years to do even more, and that my students will continue to help abroad, to brighten the lives of others. This is the continuity of my work: to pass on my knowledge and values, this is what I have done for Romania.

An interview by Emanuela Aranyos - Radio România Tg. Mureș
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)



Sri Lanka

Colombo

We send money every month to families in Sri Lanka to feed them. In six years, my daughter will have Romanian citizenship. So I plan to stay here.

Mahesh Weerasinghe (Sri Lanka)

Marian Stoica: Hello everyone. Today we are talking to Mahesh from Sri Lanka. He has been here in Romania for six years, and for the last almost three and a half years he has been living in Braşov with his family. Two years ago, his little girl was also born here, in Braşov. He works as a cook, preparing pasta in a commercial complex in the municipality of Braşov. He says that he really likes our city. Especially the people here. Please tell me Mahesh, when you came to Braşov, in Romania, was Braşov the first city in Romania or did you go to another city? Why did you choose Braşov?

Mahesh Weerasinghe: In 2018, a lot of Sri Lankans moved to Romania because of the economic problems in Sri Lanka. We have a lot of corruption, at the government level and in general. So, at that time, I also tried to come here through an agency in Sri Lanka. They sent me here, first to Braşov. So, I worked here in Braşov the first time. You know, at Paradisul Acvatic. That's where I worked, it was my first job. I worked there for more than seven months. During that time, I met a guy from Canada and he offered me a job. So I moved there, I worked there until the pandemic. He was a nice guy. He's from Canada, his name is Flister. I worked as an assistant manager for him. So, that was my first job.

MS: During the pandemic, did you return to Sri Lanka? Did you return for a few months or for how long?

MW: Yes, I stayed there for about a year. But after the pandemic ended, I missed Braşov.

MS: So, you really missed Braşov. You started to like it here.

MW: Yes, yes, yes. Because after the pandemic, I moved to Bucharest with my wife. And I think it's a very crowded city. So, after six months, I decided that I had to go back and I went back to Braşov. Now I'm here.

MS: So, let's say you like Braşov more than Bucharest.

MW: Yes, of course. Because it's calmer. The people... nice people, it's a beautiful weather.

MS: Please tell me, Mahesh, how was your first experience here in Romania? How was your adaptation? What do you think or what did you think about people then? First impression, let's say.

MW: Yes. When I arrived here in 2018, about 100 people from Sri Lanka were working here, in Braşov. Back then... The people are not the youngest, but I don't blame them. The older people. I had a few incidents. When I got on the bus, they would move from their seats. Not only in my case. It happened to my friends too.

MS: So, they were moving to be further away from you.

MW: Because, yeah... I don't know. Not the young people. But the older people. They were moving.

MS: Oh, seriously?

MW: Yeah. Something like that. But, most of them were nice and helped us a lot. Most of them were okay.

MS: So, this is a particular incident, let's say. Didn't you have any problems, I don't know, with the documents, with the papers, at work? You spoke English from the beginning, you speak English. And that helped you, the fact that you knew English.

MW: Yes. At first, at my first job, they wouldn't let us go out after 9 p.m. So if we went out during the day, they wouldn't let us stay out for more than three or four hours. We had to go back to work.

Because they thought we came here to move to another European country. But, you know, most Sri Lankans came here because of economic problems.

MS: Exactly.

MW: So, they have to survive. In Sri Lanka we are paid 100-200 euros a month. So, this is a great opportunity to come and save our families. More than, now, around 40-50,000 people from Sri Lanka are working in Romania. Now, at this moment. Not just in Braşov. Now, around Braşov, around 4-5,000 people from Sri Lanka are working.

MS: Are the economic differences that big between Sri Lanka and Romania?

MW: My salary is better here, yes. Compared to Sri Lanka, if you earn 200 euros a month, it goes towards everything. For food, fuel, electricity, gas, everything costs more than 200 euros.

MS: Oh, wow. So, you were only left with 200 euros or not?

MW: No. No, not even. Not even. So, we have to ask for money from others to survive. When we move here, we have a salary, more than the basic salary, now it's about 500 euros, over 500 euros. Accommodation, food are provided in Romania. And as for health issues, hospitals are free. So, you can save money. Even if you only earn 500, you can save.

MS: You have the option to send money home to Sri Lanka.

MW: We send every month, we send to families, to feed them. We have several banking applications to send.

MS: Exactly.

MW: Yes. So, we send money every month, to mom, dad...

MS: Which you couldn't do in Sri Lanka.

MW: No.

MS: You didn't even have any money for yourself.

MW: No, there weren't enough.

MS: After about three years, did your wife come here too?

MW: Yes, he came here on a work permit because I was trying to reunite my family. It was very difficult for me because at first I had no one to help me.

MS: Really no one?

MW: Only people who came from Sri Lanka.

MS: Yes, yes, yes. But you didn't know them that well.

MW: Yes. So, after that, she came to Cluj. I brought her here and did the paperwork. It was easier after she came. She first came to Cluj and stayed there for a few months, I found her a job, so I brought her here.

MS: Yes, very nice. Tell me about your daughter, because she appeared here, in Braşov, right?

MW: Yes, yes, yes. When we found out about it, we were scared... Because this is not my country. And we don't have family here.

MS: Yes. Exactly.

MW: In Sri Lanka, when you give birth to a child, the mothers and the whole family, people are there to take care of them.

MS: Exactly. Yes.

MW: But here, it's just me and my wife. So after that, we decided... okay, let's do this here. And we went to the hospital and asked. They said yes, you can do this. So we did it.

MS: Yes. And you're happy with the situation now. You're very satisfied.

MW: After her birth, I went to ask for allowance.

MS: Yes, it's called an allowance here in Romania.

MW: And they approved it, so we get some money, you know.

MS: Yes, exactly. Yes, some money for her. It's a big help. Tell me, is she going to kindergarten? Or is she staying with you, with you and your wife, for now.

MW: Yes, because we work in shifts.

MS: So, you found jobs so you and your wife could stay with her.

MW: We work in the same place.

MS: I understand. Very nice. Tell me, you said you had that incident at the beginning. How was the adjustment in general? Because you didn't know anyone. How did you try to do the paperwork? Who helped you?

MW: In the first year, the company gave us a residence permit. And in the second job, as I told you, I worked as an assistant manager.

MS: Yes.

MW: So, from the company, the boss in Canada, Mr. Flister, gave me a work permit, a work permit. And I got the visa. I went back home. I stayed there for two, three months. And I came back with the visa. After I came to Romania, the company took care of it. Because every company has some people in HR. They take care of these documents.

MS: Do you have a recommendation for the authorities? Are they doing enough for foreigners? Can they do more to help foreigners adapt here in Romania, to help them more?

MW: Compared to years past, it was very easy to get work permits. It used to take about two months, three months at most. Now, it takes about five to six months sometimes. And the other problem: my daughter's residence permit is going to expire. And I went and asked at Immigration. Yes. They told me that I have to put money in my account and keep it there for about two, three months.

MS: I see. Seriously?

MW: It's around 10,000 euros. It's like I have to prove that I have the money to give him a better life.

MS: Yes. That's the legislation.

MW: I don't know. I'm not sure. But we'll see. Because I have to do this for her.

MS: Tell me what your plans are here in Romania. Do you want to stay longer, I don't know, maybe forever? What do you want? What do you think?

MW: That's my plan. Because I asked some friends, Romanian friends, and one of my good friends. And they told me that after six years, my daughter will have citizenship. So I plan to stay here.

MS: Let her get citizenship. Yes, yes. And you will have citizenship after that?

MW: After that, I can get it easier. But next year, I have to apply for the long-term resident permit. It will be valid for about four or five years. So I have to get it. But I'm still learning Romanian.

MS: Yes, exactly. Yes. So do you have any advice for the authorities, can they make, I don't know, the facilities easier for foreigners or what advice do you have for them? To make the documents easier for foreigners.

MW: I think...

MS: It's complicated now, a little bit.

MW: I think there are a lot of foreigners now.

MS: Exactly.

MW: That's why it takes, it takes too long.

MS: Too much. Exactly. So... But the website, is it easy for you to get the information, to understand? Is it okay from that point of view?

MW: Yes! Because when I go to immigration in Braşov, they are very nice people. So they have some papers.

MS: Tell me a few things about Romanians. Do you have Romanian friends?

MW: Of course.

MS: What do you think Romanians are like? I don't know. Are they cold? Are they friendly? What do you think?

MW: Because, as I told you, not the majority, but a small part of the people are aggressive. But the majority are very friendly in Braşov. I have many friends here in Braşov.

MS: So you felt like more people were trying to help you than not?

MW: Yes, yes, yes. If I have a problem, everyone asks well, why, why, why?

MS: Tell me what you like, especially if you have, I don't know, three things that you're thinking about right now. About Braşov, first of all, and about Romania. If you had time to visit another city.

MW: Of course. I visited everywhere.

MS: About Braşov, three things you like the most, I don't know, the first things that come to mind about Braşov.

MW: People. Weather.

MS: You like the weather.

MW: Yes, of course. Yes.

MS: Is it the same as in Sri Lanka or not?

MW: No. It's warm now. Yes. Now. But in the winter, we don't have snow. Never. We're a small island.

MS: What is the lowest temperature in Sri Lanka?

MW: I don't know. Around 11, 11-10 degrees. At the top of the mountains that we have there. But that's it. No winter.

MS: And what is winter like for you here in Romania?

MW: The first time I saw snow, it was a miracle for me. Oh my God!

MS: Is it very cold for you or not?

MW: You adapt. Now I'm used to it, because I know how to...

MS: Exactly, I understand. So the people, the weather, and one more thing you like about Braşov?

MW: The people, yes. Of course, the people are very calm and the weather is very beautiful.

MS: And do you have, I don't know, the Black Church or something that you visited and like more? Or Bran Castle or something like that, tourist attractions that you like or didn't have time to visit?

MW: No, I've visited everywhere here, but I like it here, in the old center. At night, yes. At night, it's very calm. It's very good. Yes. And yesterday I walked around here until 11:30.

MS: Yes, yes. You like the night when it's cooler, right? Me too. I like it a lot. Tell me about the things you like in other parts of Romania. I don't know. What cities did you have time to visit?

MW: I've been to Alba Iulia. It's very peaceful. Yes. It's very beautiful. But when I've been to Buzău, Bacău and Buzău, it's very peaceful, very calm, very green. Yes, it's still very green. Yes. I've also been to Arad, it's like Bucharest. Yes. It's the same.

MS: So, in particular, would you recommend Romania to friends from Sri Lanka to come here for a visit?

MW: Yes, yes. Sometimes I help them come here to Braşov. Yes. And now, if you look in Sri Lanka, more than 100 agencies send Sri Lankans to Romania.

MS: Yes, exactly.

MW: More than 100 agencies. Yes. But they take money.

MS: 100 in Romania, not just in Braşov, throughout the country. Yes.

MW: No, agents in Sri Lanka.

MS: Ah, in Sri Lanka, who bring people to Romania or another country in Europe.

MW: In Romania.

MS: In Romania?

MW: Yes.

MS: Wow.

MW: Many, yes. Many, yes, yes. That's what I told you. Over 40,000, 50,000 are working here in Romania now. Yes.

MS: Tell me a few things about the differences between Sri Lankan culture and Romanian culture. About the people. I don't know if they are friendlier here or in Sri Lanka. About the traditions. What are the big differences between Sri Lanka and Romania?

MW: I'll give you a few examples. We don't smoke in front of our parents or our older brother or anything like that. Never.

MS: Oh, I understand.

MW: We don't smoke on the street. Because it's, you know, cultural.

MS: But it's about culture. It's not like you get a fine from the police or anything.

MW: No. Sometimes... But not in front of dad or mom.

MS: No. It's about culture.

MW: Because Sri Lankans, over 80% are Buddhists. Buddhists, yes. So we have a different culture. And if we smoke around the family, it would be a whole story.

MS: I understand. Yes.

MW: Something like that. And the food culture... We're used to eating rice. Rice with curry. And here you have it, but it's not the same.

MS: It's not the same. Yes!

MW: We eat spicy food. Yes.

MS: You eat spicy food and we don't have that much spicy food here.

MW: You guys don't eat spicy. Sometimes I bring spices from Sri Lanka. Even though we have them here, they're not the same.

MS: Not at all. Yes. Yes.

MW: Sometimes, about every two, three months, they bring in cargo. You know, air cargo.

MS: Yes, courier. And do you like the food here? Even if it's a dessert or something, I don't know.

MW: I eat a lot of Romanian food when I work in kitchens. Yes. Yes.

MS: So, sarmale. Do you like them?

MW: Yes. Soup, polenta, sour cream with polenta. It's very good.

MS: Do you like it?

MW: Yes. Because we have similar dishes, but things are different. We do something similar, but maybe with different recipes, the way you prepare them ... We don't eat corn like that and we have other seeds to make polenta.

MS: Tell me a few things that impressed you about the traditions, because, you know, we have the Junii Braşovului, maybe you've seen them. Or the folk costumes... What do you like most about Romanian tradition? What do you remember, what impressed you? If anything impressed you...

MW: When they wear those suits, it was... when I first saw them, it was impressive. I know a restaurant in Poiana Braşov where the waiters wear this suit.

MS: Yes, exactly. Yes, we have traditional costume. So that was impressive for you, right?

MW: Of course, of course, yes. Because Sri Lankan women wear a sari as their traditional dress. Yes, it's called a sari.

MS: Yes, sari. Indian style, exactly. How are your coworkers here at AFI Mall? Do you only have Sri Lankans, do you have Romanians or others?

MW: At AFI Mall, at my workplace, it's just me and my wife.

MS: Just you from Sri Lanka? Ah, I see.

MW: And a few people from Moldova, because my boss is from Moldova. So, the rest are from Romania. And now we have a girl from Cuba. She's a student. She came two years ago, but she speaks Romanian very well.

MS: I think from school. So, is it okay for you? Are your classmates okay?

MW: Yes, of course, yes.

MS: So, I don't know, in the last year or two, since you've had your daughter, you haven't had any problems with Romanians. Or you haven't had any incidents in the last two years, let's say.

MW: Uh, in the last two years... Yeah, I've had, not just me, some of my Sri Lankan friends. I've had a few incidents, I mean, I've had problems with a few Romanians in Bucharest.

MS: Uh, they have big companies. Yeah.

MW: I have some contracts because I had a company. An LLC, for courier services.

MS: Ah, I see. Yes.

MW: So, I made a contract with a lady from Bucharest. Yes. And she has, she had a big company.

MS: He needs people for that company.

MW: So, I introduced an agency. And I tried to negotiate with her. But she took the money and said okay. This incident didn't happen only to me, there are many Sri Lankans who had such problems. From Bucharest. So she said, okay, I don't want to give back the money I took. And I went to...

MS: Did you call the police?

MW: Yes, I have already filed a complaint with the police and I have filed a complaint with the Sri Lankan Embassy. We have one in Bucharest. Yes. I went there and complained. Not just me, a few of my friends, we, we have a big community. Yes.

MS: Tell me a few things... Just two things, please, Mahesh: if you had heard of Romania or Braşov before you came here in 2018, and if you think the Romanian authorities should do more to promote Romania outside the country. Maybe in Asia, in Africa, because many people there have not heard of Romania.

MW: Yes. I heard about Transylvania, about...

MS: Dracula, right?

MW: Yes, exactly.

MS: Is that all you've heard before?

MW: Yes, yes, yes. I didn't know. When I came to Braşov, I didn't even know that Bran Castle was so close to me.

MS: Yeah, you didn't know that. And you found out here.

MW: After four, five months, I found out. I heard. Seriously, Dracula is here? I have to go there!

MS: So we should do more to promote Romania outside the country, right?

MW: Yes, because, as I told you, there are many Romanians... Police officers, people who go to Sri Lanka for... They need to know more about our country.

MS: Yes, yes. What is the recommendation for foreigners coming here? What would you say

about Romania, so that they come here? Why should foreigners come here to Romania?

MW: Because they need clean air to breathe. So they need to see this green! And the mountains.

MS: And... The air is different, right?

MW: Of course, yes, yes, yes. The churches are beautiful. The churches, yes. And the people, how they behave.

MS: Yes. The people are very kind, and... Are you Buddhist?

MW: I am Buddhist, yes.

MS: And it's okay for you here, do you have any problems?

MW: No, not even a problem. Even if I wear a cross. It's okay. Nobody asks. I say ah, yes, ah, okay. You're Buddhist, great!

MS: In two or three words, how would you characterize, what would you say about Romania? In a few words, your presentation about Romania.

MW: Yes. It's a country that, I don't know, has a lot of mountains, so very beautiful areas. You can find everything, including the sea, in Romania.

MS: Exactly. And you don't see these kinds of, I don't know, mountains in Sri Lanka, or you do, or...

MW: We do. We do. But they're not set up like that, you know. I don't know, I don't know how to say it.

MS: And it's not that green, I think.

MW: We have green zones. Yes. But, uh, in the end, I have to say:, it's about the politicians. Yes ... they are different. They are different, they are corrupt, they took the money from the country and now, no one is staying there anymore.

MS: And they don't take care of nature, maybe?

MW: No, no, no.

MS: Okay, thank you very much, Mahesh, and enjoy your stay here in Romania.

MW: Thank you.

An interview by Marian Stoica - Radio România Braşov
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)



Taipei

Taiwan

**I try to stay here because I feel like people give me energy.
We learned from Romania how to show love to each other.**

Carina Wei Yun Chen (Taiwan)

Marian Stoica: Welcome everyone, today we have Carina Wei Yun Chen, 43 years old, from Taiwan, as a guest in the studio. She came to our country for the first time in 2018, and after a year she returned to Romania. She liked it so much that she was immediately convinced to stay in our country and open a bubble tea business, something that had not existed in Braşov before. So, Carina has been in Braşov for six years. She says that she likes it very much here, that she wants to stay, but we will talk to her about more things about her business, but also about life and experience in Romania.

Carina, welcome to the radio! Let's talk about your beginnings here in Romania. You told me that you first came in 2018, that you liked it a lot. How was it and why did you decide to stay here permanently in Romania?

Carina Wei Yun Chen: Ok, hello everyone, I'm Carina. The first time I visited Romania, Braşov, I felt that the energy of this city was so good! I think it was summer then, the temperature was also perfect for me and I felt, most importantly, that the people here are very friendly and very kind, eager to help me, even if they didn't speak English. I felt very welcome and I had the feeling that, oh, I'm safe here, there's peace, and the energy made me feel very comfortable. I was walking on Republicii Street and I was looking at the old terraces, everyone was sitting at the table, drinking, talking and they seemed so happy. And I really enjoyed that energy. Then, even on the street, people see you and say Hey, hello!, even if they don't know you. But this feeling was amazing for me. So I thought that I want to live here, I made a decision and asked myself how could I live here?. And I searched and thought Oh, they don't have any bubble tea shops in town right now! So I thought I could bring the drink I love the most from my country. That was the beginning of my idea. I made a plan in about six months, and after that I came back to Braşov in 2019 and started the business.

MS: You told me about the bubble tea business, but you said it was a little difficult at first. Why?

CWYC: Oh, because in Romanian culture, you don't drink tea on a regular basis. A lot of Romanians told me we drink tea when we're sick! In my culture, we drink tea every day to keep our bodies balanced, healthy. So when I opened the bubble tea shop, it wasn't in this downtown location. It was a little bit further from downtown. And nobody really wanted to try it. So it was quite difficult. But at the time, I had a marketing manager in the area. She helped me organize an event, a bubble tea event at a high school. After that, the high school students found out about bubble tea and helped me share, they posted on the internet, on Instagram, on TikTok. And after more people found out about me, that was the most emotional thing for me, because they tried to help me.

MS: And it's been a big impact for your business, this social media.

CWYC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But it's really amazing to me. And for a few years now, the business has been running perfectly.

MS: So are you satisfied, is it okay or do you need to improve more to be better?

CWYC: I need to improve more. The hardest time was the pandemic. Four months after I opened, the pandemic came. So, you know, I had to close my business. And mostly, I had to survive, but still, I had to think more. What can I do about it? So after that, I decided to change the location to downtown. Yeah, because I had to make more people know about my store. And so that they could easily come to my store to see or try. .

MS: So the first two years were very difficult.

CWYC: Yes. The first two years were difficult. Yes, yes. It's very difficult.

MS: Okay.

CWYC: But I appreciate that my old clients tried to help me. They tried to take pictures, share them on Instagram, talk to their friends. Those are the most amazing things to me. They helped me for free because they like me. They like the way I do things. So I really appreciate it.

MS: And they like tea, I'm sure.

CWYC: They love tea. Yeah, without them, I don't think my shop could have survived six years. No, all my customers helped me. All the locals who visited, who saw that I was in trouble, they went out of their way to help me. That's amazing.

MS: You have customers not only from Braşov, there are also tourists who come here and visit your store, right?

CWYC: Yes, they really beg me, saying Hey, Carina, could you open in Bucharest too? We come from there every week! The nicest thing I know is that when they get to Braşov, the first thing they do is come to Sakura Bubble Tea. Yes. And then buy their drink and enjoy the day. And many people, for example, have been coming for two years from Timișoara, from Iași. They come from each different country because they love my drink. That's the reason, even though it's very difficult to survive here, after the pandemic it's even harder. But it's the strength that makes me keep working hard, to keep the store here. Because I support myself every time they come here to say: you know, I came here three years ago. And I remember you.

MS: I came for you, maybe, or something like that.

CWYC: I'm so happy. I'm really supporting myself. That's the energy I felt the first time, I think.

MS: You said that most people support you and treat you nicely. But tell me, have you had any unpleasant experiences with some Braşov residents or tourists, how did they initially receive you when you came here to Braşov?

CWYC: I think I'm pretty lucky. I haven't had any really horrible things, but I've definitely had some. Like, at first, people don't appreciate you. I don't speak Romanian. They'd say, oh, why don't you speak Romanian, even though you have a business here? And I can't answer that. I just say I'm sorry, because it's true. Because, you know, I want to live here, I should learn. But at first, my English wasn't good, so I had to learn something that I could understand. Or sometimes they'd try to increase the price and charge me double. You have to pay because they know you're not Romanian. You don't know how much it costs. Yeah, yeah, very good. And after I learned, I had to find a Romanian friend to help me call to ask the price. So after that, I learned, and gradually you have to understand.

MS: So, do you have a friend from Romania who helps you or a friend from Taiwan that you brought here?

CWYC: At first, I didn't have any friends. But I have to thank the guy who works at an accounting firm. His name is Ovidiu. He helped me with all the paperwork from the beginning. Which is very important. Yes. And he found a solution. He found people to help me, especially with the paperwork. And then even when I imported products from Taiwan, there are a lot of documents that you have to prepare. Customs clearance. A lot of things. He did his best to help me for free. So he helped me solve the problem. So I say I'm lucky that I had his help at the beginning. But he didn't know me at the beginning. He just said: oh, Carina, your idea is very good. I'll do my best! This is a mentality that I've never encountered in Taiwan regarding these things. But he taught me what love means. What help means. So I learned from him. And I also appreciate everything he did. Yes.

MS: Tell me a few things, how you adapted. Not specifically to the business. How you adapted here. As a person coming to Braşov. What do you like about Braşov, the weather, the people, the city? What do you think about the city? I don't know, the cultural experience here in Braşov. How was it for you?

CWYC: The first time I traveled, I was walking down the street. That's what I was saying at the beginning. People say hello. Yeah. Yeah. I was shocked. Shocked! That doesn't happen in Taiwan. No, no, no. We're cool, we walk down the street and we're busy. You know, we're faster. We rush. But here, the pace is very slow. Slow. You enjoy the moment. And people just say Hey, hello! And especially when you're sitting at a terrace, the waiter will say: Oh, I like your hair! I like your makeup!

Even if they don't know you. Yeah. They just appreciate it. Yeah. When they see good things, I tell them. But it's not in our culture. We don't say what we feel. But in Romania, I feel like when they like you, they say: Hey, I like you, I like your dress! It's amazing to me. I feel like, wow, they're so kind. They just say one word and it makes my day better. Yeah.

MS: And that's one of the things that gives you energy, you know?

CWYC: Yes. So I feel like the cultural difference is very big. We are ashamed to say I love you or something like that. But in Romania, oh my God. They just say I love you! Even the kids say: Can I take a picture with you? Can I hug you? And I feel so full of love. Yes. That's why I never get tired of staying here. Even though I have a lot of problems with the business, with the documents, with everything. Even though I run out of money. I still try to stay here because I feel like people give me energy. And for me, that's the reality, that's life. You have to live with love. So I learned from Romania how to show love to each other. Yes, yes.

MS: And Romanians are friendlier than in Taiwan, let's say, right?

CWYC: Yeah. Even my neighbors there, okay, we don't know each other, but when we see each other in the block or on the stairs, they'll say: Hey, hello! It's shocking. Yeah, I'm shocked. At first, I was really struggling to say Hello! Now, it's natural. I see everyone and I say: Hey, hello!. It's amazing. Yeah. Even though I don't speak English. Even, like I was saying, one time I was at the bus stop, I was looking at the machine, how do I buy a ticket? Yeah. And a lady about 60 years old, something like that, she spoke Romanian, she asked me: Do you need help? I didn't understand. But she did her best to help me. Exactly. She tried everything she could. Yeah. And that surprised me. It's so surprising. It's something, I don't know. I just feel so touched and I appreciate that they did these things for me. Yeah.

MS: Tell me, what do you like in Braşov? I don't know, the architecture, the Black Church, or something you really like. What do you do in your free time? Do you visit something, do you relax somewhere here in Braşov?

CWYC: I like the weather here, the buildings, the view, even the street, it's very clean. I think the city hall does a very good job of maintaining this city. There's no trash on the street, it's so clean, so I like to walk when I have free time, to go to the mountain to see, because it's very close to everything. So I like the view here, I like the temperature. Even in winter, I still enjoy it, because it's beautiful, it snows, in my country it doesn't snow.

MS: It doesn't snow in Taiwan.

CWYC: Yeah, so for me, it's like an image, like a dream. So I'm happy and I think the view, all the people, are connected. So, for me, what I love the most is the people here and the view, and I think the buildings, for me, are very beautiful. Yeah.

MS: And do you like any tourist attractions? Or maybe Poiana Braşov, have you visited it? Or the mountains... do you like them?

CWYC: The mountain, I love it the most, yes, yes, because it makes me, when I'm stressed, relax more, because it's close to nature, it makes me feel like I get my energy back. When I don't know what to do, I worry a lot... but when I go to the mountain, I feel, okay, I think I get my energy back and I can continue doing something, yes.

MS: Are you trying to ski in the winter or not? In Poiana Braşov or not?

CWYC: I can't, I'm not good at skiing. Yes, but I tried twice, I'm not very good at it, but yes, I'm very happy, we're very close, we can only get there by bus.

MS: Exactly, exactly.

CWYC: It's just very lucky! This city has everything, in my opinion, this city has everything, it has a mall, it has a cinema, it has a very beautiful old center... but in winter you can ski, and in summer you can enjoy Republicii Street, have a beer, something, and the temperature is good, yes.

MS: Have you tried nightlife, nightclubs? Or, I don't know, after 10:00 PM, when you relax and you like that too...

CWYC: Yes, it was very exciting and everyone felt, as I was saying, they don't care why you dance together and they respond, they enjoy each other, they don't bother you very much, they just have fun and yes, I tried the nightlife in Braşov, not very much.

MS: Yes, but I don't know, on the weekend, or I don't know.

CWYC: Yes, on the weekend, but most of the time, when I have a day off, I just try to enjoy the city by myself, walk around, or go to a cafe, or visit a shop, for example. They have traditional shops, with lavender products, something like that, I enjoy these things and I want to see what they normally do to sell their products... and because this is the cultural difference, I enjoy it, yes.

MS: Tell me, in 2018, why did you choose Braşov and also where did you hear about Braşov, when you first came? Why?

CWYC: It's a very special story.

MS: Yes, please.

CWYC: Because I lived in the UK for two years and my work visa ran out and I was trying to travel to Eastern Europe because I had never been to that part. So I was trying to find places like Vienna and Budapest.

MS: Yes, from Hungary, yes.

CWYC: Yeah, and at that time, I had a Romanian friend, we met on the internet, and he said: You know, my country is so beautiful, you have to visit it! And I felt like, yeah, why not? Because I didn't know what Romanian culture was... He lived in Sibiu, and I Googled..., oh my God, it's so beautiful! The beauty is just different from Western Europe, it's just different, the style is different, so I said, okay, let's do it! And I visited here. And he told me that the best city he likes is Braşov. So he recommended me to visit here, and I listened to him to come here, and yeah, I fell in love on the first day.

MS: And it only took you a year to settle in, from your first visit, to settle here, just a year, in 2019 you came to stay.

CWYC: Only six months, I think.

MS: Six months, oh.

CWYC: Yes, yes.

MS: So you did it quickly, let's say.

CWYC: Yeah, I'm the kind of person who plans everything quickly, because if I delay too much, I'll give up. And I think, okay, I'm ready! And I plan, and I look for all the information, and then I just come, I say, okay, I'll come here to find a solution, to find people, to find a lawyer! But at the beginning, I have to say, Romania, in terms of information about this type of business, it's not easy to get. Even my visa, the work visa, I want to apply, it's not easy to know. Even when I went to immigration, to ask, I can't tell you the exact details. Many things, I have to spend time to find out or pay someone who is professional, but also you have to find them at that time. I tried to get my work visa for eight months. Yes. It's a very long time. Yes. So, for me, it's the most difficult. Even on the website, you can't see all the information.

MS: That's because I wanted to ask you about the problems you have here in Romania. So, this is one of the problems with documents, with papers for foreigners.

CWYC: Yes. It is, it is very difficult. Very difficult. You don't know, not everyone really knows. So even if you ask a lawyer, they say: I don't know. So, that's, to me, a strange thing, because in Taiwan, we have every detail on the website. If you need something, they have more details and they have people answering the phone to listen to you. But here, I couldn't find it.

MS: It's very difficult. There's also the language issue, believe it or not?

CWYC: The language too, of course! My problem is that I don't speak Romanian, of course, I'm a foreigner.

MS: And they don't speak English, maybe.

CWYC: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

MS: Because this is a big problem for the authorities, those who can take care of you, have to speak English and that's not happening.

CWYC: Yeah, right. And also, you see, if you put the information on the website, right? Yeah. They don't have to answer the phone anymore.

MS: Exactly.

CWYC: They didn't. Even if they changed something, they didn't update the information. So every time we go there, you have to waste time doing this, this, and this.

MS: Exactly.

CWYC: And sometimes, the document already expires, you have to reapply. So, a lot of things make you feel like it's difficult, especially the visa. You know, the visa, you have to have the right to stay here with the visa.

MS: Exactly.

CWYC: But if I apply for a visa, I have a problem, I can't stay here. So, at first, I went back to Taiwan twice, because my visa wasn't ready yet. It wasn't approved yet. So, that's the most difficult thing, I think, from my perspective as a business owner, that's the most difficult thing I've had since the beginning. And I couldn't find anyone. Even Ovidiu tried to help me, he found someone, but he couldn't really find anyone. Yeah. Yeah.

MS: So, if you were to send a message to the authorities, to simplify things for foreigners who want to stay here? Because it doesn't help much, maybe, or it's not enough what the authorities are doing for foreigners...

CWYC: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That's, yeah, I think a lot of people also have the same problem, exactly.

MS: Yes, yes. I met another person, exactly, they have the same problem. How long have you been aiming now? For how long?

CWYC: I renew my work visa every year.

MS: Every year.

CWYC: And, because I have a work visa, they only give it to me for one year for renewal, because it's related to my business.

MS: Yes, yes, yes.

CWYC: Yes. So, you see, I have to apply for all the documents.

MS: So, it's a little easier, because you have a business, because if you didn't have a business, it would be very difficult to stay here, almost impossible, I think.

CWYC: I think it's impossible, impossible, no one can do that. Or you find a company to apply for your visa.

MS: Yes.

CWYC: Yes, but at first, I don't speak Romanian.

MS: Exactly.

CWYC: And also, there aren't many companies here that only speak English. So, for example, if someone from Japan wants to work here, it's almost impossible, because they don't have a company here that will allow you to only speak English. Yeah. Yeah.

MS: You told me about Ovidiu, that he helps you a lot. Do you have Romanian friends? I don't know... maybe you're friends with him or you spend time here in Romania with someone else, do you have someone?

CWYC: No, almost all my Romanian friends are my clients.

MS: I see. So your customers become friends, right?

CWYC: Yeah. Yeah, really nice. They're like, like oh, my God, I love this! and we start talking, I was

really surprised, she's really special, a client, she always comes with her boyfriend, and one day she says, "hey, Carina, can I ask you something? Can I be your friend?"

MS: Oh, very nice.

CWYC: Because I feel, well... this is very special to me, because they want to understand me more. She says every time we talk here, we are so happy to talk to you, I wish we could have a coffee. I say yes, yes, we can do that! And I did. And then sometimes we cook, for example, hot food at her house or I invite her to my house parties to taste special food, so I connected with them, because my shop attracts people who love the culture of Japan, Taiwan, and we become friends. That way we get to know each other more easily, because we love similar things.

MS: So, you can't say that here, in Romania, there was a person who didn't want you here. Everyone tried to be friendly with you here, in Romania.

CWYC: Yes.

MS: No one wanted you to be here or acted weird towards you or anything like that. You didn't have that kind of experience.

CWYC: Most people are friendly. I think 99% are friendly.

MS: 99, that's a high percentage.

CWYC: Yeah, yeah, I don't know... I heard from some friends that they didn't have experiences like mine, so I say I'm lucky.

MS: But you didn't have this experience, was it okay for you?

CWYC: It was okay, yeah, for me, no, I don't see the negative side, maybe there are 2% of people who didn't receive me well. Yeah. But almost all the people, even if they know I don't speak English, try to speak Romanian or we use the phone to help each other.

MS: Yes, exactly, exactly.

CWYC: Because now, even in the area where I live, at Lidl, the cashiers try to help me. They ask me what I need. Even the security guards try to help me. I don't feel unwelcome.

MS: Yes, it's very beautiful, very beautiful. What are the big differences between Taiwanese culture and Romanian culture? Something that is very different, completely different.

CWYC: For me, a big difference is the way you talk to people. Yes. Here, I feel like they are very simple, very honest. They just tell you what they like, they say directly: oh, this is good, I feel okay. It's a direct way of expressing their feelings, but in my culture, we hide a lot. Or we don't try to say I love you, I like you... Or your dress is so beautiful! We don't usually say, maybe we like it, but...

MS: Or maybe in family or among friends.

CWYC: Even in my family, I can say that I never said I love you to my dad. I never said that to my dad. But here, they say that every day. Yeah. So that's the biggest difference for me. Yeah.

MS: Are you trying to bring your family here? I don't know, your father...

CWYC: I try, but during the pandemic I couldn't.

MS: The pandemic, yes.

CWYC: Yeah... and then my dad passed away. So he can't. And I would like to, but he can't. So the difficult thing is, I live here, my family is in Taiwan, but I love my life here. But we can't be together because they're enjoying their life there.

MS: Exactly.

CWYC: And here, certainly, as you see the food, they wouldn't be ordinary.

MS: Exactly.

CWYC: And they don't have friends here. So another difficult part is that my family doesn't live here. But I live here and I love the life I have here. But my family in Taiwan can't stay with me.

MS: Please tell me what your future plans are? Do you want to stay here for many years or

forever? I don't know, here in Romania, are you thinking of returning to Taiwan? What are your plans?

CWYC: My plans... I still want to stay here for maybe another 10 years, as long as I want. But there are things... I want to bring more different products here, you know, from different cultures like Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan. Or I want to do more different things here. But something that is not easy at all is that I have no one to help me. And it is difficult to train someone that you can completely trust.

MS: Exactly. Trust is very important.

CWYC: Yes! And this is the biggest problem from the beginning until now. I couldn't find a stable employee to help me. And that's the problem. I really want to make a plan to bring more things, for example, from my country.

MS: Yes, bring some of your culture here.

CWYC: Yes, yes, I really want to, because I realize that there aren't too many in Braşov either.

MS: So, in general, Romanians like Taiwanese culture or the culture that you bring. They are very receptive to Taiwanese culture. What are you trying to bring?

CWYC: Yes, yes. And they are happy to share the culture with you. But at first, they have to trust me first.

MS: Exactly.

CWYC: You know, they're a little afraid to try something they don't know. Yeah. But when they trust me, and after I give them everything, they just love it. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MS: Do you have any final advice for people coming to Romania? Or what do you recommend to Romania? The first thing, for people coming here to Romania to visit us.

CWYC: I think coming here, visiting, it's not just about visiting, you have to feel the people here. Yes. I recommend the way I feel... it's about the people here. Yes. You feel safe, you feel friendly, and of course, the food is amazing. Then of course, the view that you see, like a mountain... or the nature, you can go deeper, into the mountains, a lot. It's so natural! And you didn't know it could be so beautiful. It's a different view and you'll be surprised, yes.

MS: Thank you very much, Carina.

CWYC: Thank you.

**An interview by Marian Stoica - Radio România Braşov
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)**



You feel at home where you feel you have a purpose, you feel you are doing something, you are building something. and you are appreciated in the moment and place you are.

Sabri Jari (Tunisia)

Adelina Tocitu: Today we are in Ește, one of the beautiful places in the capital, in the Historical Center, and I want to introduce you to a champion. Sabri Jari is a multiple champion in national and international competitions and a swimming referee. He was born in Tunisia, and since 2011 Romania has been his second home. He was 24 years old when he decided to come here for studies and he stayed. He followed a master's degree in Romania with teaching in French at the University of Physical Education and Sports, quickly learned Romanian from the children for whom he was a swimming instructor and, when he thought he would go back to Tunisia, the opportunity arose to continue his studies in Romania, which he has completed in the meantime. Sabri Jari holds a doctorate in human motor sciences and a federal training certificate, a qualification that gives him the pedagogical skills necessary to be an elite coach. He is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports at Spirul Haret University and the sports director of the Premium Wellness center in Bucharest. Welcome!

Sabri Jari: Thank you for the invitation!

AT: Thank you for meeting today in Ește, for having this discussion and for speaking in Romanian.

SJ: Romanian, yes.

AT: Let's start! You were 24 years old when you came to Romania, you had just graduated from college, you had finished your undergraduate studies in Tunisia. What was your first thought when you came here, to Romania?

SJ: My first thought... Honestly, I came for my studies. I mean, I was focused on college. I had finished my bachelor's degree in Tunisia, I came here to continue my master's degree and leave. Honestly, I liked it. I liked the daily life, the daily routine in Romania. And I was offered the chance to continue my studies and do my doctorate in Romania. And then I stayed.

AT: What were the first differences you felt when you came here? You were 24, you were very young.

SJ: Exactly. The differences weren't that major. The biggest one, I can say, was the climate. Yes, I felt a bit of a difference there. There was this cultural difference, because I come from a different culture and it was different. It wasn't the same as in Tunisia. But I adapted easily.

AT: What were the first things that impressed you here, with us? In Bucharest, because you came to Bucharest.

SJ: In Bucharest, yes. In Bucharest, honestly, I went to college. I didn't really leave my dorm. I was focused on continuing my studies and finishing them and being ... having that master's degree and then going home. And I wasn't curious about seeing the country, going, walking, looking, going in, interacting with people. I was a bit reserved, let's say, at the beginning. And I was focused on what I came for.

AT: Then you visited Romania? What did you like the most?

SJ: I liked the mountains. I was in Brașov, I liked Maramureș. I went up to Maramureș up there in the north. The culture there is different from one city to another. And yes, I visited. I visited several places where I was impressed.

AT: You said that you had no difficulty adapting, that you managed to integrate easily. And you also said, when we talked, that children helped you a lot. You were a swimming instructor, you are still a swimming instructor and the sports director of a performance center in Bucharest. And children helped you a lot. You also learned Romanian from them.

SJ: I was frustrated at first, honestly. I mean, I came from a country where I studied French, speaking Arabic. When I came here, I didn't know a word of Romanian. And it was a bit frustrating. I mean, I couldn't communicate with people, I couldn't communicate! And, at the same time, I wanted to integrate into society and do something useful and build something. Without Romanian, I couldn't do that. I was then offered a job working with children and I would look among the children for someone who knew a word in French and I would combine French-Romanian and come up with something. And then that was a challenge, I can't say it was a difficulty, to learn Romanian. And then, when I learned it, I can say that some doors opened. Because, no matter how competent you are, no matter how much information you have, if you don't have the native language of the country and you can't transmit the information that needs to reach the destination, it's difficult.

AT: You mentioned the word competence a little earlier and I have another question for you now. You are a performance athlete.

SJ: I was.

AT: You were. Yes. You were a high-performance athlete, you were a medalist at national and international competitions in Tunisia. How was your training process here? Given that validation is a condition for your professional success in a foreign country?

SJ: The training, I can say that in my bachelor's degree I was trained in a way, like a start in Tunisia. I didn't come from scratch in Romania, from an academic point of view. I finished my bachelor's degree and then when I finished my master's degree in Romania... The master's degree, from my point of view, without a doctorate, is not enough, it's important to continue your studies and go into the depth of your specialization studies. I managed to keep things connected then, that is, to continue to the end, from an academic point of view. But at the same time, coming from another country, I was receiving help from my parents and I had to say stop at a certain point. I tried to rely on myself and look for a job at the same time as I was doing my doctorate. So the process wasn't that hard, but it was intense. Bachelor's degree, master's degree, doctorate... but, at the same time, I also had to earn a living. And so they went together and complemented each other. Because the PhD was in motor sciences related to sports, doing sports, working with children and swimming, it was along the same lines. And the process went naturally, so to speak.

AT: By the way, since you mentioned your doctoral thesis and the research you did... what is the conclusion you reached as a result of the study you did? What's new?

SJ: The novelty is from a physiological point of view, that is, it was more about confirming or disproving a hypothesis. A hypothesis, from the point of view of the "swimming" specialty - it was about confirming, by doing a repeated sprint training, whether it had an influence on aerobic capacity. The study was confirmed and that was a novelty. Because, in order to develop aerobic capacity, we have to work with a very high volume and a low intensity. In contrast, by doing repeated sprints more times, there is no longer that volume, but the intensity is higher than the volume we were doing before.

AT: Since we're on the subject of education and because we talked a little about your doctoral thesis, I would like to ask you a little about the differences between the educational system in Romania and the system in Tunisia. Because you are a result of both.

SJ: Exactly. I can say, in Romania there was or is an open, free educational system. It is based on applied research. And in Tunisia it is a kind of classic, of theory. Indeed, we, because we were colonized by the French, also have the French educational system. It is the same system. I can say that they complemented each other. There was no difference between the bachelor's and master's systems. There was no difference in saying that I finished my bachelor's, I'm finishing and starting my master's from scratch. No, it was a complement, even the subjects were ... I'll give you an example with biomechanics. Biomechanics was started in Tunisia with a bachelor's degree, it was limited to the definition and that's it. When it came here it was more applied, more with research, more calculations. We went to some laboratories and did some analyses. And then it was a linked process. Which unfolded normally, naturally and complemented itself in one way or another.

AT: Okay, that's related to your professional side. But I would like to ask you, is there a Tunisian community in Romania? I guess you have moments when you miss home...

SJ: Indeed, Tunisia, yes. I miss Tunisia, but the community exists. It exists, but I think it's very small. Most people who come from Tunisia to Romania come for studies, not for the workforce. And then, personally, honestly, I was only focused on my career and I was focused on what I needed.

AT: What do you miss the most? I mean... what's the first thing you do when you get to Tunisia?

SJ: Family, mom, dad, home, the sea... the atmosphere of Ramadan when you go there, which you don't find here. And then, during these periods, for example, Ramadan, I prefer to go, even if it's for a few days, I go home and come back. And then, I don't let that longing be more... To be too long.

AT: Too deep and too long. Do you go often?

SJ: Let's say three or four times a year.

AT: What is your favorite food here in Romania? Romanian food.

SJ: Belly soup, stuffed cabbage rolls... but I eat it occasionally.

AT: Did you learn to cook anything?

SJ: Not Romanian.

AT: No?

SJ: But international cuisine, yes. I mean I had to. Because I was living in a dormitory, I had to, I couldn't just eat outside, meaning from restaurants. I made it myself and ate and I learned. I think I'm a good cook.

AT: I'm convinced! What does home mean to you right now? I said that Romania is your second home, Tunisia is the country where you were born, but if you had to define home in a few words, how would you define it?

SJ: I think it's a general concept. I mean, it can't be personalized just for me. You feel at home where you feel like you have a purpose and you feel like you're doing something and you're building something and you're appreciated in the moment and in the place you are. And then you feel at home, with the people who are around you, with people who help you, people who create challenges for you, and then you really feel at home. When you don't have those things around you, I don't think it's home.

AT: What message would you send to those who want to come to Romania from another country to study or work? What message do you have for them? You have been here since 2011.

SJ: The only message I can give is to focus on why we came here and to be serious about what we want to do. Seriousness! Let's focus, let's try to avoid all the negative things that come. It's inevitable. Whether they come from people or are created by us... there are some things that we should consider.

AT: What would you convey to the Romanians in the community? When we have friends who come from other countries and who want to integrate here... What do you convey to them? What message do you have for them?

SJ: We have to leave prejudices aside. That is, let's not judge people based on where they came from... because Romanians also go abroad, and Romanians also look for a job elsewhere. How that Romanian feels integrated into society and accepted in that society, that's how the foreigner who comes to Romania wants to feel! Because there's a story behind that foreigner too... He left his family, he left his home, he left everything behind and came for a new beginning. And then let's be more flexible, more welcoming, warmer. Romanians, if you understand them, accept them and respect them, show you warmth.

AT: What do you think the Romanian state could do better to integrate foreign citizens who come here to Romania? Let's move on to the more formal part now, if you want.

SJ: If we come from abroad, Romanian is not an international language. When we provide information or when we provide access to information... it would have been much better and much easier for

foreigners to receive that information in English, in French. Indeed, now the young people... the new generation speaks English, but if we go, I don't know, to a state institution, it's very difficult to find someone who can communicate and explain more easily. And then the information is a bit blocked somewhere. And I think that's the only thing that should be taken into account.

AT: I would like to ask you one more question related to your profession. What is the most important thing you have learned as a professional here in Romania? Both in your studies and on the job? What has helped you the most in your career?

SJ: Patience! Patience, because our field requires results and for results, a lot of work needs to be done and you have to wait for those results. You don't have to give up, you have to continue, that is, move on. The moment you asked a question why things aren't going well? or you put a little pressure on the brakes, it wouldn't help you to listen to some bad things on the right and left. No, you have to be patient, you have to be persistent and move on. As in any field, results come later, they don't come immediately.

AT: It's been 14 years since you've been in Romania. I don't like to ask this question where do you see yourself in 5 years or where do you see yourself in 10 years?, but my question is this: Do you think Romania will remain a second home or do you have other plans? Maybe, at some point, a return to Tunisia or maybe a third home? Why not?

SJ: I can say that I am already Romanian and that two years ago I got my citizenship. I think the plans are for Romania and to continue in Romania. What Romania offered me was enough to succeed and I think that, why not?, the successes will come even more later.

AT: Is there anything you would change in your entire career so far? What would you do better?

SJ: No, because I didn't make any plans. Because I came and I was honest, I was fair, I worked and I received. If I had made plans, I don't think I would have turned out the way I have now.

AT: Thank you for having this discussion, for opening up to us, for sharing your experience and success with us, and for Romania being your second home.

SJ: It is. Thank you very much and thank you for the invitation!

**An interview by Adelina Tocitu - Radio România București FM
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)**



If you respect those around you and if you accept those around you for who they are, then the place welcomes you, people support you, and make your life easier.

Murat Agce (Turkey)

Silvia Pascale: Today, in the steam of this Turkish coffee, we will meet Mr. Murat Agce, he is the manager of the International Theoretical High School of Informatics in Constanța, a Dobrogean, I would say, who was born in Turkey, but who found here, in our country, the place where he founded a business, a family, where he created a destiny. Good afternoon and thank you for responding to our invitation.

Murat Agce: Hello, welcome to the International High School of Informatics.

SP: How did your story begin? How did you end up in our country? How did it all begin?

MA: My story began in 1997. I came here as a student. The first time, I was 20 years old when I left home. First I arrived in Istanbul, I had never even been to Istanbul before. I mean, it was something different for me, abroad, I had never even been to Istanbul. And, the first time, I went to Istanbul, and from there by bus to Romania, I went to Bulgaria. And it was a big emotion for me, because I didn't even know Romanian at all, my English was very poor. And, then, I took the bus, I arrived in Constanta after 16 hours. After I arrived in Constanta, a colleague of mine was supposed to meet me, he is actually a teacher at the International High School of Informatics, at the boarding school. So, after I arrived, I waited for about an hour, but no one had come. I didn't even know Romanian, I didn't know English very well. After waiting somewhere, about an hour, I saw that a colleague of ours, whom I met on the bus, was Romanian, who also knew Turkish. Lucky for me, he was passing by. And I asked if he could help me, but at that time I didn't have a mobile phone. There were public phones, with coins... I didn't even know how to contact them, nor did I know the language. Well, the colleague I met on the bus helped me, I called, and the colleague who had fallen asleep came and picked me up. I mean, my story in Romania began with an adventure for me, something of... a memory remained, an unforgettable memory.

SP: And so, you arrived in Constanta, with an unforgettable adventure, in a time when there were no mobile phones, when communication was not so easy, and yet you stepped right into Constanta, a city with an opening to the seashore, which reminded you very well of your hometown, Samsun, a city also with an opening to the Black Sea. How did you interact here with the people of Constanta? What was it like to make friends?

MA: I really didn't expect it, it was really easy. As you said, my hometown, Samsun, a city on the Black Sea coast, on the Turkish side. I really expected it to be harder, but it was really easy, because the people here, in Dobrogea, are really understanding people, because there is a diversity of culture, they live here together, without conflicts, without problems, in peace. Right after that I saw that Dobrogea is an example in Europe, that is, there is no longer an area, a region where 11 ethnic groups live, without problems, without conflicts and they live together. I saw this too, I saw this warmth too. I was very welcomed, how should I say, I felt that warmth. You understand that it was not difficult for me to adapt in Constanța. Maybe it is my luck that I arrived in Constanța the first time. So, it went by very quickly and very easily.

SP: Now, you speak Romanian very well, but 20 years ago you didn't know a single word. What were the first words you learned from our language? And please tell me if it was hard or easy for you to learn our language, which some say is very beautiful and melodious. Many foreigners say this.

MA: So, as I said, it was my luck that I arrived in Constanța the first time, meaning I was warmly welcomed. The people here were very understanding and more than that, the people here, most of them, knew Turkish. So, when I made a mistake, they corrected me without offending me. Even my colleagues at the university never offended me. You see? They might have laughed a little, but they also corrected me. So, it wasn't hard to learn Romanian, it was very hard there, I say, it wasn't easy.

Now I'm managing, I mean I solve all my problems easily, but I can't say that I speak perfectly, but I try, so to speak. The first time, the words I learned were hello, goodbye, how are you, okay, but it was very hard for me to learn the genders that you have in Romanian, feminine, masculine, neuter, they don't exist in Turkish. So, it was very complicated for me. Right now, I still make mistakes sometimes, but I keep learning. And my colleagues around me now still correct me sometimes.

SP: What is the word you love the most and say the most often?

MA: The word I learned from a teacher, he had an age, one day, Mr. Murat, let me teach you three words, but I will never forget them. Indeed, when he was almost 30, but I did not forget. Tomorrow, bread, dog. So it remained a memory for me.

SP: We talked about words, I would also like to ask you about gastronomy. Is there something in Dobrogea, a dish that reminds you of home, of your childhood days when your mother or grandmother would cook you something very tasty in Samsun, Turkey?

MA: And, I repeat once again, it's my luck that I arrived in Constanța the first time for studies from other regions, from Turkey. He wasn't as lucky as me, but for soup, for sarmale, so he wasn't foreign to me. So, that's why I adapted very quickly from this side as well.

SP: You've come to the right place.

MA: Exactly, I came to the right place. And at the right time.

SP: And the Tatar soup reminded you of home, the guest soup. You ate the guest soup because the Turks and Tatars from Dobrogea are very generous and even cooked this dish.

MA: Exactly, exactly. So, it was a soup, the Tatars make it here, it's called wedding soup. I really liked it the first time. And the polenta, as I said, with cheese, with sour cream, and it's really a taste that I knew.

SP: What can you tell us about Şuberek? Because ethnic Tatars, as well as Turks, love this dish.

MA: The Şuberek, we had something similar. It's called pide, but it's not that big, it's small, but the taste is about the same. So, what the Tatars and Romanians were preparing here, I mean, it wasn't a taste far from me. It's not foreign to me. I liked it a lot and I ate it, I adapted very easily.

SP: If I look into these cups and see this coffee prepared in a pot, I can say that you have been spoiled from this point of view as well. Because the people of Dobruja know how to prepare an exemplary Turkish coffee.

MA: Even before I came to Romania, I didn't drink much coffee. I preferred tea. You know? How do you drink coffee here? We used to drink up to 10 glasses, 15 glasses a day. But, after about 10 years, I also started drinking coffee, even Romanian and Turkish, now I drink tea less than coffee, I can say that.

SP: You've changed your habits a bit.

MA: A little, a little, yes.

SP: You have adapted to what you have found here, at home, in Romania, your second home. How do you describe our country after 20 years of adventure?

MA: Really, honestly, Romania is my second home, but since nine years ago, I can say that it is my first home. I mean, it welcomed me warmly. The people are understanding... I made friends very quickly. It wasn't hard for me to get used to the culture. The Romanian language was a little difficult, but I also learned Romanian, which is a second language for me.

SP: You came to Constanța to study. You went to college, then you went to the Republic of Moldova, you returned to Bucharest, but destiny called you back to Constanța. How did you end up leading one of the most important educational institutions in Constanța and even in Dobrogea?

MA: In short, my story began in 1997 here, I did my preparatory course in Romanian and then I moved to Bucharest to continue my studies at the Faculty of Physical Education. After I did two years there, then I transferred to the Republic of Moldova, in 2000, if I'm not mistaken, and I finished the Faculty there, I did my 3rd and 4th years there. After graduating from the Faculty in Chisinau,

I started working as a Physical Education teacher in a private school, that is, a private school in Chisinau. I actually worked there for seven years, I returned to Bucharest at an international school. After working there for seven years, I moved to Constanța where my story began. I mean, I actually returned home.

SP: What are your greatest professional achievements?

MA: The biggest important achievements with my team and I really have the honor to be part of my team. I built this campus. It's an investment of almost 10 million. That is, Dobrogea has gained an investment for education, for the public. There is no longer, as far as I know, a large investment for education in Constanța, even in Dobrogea. I'm really proud to be part of my team. And in 18 months we built and in September 2024 we opened the doors to students.

SP: A very important campus where many parents choose to bring their children, primarily for safety. What can you tell us about education in Romania?

MA: I can't make a comparison. It's really a private school, with a certain fee. But three years ago we did a questionnaire to the parents themselves. We sent the parents the question why did you choose our school? And we are successful in Romania, but according to the results of the questionnaires, no one called us successful, in terms of scores. The first point, for example, was safety. The second point was discipline. The third point was the relationship between teachers and students. The fourth was the activities we did, extracurricular. The fifth or fourth, I don't want to lie, was our success. So private educational institutions... their story also started in Constanța. In '94, a school was established with 33 students and then, the second school in Bucharest, in '96. It started with 33 students, now today, after thirty years in seven different cities, over 5,000 students, over 5,000 graduates! It's a pretty good contribution, I say, to education in Romania!

SP: It's very interesting that you, decades ago, were a teacher at this high school, and now you've become its director. Did you ever think, when you left Samsun, that you would be so successful?

MA: Yes, that's a good question. I really didn't think about it at all. In '97 I came here as a teacher at the International High School of Informatics boarding school, and 15 years later, 20 years later I would return as a manager. I really didn't expect something like that, but for me it's really an honor! When I arrived here as a 20-year-old... and 15 years later you come here and lead the school where you were a teacher. I'm really proud to lead this school and it's a great honor for me to be part of it alongside my colleagues. And after we got married, within a month, I took it and left for Chisinau. I worked for another five years and we returned to Bucharest, but my wife adapted faster, I say. Before coming to Romania, she had learned Romanian, she knew about the culture, meaning there is not a big difference between Moldova and Romania... And after we had three children, right after we arrived in Romania, my wife started going to college, to the Faculty of English-Turkish Language, she even graduated in 2019, got her driver's license in Romania, she also learned Romanian... Two years after me, in 2020, she also obtained citizenship and is now a Turkish teacher in Constanța, a full-time state teacher. So she adapted better than me!

SP: The wife was also born in Samsun, in her hometown.

MA: Also in Samsun. We are really from the same city, the same slums, there are also in Romanian I think, there are slums, it's more of a word that the Turks used to use... for example, bazaar, now it's market... It also exists in Romanian.

SP: You left the same city, with the same values and the same dreams, those of building something together. What is the most important life lesson you have taught your children?

MA: The most important thing, I always, always tell my children: Don't lose your roots! Respect each other, regardless of culture, regardless of religion, regardless of color... Now I can live and continue to live in different cultures, different ethnicities... for me it is a wealth and I would like my children to feel this wealth too! That's what I always tell them: to be good people, with respect for everyone, meaning they should never take into account that it is another culture, another religion, another region... these things don't matter, first of all we are people! That's how I learned, that's how I taught my children. Maybe you don't share the same opinion, you don't think the same way, but you have to respect. You don't have to accept, but you have to respect.

SP: An old saying, a Romanian saying says that you are what you give or that you receive with the hand you give with. Which Romanian saying do you best fit into? Which proverb, which saying do you best identify with?

MA: What I really like is that there is something similar in Turkish: people sanctify the place. I really found it here in Romania, I'm telling the truth, I found it here... if you respect those around you, if you accept them, it doesn't matter what culture, what religion or what style of clothing... if you accept what the people around you are like, then the place accepts you, the people around you support you and make your life easier. That's my wealth, my luck that I ended up in Constanța, I really found this... an essence, you know, different cultures... almost 11 ethnic groups live together, without conflicts. That influenced me a lot.

SP: And it will enrich you, because Dobrogea is a land of multiculturalism, here as you have also emphasized, there are many ethnicities, we have Lipoveans, we have Turks, we have Tatars, we have Armenians, we have Jews, they are different but beautiful people. They form a whole, they form what Dobrogea has more valuable and then you are also rich, because you belong to this place. We are also just as rich because we belong to this place, because we have roots on this Dobrogean land. What is your greatest desire from now on? You have lived beautifully for two decades in the Dobrogean land, what do you propose to achieve from now on?

MA: I also propose to my children and our students to be good people regardless of religion, culture, color... to be always on the side of peace. To respect each other regardless of what culture they belong to, what religion they have, what color they have... regardless of that, to help people, to be with a pure soul. Not to judge... yes, not to judge! To listen more than to speak, I tell this to our students, and to my children: to listen is a gift.

SP: If a friend from abroad calls you and asks you what to do, which path to take, if it would be a good idea for them to come to Romania and make a life here, what would you answer?

MA: So, how I felt from the very first day... honestly, if someone calls me, I say straight away: Come to Romania! I wasn't expecting so much warmth, even if you speak a different language or have a different culture, but there is a warmth... I didn't feel like a stranger, I was welcomed with open arms. I've made a life here longer than in Turkey, I came when I was 20, now I'm 47, meaning I've lived and still live here longer than in Turkey. I can say that I feel like a Romanian citizen more than a Turkish one and my children feel this way because they grew up here, they made friends here... When I went to Turkey, for example, after three or four weeks, no more than that, my family would ask me when we were going back. Our home is in Romania!

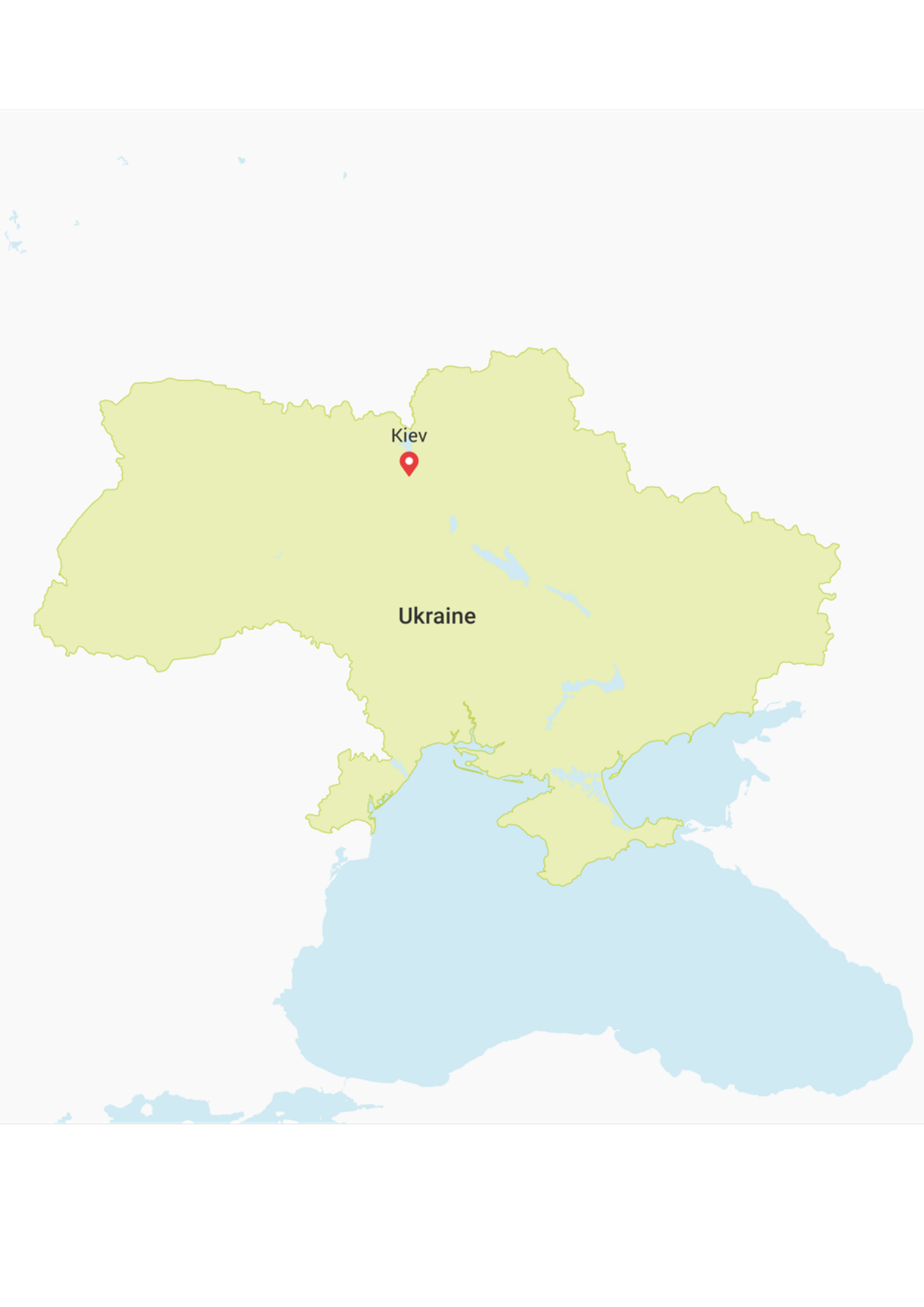
SP: Can you honestly say that you are happy here, in Romania?

MA: Very, very, I'm not exaggerating. Even after I obtained citizenship in 2018, I really am a responsible citizen, I have never missed a vote. Once, once when I was in America, I called my wife: go and vote! Believe it or not... but I really feel more of a Romanian citizen than a Turkish one. Anyway, I repeat, I never forget my roots and I propose to my children: the roots, the values that we have, we must never forget! Without losing your roots, you can accept anything, it's not a problem, I mean it doesn't hurt you, it makes you rich, that's what I saw, that's what I always tell my children and our students.

SP: Have you ever worn traditional clothing?

MA: Always, for example, every time, on December 1st or some other holiday, all our teachers dress up. Once we were in Holland, we decided to go because we had a lot of graduates and they couldn't come on December 1st... we went there, we rented a place with about 20 graduates who are studying at the university in Holland and we met in a place, we did hora, so we had a December 1st party.

SP: Very nice, we thank you very much for this heartfelt interview, for this honest interview, for this transparent interview, we learned your story, a thrilling story that began with adventures, but continued very beautifully and very harmoniously, perhaps also thanks to your open soul. Thank you!



I can't plan anything for the longer future. One day you took what you could fit in one hand and left. And in your hand the child's hand fit...

Nelia Burcan (Ukraine)

Cristina Corocan: Today we bring you the story of a woman who learned to transform homesickness into warm aromas and delicacies that bring people together around cakes. Coming all the way from Ukraine, in a difficult context, Nelia Burcan chose to stay in Reșița, where she opened a soulful business with her family, a confectionery with recipes from her native country, but also local reinterpretations, in a mountain town in the west of the country. For her, Romania has truly become a second home. In what follows, we will talk about adaptation, about courage, about cultural differences, but especially about the closeness between people, even when they come from seemingly different worlds.

Welcome, Nelia Burcan! The first question would be, how did you get here, to Reșița?

Nelia Burcan: Like a story, like a story, because we really didn't know where we were going. And the season we arrived in... It was winter and it looked pretty ugly. I didn't know where we were going, because I didn't know Romania. I only passed through Romania once, in transit, but like that, just on the highway. And when we arrived, I said Wow! Okay, there were mountains, but, because there was no greenery, it seemed to me... a bit desolate, sad, and it was cold. And I say Where did we end up? And over time, when everything started to bloom, to turn green, it became very beautiful. You really have a beautiful country.

CC: Where did your story begin? Where were you born? In which town in Ukraine?

NB: We are from the Odessa region, the city of Chilia. Okay, we are from a small village near Chilia. A very ... old city, the oldest city in Ukraine. And I am glad that I can tell this story, but, how can I say, the reason why we ended up in Romania was not pleasant. That is the sadness of our story, of our journey.

CC: We can't help but talk about what made you leave Ukraine. And what made you choose Romania? How did you end up here, in Reșița? And before that, I'd like you to tell me what you were doing in Chilia before. What do you do?

NB: Still with cakes and cookies. Still in the same field. Still this field, yes. I had a collaboration with some stores and... That's what I was doing, so I have some experience in this field.

CC: When did you have to leave there, from Chilia?

NB: The very third day after the war started. Yes, on the 25th (February) I left. And it just so happened that it was also Sofia's birthday, the youngest, the youngest child of my children. And it was like that, a very sad day. Although it was supposed to be a day of joy, because surprises were prepared for her, but she had to gather her clothes and leave. And so we left. But when we got to customs, because we weren't the only ones leaving, it was that, somewhere, at about 20 hours we waited until we could go through customs. There were so many people, a lot of people. Many children, mothers, who were leaving.

CC: When did you decide? Did something special happen? Was there an imminent danger there, near Chilia, near the town?

NB: Yes, if we really look back, we remember that in the first days the island that is very close to us was also attacked. And at the moment when this happened, there was a call from my child, from my son, that he was in the military. And he said to me: Mom, you have to take the girls and leave!

CC: How many children do you have?

NB: Five.

CC: Long live, may you all be healthy!

NB: Thank you! Thank you.

CC: What are their names, how old are they?

NB: The oldest is Ian, who turns 29 this year. And after Ian comes Iana. Iana turned 25. After Iana is Casia. Casia turned 20 in December. So now, in December (2025), she turns 21. And Eugen, who turned 15 here in Romania, already. And Sofia, who turned 13. The youngest. Sofia is right here, near us.

CC: Sofia is here, yes. You left alone then, just with the children. How many of the children?

NB: With four. The eldest stayed, he was married and lived in Dnipro, a big city, and he was also a soldier. He couldn't leave then.

CC: What was it like leaving everything behind?

NB: Like through a fog. When we got here and started unpacking, we realized that at that moment, in this rush, in this stress, we didn't take many things, we didn't take slippers, something extra. I told them Don't take much, so we don't have to carry a lot with us. Take what is most necessary. And when we got here, we noticed that we didn't have one thing or another and slowly, slowly we needed to buy them, what the children needed.

CC: Basically, when you left there, you didn't know where you were going. You didn't know the whole way where you were going to end up.

NB: Even if the gentleman who came and picked us up told us where we were going, he didn't tell us anything about the locality. We didn't know anything about Reșița and where Reșița is. And from Tulcea it was a few kilometers, I think it was about 800. We kept going and going, through Romania, not knowing where we were going, and all that way until we finally arrived.

CC: What was the first thing you did here? How do you remember that day? Apart from the setting, which was February and you thought it was a bit sad.

NB: Yes, we were very surprised and we were greeted with great, great warmth, right after we passed through customs. So many people jumped to offer us help. And at customs they approached the car, asking Do you need water, a sandwich? So people somehow organized themselves very quickly and those who needed accommodation, they accommodated them, and then they moved on. We kept thinking that some friends from Germany were still inviting us. But we stayed here at Cuptoare, for a month at Cuptoare.

CC: In a neighborhood of Reșița, near the city.

NB: And the children, especially the eldest girl, started to say: But what do we do with these little ones? But even we, we don't know the German language, but here, in Romania, we are somewhat close, it's like home, because the culture is similar and ... Indeed, the difference is small. We are all with cheese, with polenta, with sarmale, with all that.

CC: What was the first thing that impressed you here? Or maybe it was something that, let's say, shocked or was different, in a negative way?

NB: In the negative sense... Let's start with the positive.

CC: Yes. Even negatively.

NB: I haven't encountered any negative things. Someone might say, "What are you doing here?" Everyone behaved with a lot of understanding and respect. I'm satisfied and I don't have any negative examples. It was good. From all points of view.

CC: So, you first arrived at Toptoare. There you had, you stayed in a house.

NB: Yes.

CC: Were you staying with anyone else, with another family, or were you just with the four children?

NB: No, I was with the family that took us in. So, we stayed with them for a month. And we looked for something to rent. We stayed for a few days and immediately looked for work and found it, I got a job.

CC: After a few days.

NB: Yes, after a few days, because it's not worth it. It's not worth sitting like that, on people's backs and feeling somehow stupid. Well, they did it with all their heart, with all their soul, because that's what they got involved for. So, this was something that was achieved with them, they talked and so they decided to do this, to welcome us here. But we felt like a guest, a visitor, who came for a day, two, but not a month. And we are satisfied, really, very satisfied. They did a lot for us and helped us a lot. And with the children, so I really have nothing to say. Many thanks! And now we are friends, we talk, we see each other, they helped us a lot with employment and with rent and with everything, everything, everything.

CC: Where did you first work when you arrived here in Reșița?

NB: At Motif. As a cook or cook's assistant.

CC: So in a restaurant.

NB: Yes, and then in another restaurant, when it opened. Another restaurant, yes. I worked there too. So right from the opening, I worked for them for a few months. And then I needed to leave, I had health problems and I stayed, I think, for about a month, I stayed home. Then I got a job at a bakery.

CC: In the meantime, the children, how have you managed to integrate them here? I mean the level of study and are you doing quite well with the Romanian language?

NB: Now, yes. Now better, yes. At first, I just listened, I kept listening to how they speak here. It's more difficult for us to speak. Because we are Russified, we all learned Russian and we still have it, somehow... and we transform the Romanian word into Russian. And we speak more strangely. But it was very difficult for the children. We, the adults, speak Romanian much more with our parents, because they also learned Romanian at school and had all the subjects in Romanian. I learned Russian, the older children learned Russian, the younger ones learned Ukrainian and so a mixture was formed and it was difficult for them, yes. And now, I think it's not too easy.

CC: How many years has it been since you arrived here?

NB: Already three, going on four. Three and a half years, almost.

CC: We'll start with Sofia, because she's here. What stage is she at? What grade is she in now? Or what studies is she taking? And we'll talk about the others too.

NB: He is at Baptist Theological High School, finishing seventh grade and entering eighth grade.

CC: Did he integrate well?

NB: I can't say it's perfect, but I hope it's good. I hope it's good.

CC: What can you tell us about the others? I think you have something to brag about.

NB: Yes, the others think they are better. The eldest entered college and is now studying in Romania. When we had to leave Ukraine, she finished college in Ukraine. I'm talking about Iana. Casia finished, as it is here in Romania, the 12th grade. And we had all the documents and she was able to enter college in Timisoara. And now she is finishing her third year. I can't believe it, honestly, when three years have passed and the child is already finishing college. She is at college, in Timisoara, at the Faculty of Arts.

CC: Yes, at UVT, at the Faculty of Arts. In photo-video.

NB: Maybe in the future you will have a colleague at Radio.

CC: Yes, why not! That would be wonderful. We congratulate everyone for these successes, which they have. If I were to ask you this question, what does it mean for Nelia Burcan now, at home, today? Has Reșița become a second home or is it home?

NB: I think it has become a second home. I think it has become a second home and talking to the children, especially the girls when they come from Timisoara, that's what they say, that they are coming home. When are you coming home? I ask them. When are you coming home?

CC: You currently live in Reșița. Are you all in an apartment, are you renting it or do you already own it?

NB: Oh, no. We live in a rented apartment. We can't afford to buy anything. We live in a rented apartment. Both we and the girls, if they are in Timisoara, still live in a rented apartment. And Ian, the older child, with his family, still lives in another rented apartment. They are already four and they are about to be five too. And then there are three of us, we are too many for one apartment. But they are also a family. Everyone needs privacy.

CC: I understand that you are already a grandmother.

NB: Yes. I'm a grandmother. Nora gave birth here, in Reșița. So, two or three more months and she'll be here for two years.

CC: Many years ahead.

NB: Thank you.

CC: I would also like to talk about how the idea of opening this confectionery shop here, in Reșița, came about. You said that you worked in the field, in Ukraine, in the same field. You arrived here, you were in certain restaurants, then in a confectionery shop. And how did the idea come about? To open your own business? You had great courage and I congratulate you for that.

NB: Thank you.

CC: And I say it through the lens of what I see here and what you have achieved.

NB: Thank you. But the idea has been around for many, many years. That was the idea in Ukraine too. If the war hadn't started, the idea had to be fulfilled in Ukraine, in Odessa. That's what we're planning, to move with these younger children to Odessa. And I have a friend there. I talked to her to find a space. I've already found the space. But I didn't get to see it. I only got to talk to a lady who was selling equipment, from a guesthouse by the sea. She had display cases, refrigerators, tables, all that. And I talked to her to keep them until the fall. And they said that if you come and give me an advance, that's fine. And I said that I'd come to see the space, to see how big it is, what equipment I need, and to be able to give an advance. And I didn't get there. So I was supposed to get to them in March, to see all of this. And we didn't make it, because the war started. We ended up somewhere else entirely.

CC: Because that's how it was meant to be, come and delight our taste buds with these special cakes, which we enjoy here at VanNelli's bakery.

NB: Yes, yes.

CC: How long has VanNelli's Confectionery been around?

NB: We opened the bakery in December 2023. We've already had it for a year and a half.

CC: Who helps you kids? It's a family business.

NB: Yes, it's a family business, really, because the sales are done by the older child, Ian, and my nephew, Vlad. And my brother and sister-in-law help me in the back. So, really, we are family.

CC: I would like us not to miss the moment and tell us about the assortments you prepare for the people of Reșița, but not only for the people of Reșița.

NB: Yes, not only for people from Reșița.

CC: How did you bring Ukraine, the recipes from Ukraine, here? How did you adapt them and how did you adapt to the recipes here?

NB: At first I said we wouldn't do anything that's made here in the area. I said we wouldn't have savarin, because it's found everywhere. And for a year, even more, I worked only with our recipes and the recipes that I had written down. People keep coming and asking me why I need so many diaries here. To write down my different recipes. How could I not need them here in the kitchen? For example, the Kiev cake, which also features the capital of Ukraine, I understood that it's not really made here. Somewhere in Bucharest I heard that, yes, it's possible to find it there. And I have several recipes that I've collected over many years. And if something new comes along, I buy more. Or I buy another course, take another course, something, just like that, to help me grow in this field.

CC: What are the most popular products of the confectionery? Do you have a star dish?

NB: Yes, we have. Last year, the best-selling cake was a banana Medovik. We couldn't keep up with the orders with that. It sold out immediately, many people asked about it. Many people liked this Medovik. It's a traditional recipe.

CC: He's from Ukraine, right?

NB: Yes, a traditional recipe. What does the cake contain? Butter, honey, eggs, sugar and all that. But there is a way to prepare it with sheets. That's the secret. That there are more. And it's made completely differently. We also have, also with sheets, with honey, a Medovik, but it's more complicated, because it has more layers, more flavors.

CC: Have you kept in touch with other people from Ukraine here in the area?

NB: Yes.

CC: Do I come right here to the bakery?

NB: I come here to the bakery specifically to eat Medovik. Yes. And I don't see them for a while, for example, they're gone for a few days or a week and then they show up. There are two friends and they work somewhere around here, in the area, but they come to Medovik, for a coffee, for a juice. But I come especially for this cake.

CC: Do they live right here in Reșița?

NB: Yes. Yes, I live in Reșița, in the Govândari neighborhood.

CC: Have you also adapted from a culinary point of view here? And let's stay in this area, because I want you to tell me what differences or similarities you noticed between Romanian and Ukrainian culinary customs.

NB: Difference? There is something ... There is something ... How should I say? There is some difference. There is something. But, in total, so to speak, in general, we also like it, somehow, because we find here: polenta, sarmale, meatballs, soup with perișoare. It's pretty much what we do here too. I think just the name is different. And what is not done here is borscht. It's like a soup, but with cabbage and red wine. That's traditional from Ukraine. And it's not done here.

CC: From a cultural, spiritual, religious point of view, how have you adapted here? Have you found any similarities or differences?

NB: Similarities. There is no difference. It is exactly like in Ukraine.

CC: Do you go to events, participate in cultural events?

NB: Yes, yes.

CC: Or with confectionery products?

NB: Last year I was a sponsor for girls who practice gymnastics.

CC: Rhythmic gymnastics?

NB: Yes, yes. I know that there are all kinds of competitions. I also participated when they collected pennies for a girl who had cancer.

CC: You made different gestures.

NB: Yes, yes. Of these ... I made for the children. We strive to be up to date with everything, so that the world knows us well. Not only about cakes, but also from other points of view.

CC: How do you get along with the people here? How were you received? From this point of view, do you feel at home? What are the people of Banat like? How did they welcome you here? How did you integrate into the community here?

NB: I mean, even when we opened the bakery, a lot of people came to find out about us. We had already been living here since 2022, yes, and somehow in 2023, we had been living here for a little over a year. And people kept coming. That's my calling card. If you need anything, you can contact us. Nobody said anything bad about us. People kept coming and saying: If you need anything or help or even a kind word, contact us! I can't say anything bad, everyone helped us.

CC: Including the authorities, not just the people here, did they welcome you well?

NB: Yes.

CC: How do you see the future here? Is there a future here in Reșița? Or are you thinking of returning when the waters calm down there, to Chilia, in Ukraine?

NB: This is a very challenging question, I would say, for us, for what we have experienced. For example, I am talking about myself now, I cannot plan anything for the longer future. So, we are grateful for what we have today! Because what happened in Ukraine showed us what everything can become. One day you took what could only fit in one hand and left. And even more, that your child's hand fit in one hand. You took his hand and left! That's why, now, at this moment, it is very difficult for me to say anything about the future and what plans we have. We are staying here in Reșița, of course, especially since the children are adapting to some extent. Now the eldest daughter got married here in Romania. And if they settle here, then I will stay here too.

CC: Thank you for this special story that you presented to us. I wish you good health, it is the most important thing! May you continue to do all of them. Good health and success in everything you do with your children!

NB: Thank you.

An interview by Cristina Corocan - Radio Reșița
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)



Hanoi

Vietnam

People now don't just eat food. They came to your restaurant for the story, for the value you brought, for the story about the food.

Minh Binh (Vietnam)

Mihaela Ioncelescu: Welcome, Minh, nice to meet you.

Minh Binh: Nice to meet you.

MI: I want to ask you, how did your story begin in Romania? And when?

MB: My husband was in Vietnam in 2006 for a project and we met there and I came here for him. I didn't even know where Romania was then, what the country was like, I didn't know anything.

MI: You knew absolutely nothing about Romania.

MB: It's in Europe, a country far away.

MI: I found out that you worked there as a tour guide. What was the work like? What was your life like as a tour guide?

MB: I loved what I was doing and I loved meeting many people from many countries and many cultures.

MI: You met people from all countries, people came to visit Vietnam.

MB: Yes, in Vietnam, yes.

MI: And what was their impression of Vietnam?

MB: Friendly, beautiful, very good food. Aha!

MI: You are a culinary entrepreneur, now in Romania, a successful entrepreneur, you have a successful business in Romania. How was the transition from the profession of a tour guide to that of an entrepreneur?

MB: Actually, I graduated from the faculty of tourism, that is, not the specialty of tourist guide. I learned more, that is, with a hotel, with a restaurant, but food, that's just out of passion.

MI: Just out of passion for food?

MB: Yes.

MI: Is it a family passion or...?

MB: No, my passion, I love to eat.

MI: You came to Romania for your husband.

MB: Yes.

MI: What made you choose Timișoara? Is your husband from Timișoara?

MB: My husband is from Timișoara.

MI: Your husband is from Timișoara. And how did this city, Timișoara, become home for you?

MB: I mean, I think they're not that different, there are no differences between Vietnam and Romania, street by street, block by block. I mean, I think there's more construction in Vietnam now than here in Romania.

MI: So it wasn't that big of a difference? It wasn't that sudden a transition?

MB: No, not for me.

MI: How was Romania, and Timisoara in particular? Was it love at first sight or did you get used to it over time?

MB: Yes, the thing I don't like is the cold.

MI: The cold.

MB: I mean, the first winter, I stayed in the apartment building. I mean, it was the first time I saw snow in my life.

MI: In Romania.

MB: Yes.

MI: I understand. And if I were to ask you about your impressions of the city and the people, the people of Timișoara? What were your impressions, your first impressions?

MB: People here are very friendly. How can I say, very kind.

MI: Kind?

MB: Yes. And I have no problems with the people here. I like them.

MI: Did they accept you right away?

MB: Yes, yes.

MI: It's one of the characteristics of Timișoara. I want you to tell us when and how you decided to turn your passion for food, your passion for cooking, into a business.

MB: I'm not a housewife type, I mean I don't want to stay home, cook and wash. I have to work. And I want to work anything, it's no problem. But I have to go to work. And the first time I tried another business and, in my free time, I made some food, because I really miss home cooking. And my husband invited some colleagues and friends here to eat. And they said why don't you open a Vietnamese restaurant here? And I remembered that. In the center there was a small place, there was a Korean restaurant. And when I was there, I said to myself that my wish if I had a small place like that, to make my restaurant, it would be perfect. And after a few months the owner left for America and wanted to sell the business. And I said maybe this ... this is the moment.

MI: Yes. So positive reactions from friends, acquaintances towards your dishes, when they tasted your dishes.

MB: Yes. They like the taste. They said the food is very good. My husband's colleagues said we'll pay you and you make food.

MI: If you think about Romanian food, what dishes do you like from Romanian cuisine?

MB: Me? "Mici" and beer.

MI: "Mici" and beer? What do you think of the sarmale?

MB: Sarmale, when it's a holiday.

MI: For the holidays.

MB: Yes.

MI: You've been on many cooking shows. That brought you into the public eye. What did that experience teach you?

MB: At ... I learned ... At that time I didn't ... I mean I wasn't a professional to run a kitchen. And from there I learned to work with the team, teamwork.

MI: Teamwork.

MB: Yes. I work in a team. And ... Here it's different, with us it doesn't have to be decorated, with flowers, with plating. Here it's a little different, you know? Not just good food, it has to be beautiful too.

MI: There has to be plating too. Ah, so that's a difference between Romania and Vietnam.

MB: Yes. I mean, now Vietnam has adapted with decor and such, but back then we didn't have that kind of culture.

MI: Here's a very interesting difference. What other differences did you notice between Romania and Vietnam? What surprised you the most?

MB: There weren't many surprises for me.

MI: Did anything take you by surprise?

MB: No.

MI: But are there any differences in lifestyle habits that you probably had to adapt to in Romania compared to Vietnam?

MB: No. Not for me. Maybe because of my mother-in-law and father-in-law, they are very, how should I say, open. I have no problem.

MI: A good adaptation to Romania. If there was a wow moment related to Romania, what would it be? Something that surprised you very pleasantly.

MB: I think Chef Scarlatescu invited me to join the team.

MI: As a team, on the cooking show.

MB: Yes. I feel very proud. I was a stranger that he called to the team.

MI: A confirmation?

MB: Yes. Very proud.

MI: If the way you settled in Romania was so smooth and easy, do you keep Vietnamese customs in your family?

MB: No, no. I'm very open. I mean, I don't have any cultural conflicts in my family.

MI: And what are our customs that you like the most? The ones you've seen here?

MB: What do I like?

MI: What kind of customs? Traditions, customs, Romanian customs.

MB: Ah. Traditions, traditions, maybe for holidays. Too many holidays.

MI: Too many holidays in Romania?

MB: Yes.

MI: Let's talk about that. Why do you think that is?

MB: Because of ... In Vietnam we have fewer. Here every now and then holidays, holidays. I don't know why so many holidays. I want to work.

MI: Look, this is a point of view that many Romanians probably share with you. Tell us, please, what is life like as a foreign entrepreneur in Romania? What was the hardest thing, perhaps, at the beginning?

MB: At first, I think you have to ... learn the market. Maybe the local taste. I mean, every city is a little different, not everyone is the same. I have five restaurants in five cities. And I know that it might work a little better in Timisoara, but in Bucharest it's harder.

MI: So the restaurants are adapted to the specifics of each city.

MB: Yes, yes.

MI: But when you started the business, what did you find difficult, let's say?

MB: There were some problems. I mean, when we started the first restaurant in Timisoara, people didn't know about Vietnamese food yet. And there weren't even Vietnamese people in Timisoara. In 2018, 2016 or 2017, there weren't even many Romanians who traveled to Vietnam.

MI: Yes, yes. But Vietnam was not yet such a common destination for Romanian tourists.

MB: Yes. And it's hard. I mean, when we started with pho soup, it's very well-known in the world. And here, I think, one day I sold one or two products of that soup. I mean, people know about Chinese food, not Vietnamese food. But after I participated in Chefi la cuțite, people came out of curiosity. When they eat Vietnamese food, we got a lot more customers because they like the taste, they like our food.

MI: How do you work with your team? With your teams? How do you work with them?

MB: I, in each location, have a Romanian manager, because of the documents and everything. But in the kitchen there are only Vietnamese. I brought people from Vietnam. And I have a chef. I make

the menu and then I pass it on.

MI: So, your arrival in Romania also offered other specialists a way to assert themselves.

MB: Yes. Yes.

MI: What does a successful day look like for you? A good day.

MB: A good day? When the empty plate comes back from the customers.

MI: That's a good sign.

MB: Yes.

MI: Is that what success means to you? How would you define success? Now in Romania, how would you define success?

MB: For me, I don't know about anyone else, but for me, success is when you make a name for yourself. I mean, by the name of the restaurant, you know who's behind it. I think people now don't just eat food. They came to you for the story, for the value that you brought, for the story of the food. There's more.

MI: Very nice. Very nice you said. Coming back to your interaction with Romania, you speak Romanian. How difficult was it to learn Romanian?

MB: For me, it's not that hard. Because I know English well. And after English I learned Romanian.

MI: The transition through English was.

MB: Yes.

MI: Now, I would like you to tell us what you would improve, currently, so that foreign entrepreneurs, like you, can adapt more easily in Romania. What could be done?

MB: I think the most important thing is the language. If you can't communicate with the people, you can't do anything. When you come to a country, you have to learn the language. I mean, either English, or the local language. And, from the language, you understand the culture, the people, and from there you will do as you wish. And you have to know for sure what you want. I mean, what you want to do. For example, if you make Vietnamese food, you have to stay close, as close as possible to the original recipe. I mean, here it's not easy to find all the spices. But, I have to stay as close as possible to the original recipe.

MI: You respect the original recipes, you don't make discounts.

MB: Yeah, I don't do it after ... For example, 10 customers come to the restaurant and one says "Aha, this is too salty." And then, you change it, and... another one says, "this is how you should do it" and you change it after them. It's not good.

MI: It's not good. What message do you have for foreigners who want to start a business here, but are hesitant? Don't they have the courage to take this step? Did you have the courage?

MB: I think that's the most important thing, you have to have ambition, to have passion for what you do, especially in a restaurant. Because it's very hard work. I mean, you can stay from morning until night, every day, and if you don't have passion, you'll give up.

MI: I would like you to tell us now what message you have for Romanians about Vietnam. What would you like Romanians to understand better about Vietnam? Because, as I said earlier, it is a very popular tourist destination now.

MB: Vietnam is a very beautiful country. It has everything. We have a lot of vegetables, fruits, seafood, all fresh, people are friendly. It's ... a peaceful country. I mean ... a country, how should I say ... of peace.

MI: Yes, it's peace. And it's very important today. Do you think Romania is a welcoming country for those who want to build a life here?

MB: Yes, it's a good country. It's a good country. Here it's a country ... still a peaceful country. You have a chance. It's diverse. You have a chance.

MI: I understand.

MB: Yes.

MI: If you had to describe Romania in one word, what would it be?

MB: Various.

MI: Yes. And a dream that you linked to your life in Romania?

MB: I think that for everyone, the best place and the most pleasant place is the country you were born in. I mean, wherever you go, you want to be back in the country you were born in.

MI: Yes. Are you thinking about going back to Vietnam?

MB: Yes. At some point. When I can't work anymore.

MI: Minh, I wish you much success in your career and in life in Romania and thank you for being with us.

MB: Thank you too.

**An interview by Mihaela Ioncelescu - Radio Timișoara
Watch the interview in video format on the [project website](#)**

Instead of an ending

Dear reader,

We thank you for being with us, following the path of 18 newcomers for whom Romania has become their second home.

Even if we are different, if we have different traditions, customs and life experiences, we all build an extremely beautiful and complex puzzle of a multicultural society every day.

We hope that “**Romania, a second home**” helped you to know and understand our interlocutors a little better and managed to build new bridges for a dialogue free of any stereotypes.

Our project does not stop here, we are preparing new surprises for you, we hope the most pleasant ones, because Radio Romania has been, since 1928, number 1, the voice that unites, that promotes values, education, that informs promptly, objectively and balancedly, that wants to be your invisible but irreplaceable agenda.

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