

# A Review<sup>1</sup> of Strategic Options for Achieving a Country Brand for Romania

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## *Abstract*

*Since 20 years ago our country brand is unsuccessfully looking for its identity. Although over time numerous attempts were made, none of the projects was successful.*

*Sashi Tharoor – a specialist in country brands – said that „for a country to become a valuable brand it must be the country with the story”. Which is Romania’s story then? Where should it start and where should it end? Who would be the best story-teller? And who would be the listeners? These are some questions to which this article is aimed to answer.*

**Keywords:** *country brand, tourism brand, image, strategic options, promoting campaigns.*

**JEL classification:** M30, M37, M39

## **Introduction**

A country brand can be a generic label or an omnipresent packaging, or may become a link between the political, social and economic pillars of a nation. When properly designed and created, a brand can build a country, can concentrate the tourism offer, which can stimulate investment in and out of a country, can restore its reputation and create a renewed pride among the citizens of that country.

Country branding is a topic discussed both in the past and in the present by the press, because it is a fashionable topic. It marks the image projected by each country in the world. “Branding is not expensive advertising or PR campaign, but the mere idea of incorporating in each country’s development strategy the concept of creating an image that reflects reality” (Anholt, 2008, p. 1).

Regarding Romania, in the last 20 years it has gone through a continuous process of branding and rebranding, without reaching however, visible results.

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Without a budget specially assigned for the country brand, sectorial brands have emerged, such as tourism, IT, wine and furniture. In these circumstances, the British marketing consultant Simon Anholt predicted that the whole concept of country brand tends to become irrelevant, because it is being replaced by competitive identity (www.brandingromania.info).

This is also confirmed by the report of the Country Brand Index (CBI) for 2009 made by Future Brand Company, where Romania does not have a distinct image as a country brand and ranks 81 out of 102 countries analyzed<sup>1</sup>.

“Romania is underdeveloped as a brand. Residents of other parts of the world know very little about Romania and the country profile is not a distinct one”, it is shown in the CBI report, which quantifies the image of countries according to 29 criteria, from history to business and economic situation.

Chapters to which Romania is found in the first half of the rankings are “natural environment” (19), “history” (44), “high technology” (45), “purchasing power” (45) and “living standard” (47).

## **1. The tries and fails of the Romanian brand**

Starting in 2001 with “Made in Romania”, passing through eternal, fascinating and always surprising striving (2004) and culminating in 2007 with Fabulospirit the attempts to achieve a Romanian brand have ended up in failure.

In the next pages we will make a brief overview of the tries and failures of the Romanian brand.

### ***1.1 “Eternal and fascinating Romania” (1995)***

Romania’s first branding actions were made in the mid ‘90s. The *Eternal and fascinating Romania* is an example that, although there was not a campaign in itself, it aimed at imposing externally a positive image of the country through an exceptional editorial appearance, an album of photographs (Figure 1) that would present a unique country, with immutable values, many still undiscovered.

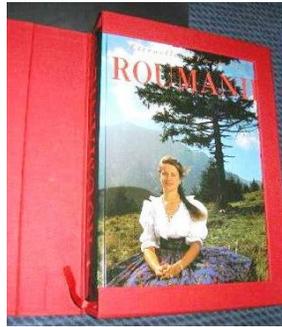
The project started in 1995 through a contract of 5,97 million dollars, signed by the Romanian Government with “Group Saintonge Edition”.

Theoretically, the *Eternal and Fascinating Romania* should have arrived in 96 countries worldwide. Thus, the album should have promoted Romania from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, in Greenland, China and Taiwan (Surcel, 2006).

Although the initiative had very good intentions, its visibility in the media was due in large part to an embezzlement scandal, started shortly after the appearance of the album. Thus, in March 1998, of the 97,000 albums only 10,000 were executed, in the country arriving only 4,200. The press pointed out that a copy cost 600 Euros, a sum considered exorbitant.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2008, Romania ranked 76 out of 78 countries analyzed.



**Figure 1 The album "Eternal and fascinating Romania"**

### ***1.2 "Made in Romania" (2000)***

In 2000, the Association for Promoting Products and Services – Romania (APPSR) launched a program to promote and support the Romanian products on the domestic market, but especially abroad "amid a decline in domestic production and loss of important milestones of the national economy" (<http://www.fir.ro>) at that time. "Romania was intended to be associated and identified with a group of products so as not to be a foreign name on the western markets. The *Made in Romania* concept refers to any creation, product or service of any kind, conducted in the country at a rate of 50% or which essentially transformed here. Businesses participating in the program, addressing the logo *Made in Romania* could promote their brands, products and services consistently, efficiently and on the long-term, with minimum cost.



**Figure 2 The logo "Made in Romania"**

Source: <http://www.fir.ro>

The stylized sun symbol in the logo *Made in Romania* (Figure 2) embodied a tradition relating to the representation of religious decor items created or used in Romania, associated with energy, dynamism and vitality expressed by this symbol.

The stated intention which has grounded all actions related to this logo was for it to become universally recognized, inextricably linked to the image of Romanian products in consumers' minds.

*Made in Romania* went bankrupt in 2005 due to the relatively small number of local producers attracted by the program, due largely to lack of

information and promotion, but also to the fee payable by each member entering into this project (100 million lei).

### ***1.3 “Romania, simply surprising” (2004)***

The campaign to promote the country’s tourism image *Romania, always surprising* meant to create a website ([www.romaniatravel.com](http://www.romaniatravel.com)) (Figure 3) and several promoting spots. The campaign was created by advertising agency Ogilvy&Mather Advertising and cost \$ 1,7 million. Launched in 2004, the campaign had as main objectives: changing perceptions and attitudes towards Romania, especially in EU countries and USA and presenting Romania as an attractive tourist destination. The message was that Romania has changed in terms of tourism. The campaign addressed to potential tourists aged between 20 and 55 years, with average income, informed, attracted experiences, interested in culture and history. The campaign was conducted from June to August and consisted of one daily spot *Romania, always surprising* on the TV channels: Euronews, Eurosport, Discovery, CNN, BBC.



**Figure 3 The campaign “Romania – simply surprising”**  
Source: [www.romaniatravel.com](http://www.romaniatravel.com)

In 2007, Richard Batchelor – head of the international consultants team from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) cancelled the slogan on the basis that “*Simply Surprising* does not communicate the essence of Romania to the potential visitors”.

### ***1.4 Branding Romania (2005)***

The idea of *Branding Romania* was launched in 2005 and responsibility for building the country brand belonged to the Agency for Governmental Strategies (AGS). The project was completed in December 2006 and approved in early 2007 by government decision.

In August 2007, AGS held a tender to initiate *Branding Romania*. On the day fixed for the opening of tenders committee of the AGS found that there are no competitors.

Estimated to cost two million Euros and after a period of three years in order to become operational, the brand Romania had absorbed 200,000 Euros by the end of 2007, with results far from the original plans. Thus, few studies have been conducted on how Romanians are perceived in Spain, Germany and Italy, and also a visual identity manual was made.

### 1.5 The campaign „Romania-Fabulospirit” (2006)

In an attempt to create an image campaign for Romania on the accession to the EU, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) released the slogan – *Romania-Fabulospirit*. The concept was developed in December 2006 following consultation with Romania’s diplomatic missions abroad, in connection to the country's image in the world and after the study of several examples of recent EU member states. The campaign *Fabulospirit* aimed at positioning Romania as a new member and finding a statement which would differentiate it from other European countries.

*Fabulospirit* campaign sought to position Romania as a country with spiritual people who enjoy life, a people defined by inner wealth and fabulous spirit, which has much to offer to the great European family. On the medium and long term, it was desirable for Romania that the word “spirit” became whatis “conservative” for the British and “engineer” for the Germans (*Evenimentul zilei*, 2007).

The campaign strategy focused on the idea of presenting Romania as a national production studio that has numerous success stories:

- The flight through Henri Coandă who made the world’s first flight with a plane powered by a jet engine (Figure 4);
- The infinity through Constantin Brâncuși and its Infinity Column (Figure 4);
- Equilibrium (gymnast Nadia Comăneci);
- Natural monuments (the Sfinx in the Bucegi Mountains).

*Fabulospirit* was based on communicating the success stories of Romania, with known or still unknown elements that would draw attention on the creative and innovative spirit, with mythical allusions to the country’s genesis.

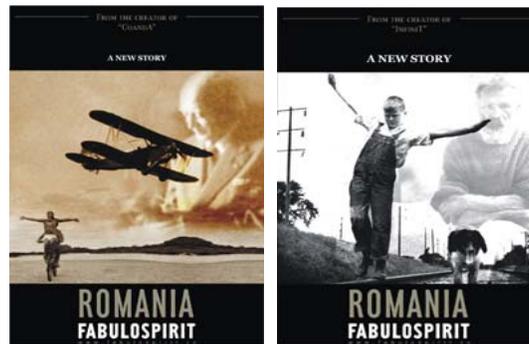


Figure 4 Prints for the campaign “Romania – Fabulospirit”

After only one week from launch, *Fabulospirit* issued controversy and gathered mostly negative feedback. Among other things it was said that not only us, Romanians have a fabulous spirit, but all the nations in the world, so a clear distinction would be difficult to make. The authors argued that they did not try to create a country brand, but only a tool for changing the image of Romania in the world.

The *Fabulospirit* campaign was budgeted at 3-5 million Euros, but the project was canceled at the end of 2006.

### 1.6 Sectorial campaigns (2007)

- **“RomâniaIT” campaign**

In January 2007, the Ministry of Economy and Commerce (MEC) launched a brand image of the Romanian IT&C industry for export promoting. The brand slogan is: “Creative talent. Technical excellence”. The marketing materials used and distributed in the campaign:

- ✓ A promotional spot that highlights the strengths of the Romanian IT sector;
- ✓ An appropriate website ([www.RomaniaIT.com](http://www.RomaniaIT.com)) which should have been used as a primary source of information about the IT sector, business community and media representatives;
- ✓ Presentation sheets and brochures, and also a book about the brand and a user guide.



Figure 5 Sectorial campaign logo „România IT”

Source: [www.RomaniaIT.com](http://www.RomaniaIT.com)

This project has been widely criticized starting with the logo (Figure 5): the image of the Infinity Column created by Brâncuși is relevant only to Romanians and not to those targeted by the concept – foreigners. Those involved argued that the column it is used to represent Romania's ICT industry, as the symbol embodies the distinct qualities of Romania's talented and ICT professionals, who strive for continuous improvement and education in technology and creativity. The column underscores a unique quality of Romanian culture: living links between the present and its ancient past. As with this sculpture, they are grounded in the nation's traditions of technical excellence and constant learning with a national focus on the achievement of the most modern of technical innovations.

- **The campaign “A fresh look at Romania”**

The campaign was started by the Ministry of European Integration (MEI) and funded by Coca-Cola and Unilever. It aimed to inform foreign business opportunities offered by Romania. The concept envisaged providing factual information about the

opportunities offered by Romania's economic development to the international business environment. The campaign was conducted in March-April 2007 in "The Economist" magazine and "Financial Times" and it cost 100,000 Euros.

Prints have been designed in the form of advertising articles whose purpose was to inform readers about the advantages offered by Romania. The problem was that the "prints looked bad (Figure 6): had too much text, were hard to read, did not have any photos, for more authenticity they wanted to imitate magazine pages, but they were not even close to their style and did not attract anyone's attention" (Brand Identity, 2007).



**Figure 6 The campaign "A fresh look at Romania" in The Economist**

**1.7 "Romanians in Europe" campaign (2008)**

This campaign was aimed at improving the image of Romanians abroad (Italy and Spain) in a time when they were known in the foreign media especially for cases of murder, theft, prostitution and fraud. It cost over 7,5 million Euros.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs ran this promoting campaign with the help of ASG between September and December 2008 in:

- *Spain:* „Hola, soy rumeno” (Hello, I am Romanian!) (Figure 7). The campaign was successfully implemented by Saatchi&Saatchi Spain at a budget of 3,5 million Euros.



**Figure 7 Hello, soy rumeno campaign**  
**Source:** <http://www.holasoyrumano.es/ro/campaign>

- *Italy*: „Romania. Piacere di conoscerti” (Romania, pleased to meet you!) (Figure 8). The campaign was implemented by the Playteam Italian agency at a cost of 4,2 million Euros.



**Figure 8** The campaign “Romania. Piacere di conoscerti”

According to some specialists the campaign *Romanians in Europe* was the first coherent governmental action after 1990. For the first time in 18 years, the Romanian Government started an integrated communication campaign which used both PR and marketing elements. Thus:

- was made based on the results of sociological research in Italy and Spain, which has facilitated the study of the situation and definition of specific issues for each of the two countries;
- the goals and objectives of the campaign were formulated;
- the target audience was crystallized;
- the key messages were developed;
- specific strategies and tactics have been adopted for each country, but in accordance with the communication line and the overall concept for presenting success stories;
- distinct visual and communication identities were created (slogan, logo, posters, media spots and layouts) for each country;
- both a budget and an implementing timeframe for action were clearly established;
- finally, a sociological survey was conducted to assess the effects of the campaign.

### **1.8 “Romania - Land of choice” (2009)**

According to data from the Ministry of Tourism (MT), the creation of the slogan *Romania, the land of choice* (Figure 9) was free, because it was developed in house by the ministry. It financed however the launching of the campaign in Paris, which cost 66,000 Euros. The spots were broadcasted on CNN and Eurosport in August-December at a cost of 1,344,500 Euros (excluding VAT).

The campaign's objectives were to increase Romania's notoriety as an international tourism destination abroad, enhance the interest of the public from other countries for Romania and grow the number of foreign tourists coming to Romania.

Short time after the campaign was launched MT was involved in a scandal related to the slogan, because it was already registered at the State Office for Inventions and Brands by a private individual.

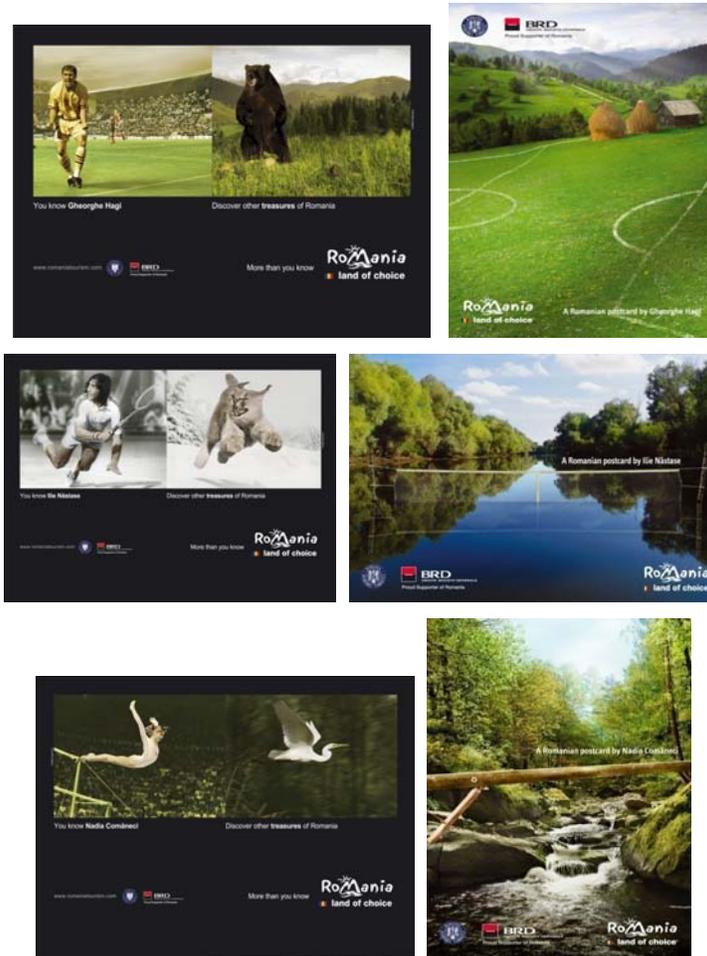


Figure 9 “Romania – Land of choice”

## 2. Romania's tourism brand (2009-2010)

The creation and promotion process of the tourism brand is financed using European funding from the Regional Operational Program is part of a project for promoting the tourism potential of Romania with a total allocation of 75 million Euros until the end of 2013. The project's general objective is to create a positive image of Romania by using and establishing a national tourism brand, by increasing Romania's attractiveness abroad as a tourism destination and, indirectly as a business opportunity.

The tender for creating a tourism brand took place in 2009 and the winning consortium was designated THR – TNS (Asesores en Turismo y Hotelera Recreacion – Taylor Nelson Sofres). The Spanish company has spent 400,000 Euros for a quantitative research which included 10,881 telephone interviews (which means 1,200 for each market) with visitors from Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy, Russia, Austria, USA, Hungary and Romania, as well as feasibility studies on the ability to attract tourists. The research has shown that:

- Reality is better than perception, most of the tourists improving their perception about Romania after visiting it;
- The biggest image problems identified regard the fact that foreigners have insufficient information about Romania, our tourism products and destinations. Consequently, Romania needs to be a better communicator.

Following the research, six tourism products were crystallized, focusing on Romania's representativeness and which can be attractive on the international tourism market: "rural tourism", "wild nature and natural reservations", "health and wellness", "action and adventure", "circuits" and "city breaks" (MRDT, 2010).

The project was finished in approximately six months after the signing of the contract and cost 894,970 Euros from European funding.

The official launch of Romania's tourism brand was held on 29 July 2010 at the World Exhibition in Shanghai. It was accompanied by the slogan "Explore the Carpathian garden" (Figure 10).



**Figure 10** The logo for Romania's tourism brand

The new brand emphasizes on returning to nature and traditional and its creation took into consideration the Romanian cultural heritage.

Right after the launch of Romania's tourism brand a big scandal emerged for the following reasons:

1) The logo resembles strikingly an Irish project regarding eco-transport, as well as a poster used by Oltchim at an exhibition in 2009, and it can be bought from an image bank with approximately 250 Euros (Figure 11). Because of this one cannot speak about uniqueness and authenticity.



**Figure 11 Romania's logo, Oltchim's imprint, the set sold on shutterstock.com and the logo of the transport company "Change Transport"**

Source: *Capital Magazine* no. 30 (884)/2 August 2010

2) The slogan "Explore the Carpathian garden" is in the same category as the logo. It does not address a unique theme, it has no attraction and when we speak about the Carpathians, they can be found not only in Romania<sup>1</sup>, but also in Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine and Serbia. Thus specialists argue that the slogan is an indirect advertising for other tourism destinations linked to the Carpathians in six other countries (Ioniță, 2010).

3) The new tourism brand is defined by some communication and branding specialists, as well as by some tourism specialists as "common", "ambiguous", "limited", far from reaching its goal. In an interview in the Austrian daily paper *Wirtschaftsblatt*, Michael Brandtner, publicist and consultant in strategic marketing, argues that Romania has no problem with its tourism logo, but with its country *brand*, which is not clearly defined and positioned on the international tourism market. Any powerful country brand is supported by a key image. "When you see the pyramids you think about Egypt. When you see an image of the Eiffel Tower you think about Paris. The Tower Bridge is a symbol of London, and the Statue of Liberty a symbol of New York" says Michael Brandtner. "How much money is Romania willing to pay in order to be associated with a green leaf?" (Drăghicescu, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> From the total surface of the Carpathians, half - over 200.000 sq km - is in Romania.

## Conclusions

Romania's first branding activities at governmental level were more isolated actions than integrated communication campaigns: albums, TV spots, labels for Romanian products. These approaches have promoted tangible objects such as places to visit in Romania, food, and only after 2005 appeared integrating concepts to present a more complex picture of the country and to also embrace customs, traditions, theatre plays, documentary films etc.

Each new attempt to create a country brand in the last 15-20 years was associated with suspicions of corruption and peculation, always looking for motives for demonstrating that the money is spent in vain, while the real problems are completely different. In addition, the communication campaigns were cancelled, most of the time following political changes in the institutions implementing them.

In conclusion, "the post-communist image campaigns were separated into two different periods (Dolea, Țăruș, 2009, pp. 85-86):

- *1996-2006*: Romania attempted to dissolve from the negative effect resulting from the association with communism, poverty and the lack of democratic values. Romania acknowledged that is situated in the middle of a Europe where democratic values are starting to take its toll and where a country's image starts to outline more and more. Yet, the 1994-2006 periods passed without leaving a mark and an etiquette on Romania.
- *2007-2010*. Romania's accession to NATO in 2004 and to the EU in 2007 brought more often into discussion the need to promote Romania's image abroad".

A country the size of Romania cannot be positioned in the mind of foreigners in more than one direction. Moreover, major European countries have used only one central topic for communication. The battle to attract the target audience's attention in the West is so strong that, once won a position, it is a waste to give up and come up with something new and totally different. Romania cannot claim to be credible as a country with a fabulous spirituality, but also as a haven for economic investment.

Quoting again Sashi Tharoor ("in order to become a valuable brand, a country must have the best story to tell") in the context of a chronological analysis of the country image campaigns conducted so far, we conclude that Romania has failed to live up to the end of any story that it started, so that just for now, a conclusion regarding the quality of the story cannot be made. According to Simon Anholt, building a country brand is primarily dependent on the will of the governors. If this will become a government priority and not a marketing action in any ministry, Romania's image might improve in two or three years, but only in few major countries, establishing realistic goals. For a change at a higher level, experts<sup>1</sup> believe that it will take 20 years.

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Anholt and Wally Olins (President at Saffron Brand Consultants, renowned specialist country branding and company branding).

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