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• Editorial •

Anda Sebesi
• Editor-in-Chief •



Plan ahead and be bold about it

2020 marked a significant milestone for the global business environment and humanity at large. It was one of the most challenging periods in recent history and it forced managers to adapt quickly in order to keep their businesses afloat. Many of them had a double and crucial mission: keeping their companies steady and taking care of their teams while trying to strike the right balance.

As a result, Business Review has decided that its first issue of 2021 would include the profiles of ten leaders from some of the most dynamic industries in Romania. We talked to them to find out how they've managed to succeed in getting through the pandemic and learn about their plans for this next year. They are the key people to watch in 2021, a year that we all hope will be better than the last one. According to the latest OECD economic estimates, the eurozone economy should grow by 3.6 percent in 2021 and 3.3 percent in 2022, while global GDP growth over the next two years is expected to be around 4 percent.

As business leaders say, companies today should reflect on their weaknesses during the pandemic and think of how they can consolidate, plan ahead, and increase their efficiency so that they might be better equipped to deal with such a risk. And they need to be bold. For example, MedLife CEO Mihail Marcu intends to give his company an international dimension by making it the first Romanian healthcare company to expand regionally.

COVER STORY



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WHO'S NEWS

BR welcomes information for Who's News. Submissions may be edited for length and clarity. Get in touch at mihai.cristea@business-review.eu

**Mihai Bordeanu**

was appointed Managing Director of the Dacia Brand for South Eastern Europe and Country Head for Romania. In 2010 he joined Renault Commercial Roumanie as Marketing Director for the Dacia and Renault brands. In 2014 he was appointed as Groupe Renault's Marketing Director for the United Kingdom, Ireland, Cyprus, and Malta markets, and in 2016, he took over as Marketing Director for the Eurasia region. In September 2019, Bordeanu was appointed VP of Marketing at Dacia.

**Dr. Florinela Cirstina**

is the new General Manager of Medicover Romania. Dr. Cirstina joined Medicover Romania in 2016 as Medical Director, with responsibilities for medical quality standards and regulations. A year later, she took over the management of the Medicover Hospital in Bucharest. Since 2020, she had been the Operational Director of Medicover Romania, managing outpatient and hospital activities. Cirstina is a doctor by profession, specialised in vascular surgery, having graduated from the Victor Babes University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Timisoara.

Haier to open new cooling plant in Romania

By Mihai Cristea



This project will make Romania a strategic hub for Haier Europe

Haier Tech Romania, part of the Haier Group, has announced that works on the first Haier refrigeration production facility in Europe are proceeding according to schedule, with production expected to start in late spring 2021. The facility will manufacture best-in-class built-in and freestanding refrigerators, designed for Haier

Europe's three pan-European brands - Candy, Hoover, and Haier - and with a focus on connectivity and preservation.

This large investment project exceeds EUR 70 million. The factory will cover 63,000 unfolded square meters on a total land of 130,000 square meters, located in the Alinso Industrial Park at Aricestii Rahtivani, near

Ploiesti. The new factory will employ almost 800 people (at full capacity) for an expected production of 600,000 units after 2022. The modular factory design will allow an expansion to up to 1 million pieces at full capacity.

"We are happy to have chosen Ploiesti for our first cooling production facility in the European Union. This project will make Romania a strategic hub for Haier Europe and will play a key role in its strategy to become one of the top 3 leaders in the industry by 2023," says Alessia Ianni, Cooling Technical Operation Director at Haier Europe and Managing Director at Haier Tech Romania.

The Romanian plant will be a first-class factory featuring premium production processes thanks to Haier's advanced R&D and manufacturing capabilities and know-how. It will serve the European market and consumers thanks to its proximity, technology, and efficiency.

Shell begins direct commercial road transport operations in Romania

By Mihai Cristea

Shell Commercial Road Transport will start direct operations in Romania from April 1, 2021. An initial team of 57 employees will support Romanian B2B transport customers, with most of the team based in Bucharest. The services offered over the last 15 years by

the local agent will now be offered directly by Shell.

"As our global and Romanian customers focus on adjusting to market changes and leveraging new technologies and more digital solutions, Shell seeks to leverage its capabilities and

An initial team of 57 employees will support Romanian B2B transport customers



Radisson Blu Hotel Bucharest adds studio events to its hybrid solutions

By Aurel Constantin

Radisson Blu Hotel Bucharest announced that it would extend its new Hybrid Solutions portfolio this year by converting one of its meeting rooms into a studio and becoming the only hotel in the country to be equipped with state-of-the-art video technology that offers unparalleled digital visual experiences. The company first announced the launch of its new Hybrid Solutions - incorporating Hybrid Rooms and Hybrid Meetings - in September 2020.

Radisson Blu's Hybrid Studio Events solution combines the best of key elements of in-person and virtual meetings, offering high resolution images, a 14/3.5-metre wide LED screen, a sound and video conferencing system, live transmissions with branding solutions, high-speed internet, solutions for interconnecting meetings or different platforms, and more.



The technology used by Event Technology AV is unique in Romania

As the world continues to adapt to the "new normal" and the ongoing travel limitations, organisers can now choose to offer virtual high-end participation options and hybrid formats that allow for small local gatherings while also broadcasting to remote attendees and satellite locations.

Radisson Blu Hotel Bucharest has developed this project in partnership with Event Technology AV, one of the top players on the audio-video equipment rental market in Bucharest.

Event Technology AV is one of the few providers that have already had experience with over 150 such events since the beginning of the pandemic.

"The technology we use is unique in Romania, so Radisson Blu Hotel Bucharest has become the only location in the country featuring a next generation screen with high refresh rates and blackface LEDs, which offer unparalleled digital visual experiences," says Dan Gavrilovici, Managing Director at Event Technology AV.



Violeta Luca

the former General Manager of Microsoft Romania, has been appointed to lead the company's operations in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Luca took over the top job at Microsoft Romania in November 2018, and since then the company experienced a period of growth and marked important moments in its development. She joined the Microsoft Romania team at the beginning of 2015 as strategy director, and later, until 2017, she held the position of Marketing and Operations Director.



Marian V. Popa

will become the Managing Director for Romania at Globalworth, starting on March 1, 2021. In his new role, Popa will be responsible for managing the company's activities in Romania, focusing on operational, administrative, and business development matters, and he will report to Dimitris Raptis, the CEO of Globalworth Group.



Valentin Vasile

is the new Marketing Director of Schneider Electric Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Vasile's appointment is an internal promotion from his previous position of Customer Satisfaction & Quality Business Partner at Schneider Electric Romania, which he held for three years. During this time, he was a key member of the management team, developing and supervising the implementation of the company's quality strategy.



global know-how to bring them the energy and service solutions they need in this journey," said Patrick Carre, Vice-President for Global Commercial Road Transport at Shell.

The company has a dedicated team which supports the handover and is committed to keeping customers informed at each step of the process.

A call centre to answer questions regarding Shell's new business operations for all existing customers has already been put in place.



Romania's Healthcare leader MedLife looks to expand international presence

The Romanian healthcare system was put to the test by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it came through. MedLife, the largest private healthcare services provider in the country, managed to both treat non-COVID patients as well as build new labs from scratch.

To find out more, Business Review talked to its CEO, **Mihail Marcu**.

By Aurel Constantin

How has MedLife tackled the coronavirus pandemic?

Mihail Marcu: We have carried out several projects to support Romanian authorities and businesses. For example, we developed a COVID-19 laboratory network in record time and started antibody testing. We designed special circuits and protocols for patients and implemented online consultation and telemedicine systems. MedLife was the first to carry out regular testing among its doctors, nurses, and patients and also had screening units dedicated to vulnerable patient categories - including a clinic which was exclusively dedicated to monitoring pregnant women during the lockdown.

Our network of RT-PCR testing labs is present in all major cities, and we organised a free national testing programme through these labs. We donated medical equipment to local authorities and COVID hospitals, such as those in Arad and Sibiu. We also made an entire hospital available to be used as a COVID-support unit.

How does MedLife fit into the system?

The hit from the virus was shocking, just like was for everybody else. It generated panic in the population, but also in the medical field; there was no protocol to treat this

disease that had come out of nowhere. MedLife has a hub of out-patient units representing about 27 percent of our business. This hub receives around 20,000 patients per day, welcomed by about 5,000 people in our staff. It is not easy to secure this process during a pandemic.

We were the first in Romania to implement filters in our clinics as well as the first to send our doctors home after they had travelled abroad. We had to find ways to keep patients with different diseases apart, so we rerouted their way into our clinics. Then we moved on to testing our entire staff; around 2,000-3,000 are being tested weekly. We currently have 7 labs that can perform RT-PCR tests, so we can immediately test both staff and patients whenever necessary.

We were also the first in Romania to conduct certain types of research. During the pandemic, we carried out a study on the number of people who were ill and those who had antibodies for the coronavirus. It was the first study on antibodies in the entire Balkan region. It was carried out on 1,000 patients and discovered that less than 2 percent - perhaps as little as 0.5 percent - of people in our country had antibodies. And that is an important and interesting fact.

MEDLIFE MILESTONES:

- **1994** - a group of doctors develops the first clinics, which would later become part of the largest private medical group in Romania and one of the largest in the region;
- **2004** - company management is taken over by Mihai Marcu and the first MedLife hyperclinic opens;
- **2006** - IFC becomes a shareholder in MedLife, the company opens the largest private hospital in Romania;
- **2011** - the first acquisition takes place; since 2011, MedLife has purchased or opened 145 medical units;
- **2016** - the first private medical company in Romania to be listed on the Bucharest Stock Exchange;
- **2018** - the first Romanian medical company to cross borders and take Romanian capital to Hungary;
- **2020** - the first private medical services company with an annual turnover above a quarter billion euros (according to estimates).

"WE ARE ALSO LAUNCHING A HUGE NEW PROGRAMME TO HARNESS THE FACT THAT MEDLIFE CAN ACCESS THE MEDICAL HISTORIES OF MORE THAN HALF A MILLION SUBSCRIBERS. IT MEANS THAT WE CAN ANALYSE THIS DATA AND IDENTIFY THOSE WHO ARE LIKELY TO DEVELOP CARDIAC ISSUES OR OTHER DISEASES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PANDEMIC."

The results were later confirmed by several studies conducted by other institutions.

The second study was conducted in Suceava, where the infection rate was huge. The city was locked down and nobody wanted to go there, but we went in to conduct our research. At that time, we found that 20 percent of the Suceava population had antibodies. The research shows the ways in which a region can evolve and provides very important information for medical professionals. The study was conducted by Romanian specialists only, without any help from abroad.

We have been involved in many other studies, including the first coronavirus genome sequencing, conducting in partnership with the Matei Bals and Colentina hospitals in Bucharest to see where new variants were coming from and how they could be recognised based on their genetic signatures. That meant we could find out whether the virus was coming from the UK or from Brazil, for example. This kind of research is very costly and we do it without any external financial help from private or public entities, but we share all of our results with the Health Ministry.

How much have you invested in research in the past year? How did the company's income evolve in 2020?

The value of investment is around EUR 500,000. I don't have the exact figure because we haven't yet crunched the numbers on things like transportation for staff and test samples, but the direct cost of all the tests we've carried out during the pandemic goes above EUR 300,000, and adding our other investments to that figure should result in about half a million euros.

The company's revenues slightly increased last year, but I'm not able to release exact figures at this time as we must go through the Stock Exchange first - I can however say that we hope to reach EUR 250 million, which includes new acquisitions.

What are your plans for the future?

We have many plans. We will continue to do research to help the public sector monitor data about the pandemic and the evolution of the virus.

We are also launching a huge new programme to harness the fact that MedLife can access the medical histories of more than half a million subscribers - I think there are 690,000 of them by now. That means we have information from as early as 2010 from some of our patients, and we can analyse this data and identify those who are

likely to develop cardiac issues or other diseases in the context of the pandemic. We will do that using data from more than 5.5 million people who have come in for various tests throughout the years. As for the 690,000 who are subscribed through their companies, we will be able to inform businesses which of their employees should not be placed on the front lines of a pandemic, as they may be at higher risk.

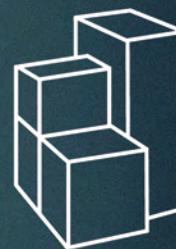
MedLife is the leader of the national healthcare market and we think it's now time to take Romanian capital across the border. It would be great for all Romanians to see a company develop in such a way.

How do you see the pandemic evolving?

We must get rid of the fear and get more people vaccinated to be able to go back to the lives we had before. This is the most important thing right now.

MEDLIFE IN NUMBERS:

- 26 years on the market;
- No. 1 in Romania and one of the biggest players in the region;
- The largest employer in the medical services sector - 7,500 employees and contractors, of which 3,000 physicians (December 2020);
- The most complex medical services system: clinics, hospitals, laboratories, stomatology, corporate, imaging, pharma;
- The largest diagnostic and treatment platform in Romania;
- 200 collection centres;
- 50 clinics;
- 32 medical laboratories;
- 22 hyperclinics;
- 20 pharmacies;
- 13 dental centres;
- 12 hospitals;
- 7 COVID laboratories;
- 4 maternity hospitals;
- 1 stem cell bank;
- 5.5 million unique patients;
- 690,000 subscribers;
- 30,000 tests processed per day;
- 20,000 customers per day.



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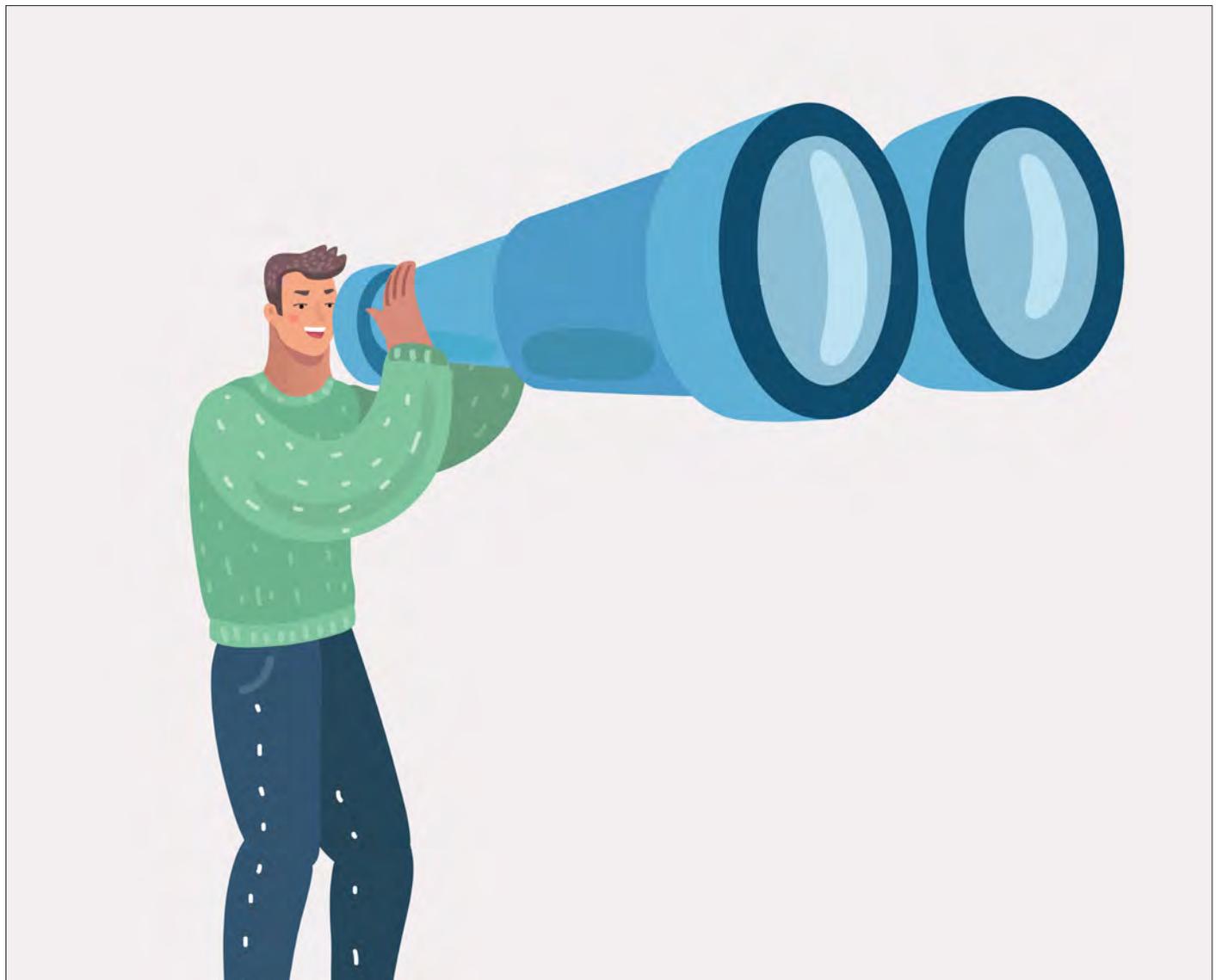
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10 PEOPLE TO WATCH IN 2021

2020 marked a significant milestone for the global business environment and humanity at large. It was one of the most challenging periods in recent history and it forced managers to adapt quickly in order to keep their businesses afloat. Many of them had a double and crucial mission: keeping their companies steady and taking care of their teams while trying to strike the right balance. Business Review sat down with leaders of some of the most dynamic industries in Romania and found out how they've managed to succeed in getting through the pandemic and what their plans are for this year. Read on to learn all about the leaders you should watch in 2021!

By **Anda Sebesi**



Turning a profit in pandemic times

Although 2020 was a disruptive year for many businesses and sectors, Chimcomplex and its CEO, **Tivadar Runtag**, marked a turnaround last year as the company generated profit for the first time after acquiring Olchim assets back in 2018, while Runtag left the oil industry and stepped into the chemical sector.

By **Anda Sebesi**

Profitability came during a global turmoil, demonstrating the potential of the company, which leveraged synergies from the integration of its platforms. As a result, Chimcomplex is a much stronger and safer company today than it was a year ago, according to Runtag. “2020 was a turnaround year for me, too; I joined the company in February, changing my career after 30 years in the oil industry. I’m learning something new every day from my colleagues - and I hope to also contribute to our development,” he says.

Chimcomplex is the producer and seller of a wide portfolio of chemicals. Some segments declined during the global lockdowns, but demand for disinfectants or flexible polyols, which are the raw materials for furniture foams, significantly increased. “In 2020 we managed to adjust our production capacities to reflect the changing markets. This is what we will continue to do in 2021. I cannot say whether we’ve overcome the pandemic yet, but so far our results are promising,” the CEO adds.

By stabilising its production, the company managed to maintain business continuity, as well as to refurbish its Oxo-Alcohol unit and resume its operations before the end of last year.

“We are now financially profitable, which is another important achievement. We have confirmed our strategic focus on our core Polyols value chain. We’ve established contacts with key stakeholders in the chemical industry, and that will be the foundation of new developments,” Runtag explains.



This year, Chimcomplex will concentrate its resources on strengthening its position as “Polyols Professionals” and on sustainability. “We will complete investments to increase our production capacity for high value-added special polyols and to optimise our operations with a reduced environmental footprint. The integration of the two plants will move into a new phase.” He adds: “I want to engage and empower more of our employees to be part of the new developments and embed a positive organisational culture of performance, based on trust and collaboration. The use of Energy Management and Maintenance Management Systems, as well as digital competence development pro-

grammes, are <bottom-up> initiatives - we will see more of those in 2021.”

According to Runtag, by responding to market demands in 2021, the company will speed up developments in special polyols, searching further partnerships in R&D. In addition, the growing middle class population requires better insulations in housing, as well as more consumer goods - all based on chemicals. “The 50 kt standard polyol manufactured in 2020 by Chimcomplex was used to produce about 5 million mattresses. We’re seeing increased demand for basic chemicals as well as for specialities. Much of that demand can be covered by local production, with Chimcomplex being a strategic partner of the Government and a supporter of the circular economy. We will lobby for selective waste collection - that is the foundation of recycling.”

Three lessons of the pandemic

1. Challenge the status quo and embrace change.
2. Build a team you trust and empower them to act.
3. Maintain a balance between your core business and new opportunities.

Making the most of a turbulent year

Having been the managing director of real estate development firm Vastint Romania for about twelve years now, **Antoniu Panait** has been able to keep the company afloat during the pandemic and make sure that all its projects could move forward, albeit at a slower pace due to the restrictive context.

By **Anda Sebesi**

In Antoniu Panait's view, 2020 was first and foremost a learning experience. It was also a very difficult year that no one was prepared to cope with, whether we're talking about governments or businesspeople, companies or individuals. "Humanity may have been prepared for or anticipated a financial crisis, but instead we found ourselves in this pandemic. It was not something we could have learned about from books or an

MBA programme and that we could just apply inside our organisations. We all had to learn and adapt as we went along," he says.

According to Antoniu Panait, in difficult times like these it is very important to know who you can count on, and teams must be united in order to move in the same direction. "We've managed to get through this storm due to my team, which is made up of highly experienced and optimistic professionals." He also notes that each building developed by Vastint is like a plant where no one can work remotely. "Although some of us can work from home, others need to always be on site and they need our support in such times. Therefore, a situation like this pandemic is very hard to manage because suddenly, the human dimension becomes much more important than the work itself. This makes it very difficult for a manager to keep the business afloat. My mission was to keep the company steady and take care of my team, while trying to find the right balance."

Antoniu Panait was successful in his approach. But how did he do it? Any financial crisis generates opportunities and if a company is well prepared and has financial resources at its disposal, it can make investments. "Vastint is a solid company because we are very careful about all the investments we make. We have a prudent approach when it comes to the growth of the company because we follow a long-term strategy. We buy lands, develop projects, and then rent, keeping them in our



portfolio for a long period of time. We are very conservative and pay a lot of attention to how and when we invest. This has also helped us overcome the crisis."

Although there is no standard recipe for dealing with unprecedented situations, Antoniu Panait says that continuous planning can help any company get through a difficult period. "We have to stay on solid ground regardless of the times. Each test makes

us better if we learn from it. Companies must find ways to consolidate or diversify their business so that they can be sustainable in the long run."

He highlights the fact that companies used to focus on offering integrated services, a business model that has no longer been valid since the 2008-2009 financial crisis. "An integrated approach was considered more profitable and more effective. But the last financial crisis proved that this model was inefficient and that companies should focus on their core business. Otherwise, their development would slow down and they would recede from their core business."

He adds that companies today should reflect on their weaknesses during the pandemic and think of how they can consolidate, plan ahead, and increase their efficiency so that they might be better equipped to deal with such a risk.

Three lessons of the pandemic

1. Managers have become more cautious.
2. Every company will develop contingency plans.
3. Any company should have a long-term plan if it wants to achieve organic growth.

2020 ACHIEVEMENTS

Antoniu Panait says that Vastint's biggest achievement last year was that its entire team managed to get through this tough period, mainly thanks to its flexibility and to everyone understanding that there was no recipe to follow in such times. From a business perspective, he says that Vastint has been affected by the pandemic, as all of its projects were slowed

down due to workforce limitations. "However, we've done good work throughout this period, including designing and developing

concepts for our future projects, as well as analysing the current situation and thinking about what the future will bring,” Antoniu Panait says.

For example, in June last year, Vastint Romania’s Timpuri Noi Square obtained the Safe Guard certification, following an audit carried out by Bureau Veritas, which looked at the health and safety measures implemented during this period, supporting tenants in the process of returning to the office in a safe environment, in line with current recommendations. The certification covers common areas, reception areas, and lobby lifts and will establish health standards applicable to all three buildings delivered so far at Timpuri Noi Square - more precisely, a commercial area of 53,000 square metres.

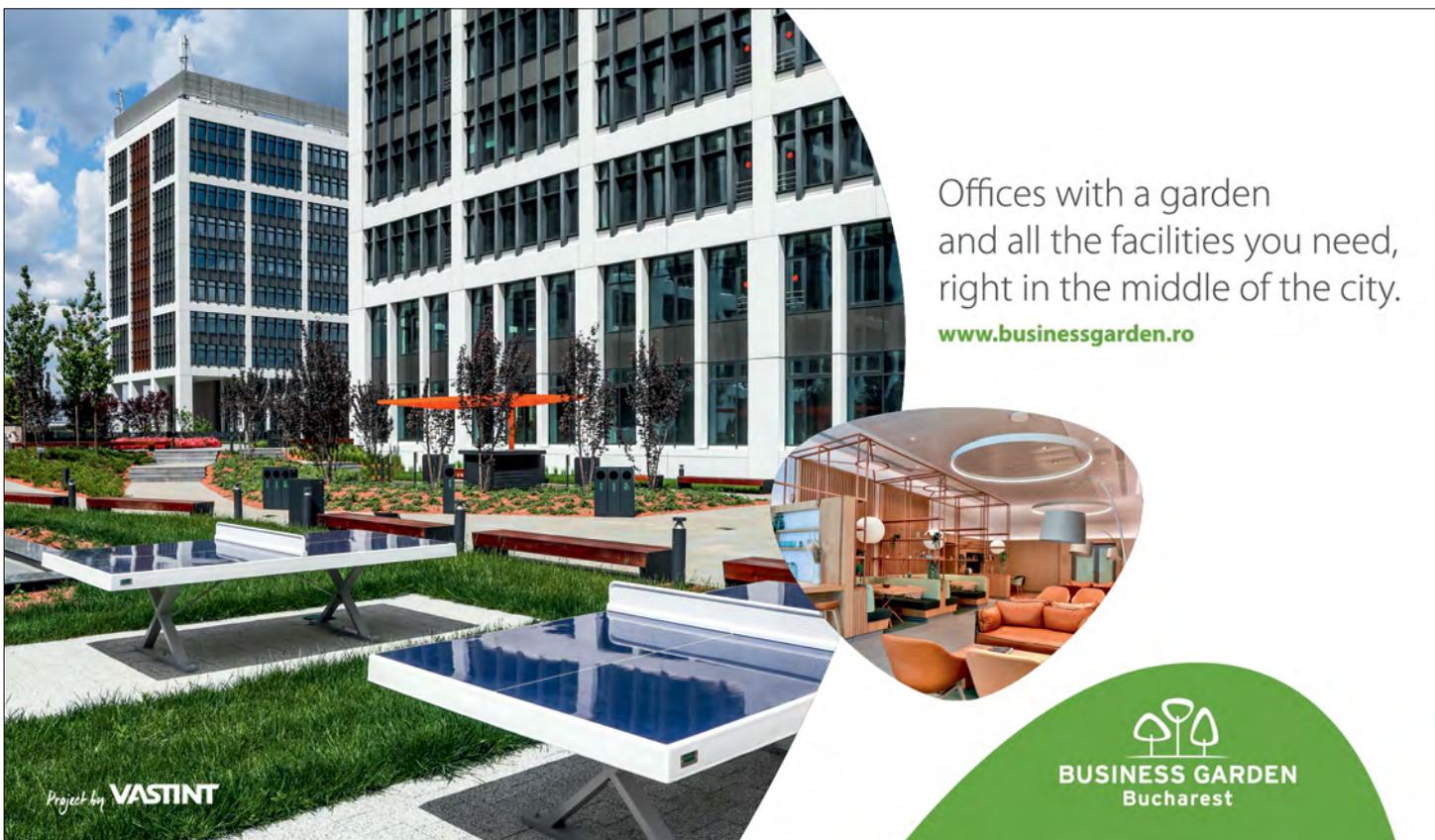
“Timpuri Noi Square offers a healthy and welcoming indoor work environment and has all the necessary characteristics to ensure a safe return to the office. Technical details such as healthy air conditioning and a superior ventilation system - providing 100 percent fresh air - combined with Vastint’s standard 3-metre floor heights, energy-saving electrical equipment, and LED lighting all contribute to a secure environment where social distancing can be ensured,” Antoniu Panait explains.

Furthermore, in January 2020, Vastint Romania received a LEED Platinum certification for the third building of Timpuri Noi Square, with a score of 92 points, which turned the company into the developer and owner of one of the highest ranked buildings in Romania, including all Business Garden Bucharest’s buildings, and the other two that are part of Timpuri Noi Square. Last but not least, Vastint also leased about 10,000 sqm last year. “It is not a big number for

the market as a whole, but it is significant for us, as our portfolio totals 100,000 sqm and we managed to lease 10 percent of it in the middle of the pandemic.”

AN EYE ON THE HORIZON

“The real estate sector will continue to operate, whether it’s in the residential, offices or hotel segment. But we need to be careful about new market developments.” Antoniu Panait argues that office buildings will not disappear because of work from home practices. “The future is about returning to the office. It is clear that some employees will continue to work remotely, and that those who return to their offices will need a larger space that can ensure social distancing. At Vastint, we have invested much more in our offices and so it is now easier for us to convince our tenants about the benefits of returning to the office.” As for rent prices, Antoniu Panait believes that a decline is out of the question for the coming period, despite the economic crisis, because of the ever-growing costs of construction and materials. In fact, rents were expected to increase before the pandemic, but we’re now more likely to see them stagnating for a while. But the Romanian real estate market may not recover this year, as decisions in the office segment remain with the tenants. “In our role as developers, we create together with our tenants something that I call a canvas, which is meant to meet their needs in terms of employee safety. Companies therefore need to draw up action plans and express their needs when it comes to maintaining social distancing. Some companies will take immediate action, while others may need more time to do so. This is why it is likely for this recovery to start in 2022” says Panait.



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Focus on empathy and innovation

Having recently been appointed as the General Manager of Medcover Romania, **Florinela Cirstina** has big plans for the company and sees 2021 in a positive light, encouraged by the widespread adoption of telemedicine and the development of innovative new services for patients.

By Anda Sebesi

2020 has been a challenging year for everybody. It was also a year of innovation and brought changes in the way we perceive the health-care sector. “In my role as an operational director last year, I had to ensure the safety of our medical staff and patients, and as a leader, I had to keep teams motivated and moving forward. It was a roller-coaster and we made it through by staying together, adjusting in real time to the new context created by this pandemic,” says Florinela Cirstina, general manager at Medcover.

Asked about the positive aspects of 2020, Florinela Cirstina says that the creation of a legal framework for the practice of telemedicine was a big step forward for the local market. “It is a service that will bring substantial benefits in the accessibility of medical services and the quality of treatments. I hope that in 2021 the law on telemedicine services will receive clear implementation criteria, and together we will find solutions tailored to the concrete needs of our patients,” she says.

Although 2020 was a difficult year, Medcover continued to invest in high performance medical equipment for its clinics, attract highly qualified doctors, and extend or upgrade its patient care areas. Last but not least, it developed new technological tools for connecting with patients. “Medcover developed in record time one of the most secure telemedicine platforms, which it launched in spring of 2020. The service has already been used by over 30,000 people. We have allocated over



30 medical specialties and a total of over 60 doctors to this project,” Florinela Cirstina explains.

In addition, in December of last year, the company launched Medcover eXclusiv, a solution that gives patients access to consultations, tests, and treatment by sending a medical team directly to their homes. “More than 100 doctors from the Medcover network are ready to visit the patient’s home and offer consultations in general medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, physiotherapy or ultrasound, as well as perform medical

tests. In December alone, about 400 patients requested this service,” she adds. Florinela Cirstina says that last year was all about empathy for Medcover. “This is why we developed online consultation platforms as well as home consultation and treatment services. Plus, we learned to show empathy to our partners and through dialogue

we identified solutions to common problems. This has helped us develop new partnerships or customised solutions for different fields such as hospitality, tourism, transport or insurance.”

Last year, Medcover had an investment budget of over RON 20 million, with the largest share allocated for the expansion of the Pelican Hospital. “In 2021, we will continue to invest in providing patients with access to state-of-the-art treatment solutions. At the same time, we will continue

to create the best conditions for the development of other centres of excellence.

Three lessons of the pandemic

1. We all learned more about empathy.
2. We learned to use new tools, to look at problems from different angles, and to appreciate the true value of digital or automation solutions.
3. We learned to take better care of our doctors and employees.

A three-pillar strategic vision

Andrei Cionca, the CEO and co-founder of Impetum Group, will direct his efforts this year towards creating a hub to support Romanian companies through business knowledge which is relevant to one of three stages: startup (through ROCA -X), growth challenges or impasse (through ROCA), and distress (through CITR).

By **Anda Sebesi**

2020 was a year of both adaptation and introspection for us all, as the novelty of the pandemic forced us to take things one step at a time. “Last year I remembered how important it was to stop from time to time, take a step back, and analyse. The pandemic gave me a huge opportunity to do that, but it also gave me some extra time that I used for myself, my family, and the business. As a team we had the time to reflect on our ‘why’s’, on our organisation’s structure, and on ways in which we could improve inside-out,” says Andrei Cionca, the CEO and co-founder of Impetum Group. He adds that the pandemic also tested the flexibility of his business, while the team had the chance to demonstrate

that they could do anything together and see opportunity in every crisis. “We also became aware of the urgent need for transparency on the market. The business environment needs to make decisions based on real economic facts. This is CONFIDEX’s strong point: diving deep into the economy’s real layers by analysing the problems and challenges of the industries that significantly contribute to the GDP,” he explains.

In addition, the company continued to upgrade and digitalize its processes and encouraged people to engage with the organisation even more. “We looked after people’s needs by providing wellbeing programmes and we also accelerated all our internal business processes, speeding up our development.” According to Cionca, 2020 was a good year not just because his company



managed to deliver its budgeted figures, but also because a team of over 160 people managed to take themselves out of the comfort zone, acting in an agile and flexible way, but most importantly, acting together. “In 2020 we tested our principles and our values and they were confirmed,” Cionca adds.

Looking to 2021, Impetum Group will maintain its focus on people, readapt its organisational culture, and prepare for the next phases of development. “Our forecasts show that our main indicators will remain constant or even increase in the coming period, but we will invest heavily in solutions to adapt to the new context, whether we are talking about digitalization or

about new products, which will be adapted to the current market,” the co-founder notes.

According to Cionca, 2020 was the perfect year for taking care of some projects that have been postponed in the past. “We’ve also taken steps towards our after-crisis development and prepared for what 2021 brings. Digitalization and creating a bottom-up organisational culture are our core priorities for the new year and, in my opinion, essential for the future.” He adds: “Our vision, which is already happening, is to create a hub to support Romanian companies through business knowledge which is relevant to one of three stages: startup (ROCA -X), growth challenges or impasse (ROCA), distress (CITR through its range of legal administration and restructuring services).”

Three lessons of the pandemic

1. Any crisis is a good opportunity to test your business model, your team’s capacity to adapt, relationships with your partners (shareholders, suppliers, clients, banks).
2. A crisis is always a good test of character.
3. What differentiates success from failure is the capacity to overcome crisis.

Digitalization: the best bet for ING Bank

Last year marked important milestones for the entire banking sector, raising new obstacles as well as new opportunities. In this context, ING Bank Romania CEO **Mihaela Bitu** and her management team have had to adjust their leadership style and stay as close to their employees as possible.

By Anda Sebesi

“2020 was a maturity test for us and for the entire banking sector, and that test continues to this day. At ING, last year started with bold plans for development and excellent business momentum. But as the pandemic reached our country, we had to refocus on business continuity and on providing safety and support to our clients and colleagues. Of course, we remained committed to developing our digital offering, continued to lend, to on-board new clients, and to mind our business responsibilities,” says Mihaela Bitu, the CEO of ING Bank Romania.

Looking back at the number of new projects and initiatives the bank took on, some of which were directly derived from the pandemic, Mihaela Bitu argues that it was clear that the company had adjusted and responded to this crisis in a successful manner. “We will remember 2020 as a year marked by lots of challenges and efforts, but also one in which we demonstrated resilience, solidarity, and the ability to swiftly adapt to a new reality.”

According to the CEO, a clear strategy and direction were very important ingredients of ING Bank’s success, as they kept it on a steady course even in stormy times. “Throughout the years, we have consistently focused on digital products and services, which could be accessed anytime and anywhere. The pandemic has accelerated many clients’ tendency to access online and mobile services. From this perspective, we can say that we were well prepared, not just in terms of interacting with our clients, but also in our internal communication,” she adds. The lender’s employees had all been fully equipped



with mobile devices well before the pandemic, which allowed 95 percent of them to begin working from home within two weeks.

“As a business leader, I’ve also had to adapt and cope with the challenges generated by the pandemic. My colleagues from the management team and I made adjustments to our leadership style and stayed close to our teams, even in the remote work environment. It was not easy, but it certainly showed us that alternative ways of working can yield equally good results as long as the team is engaged and united,” Mihaela Bitu explains.

Last year, the company continued to grow, develop, and attract new clients, which is an achievement

in itself. “Of course, the crisis took a toll on our financial results, which were nevertheless comparable to the previous year, leaving aside the higher risk costs associated with the macro-economic circumstances,” she notes.

The bank’s long-term strategic goal is to continue to offer accessible digital products and services in the coming years. It also aims to preserve and consolidate its innovative edge and good customer experience, which have helped it grow organically over the past 26 years. “I think this pandemic has made the good intentions and constructive approach of the banking sector more evident than ever, and hopefully this will eliminate the negative bias against some banks. Last but not least, another positive effect of the current context has been the faster adoption of modern banking services. Less cash, more online and digital services,” Mihaela Bitu concludes.

Three lessons of the pandemic

1. Human connection is essential.
2. The myth of needing to be in the office to work hard and deliver has been busted.
3. Digitalization was ING’s best bet.

Running a resilient business in disruptive times

For **Bogdan Ion**, Country Managing Partner, EY Romania and Moldova and Chief Operating Officer for EY, South-East and Central Europe and Central Asia, the main goal of this year will be creating value around three pillars: humans at the centre, innovation at scale, and technology at speed.

By **Anda Sebesi**

“2020 was an outlier year which we will certainly remember, although we may want to forget it. Like all Black Swan events, even if you know they are bound to happen at some point, they’re still disruptive and challenging to cope with. But even if it brought new challenges, we had a smooth transition to the new normal,” says Bogdan Ion.

As most companies were forced to allow their employees to work from home, they needed to find ways to adapt to the new conditions. Bogdan Ion says that remote working has always been part of EY’s business practices, albeit not at the scale triggered by this crisis. Therefore, the company successfully moved into remote work within 24 hours and has since continued to serve its clients without disruption. “It has arguably been the busiest period of my professional life and I’ve had to create new routines in working from home and meeting with clients and team members. In retrospect, I can say it was a challenging experience, but our team managed it well,” he adds.

The EY executive says that the pandemic was a very tangible lesson in adaptability and resilience, which we all took to heart. “Taking this a step further, our first study on Romania’s attractiveness for foreign investment, conducted in July last year, showed that this indicator would be influenced not only by traditional drivers such as labour costs, infrastructure or political stability, but also by our ability to demonstrate resilience to external shocks, such as this pandemic. Bogdan Ion points out that the SARS-CoV-2



outbreak has reminded us all that we depend on each other and has made us more aware of the importance of people who are working on the front lines, in a multitude of sectors. “The crisis has also reminded us that empathy should be a core value not just between human beings, but also in the business world. The key lesson is that creating long-term value for our clients, our people, communities, and society at large is more important than ever, in the context of widening social inequality and a significant impact of climate change,” he argues. As for future plans, the company will continue to actively support its clients in adapting and transforming while integrating key

lessons from this crisis, which started out with a focus on business continuity and has evolved towards resilience and business transformation. “In fact, EY has embarked on its own multilayered transformation journey, which brings changes to our operating model and expands our range of services. This will enable us to create value around three pillars: humans at the centre, innovation at scale, and technology at speed.

Three lessons of the pandemic

1. Adaptability and resilience emerged as key drivers.
2. We realized how much we depended on each other.
3. Creating long-term value for clients, people, communities, and society at large is more important than ever.

"THE CRISIS HAS REMINDED US THAT EMPATHY SHOULD BE A CORE VALUE ALSO IN THE BUSINESS WORLD."

Boldness pays off in digital transformation

Keeping communication infrastructures running smoothly was one of the most challenging operations of 2020. Romania did very well in this sense, as the huge number of people working from home encountered no issues with their data usage or voice calls. One major external acknowledgement of this fact was the CTO of the Year 2020 award, the Gamechanger category, given out by Mobile Europe & European Communications to **Catalin Buliga**, CTO at Vodafone Romania.

By Aurel Constantin

“Last year was a huge test not only for the resilience of networks, but of our human resilience as well. It was a year that taught us an important lesson in solidarity. From governments to companies and individuals, everybody contributed to a common cause, financially or otherwise, and I think this will continue in 2021,” says Catalin Buliga. The importance of the communications infrastructure was better understood last year as well. Businesses, people working from home, students – they all became more aware of their reliance on this infrastructure,” he adds.

“Another thing that 2020 showed us as a company was that we could do things differently, and that we could do things we never would have thought possible. We engaged in a lot of experimentation, and many of the results will stay with us in the long term. For example, we set up a communication network for a hospital in just 8 hours, even though that normally would have taken us about two weeks,” Buliga explains.

THE AWARD

“The CTO of the Year 2020 award, the Gamechanger category is very important for my team, for the company and for the Romanian industry as a whole. Vodafone Romania reached the shortlist of European communication companies, all big companies. In 2020, there were two sections in the CTO Awards - I won the Gamechanger title, which recognises the amount of transformation achieved during a certain period of time and the boldness of that transformation. Getting this kind of award is a dream come true for any CTO,” Catalin Buliga says. The award was a first for Romania, but it did not come as a surprise



considering Buliga’s many outstanding achievements, including the first 5G network in Romania, the first 4K live holograms in the world, NB-IoT technology, as well as investing in and maintaining the quality of fixed and mobile networks at an extraordinary level despite the difficult pandemic context. Catalin’s constant efforts to innovate and support the digital Romanian society have now been recognised and certified by this title as well. “Vodafone Romania was the second operator in Europe to launch 5G,” says Buliga.

PANDEMIC-DRIVEN CHANGE

“Connecting a new site usually would have taken us about two weeks. But when the pandemic started, the Army would set up campaign hospitals within 24 hours, and although it seemed like an impossible task, we managed to connect these new sites in just 8 hours. This was possible because we had the technology, the infrastructure

and the applications we needed,” Buliga notes. In August and September, everyone at Vodafone worked on connecting schools and preparing them for online education. “We connected 800 schools in a month and a half. I would describe this as necessity-driven innovation,” says the Vodafone CTO. For the future, Catalin Buliga expects major changes at Vodafone. “We will create a unified model for all companies in the group. We will also go green in terms of our power usage, as well as in other areas. We will continue to invest in our networks to make sure that people at home get top

quality services. Investments will also be made in our fixed network and in strengthening infrastructure resilience,” he concludes.

Three lessons of the pandemic

1. We saw incredible solidarity between people, companies and authorities.
2. People and communication infrastructures showed resilience in the face of the pandemic.
3. Digitalization in both companies and institutions was considerably accelerated by the pandemic.

Trust at the core of long-term business plans

Vlad Ardeleanu, the CEO of Medima Health, had a challenging but exciting 2020, a year when he embarked on a new entrepreneurial project together with Professor Gheorghe Iana and developed the Medima Health concept, which has the potential to generate positive change and bring added value to the medical imaging services industry.

By **Anda Sebesi**

“If we look at the positive side of the situation, I would describe it as <No pain, no gain>. It was a difficult year, both personally and professionally, but it helped us identify solutions to overcome the issues generated by the pandemic: teleradiology was one of those. Under normal conditions, it would have taken us many more years to implement it,” says Ardeleanu, adding that despite the COVID pandemic, Medima had a very dynamic year, during which it opened two Centres of Excellence in Radiology and Medical

Imaging in Bucharest. More centres will follow in 2021 across the country, according to the CEO. In the summer of 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, Ardeleanu and his partner had the unique opportunity to launch a new medical business model, which was adapted to the current times. “We developed an innovative service - teleradiology - which we believe is the future of this medical services niche. Teleradiology brings advantages to both doctors and patients,” Ardeleanu says.

The two Medima Health clinics in Bucharest are equipped with state-of-the-art MRI/CT scanners. “From the very beginning, our focus was on educating the market and providing information about our services online, so we had a large number of patients in the first few months. In addition, we laid the groundwork for our national expansion by starting an investment plan worth over EUR 10 million for 2021,” he adds.



Medima’s goal is to offer local access to high-end diagnostic imaging services and provide reliable results to as many patients as possible. “First, we want to focus on strengthening our presence on the market and developing our patient base.” Their short-term plans include consolidating the Bucharest practice as well as opening four other imaging and radiology clinics in Alba Iulia, Calarasi, Sibiu, and Targu Mures.

In the longer term, the company aims to reach 15 clinics nationwide. In terms of services, in addition to the current offer, it intends to develop a high-performance oncology prevention and diagnosis service, to detect cancers in their earliest stages, when treatment success rates are highest. The company’s first two centres of excellence in oncological imaging will be opened in the cities of Targu Mures and Sibiu and

will offer the most advanced investigations based on 3T MRI and PET-CT scans. “We can’t afford to wait and see what happens and what the new reality will look like. We should focus on current conditions and on the things we can do at this moment, based on the information available to us. This period has clearly shown us that the relationships we have with our patients, employees, partners, and suppliers are everything. Without trust as the main value of these relationships, there is no long-term plan, nothing to build, and no real foundation for the future,” Ardeleanu concludes.

Three lessons of the pandemic

1. Be agile. Replace the “new normal” with the “now normal”.
2. Embrace innovation and integrate it into your business.
3. Trust should be a core value in any relationship.

Innovation and solidarity: the pillars of 2020

Despite the fact that it was a very difficult and challenging year, 2020 also had several bright spots. It sparked innovation, it inspired us to come together even as we kept apart, and it encouraged new visions to create, do business, and educate.

Ramona Jurubita, Country Managing Partner at KPMG and President of the Board at FIC tells Business Review how KPMG and the wider business environment have managed to cope with this crisis.

By Anda Sebesi

From an economic perspective, Romania performed well last year, under the pressure of the pandemic. Foreign investments halved over the first ten months of the year compared to the same period in 2019, but this was offset by a growth in governmental spending and investment. According to the Business Sentiment Index survey, conducted in September by the Foreign Investors Council (FIC), many participants expressed concern regarding the worsening business environment, the Romanian market's low attractiveness, and the deterioration of their own initial investment plans. "An important achievement

of the FIC during the pandemic period has been maintaining a regular and transparent dialogue with the authorities, in spite of the urgency of the situation, which meant that every policy measure had to be adopted more quickly than usual," says Ramona Jurubita, Country Managing Partner at KPMG and President of the Board at FIC.

As the representative of KPMG, she adds that since the company already had experience with flexible work schedules and remote work, moving more than 900 employees from the office to working from home overnight was a successful transition. "On a personal level, 2020 shifted paradigms around the concept of <work>. It has been a difficult year as we need social contact and a human touch. However, as all of our interaction moved online, we adapted. We have developed a new workplace ecosystem in which our employees could adapt to home working while receiving the necessary practical and emotion-



al support, as well as contact with other team members," Jurubita explains. "I am proud to say that we have succeeded both as a team as well as for our clients. We've had to follow a new principle: solidarity in solitude. We've had to motivate our coworkers to perform well and to understand that we needed to support their wellbeing and mental health with a leadership model that focuses on employees' needs. Therefore, strategic thinking and flexibility have inspired our work throughout this pandemic." According to her, despite the economic challenges, KPMG in Romania closed the financial year at the end of Sep-

tember below the goals it had set in 2019, but above its expectations given the current context, without any personnel or wage cuts.

As for the FIC's plans, Jurubita says that the institution will

continue to focus on attracting foreign investments to

Romania and invest time and resources in working

with the government to enhance Romania's attractiveness for foreign investors, in terms of

its legal framework and opportunities. In addition, KPMG's strategy will continue to be

focus on investing in people and on providing its clients with the assistance they need

to continue on the path to success. "A key element in KPMG's future strategy will be

supporting our wider community with projects that have a real impact on society and the

economy. We will focus on Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) initiatives, including promoting

sustainable finance, combatting climate change, and supporting social development."

Three lessons of the pandemic

1. Humanity's tremendous capacity to adapt.

2. Our pressing need for a stronger healthcare system, a better education system, and better infrastructure.

3. The power of technology compensating for human vulnerability.

The artisan of Romania's recovery

Appointed as the coordinator of the national vaccination campaign, **Valeriu Gheorghita** has a huge responsibility on his shoulders: turning the vaccination effort into a success so that Romania may restart its economic engines and begin its recovery process.

By Anda Sebesi

In the second half of November last year, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis announced that physician lieutenant colonel Valeriu Gheorghita, a doctor from the Carol Davila Military Hospital, would be appointed as the coordinator of the national coronavirus vaccination campaign in Romania.

Aged 38, Gheorghita graduated from the University of Medicine

and Pharmacy in Targu Mures back in 2006 and became a doctor in medical sciences in 2013. Since 2012 he has been working at the Carol Davila Military Hospital, where he started as an infectious diseases specialist and then became a primary physician. He is also in charge of the antibiotic usage policy within the Military Hospital, and since 2016, he has been a junior lecturer. "The vaccination campaign must be a success and, in my opinion, it is a matter of national security," the Romanian president said as he announced Gheorghita's appointment. With that in mind, it is obvious why Valeriu Gheorghita is on Business Review's list of ten people to watch in 2021. In fact, the relaunch of the local economy is highly dependent on the success of the vaccination campaign. From this point of view, Gheorghita plays a crucial role in how soon the country's economic engines can regain full speed.

The vaccination campaign is split into three distinct stages and the population has access to an online platform where they can make an appointment to get vaccinated. "It is likely that this platform will also be used for other vaccines in the future, not just for the campaign against the coronavirus. For example, in Germany, such a platform is used in all national vaccination campaigns," Valeriu Gheorghita stated earlier this year.

In January, he told journalists at TV network Digi24 that the number of individuals registering for the coronavirus vaccine was on a significant upward trend, which means that the vaccination campaign has been a success in Romania so far. In the first month of 2021, Romania was among the European countries with the best vac-



cine coverage rates. "We are happy to see that Romanians are eager to get the vaccine. We need to keep a balance between the number of appointments and the available doses, in order to be able to guarantee second doses as well as vaccinate new individuals," said Gheorghita for Digi24. He added that the local authorities aimed to ensure continuity in vaccinations in order

for Romania to get through a difficult February, when the number of doses will be lower due to supply issues. "This situation is not particular to Romania; it is a challenge all European countries are facing."

Although there has been huge hope for a return to normal since US and German pharmaceutical firms Pfizer and BioNTech announced that they had developed a coronavirus vaccine which was more than 90 percent effective in preventing severe cases of COVID-19, the fight against the virus is far from being won. "Mass vaccination will take a significant amount of time, and that means that the economic outlook for 2021 will continue to be bumpy for a long time until finally these sorts of benign effects of the vaccine will become fully available," Klaas Knot, a European Central Bank Governing Council member, told CNBC soon after the launch of the first vaccine was announced.

As International Banker magazine points out, not everyone will receive a vaccine immediately after rollout begins. At this stage, there are nowhere near enough doses for the world's 7.8 billion people, and there likely won't be enough for some time. With that in mind, a lot of work needs to be done to ensure that the world can successfully move into a post-COVID-19 era with the global economy once again operating at full capacity. "Going forward, I'm not pessimistic. I mean, we'll eventually get through this. But we should not be under the illusion that it will happen fast; it will take some time," Axel Weber, chairman of UBS AG's board of directors, told CNBC in November.

Will a prolonged pandemic push recovery back to 2022?

There's finally a light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel: vaccinations have started, and more types of vaccine are on their way to approval. Millions of people all over the world have already received a vaccine, and the rate will keep growing assuming that producers manage to keep up with demand. Nevertheless, the road ahead remains bumpy.

By Aurel Constantin



Romanian companies should be proactive and become more agile

There are questions that still need to be answered, as Boston Consulting Group (BCG) analysts recently noted. The first one refers to the effectiveness of vaccine deployment at scale. It remains to be seen whether pharmaceutical companies will be able to provide enough doses to keep up with the schedules outlined by governments. For example, Romania should have 10.4 million people vaccinated by the end of September 2021, which requires a supply of over 20 million vaccines; but there are no guarantees that the country will receive all these doses.

There are also issues surrounding people's willingness to undergo vaccination. So far, only around 40 percent of the Romanian

population has expressed a desire to get the vaccine as soon as possible. Furthermore, we shall see how efficient future administrative measures will be, because the fact that the vaccination campaign has started doesn't mean we can get rid of all restrictions.

The answer to each of these questions will have a significant impact on the length of the pandemic: optimistically, we could see it winding down in the second half of 2021, while the pessimistic scenario would take us into the second half of 2022, according to the BCG report.

A MIXED ECONOMIC PICTURE

In this context, the Romanian economy has

had a mixed performance: after a relatively good period just before the crisis (with the second best growth rate in Europe in Q1 2020), the country's Q2 GDP decline was close to the EU average, but in Q3, its GDP recorded one of the five largest declines in Europe.

If we were to draw a comparison to the previous financial crisis, we'd see that Romania had also started from the highest GDP growth in Europe in 2008, experienced a drop that was close to the EU average in 2009, only to end up among the three worst performers in 2010, when its GDP decline continued even as most EU countries had returned to growth.

The time lag between European and Romanian economic phenomena suggests that Romania is dependent on other EU countries and that it is positioned at the lower end of the value chain, which results in economic waves hitting us later.

There are many uncertainties about 2021, but to have a chance of success, Romanian companies should follow a few simple rules: be proactive, stick to a clear vision, increase demand vitality, become more agile, and build enterprise resilience.

The post-COVID-19 recovery is impacted by government policies as well as business and public responses, but it is clear that the complete return to normal economic activity can only be achieved if the pandemic comes under control.

The virus spread had flattened in countries like France, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK, but are now seeing a strong resurgence. In other countries, including the US, Argentina, and Brazil, the curve was never really flattened, and the battle is still ongoing. Romania, as well as other SEE countries such as

Poland and Hungary, experienced a delayed second wave that was much more intense than the relatively small first wave.

We must acknowledge the fact that vaccine deployment will take time and we must ensure that rollout and social responsiveness also advance in order to achieve a fast recovery scenario, which could generate visible results as early as Q3 2021.

BALANCING MEASURES

Defeating the pandemic by the third quarter of 2021 will require carefully balancing multiple interventions across three important acts. The first act according to the BCG report, is Mastering "epinomics": as cases surge, we must swiftly take the right set of "epinomic" actions to drive the highest reduction in virus reproduction at the lowest socio-economic cost. The second act is Scaling the virus monitoring system: we must build robust virus monitoring systems (testing, tracking, tracing, and quarantining) to contain the virus until we reach herd immunity or vaccine supply is sufficient.

The third act is Perfecting the vaccine roll-out: the need to scale vaccines up to herd immunity, which will require a flawless roll-out and clear, transparent communications that drive uptake.

Without a successful balance of these measures, recovery can be pushed to 2022 - even late 2022 in a highly pessimistic case.

One of the biggest challenges we face is the public uptake of the vaccine: globally, only 47 percent of people say that they are very likely to get a COVID-19 vaccine. Concerns include a general distrust of the development and authorisation process, confusion over costs or modalities to get a vaccine, uncertainty about which vaccine is recommended for a given individual, the difficult logistics of the two-dose requirement for certain vaccines, and a general anti-vaccination sentiment.

While concerns may be mitigated if early vaccine rollout is successful with prioritised groups, uncertainty remains.

In this context, while we've seen sev-

eral positive economic signs in the past few months, issues related to the health crisis continue to challenge economic forecasts. Based on the most recent estimates, with the exception of China, no region is expected to firmly return to 2019 economic levels in 2021: a full recovery to pre-crisis levels is only expected in 2022.

The huge amount of support provided by several countries has yielded results: Ger-

50-60 percent of the economic output, value-added, and employment are being impacted, of which approximately 20 percent are quite heavily affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

ECONOMY BY SECTOR

Several sectors have fared relatively well during this crisis, including IT, which has been growing in Romania for several years, and on which the digitalization accelerated heavily

“WE NEED TO LEARN FROM THE PAST. IN THE PREVIOUS FINANCIAL CRISIS, ROMANIA STARTED FROM THE HIGHEST GDP GROWTH IN EUROPE IN 2008, SAW A HUGE DROP IN 2009 WHICH WAS CLOSE TO THE EU AVERAGE, AND WAS AMONG THE THREE WORST PERFORMERS IN 2010, WHEN ITS ECONOMIC DECLINE CONTINUED WHILE MOST EU COUNTRIES HAD ALREADY RETURNED TO GROWTH,”

BOGDAN BELCIU, BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP

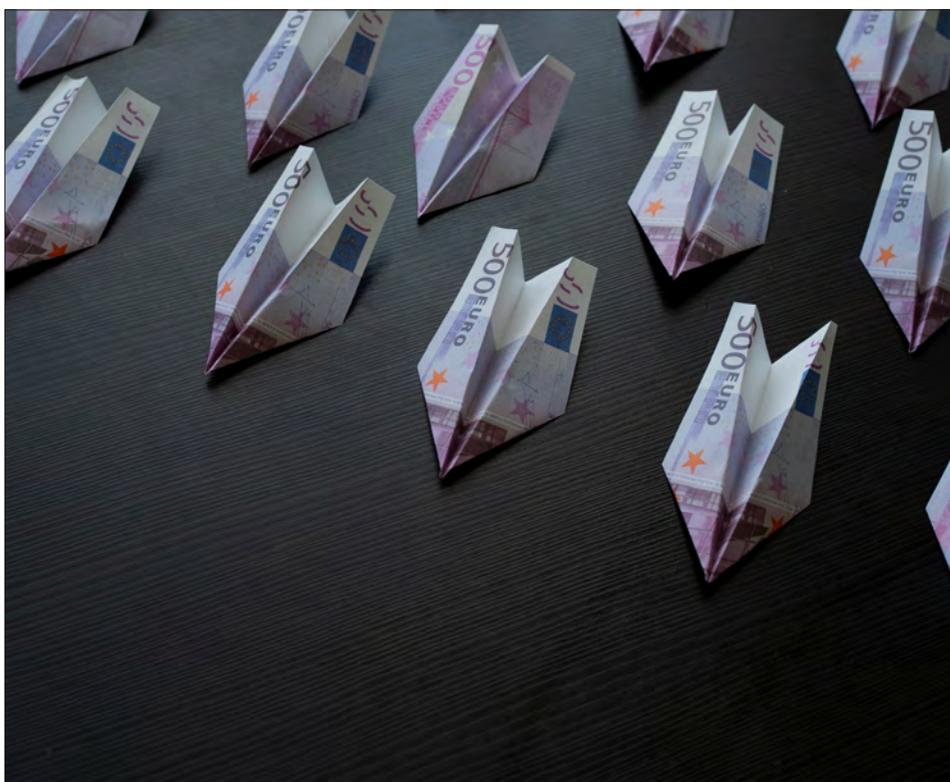
many, US, Canada, Japan, and Australia are good examples of countries where stimulus measures have helped minimise GDP impact, though countries like China and Korea have managed to contain their GDP impact with limited economic support, but a very good control of the healthcare crisis.

Failure to provide follow-up stimulus could lead to economic drag in certain regions. In Romania's case, the huge pressure on the budget deficit raises significant questions around the country's capacity to further support the economy. The end of the loan moratorium could generate headaches for the financial sector, while SMEs in general and highly affected sectors in particular could continue to struggle in 2021. Sectors totalling

by COVID-19 had a positive influence globally. The same can be said about manufacturing and retail of non-discretionary items, stimulated by changing consumption trends driven by social distancing measures, as well as healthcare and pharma, driven by the increased attention to health but also by other factors like the numerous tests carried out throughout this period. Agriculture, which had a very difficult 2020, might see a rebound in 2021.

Public investments may help in 2021, including in struggling areas like infrastructure, education, and healthcare, and there are big hopes around the absorption of the high amounts of EU funds available, for both the public and private sectors.

Top FDI 3 trends to look out for in 2021



FDI inflows should return to pre-COVID levels in about two years

1. FDI WILL CONTINUE TO SUFFER

Globally, FDI flows are likely to have decreased by 30-40 percent in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, based on early data published by UNCTAD, and a rebound is not expected to take place until 2022.

Foreign direct investment inflows to Romania and other countries in Central, Eastern and Southeast Europe (CEE) dropped by 58 percent in 2020, as the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown curbed economic activity, according to a report from the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw). In this context, FDI inflows should return to pre-COVID levels in about two years, and the CEE region could benefit from near-shoring of production by major western multinationals. Economists say that if the COVID-19 situation stabilises in the coming months because of the vaccine, there could be grounds for optimism in the second half of 2021.

2. RISING ECONOMIC NATIONALISM WILL INFLUENCE FDI

2021 will see both short- and longer-term economic and political processes which will shape FDI in both Romania and the CEE region. The post-COVID-19 recovery may see FDI return to nearly pre-pandemic levels along the business cycle in about two years. “More immediately, politically motivated disintegration and regionalisation of the global economy may result in the decline of FDI and in re-shoring. CESEE - and especially EU-CEE and the western Balkans - deeply integrated as it is in European value chains, may restructure together with the investing economies, and maintain its position”, according to wiiw specialists.

Therefore, the takeover of domestic-oriented sectors by national capital and economic nationalism may reduce exposure to foreign investors.

Like most countries in the region, Romania has a strong demand for foreign direct investment (FDI) to support its post-COVID-19 economic recovery. We take a look at the latest trends regarding foreign direct investment in our region and how they could influence Romania.

By Claudiu Vrinceanu

3. RECOVERY WILL BE SLOW IN MANUFACTURING FDI

Recovery will look different from one sector to another, and manufacturing FDI - with the automotive sector being the most important for Romania - is predicted to experience a much slower recovery than others. Manufacturing was more affected by the recession than other sectors, but investments continued in the automotive industry. Automotive accounts for 23 percent of Romania's manufacturing activity, a higher share than in the rest of the EU-CEE.

For example, Investment Monitor's Manufacturing Vulnerability Index explores which countries are most vulnerable to a weakened manufacturing industry. The index takes into account employment, value added by manufacturing, number of exports, population, and forecast output growth. Using these metrics, the index examined the top 100 global foreign direct investment (FDI) locations and found that Romania is the 28th most vulnerable country, with a 71.35 index score.

The takeaway for Romania: the government and its Invest Romania agency in particular should be aware that the fundamentals of attracting new foreign investors remain unchanged. Companies want talent availability, stability, and consistency. Foreign investors are looking for the pro-business policies that have been absent in Romania for too long.

Why now is the right time to support Romanian companies' international expansion

There are several good reasons why we can say that the time is right for Romanian companies to be helped in exporting their products and services to international markets, even though we are doing business in the middle of a global pandemic.

By **Claudiu Vrinceanu**

1. MORE PRIVATE MONEY ON THE TABLE

Romanian businesses with adequate financial resources are expected to internationalise faster than those short of funding or lacking such capabilities. Last year there were 58 investments in Romanian tech firms with global ambitions, with a total of EUR 30.4 million, a 6 percent increase in investment volume and a 51 percent increase in the number of investments, according to the How to Web Romanian Venture Report 2020.

Romania is becoming a thriving ecosystem with plenty of opportunities for global expansion. For the first time, the number of startups that received an investment doubled from one year to the next in 2019-2020, rising from 18 to 39, with the total amount growing from EUR 5.65 million to EUR 13.92 million. The average value of investments received by early stage Romanian startups also increased to EUR 357,000, which meant an increase of 12 percent compared to 2019.

2. MORE PUBLIC MONEY AVAILABLE THROUGH PNRR

One of the biggest opportunities for the business environment is the Romanian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), and Romanian companies that want to expand abroad could access some of this money. The government announced in 2020 a first version of the plan, through a document that mainly laid out on principles but was less specific about projects. In September 2020, the European Commission issued strategic guidelines for the implementation of the Relaunch and Resilience Mechanism and it is due to publish a guide for Member States on how to design their national plans to benefit from funding



COVID-19 has removed many trade barriers for Romanian firms

from the Mechanism budget. Romania must contract at least 70 percent of the total value of European recovery and resilience grants, which also include funds for entrepreneurs.

3. LOW TRADE BARRIERS FOR FIRMS

COVID-19 has removed many trade barriers for Romanian firms, while face-to-face meetings have been replaced by online interactions, allowing Romanian entrepreneurs to reduce the costs involved in meeting potential international clients. As export specialist Christelle Damiens says, the need for face-to-face meetings has disappeared, and "that makes it so much easier for small businesses to reach out to international customers. It's much easier to plan back-to-back meetings in multiple time zones as well."

4. DIASPORA POTENTIAL

There are millions of Romanian citizens all over the world and they represent a very important strategic asset that could be fully harnessed from the economic and business perspective. Imagine that just 0.1 percent of Romanians in the Diaspora became influencers and facilitators for Romanian entrepreneurs: this could mean 5,000 people that could help 5,000 firms in their internationalisation processes.

Therefore, the government should launch proposals for Romania-based companies that work at the local and regional levels and wish to internationalise their activity through Romanian communities abroad as platforms of support and promotion.

Local startups building funding positions in pandemic economy

Tech-focused Romanian startups offering products and services adapted to the pandemic economy have continued to raise funding in the past year as people are relying more on technology for work, school, and entertainment. Local entrepreneurs have the power to create startups that can shape the post-pandemic period, joining a plethora of companies that influenced the development of the global economy in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 financial crisis.

By Ovidiu Posirca



During the pandemic crisis, local startups were inclined to look at healthcare and various apps for remote operations

Five startups founded by Romanians raised at least USD 1 million in fresh funding last year, aside from robotic process automation player UiPath, who got USD 225 million as it prepares to go public in 2021.

The average funding round stood at EUR 552,000 and around EUR 7.8 million was raised through crowdfunding, according to data from professional services firm EY Romania.

“Right now, the opportunity is in volume,

not in a specific field, although SaaS (software as a service - e.n.) platforms are usually very scalable, without being available to everyone. In other countries, the FinTech field is a champion, but in our country it still has a long way to go,” Ionut Patrahau, co-founder and chief innovation officer at SeedBlink, the crowdfunding platform for startups, tells BR.

Entrepreneurs have been able to raise money in a truly challenging environment. Significant parts of the economy suffered because of the lockdown and other measures

designed to limit the spread of coronavirus. Romania’s GDP contracted by 5 percent in 2020 and is expected to jump back by 3.5 percent this year, according to World Bank estimates. In the last crisis, Romania’s economy fell by 7.1 percent.

THE FUTURE OF UNICORN STARTUPS BORN TODAY

As this period bears some similarities to the aftermath of the previous financial crisis, also marked by instability, we might see the

growth of a new generation of startups this time, too. Companies with global reach such as Airbnb, Uber or Slack were founded at the beginning of the last decade, just as the economy was starting to recover. Such startups created or accelerated the development of the sharing economy and new collaboration tools for employees.

“Any major economic crisis has the ‘merit’ of discouraging wannabe and fake entrepreneurs. Only the brave and full-hearted entrepreneurs will create startups during hard times like the financial meltdown of 2009 or the pandemic of 2020. Otherwise, there is no direct causal link between the nature of the crisis and any specific technology underlying new startups that emerge from that crisis,”

compared to those in bigger European economies. For instance, venture capital investments in Germany totalled USD 7.1 billion in 2020 alone, while in startup funding in France reached USD 6.3 billion, according to a report by professional services firm KPMG.

“Such dramatic social and behavioural changes bring a great opportunity for innovation and challenge us to reach new levels of efficiency in all sectors. We strongly believe that the pandemic is a great opportunity for startups to overturn hierarchies. And this process could be accelerated not just at the national level, but also regionally and even globally for some of them, with a small stimulus from VC funds or investors who are present in Romania,” Alexandru Bogdan,

Digitalization has been on the minds of business owners from various fields, and in some cases, technology has helped them keep their companies afloat.

During the pandemic crisis, local startups were inclined to look at healthcare - physical or mental - as well as at various applications for remote operations, such as virtual meetings/collaboration, virtual tourist/cultural tours, and remote education, says Vladimir Aninoiu, technology director within Deloitte Romania’s consulting practice.

Nowadays, companies have a higher degree of openness to adopting digital solutions, adds Sergiu Rosca, founding partner of GapMinder VC.

“As a leader of the start-up ecosystem in

USD 552,000

average funding round for Romanian startups in 2020, according to EY Romania

EUR 1.3 bln

all-time total investments in Romania’s startup ecosystem, according to EY Romania

LOCAL STARTUPS THAT RAISED THE MOST FUNDS IN 2020

Startup	Amount	Field
UiPath	USD 225 mil	Robotic Process Automation
TypingDNA	USD 6.2 mil	Biometrics
Deepstash	USD 3 mil	Education
Soleadify	USD 1.27 mil	B2B Search engine
Beez	USD 1.2 mil	FinTech
Neurolabs	USD 1 mil	Machine Learning

Source: EY Romania

Cristian Munteanu, managing partner of Early Game Ventures (EGV), a fund investing in local startups, tells BR.

Munteanu suggests that new unicorns - startups with valuations topping USD 1 billion - being born today won’t be healthcare-oriented, nor otherwise related to preventing the next pandemic. The EGV head argues that Romania is not a particularly disruptive or entrepreneurial economy, so the crisis is unlikely to bring special opportunities for the country.

The winners of this economic downturn may be startups in space tech, quantum computing, agritech or any other field, Munteanu adds.

The startup ecosystem in Romania is still in its early stages of development. All-time investments in the field have amounted to USD 1.3 billion, which is still a small figure

the CEO of startup investment fund ROCA X, tells BR.

At the end of 2020, ecommerce player eMAG, whose annual sales top EUR 1 billion, launched its own fund targeting promising startups. The company says its experience in expanding at the regional level can help smaller companies follow in its tracks.

“We have already seen emulation in sectors boosted by the pandemic crisis such as education, health & wellness, fintech or food services,” Bogdan Axinia, managing director of eMAG Ventures, tells BR. The company is yet to announce its first startup investment.

MORE COMPANIES COULD ADOPT DIGITAL SOLUTIONS FROM STARTUPS

Local startups working on ideas that can help companies navigate the digital space have a good opportunity to grow during this period.

the region, Romania will benefit from this digital transformation. A lot of Romanian startups will take advantage and expand regionally, especially well-funded companies offering unique solutions that are adapted to the crisis,” Rosca tells BR.

The pandemic has disrupted a wide range of industries ranging from travel to education and healthcare. Once the healthcare crisis starts to fade out, it remains to be seen how many people will be anxious to resume work in office buildings, visit shopping malls or go on business or leisure trips.

“This crisis has a humanitarian component, something that is specific to a pandemic, so besides helping businesses grow, startups can help people preserve their health and even their lives,” Marius Nicolae, head of technology in transaction advisory services at EY Romania, tells BR.

EU flexes funding muscle to boost startup ecosystem

The European Union is making strides in supporting the growth of the startup industry, having already made equity investments worth EUR 178 million through a specialised fund. EU funds could help Romania grow its startup ecosystem, which currently reports some EUR 36 worth of venture capital investments per capita, still below the European average.

By Ovidiu Posirca



EU funding for another 117 entrepreneurial companies is pending review

The European Innovation Council (EIC) fund has already financed 42 highly innovative startups or small and medium-sized businesses, with European funding for another 117 companies pending review.

INVESTMENTS TO KEEP HIGH-FLYING STARTUPS IN EUROPE

The EU has already provided around EUR 563 million in grants to 293 companies under the EIC Accelerator programme.

In short, the EIC fund blends equity investments with grants and aims to take a stake of 10 to 25 percent in funded startups. Equity investments start from EUR 500,000 and can reach EUR 15 million, depending on the firm's size and development stage.

“For the past several years, EU has been showing increased interest in becoming more competitive and focusing on this segment of the market, as many successful European founders have been lured by US dollars to move their businesses off the continent,”

Alexandru Bogdan, the CEO of startup investment fund ROCA X, tells BR.

The EU is deploying new funding instruments as it aims to have its own home-grown startup giants. While the value of European companies backed by venture capital stands at USD 700 billion, this figure reaches USD 10 trillion in the US, according to a report published in late 2020 by dealroom.co and Sifted.

Data from professional services firm KPMG show that in 2020, venture capital investment across Europe reached a record

USD 49 billion, up from USD 42 billion in 2019.

“We expect some Romanian start-ups and SMEs bringing breakthrough innovations in health, circular economy, advanced manufacturing, and other areas targeted by the EIC Fund to receive equity financing to develop and scale up their companies,” adds the ROCA X CEO.

Startups can use EU funds to develop research and development operations, to launch new business lines or to venture abroad.

Nonetheless, founders haven’t taken EU funds into account so much until now because they tend to follow the same pattern as the traditional approach.

“The startup ecosystem needs funds to speak its language. The fact that interest is growing is a good thing, but the EU will have to adjust its offer if it wants to win the competition against the US and China. Rather than providing funding, they have chosen to adapt their legislation. This approach seems to be more productive,” Ionut Patrahau, co-founder and chief innovation officer of SeedBlink, a crowdfunding platform for startups, tells BR.

EARLY-STAGE INVESTMENTS HIT BY PAN-DEMIC

The EIC fund could stimulate the local startup ecosystem, which recorded a decrease in venture capital investments in the pandemic year. For instance, cumulative VC investments in Romania stood at EUR 200 million in the first ten months of 2020, down from EUR 700 million in the previous year, according to the dealroom.co and Sifted report.

For Bogdan Axinia, managing director of

eMAG Ventures, the EU’s involvement in the local startup ecosystem is a good sign that can generate future growth.

“It remains to be seen how having the EIC acting as VC for start-ups will work in real life: how fast they act, how much bureaucracy is involved, and what value the EIC can add besides capital,” Axinia says.

The EIC Fund aims to support equality and gender balance and to significantly contribute to sustain-

ability with a particular focus on health, resilience, and the green and digital transitions.

Marius Nicolae, head of technology in strategy and transactions at professional services firm EY Romania, says the local ecosystem could use this alternative investment channel for startups with solutions that impact society.

“The development of startups with a social impact could bring benefits to Romanian society and to the country’s startup ecosystem, by promoting local innovation on an international scale.

Romanian startups and other technology companies could access the fund and other EU programmes for research and innovation, to increase their prototype readiness, accelerate the commercialisation stage and access the European network of experts for further development,” Nicolae tells BR.

The EU is already shaping the growth of local startups through the European Invest-

ment Fund (EIF) as one of its shareholders. This separate initiative backs several venture capital and private equity funds operating locally.

Going into the first quarter of 2021, VC investments are set to remain strong in areas like FinTech, HealthTech, EdTech, software as a service (SaaS), and cybersecurity, according to KPMG consultants. However, for startups looking to secure early-stage funding, 2020 has proven particularly difficult. As the health crisis lingers, this situation could continue to impact founders of new startups this year.

VC investors were likely also hesitant about making completely new investments



VENTURE CAPITAL FUNDING PER CAPITA IN 2019	
Economy	Amount
Europe	EUR 55
Romania	EUR 36
<i>Source: Dealroom.co</i>	

CUMULATIVE VC INVESTMENT IN ROMANIA	
Period	Amount
2019 (Jan-Oct)	EUR 0.7 bn
2020 (Jan-Oct)	EUR 0.2 bn
<i>Source: Dealroom.co</i>	

without getting the opportunity to meet founders face to face due to the health crisis, according to the KPMG report.

First-time venture financing of companies in Europe fell by 20 percent to 1,546 deals in 2020 versus 2019, while the deal value remained flat at USD 3.5 billion. The average seed investment in a European startup was USD 1.3 million last year, up from USD 1.1 million in 2019.

The EIC could provide additional funding opportunities for entrepreneurs who have been struggling to get money from angel investors or other funds backing startups in early stages.

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Are there enough reasons to make a change also? The COVID-19 pandemic could be another serious reason. The World Health Organization also states that exercise is extremely important in the fight against COVID-19. Moreover, during this period, the WHO doubled the daily period of recommended moderate exercise each week, from

150 minutes to 300 minutes! Put your health where it belongs, on your daily list of priorities. When you realize the amazing changes that exercise brings to your life, it will be the time when you make the best decision for health, immunity, and longevity: transforming movement into a lifestyle. The #BeHealthy lifestyle, as the 65,000 World Class members call it.

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It may be difficult to resume intense physical activity after a break of a few months. Find out what steps you need to take to quickly get back

in top shape. First, make sure your goals meet the SMART criteria.

SPECIFIC: It is not enough to say that you want to "be in shape", you must have a more precise goal. For example: I want to be able to climb 4 floors again without getting tired. Or, more specifically: I want to reach X kilograms!

MEASURABLE: Once you identify the specific goal, make sure you can measure your progress. After all, if you don't evaluate, you just guess and you never really know if your effort was a success. Are you trying to reach a certain weight? Weigh yourself periodically or take measurements of your body composition.

APPROACH: Regardless of your goal, you need to be confident that you can achieve it. If you are afraid that it is not a very realistic goal, consider dividing the goal into smaller objectives. For example, instead of trying to lose 10 pounds in a month, try to lose only three. He's even healthier.

RELEVANT: Before you set your goal, think about what you enjoy and start from there. This is also true for smart diets. A good nutritionist will first ask you what you like to eat and will build your new eating plan based on your preferences.

TIME: Goals like "I train to be fit" or "feel good" are vague and without a deadline. You choose a date when you think you will reach the goal. If your goal is to lose weight, then you should know that the doctors' recommendation is to aim for between 1.5-3 kg less per month.

In 2021, get into the #BeHealthy rhythm! Whatever your goals are related to mind and body wellness, the health & fitness club is the place where they can quickly become a reality. If you want to combine fitness with fun, try the group fitness classes at World Class. Music, energy, great atmosphere, lots of smiles and laughter, everything combines perfectly so that every day is lived in the #BeHealthy rhythm! On www.worldclass.ro you can find out which classes are best for you, meet the World Class personal trainers and find the nearest World Class club.



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How the pandemic has reshaped Romanian businesses

Remote work, online meetings and events, empty office towers are all parts of the current reality, but many of them could continue past the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many companies have rethought their way of doing business, and many employees have found a more balanced lifestyle – with more time to spend with their families, for example.

By Sorin Melenciuc



Many people are transitioning from being full-time employees to part-time jobs, self-employment or freelancing

This new reality is having a huge impact on business practices. The first notable shift refers to the fact that most businesses are now more reliant on remote work instead of office-based work. This has become the norm within less than a year, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and there are many reports that prove it.

According to real estate consultancy JLL, Romania's office rental market fell by 36 percent year-on-year in 2020, to around 300,000 square meters. The main causes of this sharp decline include the shift to remote work and the financial difficulties that many companies have experienced during the pandemic. In fact, many sectors, from hospitality and tourism to the auto industry, registered much

lower revenues last year, so the appetite of many businesses for renting office spaces has plummeted.

THE SHIFT TO REMOTE WORK

Across the globe, most companies are intensely debating the issues raised by the work-from-home experiment, and many businesses are planning substantial shifts as a result. "With workforces now located in kitchens, basements, and attics, what will happen to all those sleek urban office towers and their glossy suburban counterparts? The answer has to start with their current tenants. (...) In the short term, 70 percent of corporate-centre executives plan to reconfigure office space, as do 54 percent of business-unit leaders. Over the midterm, 30 percent of

corporate centres want to terminate existing leases early, compared to 14 percent of business units," a recent McKinsey global report indicates.

However, the shift to virtual working was already underway at the beginning of the pandemic in many organisations across the globe, but experts now anticipate that it will remain a very common practice.

A recent Deloitte report shows that 75 percent of CFOs in the Netherlands have said that they intended to shift at least 20 percent of previously on-premise employees to permanently remote positions after the end of the pandemic. "In addition to our workspaces, the way we work has been heavily affected, ranging from minor changes (adding a video element to a meeting) to major ones (fully virtual check-in at hospitals)," Deloitte experts write.

Another key factor for the future of working is that the pandemic has accelerated a trend that had been growing in the last decade. Many people are transitioning from being full-time employees to part-time jobs, self-employment or freelancing. In Romania, more than 300,000 individuals have part-time jobs, which allows them to spend more time with their families or enjoying their hobbies. But the pandemic seems to have accelerated this shift. In August 2020, the Romanian eJobs platform registered a 10 percent increase in applications for remote and part-time jobs.

However, office work is not going to disappear, despite the pandemic, because some types of businesses and activities simply cannot be operated remotely. In these sectors, experts suggest that the pandemic has had an

impact on productivity.

“Those who continued to work on site during the lockdown experienced a slow-down in work and productivity (aside from vital sectors), in tandem with strict social distancing and personal hygiene measures. Supply chains have also suffered, due to severe disruptions brought on by halts in production and transportation,” the report indicates.

These current realities are putting pressure on business leader to reimagine what the workforce means beyond traditional work arrangements. “It means using the strength of the open talent economy to connect furloughs and layoffs to immediate opportunities. Business leaders should also be actively planning for the use of the alternative labour market to scale, recover, and thrive,” Deloitte

restaurants or hotels, where innovation is not always so obvious. In Romania, hotels and restaurants lost at least a third of their revenues in 2020 compared to 2019. Many businesses in this sector just left the market last year due to the crisis, but many others survived.

According to current projections, indoor dining in restaurants may not return to pre-crisis levels for months – possibly even years. For full-service restaurant operators, developing a new long-term economic model becomes crucial.

Based on practices seen in many countries during the last year, experts suggest there are opportunities to optimise takeaway and drive-through operations and re-engineer menus and pricing. This might include find-

a real success and it allowed us to stay afloat,” Alexandru Dumitru, one of Anika’s owners, told HORECA magazine.

DIGITAL ACCELERATION

The current pandemic is also accelerating business digitalization, a very visible factor even before the healthcare crisis. Experts are calling the ongoing trend the Fourth Industrial Revolution (or Industry 4.0), promising huge wins for companies that have already scaled digital technologies.

“Those that were still scaling faced a reality check, and 2020 was a wake-up call for those that hadn’t yet started on their Industry 4.0 journeys,” a McKinsey report notes. This applies to many sectors, and one of them is healthcare. In fact, the pandemic has hugely accelerated the growth of digital healthcare. In 2020, almost half of US patients used telehealth services, compared to just 11 percent a year earlier.

This surge in telehealth is a huge business opportunity that digitalization helps. India’s Apollo Hospitals, comprising more than 7,000 physicians and 30,000 other healthcare professionals, launched a digital health app called Apollo 24/7 in early 2020. Within six months, the app had enrolled four million people.

Such business opportunities are appearing across the globe, including in Romania. A local startup launched in 2019, SanoPass, is now the largest platform that connects medical clinics and companies in Romania. The company now has more than 10,000 subscribers, a fivefold increase compared to the beginning of the pandemic, in March 2020.

“The company’s evolution in 2020 was the result of a strategic change. This meant a repositioning of the company from a subscription issuer addressing employers only to a platform that digitizes, connects, and individualises all preventive medical services, which generated advancement both in the area of companies as well as in the individual customers segment,” says Andrei Vasile, the CEO of SanoPass.

Many experts forecast that these trends and strategies will become even more important in a post-COVID-19 world, because of how much the pandemic has accelerated digitalization.

ANOTHER CONSEQUENCE OF THE PANDEMIC, AS SEEN IN OTHER CRISES AS WELL, HAS BEEN THE RISING IMPORTANCE OF INNOVATION AS A KEY FACTOR OF BUSINESS SURVIVAL. WHENEVER A MARKET SHRINKS, THE MORE INNOVATIVE BUSINESSES GENERALLY HAVE A BETTER CHANCE TO SURVIVE ON THE MARKET, WHILE LESS INNOVATIVE ONES TEND TO DISAPPEAR.

experts suggest. Official data in many countries showed that, with the onset of the pandemic, flex-workers (such as self-employed or freelancers) were the first to be affected. Now, experts expect COVID-19 to increase many businesses’ appetite for flexible workers.

INNOVATE OR DIE

Another consequence of the pandemic, as seen in other crises as well, has been the rising importance of innovation as a key factor of business survival. Whenever a market shrinks, the more innovative businesses generally have a better chance to survive on the market, while less innovative ones tend to disappear.

This principle applies even in sectors like

ing the right balance between special offers and “high-margin items such as appetizers, sides, desserts and beverages,” according to a McKinsey report.

Such strategies can already be observed in Romania as well. Two local entrepreneurs, the owners of a fine dining restaurant called Anika in Bucharest, have managed to survive during the pandemic thanks to an innovative strategy.

“We change the menu at Anika on a monthly basis, in order to follow seasonality and remain creative. (...) During the state of emergency, we reorganised and decided not to start food delivery, but to create a set of five jars which contained meat, our smoked trout paté, duck confit, cherry jam, etc. It was

Opportunities and threats for Romania in the next decade

Romania should benefit from huge amounts of EU funds in the coming decade – around EUR 80 billion to be exact. But many funds are associated with some ambitious plans drawn up in Brussels – like the EU aiming to become carbon-neutral by 2050 – and this means that much of the money will go to “green” projects designed to reduce pollution, enhance innovation, and create new carbon-free markets and businesses.

By Sorin Melenciu



A major challenge for the Romanian government is implementing a series of reforms in the public sector

This means that decision-makers in Romania should change the way they think in order to both benefit from the available EU funds and restructure the local business environment.

EU FUNDS BONANZA

The biggest source of money for Romania in the next decade will be the EUR 1.07 trillion multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021-2027. Romania has secured EUR 46.3 billion from the 2021-2027 MFF, with the largest part consisting of cohesion funds (EUR 26.8 billion) and another EUR 18.6 billion allocated for agriculture and rural development.

The second financing package is the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), which will make EUR 672.5 billion in loans and grants available to support reforms and investments undertaken by EU member states.

The RRF is the main support scheme of the NextGenerationEU, a temporary recovery instrument that allows the Commission to raise funds to help repair the immediate economic and social damage brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of these funds is to mitigate the economic and social impact of the pandemic and make European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient, and better prepared for the chal-

lenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions.

Romania's share of the RRF is EUR 33.5 billion, but some money was already used last year to tackle the impact of the healthcare crisis. However, there are several conditionalities in the NextGenerationEU framework. First, all member states must prepare recovery and resilience plans that set out a coherent set of reforms and public investment projects. To benefit from the available support, these reforms and investments should be implemented by 2026.

Second, the Recovery and Resilience Facility requires member states to make a commitment to the twin transitions: green and digital. In order to reach this target, the European Commission will assess the national plans against two major targets: 37 percent of funds should be used for green investments and reforms, and 20 percent for digital investments.

“Each recovery and resilience plan will have to include a minimum of 37 percent of expenditure related to climate. Progress towards other environmental objectives is also important, in line with the European Green Deal,” the EU Executive arm said last year. The Commission is now developing a methodology to ensure investment is distributed to both green projects and digital capacities.

DIFFERENT PRIORITIES

These requirements are the first major obstacles for Romanian authorities, who have a different view of local priorities. Romania joined the EU in 2007 but has had a poor

record in properly spending EU funds. The country has been developing at a fast pace over the last 14 years, limiting the gap in terms of general development measured by indicators such as GDP per capita, but it remains one of the poorest countries in the bloc. On the other hand, Bucharest has mismanaged large investments in infrastructure, and the result is that Romania currently has only about 900 kilometres of motorway and a limited number of upgraded railroad infrastructures. The former government, led by Ludovic Orban, thought that it could use a large share of the new EU funds to finance infrastructure projects and prepared a draft national recovery and resilience plan (PNRR) with this objective in mind. As expected, the first Romanian plan was not considered acceptable by the European Commission, and an improved PNRR is now being developed by the new government led by Florin Citu, a Liberal economist.

“Our priorities in the development of the PNRR are initiatives that produce immediate effects in the economy and infrastructure, as well as projects which are already advanced. They will be prioritised following an assessment of the projects already included in the first version of the PNRR and of the new proposals we have received,” Investments and European Projects minister Cristian Ghinea recently told reporters.

The new government’s target is to finalise the new PNRR by early April 2021 in order to start applying for EU funds. In fact, as long as all relevant rules and regulations were adopted or ratified, EU member states could apply for funding as of January 1, 2021.

EXPECTED REFORMS

Another major challenge for the Romanian government is implementing a series of reforms in the public sector in order to increase its capacity to develop or assess projects, monitor implementation, and attract available EU funds within a short period of time. This is a hot topic as it could include dismissing incompetent public servants and restructure institutions and public companies, an unpopular measure for any government or political party.

Some small measures have already been announced in the form of a requirement

imposed by prime minister Florin Citu to all members of the government: implementing restructuring plans in all public companies under their authority which registered losses in 2020. But there are other reforms included in the NextGenerationEU package, such as those necessary to reach the green energy or digital targets. These require real reform: strengthening institutions, imposing new and sometimes unpopular rules, pushing public sector employees to step out of their comfort zones. The future of Romania depends on the implementation of these re-

country has still a long way to go to achieve its transition towards the new EU energy goals.

In fact, Romania’s energy strategy still relies on traditional sources such as gas and nuclear, despite its large green energy potential. Some experts are warning the government that if it doesn’t change its perspective, Romania will fail in its energy transition.

“We are about to make one of the biggest strategic mistakes regarding energy in our entire history. Instead of quickly setting clear priorities for the energy transition, commit-

WHILE THE GOVERNMENT STILL LACKS A CLEAR IDEA OF HOW IT COULD ADDRESS THE CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUE IN TERMS OF ITS ENERGY POLICY, MANY COMPANIES ARE SEEING OPPORTUNITIES MUCH MORE CLEARLY.

forms, which could allow the country to fully benefit from the funds.

With this large amount of EU funds, Romania could truly be modernised during the next decade and become a real developed country. If this attempt fails, there will never be another opportunity to succeed.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

The large inflows of EU funds and their associated policies also represent huge business opportunities, on one hand, and raise tremendous risk, on the other. “We know that climate risk is investment risk. But we also believe the climate transition presents a historic investment opportunity,” BlackRock CEO Larry Fink said in a letter published at the beginning of 2021.

In Romania, the first sector that will really see the impact of the EU’s new Green Deal pact is the energy sector. Romania is among the EU member states with a high share of green energy, produced by hydro power plants, wind turbines or solar panels. But the

ting to neutrality in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, (...) we are preparing, in almost complete political consensus, to throw billions of euros out the window by building new gas pipelines that can’t even distribute hydrogen and green gas,” former Energy minister Razvan Nicolescu warned.

However, while the government still lacks a clear idea of how it could address the climate change issue in terms of its energy policy, many companies are seeing opportunities much more clearly. Restart Energy, a local independent electricity and natural gas supplier, has allied with Interlink Capital Strategies, an American consulting and fund management company, to develop green energy projects worth USD 500 million in Romania and neighboring countries. Many other smaller “green” projects, both public and private, are also flourishing all over the country. The EU aims to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and will probably adopt a new carbon reduction target of 55 percent for 2030.

The impact of mindfulness on businesses in the work from home era

Focus group research conducted by e-days, a UK-based global absence intelligence company, has revealed that “wellbeing” is the most popular area of investment for HR leaders moving into 2021.

By Romanita Oprea



Anca Banita, life @ business coach



Loredana Popasav, The Simplified Mind

When asked to identify their top three investment areas for 2021, 45 percent of respondents identified wellbeing as their key investment area, particularly in response to the reported rise in mental health issues in 2020. 43 percent said they aimed to focus on investing in employee engagement. According to Harvard Business Review, mindfulness is now seen as a crucial skill in business.

But are mindfulness techniques really a big trend right now, even for business purposes? According to Loredana Popasav, transformative coach at The Simplified Mind, the business world today is where the sports world was a few decades ago - starting to become aware of the importance of mental wellbeing and to acknowledge that an employee's mental state influences their performance and outcome. “By now, many people have figured

out the role clarity plays in business decisions. There is one common denominator between us all - we want peace of mind and calmness in our lives. When we talk about techniques, this implies doing something and putting more thought into it. This contradicts my understanding and experience of mindfulness as a state of peace, clarity, quiet mind and presence, where the thought process actually gets limited. Therefore, in my opinion, mindfulness as a state is extremely helpful, but techniques themselves do not make sense to me and I think they may lead people to focus on the wrong thing,” Popasav explained.

In turn, life & business coach Anca Banita, says that crises like this pandemic can put an untamed mind under the spotlight and cause it to lose its sense of control, so the need to train our minds has become evident

in recent months. “According to a Harvard study, we are not really present in our lives 47 percent of the time. This is what mindfulness practices do: they give you back your life and your power. In mindfulness we work with our minds but also with our hearts, because our emotional life plays an important role as well. We learn to bring our minds back into the present, again and again, with kindness and softness. I think it's time to learn how to do this; it is a life skill we need in such an unpredictable and complex world,” Banita argued.

In the era of housework being mixed with office work, the boundary between our personal and professional lives has almost disappeared. Mixing personal chores with tight deadlines isn't exactly a routine we were used to. Running from one meeting to another - even if they're virtual - while the kids are running around the house means that everyone needs a new mindset.

“This is where mindfulness stepped in as a means to understand and accept the present, to live our personal and professional lives under a new paradigm. Some were practicing it ever since before the pandemic, while for others it was a blank canvas to start from; let's just say that by the end of the year, everyone in the company was feeling a need for balance. We have slowly transformed from a manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge-based one. While we used to work primarily with our bodies, now our brains do most of the work. Over time, working with the mind has caused increasingly serious mental problems for workers,” said Alecsandra Ionita, wellbeing specialist at wellbeing.ro.

Therefore, Ionita added, mindfulness, mental fitness, and sophrology are important and a business should keep them in focus in order to thrive. These new self-development

techniques help combat and manage employee stress and at the same time reflect a major problem of today's society: chronic stress. "There are more than 1,300 mindfulness apps you can find by doing a simple search, all focusing on breathing techniques, meditation, and visual representations. This is good; it means individuals and businesses have a foundation to start from in case a mindfulness programme has not yet been implement-

ed at their workplace. Mindfulness training has proven benefits for employee health and wellness, including helping to decrease stress and build resilience," she explained.

So, what techniques should we use? Anca Banita would advise beginners to start from a mindfulness meditation. They can try MBSR training - they can find a free MBSR training course online, based on the programme founded by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the

University of Massachusetts Medical School. It provides some simple, yet powerful techniques, such as Body Scan meditation or Sitting Meditation, all guided and easy to follow.

2021 TRENDS

In Anca Banita's opinion, the pandemic has created this space for us to bring our whole selves to the office. The intense stress and the need to adapt so quickly to the rules of working from home also acted as catalysts for some precious transformation and insight. With emotions at such high levels, we could no longer hide them. As things were changing so rapidly, we could not hide our stress, either. And

because we had to work from home, around children, family, and pets, we could no longer fake perfection. "There was and still is space for more authenticity, for embracing more vulnerability, for making room for our emotions as well. And I believe that this will stay with us and that emotions will play a more important role in 2021, together with deeper conversations around mental health and what a company culture really needs in order to help people feel supported and empowered to show their real selves. In 2020 I held workshops on topics such as Overcoming Fear, Powerful Tools for Managing Stress and Resilience, Mental Clarity, Our Brain in Crisis, and Mindfulness Techniques, and these are issues that would never have found a place in the corporate world before the pandemic. They've now made their way in, which is encouraging, and they will continue to be in

the spotlight in 2021," said Anca Banita.

According to Aleksandra Ionita, trends emerging in 2021 tend to lead to a healthier employee: both physically and mentally. Two other notable trends are the focus on being positive at the workplace - Positive Psychology - and a technique developed in 1960 by a Spanish neuropsychiatrist - Sophrology.

"Positive Psychology is a trend that takes multiple forms, including programmes for mental fitness or positive intelligence - a term developed by Stanford University professor Shirzad Chamine. The outcome of implementing such a programme for a business that either had to suffer in 2020 or reached a peak in its development is mind-blowing. A Positive Intelligence programme delivers a simple, doable, ground-breaking set of exercises that can help develop one's 'performance' muscles, increase their PQ score, and gain access to previously untapped mental resources. By accessing a mental fitness programme rooted in positive intelligence, you can only bring success to the managers who are involved and ultimately to the entire company. The model is a brilliant breakthrough as it defines, measures, and improves your awareness of your own performance and happiness," Aleksandra Ionita explained.

At the same time, Sophrology has started to gain ground in Europe and some see the future of mindfulness in it, as it combines meditation, breathing, and relaxation techniques with gentle movement and visualisation. A recent Kent Business School study found that sophrology had a positive impact on employees' physical and mental health, and more research is underway.

In Popasav's view, the higher awareness of mental health the conversations around it are the biggest trends. "It is probably the first time in modern history when we've spoken freely and openly about mental health, when its importance in all aspects of life and business has been recognised. We know that top sports stars consider mental preparation to be as important as physical training, and we are beginning to see this in our personal and business lives, too. I predict that this will continue to happen over the next decade and that HR departments in many companies will have a mental health development team just as they have training managers today," she said.



Aleksandra Ionita, wellbeing.ro

ed at their workplace. Mindfulness training has proven benefits for employee health and wellness, including helping to decrease stress and build resilience," she explained.

The pandemic has changed everything, acting like a "magnifying glass," as Popasav put it. She pointed out that people spent more time with themselves, thinking about themselves, fearing for their future. All these things can generate a higher level of mental noise. "I haven't yet met anyone who likes to be tense, anxious or afraid. People want peace and quiet, but they are not sure how to achieve it. I know people have had various experiences in the last year. Looking back, we can all point to good moments and bad moments. Most of us are able to name certain benefits of 2020, whether they are personal, related to relationships or to the natural environment. We can also see the negative

How to set business objectives at the start of the year

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of the way entrepreneurs and business owners see their activity as well as the manner in which they organise their everyday work. But, one of the things that should never change is our perception of a new year: it should begin with hope as well as with some strategic planning that will help set the tone for a good, productive year. Plus, it's the perfect time to assess where your business stands and what type of actions required.

By Romanita Oprea



Focus on how to grow your business, strengthen your products and services

According to Bernard Marr & Co., the first step in setting the right targets for your business is to establish or review your company's purpose (mission) and

ambition (vision). Even if you already have a purpose and ambition statement, it's a good idea to review them at least once a year to see whether they are still relevant considering

how your company has matured and where you want it to go. If they're not, it's time for an update. And if you've never developed them in the first place, this is the perfect first step towards setting the right targets. Make sure that these statements are both inspiring and precise. Everyone in your organisation needs to have a clear understanding of where they are headed if you want to have any chance of actually getting there.

"Next, with purpose and ambition in mind, it's time to create a simple one-pager that captures your company's top-level plans, objectives, and priorities. This will increase your odds of being one of the 10 percent of companies that actually turn their strategic goals into results, because it will be easy for anyone in the company to read and understand the priorities, focus on what's important, monitor progress, and manage the team's is progress toward those objectives.

A crucial part of any company's target-setting process needs to include external changes that may impact your business in the coming year. Businesses are impacted by legislation such as the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and new regulatory requirements may shift your strategy," Bernard Marr & Co specialists added.

Moreover, it's really important to know when to say no. Reject any strategies that don't fit. You'll also have to shelve ideas that you lack the resources to pursue at the moment, regardless of however wonderful they may sound. Understand what you can accomplish and what you cannot and set your limits. Focus on how to grow your business, strengthen your products and services, and

improve the way you run your company. Other steps that are also very important and will make a difference are drafting one-year plans for individual teams, focusing on personal leadership priorities, analyse consumer behaviour and get feedback from inside and outside your company, plan your investments, keep HR needs in minds, bring your partners closer and ask for their opinions, set up a clear marketing and communication strategy, etc. And always look for ways to improve not just your company, but yourself and your knowledge, too.

“Executive coaching is an efficient, high-impact process that helps high-performing people in leadership roles improve results in ways that can be sustained over time. It is efficient because, unlike traditional consulting assignments, it does not require invasive processes, large outside teams, and lengthy reports and analyses to get results. Unlike other options, executive coaching programmes are laser-focused on achieving ambitious results that have a direct impact on your sales and profits. Testimonials show that coaching brings back control, focus, and peace of mind to your work. Before you start any coaching programme, agree that there is the potential for a five to tenfold return on your fees back to you in specific, measurable value. If the value isn't there for you, you shouldn't waste your time, nor the coach's,” said Daiana Stoicescu, Master Certified Coach Trainer.

At the same time, with high levels of uncertainty expected to continue in 2021, it's good to have one or several backup plans for your business. “Lay out potential contingencies that you may face in the coming year and use this time to craft strategic responses. These strategic plans can address different scenarios like ongoing health concerns, reopening at a slower pace, continued openings and closings, remote and on-demand environments, and full reopening. Build out each of these plans, using the experience of 2020 to help develop key tactics. Many of these tactics may have already proven effective this year or you may still be testing them out. Do research into tactics that have worked for other businesses, even some you may not have thought of, perhaps because your strategy was focused on returning to a recognisable environment,” said John Boitnott for entrepreneur.com.

OPINION Daiana Stoicescu, Master Certified Coach Trainer



How many times have you decided to finally start working towards your ambitious goal, only to end up wasting hours on the internet looking at everything from Wikipedia entries on the Civil War to adorable puppy photos? Despite knowing that we want to accomplish big goals, it's easy to lose motivation if we don't spend our time effectively.

We all know that we should have a plan. Yet so many of us fail to act or use ineffective methods and blame ourselves for being procrastinators. Unless you were one of the lucky ones, no one taught you about good time management and business strategies growing up. But it is a lot simpler than it sounds: using your time effectively means focusing on ONE task for a defined period of time, and then taking a mentally refreshing break. Easier said than done, right?

Despite being aware that we need to focus, we keep multiple browser tabs open, keep phone notifications turned on during work, and check emails like crack addicts. As studies have shown, despite thinking that we may be great multi-taskers, doing multiple tasks at once will break down our emotional strength and ultimately our productivity. Time management does not necessarily refer to how long you work, but rather to working on the right things. No matter what we tell you here in this article, if you don't focus on the stuff that's truly important to you, effective time management and business strategy will not be your saviours. To-do lists are great for

capturing ideas, but when it comes time to taking action on multiple tasks, you are often left overwhelmed and anxious.

In 1918, master hustler Charles Schwab (one of the richest men in the world at the time) solved this dilemma by hiring productivity consultant Ivy Lee to make his company Bethlehem Steel more productive. They agreed that if Lee's advice didn't work, Schwab wouldn't have to pay him anything.

Lee pulled aside each of Schwab's executives and prescribed the following simple remedy to increase productivity:

- At the end of each workday, write down the six most important things you need to accomplish tomorrow. Do not write down more than six tasks.
- Prioritize those six items in order of importance.
- When you get to work tomorrow, focus only on the first task. Work until the first task is finished before moving on to the second one.
- Approach the rest of your list in the same fashion. At the end of the day, move any unfinished items to a new list of six tasks for the following day.
- Repeat this process every working day.

While this method seemed incredibly simple, after three months, Schwab was so impressed with the increase in productivity at Bethlehem Steel that he called Lee into his office and wrote him a check for USD 25,000 (the equivalent of USD 440,000 today). How could something so simple be so effective? Simple productivity systems often beat complex ones. Top performers in any field – whether it's entrepreneurship, athletics, academia, the arts – know the value of focus. If you constantly divide your attention by trying to tackle multiple tasks at once, your productivity suffers.

Though very simple, the only productivity “trick” you'll need to learn is working on your most important task first.

Focus on sustainability and community involvement

As the world economy rapidly moves away from an oil-based and consumption-driven model to a green, sustainable way of doing business, companies are starting to focus on projects and ideas for a better world. BR sat down with **Grzegorz Grabowski**, the General Manager of Maspex Romania, to talk about the company's CSR projects.

By Mihai Cristea



What are Maspex Romania's main environmental targets?

Since the beginning of its existence, Maspex Romania has consistently strived to minimise its negative impact on the environment, in every area of operation. We always make sure that our machinery and equipment are in proper condition and we have modern warehouses. The company plans out production in a way that ensures maximum capacity utilisation. It also raises staff awareness through frequent training sessions.

Our mission is to provide quality food that can be truly appreciated by consumers. We are a responsible company, constantly looking for environmental solutions and improving our production processes. This way, the operational activity in our factories is based on

the highest environmental standards.

We have a pro-environmental policy through which we constantly invest in and search for modern solutions that minimise our impact on nature. Our investment plan follows the principle of sustainability by using modern technologies that can effectively meet business needs.

Maspex Romania develops its operations in line with its Environmental Permit, following all the provisions imposed by the law. The company rigorously monitors parameters, such as wastewater and air quality, according to legislative requirements and reports results to the authorities.

At the same time, as a manufacturer and importer, we have legal obligations regarding the product packaging we place on the

market, which must be recycled. As such, we have signed responsibility transfer contracts with specialised companies (OIREPs).

We sort waste selectively based on material type. Sorting is the first phase of recycling, followed by dividing waste into several fractions. Waste is collected separately and temporarily stored in specialised containers to avoid contamination. Subsequently, it is handed over to authorised companies that carry out recovery or proper disposal.

What types of environment projects have you carried out in the past year?

We have focused on pro-environmental investments aiming to decrease our consumption of electricity, gas and compressed air. One example was using LED technology in our newly built spaces.

What can you tell us about involving communities in protecting the environment, as part of a collective effort for a better future?

Through the Bucovina brand, Maspex Romania launched the "Keeping land wild" campaign, a social afforestation action that took place in the Valea Secu area in Suceava county. The Dorna Candrenilor City Hall and the Dorna Forest District were our partners in this endeavour, together with volunteers from the Vatra Dornei Youth Organisation and the Romanian Mountain Rescuers Association - Salvamont Vatra Dornei, and they all helped us plant fir seedlings across the area. Bucovina is a land with 23 nature reserves, virgin forests, as well as unique or rare species of flora and fauna. This rich land is

the source of the bottled Bucovina water, which is appreciated for its special qualities. Through our social responsibility actions, we set out to increase our concern for nature and to remind people that in order to live in balance, we need to keep wild lands untouched by civilisation.

What are the most effective ways to educate the population about responsible and long-term environmental behaviour?

We think that early education is the most effective long-term strategy. It is also very important for us all, as individuals and companies, to acknowledge and value the natural assets we still have around us. We must then work on protecting these resources and adopt a sustainable lifestyle. Along with other industries, we support the implementation of the DRS - deposit refund system for recyclable packaging in Romania. It is an environmental tool which has been successfully used in other European countries, it is very effective in supporting separate waste collection, and the recycling of beverage packaging.

What are your future plans for Maspex Romania's environmental strategy?

We are a responsible company and our entire strategy is based on an environmentally-friendly attitude. We are constantly working on improving our processes at every stage. For example, one of our future investments will target a new water supply pipe which will reduce water loss. A closed cooling system, with water recovery and reusage at all cooling installations along the production line is another planned investment.

What are the main pillars of Maspex Romania's current CSR strategy?

Maspex Romania has long been involved in social responsibility actions, some of them conducted regionally and some nationally. Our social activity started in 2009, with the establishment of the SOS For Tummies Foundation. Since 2009 we have become increasingly involved and have developed social programmes in order to improve quality of life through education. The main themes of our social programmes are related to a healthy lifestyle through proper nutrition and exercise, as well as child safety.





At the same time, Maspex Romania is actively involved in the community where it operates. From providing lunch for underprivileged children to providing medical equipment for health facilities in these areas, we do our best to help. We stand by people and communities to build a life in harmony. We strongly believe that a company works with people and, more importantly, for people. Business plans and objectives are all achieved based on hard work and strong emotional involvement, as well as respect for others.

What can you tell us about internal CSR projects carried out for Maspex Romania employees?

“The Tedi Safety School,” “Start Moving with

Tedi,” and “Tymbark Junior Cup” are three nationwide programmes. As part of these programmes we have frequently organised additional activities focusing on the communities to which we belong, in areas where the company has factories: Giurgiu, Vatra Dornei, Valenii de Munte. “The First Day of School with Tedi” is an internal project designed for our employees’ children who are about to start school. Tedi provides them with fully-equipped backpacks with all the supplies they need for school. We also organise summer camps for our Vatra Dornei employees’ children.

How do you think CSR initiatives in Romania will evolve in the coming years?

We will continue our existing programmes,

and we have adapted to the pandemic context where necessary - for example, the Tedi Safety School has been moved online. We’ve had to suspend projects that involved a physical presence until health conditions will allow us to resume them. We will of course continue to support local communities in these difficult times.

How much do you think the pandemic crisis has changed the concept of solidarity in Romanian society - for both companies and individuals - considering the fact that many companies joined forces to fight against COVID-19 in the first months of the pandemic?

The concept of solidarity in Romanian society has changed in the past few months, it has become stronger, and more significant. Both companies and individuals have joined the battle against our common enemy, the coronavirus.

As members of one big team, we have supported each other, but we have not forgotten those who are most exposed to danger in the front lines: doctors, nurses, and medical staff or those who need humanitarian aid. We were glad to be able to support medical staff in hospitals in Bucharest, Timisoara, and Iasi, as well as healthcare workers in our close communities - Vatra Dornei and Valenii de Munte.

Our actions did not stop there; they turned into constant support for the community. Our help has reached eight hospitals in Romania so far, five important associations, as well as town halls and social care departments in the country. We’ve supported doctors, nurses, rescuers, police officers, elderly people with special needs, children in care centres, young people, and war veterans.

We’ve donated necessary protective materials, as well as Maspex products. Just as doctors are on the front lines protecting us all, our employees represent the front line for the company, so we share with them the joy doing good. As a team, we will continue to be present in our communities. The most recent donations by Maspex Romania were made to: Valenii de Munte City Hospital, Vatra Dornei Ambulance Substation, Valenii de Munte City Hall, Vatra Dornei City Hall, Dorneni Youth Organisation, Prahova Police, DGASPC Suceava.

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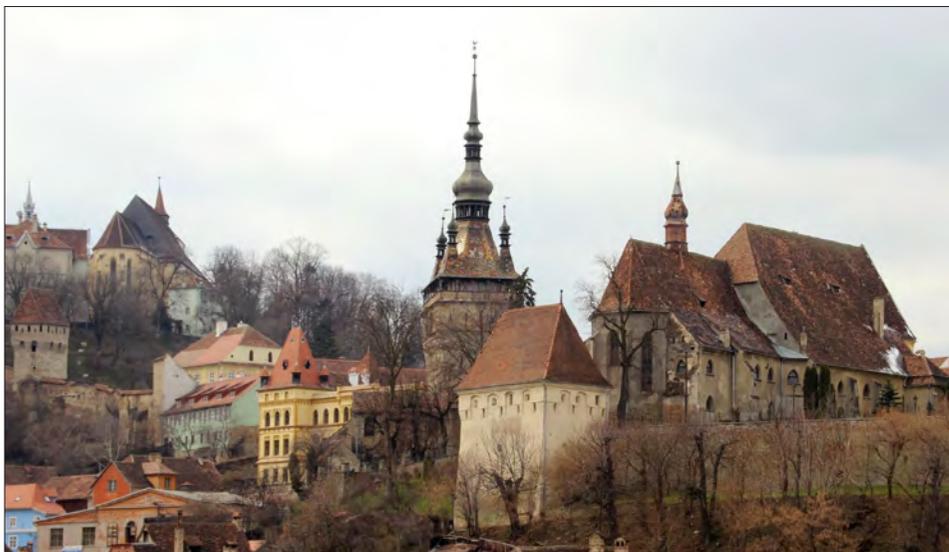
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New cultural promises: facelifting Romania's museums

In a year when no one knows for sure how many people in the cultural field have lost their jobs and how many cultural outlets are going to survive the pandemic, the Culture Ministry has continued to make promises of supporting the local cultural scene. Several museums across the country have started to work on facelifts and upgrades, all due to be completed in 2021.

By Oana Vasiliu



City of Sighisoara

MAJOR UPGRADES

The Omnia library in Craiova, Dolj County, will go through a major restoration, according to recent statements by officials in the Culture Ministry. The library owns approximately 30,000 volumes from various fields: literature, literary history and criticism, linguistics, history, sociology, medicine, philosophy, art, sports, geography, management and marketing, economics, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and a collection of periodicals. The building that hosts the Library, known as the Plesia House, is considered to be an architectural landmark, being included on the Historical Monuments List. Built in 1890 based on a project by French architect Albert Galleron, it is one of Craiova's most impressive buildings. It features an eclectic style, with Neo-Classical and Neo-Baroque interior elements, with stained glass windows in the style of the Romanian School, with geometric and floral motifs, an interior staircase and

baroque hardware, gold-plated ceilings, Venetian mirrors, and carved panels.

NEW OPENINGS

Though it's been more than 30 years since the Romanian Revolution, no museum has been dedicated to this event until now. This is about to change, however, as Timisoara is going to host **the National Museum of the Anti-Communist Revolution** - presenting the entire communist period as well as the Revolution itself. Recently, an additional investment of EUR 15 million has been approved for the project by the Council of Europe Development Bank, according to Agerpres.

The Culture Ministry will also finance the development of the **Timisoara National Theatre's decoration factory**, a unique endeavour in Romania, which will design decors for any cultural institution in the country, following an investment of RON 5 million. Furthermore, the theatre will open a second hall and will

receive an additional RON 30 million from the authorities.

PRESERVING HERITAGE



Timisoara new cultural spot



Romanian Revolution started in Timisoara

Sighisoara's Historical Center, which is currently a UNESCO heritage site, recently finished studies related to the Medieval Citadel restoration project - developed by historians, archaeologists, and landscape architects. The documentation serves as part of the international auction which, for the first time in Romania, will be held according to regulations used in UNESCO and International Union of Architecture (UIA) architectural competitions, for a complete restoration of the citadel.

Another heritage building in Sighisoara, the Monastery Church, is currently under restoration and will only be finished next summer, due to the pandemic crisis. So far, the costs have reached EUR 1 million, with the money being provided by the Evangelical Church.

Dark kitchens: A new opportunity for Romania's hospitality sector

People use many different terms – dark kitchens, ghost kitchens, cloud kitchens or virtual kitchens – to describe the same foodservice purpose: fulfilling orders quickly to get them out for delivery, in places where customers can't dine in or pick up their orders. This hospitality trend has reached Romania too, where the first restaurant gathering has been established in response to this pandemic year, dominated by the delivery-only concept: OpenKitchen, a virtual platform allowing places like Camionetta, Mamizza, Furgoneta Street Chefs, and Nori Yakitori to sell more food exclusively through delivery.

By Oana Vasiliu



Photo: OpenKitchen

Part of the menu offered by OpenKitchen

Every business in the food and beverage industry undoubtedly felt the effects of the lockdown and also suffered an unforeseen drop in demand throughout the pandemic period, as customers have been adapting to this new form of living.

Although not necessarily new in the hospitality industry, the dark kitchen concept refers to delivery-only kitchens that work exclusively through aggregator apps and similar platforms. Interest in these types of kitchens associated with food delivery platforms has grown amid the coronavirus crisis, as hospitality companies looked at new ways of delivering products and services in order to survive on the market during this period.

“When the lockdown first started and all the restaurants were closed, the only way for them to survive was to collaborate with delivery platforms, with the latter registering a huge increase in orders. We realised that a

lot of restaurants, even with the extra delivery orders, were still not using their kitchens and staff at the same levels as they had before the pandemic. It was clear then that there was an opportunity for them to increase their revenues by leveraging the growing consumer demand for food delivery,” OpenKitchen co-founder Andrei Gheorge explained for Business Review. Specialists say that this modern concept of dark kitchens offers great expansion opportunities for food delivery without the costs involved in opening a traditional restaurant. Adding an online marketing campaign, dark kitchens could enable many more in the food & beverage industry to successfully expand into the online world.

The Romanian OpenKitchen initiative operates on the same principles: “OpenKitchen brands are a turnkey solution for getting extra revenue from day one with zero investment – no franchise fee, no marketing costs, no test-

ing time wasted. We've had a lot of interest from restaurants and even hotel chains that are not currently fully using their kitchens.”

Worldwide, according to a study conducted by Euromonitor, dark kitchens could become a USD 1 trillion business by 2030. In 2020, the firm estimated that the US had 1,500 of these ghost kitchens, ahead of the UK's 750 but behind China's 7,500 and India's 3,500. So far, Romania has only 4 restaurants officially known as dark kitchens.

“We plan to open more than 30 locations in Bucharest alone this year and we estimate that a restaurant operating one of our brands can make an extra revenue of EUR 400-1,200/month, and that is after paying our commission, which includes all delivery fees, marketing and social media, staff training, as well as the OpenKitchen app integrating all available delivery platforms in one easy-to-use interface,” Andrei Gheorge added.

Dreaming of summer: long-awaited concerts scheduled for 2021 in Romania

Even though we still don't know how and under what conditions we will be able to safely return to a concert hall or festival to see our favourite bands live, one can still dream. The best news is that some of the concerts that got cancelled in 2020 have been rescheduled for 2021: Celine Dion and Herbie Hancock are still on the books, just to name a couple.

By Oana Vasiliu



Herbie Hancock returns to Romania

With the vaccine reaching more and more people even in Romania, perhaps we can hope for a more eventful summer than the previous one. The Electric Castle and Untold festivals have been brave and have announced their first confirmed line-ups, as well as their 2021 edition dates.

Yet as I was writing this article, one of the most famous festivals in the world, Glastonbury, was cancelled once again: "In spite of our efforts to move heaven and earth, it has become clear that we simply will not be able to make the festival happen this year," the organisers wrote in a statement. And this news was devastating. But we do need a ray of hope, as the Electric Castle campaign says, so here is who may go on stage in Romania this year, if the pandemic allows it.

The most awaited concert is **Celine Dion's** performance, originally scheduled for July 29, 2020 and moved to July 25, 2021. It will take place at the National Arena in Bucharest, where Celine Dion will present her new al-

bum titled "Courage" and a strong image that combines modern art, pop culture references, and an effervescent personality with motivational and inspirational speeches both for her generation as well as for younger generations. The event is currently sold out.

The first festival to announce its confirmed artists for 2021, in November 2020, was Electric Castle. **Twenty One Pilots**, **Gorillaz**, and **Deftones** will enliven the public gathered around the castle in Bontida, Cluj County. Fingers crossed; tickets are still available.

Untold Festival will go even more international, having introduced a new concept named **Untold Odyssey**, a Mediterranean cruise in a safe and comfortable environment, alongside the best DJs in the world. The show includes accommodation, full board meals and entertainment, port and governmental taxes, service charges, and EUR 200-1,000 on board credit (depending on cabin class), which you can use at your convenience while cruising. PCR tests for COVID-19 will be of-

fered beforehand at the cruise terminal and there will be a medical team on board. There are only 2,500 available tickets for the event and the cruise will go to Rome, Ibiza, and Barcelona. As for the JazzTM festival, one of



Not to be missed: Celine Dion concert

the greatest jazzmen of all time, **Herbie Hancock**, was reconfirmed for the 2021 edition. The event will take place on July 2-4, 2021. As one of the leading names in the international music industry, an artist who has made major contributions to music, influencing genres such as electronic jazz, acoustic music, and R&B, Herbie Hancock is the pianist Miles Davis described in his autobiography as "the next step after Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk and I still haven't heard anyone overtake him."

Pink Martini will return as well, with two concerts scheduled for April 12, 2021. The orchestra of 12 artists, playing in no less than 25 languages, will perform two concerts in Bucharest. The band takes you on a musical adventure around the world - they play everything from pop to jazz and classical music. The inspiration for their repertoire comes from the Hollywood musicals of the '40s and '50s and combines a variety of genres in a modern and eclectic composition.

1

Editorial: **10 Business People to Watch in 2021**
Event: **RE:FOCUS ON ECOMMERCE, RETAIL & LOGISTICS**

JANUARY &
FEBRUARY

2

Editorial: **Romania's star sectors/industries**
Special project: **Achievements and success spotlight: Women who Rock the Business World**
Event: **SPRING EDITION HR #FUTURE OF WORK | WORKING ROMANIA**

MARCH

3

Editorial: **How can Romania be more competitive in the region**
Events: **TAX & LAW CONFERENCE; BUSINESS REVIEW AWARDS GALA**

APRIL

4

Editorial: **Romanian CSR scene: how did pandemic change the rules in corporate involvement?**

MAY

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Editorial: **Sustainable developments of the communities. Technologies that push forward the smart development of cities.**
Event: **SUSTAINABLE FUTURE CITIES**
Supplement: **Real Estate Guide**

JUNE

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Editorial: **Main Trends on the Local Real Estate & Constructions Market**
Event: **GARDEN ZOOM-OUT | REAL ESTATE & CONSTRUCTION FORUM**

JULY

7

Editorial: **Top 10 most developed cities in Romania from various perspectives: economic, human resources, investments**

AUGUST

8

Editorial: **"Corporate Environment Involvement" - Recycling and separate collection in the spotlight**
Event: **ENVIRONMENTAL & SUSTAINABILITY SUMMIT**

SEPTEMBER

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Editorial: **Foreign Investments in Romania**
Event: **FOREIGN INVESTORS SUMMIT**
Supplement: **Invest in Romania**

OCTOBER

10

Editorial: **Top salaries in ten most dynamic industries in Romania for top and middle management**
Event: **FALL EDITION HR#FUTUREOFWORK/WORKING ROMANIA**

NOVEMBER

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Editorial: **Romanian Retail Market on the Radar**

DECEMBER



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