

INVESTIGATION. The mysterious centre meant for recovering human trafficked women

<https://presshub.ro/investigatie-centru-fantoma-pentru-recuperarea-femeilor-traficate-213356/>

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Picture of the Frauentormauer district of Nuremberg, the site of legal brothels and sexual services in Germany

A project talked about in the public for at least seven years, which initially promised the creation of a centre in the Timis County dedicated to protecting and recovering human trafficking victims.

There has been a generous and constant flow of cash towards the WorldTeach Romania Association, led by Benjamin Lup. The Butterfly Sanctuary project became a well-guarded secret, both by the Romanian organisation and Uncaged, the US organisation led by Kim Grosshans Westfall, which provided the funding. Amid all this, there are unbelievable numbers and grand sums of money.

An investigation carried out by Brîndușa Armanca and Sorin Istrate

hands of the NGOs. The authorised special centres built to be safe shelters for these people are so few, they can be counted on the fingers of one hand .

Good news... only on paper

The news about the new recovery centre, which will be built close to Timișoara, dedicated to people retrieved from the human trafficking networks, had a great impact on the local press.

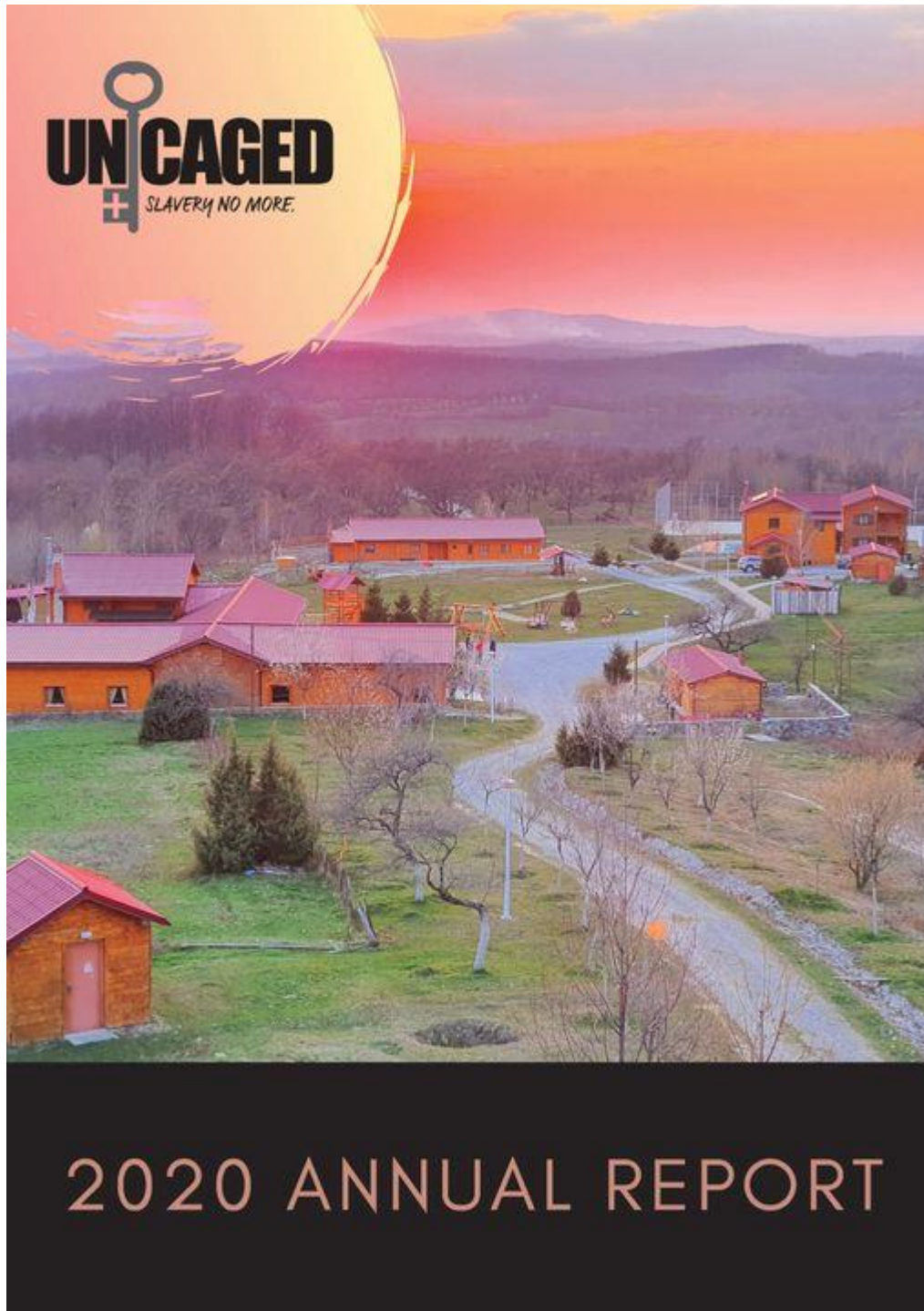


*Th
e Butterfly Centre / Source: the Official Uncaged Website*

In 2015, journalists were quoting Benjamin Lup, the CEO of the WorldTeach Romania Association, who was presenting how the Butterfly Centre project benefits from a terrain “donated by someone, the project of the centre was envisioned by a young lady architect, and the implementation of it will prove that Romania can support such an initiative”. With a capacity of 40 people, the shelter would provide "within the centre itself specialists in law, in social assistance, and personal development". The therapy was meant to last between 6 and 12 months.

Until 2019, no relevant information about the project surfaced. In June 2019, Mr. Lup told the press from Timișoara that the ready-to-operate shelter named Butterfly Sanctuary has a capacity of 100 women and children. Benjamin Lup mentioned for Tion.ro the following: "It is a

partnership between Uncaged, WorldTeach and public authorities, through which we want to demonstrate the effectiveness of a holistic program focused on the survivor of human trafficking. WorldTeach will provide practical experience, while Uncaged will bring the therapy program".

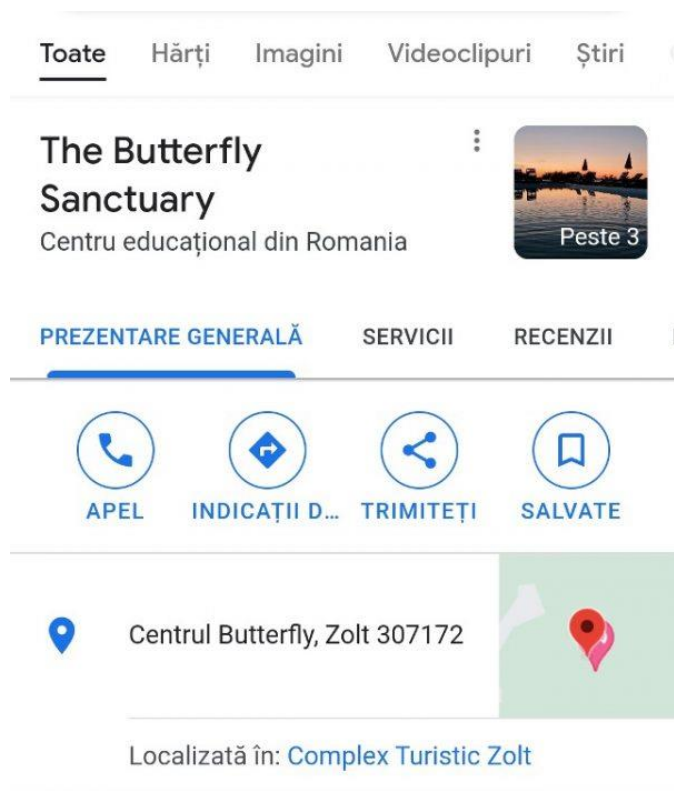


Uncaged, 2020 annual report without access to financial data

In 2019, during an interview offered by Kim Westfall, CEO of the American organisation Uncaged, with the Californian television channel Beond TV, accompanied by Benjamin Lup, Ms. Westfall stated that "we can open the centre in Romania next week." This time, the advanced capacity was of 60 people.



Interview with Kim Westfall and Benjamin Lup in November 2019 on Beond TV in California / Photo: Beond TV channel screenshot (YouTube)



Butterfly Sanctuary Centre / Source: Google screenshot

A Google search provides detailed information about The Butterfly Sanctuary, Romanian Educational Centre, Zolt, including GPS coordinates. In fact, the newspaper “Redeșteptarea” from Lugoj also provided data about the location.

At the scene

In mid-February 2022, I arrived in the commune of Fârdea to find out how the relocation to Zolt took place, and about the initiation of the 35 people rescued from the trafficking network, "women and children between 12 and 25 years old", as recorded by Uncaged on its Facebook page. We hoped to find the head of the association and his team in full swing there.

The mayor of Fârdea, Violeta Murari, did not know about any kind of activity which might have started in Zolt, in a former Tourist Centre purchased by WorldTeach Romania. Fârdea is a commune with seven villages, with a predominantly Orthodox population, including Zolt, a town of 200 inhabitants.

"I heard that a centre for women recovered from human trafficking networks would be built here. I'm open to such projects, but people are a little reluctant, especially since they have no information about what will be built in Zolt. From certain documents, it appears that there is only one employee there", Violeta Murari told us.

At Zolt, on the hillside road leading to the Butterfly Sanctuary, we came across a barrier and the "no access" sign. The employee who arrived in a heartbeat told us sharply that we are not allowed to enter the property "without permission".



Th
e barrier leading to the Butterfly Centre from Zolt / Photo: Brîndușa Armanca

The people we talked to told us that nothing happens there except for birthdays or maybe a celebration. We left the place.

The mystery deepens

What else can a journalist do other than contact the project owners for information? I wrote an email to Kim Westfall, President of Uncaged from Georgia, asking a few simple questions about the progress of the project, U.S. funding and partnerships. Here is her answer:



Kim Westfall, CEO of Uncaged / Source: official uncaged.org website

"Uncaged is a US 501 (c) (3) organisation. As an organisation dealing with human trafficking subjects, some information is considered confidential for obvious reasons. Our partners have asked us to keep this information confidential. Because we do not use government funds, we will honour the request of our partners. "

US 501 (c) (3) organisations are charities, not secret organisations.

Moreover, our request for the financial report of Uncaged for the year 2020, which was presented as accessible on request, was also rejected.

According to open data posted on Guidestar, Uncaged recently reported revenues of \$1,340,972 and \$ 422,455 more in assets. The organisation receives significant sums of money from the Westfall Gold fundraising company, owned by Bob Westfall, the husband of Kim Westfall.

Five days after refusing to give information to the press, Kim Westfall came over from Atlanta to Zolt, as proved by the images posted on the official Facebook page of the Uncaged organisation.



Bu

terfly Sanctuary, January 2022 / Source: Official Uncaged Facebook page

We therefore addressed the president of the WorldTeach Romania Association, Mr. Lup. After an email with a few unanswered questions, we decided to have a phone call.

"As of now, we are not doing anything, we are only preparing an educational centre. We are not working momentarily," the project's owner explained to us, reproaching us that we tried to dig around too much. We learnt that the centre would provide "social services for disadvantaged and abused children", but we didn't find out anything about the people rescued from human trafficking networks "ready" to arrive in Zolt, as Uncaged repeatedly announced and still does so.

The WorldTeach Association, founded in Oțelu Roșu, a city in the Caraș-Severin county, is accredited by the Ministry of Labour with the AF / 006302/2019 certificate as a provider of social services, similar to other over 3500 organisations, under the Law no. 197/2012.

To fulfil the complex activity of a shelter, which offers psychological and legal counselling, therapy, social reintegration solutions, etc. a licence with many legal requirements is required.

What does a shelter mean for the survivors of human trafficking?

Monica Boseff leads the Ușa Deschisă Foundation, licensed to take in 16 rescued people from human trafficking networks. It is a protected shelter with accreditation and licensing for services, which involves a complex team of people: social workers, psychologists, lawyers, security services, administration, and management.

Monica Boseff was awarded by the U.S. Department of State for the fight against human trafficking.

The people in the program are referred by various institutions DIICOT, BCCO, local police, NAATP, and sometimes by the police in the countries or fellow NGOs. The route from the traffic network to the safe-guarded shelter passes through state institutions.

Licensing conditions and standards for centres for victims of human trafficking are described in Annex no. 6 of Ordinance no. 29/2019. The centres must provide psychosocial counselling, information, legal advice and assistance, emotional support, vocational counselling, occupational therapy, medical treatments, emergency telephone lines, meals, security, etc. As an example, one psychologist must be provided for every 10 victims.

WorldTeach Romania and its contradictory data

Although it invokes a wide experience in combating human trafficking, the activity of the association established in 2003 is briefly presented on the website www.worldteach.ro, where a total of four projects described expeditiously in Romania and the Republic of Moldova are posted. The pictures also show a flash mob and some activities with children in Moldova. It is

claimed that the "Aripi noi și vise împlinite (New Wings and Fulfilled Dreams)" project focuses annually on a number of "70 survivors who have been sexually exploited and trafficked in European countries". No concrete information.

The Butterfly Sanctuary project wrapped in a discourse on salvation, and Christian love suffers from many inconsistencies. The number of people invoked is inaccurate: sometimes 40, sometimes 60, sometimes 100, sometimes 35. A request for donations from the association in August 2020 states that Butterfly Sanctuary will accommodate 70 people, and there is an urgent need of 78,500 euros for preparing the centre.

The question of where the survivors come from, without any details, until they are brought to Zolt, persists. We collect suggestions from the Uncaged page, where it is noted in August 2021 that "70+ survivors" had been taken over by the Freedom Highway during the pandemic in Europe.

Although in 2015 the terrain which Benjamin Lup was talking about was a donation, in 2020 it becomes an acquisition. The WorldTeach Association buys the former Zolt resort for an estimated \$ 300,000. The book extract shows that the association bought in March 2020 from the company Ziegler SRL approx. 80-90 ha of land with several wooden constructions, pasture, and an orchard.

Kim Westfall asked donors to contribute, "We still have to raise 16.7% of the total sum of money to buy the Sanctuary's 237 acres (approx. 95 ha), area which is equivalent to \$ 301,000."

The financial indicators of WorldTeach Romania reported by the Ministry of Finance show that in 2020 the organisation had revenues of 3,989,017 RON, an increase compared to the previous year by 142.43% and a net profit of 2,866,234 RON, an increase by 226.14%. From 2015 to 2018, the amount of money collected by the organisation, mostly from American donations, ranged between 300,000 and 600,000 RON. However, WorldTeach has never exceeded the number of 4 employees, reached only in 2020.

With a substantial amount of money in its account, the organisation does not seem to be in a hurry. Invoking sometimes the pandemic, other times some difficulties, Uncaged USA and WorldTeach Romania do not meet as of now the standards imposed by law for a shelter.

The identities of Mr. Lup

On the About Me tab of the website, Benjamin Lup introduces himself as a lawyer, graduate of a diplomatic institute, and an involved individual. He was a pastor of the "Speranța" Baptist Church in Anina, and on some occasions he was presented as a delegate to the Neo-Protestant Christian Alliance. Through these affiliations, he was for a while the chief of staff of the deputy Marius Dugulescu. Quoted by Uncaged, Benjamin Lup claims to have been persecuted during the communist era for his faith.

We find him in the Internet's archives as a legal adviser for 10 years of the "king" Florin Cioabă Jr., co-opted in the board of the WorldTeach Association, until 2013.



Uncaged's visit to Zolt in September 2019. Kim Westfall holds the flag of the "Cioabă Royal House" together with Florin Cioabă Jr., co-opted on the board of the WorldTeach Romania Association / Source: Uncaged official page

Benjamin Lup, head of the WorldTeach Romania Association and nicknamed "our director for Europe" by Uncaged, invokes a prodigious activity of "rescuing" victims of human trafficking since 2004, this mission being unknown to public opinion and the Romanian authorities.

Benjamin Lup also started being active in the field of politics. In 2014, he tried to run for deputy, as part of PMP Timiș, but was never made it on the final list. His attempts to stand out caused an incident in November 2015 at a demonstration of students who gathered to commemorate the

young dead in the Collective Club: he was ushered away from the Opera Square by the participants when he spoke into the microphone with political messages, the local press reports.

His political pursuits are currently focused on consolidating the National Renaissance Alliance (ANR), a party he registered in 2019 in Timisoara. Initially, the party's leadership largely overlapped with the association's leadership, consisting of President Benjamin Lup, his wife Rodica Guran Lup as secretary and Alexandra Molodoi as vice president. Benjamin Lup is the executive chairman of ANR.



Photos from the ANR 2020 election campaign

The remote chairman of the party, Peter Costea, a lawyer in Huston, Texas, had run as an independent candidate in the 2019 European Parliament Elections, but he did not pass the threshold. He launched ANR together with the Alliance of Families following the failure of the 2018 Family Referendum. ANR is a conservative party, pro-natural family, anti-abortion, anti-vaccine, anti-COVID certificate, etc., with an AUR-like profile. (nr. AUR – the Alliance for the

Union of Romanians is a far-right party which first entered the Parliament after the 2020 elections)



Candidate Alliance for National Renaissance / Source: the 2020 election campaign

Benjamin Lup unsuccessfully ran in 2020 as part of the ANR on the list of deputies of the Galați constituency. As executive president, he faced the suspicion of false lists presented by the party in Mureș County, a case that was brought into the police's attention.

The officially registered headquarters of the National Renaissance Alliance in Timișoara is Plevnei Square no. 4. At this address, in an old building with several apartments, the tenants do not know that there are the offices of a party.

Saviour?

The most spectacular of the faces publicly presented by Mr. Benjamin Lup is the "saviour" of human trafficked people.

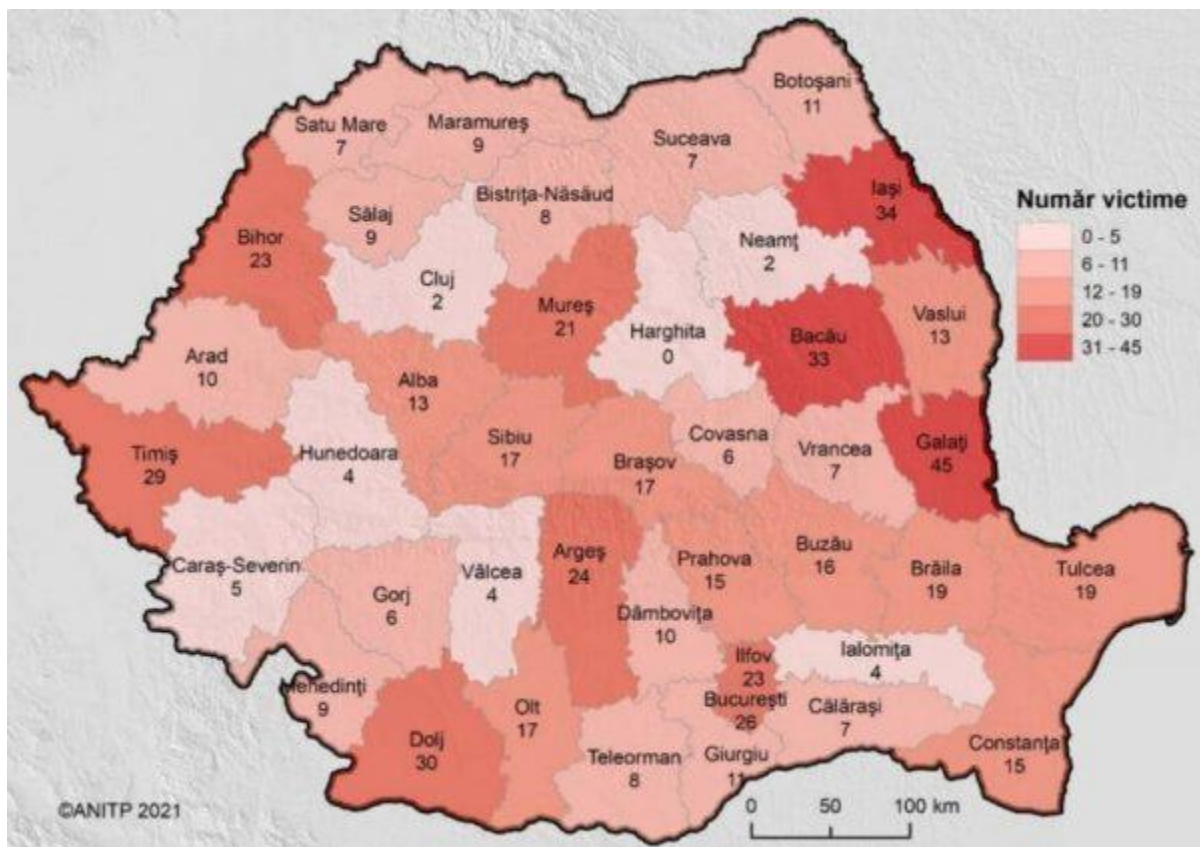
"I have been actively involved in the fight against human trafficking since 2004, especially in the western part of Romania, saving hundreds of victims and helping to rehabilitate and reintegrate them," the website notes. In 2004, Benjamin Lup began his law studies, completed in 2008 and followed by a master's degree. Also in 2004, Benjamin Lup claimed to have rescued the first 450 people out of these trafficking networks.

An Uncaged report portrays Benjamin Lup as the "hero" who saved 770 people from trafficking. In the 2019 Beond TV interview, Mr. Lup said he was and is being called by governments across Europe, including his own country, to exercise his rescuing qualities.

The numbers, the specialised organisations have noted, are unbelievable. For comparison, Romania with all its institutions has annually identified between 400 and a maximum of 600 trafficked people.

Officer Laurențiu Dincă, coordinator of the Timișoara Regional Centre of the National Agency Against Trafficking in People (NAATP), told us that the institution did not work with the WorldTeach or Uncaged Association and does not know their activity, so he did not send any victims of trafficking to be taken care of by those organisations. Although they claim that the public authorities request their support in the anti-trafficking action, on the lists of internal and external collaborators published by NAATP on the site, where there are dozens of NGOs, but there is neither WorldTeach Romania, nor Uncaged written on it.

In 2020, NAATP registered in the western region 49 identified victims of human trafficking, 29 from the Timiș County, some even involved in criminal proceedings as witnesses against traffickers.



An

annual report on the phenomenon of human trafficking in 2020 / Source: ANITP

Annual 2020 Report Download

The number of 770 people rescued also seemed hard to believe to Flavius Ilioni-Loga, head of LOGS, with experience in the refugee and human trafficking issue. Ilioni-Loga addressed a message to the head of Uncaged, Kim Westfall, informing her of his doubts about the veracity of these claims, about the nature of the assistance provided, etc. His doubts did not diminish once he got an answer back, which suggested that the questions were likely to cause a "rupture". Moreover, Kim Westfall added that Mr. Lup formed the "first coalition of NGOs" against human trafficking.

The 20 most important Romanian organizations that provide essential services in combating human trafficking, associated in the RoTIP network, as well as ECLER, the organization that provides the secretariat of the network, have strongly dissociated themselves from WorldTeach Romania and Uncaged USA, showing that, although funds have been collected using the name of the network in Romania, they are not associated with the two organizations.



DISCLAIMER: ECLER și RoTIP se disociază de ONG-urile UNCAGED (SUA) și Asociația WorldTeach (România)

ECLER este un ONG din România care asigură secretariatul Rețelei de 20 de ONG-uri Împotriva Traficului de Persoane (RoTIP). Nici ECLER nici RoTIP nu au primit niciodată fonduri, sub nicio formă, de la UNCAGED (SUA) ori de la WorldTeach (partenerul UNCAGED din România), chiar dacă strângerea de fonduri realizată de UNCAGED în SUA a fost făcută în numele acestor 2 entități.

Nici ECLER și nici RoTIP nu sunt sau nu au fost parteneri UNCAGED.



The lack of transparency, both on the American and Romanian side, in a project announced with bells and whistles and very heavily funded generates legitimate suspicions. The concerns of the holder of the generous American financing are directed towards politics, rather than towards the completion of the Butterfly Sanctuary project. The rhetoric of the moment is in contradiction with the facts.

What do the Facebook pages say?

A comparison of the public presence through social networks shows that, although there are a million dollars in the accounts of WorldTeach Romania, the concerns of the head of the association are more applied to politics than to combating human trafficking. The centre of Zolt is deserted, the legal conditions are far from those of the promised shelter, over which the smoke curtains are thrown and many words are also thrown on Uncaged.

WorldTeach

"WorldTeach was created and exists to help people, individually, but also as part of the community. We believe that Transformation is possible! We promote talent, competence, integrity and values! The four Departments of WorldTeach are: Education, Social-Humanitarian, Legal and Personal Development. " This is how the WorldTeach Romania Association, with its centre based in Timișoara, presents itself on the Facebook page.



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e WorldTeach Romania Facebook page

Created 13 years ago, the page was viewed by less than 1,500 people. In addition to a post from March 1, about the www.dopomoha.ro platform for refugees in Ukraine, and a "Happy Birthday", from January 1, 2022, against the background of four snowy photos from the Butterfly Sanctuary in July of last year and so far the page presents only two scattered posts about what should be the object of activity of this organisation: on October 18, 2021, it announces that it is the European Day Against Human Trafficking, and on September 10, the organisation redistributes a post on Uncaged's Facebook page, "marking a year of freedom" for some of the "rescued victims."

Until July 30, 2021, when it announces that it is the World Day Against Human Trafficking, the public communication activity of the WorldTeach Romania page is mostly reduced to posting general "motivational" messages, redistributions of some press articles related to human trafficking, but not directly related to the association, as well as redistributions from the Uncaged page.

Uncaged

Created four years ago, with less than 800 followers, the page of the Uncaged Association from the USA is more active, with posts whose message revolves around its anti-trafficking purpose declared publicly. It should be noted that all cases of rescuing victims of human trafficking referred to by Uncaged are subject to "protection of the real identity" of the people, or for "security" reasons, therefore both the name and the photos posted are only illustrative, there is no possibility for the reader to verify in any way the veracity of the cases.



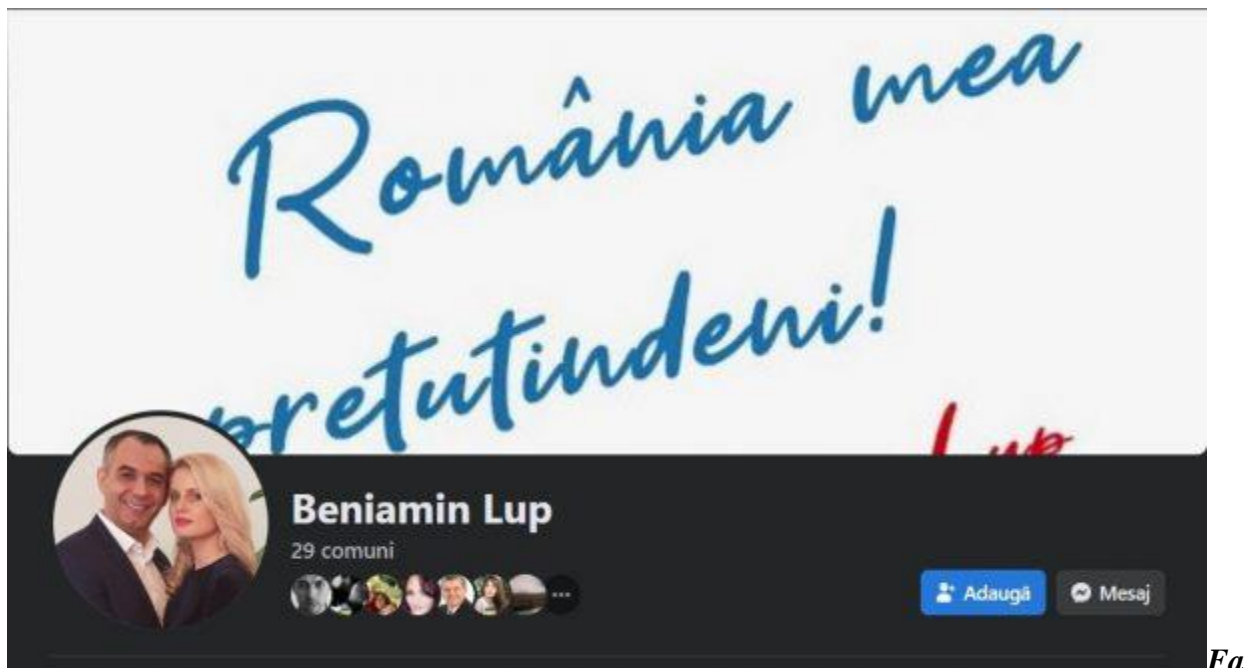
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e Uncaged Facebook page

On February 28, in an update to the previous post, Uncaged states that, in the context of the war in Ukraine, “we have already successfully protected hundreds of women and children by implementing the first phase of our strategy. It included some simple protocols (which we cannot distribute for security reasons) to keep traffickers away from women and children crossing Romania”. The posted public message ends with a link to a cash donation form to Uncaged, open on the www.donorperfect.net website.

Beniamin Lup

Followed by almost 2,300 people, Beniamin Lup's personal Facebook account indicates the concerns of a politician eager to rise, judging by the frequency of posts with political propaganda content made recently to the established Alliance for the National Renaissance (ANR) party, to the detriment of those dedicated to the main object of activity of the associations they represent, mainly in the field of the fight against human trafficking.



Facebook Page Benjamin Lup

An ANR press release on February 27 found that the political party whose executive chairman is Benjamin Lup had "categorically disapproved of the use of military force to resolve any geopolitical and geostrategic disputes between Russia and the rest of Europe." A strange image accompanies the message posted on February 26, "Defending the freedom of those in need must become the priority of those who claim to be free!": Benjamin Lup at the wheel of a missile carrier.

The names and insignia of the Alliance for the National Renaissance party are present in numerous posts, such as those related to the Furdui case in Germany, or in the debates distributed directly on the party's YouTube channel. There are also petitions against the COVID certificate and the restrictive measures during the pandemic imposed by the authorities.

We find the executive president of ANR on December 18, 2021, as a guest of ROC TV, in a debate on how "Germany steals (again) the future of Europe". The debate took place on the same day that the Alliance for the National Renaissance broadcast live from Victoriei Square in Bucharest, a "Protest for the support of the Furdui family".

In another nearly two-hour live marathon broadcast, redistributed by Benjamin Lup on December 11, 2021, we see Peter Costea, the party's president, debating with his interlocutor, Dr. Voddie T. Baucham, the author of the recently released book "Tectonic plates: The social justice

movement and the possible catastrophe of evangelism, about anti-racism, the new anti-Christian religion in America”.

Alliance for the National Renaissance

On the page of the party whose founder and executive president is Benjamin Lup, he appears in several posts as a presenter for the ANR News with Benjamin Lup, through Watch. His image also appears on the credits of the online show, along with Peter Costea, the president of ANR. The Facebook page of ANR has 8000 followers.