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National Identity and International Politics
An Analysis of Romania's Post-Communist Foreign Policy Imaginary (1990-1996)

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The concept of "identity" with its various nuances has been intensely analysed in academia, shedding distinctive light on the way we think about a state's external affairs. Post-1990 the gradual restoration of democracy provided Romania with the opportunity to freely choose a new international direction. Following the collapse of the communist dictatorship in December 1989, Romanian foreign policy featured two major goals that marked the evolution of national identity – membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and in the European Union (EU). Euro-Atlantic accession was partly a rational foreign policy choice because it would bring material advantages such as increased security and economic prosperity. Nevertheless, NATO and EU integration primarily meant for Romania the return to the Western world from which it had been separated by communism and the irrevocable recognition of its proclaimed Euro-Atlantic identity. Joining the Euro-Atlantic community was a necessary step since a state's national identity becomes valid only in so far as it is legitimated at both the domestic and international level.

In line with such an argument, this article aims to configure an inter-disciplinary perspective of national identity and to illustrate it by analysing Romania's post-communist foreign policy imaginary, which emerged in 1990-1996. The working framework of national identity draws insights related to four literatures: constructivism, nationalism studies, collective memory and international recognition. They have a complementary utility in identifying the elements that shape the dual dynamic of national identity – internal (the nation and collective memory-myths) and external (recognition by relevant others). As an empirical application, the years 1990-1996 constitute an important case study since they were one of the key formative periods of Romania's post-communist identity and exhibited a bewildering array of emerging and re-emerging ideas. The foreign policy imaginary articulated three main discursive themes or self-images: "European", "non-Balkan" and "security provider". These self-images feeding into national identity formed an ideational foundation that influenced how Romania positioned itself in the arena of international politics. In terms of structure, the article first introduces the conceptual outline of national identity

and then examines the three major identity themes that circulated in the Romanian foreign policy imaginary between 1990 and 1996.

An Inter-Disciplinary Perspective on National Identity

The conceptual stance adopted by this article is an inter-disciplinary view on national identity, which draws from four academic literatures – constructivism, nationalism studies, collective memory and international recognition. It starts from the constructivist principle that identities have an ideational basis and fluid nature, being defined and re-defined under the impact of systemic and internal factors[1]. Constructivism in turn represents the ontological position which posits that "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context"[2]. When discussing the relationship between foreign policy and identity, the foreign policy imaginary becomes a key tool derived from Jutta Weldes' "security imaginary" – "a structure of well-established meanings and social relations out of which representations of the world of international relations are created"[3].

Both adaptations originate in the "social imaginary" of Cornelius Castoriadis, who argues that the symbolic carries understandings that take into account the "real-rational", but also includes an imaginary dimension which comes "from the original faculty of positioning or presenting oneself with things and relations that do not exist, in the form of representation"[4]. To put it more simply, the foreign policy imaginary enables answers to existential questions like "[w]ho are we as a collectivity? What are we for one another? [...] What do we want […] what are we lacking?"[5]. It also offers "the cultural raw materials out of which representations of states, of relations among states, and of the international system are constructed"[6].

For the purpose of this context, the foreign policy imaginary is an ideational reservoir, which contains those stable self-images rooted in the

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1 Jutta Weldes, "Constructing National Interests", *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1996, p. 281.

2 Michael J. Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*, Sage, London, 2003, p. 42.

3 Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999, p. 10.

4 Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 127.

5 *Ibidem*, p. 146.

6 Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests*…cit., p. 10.

nation's memories of historical past and configuring national identity at present. The ideational structure influences how elites think about or perceive themselves and the state they represent. It conditions agents to an extent, yet they do retain freedom of action and choice. Political actors are conditioned in the sense that they operate within the parameters set by the foreign policy imaginary. However, the foreign policy imaginary is not a fixed structure and has a variety of articulations, which allows decision-makers to modify meanings or to select the appropriate ones depending on the circumstances. The concept has been inspired by Weldes' work, but an inter-disciplinary view of identity takes things a step further by elucidating the specific factors shaping national identity both from within and from outside[7].

Building on Castoriadis' reasoning, this article argues that the self-images feeding into national identity may have a "real" (somewhat objectively identifiable) core like language and ethnicity, an "imagined" basis or a combination of the two categories. In order to explain such a thesis and better grasp the domestic sources of Romanian identity, the scholarships on nationalism and collective memory play a prominent part. The literature on nationalism has examined the first and most obvious internal element of national identity – the nation. Benedict Anderson regards nations as an "imagined" phenomenon because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion"[8]. Even though modern nations are constructed, Anthony Smith claims that they have stable historical roots in the ethnic groups – "ethnies", which also provide the shared "myths, memories, values and symbols"[9] necessary for the formation of national identity. The combined insights of Anderson and Smith highlight the imagined nature of nations and national identity, which still retain a stable ethno-cultural core (ancestry, language, territory, historical myths and memories). While discussing the nation's foundations, scholars of nationalism mention the role of historical memory as shared narratives and symbols, yet without going into sufficient detail as to how they impact national identity from within[10].

This brings forward the second domestic source of national identity – collective memory-myths. Broadly defined, collective memory constitutes "how members of society remember and interpret events, how the meaning of the past

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7 Loretta C. Sălăjan, *The Role of National Identity in the Trajectory of Romania's Foreign Policy (1990-2007)*, Doctoral thesis, Aberystwyth University, 2015, p. 57.

8 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 2006, p. 6.

9 Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, p. 15.

10 Loretta C. Sălăjan, *The Role of National Identity*…cit., p. 63.

is constructed, and how it is modified over time"[11]. It can be described as "a powerful cohesive force, binding the disparate members of a nation together", drawing boundaries between the self and others and being "transmitted across multiple historical contexts"[12]. When analysing the link between memory and national identity, Duncan Bell cautions against the widespread "running together (and even conflation) of memory and mythology"[13]. The national identity perspective used in this article acknowledges that there is a mythological dimension to the historical narratives passed as collective memories from generation to generation in the nation's evolution. That is why the term "collective memory-myths" is preferable here, serving to anchor people's identities into an overarching national identity across many contexts of understanding and belonging. To summarise thus far, national identity is an ideational construct with two key internal sources: a stable ethno-cultural core and enduring collective memory-myths, from which perpetuated self-images of the nation draw meaning.

However, a multi-faceted view of national identity would be incomplete without considering the latter's external dynamic – international recognition. A state's national identity does not circulate in a social vacuum and is highly dependent on whether other actors like fellow states accept it or not. Otherwise, that identity simply does not exist as a social construct in bilateral or multi-lateral state interactions. After all, "not only physical, but also social survival is at stake" in international politics[14]. Social survival in the international system means having a stable national identity, which is not contested by others. Recognition can be defined as "a social act that ascribes to a state some positive status, whereby its identity is acknowledged and reinforced as meaningful by a significant Other, and thus the state is constituted as a subject with legitimate social standing"[15]. National identity formation is hence understood as an inter-subjective process of negotiation and dialogue between the self and salient others. Since a state has several social positions in the international system, it needs to "reflect this differentiation into components" or "multiple selves"[16]. Each of these smaller selves or self-images feeds into an overall national identity. The self-image might be called an identity in its own right, but it also

[11] Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995, pp. 3-5.

[12] Duncan Bell, "Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity", *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2003, p. 70.

[13] *Ibidem*.

[14] Erik Ringmar, "The Recognition Game: Soviet Russia against the West", *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2002, p. 116.

[15] Michelle K. Murray, "Recognition, Disrespect and the Struggle for Morocco", in Thomas Lindemann, Erik Ringmar (eds.), *The International Politics of Recognition*, Paradigm Publishers, London, 2011, p. 134.

[16] Peter J. Burke, Jan E. Stets, *Identity Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 10.

subsumes hierarchically to a larger identity. Looking at the Romanian case, the "Euro-Atlantic" identity is the supreme or overarching national identity. Post-communist Romania has viewed itself as part of the Euro-Atlantic community or Western world, which comprises of two key institutions: NATO and the EU. Romania's "Euro-Atlantic" identity then encompasses three self-images: "European", "non-Balkan" and "security provider". These are the main themes of Romania's foreign policy imaginary, which were intensely re-articulated between 1990 and 1996.

Romania's "European" Self-Image

Among the three self-images circulating in the Romanian foreign policy imaginary, the European one was the most frequently re-defined during 1990-1996. The main reason is quite simple, as Romanian national identity tends to be first associated with a European representation by both elites and the general population. Broadly defined, being a "European" state or having a European identity refers to being known and accepted as a Western European inspired liberal democracy, which upholds two key principles – the organisation of regular democratic elections and the protection of human and civil rights and liberties. The European self-image was also often subjected to re-definitions because it had to simultaneously converse with influential domestic and international discourses. This became evident in December 1989, when point nine of the statement proposal issued by the National Salvation Front hinted at a European direction for Romania: "[T]he country's entire foreign policy is to promote good neighbourly relations, friendship and peace in the world, integrating itself in the construction process of a united Europe"[17]. Following the first post-communist parliamentary and presidential elections of May 1990, at the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) Summit in November, President Ion Iliescu gave a clear indication of the state's foreign policy goals:

> "[T]he new Romania resulting from the Revolution of December 1989 has adopted a policy oriented towards re-establishing historical and traditional relations with the other countries of Europe and North America, as well as towards developing relations with states sharing the same Latin culture and civilisation"[18].

[17] The National Salvation Front, "Statement towards the Country", initially broadcast on the national television and radio, then published in *Monitorul Oficial al României*, no. I (1), 22 December 1989.

[18] Ion Iliescu – President of Romania (May 1990-September 1992; September 1992-November 1996), "Speech at the CSCE Summit" (Paris, 21 November 1990), in *Adevărul*, no. I-239, 1990, p. 3.

Romania's second post-communist democratic elections in September 1992 reconfirmed Iliescu as President and placed the centre-left Social Democratic Party of Romania (PDSR) in government. Throughout the electoral campaign for a new mandate, Iliescu argued that his main vision of the country's external trajectory was "integration into […] the structures dominating the European and Euro-Atlantic area"[19]. The message delivered in Parliament by the re-elected President indicated the same foreign policy choice, as he stressed that "[Romania's] long-term interests demand, in my opinion, the development of privileged relations with the United States, Germany, Great Britain, France and with all the other European states"[20]. The official discourse evolved in 1992-1996 towards the recurring representation of NATO and EU accession as Romania's "natural" direction. Teodor Meleşcanu, the new Foreign Affairs Minister appointed in November 1992, declared that: "The option of Euro-Atlantic integration is a natural choice. It is a well known fact that the institutions, the political, cultural and economic life of modern Romania have always – with the exception of the Cold War period – been an intrinsic part of European civilisation"[21]. Or as President Iliescu explained in November 1994:

> "[T]he central orientation of Romanian foreign policy is based on the decision adopted in the first day of the Romanian revolution and supported, then and now, by all political forces in the country – full integration into the political, economic and security structures of democratic Europe. This decision was nothing short of natural, considering that, through its civilisation, culture, history and geographical position, the Romanian nation has always been an inseparable part of European culture and civilisation"[22].

In terms of targeted audiences, Romania's decision-makers were addressing such speeches to mostly external recipients. Their messages indirectly aimed to remind the Euro-Atlantic community of the "kidnapped, displaced West", the European peoples who had not abandoned their identity during communism[23]. This notion of "natural" choice certainly belied the range of foreign policy and security alternatives actually available to post-communist Romania and Central-Eastern Europe in general, which included "a reformed

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[19] Ion Iliescu, *Cred în schimbarea în bine a României*, Fundaţia "Dimineaţa", Bucureşti, 1992, p. 12.

[20] *Idem*, *Address at the Investiture as President of Romania*, Fundaţia "Dimineaţa", Bucureşti, 1992, p. 14.

[21] Teodor Meleşcanu – Minister of Foreign Affairs (November 1992-November 1996), "Speech on Romania's Journey towards Euro-Atlantic Integration" (Athens, July 1996), in *Renaşterea diplomaţiei româneşti*, Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 144.

[22] Ion Iliescu, "Speech delivered at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union" (Paris, 29 November 1994), in *Toamna diplomatică/ The Autumn of Diplomacy*, Redacţia publicaţiilor pentru străinătate, Bucureşti, 1995, p. 142.

[23] Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe", *New York Review of Books*, vol. 31, no. 7, 26 April 1984, p. 2.

alliance with the former Soviet Union, neutrality or non-alignment, regional security cooperation within Eastern Europe, pan-European collective or common security through the CSCE, a realpolitik balance of power or reliance on national defence"[24]. Yet the Euro-Atlantic orientation was domestically validated "with an impressive unanimity by the entire political elite" gathered for consultations at Snagov in 1993[25]. If Romania had a range of international security options, why did the post-1992 official discourse construct Euro-Atlantic accession as natural? NATO and EU membership provided the surest and fastest way in which Romania could receive international recognition for its desired Euro-Atlantic identity. The Western self would thus validate unequivocally that the Romanian other was part of the Euro-Atlantic community in both civilisational and institutional meanings. Among the different discursive facets of Romanian identity, the "European" self-image was deeply rooted in the foreign policy imaginary and was meant to show the country's Western origins. Since the Euro-Atlantic self continued to construct candidate states (including Romania) as "liminal Europe" or "Europe but not quite Europe"[26], the foreign policy imaginary needed to be re-defined in reaction to Western representations.

In the 1990-1996 official discourses, Romania was very frequently depicted as a "European" state. This self-image started taking shape soon after the fall of the communist dictatorship, as the newly appointed Foreign Affairs Minister Adrian Năstase stated in the wake of Romania's first free elections (May 1990) – "[t]o my view, things are clear. Romania is a European state"[27]. President Iliescu also summed up what this identity meant for the country historically and in terms of values:

> "[D]ue to its culture, civilisation and political tradition, Romania decidedly belongs to classical Europe, inheriting both the ancient Greek-Roman tradition and the modern principles of statehood – citizenship, freedom, fundamental human rights, the separation of powers within the state, the rule of law"[28].

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[24] Andrew Cottey, *East-Central Europe after the Cold War*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 1995, p. 13.

[25] Andrei Miroiu, "National and International Security at the Dawn of the XXI[st] Century: The Romanian Case", *Romanian Journal of Society and Politics*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2002, p. 103.

[26] Maria Mälksoo, *The Politics of Becoming European. A Study of Polish and Baltic Post-Cold War Security Imaginaries*, Routledge, London, 2010, p. 57.

[27] Adrian Năstase – Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs (June 1990-November 1992), "Interview for the Romanian National Radio" (Bucharest, 14 July 1990), in *România după Malta. 875 de zile la Externe*, vol. 1, Fundaţia Titulescu, București, 2006, p. 96.

[28] Ion Iliescu, "We Need One Another, just like All of Us Need a United Europe, a Europe of the Nations" – Speech delivered at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (London, 3 November 1994), in *Toamna diplomatică/ The Autumn of Diplomacy*, Redacţia publicaţiilor pentru străinătate, București, 1995, p. 94.

When studying the evolution of Romania's post-communist foreign policy articulations, two recurring and interconnected themes become apparent – recovering the "European" identity and "returning to Europe", both politically and economically. This was definitely not a unique approach, as obtaining Euro-Atlantic membership was the general aspiration for Central and Eastern European states, while most of their leaders gradually incorporated in speeches the concept of "European identity"[29]. Despite the common theme, there were specific nuances and meanings associated with the overarching European identity in each state. In the Romanian case, the official discourse articulated several variations ("European", "Western", "Latin"), all of which were meant to dissociate the new state from its communist past and promote a shared identity with the West. The latter two are inextricably linked, if one takes into account the common ethnic, cultural and linguistic origins of the French, Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian peoples as descendants of the ancient Romans. The Latin identity of Romanians was portrayed as "an undeniable sign of our connection to the great family of Western European peoples"[30]. The state's Western subjectivity and "return to Europe" were associated with key moments of European history:

> "[T]he generation of 1848 and that of the Union [1918] linked the Romanians' country to Western civilisation, extricating it from Oriental rule. The current generation of the Romanian nation will re-adopt that tradition"[31] .

So the approximately fifty years of communism were seen as yet another period which had forcefully separated Romania from its Western family, or "a sort of parenthesis in the country's historical destiny"[32].

In early 1991, a pivotal shift occurred in the foreign policy discourse, which attempted to distance Romania from its traditional "Eastern European" representation, moving towards that of "Central European". The motivations behind the change in terminology could be attributed to the fact that "Eastern Europe" had acquired specific political and ideological connotations during the Cold War, primarily defining the Soviet Union's satellite states[33]. It should be noted that the political entity of "Eastern Europe" had been created in the

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29 Petr Drulák, "The Return of Identity to European Politics", in *Idem* (ed.), *National and European Identities in EU Enlargement: Views from Central and Eastern Europe*, Institute of International Relations, Prague, 2001, pp. 11-20.

30 Teodor Meleşcanu, "Romania Has Refused to Give Up Its European Identity even in the Context of Bipolar Confrontation" (Excerpts from Speeches of late 1995), in *Renaşterea diplomaţiei româneşti*, cit., p. 115.

31 *Idem*, "The Romanian Diplomacy's Contribution to the Union of Principalities" (Focşani, 24 January 1996), in *Renaşterea diplomaţiei româneşti*, cit., p. 23.

32 Ion Iliescu, "Interview for 'Le Point"' (2 April 1994), in *Romania in Europe and in the World*, The Foreign Languages Press Group, București, 1994, p. 184.

33 Christian-Radu Chereji, "The Concept of Central Europe in the 90s", in Vasile Puşcaş (ed.), *Central Europe since 1989. Concepts and Developments*, Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2000, pp. 13-14.

aftermath of the Yalta Conference (1945), where the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom discussed and controversially decided the reconfiguration of war-torn Europe. The concept of "Eastern Europe" was invented by Western Europe as its other half in the Enlightenment (eighteenth century), the imagined space where "European" civilisation encountered "Oriental" barbarism[34]. During the Cold War, NATO and the EU defined their eastern boundary as a defence line for "European unity", which enabled them to construct a superior Western identity based on shared democratic values[35]. Or, to adapt the Orientalism of Edward Said, the Euro-Atlantic community developed a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over" Eastern Europe[36]. Being articulated as part of "Eastern Europe" did not help the efforts of a state aspiring to form a shared identity with the West. Romania's discursive responses were a combination of acceptance and resistance: accepting the authority of the Western European self yet refusing to be placed in the "East". Therefore, the official discourse started describing Romania as "Central European". The re-defined self-image became most obvious in foreign policy documents – "[Romania's] geopolitical location is that of a country belonging to Central Europe"[37]. In April 1992, the Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister defined "Central European" states to be all those forcefully placed behind the borders of the extended Soviet empire[38].

As the contemporary articulation and heir of "Mitteleuropa", this notion of "Central Europe" was advocated by candidate states in the early stages of NATO and EU enlargement, trying to symbolise a stronger European subjectivity[39]. It had been first revived in February 1991 by three post-communist states (Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary), in an attempt to stand out among fellow Euro-Atlantic aspirants. They formed the self-entitled "Visegrad Group", which "reflects the efforts of the countries of the Central European region to work together in a number of fields of common interest within the all-European integration"[40]. Romania opposed the Visegrad Group's discursive differentiation and exclusive appropriation of "Central Europe". On 19 June 1992, the Western European Union (WEU later incorporated into the

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[34] Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1994, p. 5.

[35] Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1995, p. 8.

[36] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p. 3.

[37] The White Chart of Romania's Foreign Affairs Ministry (January 1991-May 1992), in *Lumea*, no. 25-26, 25 June 1992, p. 12.

[38] Adrian Năstase, "A New Architecture for Central and Eastern Europe" (Geneva, 29 April 1992), in *România şi noua arhitectură mondială. Studii, Alocuţiuni, Interviuri 1990-1996*, Asociaţia Română pentru Educaţie Democratică, București, 1996, p. 132.

[39] Iver Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999, pp. 236-237.

[40] The Visegrad Group, *About the Visegrad Group*; h□p://www.vi□egr□dgroup.eu/□bou□ (April 2014).

EU) issued a statement in which it included all post-communist states as part of "Central Europe"[41]. Talking about the WEU declaration, Foreign Affairs Minister Năstase mentioned the importance of external validation and clarified what being "Central European" meant for Romania:

> "I think that things are now better because this document certifies our philosophy concerning the area where we are situated, so there can be no more discussions about a division between Central (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia) and Eastern European countries (Romania, Bulgaria and, perhaps, the Baltic states). We have managed to express our view: the area between the former Soviet Union and Western Europe is a unitary zone, which is indivisible from the security perspective and must be treated as such [...] all these countries belong to Central Europe"[42].

The next years highlighted the articulation of different versions on the same "Central European" theme, which showed the fluid process of national identity formation and how the discourse did not crystallise a specific image. For example, according to President Iliescu, Romania "is an intrinsic part of the Central-European area"[43]; and since "the map of Europe" stretched "from the Atlantic to the Ural Mountains and the Caspian Sea", Romania was located "not only in the centre of Europe, but even in the centre of Central Europe"[44]. Foreign Affairs Minister Meleşcanu reinforced a similar line – "Romania is situated at an equal distance from the western and northern, as well as the eastern borders of Europe […] [it] is the second largest country in Central Europe after Poland"[45]. As argued in the conceptual outline of this article, national identity draws understandings from a stable ethno-cultural core that resonates with the nation's ancestry and territory. That is why Romania had to position its identity with reference to the neighbouring region known as "the Balkans", a task subjected to the impact of domestic and external discourses.

Romania's Self-Image as "Non-Balkan"

The second main self-image feeding into Romanian national identity derives from the state's complex relationship with the Balkans. This self-image was part of a wider international context that shaped the Romanian foreign

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41 The Western European Union, *Declaration after the Extraordinary Meeting of the WEU Council of Ministers with States of Central Europe* (Bonn, 19 June 2002); available within "Key Texts" at http://www.weu.int/ (April 2014).

42 Adrian Năstase, "Interview", in *Lumea*, no. 25-26, 25 June 1992, p. 3.

43 Ion Iliescu, *Revoluţie şi reformă*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1994, p. 264.

44 Ion Iliescu, "Address at the Crans-Montana Forum" (Bucharest, 21 April 1994), in *Romania in Europe and in the World*, cit., pp. 55-56.

45 Teodor Meleşcanu, "Romania as a Security Provider" (Washington, 15-17 July 1996), in *Renaşterea diplomaţiei româneşti*, cit., p. 136.

policy imaginary, especially Western perceptions of the Yugoslav wars. In July 1990, NATO invited the Central-Eastern European states (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria) and the Soviet Union to create regular diplomatic relations with the Alliance. The North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) was founded in 1991 as another step in the institutionalised dialogue between NATO and the post-communist states. Since the Soviet Union disintegrated later that year, NACC became the suitable mechanism through which to enhance cooperation with Central-Eastern Europe. By the early 1990s, many post-communist states had expressed their wish to join NATO. Following the end of the Cold War, the Alliance faced an "identity crisis" and "had to reassess its strategic concept, its views of the types of war or hostilities it could expect to deter and fight and, more broadly, re-evaluate its role in international security and politics"[46]. Given this post-Cold War identity crisis, some argued that enlargement would provide NATO with a new purpose. Alliance expansion to newly democratic Central-Eastern Europe sparked a lot of debate and the first wave would eventually occur in 1999. Meanwhile, the EU was re-considering its identity as well. Post-1990 the supranational organisation had to decide whether it aimed to be something more than a "problem-solving entity" that only promoted the interests of its member states[47]. The collapse of communism confronted the EU with the opportunity to become a "value-based community", which would extend its principles and form a common identity with Central-Eastern Europe[48]. At the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, the EU decided to enlarge and drafted a set of political and economic criteria that candidate states would have to fulfil to obtain membership. Yet both the EU and NATO proved to be unprepared to deal with what was happening in Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslav Federation had six constituent republics: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. By 1990 Yugoslavia was undergoing drastic transformations. Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, followed by Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992. The Serbs living in these republics retaliated and were supported by Belgrade, leading to armed inter-ethnic conflicts. The timing of such outbreaks relates to the wider global context. When the international order maintaining a certain level of regional security disappears, individuals search for security in their national or ethnic identity[49]. The revolutions in communist

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[46] Zoltan Barany, *The Future of NATO Expansion: Four Case Studies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 11.

[47] Helene Sjursen, "Introduction: Enlargement and the Nature of the EU Polity", in Helene Sjursen (ed.), *Questioning EU Enlargement: Europe in Search of Identity*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 2.

[48] *Ibidem*.

[49] Jack Snyder, "Nationalism and the Crisis of the Post-Soviet State", in Michael E. Brown (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, pp. 79-101.

Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union helped to break down the dictatorial system ensuring a tentative stability in the Balkan area. Long-standing inter-ethnic tensions resurfaced and turned into the Yugoslav wars of the early 1990s. Unfortunately, the "well established derogatory connotations" also re-emerged, as "the fighting precipitated by the break-up of Yugoslavia has probably left these more entrenched in the popular imagination than ever"; not only communism was "blamed for the mass violence, but ethnic diversity itself, and historical cleavages between religions and cultures"[50]. Nevertheless, the causes of the Yugoslav wars are complex and varied. One of them was the aspiration of Balkan peoples to create viable nation-states, which differed little from what the rest of Europe had experienced in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Gale Stokes explained this process:

> "[R]emapping state boundaries onto ethnic lines is one of the major threads of post-French Revolutionary European history. The process began with the unifications of Italy and Germany, ran through the creation of new states at the end of World War I, and had its most catastrophic outcomes [...] with the Holocaust and the [later] expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe […] [T]he wars of Yugoslav succession are not some aberrant Balkan phenomenon; they are the last stages of a process of European redefinition that has been going on since the French revolution"[51].

Another cause of the Yugoslav wars referred to controversial figures like Slobodan Milošević, who manipulated national sentiments for their personal gains or for what they perceived to be the benefit of their ethnic group. Since Western political elites "struggled to make sense of an otherwise perplexing conflict", simplistic accounts of the Yugoslav wars became increasingly appealing[52]. These explanations were rooted in negative stereotypes of "the Balkans", which had been articulated as "Balkan ghosts, ancient Balkan enmities, primordial Balkan cultural patterns and proverbial Balkan turmoil"[53]. The negative imagery of "the Balkans" dated back to the early 1900s and gradually intensified to the point that even World War II was seen as the Balkans' fault[54]. For example, the journalist Robert Kaplan said that – "Nazism [...] can claim Balkan origins. Among the flophouses of Vienna, a breeding ground of ethnic resentments close to the southern Slavic world, Hitler

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50 Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: From the End of Byzantium to the Present Day*, Phoenix, London, 2001, p. 6.

51 Gale Stokes, "The Unpalatable Paradox", *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1999, pp. 327-329.

52 Tom Gallagher, *The Balkans after the Cold War: From Tyranny to Tragedy*, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 48.

53 Maria N. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 186.

54 *Ibidem*, pp. 118-119.

learned how to hate so infectiously"[55]. In the case of the Yugoslav wars, such pejorative stereotypes and derogatory remarks proliferated. Ioan M. Paşcu regretfully noted that:

> "The conflict is usually viewed as another irrefutable instance of the perpetual violence and proverbial lack of civilization characterizing a region incapable of overcoming its traditional condition as Europe's powder keg. In today's vocabulary, these terms imply a judgement that Balkan peoples exhibit a total incapacity to learn and practice democracy and market economy"[56].

As State Secretary in the Ministry of National Defence, Paşcu elaborated upon Romania's stance on the Yugoslav wars in 1994:

> "Romania's official position with regard to the Yugoslav conflict has three major components. First, we hold the view that the only viable solution is to be reached by the parties which are directly involved. Regardless how impatient the outside world might become – and for good reason – its main mission would be *to create conditions for bringing the parties to the negotiating table and to facilitate their agreement*. External efforts aimed at finding a solution to the conflict should not be viewed, in other words, as a substitute for an accord between protagonists [...] Second, *Romania has firmly abstained from any military involvement in the conflict* [...] Third, *Romania has declared that she is disposed to explore diplomatic solutions to Yugoslav wars.* Romania is thus materializing her uncontested advantages (lack of any interest in the conflict itself, good relations with practically all former Yugoslav republics, and a relatively correct understanding of the situation, given her knowledge of the Balkan region)"[57].

The Yugoslav wars and their connection to "the Balkans" impacted on the Romanian foreign policy imaginary and a key self-image of national identity – Romania as "non-Balkan".

Romania's discursive relationship with "the Balkans" has been an interesting combination of rejection and acceptance. Foreign policy decision-makers put great effort into explaining that Romania was not part of the Balkans, particularly to international audiences[58]. They promoted instead the subjectivity of a Central European state neighbouring or "in immediate proximity" to that region[59]. Similarly to the "Eastern European" articulation, Romania's post-communist national identity was dissociated from representations like "Oriental", "Byzantine" or "Balkan", which

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55 Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts. A Journey Through History*, St. Martin's, New York, 1993), p. xxiii.

56 Ioan M. Paşcu, "Romania and the Yugoslav Conflict", *European Security*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1994, p. 154.

57 *Ibidem*, pp. 159-160, emphasis in original.

58 Tom Gallagher, "To Be or Not to Be Balkan: Romania's Quest for Self-Definition", *Daedalus*, vol. 126, no. 3, 1997, p. 69.

59 Teodor Meleşcanu, "The Perspectives of Peace in the Balkans" (Bucharest, 22 April 1994), in *Renaşterea diplomaţiei româneşti*, cit., p. 202.

illustrated "biased" and "bad faithed" categorisations with the intent of "stigmatizing the perspectives of our [democratic] evolution"[60]. In October 1993, Foreign Affairs Minister Meleşcanu argued that not only geography constituted Romania as a "non-Balkan" state – "[w]e Romanians prefer to describe ourselves as a Central European country close to the Balkans […] Romania, being located north of the Danube, does not belong geographically to the Balkan region"; since a "country belongs to the area where its problems lie", Romania's "well-known" good relations with "any Balkan or successor states in the former Yugoslavia" lead to the conclusion that Romania cannot be Balkan[61]. Within the same context, Meleşcanu went on to add: "[T]his clarification might help *our friends to the south* to understand that the way we characterize Romania implies neither a denial of enduring economic, political and cultural ties, nor a diminution of the important Balkan dimension of our foreign policy"[62]. In the light of such constructs, Romania shaped its national identity to be different from two significant others – "Eastern" and "Balkan". Like the underlying Orientalism of Western narratives, Balkanism explores a more geographically specific but equally problematic and negative representation of "otherness". Maria Todorova aptly concludes in this respect: "[A]s in the case of the Orient, the Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the 'European' and the 'West' has been constructed".[63]. The urgency of Romanian efforts to dissociate national identity from the label "Balkan" was related to international Western debates about the "Balkan" character and the Yugoslav wars, which abounded in negative stereotypes. A key text of this Balkanist pejorative discourse, influential in the West, was Kaplan's "Balkan Ghosts" based on his travels in several countries including Romania. For Kaplan and his growing number of readers, Romania was emphatically "Balkan".

Upon closer examination of the Romanian foreign policy discourses, the self-image of "non-Balkan" coexisted with articulations like "our friends to the south". The long-time "friend" in the region was Yugoslavia, whether in its past political form or contemporary individual entities. President Iliescu clarified and reinforced those understandings:

> "[W]e have a good tradition in terms of relations with Yugoslavia. We could even say that Yugoslavia was our *best neighbour*, the history of our relations having never known any conflict. We had permanent communication and supported each other; a *solidarity* based on *common history* was created. We are very sensitive from that point

[60] *Idem*, "Romania's Option for Integration with the West: Historical and Present Grounds", *Romanian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1995, p. 13.

[61] Teodor Meleşcanu, "Security in Central Europe: A Positive-Sum Game", *NATO Review*, vol. 41, no. 5, October 1993, http://www.nato.int/docu/review/1993/9305-3.htm (April 2014).

[62] *Ibidem*, emphasis added.

[63] Maria N. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, cit., p. 188.

> of view. The Romanian people show a certain *solidarity* and a feeling of frustration because of this tragedy[64] affecting a heroic people with a rather tumultuous past"[65].

The representations of Balkan states as "friends", "best neighbour", two mentions of "solidarity" in quick succession and "common history" suggest that Romania's national identity was not constructed by applying a mutually exclusive and hostile relationship of otherness vis-à-vis the Balkans. Romanian identity was defined as "non-Balkan", yet retained a Balkan affinity and traditional friendly rapport with the Balkans. Once Romania was accepted as an EU and NATO candidate, its official discourses gradually encountered external sources that promoted different articulations about Romanian identity. It is essential to remember that national identity formation involves both self-projection and external recognition. In other words, Romanian discursive attempts to portray the state as "non-Balkan" would be unsuccessful without Western validation. So, even though Romanian political leaders sought to dissociate their state from "the Balkans" by invoking geographic, historical and cultural arguments, their representation was partially supported by international narratives. Many external audiences did not seem inclined to differentiate between Romania and the Balkan region. Their influence needed to be accommodated by national discourses, shaping modified meanings for Romanian identity. From 1994 onwards, Romania was often depicted as "marking the border of different, even divergent, areas of civilization: Central, but also South-Eastern Europe"[66]. Apart from the "European" and "non-Balkan" self-images, Romanian national identity had historically resonated with the idea of being a "security provider". The latter construct relates to the second factor shaping national identity from within – collective memory-myths and how interpretations of the past are invoked to legitimate images in the present.

Romania's Self-Image as a "Security Provider"

The third discursive theme of Romania's foreign policy imaginary is that of "security provider". The post-1992 Romanian discourse showed a range of interconnected articulations – "security provider", "source of stability", "reliable partner". Romanian elites often explicitly mentioned or suggested their

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64 Here Iliescu referred to the conflict in Bosnia.

65 Ion Iliescu, "Interview with Dominique Audibert for 'Le Point"' (Bucharest, 2 April 1994), in *Romania in Europe and in the World*, cit., p. 161 – emphasis added.

66 Zoe Petre, "The Role of the President in Romania's Approach to NATO Integration", in Kurt W. Treptow, Mihail E. Ionescu (eds.), *Romania and Euro-Atlantic Integration*, The Centre for Romanian Studies, Iaşi, 1999, p. 95.

state's contribution to generating stability among its troubled neighbours. For instance, Foreign Affairs Minister Meleşcanu stressed the following:

> "[Romania's] internal stability and responsible, predictable international conduct have so far made it possible to physically separate two areas of open or latent conflict. The mutual reinforcement of the eastern and the southern 'arcs of crises' has been prevented. Had this not happened, the problems currently confronting the European Union, NATO and the WEU [Western European Union] would have been considerably greater, perhaps even unsolvable"[67].

President Iliescu said on several occasions that "we are deeply concerned with the tragic developments in the former Yugoslavia" and that Romania, "situated in the immediate vicinity to areas with high possibility for conflict", can play an important role in ensuring regional security[68]. Even though variations on this theme also circulated in the foreign policy imaginary pre-1992, Romania's official discourse indicated a notable emphasis on the "security provider" self-image after November 1992 when Meleşcanu came into office. He insisted on depicting Romania as a "security generator" that could export democratic stability to the Balkans. Such external efforts would be supported by the "unbiased" and "traditional good relations" with former Yugoslav states:

> "[W]hether it is openly admitted or not, Romania has been perceived more and more by all its southern neighbours as a factor of stability for the Balkans […] Romania does not intend to comfortably position itself as mere beneficiary of the security arrangements in Europe. Commensurate with our resources, military capability and comparative advantages in terms of strategic position and infrastructure facilities at Romania's disposal, we are also able and willing to play the role of *security generator*"[69].

Meleşcanu had an important role in configuring this self-image and appeared to be the most emphatic about it in 1993-1996. His professional background as a long-time diplomat brought another type of elite perspective on Romanian national identity and external relations. Unlike President Iliescu, who was generally perceived to have a strong affinity towards Russia (due to his education in Moscow and especially due to the 1991 Soviet "Friendship Treaty"), Meleşcanu had been socialised in a different and more "Western"-

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67 Teodor Meleşcanu, "Romania – Factor of Stability in the New Europe", Speech delivered at the Royal Institute of International Affairs "Chatham House" (London, 28 June 1994), in *Renaşterea diplomaţiei româneşti*, cit., p. 42.

68 Ion Iliescu, "Speech delivered at the NATO Headquarters" (Brussels, February 1993), in *Romania in Europe and in the World*, cit., pp. 70-71.

69 Teodor Meleşcanu, "Romania – Factor of Stability in the New Europe", in *Renaşterea diplomaţiei româneşti*, cit., p. 43 – emphasis in original.

oriented setting. He had attended postgraduate courses in International Relations and earned a PhD in International Law at the University of Geneva during 1966-1973[70], where he was exposed to several ideas that affected the future Minister's interpretation of the Romanian and international imaginaries. Meleşcanu's studies influenced him as a foreign policy practitioner who distinctly reinforced Romania's chosen European and Euro-Atlantic direction. Being a firm advocate of it, the Foreign Affairs Minister elaborated on the "security provider" self-image (as opposed to consumer) in the context of NATO accession:

> "Romania does not intend to simply be positioned at the receiving end of European security arrangements, instead wishing to play a role of security provider. The fact that Romania is considered a factor of stability in its geographical area speaks for itself in this respect. The political stability of Romania, its balanced, responsible and predictable international behaviour recommend it as an asset for NATO"[71].

These speeches were delivered in London and Washington, where the intended audiences were highly influential Alliance members. Romania, just like the other post-communist candidate states, needed to highlight and convince NATO decision-makers that it could contribute to allied capabilities. A purely rational account would argue that Romanian officials created the representation of "security provider", in order to alleviate NATO's concerns about Romania becoming a potential net consumer of security once given membership. Yet the evidence shows that there is more to the story of foreign policy than mere cost-benefit calculations. This is particularly relevant in the Romanian case, where deeply ingrained meanings about national identity shaped the state's main self-images and international behaviour.

Thus, the construct of "security provider" did not simply emerge as a response to NATO requirements. Its ideational roots were closely linked to a long-standing collective memory-myth of Romania as defender of Europe and the West, which features prominently in the Romanian imaginary. As previously discussed, collective memory-myths are a domestic source of national identity formation, a source from which elites draw understandings about the state's self-images. They also constitute subjective interpretations regarding the nation's remembered past. When talking about the construction of Romanian "uniqueness" or exceptionalism in historiography, Anca Băicoianu distinguishes three major coordinates – geographic, historical and cultural. Geographically, Romania occupied the strategic position of a "turning point"

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[70] *Idem*, "Biografie"/"Biography", in *The Parliament of Romania – Senate*; available at http://www.senat.ro/FisaSenator.aspx?ParlamentarID=9c148cba-956a-4a60-805a-c53d508a133e (April 2014).

[71] *Idem*, "Romania as a Security Provider" (Washington, 15-17 July 1996), in *Renaşterea diplomaţiei româneşti*, cit., pp. 134-135.

between the East and the West, as well as a necessary "defence line against all invasions"[72]. Second, the historical coordinate obsessively portrayed the "heroic and civilizing" double descent (Dacian and Roman), which was invoked to "claim superiority over the closest neighbours and to legitimate Romania's place as a rightful member of the European choir of nations"[73]. Third, culturally speaking, "the ever increasing feeling of isolation" turned "the idea of uniqueness into a true framework of Romanian identity"; unable to find a suitable pace and constantly fearing exclusion from an ideally imagined Western Europe, Romanian culture "struggles to achieve a however fragile balance between its specificity and a longing for integration"[74]. The collective memory-myth of Romanian exceptionalism, its articulation as defender of the West and stronghold protecting European civilisation against invading foreigners, was sometimes openly expressed in the foreign policy texts: "[S]ituated in Central Europe, Romania has certainly been central to Europe. For centuries, the Romanian countries were the bastions of European civilisation, independence and freedom"[75].

The above quote is a good example of how the Romanian past has been dramatised under the "remarkable functionality" of the myth of the struggle for independence[76]. In this respect, Lucian Boia explains how the "pressure of foreigners from outside and from within, real up to a point but hyperbolized in the national imaginary, generated the besieged fortress complex which is so typical of the Romanian mentality of the last two centuries"[77]. Such inter-connected collective memory-myths hold a triple purpose: "Highlighting the virtue and heroism of the Romanians, justifying their historical late-coming in terms of the sacrifices imposed by ceaseless aggression, and, finally, attracting the attention of the West to its debt of gratitude towards the Romanians who defended it from the Ottoman onslaught"[78]. So the "security provider" self-image had a solid and older ideational foundation to be built upon, resonating with Romanian understandings of the nation's past. It drew on a historical reference point to mould and guide one of the main facets of Romania's post-communist national identity and foreign policy role. As Boia concludes,

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[72] Anca Băicoianu, "The Trap of Memory: Auto-Orientalism as Victimization", *Internet Journal for Cultural Sciences*, no. 16, 2006; www.inst.at/trans/16Nr/02_2/ baicoianu 16.htm (March 2014).

[73] Anca Băicoianu, "Markers and Shifters of Romanian Identity", *Analele Universităţii "Ovidius"– Literary and Cultural Encounters*, vol. XIX, 2008, p. 10.

[74] *Idem*, "The Trap of Memory…cit.".

[75] Teodor Meleşcanu, "Romania as a Security Provider", cit.' p. 135.

[76] Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2001, p. 155.

[77] *Ibidem*.

[78] *Ibidem*.

> "[T]he image of a West protected thanks to Romania's sacrifice and a Romanian society strained and held back by fulfilling the function of defender of the European civilization has become deeply ingrained in the political vision of the Romanians, in their behavior and their reactions"[79].

In conclusion, this article has argued for a re-thinking of Romania's foreign policy within an identity puzzle. It put forward an inter-disciplinary perspective on national identity derived from the combined insights of constructivism, nationalism studies, collective memory and international recognition. At its fundamental level, national identity is a two-way social construct that encompasses both a domestic and an international component. The internal sources of national identity refer to the nation and collective memory-myths or interpretations of the nation's past. The external dimension of national identity is about a state's self-images being recognised or accepted by salient others in the international arena. Such a multi-faceted view of national identity becomes particularly relevant for the period 1990-1996, when the Romanian foreign policy imaginary crystallised three main themes: "European", "non-Balkan" and "security provider". These self-images have been intensely re-articulated between 1990 and 1996 under the internal and external dynamic of national identity formation, configuring a rich palette of meanings for Romania's post-communist foreign policy.

[79] *Ibidem*, p. 156.