

# **The risk of losing national identity in the twenty-first century Romania, or national identity from adaptation to self-censorship**

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## **Introduction**

### ***Risk and/in society – risking national identity***

The concept of risk was defined in general terms or with reference to a specific aspect of one field of research or another. When the term was regarded at a general level it was defined, for example, as “the probable frequency and probable magnitude of *future loss*” (Jones 2005: 12). Therefore, the most striking effect of or aspect related to risk is the loss that it engenders. When related to movements in society at one level or another the notion was viewed in connection with various aspects such as business, politics, language, health, security, etc. concerning the evolution of society in a particular concern. In our paper we propose to relate the risk paradigm to aspects concerning national identity and discuss the manner in which risk can be registered and/or gauged at the level of preserving the markers of national identity in the twenty-first century Romania in the context of the new economic, financial, cultural, political, etc. challenges and factors of change. The contribution of all these factors can negatively affect the integrity of national identity and, in time, the weakening or devitalisation of national specificity may become increasingly discernible.

The purposes of our research are related to these areas in a theoretical and practical manner, as follows. Firstly, the paper identifies the aspects that are subjected to risk in terms of national identity in general terms and, more specifically, in Romania. Secondly, it distinguishes the factors leading to (potential) loss of (aspects of) national identity in various areas of human activity. Thirdly, it attempts to provide some possible solutions for preventing such a loss.

## 1. The notion and scope of national identity and contemporary challenges

The starting point for a discussion on the topic of national identity from any perspective should start from the definition of the term so as to identify the coordinates of the research. Thus, the generic term of (national) identity was defined as a fusion of common understanding among groups and a host of *local loyalties* – family, work, region, language and so on; the concept could also be regarded from the angle of designating the way individuals feel about *who they are* even if (or precisely because) this process of self-analysis is done not only in a national, but also a larger (continental, global) context (Lewis 2008: 10). This is because it seems less and less possible to speak of or delineate between national identities, with people simultaneously belonging to national contexts as well as to larger locations, be they geographical, political or cultural. Consequently, multiple layers add up to what constitutes the contemporary individual's identity.

It is in such an expanded perspective that other questions arise and the search for a newly shaped or understood identity begins, be it at a scientific level or at the personal level of the individual who is compelled to master more than one language, to move more actively (within or beyond national borders) in search for work and other types of experiences, or to develop new levels of tolerance when it comes to human interaction. This search for identity was also regarded as the act of “differentiating oneself from what one is” from more perspectives: ethnic, national, linguistic, religious, and cultural (Benhabib 1996: 3). Focusing or restricting the perspective on national identity, an analysis of such a paradigm would include “an awareness of difference”; “a feeling and recognition of ‘we’ and ‘they’” (Lee 2012: 29), but also the recognition of sameness in terms of territory, cultural legacy or the state.

The discussion should also take into account matters related to the feelings of belonging and allegiance to that which defines or distinguishes one national identity against others or against the expanded definition of identity in the global society. It is, of course, still perfectly valid to speak about Romanian identity (or national identity in general), but this is done in relation to or comparison with, for example, the European identity or the globalized multicultural setting.

One other important distinction concerning national identity has to involve the process of defining the term *nation*. A classical definition is the one given by Smith: “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members”(Smith 1991: 14). But the analysis was also divided between various levels of the concept depending on the degree of involvement of the members of a particular nation. Thus, according to Friedrich Meinecke (quoted in Smith 1991: 8) one can speak of *Kulturnation* – the largely passive cultural community and of *Staatsnation* – the active, self-determining

political nation (Friedrich Meinecke quoted in Smith 1991: 8). Most often it is the discrepancies between the two systems of thinking belonging to these two poles that lead to important clashes in forming an opinion upon what national identity consists in and in setting the course a nation follows in terms of political choices and policy establishing. Perhaps these are the aspects that made other researchers introduce the concept of will in the analysis and thus speak of *Willensnation* – nation by an act of will (cf. Ernest Renan quoted in Wodak et al. 2009: 18). Thus, we understand that a nation could and should also be defined mainly by the acts it wilfully makes rather than those imposed by an exterior reality. This is the perspective from which we choose to analyse the syntagm of national identity in the context of the twenty-first century Romania and identify such aspects as: the identity markers which Romania has managed to preserve unchanged for centuries, the aspects that have been affected by change as a result of the evolution of society from the inside, the aspects that were or have been rather imposed by external factors dictated mainly by foreign policy and cultural-economic transformations at a continental or global level. Like many other states, Romania is also part of a complex network of European or international political, economic or cultural relationships or associations and it inevitably finds itself caught between strong acts of will directed at preserving its national identity intact and the more flexible adaptation to or acceptance of attributes of an expanded view on identity.

## **2. Aspects of national identity and external or internal changing forces**

According to researchers, when it comes to discussing national identity, a number of variables have to be taken into consideration for the delineation of the coordinates between which the concept is developed. Thus, A.D. Smith (1991: 14) lists the following features as common points that unite people of a certain nation:

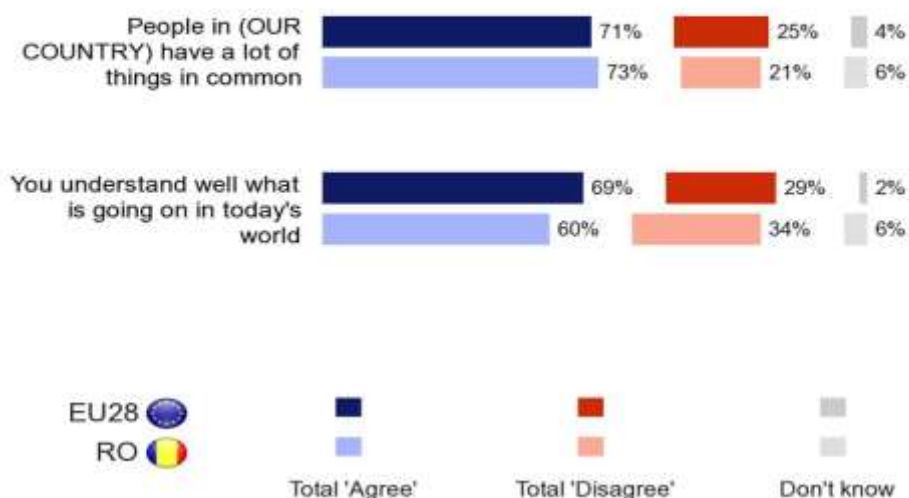
- (a) a historic territory;
- (b) common myths;
- (c) historical memories and values;
- (d) a common public culture;
- (e) common legal rights and duties;
- (f) a common economy with territorial mobility.

It is in this context that a *homo nationalis* (Wodak et al. 2009: 4) could be identified and defined and these would be the common grounds that would make him feel rooted in a common identity. In our paper we intend to explore some of these components of national identity starting from the series of factors which cause

important changes to this the concept (both from within a nation and from outside of it) and to present the degree to which such changes may lead to a loss of national identity.

The investigation of the risks of losing national identity has to start from an analysis of the changes registered in a society at a particular moment and of the degree to which these changes affect the population at a personal or institutionalized level. At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, Romania was and still is heavily influenced by the decisions which are taken at the level of the European Union. The foreign policy dictates and largely influences the new coordinates and shapes the boundaries (both spatial and economic or political) within which people have to act. On the other hand, the shaping of a European identity based on the sum total of national political, social, economic, cultural identities as well as their values is a key aspect in contemporary Romania. The borders of the Romanian identity seem to have been ‘moved’, ‘effaced’ or ‘dimmed’ so as to be circumscribed to a larger European identity. As a proof for such a tendency at the European level of questioning this attachment to a common set of attributes stands such a report as the Eurobarometer Report from 2014.<sup>1</sup> Question 6 of this report (see the first statement in the statistics below) seems to be leading to this idea of the citizens from the European countries being circumscribed to a

**QD6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?**



European (physical and non-physical territory) and indicates a levelling of a series of the features that gave specific shape to national identity.

Underpinned by this context, the concepts of geographical territory, economy, finance, the environment, culture and others have become important factors that help the understanding of a new concept of identity. Starting from Smith's (1991) model and adding new components to the definition of national identity, we will further develop an analysis of these external factors that have caused important changes in the Romanian society starting with the second half of the twentieth century, factors which are discussed by theorists as *practice areas of risk*.

## 2.1 Geographical territory

In generic terms, the dynamics of geographical territory in Europe has been very high over the last fifty years for more reasons than one. Firstly, many nations have emerged and were (more or less) recognized as new nations by international fora as a result of a series of internal factors such as ethnic dissension – a fight for territorial and linguistic recognition was commenced at one point or another which led to territorial and administrative separation (see the case of states from the former USSR or of the ones from the former Yugoslavia). After political debates and, often, wars, they have gained a new independence and a new individual identity at the level of administration, politics, or even economy.

The same change of the topographical identity was registered in the case of a unification or adherence to a larger nation or federation. A similar effacement of borders but at a political level this time was registered by means of the adherence to types of entities such as the European Union or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The political, economic and cultural advantages were supposed to be the first to compensate for the loss of political, economic, cultural, military independence and this is because the annulment of a historic territory and the passage to a European (or global) enlargement and, therefore, the creation of a supra-state like “the Federation of European States” will affect national identity as long as the spatial independence and territorial definiteness is transferred to the imprecise space of the new political organisation (Basciani in LonginPopescu 2012: 3).

In the context of the twenty-first century Romania the most important transformations and incursions have been registered at economic, fiscal, judicial and military levels. Romania, in order to benefit from the EU's privileges was somehow forced to accept a series of investments dictated from a continental level, to adopt a series of fiscal policies imposed by the EU, to align to its judicial system at least in some regards, or to accept foreign (NATO) military bases on its territory. The

instalment of the military base at Deveselu (Olt) – where a missile defence system is being put in place – as well as that of the projected NATO permanent military base on the Romanian territory confirm that political decisions may influence territorial configuration.

## 2.2 Economic

Some of the most important changes brought by this tendency of *globalization* occurred at an economic level. Rooted in the goals of the European Coal and Steel Community (1951), the economic unification and integration of European states was planned to pave the way for political pacification and cooperation. The economic implication of subsequent territorial, political, fiscal and administrative reorganizations meant the bringing together of different national economies and the forming of a single or global economy by way of exchange of goods and services, capital or workforce, with the purpose of augmenting living standards, social conditions and boosting economic progress in general. Thus, the process of *market unification* has at its origins one of the EU's capital projects. This is how a large number of Romania's important producers were swallowed or at least affiliated to other foreign investors from Europe, often at the expense of small local producers, small-scale production or the production of specific goods.

Therefore, one of the most important sectors of Romania's economy – *agriculture* – was subject to major changes and, apart from some fortunate situations in which the foreign investments brought important financial advantages and sometimes even managed to preserve the Romanian tradition of producing goods, in many other cases the local producers were put to a disadvantage by large producers who bought important surfaces of land. Another situation leading to the destabilization if not complete change of the Romanian agricultural tradition is that in which an effort for a *common agricultural policy* in EU member states is made. One important measure in this direction is the EU's recent announcement that subsidies for agricultural farmers will rise only if farmers join in farms larger than 5 hectares. This creates a threatened position for the small rural farms and may also entail the threat of rural devastation, of the disappearance of the peasantry and of the traditional village as such. The policy of intensive agricultural exploitation means that the EU wants "fewer farms, more chemicals, huge lands by means of amassing agricultural land, poor quality of local food and less biodiversity" (Sir Julian Rose in LonginPopescu2014: 3). This may have a negative permanent effect on the national agricultural system. This situation is sometimes fought against by local producers who struggle to maintain the traditional methods of production and, through them, a part of the Romanian spirit. The Romanians' ancestral intimate relationship with nature, the land and its produce has constantly been a reason of national pride in the

end and it is sometimes the international voices that urge us to preserve this spirit (e.g. Prince Charles observed that Transylvania offers a lesson against the agro-industrial development).

Certain factors like market demand or the change of climatic conditions causing unprofitable crops have also led to changing traditional agricultural practices. It is the case of the Indigo Rose tomato variety boasting improved nutritional values and significant benefits for health. The genetically improved tomato variety was invented by the British and appeals to Romanian producers as well, especially due to the profits generated (they are twice as expensive as the traditional red tomatoes). Lavender crops are also becoming attractive to Romanian farmers who have given up growing wheat or corn and take advantage of the multiple uses of aromatic plants. Likewise, kiwi plantations or banana tree orchards in southern parts of Romania seem to be quite profitable alternatives to traditional crops.

Another tendency in what agriculture is concerned is that of cultivating new species of traditional vegetables or fruit dictated by two main grounds: financial reasons (some new species of beans, for instance, are seen as being much more productive and profitable) or environmental reasons (some seeds are seen to be more productive in the newly changed climatic conditions of our country, a direct result of global warming).

### **2.3 Financial**

*The adoption of a common currency of the Union* in all member states is another factor which is, from one perspective, the equivalent of an effacement or weakening of one aspect of national identity. The Romanian leu, an important national symbol of the past, after having lost its value in front of the foreign currency would finally lose trace in the context of the foreign fiscal policy. At present, Romania is planning to adopt the euro as the national currency in 2016, joining the process of expansion of the euro zone (now comprising 18 nations).

Monetary union is also seen by many analysts as a threat to national currencies. For instance, for the British, the pound sterling is closely related to national sovereignty and it has had many defenders throughout the last 30 years. In effect, the abolition of the pound sterling would be a crime, former PM Margaret Thatcher declared in 1990. This situation would bring about the loss of political sovereignty, economic power and cultural completeness or even of the integrity of national identity. Other politicians touched upon another aspect of the issue which is not circumscribed to the cultural area, but strictly and directly to the financial one. In 2012, Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that the EU does not only “need *a currency union*, we also

need a so-called fiscal union – more joint budget policy.”<sup>2</sup>In this context, the preservation of fiscal specificity and autonomy is constantly challenged by the EU’s policies pleading for “more Europe”, including the financial domain.

## **2.4 Environmental**

Just as the English landscape evokes Englishness, the Romanian landscape and the uniqueness of its environment also connote a sense of specific territory and spirit, a particular sense of belonging, a yearning for home (see Burden&Kohl 2006). That is why the original habitat of the Romanians has become a trademark for the Romanian spirit but it too was affected not only at a geo-political level, but also at the more uncontrollable level of the environmental factors. And we do not refer here to the climatic factors but to the human-generated aspects that have transformed the environment of the Romanian inhabited space (village, town or region) as well as the uninhabited territory (fields, hills, mountains, river courses).

At the level of the inhabited areas, Romania has been subjected in the past twenty years to a massive import of styles in architecture (as a result of the modernization of the city by professional architects and as a result of the styles brought by common people from the countries in which they travelled) which has frequently led to a kitsch pastiche which combines Chinese, Indian or Spanish architectural specific features sometimes grotesquely pinned in rural spaces.

Against this background and in line with the implications of the EU’s motto “United in diversity”, the Romanian authorities have received echoes of encouragement with a view to preserving the specificity of the Romanian village untainted by the modern style or in the spirit of sustainable development, a concept which involves a threefold development: at an economic level, as well as at the socio-cultural and environmental levels. In this respect, lately, the mass media have had campaigns for encouraging the saving and promotion of tradition in the Romanian village (regarding especially the restoration of age-old houses and mansions or castles). But Romania has also had the honour of having more prominent ambassadors in this respect: HRH Prince Charles was the one to draw attention to Romania’s natural treasures which lie forgotten by the authorities and which have not been included in any special programmes of restoration and promotion. The active support of endangered ecosystems and old ways of life has also been one of Prince Charles’s major contributions. HRH is an active campaigner of sustainable development, which is intended to successfully combine present and future human action with the purpose of both preserving the environment and developing it so as to comply with

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.dw.de/merkel-demands-more-europe/a-16007150>. Retrieved October 5 2013.



the demands of the present and the future. He clearly stated that what defines Romania and its people is, first of all, its historic architecture and the unspoiled landscape, which contribute to Romania's "unique cultural, spiritual and national inheritance."<sup>3</sup>What was also underlined was the importance of preserving Romania's ancestral rural heritage and the rich natural system, two components of national identity which are now extinct in many parts of Europe.

In what the urban spaces are concerned, plans for building whole neighbourhoods in a clearly foreign architectural style would clearly and definitely affect, if not totally attack, the Romanian identity. An example is the latest type of collaboration signed between the Romanian and the Chinese governments that would entail the building of entire neighbourhoods of blocks of flats and other buildings in various towns from Romania in the typical Chinese style with pagoda-like roofs. Obviously, economic reasons also lie at the basis of such architectural changes and imports that will change the face of those urban areas, but the amalgamation of definite identity markers from this perspective will also affect national cultural specificity.

At the level of the uninhabited areas, the cohabitation man–nature is recognized as unique in Europe, so the forms of relief that exist within our borders have been recognized by foreign experts to have disappeared from Europe fifty years ago and that is why the general opinion is that these are the symbols that we should preserve and promote consistently as markers of our national identity. In Prince Charles's words, "the sense of belonging, identity and meaning" that people are yearning for would thus be safeguarded and the country would also benefit from other financial gains brought by the tourist industry.

## 2.5 Legal aspects

Another important aspect directly connected to the subject of national identity within the European context refers to the legal aspects and the judicial system to which countries on the continent have to align. On the one hand, countries belonging to the Union would benefit from a series of common legal rights and duties (e.g. European citizenship), but on the other hand this development of a European background of common legal rights and duties which, broadening the meaning or extending the limits of applicability, might bring about the absorption of the concept of "national common legal rights and duties" could also lead to the imposing of a concept of a European identity from this perspective. Laws being made not within one nation, but as part of a larger, global background having as orchestrators big state powers, could

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<sup>3</sup>Dr Honoris Causa awarding ceremony at the University of Bucharest, May 31, 2014. Retrieved June 12 2014 from [http://adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/printul-charles-s-a-intalnit-presedintele-traian-basescula-palatul-cotroceni-1\\_5389cae70d133766a82b71b8/index.html](http://adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/printul-charles-s-a-intalnit-presedintele-traian-basescula-palatul-cotroceni-1_5389cae70d133766a82b71b8/index.html).

work in the detriment of small nations. The concept of European citizenship may work as a distorting lens through which common people and authorities may choose not to promote national specific elements any more, but rather to align to the European ones.

Moreover, this legal concept may also lead to large distortions of aspects of national identity from a cultural point of view – apart from the written law, people may feel the pressure of an unwritten law to adhere to European values and traditions that may disadvantage the national ones. Nevertheless, it may be the case that we are becoming European citizens both respecting and complying with a set of common European laws, but could every European citizen, from such diverse parts of the continent, identify himself with a homogenized set of regulations that may fail to observe national characteristics or historical trends?

## 2.6 Cultural

The cultural level is perhaps the one at which the changes in the concept of national identity are the most visible and numerous. Aspects connected to the national language, to the traditions and customs of a country which automatically trigger aspects connected to processes of stereotyping and discrimination, to the national symbols, music and cuisine of a country are the ones to undergo some of the most dynamic changes.

**a.** Thus, *national language*, with its two main functions: 1. communication (with the others) and 2. representation of reality (of the world to ourselves in our minds) (Joseph 2004: 15) was the first to register numerous lexical shifts and imports brought by the introduction of the English (but also Italian or French) language via the foreign politics, economy, but also fashion, sports and entertainment. If, generally speaking, multilingualism is treasured and languages become bridges between cultures, as former European commissioner for multilingualism underlined (Orban 2007), unjustified linguistic imports may become threats to the Romanian language – in various fields, especially in the journalistic language, they are abusively used, surpassing the limit of specialized /technical terms and are rather used as a modern fad. If in the fields of information technology, economy and finance, or medicine such terms could not find a satisfying Romanian equivalent (simple examples are: “software”, “desktop”, “boom”, “broker”, “input”, “bypass”), in other fields such as sports, fashion, and entertainment lexical imports have become a marker of a pseudo-professional elitism when in fact the Romanian language possesses perfectly valid paradigms for such concepts (e.g. “goal keeper”, “cat walk”, “performance”, “show”). Since language is perhaps one of the most treasured values or quintessential markers of a nation, we consider that this is an

example of a distorted understanding of the concept of adherence to European/global values and culture and one type of behaviour which contributes to the gradual loss of national identity at the level of language.

**b. Traditions and customs** are another important marker of national identity and a way of exhibiting one nation in the world. Due to commercial reasons (which make certain producers promote certain goods in the context of a particular holiday; for example Valentine's Day, Halloween, etc.) or to a falsely understood notion of tradition (which permitted even the import of the custom of turkey eating on festive occasions), the Romanian contemporary cultural 'scenery' has changed substantially. So many traditions from the rural world are often forgotten and regarded as colourful folklore of yore when they are presented on TV, and they are scarcely felt as belonging to the contemporary world and thus they are discarded willingly. For example, the Romanian tradition has two similar examples of traditions as those mentioned above – the night before St. Andrew's Day (also called Night of the Ghouls, the 29<sup>th</sup> of November) and Dragobete (the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, an equivalent of St. Valentine's Day for lovers' day), but commercially speaking the American imported traditions are quite aggressively promoted. One of the main reasons for this loss is the fact that these traditions were tightly connected with the work of the land and often promoted a special connection with nature, a supernatural entity, with whom, through the rituals performed as part of these traditions, people tried to establish some contact. But as long as the village world, its significance and the spirit of the land are precisely some coordinates of the Romanian identity which are in peril, as mentioned above, it follows as a natural consequence that the traditions associated with them are in danger as well.

It is at this point that the issue of *the flow of cultural imports vs. the valorization of cultural heritage* was brought into discussion by the defenders of the national spirit and identity and efforts have been made against the input of redundant imported holidays and their commercially associated objects, and against the tendency of the commodification of culture with its insistence on cultural products. What Romania needs in this context is a conjugated effort of the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change for the promotion and financing of some programmes that would defend these markers of the Romanian national identity. At the individual level, the joint efforts of the Romanian people could also signify the weakening of the impetus of cultural imports and the revitalisation of traditional components of culture for future generations.

**c. Integration vs. national stereotypes and discrimination** – in this context of the creation of an identity beyond a country's national borders (at a continental or global level), the issue of levelling discrepancies of any type, assimilating certain national aspects but especially adapting and integrating a part of the national traits into a

larger (political, economic, judicial, a.s.o.) context was a price that all smaller nations had to pay. The intended shaping of a European identity and the migration phenomenon have led to comparisons between the (outsider) new comers and the (insider) initial founders of a type of political-administrative entity and so the issue of labelling people emerged. Thus, our national identity gained new features assigned by a more or less distorting and prejudiced lens of the “beholder”-nations. In the communicational age the spread of such a view is quickly transmitted by means of the mass media. Media stereotypes become rapidly and unjustly disseminated and Romanians are seen as lazy people, criminals, or are even unjustly treated as gypsies who come to steal their jobs. Labels of Romanians as “benefit tourists”, unwelcome guests and economic exploiters permeate media discourses in a number of European countries. The official calls for more integration and collaboration often meet the reluctance of the host countries because migrants are seen as a threat to the national identity of the countries in which they seek work (for example in Great Britain). It was perhaps that we started too late a fight against our being assigned such national stereotypes. New disparaging markers have been added to our national identity and it has become more and more difficult to make people discard such opinions in what we are concerned. One of the most famous examples of such a recent campaign against the Romanians was rooted in a *Guardian* article from January 27, 2013 which speculated that the British government was planning to launch a negative media campaign entitled *Don't Come to Britain* with the aim of discouraging Romanians and Bulgarians from coming to Britain in search for work. The newspaper actually engaged readers in sending posters that would present negative aspects of British life and thus deter potential immigrants from coming to Britain. This absurd self-discrediting campaign was a success, its echoes reached much of the European world and, paradoxically, its absurdity was justifiable to some. On the other hand, the British themselves made fun of and discredited aspects of their nation's life such as: the weather, politics, the nation's sanitary conditions (the rubbish in the street is supposedly epic), the country's social system (the offering of menial jobs to foreigners or the system of social benefits), etc.<sup>4</sup>

A response to such a campaign was given through the Romanian media campaign *Why don't you come over here?*, launched on January 29, 2013 by [www.gandul.info](http://www.gandul.info) and GMP Advertising. Thus, an attempt to create a positive image for the Romanians was made with the purpose of also promoting the country. Among the topics were: drinks and food (*Our draft beer is less expensive than your bottled water; You have only whiskey. We have wine, țuică, rachiu, brandy*), the beauty of Romanian women (*Half of our women look like Kate. The other half, like her sister*),

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<sup>4</sup> For pictures see <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/gallery/2013/jan/29/immigration-britain-ministers-gallery#/?picture=403153052&index=0>, retrieved October 5 2013.

a pragmatic attitude and mindset (“*To be or not to be*” vs. “*ce-iîn mână nu-îmciună*” – a sure thing is better than anything), a relaxed attitude which compensates for economic difficulties (*We may have half of your GDP but we have three times the fun*), touristic sites (*We have the most beautiful road in the world according to your top motoring show*), etc.

Unfortunately, the fight for the defense of our image, face, or national reputation has to be a fierce one because our country is discredited systematically and sometimes even by officials with a privileged position. Thus, European politicians sometimes reinforce stereotypes and prejudice. For instance, Nigel Farage, the head of UKIP, a Eurosceptic British party, has recently declared sarcastically: “I haven’t got a problem with Romanians. I have a massive problem with Romania” (May 2014).<sup>5</sup>

#### **d. National symbols**

One strong weapon which we must use against such attacks is the promotion of our nation’s symbols which will be one way of asserting (and preserving) our markers of national identity. Further on, some clear examples will be discussed in view of both signalling risks and proposing some solutions.

1. We have to engage in a strong promotion of *national myths and legends* (Baba Dochia, Doamna Neaga, Luana), a fact which impacts our country both regarding the tourism industry and the general impression upon the lack of potential of our country.
2. We have to advertise *musical instruments* as national symbols (the panpipe, the dulcimer and the bucium) which would bring a capital of artistic image by means of the artists who excelled in playing these instruments, but which would also present our history in a new light.
3. We have to foreground and endorse our nation’s *iconic figures* (from the worlds of culture, science, sports, etc.) and present to the world the country’s potential from more perspectives than one. Iconic personalities have successfully represented Romania abroad and still do (Constantin Brâncuși, Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica, Eugen Ionesco, Emil Cioran; Nicolae Paulescu, Emil Racoviță, Henri Coandă, Ionuț Budișteanu; Nadia Comăneci, Gheorghe Hagi, Ilie Năstase, Gabriela Szabo), a proof of Romania’s potential in contributing to national, European and world culture in general. Such persons are emblematic for our culture and so, they are considered worthy of admiration and respect (Holt 2004: 11).

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<sup>5</sup><http://www.cnn.com/id/101713628>, retrieved June 25 2014.

4. Traditional *products* also echo the ancient values of our nation and man's special connection with the land and its benefits. Whether we refer to food products with protected designation of origin (PDO), protected geographical indication (PGI) or traditional speciality guaranteed (TSG), the long list of famous Romanian products includes Salam de Sibiu (Sibiu Salami), Cârnați de Pleșcoi (Pleșcoi Sausages), Magiun de Topoloveni (Topoloveni Jam), lapte de Napoca (Napoca Milk), which send to such characteristics as stability, tradition, authenticity and high quality. In order to protect their quality and uniqueness, special EU schemes have been put in place for the encouragement of their production according to certain standards<sup>6</sup> and these efforts could be beneficial for the conservation of traditional food and drinks.

5. We have to attempt maintaining the specificity of our *folk music* because even this has been contaminated or altered at the level of the text, the general image of the performers and, occasionally, the values being promoted which are far from traditional. To meet this need, folk festivals are organized regularly and efforts are made to continue the tradition and make the Romanian folk music endure the test of time. For example, Floarea din Grădină and Florile Oltului festivals are both more than forty years old.

6. We have to be more keen on preserving and promoting even such aspects as *local cuisine*; as trivial as this might seem, in the context of the contemporary world in which tourists travel and are in search of the particular identity features of a nation, cuisine represents an important element, a calling card of a nation's uniqueness, level of artistry, sophistication and (authentic) spirit. In what the last aspect is concerned, an item of local cuisine as mămăliga (polenta) was used so as to describe the apathy of the Romanian people especially before the 1989 Revolution, by analogy with the behaviour of the aforementioned type of food – air bubbles are formed in the mass of the polenta but they escape individually and do not coalesce so as to form a larger burst/explosion. Thus, “Polenta doesn't explode” became a refrain which was sung in a lower or higher volume when it came to the Romanians' weak social ferment and involvement.

From another perspective, cuisine is an important factor of cultural promotion and display of local and national specificity not only through festivals of local food, and not only in restaurants but even at the level of the street culture. But, unfortunately, it seems that we have fallen victims to intercultural borrowing and promote the Turkish shaorma and kebab, the Greek gyros and tzatziki rather than the Romanian cheese and polenta, sarmale (stuffed cabbage) or even the controversial Romanian mic (a type of meat sausage).

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<sup>6</sup> See more at [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/quality/schemes/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/quality/schemes/index_en.htm), retrieved September 10 2014.

## 2.7 Socialaspects

In the context of the free movement of people, goods and services within the EU, one aspect seems to have brought only prejudices for the Romanian citizens. Because of a very dynamic process of social mobility and migration from our country to other countries from Europe or the rest of the world, Romania has come to be viewed predominantly as a producer of emigrants and the phenomenon of migration was regarded as a menace for more reasons than one. A threat that may assist the change of local or national social patterns, the migration phenomenon has been regarded as a security danger (acts of stealing, looting, squatting and inclination to crime attributed to migrants, migrants as dangers to public order), a labour-peril (it endangers the residents' jobs and encourages labour market competition with the locals/natives), a threat to the community welfare (migrants gain access to the community's social and economic benefits) or a risk that facilitates the weakening of both communities' heritage, culture and way of life which are distinctive and unique and which must be passed on to future generations unaltered.

It is this unilateral lens of viewing Romanians exclusively from this perspective that has made both European authorities and ordinary citizens consider the people in our country a 'social pest' lacking any kind of other scientific or cultural-economic merits and benefits that our workers might bring to their countries.

## 2.8 Political

We consider political change one of the most dynamic ferments at a European level, a vector which drives so many other sectors of society in general and the European Union in particular. The idea that a federal state could be created has pervaded more and more contemporary politics (and the media) and the syntagma "*European super-state*" has been promoted in more or less controversial terms, and has been more or less supported. Some of the factors already mentioned above seem to lead to the idea of a possible future type of organization under the heading United States of Europe which would entail, surely and automatically, the loss of a series of national specific traits. The causes that led to such possibilities were:

- a. The gradual *decline of the nation-state* and the rise of the Brussels institutions and their control over national political matters. At present, the EU represents a post-national political system (Lucarelli & Manners 2006: 8) replacing the conception of national states as the best form of political organization.
- b. The promotion of such a concept as "*more Europe*" (supported by the Future Group set up by the German foreign minister Guido Westerwelle) might lead to the

creation of a federation with an elected president of the Commission of Europe and a bicameral European Parliament, while all these changes would bring more European power at the level of the EU institutions.

## 2.9 Human values

In the context of the progress of contemporary society imposed by strong modernization, aspects concerning human values have increasingly been brought under scrutiny. Many studies<sup>7</sup> focus on the aspect of society and the impact of emancipation, civility, transformation, modernization, or democracy on a nation's identity. The contemporary age, the age of postmodernity, is said to have emerged out of the loss of traditional values and the overflow of progress on so many levels. Thus, the process of losing traditional values can be seen from two perspectives: on the one hand, as a result of what was labelled the "postmodern condition" (Lyotard 2005) or the "postmodern turn" (Best & Kellner 1997), each nation seems to have experienced a more or less significant loss of traditional values due to the transformation registered in the values scales of people in the contemporary society. On the other hand, a new map of shared memories and values whose coordinates have been outlined in the context of the promotion of the European spirit has been drawn. More or less overtly, the EU imposes or promotes a set of common values that are believed to represent constitutive elements of the EU's identity, those values that Europeans (should) recognize as theirs and give sense to their feeling of belonging to the same cultural and political entity. However, sometimes there is an opposition from different nations that take pride in and strength from those elements which ensure their continuity over time – and their uniqueness –, such as traditions, beliefs, mindsets, language, history, and the set of specific values.

Two concepts have become very important on the background of these transformations: homogenization and diversity.

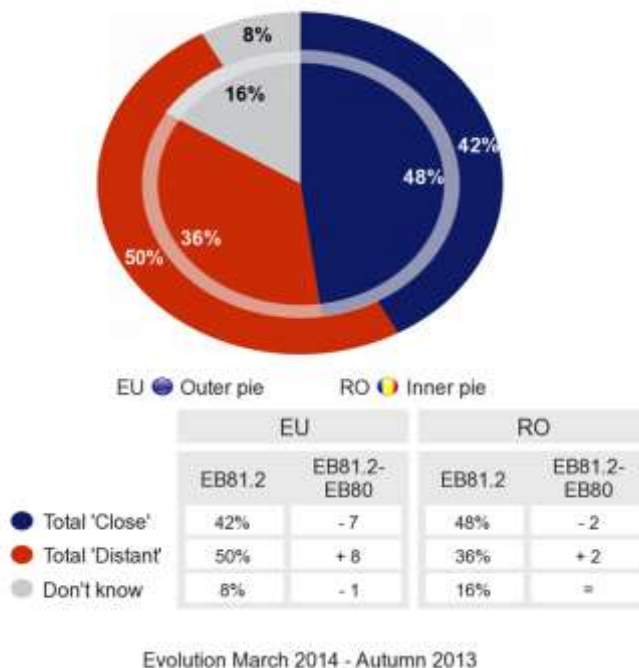
a. In what *the homogenization of values* is concerned, there is a tendency of integrating the basic set of **European** principles and values formed by the spiritual and political history of the continent in each and every nation of the Union and this is done in a clearly established institutionalized manner. This set consists of *respect for the unique human being and humanity's freedoms, rights and dignity; the principle of solidarity; equality before the law; protection of minorities; democratic institutions; political pluralism; respect for private ownership and private enterprise, and a market economy; and the furtherance of civil society, the necessity to preserve peace* (Vaclav Havel 2000: *Is there a European Identity, Is there a Europe?*).

<sup>7</sup> See Etienne Balibar's *Politics and the Other Scene* (2002), Cris E. Toffolo's *Emancipating Cultural Pluralism* (2003) or Ulrich Beck's *Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity* (1992).



b. As a way of preventing the fear of total or at least exaggerated homogenization, there come the EU's motto, "unity/united in diversity", through which inclusion is encouraged while national individuality is maintained. On the EU official website it is suggested that the motto means that, via the EU, Europeans are united in working together for peace and prosperity, and that the many different cultures, traditions and languages in Europe are a positive asset for the continent.<sup>8</sup> Thus, we could deduce that the preservation of specific **Romanian** values is encouraged (despite recent Eurobarometer statistics which show that 48% of Romanians believe that member states are totally close in point of shared values – see pie chart below<sup>9</sup>). Such values would include the cultivation of language, the endurance of the spiritual dimension, respect for tradition and the church, the celebration of the past and its glory, the celebration of past rites, a close communion with one's fellows and the community, the concept of family, an intimate relationship with nature, the land and its produce, openness to the archetypal existential condition, patriotism and sovereignty, autochthonism, wisdom, hospitality and generosity, simplicity, perseverance, stability, or authenticity; also cultured sensitivity (Noica 1991: 43). Endurance and continuity of national values throughout time represent a testimony of the nation's historical past, it is a mode of getting to know and interpreting the world, man, and

QD5. In your opinion, in terms of shared values, are EU Member States...?



<sup>8</sup>[http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/motto/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/motto/index_en.htm). Retrieved June 24 2014.

<sup>9</sup>*Europeans in 2014*, Eurobarometer Results for Romania, European Commission. Retrieved June 5 2014 from [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_415\\_fact\\_ro\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_415_fact_ro_en.pdf), p. 4.

his evolution. Preserving Romanianness ensures the eternity of the Romanian citizen/ spirit/ identity due to the feeling and awareness that there is a never-ending existential dimension beyond any historical achievements or major accomplishments (Noica 1991: 10). However, it is obvious that because of the factors mentioned throughout our paper some of these values might have to be aligned to a series of European norms, a fact which is synonymous with a tendency of homogenization rather than preservation of diversity.

### **3. National identity from adaptation to self-censorship**

One of the main issues which we raise in our research as an important aspect of the analysis of factors which might lead to high quotas of risk in connection to losing markers of a nation's identity is the nature of the change/contamination/borrowing that leads to loss. Three possible situations of implementing change can be identified: *accepted change* – under the form of appropriation; *absorbed change* – as unconscious assimilation; *imposed change* – a form of imperialism. Depending on these three situations the transformations are handled with more or less control on the part of the receiver-nation. In other words, an accepted type of change from the exterior might entail a greater degree of awareness on the part of the nations which have to align to a series of general/international norms, and thus a strategy could be developed so as to include clear and strong provisions for the preservation of the national markers of identity. The unconscious absorbed change or the imposed one might lead to a more unfortunate case of being in the impossibility of defending specific national markers. Thus, the fight which has to be borne should include a strong component of consciousness raising in the direction of preserving traits of national identity.

At the opposite pole, we can find the situation in which some individuals, in their desire of adhering to a “superior” type of civilization might exhibit behaviour of repressing/ self-censoring the markers of their national identity. This form of denial of belonging to a nation and inheriting its national specificity is a means of distancing from its negative aspects: criminals and criminal groups, corruption, illiteracy, social status or even general lifestyle. For example, some Romanian people working in European countries avoid to openly state their nationality because they fear they might be stigmatized, especially given that the media often equals the Romanians with the Roma. Even representatives of the high culture, more or less metaphorically, denigrate the Romanian identity at the levels of historical evolution,

the psychological and intellectual profile of the Romanians, our language, the Romanian education, or iconic figures of the Romanian culture.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the steps that could be taken in order to prevent either the loss(es) that we have presented in our research or the coming to such absurd situations as the one mentioned above could be:

- a. *acceptance* of the fact that we live in a risk society (with special focus on the aspects debated in our paper) paralleled by active attempts to combat aspects of loss concerning the markers of national identity discussed above;
- b. *conservation* of the past as an inherent component of the future – the necessity to retrieve, recover and safeguard the principles and values associated with the past and with national identity in order to prevent future loss of national identity; it is by revitalizing the past that the present can continue into the future;
- c. *maintenance of diversity, democracy and peace* – people still identify themselves strongly with their national origin and the preservation of national identity is a very important factor for maintaining democracy and peace; people cannot be homogenized into artificial constructs as long as they feel that they do not belong to a community in the truest sense;
- d. *promotion of the concept of individuality and independence* in strong connection to the concept of alignment to a series of international norms and provisions;
- e. the implementation of *official programmes* together with individual efforts could also help the preservation of national identity despite inherent change.

#### 4. Conclusion

After briefly discussing (some of) the multiple layers of risks affecting the Romanian society at various levels (geographical, economic and financial, social, environmental, political, legal, cultural or axiological), a number of key ideas or conclusive remarks have surfaced. First of all, change is perhaps a central paradigm defining the contemporary society in its complexity. If such changes are inevitable, it is the preservation of the essential features of national identity that constantly remind people who they are and how they position themselves in the world without having their identity denied, altered or even fractured. National specificity strengthens the existence of variety and upholds the protection of authenticity. It is the acknowledgement of the fact that these two concepts do not exclude each other that could change the risk society into one where risk no longer means possible loss

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<sup>10</sup> See the controversial case of Horia-Roman Patapievici in his work *Politice* (1996).

but authentic future growth. This is because progress cannot be built on destruction and loss but on collaborative endeavour to maintain the valuable principles and accomplishments of the other. Consequently, embracing change outside the threat of loss is possible at both individual and collective levels and, in time, it ensures the endurance of humanity in general.

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## SUMMARY

### **The risk of losing national identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Romania, or national identity from adaptation to self-censorship**

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In the contemporary world of extremely dynamic movements in the fields of territorial state reconfiguration, economic “colonization”, globalization, Europeanization, migration of population, borrowing of cultural values and intensified cultural exchange or transfer, defining national identity has become a process which registers numerous changes and encounters various challenges. The classical features that assisted this process of defining national identity in the past – a historic territory, common myths, historical memories and values, a common public culture, common legal rights and duties, a common economy with territorial mobility (A. D. Smith 1991: 14) – undergo significant transformations each decade and the definition of a nation’s identity calls for important reconsiderations. One aspect worth considering is that of losing or self-censoring one’s national identity due to a nation’s own intention or some external demands of adaptation to general aspects of political, economic, financial, social, or cultural nature. Our paper intends to explore some of the causes or factors that might lead to twenty-first century Romania’s weakening, degradation or loss of national identity and suggest some possible solutions against such a process.

**Keywords:** Risk, national identity, culture, values, preservation, self-censorship