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Communitas and forms without foundations: Romania's case of interlocking liminalities

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Introduction

As Maria Mälksoo and Bahar Rumelili's contributions in this Forum show, the concept of liminality has either been ignored or understudied in International Relations (IR) theory. To a certain extent, liminality suffers from the same ills as the condition it refers to, since liminal actors, by finding themselves simultaneously inside and outside structures, puzzle and challenge them. It has been shown that through the lens of liminality it is possible to read deeper into the social construction of identities on the international scene, into the question of ontological security, and into actors' capacities of consolidating or subverting structural arrangements. When considering liminality for a particular case, its position as a concept within IR theory must be kept in mind. It challenges the linearity and neatness of many IR categories, and also, questions certain tendencies in IR theory that make it a rather self-referential system of concepts with the worrying capacity of developing a world entirely divorced from field realities; it is equally important to look at liminality as a way of seeing things which is inspired and informed by the fluctuating facts of social dynamics.

In order to avoid liminality becoming a geopolitical trope in the terminological artillery of the 'banal geopolitics of Europe'[1] (or any other universalising category), through which certain practices are enabled (such as the accession stages and categories that go with them; neighbour, associate, pre-accession candidate, candidate, etc.) but never analysed or made sense of, it is important to look at the cultural and political resources that agents in a liminal state mobilise and how they use it.

As an anthropological notion, liminality is built from the ground up, with indications coming from the field, rather than as a category imposed on concrete realities, fitting them within neat boundaries. Liminality is not a basket in which different

* To Eveline Sautaux, for whom the *limes* is never the limit, but the beginning of a new adventure.

[1] Merje Kuus, 'Policy and geopolitics: bounding Europe in Europe', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 101 (forthcoming 2011), p. 16.

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images, behaviours, ideas, and strategies can fit because they satisfy a particular criteria. It is rather the expression and the style of orderings, arrangements, and movements during a phase in the life of an actor, agent, entity, or a structure. As Iver Neumann pointed out in an informal discussion on the notion, liminality has a strong temporal dimension, and as such, its contribution comes from what it points to. In other words, saying about an entity that it is liminal does not necessarily explain its behaviour, does not indicate the steps that it might take, or ideas it might develop in a given circumstance; it does, however, help understand what are the different, often contradictory, parts that make up its identity and actions, uncovering the tools, materials, and strategies that an actor can choose from, or develops, in its dealings with others. There is an element of anticipation, rather than prediction connected to it. Liminality is best understood in relation to social structure, which to a certain extent it precedes and conditions.

Communitas as a condition

As the previous contributions focused on the characteristics of the liminal, on the 'in-betweenness' of its condition and the potentialities of that situation, I would like to concentrate on another element tightly connected to the question of liminality, namely *communitas*. Neither Turner, nor van Gennep directly defined liminality, preferring a rather indirect approach, describing the characteristics of liminars, or the processes they go through. Victor Turner spent a whole chapter describing and analysing the link between liminality and *communitas*[2] in order to get through the message about what liminality is as a state. For Turner, *communitas* is made up of the uncategorised, undefined, spontaneous relationships between statuses, roles, and offices in a society,[3] it is a most direct and immediate form of social existence. *Communitas* is articulated in relation to social structure, for the definition of which Turner borrows from Lévi-Strauss: structure is seen as a set of classifications, a model for thinking about culture and nature and ordering one's public life.[4] *Communitas* is also a reading of relationships in society, but a more underdetermined one. Turner classifies it as *existential and spontaneous*, dealing with the immediacy of human experience – an example of that being temporary moments of dissolution of social hierarchy, and destabilisation of social functions, such as revolutions, for example;[5] *normative*, 'where under the influence of time, the need to organise and mobilise resources, and the need for social control, the existential communitas is organised in a perduring social system';[6] and *ideological*, in terms of utopian social models based on existential *communitas*[7] – hippie and kibbutz communities. In International Relations we deal mostly with normative *communitas* (see below for a more detailed discussion). For Turner, *communitas* 'breaks through the interstices of structure in liminality'[8] in the sense that the models and classifications that are invented to

[2] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), p. 95.
[3] Ibid., p. 131.
[4] Ibid., p. 127.
[5] See Maria Mälksoo's article in this Forum.
[6] Turner, *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-Structure*, p. 132.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., p. 128.

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read the world sometimes omit certain elements or relationships, which nevertheless linger on at the level of actor's experience, and need to be taken into account.

Communitas can equally be seen as the 'id' in the id, ego, superego triad. This metaphor suggests that *communitas* is composed of contradictory elements, which – unlike in structural relations – do not exclude one another; at the same time, in case structure arises, *communitas* elements remain latent, until a breach allows them to manifest. To a certain extent, the current economic and political crisis that Europe is going through is a time when elements of *communitas*, such as unresolved cultural tensions and nationalist fears rise to the fore to inform political decisions and policy choices. This type of situation indicates that *communitas* underlies the complexity of liminality, which can at the same be time a way of being in itself AND a stage in a process of moving from one way of being to another.

Bahar Rumelili's article speaks of two instances in which liminality might be constituted in international processes: in the interstices of crosscutting discourses of identity, which create mismatching categorisations, and as a product of universalising discourses, where liminality designates the constant state of becoming of an actor in search for a place within an established structural arrangement. Both these processes underline the encounter between the specific and the general, text and discourse, context and model, as a matrix for *communitas* to be articulated by other and like along patterns of conflict and/or cooperation.

The state as a (potential) liminal actor on the international scene underlines a basic tension lying at the heart of this structural category (the state). A state is both a form, *quasi* universally used to mediate and organise the political processes of a given polity, and, originally, the reflection and outcome of patterns of relations (in a certain part of the world), which evolved into what we currently call the modern state. The state that finds itself in a liminal situation, whether as a mismatch of categories or as a stage on the way to a certain status, or both, poses the question as to the immutability of structural forms and their appropriateness in certain contexts. This happens because in such cases, processes and materials that normally get obscured by unambiguous categorisations are more visible and have more effects on political life. The Romanian case, below analysed, is a good example and goes at the heart of what the liminal challenges: the purity of forms and structures.

The kind of *communitas* that we can speak about in such cases as Romania, in which the actors going through the liminal stage are part of sophisticated international social structures and are themselves structured along the nation-state model and other highly organised patterns of interaction is normative *communitas*. It arises from the interaction between the forms mentioned above – the nation state, the international system, an ever-specialising juridical system, etc. – and the societies that they aim to structure. It is often manifested in a form of indeterminacy, such as, for example, incomplete modernisation, democratic deficiencies, ambiguous internal and international policies, sometimes combining contradictory patterns, perpetually criticised and at the same time defended. George Schöpflin aptly analysed the state in the South-Eastern region of Europe, pointing to the fact that there is a strong mismatch between the state as it was imported and imposed from Western Europe and the social and cultural structures of the area.[9] When a particular project is

[9] George Schöpflin, 'Defining South-Eastern Europe', *Balkanologie* 3:2 (December 1999) online 22 June 2010, available at: {http://balkanologie.revues.org/index743.html} accessed 26 September 2010. 'In South-Eastern Europe the complexity of social structures is not matched intellectually, cognitively or

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enacted, the less articulated points are not void, they are filled with the relationships that have yet to be specified, according to a model chosen.

The images and metaphors associated with the different articulations arising for the liminal actor are part of a vocabulary through which the latter makes sense and communicates its condition. They indicate the cultural, political, and identity-related elements that are at stake in identity negotiation processes, which are not the same in all cases, although they follow the same broad themes.

The Romanian case is examined with respect to one of the country's historically important partners, Europe, as embodied by the culture and civilisation of Western European countries, and the EU as the institutional expression of these arrangements. (Romania's other partners have been its most immediate neighbours, including Russia and the Ottoman Empire/Turkey) The case study is premised on the fact that as a polity, Europe and the EU produces spaces of liminality and liminal actors, often represented as multiple Easts, as part of the process of self-definition.[10]

The analysis indicates that the liminal condition becomes relevant for understanding relations if it is activated, or infused with political value, if it has a meaning for the purposes of a process. The play of images and subject positions shows how this is achieved, and whether an actor has engaged in domestication of subversion practices with respect to the structure it wishes to be a part of. The vocabulary developed to catalogue the liminal condition shows the main political elements along which the actor structures its experience and thus can provide insights into what are the main ontological and epistemological dilemmas or tensions that it is faced with. These are the kind of details that, if taken into account, can affect positively the interaction between structures and agents, other and like, by allowing for the inclusion of differences and their transformation into resources rather than points of contention.

Romania: a case of interlocking liminalities

The Romanian case features the two kinds of liminality mentioned above. Its trajectory is quite a typical case for EU accession countries, in terms of discursive themes and stages. In what follows I present the texts, discourse, strategies, and subject positions as they were experienced from the Romanian perspective, showing how the country engaged with and construed its liminal condition.

For centuries placed at the intersection and interference of empires, the three constitutive Principalities of what in 1859 became Romania, had developed an identity that sought to reconcile Eastern and Western influences, slipping into a state of permanent transaction between them, depending on the arrangements of the moment.[11]

semantically by society and social knowledge. Modernity was taken over by the state rather than by the society that had still to be modernised when the reception occurred, leaving the state the primary agent of modernisation in a dominant position over society, thereby reproducing the problem, because society finds it difficult to take on the state with inadequate information and social knowledge.'

[10] Merje Kuus, 'Europe's eastern expansion and the re-inscription of otherness in East Central Europe', *Progress in Human Geography*, 28:4 (2004), p. 484.

[11] Razvan Theodorescu, *Two Europes, an Intellectual Divorce?* (Bucharest: Romanian Institute of International Studies, 2004) pp. 46–7. 'In the Romanian Principalities we encounter at the time of the first modernity disconcerting alliances, opportune betrayals, unrestrainable corruption, forever withering for ever flowering again, hand in glove with flattery, the hyperlaudatory phrase addressed not only to the native voïvod, king or party First Secretary, but also to the impermanent foreign ruler, from the Sultan in Istanbul to the Russian Tsar and the Emperor in Vienna, up to Hitler or Stalin, whose names were

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As Larry Wolff noted in his book, the traveller to Eastern Europe and to Wallachia in particular noted the inhabitants of this land spoke a Roman language, 'although corrupted', and reminded one of ancient Rome through their garment but not through their miserable condition.[12] The language appeared to be a mixture of various other languages, in particular of Italian and Latin.[13] Beyond that, what was also surprising was the fact that in this 'barbaric land' people were nevertheless capable of refined gestures, such as the invitation to tea that the Voievod of Moldavia extended to Father Boscovitch during the latter's visit to his land.[14]

The structures and categories the Principalities were pitted against and took their cues from, belonged to both an underdeveloped, wild, uncivilised East, and a civilised, Catholic, modern West. In 1859, a country called Romania was constituted (through the unification of two of the Provinces), its identity wrapped around the discursive nexus of 'going [back] to Europe' (a very common theme in the East and South-East European space), whose main characteristic was described a being a barrier and an outpost of the West facing an ever menacing East.

The most important indication this period provides is that although the EU and its processes systematised and bureaucratised the question of transition to a presumably superior civilisation – thus also entrenching a process of producing liminals – this was based on previous tendencies, generally subsumed under the modernity project that the 'lesser' countries adhered to. The struggle of the liminal to make sense of its situation uncovers the choices that could have been made at a certain point in time, when modernity was not a natural or inevitable choice, although it was presented as such by those who wished it. The fact that these choices remain even when the liminal has ceased to be considered as such is crucial in understanding behaviours or attitudes that do not correspond to expected standards.

The beginnings: a country placed at the crossroads of all evils

For Romania it can be said that the 1849–59 period, when the political and administrative bases of the new country were set, was also the period when liminality as a state in between identities was articulated into liminality as a transitional phase to another state. A crucial and very specific feature to remember about this case is that the discourses arguing for the creation of Romania as a political actor in Europe and in the world had as one of their main core elements the liminal. There was no pre-existent entity called Romania, which also happened to be in a liminal situation; the liminal situation of its constitutive parts was at the centre of its rationale as an entity, and it was meant to become from vulnerability, a strength.

The political discourse and arena at the time of the creation of the country mobilised every existent historical, literary, geographical, and politically relevant text that could be used to stress the fact that the Romanian Principalities (precursors to a

given in a sadly hilarious succession to a central square in Bucharest … In a country of peasant pride, the "exit from history" took the shape, paradoxically, of perpetual transaction. This was above all a transaction to insure the safety of a life forever under threat.'

[12] Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe – the Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 47–8.

[13] Ibid., pp. 177–8.

[14] Ibid., pp. 189–90.

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unified Romanian state) had decided to break with the state of being subordinated to the Ottoman Empire through Phanariot rule, and to undertake a return to Europe, with which it was thought, ties had previously existed and needed to be reconstructed.[15]

Texts as old as the fifteenth century, emphasising the difficulty the Romanian principalities had to manage what was a relatively untenable situation between Russia and the Ottoman empire, were enlisted to support this phase.[16] Riding the wave of the 1848 liberal revolutions, Romanian elites intensified their fight for the unification of Moldova and Wallachia, which, in their eyes could constitute a barrier between an uncivilised East and a democratic West. This was the cornerstone of their argument for a single country, and a first concrete instance of the political relevance given to being placed between structures. The most representative text of the period (supported by many others) eloquently presented this idea:

> Moldova and Wallachia are important for the Oriental question, because we are convinced that the quiet of the Orient much depends on the situation which shall be created for these countries … if the Occidental powers want these two Principalities to become again a power element for the European civilisation against Asiatic barbarity, and not unending trouble, they should help the two countries fight independently. '… whose social mission is to represent the Latin element, and the Western civilisation in the Orient and whose political mission is to split in two the eastern Slavs in order to stop them from becoming a compact and dangerous mass for Europe' … these provinces can form a State without harming the Porte, even in its interest, since it would constitute a serious barrier between it and Russia.[17]

This is how a first emblematic image of the liminal phase was coined in the Romanian case.

Given the aims of Moldavian and Wallachian elites, it was necessary to sell the country's position based on past experiences and exchanges with Europe; at the time, the image of the buffer and the barrier made most sense given the Principalities' situation and Europe's battles. The image was the result of the encounter between Romanian texts, exalting the dilemmas and challenges of a difficult position – 'in the way of all vicissitudes', where empires' spheres of influenced crossed and clashed – and the European discourses on the non-Europeans and on modernity, which was proposed as a better social model.

The barrier/buffer suggested solidity and reliance, signifying a move from being in the margin of European powers – in the ambit of the Russian and Ottoman Empires – to starting a rapprochement (through a modernisation project) by performing a function in relation to Europe. The discussion and insistence on this went hand in hand with the fact that the very make-up of the Romanian culture is structured around the tireless search for an absolute foundational model for its identity.[18] Hence, the constant oscillation between those promoting an Eastern model, favouring basic choices such as a rural, community-based, rather passive polity, and those advocating a 'synchronisation with the western world'.[19] With this in mind, the Romanians' self-promotion as a buffer and a barrier did not only serve as a tactic of securing their

[15] Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria ideilor politice românesti*, Colectia Istorica (Munchen: Ion Dumitru Verlag, 1984), p. 34.

[16] Mihail Kogalniceanu, article about the necessity of the union, *Steaua Dunarii* (1 October 1855), published in M. Kogalniceanu, *Texte social-politice alese* (Bucharest, 1967), pp. 184–5.

[17] I. C. Bratianu, 'Memoriu asupra Romaniei pentru Napoleon III', *Scrierile si cuvântarile lui Bratianu, 1821–1891* (Bucharest: Carol Göbl, 1853), pp. 35–6.

[18] Monica Spiridon, *Les dilemmes de l'identité aux confins de l'Europe: le cas roumain* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), p. 34.

[19] Ibid., p. 55.

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identity as a European nation, and a confirmation of the victory of the Westernisers, but also played on Europe's sense of ontological insecurity by presenting themselves as an instrument for strengthening and protecting the values promoted by it.

Subject positioning and predicates in this first phase illustrated the road from a marginal, passive country suffering the hardships of history, into an active agent of its own destiny, capable of producing benefits for those who accepted it in their midst, namely other European nation-states. The discourse on the liminal at this time revealed the fact that the Romanian Principalities and Europe were cast in the 'European' and 'lesser European' categories, and very rarely into 'us' and 'them', as sign of a clear opposition. This is directly linked to the idea of a liminal as a lesser self, rather than an opposing other. Positioning Romania as the barrier on the way of all misfortunes, as a guardian of Europe's integrity and prosperity, indicated a self-perception as part of Europe. The nineteenth-century discourse on the liminal was dominated by a student/master positioning between Romania and European Great powers (often subsumed under the name of simply 'Europe'), which were perceived as great holders and dispensers of values and civilisation, as well as arbiters of Romania's progress on the path of modernisation. This was mainly achieved through seeking approval from Europe.[20] Ironically, this is a process that in the post-1989 period was reproduced by Eastern European states, with what Slavoj Zizek called their supposedly naïve gaze towards the West: 'Eastern Europe functions for the West as its Ego-Ideal: the point from which the West sees itself in a likeable, idealized form, as worthy of love. The real object of fascination for the West is thus the *gaze*, namely the supposedly naive gaze by means of which Eastern Europe stares back at the West, fascinated by its democracy.'[21]

In the terms outlined in the theoretical articles above, Romania, by operationalising what its 'in-betweenness' meant, adopted a discursive turn and practice which worked with already existent classifications proposed by European powers, confirming the very concrete mental division between East and West, civilised and uncivilised, worthy and unworthy actors. It was just trying to make sure of being 'in' rather than 'out'. The notion of the barrier, modern in its delimitating functions, gradually replaced other metaphors, ushering a more technical terminology in texts that otherwise used a certain Oriental flourish to pass their messages. This indicated not only a play on the question of ontological security, but also a step into getting out of the epistemological uncertainty that might have existed in terms of how the reality of their relationship was known and expressed.

Gearing the resources (discursive and material) described above into making sense of Romania's liminal condition, particularly for an external audience, or at least in this audience's language, which was not always the local one, left many open ends within. Romania, placed at the crossing influences of where the Roman *limes* used to be '*une limite de l'Empire qui distinguait non pas deux territoires mais deux rythmes de temps, le temps des hommes dans l'ordre des humains et le temps des*

[20] Barbu Katargiu, 'Rolul vechei noastre boierimi', *Monitorul Oficial* (21 September 1859), p. 453. 'Gentlemen, Europe gave Romania its rights back, but it also watches our gestures. It demands that our country has a solid army. Let us conform with Europe's wish, so that it can see we are worthy of the status it gave us.'

[21] Slavoj Zizek, 'Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead', *New Left Review*, I:183 (September–October 1990).

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monstres dans l'ordre de l'inconnu'[22] (a limit of the Empire which distinguished not between two territories, but between two rhythms of time, the time of humans in the realm of humans, and the time of monsters in the realm of the unknown) found itself faced with a structural dilemma. If, as Victor Turner pointed out, liminality is a moment 'in and out of time', and in and out of social structure,[23] the tension Romania encountered at that point was of being in and out the time of modernity proposed as a model of society by the European core powers. It is interesting to note that in this period, Titu Maiorescu, active politician and literary critic elaborated one of the most powerful cultural thesis on Romania, quoted still today, called the theory of forms without foundations. In brief, the main argument ran that the modernisation process undertaken in the country was importing forms – institutional, political, economic, social, and cultural – which did not really correspond to the Romanian terrain, and which were merely imitated, and not really integrated. It was in the space between the forms and the materials that did not correspond to them that the traditional network of *communitas*-like relationships, the 'out of modernity', took refuge, signifying the incompleteness so characteristic of the liminal. Pockets of this type of *communitas* would manifest in the subversion of received forms by local practices and materials that combined seemingly contradictory features. The form without foundation theory was another way of saying Romania, with its liminal characteristics, was at the same time placed within and without the dominant forms irradiating from the European core, although it placed itself within the European discourse.

As Romania's status and position on the European scene improved between the two World Wars, the liminal dimension continued to be appropriated discursively and practiced. The image of the bridge and other variations suggesting the linking quality of the bridge, such as the nexus, plaque tournante, corridor, and passageway, all emphasised a rapprochement towards the ultimate goal of being recognised as part of the European family of nations, and the positive capabilities of a liminal position. Far from subverting, these connotative chains reinforced already existent categories and also supported certain decisions and policies, such as military alliances, strategic decisions, economic arrangements, whose justification also rested on the value of the country as a liminar that had the capacity of linking opposing structures, and conveying the message of civilisation to those who were not. This was a phase when the creative possibilities of the liminal state were emphasised along with the idea that had already been stressed by the image of the barrier, of the possibility of transforming weakness into strength.

C'est alors que pour nous autres, rangés aux portes des deux mondes, des possibilités infinies de transit s'ouvriront immanquablement. Toutes ces contrées limitrophes, entrées dans la voie du déclin il y a quelques siècles, recouvriraient vite leur importance économique de jadis parce que placées sur le chemin le plus court de l'Asie. (It is then that for us, placed at the gates of the two worlds, infinite transit possibilities will undoubtedly open. All these bordered countries, declining a few centuries ago, will quickly recover their former economic importance because they would be placed on the shortest way to Asia.)[24]

[22] Paul Augustin Deproost, 'Hic non finit Roma: les paradoxes de la frontière romaine, un modèle pour l'Europe?, *Frontières Imaginaires Européens* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2004), p. 33.
[23] Turner, *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-Structure*, p. 96.
[24] C. Bratesco et al., *L'unité et les fonctions du pays et du peuple roumain* (Bucuresti: Cartea Românească, 1943), p. 67.

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This affirmation coins very well the basic mould of Romanian identity, characterised by the inverted tendency of keeping one's identity in relation to the thread of history and at the same time the taste and opening towards heterogeneous models.[25]

From limes to the frontier

Although Romania was quite active in promoting these advantageous images in the interwar era, it was only during the 1990s, after the communist hiatus, that the appropriation of its liminal state truly started to become a tool in its relations to a highly structured European Union (EU). Even then, in a first phase, the liminal condition and the vocabulary around it was avoided between 1990–4.

The early 1990s were characterised in Romania by what Sorin Antohi called 'geocultural bovarysm',[26] a discursive practice through which the leaders of the country tried to change its position on the mental map of Europe by alleging it to be Central European, rather than Balkan or Eastern European. By under-investing in the liminal dimension, and therefore the barrier or bridge images, Romanian decision-makers of the time hoped to convince the EU partners of the country's worthiness by leapfrogging out of a negatively connoted East into what seemed a more attractive, wholesome, and less torn Central Europe. This strategy did not function, not least because there were actually no texts, elaborations, or policies that could support such a claim, never mind the fact that the Visegrad Countries (which were claiming Central Europe) did not accept Romania into their 'club'. The actual geopolitical and economic strategies that were employed by the administration conveyed an ambiguous message regarding the ideological and civilisational choice for the country, since they were a mixed bag of neo-communist and liberal-democratic measures that convinced no one, least of all Romanians, regarding what direction the country was actually taking.[27] Essentially, Romania's mismatching categories and marginality was not admitted or acknowledged by its leaders.

This instance underlined a very important element about the role of texts and discourse in constituting an identity by showing that they are not as easily instrumentalised as might be thought. As the claims of being considered a Central European country had no historical background, had not been systematised in any study or reflections, and were not sustained by enough cultural and political features, they could not be productive of any convincing arguments. Romania remained in the East of the EU imaginary, in an unacknowledged liminal condition, struggling with the contradiction of its policies towards both Eastern and Western structures.[28]

Subsequent administrations promptly recuperated and reappropriated the liminal, first in its dimension as a product of mismatching identities, and later, as a phase on the way to joining the EU. This process presupposed a return to older discursive trends. There was an explicit and sustained reconnection with elements of past discourses that emphasised the importance of Romania's geographic position to its

[25] Monica Spiridon, *Les dilemmes de l'identité aux confins de l'Europe: le cas roumain*, p. 95.
[26] Sorin Antohi, 'Les Roumains dans les années 90. Géographie symbolique et identité sociale', *Exercitiul distantei* (Bucuresti: Nemira, 1997).
[27] Ruxandra Stoicescu, *Liminality in international relations. Three case studies, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine* (unpublished manuscript, 2009).
[28] Ibid.

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geopolitical value, thus bringing back into the centre of discussion liminal images such as the bridge, the plaque tournante, crossroads, or point of confluence. Unlike the previous era, the emphasis went on their positive connotations, and even more importantly, on their connection to Romania's identitary quest and destiny. They were reinscribed in Romania's modernisation project. This reopening of the narrative of Romania's road towards the goal of joining what had traditionally been seen as the 'civilised' world, with its democratic values and modern structures (which would be signified through NATO and EU accession) revived the use of liminal images.

One of its effects was, to a certain extent, subversive and surprising at the same time. What had not been achieved through the stubborn insistence on a place in Central Europe, was achieved through a nuanced reading of Romania's liminal position in South-Eastern Europe. This was a geopolitical category that had been theorised by a noted interwar Romanian historian, Nicolae Iorga. Its history is quite interesting, indicating that South-Eastern Europe was coined as a geographical notion in the early nineteenth century by a German geographer, and was established in geopolitical parlance as a recognised category in 1861 by a German diplomat and scholar, Johann Georg van Hahn.[29] However, despite its use by the English foreign-service well into the beginning of the twentieth century,[30] it took a Romanian historian's lengthy theorisation,[31] fifty years of communism, and a series of Balkan wars (the latest in the 1990s) to anchor it on the mental map of Europe in 1999 with the South-East Europe stability pact. The Romanians were amongst the most vocal to recuperate what was another Western coined concept and sell it back to the EU. But for this to occur the Romanians (and other countries in this area) had to come to terms with the diversity of relationships that their placement brought, be them positive or negative.

In the Romanian case, associated with it was a policy initiative elaborated in the late 1990s, of a series of trilateral agreements aiming to bring together the constellation of neighbours Romania had. The trilateral treaties initiative had at its basis the recognition that Romania had a special position in Central Europe, as 'the most important bridge between Central Europe and South-East Europe, which, in my opinion, constitutes the South-East European extension of Central Europe'.[32] In terms of the strategies liminal actors adopt, this one showed that the subversion effect is also connected with looking further back into the history of relations between entities, than expected. Proposing and imposing what was, in terms of conceptual power, a relatively new structuring category and initiatives went beyond the simple inscription within a process, towards its appropriation.

Beyond this point, Romania followed a discursive path to EU accession, which saw the gradual transformation of the metaphor of the bridge into that of the frontier. Despite subject positions and predicates producing a more active and less subaltern subject in relation to the EU, in 2004, Calin Popescu Tariceanu, future prime minister, articulated where the country found itself in relation to its main aims: 'With the 2004 elections the Romanian transition ended. We are starting the modernisation of the

[29] Alex Drake-Francis, 'The Prehistory of a Neologism: South-Eastern Europe', *Balkanologie*, 3:2 (December 1999) online 22 June 2010, available at: {http://balkanologie.revues.org/index751.html} accessed 28 September 2010.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Nicolae Iorga, *Ce este sud-estul European* (Bucharest, 1941).
[32] Ibid., p. 284.

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country through EU integration and the reconstruction of the welfare state. Now we are at the frontier between a controversial transition and the re-launching of the Romanian modernity.'[33] With this affirmation he pointed to the fact that Romania was going through a multilayered transitional phase, or, as has been previously mentioned, a process where the liminal was not likely to subside, since there was always something else needed before achieving full status as an EU country.

At this moment, Romania's interlocking liminalities separated, as it was no longer portrayed as a country caught in the mismatches between competing discourses and identities, and insistence was placed on the transitional phase towards EU membership, reinforcing domestication processes. This is in stark contrast with the case of Turkey, where emphasis is placed far more on the subversive processes enhanced by the country's liminal placement at the intersection of incongruent and divergent identities and structural categorisations.[34] A logical conclusion would be that domestication strategies tend to be associated with liminality as a transitional phase in an entity's life, whereas subversive ones are associated with liminality as produced by the aforementioned mismatches. Both types of strategies aim towards the actor being liminal no more, whether this goal is reached through assimilation or with outgrowing the vulnerable features of the liminal, as Turkey seems to be currently doing.

Liminal as it might have been, Romania's image improved, since its capacities as a projector of democracy and connector in its area were stressed. The policy initiatives constructed around the Black Sea region as an area of great potentiality due to the multiple influences and geopolitical vectors, marked the transition from vulnerability to strength. What a century ago was seen as a source of troubles and misfortunes was constructed as a source of hope and audacity. A 2006 report on Romania's role as a member of the EU emphasised precisely this journey, by saying that, although the country is still placed in a vulnerable spot, at the EU frontier, close to areas ridden by conflict and instability, it is no longer a consumer, but a producer of security and stability.[35]

However, that is not to say liminality ceased to be an issue for Romania. Its placement at the EU frontier and the still numerous instances of incomplete modernisation and democratisation were still a reminder of the mismatching features characteristic of the liminal. As Merje Kuus recently pointed out, Eastern European countries developed in this period strategies of listening to the EU and adopting a specialised language that masked the incongruities between them and the systems they were supposed to adopt.[36]

[33] Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, 'Speech before the Senate and the House of Representatives' (28 December 2004). Available at: {http://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno.stenograma?ids=5788&idm=3&idl=1} accessed October 2007.

[34] As documented by Bahar Rumelili in 'Constructing Identity and Relating to Difference: Understanding EU's Mode of Differentiation', *Review of International Studies*, 30 (Jan 2004), pp. 27–47, 'Liminality and the Perpetuation of Conflicts: Turkish-Greek Relations in the Context of the Community-Building by the EU', *European Journal of International Relations*, 9:2 (June 2003), pp. 213–48; and Ruxandra Stoicescu, *Liminality in international relations. Three case studies, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine* (unpublished manuscript, 2009).

[35] Gheorghe Ciascai, 'Entre Balkans et Orient, l'approche roumaine de la PESC', Occasional Paper, (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, 2006), p. 1.

[36] Merje Kuus, 'The ritual of listening to foreigners: Appropriating geopolitics in Central Europe', in Noël Parker (ed.), *Geopolitics of Europe's Identity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 178.

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Conclusion

In terms of the contribution to understanding the multiple images and practices that can arise for liminal actors, perhaps one of the most important features that the Romanian case underlines is the journey from vulnerability to strength, from invisibility to visibility. This turn seemed to happen as Romania sought to give value to a liminality arisen in the interstices of mismatching discourses and identities, and make it a relevant dimension supporting its efforts in joining Europe. The Romanian case shows that by articulating the characteristics and position of the liminal into texts that had a political and strategic mission, liminality became a politically mobilised resource. The importance of this nuance grows when one encounters cases in which the liminal dimension exists, but is not given high value. The Ukraine is such a case, in which the liminal was recognised and even accepted, but did not become a strong 'selling point', or even one of the main lenses through which the experience of being Ukrainian was articulated. A combination of factors influenced this outcome overtime, varying from a lack of a solid tradition of political thought to the fact that Ukraine seems to be caught in the EU's own classification of liminal paces, under the Neighbourhood policy.

The vocabulary developed in Romania ever since the nineteenth century around this issue (barrier, crossroads, bridge, nexus, plaque tournante, frontier, etc.) precedes the technical categories created in our age by the EU in order to indicate the degree of liminality its candidates are at. The subject positions corollary to those images and strategies point to the long history that European powers, before the EU, had in creating such spaces, emphasising the continuity of the liminal condition and therefore, the continuous efforts different actors deployed in dealing with it.

Romania could be considered a case of domestication processes in relation to the way it managed its liminal condition, since it opted for a firm inscription within the European ambit, reproducing and strengthening the binary categories proposed by the dominating discourse. In the early 1990s some would even talk of Romania trying to run away from the East and from the Balkans, in its attempt to convince the EU of its qualities as a Central European country. This was a failed subversive attempt to change a dominant mental map of Europe. Ironically, later on, Romania was successful in repositioning itself on that map not by trying to avoid its placement, but by embracing it even further, in its specifics, deepening the notion of South-Eastern Europe, which has by now become an accepted geopolitical category. This particular instance, combined with the policy initiative that was tightly connected to it (the trilateral agreements) underlined that going further into the roots of what is initially construed as a point of vulnerability (as the Romanian geographical position was for a long time considered) can be turned into a point of strength.

An article written in 2001 by Tony Judt on Romania bore the title: 'Romania between history and Europe'. The study through the lens of liminality shows indeed that Romania has for a long time been caught between its history as an actor confronted with a particular set of structural arrangements, and Europe as a particular discourse, of which it has chosen to be part of. Thus, different Romanian texts, historical, literary, geographic, etc. had to be articulated and put together in such a way as to be intelligible for an audience which was to be seduced and convinced, and at the same time in a way as to construct a story of the self that had a destiny less tragic and subdued.

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The Romanian story of liminality provides indications about how the liminal state can be conceived of. It can be structured along temporal or spatial axes, or both. The temporal axis concerns processes, such as a modernisation or democratisation project, whilst the spatial axis refers to geographic positioning. These categories relate to what Bahar Rumelili has termed acquired and inherent qualities, respectively, concerning the European project, and indicate the nature of the liminal dimension one can encounter, as part of a (ritual) process, or as a state in the interstices of social structure, or both.

These two kinds of liminality are connected with the question of *communitas*, because, depending on their combination and distribution, they produce a series of social relationships and realities that are not easily classifiable under categories such as 'democratic', 'developed', 'modern', but which are nevertheless experienced at the point where the form of the state (and its corollaries) meets with the perpetually mobile matter of society. By leaving the space open for ambiguous and contradictory tendencies the liminal state pushes to a reconsideration of structures as neither bad nor good, but rather in terms of their usefulness in understanding the world, or lack thereof. The most powerful message the state as a liminal actor sends is that forms and structures, of whatever kind, cannot become substantialised, things-in-themselves,[37] because that is the point when they become divorced from the terrain they are supposed to represent, which feeds them.

The encounter between the Romanian text and the European discourse is a good example, as it produced mismatches, revealed by the basic tension between imported forms without foundations. At a higher level this effect points to the basic dilemma of actors entering structures at the expense of their own particularisms – which are perpetually forced into places of refuge rather than elaborated as resources.

[37] It could be said, and many have, that in this sense liminality is not so different from hybridity, which has to a certain extent been its main theoretical rival, at least in IR. However, one of the main differences between the two notions is that whereas hybridity points to a new construct, a mix, producing ambivalence and ambiguity, liminality – in most cases studied – offers tools for deconstruction and ways of understanding how things do not mix, and yet can still exist together side by side. Hybridity has more diffuse effects, and does not challenge political structures as much as cultural ones, whereas liminality takes on the question of structure developing a life of its own, by resetting the focus on the potentiality of actors' agency and its effects.

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