

## **National identity in King Michael's anniversary speech in the Romanian Parliament**

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*In this study, I examine the construction of national identity in King Michael's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary speech, held in the Romanian Parliament in October 2011. This speech represents the quintessence of all His Majesty's efforts to promote Romania as one lawful European member that earned its place next to the other European countries not only by returning to democracy in 1989 but also through its constant endeavour to promote the core values of the European Union. Using theories on national identity rooted in linguistics and sociology, in this study I investigate if and how national identity was emphasised and linguistically constructed in this speech. Given the political situation in Romania and the European context, the King's speech comes as an attempt to unite people around a common goal: to create a stronger Romania for the future generations, in which a strong national identity might play a crucial part. Through the analysis, it became obvious to various extents that the speech emphasised and linguistically constructed national identity.*

**Keywords:** *national identity, King Michael, political speech, construction of national identity*

### **1. Introduction**

Even though the idea of autochthonous national identity is widely debated throughout Europe, the idea of an "identity" that might be considered "national" seems to be only a subjective construction. The term 'identity' is a fluctuating phenomenon. According to the objectivist perception of identity, there are objective factors defining one's identity, such as a common origin, language, culture, religion, psychology and connections to a certain territory. The subjectivist perception, on the other hand, tells us that the only thing defining to what community or group one belongs is one's sense of belonging to that specific community. Hall argued that "the fully unified, completed, secure and coherent

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identity is a fantasy" (1996, 598). Instead, it transforms itself to suit new purposes. The same is true for *national* identity, simply because nations do not have natural identities – the identities of nations are “incessantly negotiated through discourse”. They are taken from history and shaped by historical events and memories. Hence, they can be remade in history just as easily (Paresh 1994, 504).

Today, the question of national identity is frequently brought up in Europe as extreme right-wing parties with xenophobic agendas gain support across the continent with nationalist arguments. Often, the question of what is “Swedish”, “French” or “Hungarian” is at the centre of the debate, as this “identity” is something that, according to the proponents of these parties, needs to be protected from the influence of cultures brought in to the countries by immigrants. At the other side of the spectrum, national identity is sometimes questioned or contested in newly established states or former colonies (Ukraine and South Sudan being two very recent examples), as those countries are often made up of various linguistic or ethnic groups that never sought to create a sovereign state together. Even though Hall states that all modern nations are “cultural hybrids” (1996, 617), many of these nations have a history of linguistic and cultural continuity and were, in some sense, shaped from their own initiative. This is true for most European nations.

In this study, I will look at the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary speech held by King Michael in the Romanian Parliament in a time of political turmoil and aims to examine whether or not national identity was being emphasised in those times of crisis. This will be done using theories rooted in linguistics and sociology that will be applied in the analysis, which hopefully will highlight important aspects and tools employed in the construction of national identity.

## **2. Purpose and research question**

Building on the above, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether or not national identity is under construction in the selected material. As mentioned before, the material comprises King Michael’s 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary speech, held in the Romanian Parliament in October 2011. The essence of this speech is emphasising the importance of great historical events in order to serve as an inspiration to meet the challenges of the future.

Investigating national identity is interesting from both a linguistic and a political perspective. As for the latter, one could ask many questions such as what importance the topics brought up in this speech actually had. However, as this is a

study focusing on the Romanian language, I shall try to investigate what was said and how was said. What I intend to investigate is the following:

*Is the King emphasising and linguistically constructing a national identity for Romania in his speech?*

*If yes, how this is being executed?*

### **3. Background**

King Michael was born in 1921 at Foişor Castle, Sinaia, Romania, the son of Carol II of Romania (then Crown Prince of Romania) and Princess Elena of Greece. He was born as the grandson of then-reigning King Ferdinand I of Romania and he was to become the fourth King in the history of the country.

Although he had two short reigns (1927-1930 under regency and 1940-1947) and he was quite young, his decisions related to the WWII in Romania and to the Romanian state at that time are considered to having had a serious impact on the nation's history. These decisions turned him into the Romanian head of state who changed the course of the WWII in Romania and in Europe, by turning arms against the Nazis, with the coup against dictator Ion Antonescu considered to have shortened the war by 6 months, thus saving hundreds of thousands of lives. Moreover, the move enabled Transylvania reunification.

On 23 August 1944, Michael joined the pro-Allied politicians, a number of army officers, and armed communist-led civilians in staging a coup against military Marshal Ion Antonescu, who was Hitler's ally fighting for the Axis powers, but in fact he was considered rather Hitler's puppet, used by the Nazis to take advantage of Romania's oil fields and other natural resources of the country. King Michael ordered Antonescu's arrest by the Royal Palace Guard. In a radio broadcast to the Romanian nation and army, Michael issued a cease-fire just as the Red Army was entering Moldavia, in Iasi, proclaimed Romania's loyalty to the Allies, announced the acceptance of the truce offered by the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union, and declared war against Germany.

For this act, King Michael was awarded, at the end of the war, the highest rank of the American Legion of Merit by the US President, Harry Truman. He was also decorated with the Soviet Order of Victory by Stalin "for the courageous act of the radical change in Romania's politics towards a break-up from Hitler's Germany and an alliance with the Allied forces, at the moment when there was no clear sign yet of Germany's defeat", according to the official description of the decoration.

However, the history seemed to be against him as his decision to turning against Nazis and shortening the war did not prevent the later Soviet occupation, which would also negatively reverse the course his life and destiny. Under the terms of the armistice, Romania recognized its defeat by the USSR and was placed under occupation of the Allied forces, with the Soviets, as their representative, in control of media, communication, post, and civil administration behind the front. In March 1945, political pressures forced King Michael to appoint a pro-Soviet government headed by Petru Groza. Between August 1945 and January 1946, during what was later known as the "royal strike", King Michael unsuccessfully tried to oppose the Groza government by refusing to sign its decrees. The USA and the UK refused to intervene. The entire fight against the communists ended by King's forced abdication. Early on the morning of 30 December 1947, Michael was preparing to spend the New Year's Eve in Sinaia at the Peleş Castle, when the Prime Minister Petru Groza summoned him back to Bucharest. Michael returned to Elisabeta Palace in Bucharest to find it surrounded by the army unit that was loyal to the Communists. Groza and the Communist Party leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej urged him to sign a pre-typed declaration of abdication. Unable to call in loyal troops, due to the fact that the telephone lines were cut, Michael signed the document. Later on, after he returned to Romania, the King recounted that the communist leaders back then had threatened him that over 1000 students, who were imprisoned at the at time, would be killed if he had not signed the abdication.

He embarked on a long exile, along with his mother, an exile that would last until 1989 when the communist regime eventually fell. Despite the communist propaganda that Michael would have left with considerable valuable assets, the King has repeatedly denied the reports, saying the only things he took were four personal automobiles loaded on two train cars.

His life was to be as challenging in exile as it had been before. Yet, he continued to serve as a beacon of hope for all Romanians who believed in the power of monarchy. After the fall of the communist regime and two unsuccessful attempts to return to Romania, in 1997 he finally enjoyed a happy homecoming. During all this time, he never ceased to promote Romania in Europe and worldwide, playing a key role in Romania becoming a member of NATO and of the European Union.

Finally, in 2011, as a tribute to his 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary, his contribution to modern Romania was acknowledged and was granted all the privileges of a former chief of state and he was invited to address the Romanian Parliament. Although not without his critics, King Michael remains a greatly admired and highly regarded

man both in Romania and around the world for his integrity, his devotion to his people and his courage in the face of daunting odds.

## 4. Theoretical background

### 4.1. The bases

The theoretical framework of this study is constituted by Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl and Liebhart's theory on what constitutes national culture and national identity, and how this identity is created and upheld. I shall try to present it briefly in this section.

Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl and Liebhart have presented their own theory on what constitutes the discourse on national identity and their pilot analyses of national identity construction in Austria (1999, 30). This theory, or rather "thematic areas", is later employed in their investigation on national identity discourse in Austria in *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. Wodak et al. present their own five aspect scheme, their own adapted version of the theories presented by Hall (1996) and Kolakowski (1999) and the initial findings of their study. The following is what Wodak et al. stipulate as the five major thematic areas of national identity construction:

- 1) The linguistic construction of the *homo nationalis*
- 2) The narration and confabulation of a common political past
- 3) The linguistic construction of a common culture
- 4) The linguistic construction of a common political present and future
- 5) The linguistic construction of a "national body"

As their data concerns Austria and their study differs from mine, I have decided not to use their theory as such, as I find part of it to be irrelevant to my material. Furthermore, I believe that, even though Wodak et al. have created their own theory of what national identity discourse is comprised of, some of these elements are highly unspecific and difficult to detect. That specifically concerns the third and the fifth elements on their list. Therefore, I have decided to return to work with a selection of the remaining three elements to create my own perspective of what constitutes national identity construction.

### 4.2. The framework

As mentioned before, I will base my search for a construction of national identity in this speech on the following three instruments:

- 1) The construction of a *homo nationalis*
- 2) Narration and confabulation of a common political past
- 3) The linguistic construction of a common political present and future

I consider these three to be instruments of a national identity construction. As such, they are all functioning methods for the construction of national identity and each of them could, individually, assist in the creation of such an identity. These three instruments are thus, not components of a set universal package invaluable to the construction of national identity, since there are many ways to create, construct, shape and establish a national identity. Nonetheless, I have chosen to examine these particular instruments since I believe them to be relevant to my primary material. In the following passages, I shall try to argue, more specifically, for why I have chosen them and to present them more exhaustively.

The first instrument is, as said, the construction of "*homo nationalis*", an entity that is actively constructed. According to Wodak et al. speechmakers could appeal to emotional attachments to one's *Vaterland*, a national mentality and conjecture certain national behavioural dispositions (Wodak et al. 1999, 30-31). Hence, a speaker using this tool is attributing particular characteristics to a people.

The second instrument is "narration and confabulation of a common political past". The construction of a political past concerns past political successes, defeats and times of prosperity, rather than simply creating pseudo-history. If historical memory concerns mentioning certain events, the narration of a common political past tells us the story of how a nation together created those events. Here, I argue that the importance lies in a nation having shared something, with the actual happenings being of secondary significance. Wodak et al. give the example of how Austrian politicians have emphasised how the Austrians were victims of National Socialism (Wodak et al. 1999, 31). Despite this being an unpleasant memory, it is effective as it paints a picture of a shared political past. If this notion is present in my material, the King will try to emphasise shared past events, regardless of them being positive or negative.

The third instrument is called the "linguistic construction of a political present and future". It concerns citizenship, political achievements, current problems, dangers and future aspirations. Here, the speaker will attempt to create a common political present and future using linguistic means. According to the study carried out by Wodak et al., there are a number of strategies employed in order to create a national identity. The strategies used to create and establish a certain national identity are called "Constructive Strategies" (Wodak et al. 1999, 33), and Wodak et al. present a number of sub-strategies within this category. I shall try to present them briefly. The "Assimilation, Inclusion and Continuation Strategy" aims to emphasise intra-national sameness and positive political

continuity, and a speaker performing this strategy will try, among other things, to unite his audience through the use of “we”, spatial reference and temporal references indicating continuity, such as “since” or “always”. The “Singularisation Strategy” establishes a nation’s identity by accentuating its uniqueness, and the “Autonomisation Strategy” focuses its emphasis on the nation’s independence and sovereignty. The “Unification and Cohesivation Strategy” emphasises shared common features and the will to co-operate and unify, through appeals for co-operation and “lexemes with semantic components creating unification” (Wodak et al. 1999, 38). The “Dissimilation/ Exclusion and Discontinuation Strategy” tries to emphasise inter-national differences and difference between present and past, by excluding other groups through the use of “they” and “them”. A “Strategy of Avoidance” aims to suppress/background intra-national differences and inter-national sameness, and the “Vitalisation Strategy” uses personifications and anthropomorphisms in order to vitalise features of a nation (Wodak et al. 1999, 37-39). Being aware of these strategies will undoubtedly facilitate my search for linguistic construction of a common political present and future.

I believe that the three instruments presented above constitute a theory of how the creation of national identity is accomplished that is relevant to my material.

## 5. Method

After a careful analysis of the speech, I shall present examples in the analysis section of this study. Looking at the speech, there are many things of interest depending on the purpose you are examining it for. In the analysis I shall apply the theoretical framework presented, and examine whether or not the instruments outlined above are being used. Succeeding in this will require a bit of methodological assistance, i.e. defining what I am looking for in relation to each component of the theoretical framework.

As for *homo nationalis*, I shall look for statements evoking a certain national mentality or behaviour. This means examining whether or not the King appeals to an active construction of a national human being, including “national features”. As for the narration and confabulation of a common political past, I shall look for traces of the speaker mentioning times of unity in defeats and crises. The main focus here is that the speaker, in order to achieve a narration of a common political past, will have to point out that the people of a nation have shared political history together, regardless of that history being positive or negative for the nation as a whole. I expect to detect this by looking at simple linguistic means, such as the usage of “we” and “together” in relation to a historical event or period being mentioned. When

examining whether or not a linguistic construction of a common political present and future is being used, I shall examine whether or not the speaker is using linguistic means in order to emphasise present or future political unity.

As I discussed while presenting my theoretical framework, national identity construction can take many shapes. Bearing this in mind, one realises that a speaker may emphasise and/or linguistically construct a national identity for his country without necessarily using all of the three instruments outlined in the theoretical framework. Should I find evidence of any of the instruments being used, I shall argue that the speaker, to some extent, is emphasising and/or linguistically constructing a national identity. After having analysed the speech, I will hopefully be able to see if and how the speaker approaches to the issue of national identity, and thus be able to answer my second research question.

The paragraphs will be presented in Romanian, followed by my own translation. The translations will focus on extracting the essence of the paragraphs rather than achieving a literal translation. After having analysed the speech, I will discuss the general results of my analysis.

## 6. Analysis

### 6.1. Examples

- (1) *Prima noastră datorie astăzi este să ne amintim de toți cei care au murit pentru independența și libertățile noastre, în toate războaiele pe care a trebuit să le ducem și în evenimentele din Decembrie 1989, care au dăruit dictatura comunistă. Nu putem avea viitor fără a respecta trecutul nostru.*

Our first duty today is to remember all those who died for our independence and freedom, in all wars in which we had to fight and in the events of December 1989, which demolished the communist dictatorship. We can have no future, unless we respect the past.

By evoking the sacrifice of all wars' heroes, the above example can be classified as a narration and confabulation of a common political past. Moreover, the King is connecting this sacrifice to the principles of citizenship that we enjoy today. By doing this, he is constructing a common political present. Here, he uses the "Unification and Cohesivation Strategy" presented by Wodak et al. (1999, 38) as he emphasises common unifying features of all Romanians. In this example, those common features are the principles of the Romanian people who raised against

everything and everyone who threatened their freedom. In this sentence, he is using simple but efficient means of realisation while employing this strategy. For example, he uses the 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun plural: *noastră* (our) three times: *our duty, our freedom, our past*, to create an axis of remembrance meant to unite all Romanians and come together again for a better future, idea which is clearly stated in the last line of this example.

- (2) *Coroana regală nu este un simbol al trecutului, ci o reprezentare unică a independenței, suveranității și unității noastre. Coroana este o reflectare a Statului, în continuitatea lui istorică, și a Națiunii, în devenirea ei. Coroana a consolidat România prin loialitate, curaj, respect, seriozitate și modestie.*

The Royal Crown is not a symbol of the past, but a unique embodiment of our independence, sovereignty and unity! The Crown is a reflection of the State in its historical continuity and of the nation in its evolution. The Crown has consolidated Romania through loyalty, courage, respect, probity and modesty.

Coming to address the subject of monarchy, the King traces back the importance of this institution, linking it to crucial events in Romanian history: its independence, thus, narrating a common past but at the same time emphasizing its role into the future (*the nation in its evolution*). He then, synthesizes the role of monarchy by mentioning a set of values, functioning as a strong base for the nation's evolution (*loyalty, courage, respect, probity and modesty*); in this way the King is linguistically constructing a common political present.

- (3) *A sosit momentul, după douăzeci de ani, să avem un comportament public rupt complet și definitiv de năravurile trecutului. Demagogia, disimularea, egoismul primitiv, agățarea de putere și bunul plac nu au ce căuta în instituțiile românești ale anului 2011. Ele aduc prea mult aminte de anii dinainte de 1989. Se cuvine să rezistăm prezentului și să ne pregătim viitorul. Uniți între noi și cu vecinii și frații noștri, să continuăm efortul de a redeveni demni și respectați.*

It is time, after twenty years, to have a public conduct completely and definitively separated of the past vices. Demagoguery, dissimulation, primitive selfishness, clinging to power and personal interests have no place in Romanian institutions of 2011. These are things that are reminiscent of the years before 1989. We should resist the present and prepare for the

future. United among ourselves and with our neighbours and brothers, we shall continue the effort to regain dignity and respect.

With this example, the King brings back into discussion the Revolution in 1989, an event in Romanian history that could be mentioned as an attempt to restore national identity and unity. Here, it does not only stand for a mere narration of a common past event, but it also serves the role of a nationalistic name drop, being used with a clear purpose, i.e. to linguistically construct a common political present and future, totally delimited from the drifting years before 1989. The King is employing the “Unification and Cohesivation Strategy”, evident in how he is “inviting/calling on everyone” (*să rezistăm prezentului și să ne pregătim viitorul* – we should resist the present and prepare for the future) to follow the plan that has been outlined for Romania’s future. Wodak et al. specify the appeals for co-operation as a characteristic trait of this strategy, since co-operation is crucial for the creation of unity and solidarity in a nation and gives a sense of the people working together towards a specific aim.

- (4) *După 84 de ani de când am devenit Rege, pot spune fără ezitare națiunii române: cele mai importante lucruri de dobândit, după libertate și democrație, sunt identitatea și demnitatea.*

After 84 years since I became King, I can say without hesitation to the Romanian nation: the most important things to be achieved after freedom and democracy are identity and dignity.

By mentioning the length of his ‘reign’, and defining *identity* and *dignity* as common goals for the entire nation, the King is approaching the concept of a *homo nationalis*. But, this is not a very clear example of this concept. Although the King calls for the entire nation to regain its former values, identity, being one of them, this is not entirely part of constructing a national human being, even if, in doing so, he is emphasising a unifying common feature: regaining group identity and dignity, hence using the “Unification and Cohesivation Strategy.”

- (5) *Jurământul meu a fost făcut și continuă să fie valabil pentru toți românii. Ei sunt toți parte a națiunii noastre și așa vor rămâne totdeauna. Stă doar în puterea noastră să facem țara statornică, prosperă și admirată în lume. Nu văd România de astăzi ca pe o moștenire de la părinții noștri, ci ca pe o țară pe care am luat-o cu împrumut de la copiii noștri. Așa să ne ajute Dumnezeu!*

My vow was made and continues to be valid for all Romanians. They are all part of our nation and it will remain forever. It's just in our power to make this country stable, prosperous and admired in the world. I see today's Romania not as a heritage from our parents, but as a country we borrowed from our children. So help us God!

This time, after identifying himself as a *homo nationalis*, evoking his coronation oath, to serve and protect the nation, the King calls for unanimous support for his initiative, and wants everyone to put the nation's best interests first in order for this to succeed. He does this by calling for everyone to mobilise behind his initiative, motivating people to oblige by evoking the nationalist notion of creating a better environment for the future generations, to whom we are directly responsible. As it has been mentioned earlier, calling for mobilisation and co-operation is a characteristic of the "Unification and Cohesivation Strategy" presented by Wodak et al. Furthermore, the King is setting a common and unifying future goal for his countrymen, in this way creating both a common political present in which all Romanians need to work together and a common political future in which the next generations might be able to enjoy the harvest of their support.

## 7. Conclusions

With his speech, King Michael is using all of the instruments outlined in the theoretical framework, except the first (*homo nationalis*), which he is merely approaching.

In the examples provided, King Michael is mainly working on the construction of a common present and future but constantly narrating past events. In the first example, the King is both narrating a common political past and constructing a common political future. In the second, he is referring to a historical memory, evoking the imagery of The Royal Crown, confabulating a common political past and constructing a common political present, continuing with the latter in the third example. In the fourth example, he touches upon the concept of a national human being or a national spirit, but does not, as stated, quite meet all the criteria. The same with the fifth example, in which he continues his construction of a common political future.

The strategies he is using while constructing a common political present are the "Assimilation, Inclusion and Continuation Strategy" and the "Unification and

Cohesivation Strategy". What is interesting is that even when creating a common political present, the King is well rooted in history. While using the "Assimilation, Inclusion and Continuation Strategy", he is focusing heavily on the idea of continuity.

In addition to using most of the instruments outlined in the theoretical framework, the King is using a nationalistic vocabulary in general. The 1<sup>st</sup> person singular and plural (both the pronouns *I* and *we* and the verb conjugation) is employed in all examples. The King refers to himself as *I* during the entire speech, which clearly indicates that his use of *we* is aimed at creating unity and a sense of inclusion.

To sum up, King Michael emphasises and linguistically constructs a national identity in his speech, emphasising both the past and the present (sometimes hinting also at the future) in his construction of national identity, with the latter being constructed on the base of the former.

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