

# Identity and Intercultural Communication



# Identity and Intercultural Communication

Edited by

Nicoleta Corbu, Dana Popescu-Jourdy  
and Tudor Vlad

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

Identity and Intercultural Communication,  
Edited by Nicoleta Corbu, Dana Popescu-Jourdy and Tudor Vlad

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INTRODUCTION:  
REDEFINING IDENTITY  
IN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT

NICOLETA CORBU, DANA POPESCU-JOURDY  
AND TUDOR VLAD

The search for identity is a continuous challenge in the academic field, a much-discussed topic and a point of junction of different research fields. Placing the topic against an intercultural background, with a focus on communication, opens a three-fold perspective that is addressed in this book.

The first chapter focuses on the European dimension of identity, questioning the very concept of “European identity”, from both theoretical and empirical points of view.

The concept of European identity was coined at the European Community summit in Copenhagen, in 1973, after the first enlargement. It marked a step forward in the European construction, as a reaction to the lack of identity visible in the interpretative framework existent at the time. The Declaration on European identity, or Declaration of Copenhagen, signed by the then nine European Community member states, marks a period of constant academic inquiry about the new concept.

The debates on European identity are nowadays focused on two main approaches. On the one hand, many scholars agree that European identity is a rather theoretical construct, a form lacking content, an empty shell, a desired ideal, far from being achieved. On the other hand some scholars argue that European identity is a well-established presence, a new layer of one’s identity, just as real as national identity.

A lot of research has been done with regard to the possible construction of a European public sphere, and a common European agenda, within which the European identity is constantly questioned and analysed. In this context, the Europeanization of national public spheres and of national media raises the problem of a fragmented and rather inconsistent identity. The role played by the media in the Europeanization process and in the

construction of a European public sphere is another rich field of constant academic attention.

In this regard, the first chapter addresses issues related to European identity myths, the Europeanization of national media, the European public sphere, intercultural communication within the EU, Euroscepticism and the media framing of European topics, as well as specific national perspectives on European identity.

The second chapter of the book discusses the concept of identity in national and intercultural contexts. The question of identity can be placed at the crossroads of different fields of study: sociology (social and/or professional identities), anthropology (behaviours, rituals, ways of life), political science (identity through institutional structures) etc. Thus, the academic discussion about identity takes place in the general framework of intercultural communication and gives the concept of “communication” its entire disciplinary importance, referring to those academic and professional works that structure communication as scientific knowledge. Specifically, authors discuss the possible relationships among communication, culture and identity during the encounter with the Other.

The representation of otherness is mostly developed by media discourse. Included in the logic of expression of our own identity, “our” media provide us with specific definitions of the difference to the Other, inside a dynamic news discourse.

Researchers often speak of the ideological dimension of culture. On the one hand, this dimension can create, in an intercultural context, a specific connection between identity and commitment. On the other hand, it can contribute, in certain cases, to specific strategies of argumentation or persuasion, according to a hierarchy of values or assimilation logics.

This general background helps build an academic debate about national identity and related concepts: cultural stereotypes, diasporic identities, communities, intercultural communication etc.

The third chapter, Professional Identities, repositions the concept of identity in the context of professional life: journalism, political communication, information technology, organizational communication etc.

The sharp downturn in the world economy, the collapse of the economic model for media industries in the country and the strong impact of new communication technologies at the end of the first decade of the new century have had a dramatic impact on the media job market and on the professional communicators’ status. The turmoil was not limited to the entry-level segment of the job market. Television, radio and news magazines trimmed their staffs, often by eliminating positions at the top. Perhaps what is more important, the journalists continuing to work in the

established media and those who have gone out on their own have found themselves in competition with another group of individuals, often labelled “citizen” journalists.

The turmoil has affected other communication occupations as well. The professional identity of various fields has gone through a process of redefinition and repositioning in recent years. In the same time, any deprofessionalization of an occupation raises questions about the necessity for and components of the educational paths that lead to it.

Some specific situations develop today professional practices of intercultural communication, which contribute to the definition of identity: geographical mobility, cohabitation (personnel, “communities”), cooperation between organizations in an international context.

In this context, the third chapter gather together papers focused on deprofessionalization, impact of new technologies on various aspects of professional identities, professional stereotypes, organizational communication etc.

The internal consistency of this book resides in the authors’ constant inquiry about redefining identity in intercultural context, at the crossroad of different perspectives: political, social, cultural, professional.



**PART ONE:**  
**IN SEARCH OF A EUROPEAN IDENTITY**

# PROMOTING EUROPEAN IDENTITY: THE CONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF EUROPEAN UNION IDENTITY MYTHS, ISRAEL VS. ROMANIA

MIRA MOSHE AND NICOLETA CORBU

## Abstract

Academic investigation of European identity has been constantly challenged in recent decades. While the pessimistic approach (“doom and gloom”) is based upon the widespread Euroscepticism which criticizes the enlargement process, the optimistic path portrays European identity as a promising entity, strengthened by pro-European life-saving migration, television without frontiers etc. In this context, the present study aims to identify the way in which the online press promotes the European identity through the construction and reconstruction of myths that appear in Israeli and Romanian online media. Juxtaposing these cultural spaces offers the benefit of diversified perspectives, based on each nation’s political position vis-à-vis the European Union: Israel, a member of the Mediterranean European initiative, and Romania, a newly integrated member state of the EU. These dual analytical economic and political contexts have revealed “insider” and “outsider” insights with regard to promoting an optimistic versus a pessimistic mythical perception of European identity. Moreover, both Romania and the EU have been undergoing some of their most challenging times in recent months. The struggles of Romania are connected to the postponement of Schengen Area integration (postponed in December 2010), while the struggles of the EU comprise the most difficult economic and political period in its existence. These circumstances present a unique opportunity to confront identity construction during the massive and ongoing crises that have arisen. Hence, we examined all EU-related news from the most prominent online news sites in Israel and Romania immediately after the postponement of Romania’s Schengen integration for a period of two

months, January and February 2011. Framing analysis was employed to identify and compare the ways in which media coverage of the EU has created and shaped mythological narratives regarding European identity. The research population included 452 news items identified on the Israeli news sites Ha'aretz and Ynet, and 289 news reports from the Romanian news sites Hotnews and Ziare.com. Findings showed a dialectical approach to the European identity. On the one hand, Israeli online media have fostered the myth of the EU as a powerful and united geopolitical player, based on a narrative of the foundation and fortification of the European Union, viewed as a saviour from both an economic and a political point of view. On the other hand, Romanian media have constructed a much more fragmented and disruptive image of the EU and its identity. They have indicated internal inequities, as well as political and economic disputes. Both sites discuss the imbalance between "old" and "new" member states, as well as the constant loss of Euroenthusiasm, which occurred in newly integrated countries soon after their admission into the EU. In conclusion, the promotion by the media of the EU as a political myth is dually represented by various reportage patterns x-raying heterogeneous positions regarding one of the most prominent actors in the political arena nowadays: the "outsider" view of the EU as a saviour and the disenchanting "insider" perspective of the EU myth.

**Key words:** European Union identity, myths, political myths and media

## INTRODUCTION

The preoccupation of media research with the European Union has been coming to terms with the Union's attempt to generate a "new" European identity with the purpose to replace local national identities (Henry, 2001; Marciniak, 2009). On the one hand, it is clear that the legitimacy of the EU rests on a collective agreement regarding the symbols, values and narratives created by the Union, past and present (Bruter, 2009). But on the other hand, in order to create that same consensus (which relies on a common identity, whether real or imaginary), it is vital for the European Union to create, promote and establish appropriate values, symbols and myths (Hardt-Mautner, 1995). This task is made especially difficult by numerous challenging voices asking: "Is a unified European identity myth or reality?" (Blokker, 2008; Maguire, Poulton & Possamai, 1999).

This dual attitude towards the ability of EU institutions to generate a European identity having mythological meaning is also evident in mass media. As far as the media are concerned, research shows that in the long

run (Bruter, 2007), news has an important impact on European identity; it shapes people's understanding of the world and their place within it; and it "contributes to our understanding of what it means to belong to a cultural and political collective such as Europe" (Inthorn, 2006, p. 72).

Little attention has been paid so far to the new media, mainly because they are fragmented, difficult to investigate, less policy driven, and led by the elite (Trandafoiu, 2006, p. 96). Central to the present article is the question of how the press promotes European identity. In other words, does the public arena, as represented by the press, present mythical reportage of EU institutions? How are journalists in various countries promoting a united European identity, and what kind of mythological frameworks are they employing to do so? In the present article, an attempt will be made to answer these questions based on two case studies: press coverage of the EU in Israel (a member of the Mediterranean European initiative) compared to that of Romania (a member state since 2007).

## MYTHS AND IDENTITY

The attitude towards mythology has changed considerably in the past hundred years. From having been regarded as a mystical tale of a pagan or religious nature describing impossible events, myth has become a significant social tool that is clearly relevant to the structure of any given society and the changes taking place in it. Thus, perceiving myth as a pre-scientific naturalist theory gave way in the twentieth century to a wide range of new conceptions and approaches (Honko, 1984; Kirk, 1984, Rogerson et al., 1984). In daily parlance, the term "myth" refers to beliefs that lack factual basis, a fabrication or illusion that is the product of fantasy (Tudor, 1972). To a great extent, the myth is the most basic form of holiness performed by the human race (Cassirer, 1971). It appears in the form of a personal, symbolic story that starts out dramatically and describes unusual events that are of vital importance to the community. This story is not necessarily true in the sense of an objective description of reality or historical fact. The truth of the myth does not derive from external proof, but is intrinsic to the myth itself and the social truth that it represents and transmits. Accordingly, it is not surprising to discover that from time immemorial mythology has had a strong impact on the formation of the national, political and economic identity of individuals and collectives (Hedeager, 1998; Quispel, 1999; Judaken, 1999; Gerstle, 2000; Buchanan, 2002; Roof, 2009). Cultural myths, like political ones, provide the imaginative impetus necessary for adopting frameworks and characteristics of identity (Sarbin, 1997). At times, the identity-shaping

mythical story draws on sources celebrating the optimistic, hopeful and resilient human spirit (Girardelli, 2004; Buchanan, 2002). Especially in cases of tales of bravery that reinforce collective identity, such myths are translated into legal or behavioural codes (Davis, 2000); at other times myths derive from sources describing fear and insecurity in the face of cruel human behaviour (McDonald-Walker, 1998). In such cases, especially regarding tragic reality, the myths become the basis for tragic identification (Nyusztay, 2002). At times the mythical story turns to technology in order to promote the shaping of identity; at other times, the mythical tale depicts science and technology as the enemy, arousing primeval fear and trembling (Caeton, 2007).

To a large extent, the powerful influence of the mythological story deviates from the physical space we inhabit and penetrates the cultural space that surrounds us (Josephs, 2002; Light, 2009).

The various media make it possible for myths to extend their influence to individuals who are no longer living in their country of national origin (Isabella, 2006). However, myths are capable of breaking through not only spatial boundaries, but also temporal ones. That is, on the one hand, modern nation states make it possible to bridge the gap between modernity and religious mythology (Rahman, 2003; Rosen & Rosen, 2000; Nygren, 1998). But on the other hand, the nation state facilitates jumping ahead in time, minimizing the importance of the past, the old myth, in favour of building a new ethos for a better future (Dos Santos, 2003; Martel, 2003). In such cases, myth represents a form of interpretation, a point of view that possesses internal cohesion and spiritual topography. It constitutes a firm permanent basis for culture and identity. It is created by culture, while it also creates a culture of its own.

## POLITICAL MYTHS

As stated above, myths play an integral role in daily life and in preserving identity (Arruda, 1996). In cases where myths justify customs, a common past or hope for the future, communities will cling to their mythical beliefs and reject information that challenges them (Flowerdew, 1997). Over the years, Sorel's (1999) view that political myths spur us on to action by means of an appeal to our irrational inner worlds has prevailed in one form or another. Cassirer (1971), for example, claimed that in everything related to political action, people tend to forget what they've learned in the course of their intellectual development and return to the earliest stages of human culture. In this context, myth departs from an empirical perception of reality. This leads people to political action

inspired by the emotional, passionate manipulation characteristic of irrational thinking. This can lead to a potentially dangerous situation. As Spinoza claimed, all societies are aided to one degree or another by mythological political imagination as the basis for cooperation and identification. This does not mean, however, that every society is capable of subjecting its imaginary mythical dimension to critical ethical discourse (Duff, 1903; McShea, 1968).

The political myth, then, is a fantasy or illusion regarding political matters (Tudor, 1972), but it is more than just a fantasy or an illusion. According to Tudor, those who generate myths also play a central role in setting them in motion; the inner structure of such myths will reflect the political motivations of their creators, as well as the roles and needs they are meant to fill. Furthermore, political myths will retain their validity as long as they serve a particular world order, while in the modern era the creation and fading of myths is an integral part of the dynamic struggle for cultural-political hegemony in a society. For example,

The clash of two economic systems generates the contradiction of the political myth of a state in perpetual waiting and in opposition to it. (Boer, 2009, p. 4)

Accordingly, it is only natural to discover that the human difficulty in coping with phenomena that carry critical implications for our period has turned the political myth into a factor imparting significance to events or processes by means of developing a compatible narrative. Namely,

the concept of political myth points to the fact that this imaginary mediation can also take the form of a narrative that coagulates and reproduces significance, that is, it creates the form of a myth. (Bottici, 2007, p. 132)

However, what narrative is being discussed?

[M]odern political myths are narratives of past, present, or predicted political events which their tellers seek to make intelligible and meaningful to their audience. (Flood, 2002, p. 41)

Hence, we should

understand political myth as the continual process of work on a common narrative by which the members of a social group can provide significance to their political conditions and experience. (Bottici & Challand, 2006, p. 315)

At the same time, the meaning created by political myths is closely tied to cultural and political contexts, which provide the conditions that allow the birth of these myths. It is no less true that today the ability to create and circulate any particular political myth depends on the cooperation of the mass media.

## POLITICAL MYTHS AND THE MEDIA

Dominant ideology, cultural climate and economic structures are greatly assisted by the mediating ability of various media to circulate myths (Winslow, 2010; Ivie & Giner, 2009). Furthermore, government administrations create a rhetoric that includes mythical elements in order to justify power decisions and actions, especially in times of security crises and military instability (Williamson, 2010). It also seems that broadcasting companies and news agencies find it difficult to create an objective framework for controversial topics, turning instead to mythological media coverage. Such coverage can place a specific aspect of the conflict at its centre (Lacy, 2010; Ivie, 2009) or alternatively turn to the film industry in order to seek support for a particular myth (Blum, 2010). Even when the media attempt to uncover, mock or denigrate mythological coverage, it is still perceived to be an effective propaganda tool (Hollander, 2010).

It is rather surprising, then, that mythological media coverage diverges from areas of political security, also dealing with matters related to the politics of technology, i.e., the penetration of the Internet into third world countries and weaker populations (Eko, 2010) and other groups and an awareness of the abilities inherent in the new media (Couldry, 2010); with the use of myth in the politics of language and rights (Jones, 2009); with the politics of gender, romance and heterosexual love (Smith, 2009); and with the politics of music and the mythical creation of meaning through music (Wolfe, Loy & Chidester, 2009; Kistler & Lee, 2010). The modern media are capable of creating or supporting political myths by selecting heroes (Sealey-Morris, 2009) that can be glorified by the use of reportage frameworks parallel to the symbolic world which they inhabit (for example, the Kennedy family [O'Rourke, 2009]). Politicians also use various media in order to create, support or disseminate myths of a more general or pragmatic nature, such as the "myth of the small city" (that served Jimmy Carter in his 1976 presidential campaign [Lee, 1995]), the "myth of the West" and the "birth of a nation myth" (connecting the Western myth with the birth of the nation myth as was done by Barry Goldwater in 1964 and Ronald Reagan in his 1980 presidential campaign [Moore, 1991]). Incidentally, one of the myths common to many United

States leaders is the “public faith” myth that is deeply engrained in the American civil religion myth (Roof, 2009).

Newspapers and reporters make use of mythological coverage in a number of ways. It may be of a coercive “top-down” nature, as in the case of Goebbels and Nazi Germany, where the regime demanded the use of mythological newspaper coverage for propaganda purposes (Gibbs, 2008). However, reporters can use mythological coverage also as a result of the influences of the cultural milieu in which they are active, and not necessarily due to political coercion (Ehrlich, 2006). Among other things, this can be seen, for instance, in the media structures of the community and local press (Berry, 2008). The creation of myths by means of newspaper coverage may be effected by a combination of printed journalism and television (Johnson, 2008); by the use of iconic newspaper photography (Spratt, 2008); by creating news headlines that generate a textual mythological story (Weinblatt, 2008); by including human interest stories (Mason, 2007) and by other techniques. A mythical news analysis can be performed by content analysis of news items and reports (Parkinson, 2007); and of course through an analysis of recontextualization of newspaper publications (Erjavec & Volcic, 2007). It seems, however, that the importance of the political myth is in fact derived more from the nature of the media world than from that of the political world. In such a reality, it would not be surprising to discover that political figures pay court to the various media in order to disseminate their ideas.

## METHODOLOGY

It indeed seems that the European Union utilizes different media channels and employs a variety of convincing strategies in order to disseminate its ideas, values and symbols (Bruter, 2009; Olausson, 2010). Among other methods, this is done by appealing to children (the EU Kids Online Project [Hasebrink, Olafsson & Stetka, 2010; Taraszow et al., 2010]); by shaping media policy while presenting a new European media agenda and encouraging digital broadcasting as a tool for disseminating information (D’Arma, 2009); by determining a European public space by means of media regulation despite the fact that the level of dialogue being conducted in this cultural space is still inadequate (Bruggemann, 2010); by encouraging journalists who work in Brussels to adopt a unique newspaper style, one that will better explain the goals of the organization and its decision-making process (at times at the expense of press criticism [Lecheler & Hinrichsen, 2010]), and more. All the techniques described above can be categorized as “top-down” pressure to shape a European

identity. One may ask, however, if and how such an identity will be shaped by means of “bottom-up” media pressure. Accordingly, the research questions for the present study are as follows: What are the characteristics of the media structure of the European Union? Does EU newspaper coverage create a mythological narrative? What are the mythical elements of this coverage? Does the coverage with these characteristics traverse national borders and identities?

In order to answer the questions regarding the press portrayal of the EU myth, two case studies were performed involving newspaper coverage of the European Union on Romanian Internet news sites and EU coverage on Israeli Internet news sites. That is, the research population includes all Internet press reports that appeared on two leading Romanian sites – one of which leans in the direction of the party in power and the other in the direction of the opposition party. Similarly, press publications were examined on two leading Israeli news sites – one (the Y-Net site) in favour of the party in power and the other (the Ha’aretz site) in favour of the left-wing Israeli elite and the opposition parties.

The time frame set for the research was January and February 2011, since that period was a dramatic one in Romania’s process of joining the European Union. In March 2011, Romania was supposed to be accepted as part of the Schengen Area, after a period of technical preparation prior to its integration (securing its borders to European standards and dealing with internal problems, such as corruption and the justice system). On 21 December 2010, the French and German Ministers of the Interior sent a letter in which they notified the European Commissioner for Justice and Interior Affairs about their proposal to delay the inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria in the Schengen Area. The Romanian officials’ reactions to the letter, as well as the responses of both internal and external actors to the French and German positions, were widely covered and commented upon in the news during January 2011.

The research method used was framing analysis. The concept of framing was introduced by Goffman (1974), who proposed a method of structuring meanings by organizing the process of interpreting events. But it was not until the early 1990s that Entman (1991) and Snow and Benford (1992) gave framing theory its most significant development, defining framing as

an interpretive schemata that signifies and condenses the “world out there” by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action in one’s present or past environment. (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 137)

In addition, they argued that there is a “master frame” – a relatively stable configuration of ideas, elements, and symbols that act as a kind of grammar through which collective action is elucidated. Framing is analysed, then, by describing the process of creating meanings and elements of persuasion vital to both collective action and cognitive processes (Benford, 1997). The basic premise of these analyses is that the media construct various frames for covering events; the main rationale for the premise being that reporters’ attitudes and values influence the way they write (Parenti, 1986; Hess, 1996; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Wolfsfeld, 1997).

## THE CASE STUDIES

### *Romania and the European Union<sup>1</sup>*

The fifth wave of EU expansion began in 2004 and ended in 2007 with the entry of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union. The relationship between Romania (the first Eastern European country to have official relations with the EU) and the EU started back in 1974, with a Treaty that included Romania in the Community’s Generalized System of Preferences. After the Romanian Revolution in 1989 and the fall of communism, accession to the Union became one of the main goals of every government, especially after 1995, when Romania submitted an official application for membership.

After official intergovernmental negotiations began in 2000 (together with Malta, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania and Bulgaria), Romania initiated a series of reforms to prepare for its entry into the EU. On 13 April 2005, the European Parliament approved Romania’s and Bulgaria’s accession to the EU, and on 1 January 2007 Romania officially became a member of the European Union.

Inclusion in the Schengen Area of Free Movement was considered a further step in European integration, although non-member states are also included in this Area, along with most of the European Union countries. Romania’s negotiations for inclusion in the Schengen Area started in 2001, soon after the commencement of official negotiations for joining the European Union. At the end of 2007, Romania and Bulgaria were both officially accepted for the Schengen Area and preparations were intended to be complete by March 2011. However, on 21 December 2010 the

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<sup>1</sup> Official background information for this section was retrieved from [www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu).

French and German Ministers of the Interior notified the European Commissioner for Justice and Interior Affairs of their proposal to delay the inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria in the Schengen Area.

Presently, as these lines are written, Romania is still in process of integration into the Schengen Area of Free Movement, but a final date for this has not yet been determined.

### ***Israel and the European Union***

In 1964 an agreement was signed between Israel and member nations of the European Community. This treaty was the first in a series signed by the two parties, which in 1975 finally led to establishing a free trade zone. This treaty determined that apart from a small number of exceptions there would be trade restrictions on all sides. Despite the fact that both parties succeeded in reaching an agreement regarding a free market between Israel and the EU, cooperation between the parties did not expand to other areas. An opportunity to change this situation presented itself in 1995 as a result of an EU decision to launch a European-Mediterranean joint initiative, generally known as the “Barcelona Process”. The participants in this initiative included the fifteen members of the European Union together with the twelve Mediterranean nations (Algeria, Tunisia, Turkey, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Malta, Egypt, Syria, Cyprus, the Palestinian Authority, and Libya as an observer). The idea that guided the initiators of the Barcelona Process was to reproduce the European model in order to achieve stability and encourage development in the region. An additional development regarding Israel and the European Union took place as a result of Israel becoming a part of the EU framework plan for technical research and development in 1996, and again in 2003. Since March 2003 there has been cooperation between Israel and the European Union in the framework of the European Neighbours policy intended to allow neighbouring countries that are not members of the EU to become part of the European Free Trade Zone. In 2008, the EU and Israel decided on an additional upgrade of their relations. According to this agreement, Israel joined the programmes of the European Union in various fields, while a communal work group was set up with the goal of including Israel in the EU Single Market. (“A milestone in Israel’s relations with the European Union: the Union upgrades its ties with Israel”, Israel Foreign Office Website, accessed 16 June 2008)

As we write these lines, an official delegation of the European Union Commission has been established in Israel, while in Brussels there is a resident Israeli Ambassador to the European Union and a diplomatic corps.

## FINDINGS

### The Israeli Case

In January 2011 and February 2011, 342 news items and articles were published on the *Ha'aretz* website – the website of the elite Israeli newspaper identified with the Israeli Left – concerning the European Union. Similarly, on the opposite side of the arena, 110 news items and articles were published on the *Ynet* site (the website of the most popular Israeli newspaper identified with the Israeli Right). Despite the obvious differences between the two websites, both are making their contribution towards creating the myth of a powerful European Union – or, to be more specific, the myth of recreation. Not only is the EU gaining power, it is recreating a new European and a new global order by organizing a new balance of power and status in today's and tomorrow's world in accordance with principles of global stratification.

For years now we have been witnessing fundamental changes in the socio-economic fragmentation of societies (Standing, 2002) and the interconnection between nations. A key aspect of those European and global changes is attributed to the EU, which has established itself as a major player with a significant role in this process (Bartle, 2005). It is therefore not surprising to discover that the narrative of the foundation and fortification of the European Union has been related in past years by means of the various media, using dramatic reportage structures to create a mythical construction of the Union. The preliminary feature of the European Union mythological notion is the saviour – the EU as an economic, political and environmental redeemer. It offers: a) economic salvation to countries such as Ireland and Portugal “that had a particularly bad year and needed EU economic rescue plans” (News Agencies A., 1.1.11); b) it is a political saviour of countries such as Greece which has been aided “by a quick intervention force at its borders of about 175 armed guards from 25 member countries of the EU who patrol the border in order to keep out illegal immigrants and ease the pressure on Greece” (Herman, 4.1.11); c) and it is a lifesaver that forbids the marketing of hundreds of dangerous substances that cause “serious side effects and poisoning as a result of herbal remedies” (Gal, 1.1.11).

In the case of Israel, however, the salvation narrative takes on the nature of self-redemption. The European Union is offering the Israelis and the Palestinians, who are having difficulties rescuing themselves and solving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, intervention. In January 2011 EU representatives in Jerusalem and Ramallah prepared a scathing report that

“determines that the Union must increase its protest measures against Israel and act as though East Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine” (Hason, 10.1.11).

The functionaries even requested that European officials act to further their interests with the Israeli Government. The fact that both right-wing and left-wing news sources were dedicated to this issue and published 12 news items and articles in two days (7 on the *Ynet* site and 5 on that of *Ha'aretz*) only emphasizes the mythological role of the European Union as an agent that helps deal with difficult human situations. Inspired by Armstrong (2005), we suggest that while handling ideological disputes, the European Union attempts to help Palestinians and Israelis find their place in the world and give them new hope. Furthermore, Armstrong claims that myths always derive from a near-death experience and the fear of extinction. In the second millennium Israel's fear of death and extinction is represented by Iran. The leader of the Israeli opposition, Tsipi Livni, for example, reassures readers that:

As stated in a meeting with the Foreign Minister of the EU, Catherine Ashton, “Europe's stand against Iran must be firm so that Iran understands that the world will not accept any more dragging of feet and marking time in an attempt to obtain nuclear weapons. This is definitely in Europe's best interest and must be stated clearly and harshly, especially now. (Shumpelby, 5.1.11)

The request for help presented to the Foreign Minister of the EU runs parallel with the traditional ability of mythology to extricate us from problematic, destructive, human situations. It seems that by means of an appeal to the European Union, Israelis hope to be able to cope more effectively with future threats and dangers:

The Iranians are hard bargainers and their aim is to create a schism among the (six nations) and see if they can negotiate concessions . . . the Foreign Minister of the European Union, Catherine Ashton, stood firm in the negotiations (and) did not fall into a single one of their traps. (ibid.)

This further emphasizes the mythical power of the EU as an agent that is likely to save the Israelis from annihilation, from a second holocaust. The EU representatives understand and respect the deep Israeli fear of destruction and they are prepared to stand by Israel – as was evident on International Holocaust Day, when “The EU Parliament is convening in commemoration” (Magnezi, 25.1.11).

To a large extent, the preoccupation with generating hope is anchored in and constructed from the creation myth, specifically the *re-creation*

myth. The significance and value of acts does not depend on physical data alone, but rather on the ability to reconstruct an act of genesis, to reiterate a mythical model. Thus, the myth of salvation is firmly grounded in the myth of re-creation. The act of creation realizes the transition from non-appearance to appearance, the transition from chaos to cosmos. In general, a mythical, symbolic outlook attributes much importance to transitional moments, the most significant of which is no doubt celebrating the New Year (Eliade, 1989). New Year celebrations in Europe illustrate the transformation of the European Union into a creative force to which one prays in time of need (News Agencies, A. 1.1.11).

The Eurobloc, if so, is a kind of centre with a prestigious and honourable status. According to Eliade (1989), the creation myth views the centre as holy. The creation, to its full extent, takes place at the centre of the world by means of sanctifying the area, making it holy and then ratifying the act by offering a godly sacrifice. The recreation is accompanied by a difficult path that must be travelled on the way to the centre, a road full of dangers that stand for the transitional ceremony from the profane to the sacred, from the imaginary and the fleeting to the real and the eternal, from death to life (AFP, 7.1.11; AP, 15.1.11). That is, the approach to the centre, i.e., the Eurobloc, represents the transition to a new, different existence, one that is more moral, efficient and lasting. Re-creation is assured only after a hard struggle among different agents.

Accordingly, at the foundation of the mythological recreation story rests the drama, the conflict among figures, circumstances and attitudes. The construction of the European Union myth in Israel includes two dramatic foci: a) a particular state's internal affairs; b) the internal conflicts among Union nations. An example of the drama of a state's internal affairs is Israel's coverage of France's attitude towards the European Union. On the one hand, the French president is represented as defending the EU:

The President of France said that it is his intention to oppose with all his power those that try to put an end to the Euro. "Europe was strong and Europe defended us," he stated in a speech to the nation on New Year's Eve. (News Agencies B. 1.1.11).

On the other hand, the leader of the extreme right opposition in France, Marine Le Pen, clarifies that

We were the first to object to transferring rights of national sovereignty to the institutions of the European Union. (Primor, 7.1.11)

Newspaper coverage of the internal French conflict between the government and the opposition, between left and right, also embodies a media conflict between the left-wing press in Israel (which in fact represents the French right-wing stance) and the right-wing Israeli press (which in fact represents the left-wing Israeli position). What we have here are parallel patterns of conflict, right versus left, government versus opposition, in an effort to spur to action because, in order to nourish a determination to act, a myth has to stage a dramatic performance, or rather, has to be perceived as a drama (Bottici, 2007).

An example of an internal European drama (an internal conflict among the Union nations) may be found in the news report that:

From the Wikileaks documents it appears that in opposition to France and the other member states, Berlin and Washington are working towards especially accurate spy satellite networks, which are expected to come into use shortly. The project was camouflaged as an environmental trade initiative, but is being run by the intelligence agencies. (AP, 3.1.11)

While Paris did everything in its power to stop the project, officials in Berlin were quoted as claiming that they were sick of being manipulated by France. Of course, the importance of the current internal European conflict goes beyond issues in the here and now, symbolizing conflict pertaining to the future of these nations. This might be understood in light of Tudor (1996), who claims that every current political struggle is just a preview, an introduction, to future battles.

It seems, then, that the mythological narrative relates to drama as action. "The myth is the continuation of the dialogue, but the dialogue itself is a mythical tribunal" (Strauss et al., 1993/2004).

Since we are discussing the press, it is clear that the main part of the mythical action is a dialogue that is reproduced in the ongoing discourse of the present moment. This means that the dramatic newspaper text that constructs the myth of the European Union is grounded on a dialogue where each of the speakers sets out an intention as part of a dialogue or a symposium. For instance, while the morning headlines on the Ynet website announced that the foreign minister of the EU, Catherine Ashton, "arrives in Israel and states 'there is no replacement for negotiations'" (Shumpelby, 5.1.11), the evening headlines had already reported the reply of the Israel foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, who promised that "when the smuggling of arms to Gaza ceases, the embargo will be lifted" (Medzini, 5.1.11).

There are those like North (1977) who claim that the myth of the European Union has been constructed by means of the technique of

dialogue, but it is clear that a real dialogue between Israel and the European Union has not come into existence. One way or another, it is clear that dialogue is central to the myth of re-creation.

### *The Romanian Case*

During the month of January 2011, 279 news items covering topics related to the European Union were published on major news sites in Romania, 123 on Hotnews.ro (this site generally perceived as supportive of the incumbent party), and 156 on Ziare.com (this site generally considered to be supportive of the opposition). About 205 news items covered “the Schengen case”<sup>2</sup> and 74 presented other EU-related news, such as external political subjects, internal decisions related to the financial crisis, different events regarding European member states, institutions or people, etc. The analysis showed no important differences in coverage between the two sites, both sites showing a rather fractured image of EU identity regarding the deconstruction and reconstruction of two myths. On the one hand, the myth of the saviour, constantly present in the Romanian media before and immediately after the Romanian integration into the EU (January 2007), was about to be replaced by the myth of the punisher, a Europe that punishes Romania, whether justly or not, for its problems connected to corruption, the Roma population, or justice etc. On the other hand, the general myth of a united and coherent European Union has partially been replaced by the myth of a stratified Europe, which is driven by political, socio-economic and integration issues.

Turbulent times such as the current economic global crisis favour the deconstruction of myths and the construction of new ones, just as times of economic and political stability favour the consolidation of myths (Girling, 1993, p. 62). Myths related to European identity are no exception to this rule. The insider perspective offered by the Romanian media shows a transition period dominated by frequently opposing ideas or stereotypes related to the European Union as a whole, a fractured paradigm within which can identify the serious changes facing European identity currently. One of the recurrent depictions of the European Union in the Romanian

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<sup>2</sup> Although in March 2011, Romania was supposed to have been accepted to the Schengen Area, on 21 December 2010 the French and the Germans notified the European Commissioner for Justice and Interior Affairs of their proposal to delay the affixation of Romania and Bulgaria to the Schengen Area. As a result, the Romanian media have paid increased attention to what it called “the Schengen case”.

media at the beginning of 2011 is that of a supreme force which punishes Romania and Romanians. This appears as the myth of a *punisher* who checks to see if Romania has done its homework and has fulfilled its obligation, without really caring about preserving its rights. During the period analysed, the face of the European Union was not composed of its representatives (rarely present in the news), but rather of its most prominent geopolitical actors, the countries that are perceived to be “the engine of the EU”, “the core of the EU”, namely France and Germany. That is the reason why, symbolically, the letter sent by the French and German Ministers of the Interior was considered “a European position”.

Most of the time, France and Germany appeared in the Romanian media as the forces punishing and deciding Romania’s fate within the European Union.

France and Germany’s objections regarding the adhesion were received with indignation by the Romanian officials; President Băsescu stated that we are being discriminated against. (21.01.2011, Ziare.com)

The general perception of Romania’s penalization is highlighted by the dominant frame of Schengen-related news: the powerlessness frame. Romanians are depicted as humble, incapable of managing the situation, discriminated against, isolated beggars, spineless worms etc. At the same time, we find voices calling out the injustice of the European Union’s decision regarding the postponement of Romanian integration into the Schengen Area, thus the labels of “discrimination”, lack of respect, etc.:

President Traian Băsescu stated that Romania asks that its adhesion to the Schengen Area be accomplished following the rules agreed upon by the EU treaties, and that Romania should not be treated in a discriminatory way. (28.01.11, Ziare.com)

This constitutes discrimination against Romania. We are now forced to wait like worms, as they recommend; 22 million Romanians have the right to be respected. (06.01.11, Ziare.com)

However, the general perception is that Romanians deserve their fate; they deserve to be punished due to their consistently humble attitude on the one hand, and the real problems Romania is facing today on the other:

Our problem is that when we should have preserved our dignity and negotiated integration into the EU far more honorably, when we should not have been so desperate to obtain a place that we did not deserve, we were humble, we kept our heads down, worms with no claims of their own. And

now, when we should put our irritated tone and hurt pride aside and admit that we are too dirty and ill-mannered to enter once more into a clean house with our boots full of mud, now we get hysterical and cry that “it is not acceptable to be treated like this” (07.01.11, Ziare.com)

The idea of powerlessness has often been used in past years to represent external Romanian politics in respect of its “lack of professionalism in promoting Romania’s interests abroad” (03.01.11, Ziare.com) and the low self-esteem of the Romanian mentality:

We have very low self-esteem. Every day the TV channels and the media generally repeat all these things so obsessively that we have come to believe that we are powerless. They have their reasons. . . . In the “Golden Era” (i.e., the Ceaușescu regime), we thought we were the center of the world; now we believe we are dust on the ground. We are neither; just an unbalanced society, with its good and bad elements.” (Ciucu, 07.01.11, Hotnews.ro)

Overall, the EU is portrayed as a punisher, the general saviour myth created before and immediately after the Romanian integration into the EU being replaced by the myth of an all-powerful Europe symbolically represented by France and Germany, which is in a position to “dictate” the rules inside the EU.

In addition, this new European Union identity has changed the myth of a united Europe, inside which countries have equal positions and commonly decide upon the well-being of European citizens. The Romanian media have depicted a fractured Union, divided by spheres of influence and unequal power centres. The original member states are viewed as the central European Union, and they decide upon the fate of newly integrated countries. They are referred to as “the A-Team”, comprising Germany, France, Austria, the Netherlands and Luxemburg, an “exclusive elite”, “the saviours of the European retained students” (Mixich, Hotnews.ro, 21.01.11).

In this context, Romania is depicted as a “small county at the mercy of world powers, a ‘casualty’ in the battle for power within the EU or France” (Ziare.com, 24.01.11).

Romania is often viewed as a victim of France’s power game within the EU or of France’s internal political games. Headlines such as “The French knife stuck in Romania’s back. Possible victim: the European Union” (Mixich, Hotnews.ro, 17.01.11) bring to the forefront the weak and powerless position of Romania in the European “chess game”.

To sum up, the Romanian media have deconstructed two major myths regarding the European Union: the myth of the saviour, largely present in