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LIMINALITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DISCURSIVE ARTICULATIONS IN THE GEOPOLITICAL VISIONS OF ROMANIA, TURKEY, AND UKRAINE

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This analysis has its intellectual roots in an older research project which I developed and produced as part of my Master studies. Focused on the question of strategic culture in Romania, my research revealed the existence of a series of metaphors and representations that suggested the presence amongst Romanian political elites of the conscience of a liminal position on the international scene, particularly in relation to Europe. I wished to deepen my research in this sense and, in order to acquire a more complete view of the matter, I have decided to look at the question of liminality not just in Romania, but in two other cases as well, Turkey and Ukraine.

Liminality is a subject that has not been studied extensively in the field of international relations, despite it being approached in other disciplines, such as anthropology or cultural studies. The latter have looked at it as a transitional phase, particularly in rituals of transformation and initiation. Some political scientists, such as Ann Norton and Bahar Rumelili have noted the wealth of understanding that a thorough analysis of the notion of liminality could bring into the study of politics and international relations. They have especially pointed to the role that the liminal has in the definition and delimitation of the Self and the Other, as the marker of both difference and similarity.\(^1\)

However, there are no studies that look at the liminal from the point of view of the entities that are considered to be liminal. More precisely, there are no studies that examine how this condition has been “translated” in the language and the self-image of liminars. In international relations literature there is a reasonable amount of study of notions that are akin to the liminal, such as borders, boundaries, frontiers, buffers, or borderlands. Nevertheless,

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they are not necessarily seen as a crystallisation or reflection of the liminal, not least because they not always are.

In order to study the matter from the perspective mentioned above, I chose to look at three case studies of countries that are considered to be, internally and externally, in different ways, liminal. Furthermore, in order to tighten the research more, I have decided to look at a particular aspect in these countries, namely their foreign policy discourse, and, even more specifically, the geopolitical imagery it produces. There are of course other possible ways of examining a notion such as the one of liminality. For example, one could look at the processes of transition through which entities go, as some authors (quoted in the literature review) have done. However, I have chosen the foreign policy discourse as a primary discursive site for examination, because it is connected more explicitly to the issue of the Self/Other nexus and that of self-perception. The geopolitical dimension of foreign policy became the more specific discursive site for this analysis as my research unfolded and revealed it to be the main site of concentration for representations of liminality.

Given that the issue of liminality has so far been addressed in international relations mainly in respect to the West (mainly Europe and the European Union), as producer of sites of liminality (not well-phrased), the choice of Romania, Turkey and Ukraine, and their relations with the latter seemed a natural focus for the analysis.

Even a very superficial perusal of these countries’ histories, as well as past and current political discourses, shows a painful consciousness of their position in the margin of the Western European space, culture and politics. The image of the country as a border, frontier, bridge or buffer between Europe and an undesirable Other is frequently invoked and actively circulated in each of these countries, with specific variations and intensities.

The centrality of this motif in political discourse led me to operate on the premise that understanding what sense these countries make of it provides an important key to the dynamics of a region of liminals, which has for centuries raised perplexing questions and unsettling problems. Given recent theoretical debates in the field of international relations, which problematise the state as a fixed given entity and deny the linearity of historical processes, I believe it is useful to identify what are the practices and images that shape states and maintain them on the political scene as liminars. This is particularly important when they happen to be found in one of the more volatile parts of the world, namely where Europe meets much of the rest of the world.

In June 2005, The Economist put on its front page one of the burning issues concerning Europe and its Union: its eastern borders, discussing the matter of EU enlargement with respect to its “changing limits” and to the constant dilemmas that this process brings forth. Debate about this issue was symptomatic of the perception that Europe as a project has a spatio-temporal limit, which has not yet been determined, but which is gradually being reached. What the

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5 The Economist, 2005, Meet the neighbours, 23 June.
Economist article did not mention is that the way in which Europe enlarges itself is a process that constantly produces “sites of liminality around it”\(^5\).

This analysis is about the study of such sites of liminality as represented by the three countries under examination, in order to better understand the logic behind their dynamic on the regional and international scene.

The definition of liminality that I used was that given by Donnan and Wilson: “(...) an interstitial condition, a journey from one state of social being to another”\(^6\). However, as the literature review and methodology sections show, it is supplemented by an indispensable in-depth study clarifying this idea. The strategy I used to examine the different images representing liminality was discourse analysis. I have looked at the discourse of “intellectuals of statecraft”, as defined by G. O’Thuatal and J. Agnew, as a group that, through its writings and practices shapes the geopolitical vision in a state.

The three cases under study revealed interesting and sometimes unexpected results. Romania and Turkey proved to be sites of liminality where this state is represented by various metaphors and discursive articulations, showing that the two have accepted, in different ways, the process proposed by Europe that engenders such sites of liminality. In fact, the Romanian case suggests this process has existed for much longer than the European Union and its process of enlargement, even if it is with respect to them that liminality has been studied so far.

Ukraine challenged some of the assumptions in relation to her geographical and geopolitical position, showing that the liminal was not very present in the elite’s discourse. However, through the elements that were lacking in this case, Ukraine underlined the importance of the link between images that represent liminality and the narratives surrounding them. Furthermore, the Ukrainian case posed an important challenge regarding the compatibility between discourse and practice, showing how necessary knowledge of context is in understanding seeming contradictions.

Regarding the liminal, the cases illustrate differently, but richly, that the merit of this condition within the Self/Other nexus is to introduce the dimension of time and the possibility of change, that allow these two notions to become fluid and adaptable, rather than reified positions of an immobile world. The concluding chapter of this thesis equally proposes a typology of images representing liminality, and its gradual movement along the Self-Other axis.

This analysis is structured in six chapters: a literature review, surveying the available texts in connection to the question of the liminal; an outline of the research and analysis method employed; three case studies; and, a concluding chapter providing reflections on liminality, a discussion of the limitations of the research, as well as a mention of future research possibilities.


LITERATURE REVIEW

Liminality is a notion that has not been extensively examined in international relations or even in political theory. It has received more attention in anthropology, through the studies of Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of passage*, and, later on, Victor Turner’s *The ritual process*. Some critical geographers and sociologists of space have also examined the concept. Homi Bhabha, theorist of culture, has used the idea of liminality and limen in order to locate the spaces “in-between”, where “strategies of identity” are elaborated, “the boundary that becomes place from which something begins its presencing”\(^1\).

Ann Norton is a political science scholar who has introduced the notion to the political realm through a study on liminality in 1988. Recently, the notion of liminality has been explored in international relations by Bahar Rumelili, Turkish scholar, and other eastern European scholars in reference to Eastern Europe. Other theorists, such as Ole Wæver, Merje Kuus, and Iver Neumann, to name but three of the more prominent ones, have come indirectly close to the idea of liminality in their examination of the European Union’s enlargement processes and the examination of European identity formation. Many more studies exist on topics approximating or intellectually related to the concept of liminality.

This literature review will comport two parts. In a first part I shall outline the literature that is directly linked with liminality, and talks about it. I shall explain how it is relevant to my current analysis. In a second part, which will be more extensive, I outline the arguments found in the literature that has less direct bearing on my analysis, but which I believe has brought a necessary dimension to the exploration of the issue of liminality in politics and international relations, and therefore has greatly contributed to my understanding and analysis of the issue.

As stated above, the scholars who have theorised extensively about liminality are a

\(^1\) Homi Bhabha, 1994, *The location of Culture*, London: Routledge, p. 5.
couple of anthropologists, Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner, both preoccupied with the rites of passage in initiation rituals of isolated tribes. Van Gennep came to see liminality as a transitory stage in the process of ritual initiation constituted by three phases: separation, margin or limen, and re-aggregation. Liminality in his view was a transitory moment between states, social positions or points in age. Later on, Victor Turner argued that liminality is in fact a state in itself, which refers to any condition outside or on the periphery of everyday life, “neither here nor there, betwixt and between the positions assigned by law and custom, convention and ceremonial”. In his view liminaries elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminality, he continues, is a blend of lowliness and sacredness, homogeneity and comradeship, necessarily ambiguous and represented by a rich variety of symbols (monsters, nudity, death and rebirth, being in the womb, bisexuality).

Turner’s theory has obviously struck a note with sociologists of space since in 1991 Rob Shields has elaborated on his findings, writing about liminal places and how they are upheld through various narratives. In his book, Places in the margin, Shields took the example of Brighton in the south of England and the Niagara falls as examples of liminal places created as such by the kind of activities that were going on there and the narratives about them. Thus, in the 19th century Brighton became

“the centre luminary of a system of pleasure, to which everyone wanted to flee”.
“Brighton was popularly known for ‘freedom of manners beyond Bath in the old days, and for total dissipation beyond London in the new times’.

Together with the fact that the town’s reputation was of a place that accommodated both the wealthy and the poor, the upright industrial bourgeoisie and the prostitutes and hucksters living by their wits, the aforementioned feature made of Brighton a place outside everyday reality and social rules. It was liminal because it accommodated contrasts without being a final and irreversible phase of one’s life.

On the other hand, the Niagara Falls had become in the early 20th century a place of pilgrimage for newlyweds, or rather, honeymoon. It was also a place where people in search of a partner went. As such, the Falls were a liminal zone where the strict social rules of the American bourgeois society were relaxed, because of the requirements of travel and the fact that social surveillance was less intensive. These two examples were extremely interesting, because they could show convincingly how the concept of liminality could be applied to settings and situations other than ritual, particularly to geographical locations.

In 1991, Philip Smith reinforced this idea in an article outlining a typology of places, which he

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4 Idem.
5 Idem.
7 Idem, p. 79.
9 Idem, p. 149.
believed were of four kinds: sacred, profane, liminal and mundane. For Smith, liminal places “are created by narratives of absurdity, and are sustained by quasi-ritualised carnivalesque, playful or grotesque forms of behaviour. These narratives disrupt traditional categories of thought and morality. They are often either ludic in character, or absurd in the sense that they are fragmented and defy any easy classification or ontological grounding except that they are “other” to the everyday”\textsuperscript{10}.

Smith looked at how one place, the prison of Bastille in Paris, could change status and go through all the above-mentioned modes of place. This article was extremely useful in detailing the kind of contrasts and absurdity that characterise a liminal state in another field than that of tribal rituals. In fact, the great contribution that Smith’s and Shield’s writings brought was to show that the concept of liminal was relatively easily transferable and adaptable to different aspects of life and scholarly endeavours. It was not confined to the realm of anthropology.

Ann Norton, writing at the end of the 1980s on liminality in politics also confirmed this fact. Using in her turn Victor Turner’s vision, she elaborated on what this notion could mean in politics. Although she used the basic ideas developed by Turner she brought in a few key notions that had not before been insisted on in connection to liminality. She explicitly affirmed that, in politics, to be liminal is to be between identities. She stressed the productive capacities of the liminal states, and gave a series of concrete\textsuperscript{11} examples, which linked political notions, such as territory, class, and gender with liminality. Thus

“Liminars, whether their rites of passage are ritual or revolutionary, are between identities. In politics, they are between allegiances. This state is marked by ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradiction, yet it is from this disorder that new orders arise. In reflecting on the differences that mark out the liminal, people give meaning to their nationalities”\textsuperscript{12}.

Norton believed liminars stand on the line that defines the state\textsuperscript{13}, and she gave a couple of examples: frontiersmen, intellectual liminars, such as madmen, traitors and bohemians. Even more importantly, she points to the fact that

“the recognition of liminality provides for the differentiation of Self and Other, subject and object, by establishing a triadic relationship: the Self, an object of likeness, and an object of difference. Liminars serve as mirrors for nations (...) However, after this act of abstraction, the significance of the liminar alters. Once the condition that provided material for the decisive differentiation of subject and object, self and other, now undermines that differentiation, providing an illustration in which like and unlike, the alien and the appropriate are inextricably entangled. Thus liminality provides not only for the initial definition of the nation, but also for the recognition of the source of that definition and the informal, immediate state preceding it”\textsuperscript{14}.

\textsuperscript{11} Idem, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{13} Idem, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{14} Idem, p. 54.
This remark is extremely important particularly in the cases I am examining, because they have at times found themselves to be part of the Other against which European identity was built. Turkey was even the epitome of this relationship, which has obviously become problematic.

Norton also outlined the structures according to which entities can be liminal, although they are not exhaustive: wealth, class, gender and ethnicity. As a conclusion Noron tells us:

“liminality is twice relative. It is determined first in opposition to structure, for different types of liminality are created by different types of structure: by class, by wealth, and by proximity to the centre, for example. Secondly, inasmuch as it is ‘betwixt and between’, liminality marks the boundaries or a group determined by a structuring concept”

These remarks and elaborations are extremely useful for my analysis, because, as shall be seen, the countries under study exhibit many of the characteristics mentioned, identified as such both outside and inside their ambit. This is the case in their relationship with Europe, a political and civilisational entity that they claim they wish to join.

This must be also why contemporary scholars have chosen to look at particular states through the prism of the liminal. Thus, Bahar Rumelili, Turkish scholar of international relations, affirms that Europe has placed Turkey in a liminal position to itself, by acknowledging it as part Self, part Other. She upholds, and I agree, that Turkey’s liminal status has clearly demonstrated itself in her institutional relations with Europe. Rumelili’s merit in her analysis is threefold: she builds solidly on the categories developed by Turner and Norton in her analysis of Turkey, opens up the space to the idea that peoples and states can be as liminal as individuals, and emphasises that liminality is a relational condition, not an inherent quality some peoples have and others do not. Furthermore, she stresses that Turkey’s (and by induction) others’ liminal identity is contingent on the current discourse on European identity. If it were to change, Rumelili suggests, its liminars might also change, but as long as there will be a collective identity, there will be liminal sites round it.

This position is upheld by texts dealing with EU enlargement processes. However, before detailing them I wish to mention two other authors who have specifically linked the idea of liminality with the area under study in this analysis, namely Eastern Europe. Jiri Melich and Elemer Hankiss have both likened the post-communist transitional process in the area with a form of liminality. Hankiss has even elaborated a stage-by-stage comparison with Turner’s liminality stages, in an effort to identify which fit and which do not. Hankiss tells us that Turner himself admits that entire societies can go through a liminal phase and he believes that the post-communist transition is such a phase, largely because it is about passing from one type of social order to another, from dis-order to the European order, which is one of the main elements of the liminal state.

15 Idem, p. 91.
17 Idem, p. 221.
18 Idem, p. 220.
19 Idem, p. 222.
The texts reviewed above are rich in elements regarding the possibility of identifying and understanding liminality. They stress the fact that this notion is inextricably linked with questions of identity formation and how Self and Other interact. However, since my analysis has a distinct European focus, there are a few writings on the subject that can help tightening further the link between the subject of liminality and Europe. They shed an interesting light on the process of EU enlargement and its effects in relation to this notion.

Although I found a few texts referring to the matter, I consider three to be representative and particularly relevant for my analysis. They are written by Ole Waever, Merje Kuus and Bahar Rumelili. In their articles, “The EU as a security actor”, and “Europe’s eastern expansion and the re-inscription of otherness in East Central Europe”, Ole Waever and Merje Kuus respectively, adopt a similar view according to which the EU enlargement process creates a form of liminality by creating spaces which are “almost” European, but not quite. As Waever argues, the fact that the EU tells candidate countries “yes, we accept you, but…” creates the idea of an incomplete Europeanness, incomplete modernity and reforms.

“The EU policy, which reflects the basic concentric circles pattern, is to avoid ever saying ‘no’. The answer is always ‘not yet’, or ‘yes, but’. The EU practice towards the East is not to draw a line between those who are European and potential members and those who are not. With the possibility of drawing on the classical uncertainty about the eastern boundary of Europe, the EU manages to place nobody as non-European but everybody as more or less European, more or less close to the centre”.

In is in the “more or less” space that the liminal is born, that my study takes place. After all, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine are such kind of “more or less” European places, struggling continuously to achieve completion. Waever is joined in his opinions by Merje Kuus, who claims that the EU and NATO enlargement processes are creating and re-creating Easts as they advance.

“(…) the representational pattern that privileges the fully European Europe over the not-yet-fully European Eastern Europe continues not as a marginal incident but as a central premise of EU and NATO enlargement. We are witnessing not a dissolution of Eastern Europe, but a multiplication of Eastern Europes. The figure of Eastern Europe perpetually being brought up to European standards is therefore not a threat to, but a precondition for “Europe whole and free”.

Kuus emphasises another very important factor, which will be apparent through my analysis: the EU is largely conceived as a disciplining power, operative in the minds of Eastern Europeans even when they are not conscious of it. This is relevant, because it explains the

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22 Idem.
24 Idem, p. 477.
construction of subject positioning in the discourses that are examined and also helps clarify how certain liminal images fail to take hold in the case these positions are not accepted.

In her article on EU’s modes of differentiation, Bahar Rumelili brings a further dimension to the ones already provided by Waever and Kuus. Thus, Rumelili sees the institution of candidacy to the EU as productive of “acquired” difference. By making other countries to be candidates to membership, the EU implies that its members are natural holders of a series of attributes, such as liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and those who are not yet members do not possess these attributes, or at least not in the adequate degree. However, since these attributes are not inherent, such as geography or culture, they also suggest that, in time, it is possible to develop, to acquire them, and therefore become like the European Self.

Rumelili argues that the EU has different modes of differentiations towards East and Central European countries and Turkey. Her discussion of this is important to my analysis, because it underlines where the main points of divergence are to be found between the Turkish and Romanian cases, for example. Thus, Romania, as part of Central and Eastern Europe, was considered different to Europe based on the acquired characteristics mentioned above, but similar and closer, due to her geographical placement, culture and Christianity, considered inherent features. Turkey, on the other hand, started by being different on all accounts, and depending on what view of European integration was taken, inclusive, or exclusive, was perceived to be more or less closer to Europe. This meant that at best, Turkey could be seen as improving in terms of acquired attributes, but never quite “in” in terms of geography, culture, or religion. However, Rumelili notes:

“Successive Turkish governments have actively resisted constructions of Turkey’s identity as inherently different from Europe by producing counter-arguments that construct Turkey as sharing Europe’s collective identity. Turkey’s counter arguments resonate strongly in Europe, making Turkey’s resistance noticeable. Through its resistance Turkey upsets the establishment of clear boundaries between Europe and non-Europe, and has a subversive effect on the exclusive aspects of European identity” such as geography and culture.

My analysis will show that the development of the liminal imagery in geopolitical and foreign policy discourse can be seen both as a as a means of resistance to the fact of being defined by Europe, as in Turkey, and as a means of accepting the definition coming from Europe, as in Romania. In both cases, however, the countries actively participated in the process of negotiation of what a European identity is, thus staging a siege directly on the essentialised variant of what that might be. The development of the liminal imagery also signified the acceptance and adoption of the European discourse on enlargement. On the other hand, Ukraine, somewhat

26 Idem.
27 Idem, p. 37.
28 Idem, p. 41.
29 Idem, p. 44.
30 Idem, p. 45.
excluded from this multifaceted process, will confirm through what it lacks the presence of the aforementioned developments.

The writings surveyed above constitute the theoretical matrix of my analysis, as they provide the guiding ideas and principles of the research. As can be observed from their ensemble, they deal with relatively abstract notions and processes. In my analysis I wished to see how these concepts and developments transpire in the geopolitical thinking of elites, how they are translated in terms of geopolitical language and figurations. This is why, in the following section of this literature survey I look at studies undertaken about notions that are akin to the liminal, such as borders and frontiers. By looking at the way they have been examined in different bodies of literature I aim to identify the elements that make them be associated with liminality. I also aim to sketch out what have been the dominant approaches in this matter and how they can inform my own research.

The general opinion is that borders constitute a fascinating and extremely fertile field of study, capable of offering insights in a variety of subjects, ranging from how the human mind works to how states make sense of their territories and subjects. However, the downside of that richness is that there does not exist an ideal way of approaching the matter, a way that is capable of exploring exhaustively the possible meanings and significance that borders carry with them. In short, there is no such thing as a theory of borders that could frame the issue.

In the domain of the social sciences, some of the most recent analyses emphasise the mixity and plurality of borders, their capacity to enhance social and political metissage, and idea very much akin to the liminal; they celebrate the incommensurate character of borders, drawing attention to the various levels on which they operate. They also seek to unpack the black box of the bordered state and show that in order to understand the latter’s mechanism it is necessary to question the role of borders, their appearance and the justification of their existence.

Many social scientists especially in the field of international affairs have decried the reification of borders, the assumption of their fixity and the fact that they have been “enrolled” notionally in the fiction of the territorialisation of the modern state and its equation with a nation and its population. To a certain extent what is lost is the kind of openness and oscillation that the liminal quality of borders bears. J. Agnew has aptly shown that for too long scholars and political practitioners have assumed equivalence between the state and its territory, whereas in fact, economic and political flows have always transcended its borders, thus giving the latter more than the role of simple containers and limits. J. Agnew and Corbridge emphasised the fact that both geography and international relations have been caught in a territorial trap, which has combined territory with sovereign politics, superimposing and forcing them

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33 In all their aspects: the nation had to coincide with the territorial state, territories of states were neatly divided by the very division of internal and foreign policy, the reification of territorial sovereignty and the objectification of the state lead to the creation of an illusion as regards the similarity of states and people’s visions of territory. Elements discussed in Agnew, and Corbridge, Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory and International Political Economy, 1995, London: Routledge, pp. 79-91.
to fit, hence circumscribing most analyses to a reductive perspective. The two authors point
to the fact that the effort to make territory manageable and readable within certain limits has
pushed the modern state to impose uniform measures and policies, creating thus the illusion
of identification between territory, identity and body-politic, and a very rigid separation
between Self and Other. As a consequence, for many years, research regarding borders in
political geography concerned itself with the study of disputed areas, boundary changes and
their evolution, conflicts over resource allocation or maritime boundaries\(^{34}\). Analyses limited
themselves at this kind of approaches because borders were essentialised and seen as fixed. This
perspective, however useful, remained somewhat limited and has gradually crumbled when
faced with the multiplicity of dimensions that the real (political) world had\(^{35}\). So far, useful
contributions to untangle this trap have been made in the domain of changing territoriosity, of
the modification of the status of borders, and, of course, in the realm of identity construction.

Two\(^{36}\) recently edited volumes take the border scholar on a “tour d’horizon” of how the
issue is currently conceived of: case studies of border populations dealing with their uncertain
status, re-imagining the function of borders in the aftermath of EU enlargement, borders as
keepers and strengtheners of marginality, borders as spaces of difference and interstitionality.
Original contributions, such as Anssi Paasi’s look at borders as social practice\(^{37}\), challenge
conventional perspectives on the matter by suggesting that borders do not merely fulfil
particular functions, but rather are a way of thinking and of understanding the world. Some
scholars concentrate on the constitutive role of borders in the process of appropriating reality
(see Viktorova and D. Newman), and others look at communities as embodiments of the
borders and their dynamics.

The value added by these analyses is incontestable given the fact that they bring borders
firmly into the centre stage of social science inquiry. However, the very localised knowledge
such studies yield is only of limited value for a research that is concerned with whole states
and countries as borders and frontiers as representations of their liminality. At best, they can
show the directions and the uses that border images and metaphors can have. For example,
Paasi’s examination of the Russian Finnish border shows how the status of borders can change,
how they can become from barriers places of passage because the social and political practices
along them have been modified\(^{38}\). Inquiries such as D. Flynn’s\(^{39}\), into cases of weak states that
essentially allow their “fringe” nationals to make what they will of the borders that surround
them depict a situation in which borders are actively used and redrawn in order to fulfil local
punctual interests rather than long term centrally planned strategies.

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\(^{34}\) Donnan and Wilson, 1999, op. cit., p. 47.
\(^{35}\) Idem, pp. 79-100.
\(^{38}\) Idem.
\(^{39}\) Donna K Flynn, 1997, ‘We are the border: Identity, Exchange and the State along the Benin-Nigeria Border’, in American
Historical cartography sheds light on the process of state making through the angle of mapmaking and the efforts, which political elites employ in order to make the territory of the society they wish to rule legible and intelligible. In conjunction with analyses such as those mentioned above, it can help reveal the dynamics behind frontier states.

In his book “Seeing like a state”40, James Scott provides some important insights about the way in which modern states have sought to make sense of their territory and the people inhabiting it. “An exercise in simplification and legibility” is what Scott suggests the action of states has been in general in matters administrative of the territory. By taking various examples, going from forest management in early modern Europe through Soviet collectivisation to villagization in Tanzania, Scott shows that the central administration of states has always looked for ways of simplifying the ‘social hieroglyph’: ‘much of early modern European statecraft seemed similarly devoted to rationalising and standardising what was a social hieroglyph into a legible and administratively more convenient format’41. This simplification process sought to overcome the problems that the pre-modern states faced, such as ignorance about their subjects, their wealth, location and identity42. The states did not have maps to represent their extent and limits and therefore they began to standardise and homogenise their territories administratively when drawing them. Thus, for example, measurement units were recalibrated and generalised throughout the whole country and complex social practices were codified and subsequently rewritten in a simpler fashion in order to make sense at an official level. Scott furthers his analysis and reaches the conclusion that these new social and administrative maps ‘were not just maps, they were maps that, when allied with state power they would enable much of the reality they depicted to be remade’43. He gives the examples of the Great Leap Forward in China and villagization in Tanzania, Mozambique and Ethiopia to illustrate this affirmation. However, what is most important to remember from Scott’s very pertinent analysis is the fact that the act of dismembering complex and poorly understood sets of relations leads to an obtuse simplification of perspectives and impoverishes the understanding of realities in the field44. This conclusion is particularly relevant in the case of borders, which, as has been previously stated, have for a long time been seen as lines or barriers, mainly because the rationality of the modern state has produced maps that concentrated on the most utilitarian and, in that sense, simple function of boundaries, mentioned above.

Josef Konvitz, scholar in historical cartography, confirms that in the early modern states ‘borders were easier to describe verbally than to represent cartographically. Territories were assigned to one state or another because they belonged to a given diocese or customs unit or according to some other non-topographic criterion that a surveyor could not depict’45. When states started to systematise their knowledge of territory, borders appeared as continuous

40 James Scott, 1998, Seeing like a state, how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed, Yale University Press.
41 Idem, p. 3.
42 Idem, p. 2.
43 Idem, p. 3.
44 Idem, p. 21.
lines; however, ‘since the frontier was negotiated with an eye to the next war, assumptions internalised in the treaty making process included the likelihood that the boundary was not permanent’\(^{46}\). Later on in the 18\(^{th}\) century, proposals to consider rivers as “natural” boundaries took gradually more ground and this became a principle for organising territory within and between countries\(^{47}\). Konvitz’ study points to the arbitrariness of boundary making in early modern Europe. At the same time he makes a point which Scott emphasised 10 years later: the necessity to manage and understand territory has gradually pushed central administrations to develop entire mapmaking machineries which in their activity codified and re-imagined the places they were representing\(^{48}\).

In doing so, such practices have attempted to inscribe a sharp division between Self and Other, thus excluding the third element of the triad mentioned by Ann Norton, which, paradoxically, was the one helping with the identification of Self and Other. By trying to reify a binary view of the world, modern state-making has also set itself up for failure in its evolution process, because in the absence of the third factor, it became condemned to a reproduction of its own limits and shortcomings.

However, more recent developments in historical approaches to borders have succeeded in capturing more of the nuances, which the notion of border implies, veering more towards the idea of liminality. The concept of borderland has been introduced in order to illustrate the wider place around the frontier, and is the result not only of the process of questioning space and territoriality, but also temporality. Borderlands are spaces that comport a history of their own, where the people have developed specific strategies to cope with their peripherality. Thus, historians have brought to the fore the idea that beyond their common functions, borders may have particular roles to play in the forging of the identity of nations and in the illustration of how the influence of the state is actually perceived and managed in these areas. As a consequence of this new perspective, authors have shifted their focus on borders and borderlands as agents of change and transformation. The work of Peter Sahlins on this matter constitutes one of the more salient examples\(^{49}\). His study of the Cerdanya Valley\(^{50}\) people follows the way in which national identity became entrenched in the borderland between France and Spain. Thus, ‘an essentially ecological conflict between neighbouring settlements became a national revolt pitting French and Spanish Cerdans against each other’\(^{51}\). This was done through the active engagement of the borderland population in the administrative process of boundary creation; for example, when in 1866 Spain and France achieved settlement on territorial issues regarding the Cerdanya Valley, the inhabitants of the area rejected it, claiming

\(^{46}\) Idem. 
\(^{47}\) Idem. 
\(^{48}\) ‘The use of maps helped to rationalise diplomatic procedures and strategic thinking(…) the border mapping activities of the Army and the Minister of Foreign Affairs show that permanent mapmaking and map-collecting functions were taken seriously in the last decades of the Old Regime’, in Konvitz, op. cit., 1987, p. 40. 
\(^{49}\) Although other historians have also concentrated on the issue: Asiwaju and Adeniyi (1989), Baud and Van Schendel (1997), Derby (1994), and Martinez (1994). 
\(^{51}\) Idem, p. 251.
it did not represent or respect their reality. Thus, they asked for a clear delimitation of the French and Spanish areas, through petitions and active opposition\textsuperscript{52}. Sahlins claims that such actions were the result of perceived differences between the different parts of the population, which were only subsequently transformed in political realities. As Wilson and Donnan point out,

“Sahlins shows that there is no intrinsic, inherent or necessary relationship between territory, identity and sovereignty”\textsuperscript{53}.

Nevertheless, establishing that there is no foregone equivalence between territory, identity and sovereignty only emphasises how intricate and complex the matter of borders and liminality actually is and how important it is to understand in what way it has participated in the creation of the modern states, which are under scrutiny in this study. This is why a thorough look at how the issue of liminality as represented by the concept of the border figured in the birth of the Romanian, Turkish and Ukrainian geopolitical discourses is necessary, as groundwork for understanding the development of the discourse on the liminal in these three contexts.

A historical perspective similar to the one practised by Sahlins or Scott is useful for two reasons: it accepts the fact that borders are dynamic processes, thus allowing for the understanding and the mapping of change, and concentrates not only on how the centre can influence the margins, but how the margins can themselves affect the image and discourses that are created about them. In a project whose underlying/background research theme is the interplay of different factors in the design of a political, economic, security and cultural/civilisational space (namely the European one, as shall be discussed later) such an approach is crucial. It needs, however, to be nuanced by looking at particular topics that reveal the moments in which borders can be especially important and gain meaning.

The IR literature on geopolitics, security and identity issues brings methods and ideas that further shape my research, by giving it a more specific direction.

The study of international relations has engaged with the issue of liminality as borders in their various dimensions, political, geographical, legal and even social.\textsuperscript{54} Michel Foucher, in a survey of the geopolitical consideration of the border/frontier gives a brief outline of how this geographical and political feature is seen\textsuperscript{55}. He contrasts the ideal frontier

“La bonne frontière? On la voudrait naturelle mais effacée, ouverte mais protectrice, lieu d’échanges et de contacts, de conciliabules (…)” with the reality of the terrain, and claims that often, frontiers “sont l’une des traces de systèmes spatiaux qui se sont effacés. Elles sont ainsi les témoins ou les mémoires d’une sorte de télescopic de temps différentiels. On se trouve à des degrés variables, en présence d’une combinaison de temps sociaux distincts. L’établissement de frontières a rompu, provisoirement ou définitivement des processus historiques, qui pouvaient tendre vers l’éclatement ou vers l’unification”\textsuperscript{56}.

\textsuperscript{52} Idem, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{53} Wilson and Donnan, op. cit., 1999, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{55} Michel Foucher, 1988, 	extit{Fronts et frontières, un tour du monde géopolitique}, Paris : Fayard.
\textsuperscript{56} Idem, p. 21.
This remark is important in so far as it points to the fact that geopolitics has been for the greater part of its life a process of “writing the global space”\(^{57}\), of categorising the world according to particular criteria, most of them product of the Western mind. Foucher identifies in history particular states that have been frontier forgers, such as ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, and creator of the “limes Imperii”, the old Chinese Empire, Byzance, the Ottoman Empire and Russia\(^{58}\). However, he draws attention to the idea that in most of these cases (except the Chinese) borders were not always clearly delimited. The limes imperii ‘étaient par définition invisibles et en tout cas introuvables\(^{59}\), while in Byzantium, heir to Greek and Roman conceptions of borders, they were a mixture of ideological and cultural limits\(^{60}\). These features indicated a sense of liminality as determined by the existence of a collective identity, or at least an ethos of a space. The Ottoman Empire respected the different border set ups of the conquered people, whereas the Russians established their frontiers in the forests and used various social techniques (demilitarisation and instauration of serfdom and forced emigration) to demarcate them\(^{61}\). The linear and clearer aspect of borders, Foucher claims, appeared around 1700, with the occasion of the Russo-Turk negotiations, when Western diplomats saw an advantage in tracing them, as this process ensured the visibility of clauses and gave them the opportunity to intervene in the affairs of a very troubled spot. Foucher claims that the fact of writing borders was Europe’s way of dealing with the Oriental Question\(^{62}\). It is, therefore, not surprising that to this day, the question of liminality looms large in this area. What is important to retain is that making frontiers, although not a “new” activity\(^{63}\), became a conscious and political one in the modern era and formed one of the main elements of the discipline which is today known as geopolitics, the study of how geography bears upon international politics.

Unfortunately, the “founding fathers” of geopolitics\(^{64}\) have had a very reductive approach to the idea of space and by consequence to borders. Space was for a long time considered as “given” and therefore the practices that it enclosed and that ultimately made it up were ignored. Consequently, from this standpoint borders were seen as merely the bearers of space, with no generative power. In these conditions, focusing on liminal states, those entities that stand in-between different essentialised portions of space would yield only the image of marginalised international actors, caught in an immense jigsaw of power politics; there was no manoeuvring space in which to find out how their border like quality is enacted, changed and produced.

“Critical geopolitics” is the term dubbed by G. O’Tuathail in a homonym study referring to a series of analyses which seek to deconstruct existing geopolitical discourses. O’Tuathail starts

\(^{57}\) O Tuathail, op. cit., 1996, p. 33.
\(^{58}\) Foucher, op. cit., 1988, p. 34-47.
\(^{59}\) Idem, p. 37.
\(^{60}\) Idem, p. 38.
\(^{61}\) Idem, p. 45.
\(^{62}\) Idem, p. 47.
\(^{63}\) More will be said about this topic in the history section, which shall include the issue of cartography.
\(^{64}\) Mackinder, Ratzel, Haushofer, Mahan.
from the premise that there is no such thing as an objective reality and therefore, geography and geopolitics, as any other form of knowledge, impose a certain reading of the world, by which it produces a particular text interpreting reality. Given this idea, scholars who seek to understand them must look at the spatialising practices of practitioners of statecraft as well as the spatialising practices of strategic thinkers who set themselves up as authorities on the totality of the world political map. In doing this, O’Tuathail focuses the attention upon “the scripting of places” into the spatial spectacle of world politics, emphasising at the same time the issue of hegemonic discourses. In his own words:

“critical geopolitics is a tactical form of knowledge. It works within the conceptual infrastructures that make the geopolitical tradition possible and borrows from it the tools necessary for its deconstruction.”

So far, the studies which have been performed using this approach concerned cases of war, namely the first Gulf War. They have provided important insights regarding the way in which geography is discursively constructed in order to justify and facilitate the undertaking of certain actions. They have also outlined the political practices through which images are constructed and maintained. It is suggested that using this perspective can liberate the study of geography and geopolitics of its ethnocentric focus and Western ideas, opening the field for alternative explanations of space. Indeed, having seized the major problem of classical approaches, namely the imposition of Cartesian perspectivalism and enlightenment rationalism on the study of the world, critical geopolitics allows for the study of borders as spaces that are practiced politically and that are invested with a status other than bearers of a pre-determined geographical destiny. In this context, liminal states and their representations of liminality in geopolitical discourse appear as ideal subjects for the exploration of the “grey areas” of international politics.

Critical geopolitics is a good approach in the study of frontier states because it concentrates on spatial dynamics and the ways in which it is discursively controlled and created by “intellectuals of statecraft”. It favours the examination of policy documents, map making processes and histories, all materials that can testify how the border images have been codified and changed and how they have influenced official policies. At the same time, it takes into consideration power relations and the way they mark geographical realities.

Studies have been performed which attempt to put into action the critical geopolitics approach precisely with respect to frontier countries. Mario Apostolov’s analysis of the Christian-Muslim Frontier is but one recent example which sought to show the complexity of the area(s) that lie in between the Christian and the Muslim worlds. At the basis of his study

66 Idem, p. 60.
67 Idem, p. 61.
68 Idem, p. 68.
69 Explained by O Thuatail as the assumption of the existence of an objective reality that can be known.
70 M. Apostolov, 2004, The Christian-Muslim Frontier, A zone of contact, conflict or co-operation, London: Ashgate
lays a basic problematisation of the border/frontier as a line or as a zone. This debate was for the first time stirred by J. Gottman; M. Foucher claims that that this issue has its origins in Anglo-American semantics, which have conflated the meanings of borders and frontiers, this attitude stemming from the fact that the Anglo-American tradition considers borders as things in themselves, when in fact they are political products of particular historical processes. Apostolov claims that in fact the Christian Muslim zone of contact is both a zone and a line and a divide and a bridge between civilisations. By looking at the “wave-like movement” of this frontier, he is able to underline the myriad of complex processes that occur in the countries that compose it: mobilisation of national identities, isolation of certain minorities, the constant drawing and redrawing of borders between states. Nevertheless, despite the great merit of engaging and re-directing the studies of contact zones in a positive perspective, Apostolov leaves certain issues under-explored with respect to the peculiar realities of frontier states, because he does not delve into the analysis of their political practices with respect to their status. How do these states deal with this peculiar quality? Do they engage with it or do they just “suffer” from it? One of the crucial reasons for which it is difficult to answer such questions is a clear lack of existing research upon which to build one’s projects. This is where my study comes in, by looking precisely at some of the missing pieces that have been mentioned.

An examination of the discursive construction of the liminal condition sheds light on the different images that make it up and on the dynamics existing between them. Yet, in order to uncover these factors it is necessary to engage them from a perspective that is actually capable of revealing them. This means I shall analyse situations and issues in which the matter of liminality occupies a significant place, such as relations with the EU and NATO and their discursive representations.

In addition to these bodies of literature the ethnographic and anthropologic approaches are necessary to supplement and to provide the theoretical and practical “glue” which brings practices together.

W. Donnan and T.M Wilson aptly point out the fact that borders constitute the hieroglyph of state power and they are one of the few clear manifestations of it. They represent the limits of a state, the place where effective sovereignty ends and begins. State borders can exist on many levels, but their more pragmatic use is in the control and guard of the territories they delimit, the management of the flows of people and as the demarcation of the end and the beginning of different political and administrative units. Frontiers, their direct corollaries, have a more difficult function, of being

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73 Idem, pp. 24-29.
“territorial zones of varying width which stretch across and away from state borders, within which people negotiate a variety of behaviours and meanings associated with membership in their nations and states.”

The important thing to note is that the two notions are taken in conjunction and that it is believed that they influence each other. The difficulty that arises for the study of borders and frontiers in anthropology is, however, as Prescott has noted, the fact that they are so much part of every day life and reality that often they become unnoticed and taken for granted. Prescott claims that they are almost invisible to many people and as such they escape anthropological inquiry. Part of the effort of making borders less invisible is the process of identifying where and when exactly they play a role in a state and its people’s lives, which essentially means scoping for moments and circumstances in which liminality is represented. This is precisely the exercise that I set out to pursue in the development of my research.

It is important to note that questions and re-definitions such as those alluded to above rest on other types of studies done on borders, notably those performed by Frederik Barth on social boundaries. Although not directly relevant to interstate borders, his analysis of different cultural and ethnic groups provides precious insights into the behaviour of boundaries, because it brings under the spotlight the mechanisms through which a group gets inscribed and ascribed to a particular identity. Barth’s findings point to the fact that ethnic groups are socially constructed and

“made up of individuals who strategically manipulate their cultural identity by emphasising or underplaying it according to context. People may cross the boundaries across groups, but this does not affect the latter’s stability and durability.”

Cohen and Wallman bring an interesting dimension to social boundaries. Cohen compared the boundary to a balloon, whereas Wallman saw a comparison with a teabag as more appropriate; both these images referred to the noted capacity of borders to be influenced and impregnated by factors coming from outside(s). This discussion signified the acknowledgement that borders had sides, which were often opposite and that the boundary provided an interface between “two systems of activities, organisation and meaning”, between an inside and an outside and between “us” and “them”. Thus, the relational nature of social boundaries is revealed to give birth to questions such as: what is a boundary used for? In which contexts is it relevant? What is its status in history? What meaning does it have on the other side?

79 Idem, p. 22.
80 Wallman quoted in Donnan and Wilson, op. cit., p. 22.
81 Idem, p. 23.
By looking into the meanings that people give boundaries and borders, Cohen realised that for some people they existed and for some they did not: “not all boundaries and not all the components of any boundary are objectively apparent. They may be thought of as existing in the minds of the beholders, (...) they may be perceived in rather different terms, not only by people on opposite sides of it but also by people on the same side”\(^82\). Another important finding is that in cases where boundaries were supported by a structure, such as class and kinship in Britain (which constitutes Cohen’s focus of study), they remained in existence even after the latter disappeared, “in people’s minds”, thus becoming boundaries at a symbolic level. This notion has the advantage of being applicable to all levels of analysis and inquiry, including the one undertaken by current research. It also resonates with the processes outlined by Waever, Kuus and Rumelili, who mention the resistance of the border between Self and Other in the relation between the EU and its partners, border that repeatedly gets inscribed and re-inscribed creating ever more liminal spaces. Nevertheless, as many critics have remarked about both Cohen and Barth, their systems tend to focus too much on the inside part of the equation they have outlined, whilst paying little attention to the external constraints that determine the way in which borders appear, develop and gain a particular meaning\(^83\). Therefore, as issues of power are largely ignored in their accounts, it is necessary to look to studies, which have engaged with it in order to see what instruments are available in such an approach.

“The Hidden Frontier”, a book written by John Cole and Eric Wolf\(^84\) traces the birth and resistance of the cultural frontier in two villages of South Tyrol, by looking at the survival of ethnic boundaries in the context of changing state borders (the passing of the two villages from the Habsburg Empire to Italy in 1919). Their approach was innovative because it provided a historical dimension and combined political economy with anthropological research, thus providing a complex picture of what life at the border is. Since then, the opinion that borders and borderlands ‘are sites of creative cultural production that require investigation’\(^85\) has become an accepted view amongst anthropologists. It is necessary to keep in mind the fact that borders represent ‘spatial and temporal records of relationships between communities and between states’\(^86\) and as such they hold the key to political and cultural practices that go up to the very heart of states.

These ideas have been encouraged by a variety of studies, which looked at borders as determinants of national identities, as influences on local culture, as passages in legal or illegal movements (migration), as the substance of symbols of everyday life. The subject living in this space is caught between influences that it crosses, combines and ultimately sublimes into its own identity, adapted to its needs, themselves determined by the situation it is in. Such a perspective is pivotal in understanding the processes at work in the countries to be examined. As borders appear to be a most favourite representation and approximation of the liminal, at

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\(^82\) Idem, p. 12.  
\(^83\) Donnan and Wilson, op. cit., p. 25.  
least as far as academic studies are concerned, the body of literature reviewed above proves extremely useful in understanding the way in which the border is intimately tied with the liminal. It is also good to know how borders have come to be understood from fixed lines and rigid demarcations as liminal places. Together with the texts dealing directly with liminality, the texts above constitute an important guide for my analysis. However, I shall show in my study that the border and the frontier are not the only possible representations of the liminal. For that, the most useful literature available turned out to be the primary sources from the cases under examination themselves.
Definitions

Liminality is an admittedly vague concept and can act as an umbrella for many notions, all-hinging on the idea of passage, transition, signpost that marks a change of condition. Donnan and Wilson offer a working definition\(^1\) that suits this current analysis: “(...) an interstitial condition, a journey from one state of social being to another”. However, and this is a very important element, I want to point out that most of those who wrote more extensively on liminality did not merely stop at giving a definition. The many pages Victor Turner and, later on, Ann Norton (writing specifically on political liminality) spent on the subject prove that it is not a notion or a state that can be exhausted by a definition.

The word itself comes from the Latin *limes*, which means threshold\(^2\), but has been used in Roman times to denote the limits of the empire-*limes imperii*-meaning those Roman provinces which were the last outpost of civilisation before the worlds of the barbarians. Paul-Augustin Deproost offers a brief but representative account of the evolution of the notion of *limes*:

> “étymologiquement le limes est un chemin qui borde un domaine et dont l’emplacement est toujours bien défini par les arpenteurs dans le cadastre des campagnes. (…) auparavant, tant que la conquête était a l’ordre du jour, cette limite n’était qu’une ligne de départ, une ligne nomade (…) dès le moment où il est devenu une limite défensive et fortifie, le limes est apparu comme un espace de séparation et de démarcation. Ainsi le limes créait une limite d’Empire qui distinguait non pas deux

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\(^1\) Donnan and Wilson, 1999, op. cit, p. 66.

\(^2\) I would like to thank Professor Andre Liebich for pointing this out to me.
It is important to remember this idea because to this day the concept of liminality encompasses more than just borders, frontiers and limits; it marks the idea of difference and constitutes the notion that designates the point where differences are visible yet mitigated, where they create a blend of their own. Liminality is an eminently relational concept, and as such it is inscribed in the wider issue of the relation between the Self and Other. As Bahar Rumelili remarks,

“liminals appear as a threat to the communities that are concerned with maintaining a structure of identity and clear Others, because as entities that fall in between they challenge the categories and hierarchies embedded in that structure. (...) Liminals undermine the differentiation between Self and Other, by providing an illustration of a condition in which the like and the unlike, the alien and the appropriate are inextricable entangled”

However, their importance resides in their very hybridity. C. Mouffe pointed out: “By accepting that only hybridity creates us as separate identities, it affirms and upholds the nomadic character of every identity”. This analysis delves at the heart of this matter by showing how representations of liminality and hybridity participate in the production of subjects with evolving identities, thus introducing the possibility of change for the otherwise essentialised image of what Europe might be from the point of view of its identity.

Victor Turner, whose writings on liminality were detailed in the literature review above, noted about liminals that they elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Ann Norton gives a whole host of characteristics for liminars, ranging from the idea of the outlaw, to the sacred and the profane, the invisible and the outspoken, madness, weakness and strength (see above).

In addition to these seminal writings on liminality, the article written by Philip Smith on the elementary forms of place is particularly useful in providing guiding criteria about how to analyse the issue of liminality. He proposes that places have four modes in which they exist, and any place can be in one of these modes at a given point in time. These modes can come and go, depending on the practices and discourses that make the up. They are the sacred, the profane, the liminal and the mundane.

“Liminal places provide an alternative point of mediation between the sacred and the profane. They are seen as being outside the everyday place, where everyday

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9 Idem, p. 13.
rules are seen as held in abeyance. They are marked by ludic forms of behaviour and emotional constellations which suspend the traditional moralities that are founded upon the careful separation between the sacred and the profane"\textsuperscript{11}.

These are the ideas that lay at my vision of the liminal for this analysis. However, they do not provide concrete indications about how to identify the liminal in the geopolitical discourse of intellectuals of statecraft, as outlined below. Given the literature examined for this study, I believe there is a series of images that can be seen as representations of the liminal in geopolitical discourse, or rather representations of the self-perception as liminal by the elites in the countries under examination. I wish to make clear that I do not believe these images constitute perfect embodiments of the idea of the liminal. To the extent that the liminal points to the state of in-betweeness, they all do; however, each emphasise a different attribute of liminality, varying from the margin and the outsider, to the insider with capacities for projection of a certain system of values. I believe that all the images that are outlined below have a “family” air that relates them to the concept of liminality and as such they constitute an imperfect but real representation of what it feels like to be liminal in the geopolitical vision of particular people. The point of studying how they tie into a discourse and with other images and subject positions is precisely to find out how particular narratives and constructions give them more depth and sense, thus bringing them closer to that which they are meant to represent.

In his study of liminality Rob Shields pointed that liminal sites are not only constructed through images, but also through a series of practices and narratives about those places that suggest the quality of being liminal\textsuperscript{12}. By looking at the narratives in which these images are embedded it will be easier to understand how the liminal is perceived and represented in three particular contexts. The practices do not constitute the focus of my study, but they are mentioned occasionally.

The images I considered as indicating a perception as liminal are the images of buffer, barrier, border, frontier, crossroads, nexus, confluence, thresholds, margins, and any synonyms or metaphors suggesting these notions. Borders, limits, frontiers, margins or thresholds are tightly knitted within the philosophical debate concerning the separation and unity of the world, constituting a protagonist of choice in a universe hitherto divided according to Cartesian logic and metaphysics\textsuperscript{13}. Indeed, from this perspective, the images mentioned above as linguistic representations of liminality appear as necessary elements in an environment governed by the law of finite dualities. However, from here also stems their controversial status, since they are supposed to embody at the same time an end and a beginning, thus becoming the enactment of the duality that they are supposed to underpin. As a consequence, they contradict it by bringing to the fore the fact that reality is far from being neatly divided into ins and outs,\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11}Idem, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{12}Rob Shields, 1991, op. cit., p. 75.
\textsuperscript{13}This logic refers to the idea that the world is structured according to a duality that always posits an inside and an outside, an observer and an observed etc.
heres and theres, and is rather like a tide, with elements growing and retreating, never being completely separated from each other.

The nature of the border is such that it constitutes the place “where life is turned towards the outside, and its function is to represent something that is (already) not there”, a kind of interface and a form of passage between entities, where space comes undone and recast in a place other than the neighbouring one. Furthermore, Donnan and Wilson interestingly affirmed the border is a good metaphor for liminality\(^\text{14}\).

The bridge, Georg Simmel tells us, separates and unites at the same time and maintains the ambiguity of the direction in which it is taken\(^\text{15}\). On the other hand, the buffer might seem as the antithesis of communication and linking, but the fact that it refers to a position of in-betweenness, particularly in world affairs, brings it close to the idea of liminality in that it also suggests precariousness and uneasiness, as well as a high exposure to conflicting interests and therefore influences.

The frontier already suggests more openness and flexibility, but it also indicates the presence of the margin, of the end of something and the beginning of something else, and as the literature examined above shows, it constitutes a quite appropriate metaphor for the liminal condition.

The crossroads, nexus and confluence, all relate to the idea of multiplicity and hybridity, of fluid movements and unclear classifications. The threshold and the margin are perhaps most commonly linked to the notion of liminality. However, I wish to stress that all these images would mean very little without the stories around them, which give them depth and sense. This is why the next section of this chapter deals with the elements that are part of those stories and narratives.

**Methods of inquiry**

As Mary Kaldor noted, the way we describe the world, and the words we use, shape it and the way we decide to act in it and on it. Starting from this basic premise, which is accepted in different forms by many scholars concerned with the importance of the impact of words and discourse on the reality we live in, I have decided to look for the liminal in the geopolitical discourse of three countries. The reason behind that is the wish to understand the value of the liminal in geopolitics, and particularly the “geopolitical imagination” existent in these three particular cases. This undertaking is based on the idea that images are discursively created and articulate into discourses, and as such shape reality by enabling the existence of certain ideas and practices, and making others seem less adapted or appealing for in a given circumstance. (As outlined in the writings of Roxanne Lynn Doty, Jennifer Miliken, Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes, quoted below.) As structure, discourses are socio-cultural resources used by people in the construction of meaning about their world and their activities\(^\text{16}\). What I am examining is

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\(^{14}\) Donnan and Wilson, 1999, op. cit. p. 66.

\(^{15}\) Georg Simmel, op. cit.

the meaning elites have chosen for the liminal in the image and geopolitics of their countries.

I shall be looking at the discourses of what G. O’Thuatail and J. Agnew have termed the “intellectuals of statecraft” -

“a whole community of state bureaucrats, leaders, foreign policy advisors, who influence and conduct the activities of statecraft. Ever since the development of the modern state system in the 16th century there has been a community of intellectuals of statecraft. Up until the 20th century this community was restricted, with most intellectuals also being practitioners of statecraft. In the 20th century this community has become quite extensive and internally specialised”\(^{17}\).

Together with this definition, I also adopt a vision of geopolitical discourse as proposed by the two scholars. They suggest that geopolitical thinking can be formal, governed by particular rules of statement and codified systems of ideas, largely belonging to strategists and public intellectuals, and practical, as used by decision makers. Practical geopolitical thinking tends to be more simplistic and based on common sense type of affirmations, using binary distinctions found in societal mythologies\(^{18}\). For the purposes of this analysis I shall look at both kinds of thinking, which are intertwined and sometimes flow into and from each other. It is in view of this strategy that I shall look at texts that pertain to both decision-makers and experts or analysts. Priority will clearly be given to the former, but the latter will equally be considered as primary sources of material, because, depending on their analyses and the ways in which they express their opinions they perpetrate or contradict certain ideas and points of view.

Therefore, the materials examined are official documents regarding foreign policy decisions, public political statements, political strategies as outlined in the programmes of governments and political parties’ platforms, and interviews with members of the political elite\(^{19}\). As stated previously, I also look at analyses, reports and articles written by experts. Within this set of primary sources, I consider official speeches and statements of the decision-making elite as most important. A media analysis will be used as a complement indicating what was the scope of the statements on the liminal in a particular context.

There are also writings and opinions coming from experts that I did not use as primary sources. They are mainly analyses that take a critique approach, examining various points of view, thus exposing the different perspectives rather than espousing a particular one.

As A. Johnston suggests in his analysis of strategic culture\(^{20}\), in such studies it is also important to examine the formative period of the country because this constitutes a moment


\(^{18}\) Idem, p. 194.

\(^{19}\) ‘Foreign policy making can also extend beyond the realm of official government institutions. The reception as meaningful of statements revolving around policy situations depends on how well they fit into the general system of representation in a given society. Even speeches and press conferences statements produced for specific purposes, in order to be taken seriously, must make sense and fit what the general public takes as “reality”. Thus, the analysis of statements can entail the examination of what was said and written within broad policy-making contexts as well as statements made in society more generally.’ Roxanne Lynn Doty, op. cit., p. 303.

when the “seeds” of various discourses are planted, that might appear and develop at a later discourse analysis in the policy of the state. Therefore I look at historical texts, which have mentioned or hinted at the liminal in its different guises, in order to identify which were the primal connotative chains and articulations that saw its birth.

I adopt a definition of discourse as enounced by Roxanne Lynn Doty, “a system of statements in which each individual statement makes sense, and produces interpretive possibilities by making it impossible to think outside of it”\(^{21}\). I shall perform discourse analysis as explained in the writings of Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, and Jennifer Milliken\(^{22}\).

Following J. Milliken’s three stage type of discourse analysis, I shall be looking at discourses as systems of signification, at their productive capacity in terms of creating subjects, subject positions, and at the “play of practice”\(^{23}\) in order to identify which discourse on the liminal, if any, has been received, extinguished or been dominant in the period under study. Having performed this operation for all three cases I shall make a comparative analysis outlining the similarities and differences present, thus being able to trace the life time and qualitative variations in terms of intensity and images that are used in order to substantiate the discourse. As a consequence, I shall equally dwell on what these three cases indicate about the liminal in geopolitical terms, as well as the function of the liminal in the creation of a certain image or identity.

To this end, both predicate and metaphorical analyses\(^{24}\) will be used with a view to present the details of the images used in the discourses, of the way they are used in relation to other images and ultimately, of the larger picture they construct in connection with discourses on the same theme stemming in another age or period. Narratives, frames and metaphors will take a large part of the analysis, as components that structure and give direction to discourses.

Regarding discursive practices, I shall apply the approach outlined by Roxanne Lynn Doty in her article on US foreign policy in the Philippines\(^{25}\). This approach examines how discursive practices constitute subjects and objects and organise them into a “grid of intelligibility”\(^{26}\).

There are several ways of examining this phenomenon, through the prism of various textual mechanisms: presupposition (the creation of background knowledge about the world where particular ideas are held to be true), predication (attaching qualities to a subject through the use


\(^{22}\)Jennifer Milliken, 1999, op. cit.


\(^{24}\)As outlined in Jennifer Milliken, 1999, op. cit., pp. 232-234


\(^{26}\)Idem, p. 306.
of predicates and adverbs) and subject positioning (the relation between subjects and objects, which can be of opposition, identity, similarity and complementarity). It is important to look at discursive practices because they enable and create the propitious conditions for material practices. In the context of my analysis, predication and subject positioning are important because, depending on the subjects produced, they will indicate what is the nature or rather presupposed nature of the elements associated with the liminal, their hierarchy and power rapport. It is necessary to identify what elements are associated with particular modes (or images) of the liminal; for example, is the image of the bridge associated with an ambiguous characteristic, with ideas suggesting ambivalence, or predicates indicating intense linking activities? Is it associated with a subaltern position in the discourse, or is it presented as a sign of superiority? The answer to this type of question will provide elements as to how the liminal is seen in these three cases; they will also enable the creation of a typology concerning liminal images. In addition to that, one other indication, provided by Laffey and Weldes in their work, will be used. This will be the identification of chains of connotations in relation to the liminal, as well as the connection between certain entities (be them ideas, institutions, civilisational notions) and liminal images. At the end of each case study, I introduce a table that sums up the main features mentioned above, in order to present the essential part of the findings.

In pursuing my discourse analysis I favour a genealogical method in identifying discursive practices in relation to the liminality issue, in order to be able to identify what was the location of the dominant discourses, how they participated in harnessing a certain reality and what power relations they reflected through their unfolding. Looking at different historical moments in all the three cases under examination, I try to identify if and how a certain “dialogue” occurs between present decision-makers and liminal images elaborated previously; are they contested or adopted and rearticulated for another type of message? Another dialogue that is pursued is that with Europe, as a provider of cues for liminal images (mentioned in more detail in the “Case selection” section). The idea of the dialogue points to the concept of the “dialogical imagination” as adopted in international studies by those who sought to introduce the philosophy of Michael Bakhtin to the study of international affairs. Indeed, I believe that identities and policies, particularly foreign policy, are produced as a result of dialogue between utterances pronounced by various actors. However, my analysis focuses on distinct moments of history and discourse, and not on a continuity of the kind that is observed in a dialogical study of a relationship. Nevertheless, this feature will be mentioned when relevant to the evolution of the discourse on the liminal.

Case study and case selection

In his (in)famous “Clash of Civilisations” Samuel Huntington mentioned Romania, Ukraine

27 Idem.
28 Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes, op. cit., p. 28.
and Turkey in relation to the idea of being “torn” countries. About Ukraine and Romania he said

“This (fault) line between civilisations runs along what are now the boundaries between Finland and Russia and between the Baltic states and Russia, cuts through Belarus and Ukraine separating the more Catholic western Ukraine from Orthodox eastern Ukraine, swings westward separating Transylvania from the rest of Romania (…)”29.

About Turkey:

“The most obvious and prototypical torn country is Turkey. The late 20th century leaders of Turkey have followed in the Atatürk tradition and defined Turkey as a modern, secular, Western nation state. (…) at the same time”30.

With reference to Turkey, Iver Neumann had an interesting remark:

“If the Turk really became what we may call a marginal or liminal other in the guise of the “sick man of Europe”, we have in the case of Russia a European other, that has been marginal all along”31.

As for Romania, he chose to quote Timothy Garton Ash: “Romania is a borderline case”32, insofar as qualifying as an East Central European case. All these remarks, whether just or extremely arguable, point in a direct or indirect way to a perceived quality of these countries as being liminal.

Writing on Turkish-Greek relations within the framework of the EU, Bahar Rumelili rightly pointed out that International Relations theory has ignored liminal entities for too long, merely because they represent a difficult subject33. She adopts Victor Turner’s definition of liminals, as ‘entities that are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arranged by law, custom, convention and ceremonial…They elude and slip through the network of classifications that normally locates states and positions in cultural space34.’ According to this definition, she suggests that Turkey is a liminal state and constructs her argument taking this idea into account. In my opinion, Romania and Ukraine also fit into this category. Philip Smith tells us:

“Liminal places are created by narratives of absurdity, and are sustained by quasi-ritualised carnivalesque, playful or grotesque forms of behaviour. These narratives disrupt traditional categories of thought and morality. They are often either ludic in

31 Iver Neumann, 1999, op. cit. p. 63
32 Idem, p. 145.
33 Bahar Rumelili, ‘Liminality and Perpetuation of Conflicts: Turkish-Greek Relations in the context of community building by the EU’, European Journal of International Relations, 9 (2), pp. 219-220.
34 Idem, p. 220.
character, or absurd in the sense that they are fragmented and defy any easy classification or ontological grounding except that they are “other” to the everyday.\footnote{Philip Smith, 1993, op. cit., p. 20.}

Although one would be hard pressed to show how exactly any of these countries are “carnivalesque”, there is a sense of the absurd in the way they are perceived and even perceived internally. Thus, about Romania it is often said that she is placed “at the gates of the Orient, where everything is taken lightly”, Turkey is seen as being “on the threshold”- the domain of the djinni, and Ukraine fails to fit many of the classifications that some try to assign her.

However, there is no extensive research looking into finding out how this liminality is experienced or understood in these countries in the sense of its representation. In my literature review I have shown that texts have indeed been produced which talk about the liminality of these places, focusing mostly on a state of mind, rather than concrete images. In most cases it is simply assumed and used in the construction of other arguments. This is the reason why I chose to concentrate on the details of how liminality is construed in the geopolitical discourse in these three similar cases, strategy, which should point out the similarities and the differences in making sense of this condition.

In analysing the three countries, I uphold Rumelili’s opinion that

“liminality is not an objective condition, but rather a contextual position that is socially and discursively produced (hence opting for discourse analysis as the method of analysis)”\footnote{Bohor Rumelili, op.cit., p. 222.}

which is also why my approach is historical, diachronic and looks at the relation with Europe as the particular context for the forging of the liminal position.

Europe sustains a system of rules, norms, processes and configurations which, although far from being homogenous, enjoy a “minimum” which allows them to be considered “European” and create a space, or a “zone de rayonnement” in which different places and territories play out different spatial practices destined to produce and re-produce (consciously or not) this space.

It is generally agreed that there is no such thing as a common European identity that could be said to lie at the root of a European space. In fact, the multiple identities that can be identified on this continent\footnote{Which, truth be told, has even difficulties identifying itself as such if one bears in mind the fact that it is not entirely clear if one should talk about Europe or Eurasia or if this should be an exclusive geographic category or a political and civilisational mark.} are testament to how diverse it really is and how wrong it would be to try to level them out. However, there exists a European project, based on a few crucial sets of processes, such as the modern state, sovereignty, democracy, human rights, modernity and post- that can be said to be vigorous enough as to be space and place creating, in and of itself. The European space is as much an ideational as a geographical one. This double quality has made it notoriously difficult for Europe to define and set limits to itself, which is why the
question of its borders and margins are a fixture in European debates at all levels (economic, social, political etc.) The EU, recuperating the European project, favours the birth of the issue of the liminal mostly through the debate over its borders and through its enlargement process.

Ole Waever, Merje Kuus and Bahar Rumelili notice that in the process of EU enlargement the countries in the East were and are never told “no” if they wish to become European. The answer is always “not yet” or “yes, but” 38, suggesting that their European quality is not denied but needs improvement. Rumelili notes that this tactic has the result of creating a grey area around a European core of countries; referring back to her scheme of inherent European qualities and acquired ones, the countries of Eastern Europe theoretically present no problem with the first set, but have a great amount of catching up to do in the second category 39, by being “almost European” and not fully so.

In her turn, Merje Kuus remarks that EU enlargement has at its centre a process of re-inscription of otherness by multiplying Eastern Europe; the uses of the East in this context are to signify that a place is not quite European 40 and to keep it circumscribed to a zone from where it still has to learn something, to progress. However, since Eastness has become a symbol not of anti-Europeanness, but of a certain gradation of how European an entity is, it can easily be reproduced by countries who have “graduated” or progressed enough to be considered more European than others. Thus the so-called central European countries can have an Eastern Europe, comprised of Balkan countries and Romania, whilst these ones can have Turkey, Ukraine or Russia as their Easts 41. Given this situation, Kuus suggests it would be interesting to look at processes through which Easts create other Easts, meaning it would be good to look at the phenomenon not in the core power centres, but in the relatively peripheral ones. This analysis does not aim to address this problem, but by examination of the liminal in these “Easts” aims to shed some light about the mentality in these places, and how far they have adopted this liminal vision as their own.

I wish to specify that I do not believe that the three countries chosen are the only ones that enjoy a condition of liminality. Rather, their choice represents the concertation of several


41 Idem. This opinion is reiterated by Gerard Delanty, 2004, “Peripheries and borders in post-western Europe”, Eur 52. Available at http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-08-29-delanty-en.html#footNoteNUM11. Accessed October 2008. “With the gradual incorporation of the periphery into the core, the periphery does not disappear. Rather new peripheries emerge. This is already the case with regard to the division that is now becoming evident between the countries that have joined the EU and those that remain outside. Although the older term “eastern Europe” is now losing its meaning in that it does not refer to a specific regional entity, the functional equivalent is taking shape with countries further to the east – such as Moldova, Belarus, and Ukraine – and to the southeast – such as the Balkan countries".
criteria: personal interest, accessibility to sources, timeliness (given their involvement in an intense political and economic process relevant to the entire Eurasian continent), geo-political positioning and emblematic identity.

As previously specified, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine are countries whose liminality is often mentioned and constitutes an active element in the states’ self-definition. Moreover, they are situated in the same geographical and geopolitical zone, whilst at the same time exhibiting considerable differences, fact which makes their comparison interesting because it enlarges the potential range of variation of the liminality image. By looking at these cases in a diachronic approach I seek to identify what are the enduring images surrounding the idea of liminality and, if possible identify what are the factors that make them enduring. I believe it is useful to construct the three case studies in historical perspective, choosing particular periods in their history, which are going to be examined for the presence of representations of the liminal.

Given that the three countries are extremely diverse from many points of view: physical size, geographical position, history, length of life of the modern national state, languages, cultures, it is necessary to find a few common issues against which the issue of liminality can be “measured” and assessed. Having established that the geopolitical discourse is the main interest of my research, especially in their relation with the identity of the three countries, it is natural to select for examination the common matters that concern all the three countries: the relation with the EU, NATO and regional politics. These are all instances in which the question of liminality is highly relevant and therefore offer a wealth of materials to survey for the appearance and evolution of its representations.

Since a relational approach is implied, and since the idea of liminality implies a Self and an Other, matters will be looked at from the perspective of a link with Europe and the West. This is why, for all the historical moments under study, Europe and the idea of Europe will play a significant role in understanding the whole border debate. For that reason, part of the research will also focus upon the responses that Europe had when faced with the images of the three countries, in order to see how receptive it has been to them. This may also constitute a measure of how productive the discourses on the topic in the three cases have been.

As a last note, I would like to specify what this analysis is not. It is not an attempt to demonstrate that the three countries in the study are liminal. I operate on the assumption that they fulfil many of the criteria outlined in the definition on liminality. It is also not a foreign policy analysis of three countries, nor an exploration of their identities or identity formation processes. All of these elements will, of course, come into play and they are important in the unfolding of the analysis, but they do not constitute its focus.
Introduction

As outlined in the methodology chapter, the findings of the research concerning Turkey are grouped around the four main conceptual categories structuring the discourse on liminality: liminal images, subject positioning, predicate analysis and hailing processes. The Turkish case exhibits some interesting features, insofar as hailing processes and subject positioning point to a more tumultuous relationship with Europe and the EU, which necessitated more specification and determination than the relationship between Romania and Ukraine and Europe/EU. Associated with this feature are a significantly higher number of liminal images present in the Turkish discourse; I am not suggesting a causal link between the two. Rather, given that the Turks had a greater amount of time at their disposal, as well as a more sustained effort at constructing a coherent position, we are witnessing an effect of accumulation and consistence in connection to liminal imagery. Throughout the chapter it will become apparent that the strength of liminal images, particularly those related to geopolitics and geography are used as a springboard and a solid stand in the development of subject positions and hailing processes, as well as other liminal images, such as those related to identity.

Turkey is a particular case in the triad that I examine for two main reasons: she carries the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and has a history of free expression and democracy (even if limited in form), which is longer than both Romania’s and Ukraine’s. This feature is very important because it means that no matter how patchy and constrained the Turkish democratic record might be, at least in terms of geopolitical and foreign policy debate it has been relatively open since the 1960s. Consequently, there are more materials and a variety of sources available for understanding the issues around liminality. However, the fact that Turkey rose “on the ashes” of the Ottoman Empire gave the history of the liminal question a shorter span, in the
sense that one cannot talk of its existence before 1923 or even before 1960 for that matter. Even if, as shall be seen, there are some Turkish analysts and foreign policy experts that claim that the Ottoman Empire used to fulfill the function of a bridge between Europe and Middle Eastern culture, it is hard to find a concrete filiation of the type found in the Romanian or even the Ukrainian case, not least because Turkey’s discourse on liminal is not constructed as a dialogue with her own history, but rather as an exchange with Europe and the West. It is possible to see that modern Turkey inherited from the Ottoman Empire an uneasy relation to Europe, first for being seen as the latter’s seminal “Other” and second, for taking over the modernity project initiated in the middle of the 19th century, which in 1923 became the official goal of “joining the West” and becoming Westernised, as announced by Kemal Atatürk.

Much more than in Romania’s case, the question of the modernity project appears salient in relation to matters liminal because through it Turkey sought not only to improve herself, but also to prove her belonging to Europe. Thus, whilst through her modernity project Romania merely tried to catch-up with other elder European brothers, Turkey aimed to prove her political and cultural outlook could be European even if somewhat different; Romania did not need to modernise in order to be European, she could stay a poorer less developed and less respected sister in the family, a second-hand European country (some would argue she still is), whereas Turkey’s Europeanness is still brought into question, in spite of her significant efforts. Therefore, although the modernity project can be considered relevant for liminal imagery in all three cases under examination, in Turkey’s case the two are explicitly linked. This is because being modern and being European are different ideas in this instance, since the country runs the constant risk of attaining modernity without attaining Europeanness, a factor that depends on recognition from Europe itself.

Regarding the structure of the chapter, it is similar to the Romanian and Ukrainian cases, including a historical section and one focusing on the past 16 years. The contemporary period examines discursive episodes and trends in relation to the liminal question by looking at similar types of documents and sources: official speeches, official declarations, memoirs, histories, commentaries, media analysis and interviews. An interesting addition compared to the other two cases is a section on the perception of Europe on Turkey, directly and strongly related to the issue of hailing, because it informs a dialogue between two consolidated and mostly inertial positions. My research has yielded a significant number of materials concerning the dialogue between European powers and Turkish authorities on Turkey’s identity, suggesting this is an important element participating in the shaping of the liminal discourse. With reference to the Methodology chapter, where I have specified the issue of “defined or be defined”, the Turkish case constitutes a solid case of a battle of geopolitical wills and definitions. Thus, I analyse the different definitions and images projected by European leaders onto Turkey and seek to follow how many of those are integrated or dealt with by the Turkish elite, feeding them into the larger stream of discussion on the matter.

As a preliminary remark about the findings in the Turkish case I would like to point to the fact that Turkish elites seem to be particularly attached to the image of the bridge for their country. Even if occasional analysts or decision-makers express their discontent with this metaphor, claiming that a bridge is too easily trodden and discounted or simply not representative of what Turkey is, there is a general sense that a bridge is what best describes the function that the country fulfils. This
is an interesting element because as we can see in the Romanian and Ukrainian cases the image of the bridge is something that is to be eventually surpassed. I would like to suggest that, depending on the progress in relation to Europe and the West in general, Turkey’s perspective will also change and it is probable that the bridge metaphor will also fade to be replaced by other images.

**From Empire to Republic, Turkey’s road from “the Other” to… “the Other”?**

This section of the chapter examines the period before the years that constitute the focus of my study (1987-2006) and aims to clarify the kind of ideas or “embryos” that existed in Turkish foreign policy discourse that might have fed later liminal images. Although it does not delve into the details of the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the commencement of its modernisation process, it mentions the main features and developments in relation to this process. This historical part is not as long as in the Romanian and Ukrainian cases, largely because Turkey as a modern state has emerged in a spirit of break and revolutionary change with respect to its predecessor, the Ottoman Empire; she was not created in order to restore an identity or a dimension, but to pursue a new idea. This did not mean a complete denial of her past (which would have been useless), but an attempted break with many traditions and beliefs. This has been seen occasionally as a shortcoming for Turkey because denying the past prevents a critical examination of it and therefore political atavisms persist often without being acknowledged. It is important to be aware of these elements, however, because they lay at the base of the formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; furthermore, knowing about the general traits of the Ottoman Empire and its transformation helps understand what kind of inheritance Turkey received and perpetrated in international affairs. In addition to this, the section examines aspects of Turkey’s dealings with NATO and the EC when these institutions were created, as well as the ideas and images that were developed once Turkey became part of the European security system by becoming a NATO member. NATO and the EC constituted the two facets of the West and the two “branches” of it with which Turkey had most contact and relations, which is why the focus of this entire chapter is on relationships with both of them. The sources and materials used for this part of the chapter are largely secondary, with the exception of several memoirs and analyses identified in the press of the time. The question might arise about the number of texts, 12, for a relatively long period of time, namely from 1947 to 1989. The reason behind such scarcity is complex: there are few texts, written in Turkish or English, directly concerned with the liminal question, this is also a period of ongoing definitions and variable (read not always harmonious) relations with Europe and the West (as shall be explained later), it is equally a context when Turkey sought to prove her Western credentials rather than a role in relation to Europe (which remained fixed and one-dimensional during the Cold War through her NATO membership); the 1960s and 1970s were a period when Turkish elites also looked closer to the Middle East, concentrating less on Europe (as I shall mention). Yet, the selected texts represent the opinions of characters intimately connected with foreign policy decision-making, ranging from former ambassadors to military strategists, opinions backed and detailed by the secondary sources used as documentation for this period. Some of these opinions were expressed in the Foreign Policy journal of the Ankara Foreign Policy Institute, a representative academic organ that has been the flagship of foreign policy opinion since the 1950s.
Cevat Acikalin, military officer 1947 “Turkey’s international relations”, International Affairs

Editorial 1952 “The victory of the Government”, Cumhuriyet

Editorial 1952 “The Military and strategic aspects of the Atlantic Pact”, Cumhuriyet

Nuri Eren, Turkish diplomat 1960 Turkey Today and Tomorrow, an experiment in Westernisation

Osman Okyar, analyst 1963 “Should we join the Common Market?”, Cumhuryiet

Ferenc A Vali, analyst 1972 A bridge across the Bosphorus

Kamran Inan, military officer 1974 “Turkey and NATO”, Foreign Policy

Ismail Soysal, foreign policy analyst 1977 “The influence of the concept of Western civilisation on Turkish foreign policy”, Foreign Policy

Mehmet Gonlubol, foreign policy analyst 1975 “NATO, USA and Turkey”

Necdet Tezel, military officer 1986 Opening speech of the seminar on Eastern Mediterranean security: “NATO perspectives”, Foreign Policy

Ihsan Gurkan, military officer 1986 “Security environment in the Mediterranean”, Foreign Policy

The modernisation project and the Turkish Republic

The Turkish republic rose from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire in 1923 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Historians tend to agree that this moment represented the culmination of the reform process initiated by the middle of the 19th century in the Empire as well as the result of a long period of decline¹. It also represented the start of a new era, in which the modernisation and Westernisation drives that had been initiated by Ottoman bureaucracy were given a new élan and meaning by the same Atatürk². Modernisation and Westernisation processes are the umbilical cords through which the Ottoman Empire and subsequently Turkey have connected to Europe and have tried to demonstrate their Europeanness. Often used interchangeably, they came to represent the move towards the creation of a modern democracy, a secular state (in which religion belonged to the private and not the public sphere),

modern public services, universal franchise and a modern economy. In my view, the difference between modernisation and Westernisation was in the idea of cultural choice: the Turkish state could become modern whilst keeping certain civilisational aspects which would make it less Western-like, whilst Westernisation was a purposeful adoption of Western traits, such as the Latin alphabet instead of the Arabic one, or, much later on, the principle of human rights. The efforts invested in joining NATO and the EC represented the summum of modernisation and Westernisation trends combined, since being received in these institutions constituted a sign of recognition of Turkey’s belonging to the Western world, and therefore her modernity. These processes worked hand in hand with the attempt to confirm and consolidate the Ottoman Empire’s and later Turkey’s belonging to Europe.

It is important to be aware of them because they constitute the threads that are intertwined with every political and strategic decision made since the middle of the 19th century and even earlier. Thus, at an early stage the Ottomans started to borrow and adopt Western weaponry and cultural objects, then proceeded to open military schools where Western techniques and science were taught, and ultimately introduced administrative reforms (known under the term Tanzimat) which culminated with the proclamation of the first Turkish constitution in 1876. All of these measures were adopted with a view to modernisation and to rapprochement with the Western powers, and were transmitted to the new republic which was born in 1923, as is suggested by the following commentary:

“Westernism was a tradition rooted in the elite during the Young Turk revolution of 1908, and the independence war. (...) The independent national state of Turkey owes its existence primarily to the group of Ottoman bureaucrats who tried in the decades after 1908 to bring a complete Westernisation of the state and society”4.

It could therefore be said that Atatürk’s policies including complete secularisation of the state, gradual introduction of a democratic-pluralist political system, introduction of Latin alphabet, universal education and a judicial system based on the French model represented an important step towards modernisation for Turkey. Indeed, for many in the country the progress registered by Turkey in the inter-war period, including good relations with neighbouring countries (most of them former possessions of the Ottoman Empire) manifested through treaties and alliances such as the “Balkan pact” of 1934, was a sign that she was rapidly becoming modern and Western. Furthermore, the very definition of the new Turkish identity as Western created the belief that the country was indeed very similar to counterparts such as France, or Italy and Britain5.

One can therefore imagine the surprise and disappointment felt by the Turks after World War II when they overtly claimed they wished to join the Western bloc (of which they believed themselves to be part) only to encounter the doubtful gaze and attitude of the main Western

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4 Idem, p. 3.
actors, who publicly expressed their opposition to Turkish participation in any existent or future Western organisation. As Saban Calis showed in an article about the beginnings of sustained Turkish-West relations, the era immediately following the end of the war was full of uncertainties for Turkey, not unlike the present days.

The reason why it is important to know about these beginnings for the liminal imagery is because it is at this time that the framework for questioning Turkey’s identity as a European country was set for decades to come; in its turn, the questioning on Turkey’s European identity is directly related with liminal images, since they act as one factor representing how far or how close Turkey is perceived to be on her way to being European, or rather accepted by Europe as such. Seen in this light, liminal images in this case fulfil the same function as for Romania, with the difference that in Turkey’s case the doubt was whether she was European at all, rather than what kind of European country she was. This nuance sheds light on why in the Turkish case the issue of European identity is emphasised and permanently under the spotlight, whereas in the Romanian case, where the doubt is not about belonging to Europe but about the kind of Europe that Romania is (second hand, incomplete, young, etc.), this is not such a primordial matter; instead, the focus shifts on how to be the best kind of Europe, how to catch up and what are the best roles that could help in this process.

Another feature to keep in mind about the Turkish case is that inner and outer questionings about Turkey’s Europeanness did not emerge in the years after the war, but existed in a different form long before. They appeared more or less at the same time as the process of modernisation/Westernisation started, which naturally brought to the fore tensions between Eastern and Western cultures, thus pitting reformers against reactionaries within the Ottoman Empire. At that time questions about identity surfaced in the wake of Westernising measures, seeking to establish which of them were compatible with a certain Ottoman identity, indicating both self-doubt and justifying doubts from Europe. However, they were not raised in the sense of being European, both because an idea of Europe such as that which emerged after World War II did not exist and because the Empire was thought to be part of the European international system; as pointed out by many analysts, the Ottoman Empire was portrayed as the “sick man of Europe”, not of Asia, terminology which indicated at least a direct interest by European powers, if not the acceptance of the quality of being European. Furthermore, as Idris Bal remarks, the Ottoman Empire had started to look at the European countries and was constantly seeking recognition for its progress; the 1856 Paris Treaty represented in the eyes of many its admittance to the Concert of Europe, if it agreed to protect its Christian subjects. The continuation of this recognition has since remained one of the Turkish State’s main foreign policy goals.

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9 Idem.
With this context in mind, it is easier to understand why Atatürk’s Turkey, having publicly reformed in the name of modernisation and Westernisation, had the expectation of being welcomed by other European countries in their organisations. It is at the very moment of publicly declaring their intentions of joining European structures that the Turks opened Pandora’s box of identity questioning outside their borders, transforming Turkey’s Europeanness question from an internal debate into an international dilemma lasting to this day. The liminal imagery was intimately connected to this issue, since it appeared each time doubt was expressed, as a measure of how things evolved.

As Turkish historian Saban Calis points out, the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan are currently considered a turning point in the history of relations with the West and Europe because “thanks to the USA and the Truman doctrine Turkey was able to enter the defence structure of the West, but is still struggling to complete the process of integration with Europe as a fully fledged member, a process started by the Marshall Plan.” Indeed, Calis’ analysis suggests that the ambiguity about Turkey’s accession to European structures has existed ever since these two initial moments, and was manifested and one could say, instituted, through a series of developments as follows: the Truman Doctrine designated Turkey (and Greece) as lands to be extracted from the influence of communism, thus giving Turkish elites the necessary moral and psychological support to continue with their Western drive, and the Marshall Plan, its economic companion seemed to encompass her too; however, after successfully participating in the Conference which created the Committee for European Economic Cooperation, Turkey saw herself excluded from the European Recovery Programme that the Conference had established, the pretext being that her development plans fell out of the scope of the Programme. Research undertaken by the US government suggested that Turkey’s development issues could not be inserted in the Recovery Programme; in addition she was considered to be a “cash country” possessing important gold reserves and foreign currency, allowing her to purchase the necessary materials for her agriculture and mining output.

Incensed by this unexpected decision by the American authorities (who were providing the funds) the Turks decided to lobby them more and to make their situation better known internationally. Thus, a concerted effort by the press and renewed diplomatic efforts, emphasising Turkey’s special geopolitical situation as well as the military expenditure which she had to undertake in order to make herself credible as an ally, eventually convinced the

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10 Saban Calis, 1998, “Turkey’s integration with Europe, initial phases reconsidered”, Perceptions, 3 (3); this point is also articulated by Eylem Yilmaz and Pinar Bilgin, 2006, “Constructing Turkey’s Western identity during the Cold War”, International Journal, Winter, p. 41.
12 Idem.
13 Idem, p. 4. Mustafa Aydin, 2004, Turkish Foreign Policy framework and analysis, SAM papers, no. 1, Ankara: Centre or Strategic Research, December, p. 54. It is suggested that although Turkey possessed important material resources, her leaders did not wish to use them in the building of her military might, preferring to obtain foreign funds to this end.
Americans to include her in the European Recovery Programme\textsuperscript{14}, which meant membership in the Organisation of European Economic Cooperation. As Calis remarks, “for Turkish decision-makers and intellectuals alike OEEC was much more than an economic organisation; they regarded it as a political entity of great symbolical value. It was regarded as a symbol of Turkish integration with Europe and the civilised world”\textsuperscript{15}. The Turkish Prime Minister at the time stated that OEEC membership represented the confirmation of Turkey’s place amongst the countries of the West and her important geopolitical situation in a world divided between East and West\textsuperscript{16}. In order to support Turkey’s good faith in her pursuit of membership into Western structures ambassador Cevat Acikalin affirmed: “at a moment when the Allies were in great difficulties, Turkey played the temporary role of a shield behind which the Russians and the British were able to use their forces more freely against aggressors”\textsuperscript{17}. This represents one of the first affirmations with a liminal thrust; the combination of “special geopolitical” use to the West with the image of the shield represented one of the seminal articulations of the liminal theme.

Turkey’s tribulations regarding her membership in European structures continued. The debates sparkled by her desire to join the Council of Europe in 1949, underlined the fact that most European countries did not regard her as European, or as sharing with them the common heritage of Christianity; some even doubted her modernity\textsuperscript{18}. The response of Turkish authorities to these doubts amounted to a “profession de foi”. The Turkish foreign minister at the time stated: “The centre of gravity of our foreign policy is the Western world…Our participation in the Council of Europe as a European country is the necessary result of our long and continuous policy…It is doubtless that in the matter of Turkey’s entry into the Council of Europe in terms of culture and civilisation, the reforms of Atatürk play a much greater role than geography. Our membership is not only a matter of geography but is a result of the revolution of Atatürk”\textsuperscript{19}.

This affirmation is of particular importance for my analysis, because it points to several elements that are crucial to understanding Turkey’s main challenges and dilemmas. First of all, it is acknowledged and re-stated that Turkish elites believed their country to be modern and Westernised as a result of Atatürk’s reforms; second, it was clearly upheld that Turkey had a pro-Western orientation in her foreign policy, thus proclaiming what were her preferences in terms of geopolitics; third, just as in the Romanian case, this affirmation announced the tension existent between the question of geography and civilisation, two main ingredients in the matter of geopolitics. Thus, the foreign minister was responding to those who contested Turkey’s quality as a civilised country of European calibre, but was also responding to those

\textsuperscript{14} Saban Calis, 1998, op. cit., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{15} Idem, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{16} Idem.
\textsuperscript{17} Cevat Acikalin, 1947, “Turkey’s international relations”, \textit{International Affairs}, 23(4), p. 485.
\textsuperscript{18} Idem, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{19} Turkish Foreign minister, quoted in Saban Calis, 1998, op. cit., p. 8.
who would accept her only on her geographic merits. In the battle of “defined or be defined” these were seminal events and declarations, which, as we shall see, reverberated down to the current period. It was at this point too, that the frame for a Europe-Turkey dialogue was set as a defining practice.

The initial contacts between Turkey and European countries in the aftermath of World War II show that the geopolitical and geographic element was not overemphasised, as Turkish elites were more concerned with demonstrating their country’s level of civilisation rather than geostrategic value. However, the push for membership in NATO taught Turkey that geographical position might be her trump card in relations with the West, after all.

Since Westernisation was reinterpreted as of the 1950s to mean not only modernisation, but also a close cooperation with Western institutions at any cost and under all conditions\(^\text{20}\), such ideas continued to proliferate, with emphasis on Turkey’s intention to join the civilised world. When NATO was in the works and when Turkey was refused membership in it in 1949, Turkish elites grew anxious with respect to their future, especially since the doubts expressed by those who were against Turkish membership re-iterated concerns about Turkey’s level of civilisation and compatibility with the Western world\(^\text{21}\). Indeed, Great Britain, Norway and Denmark expressed serious concerns regarding a potential Turkish membership. Great Britain was worried about fund diversion to an increasing number of members and about what effect this would have on her ability to act in the Middle East; at the time, she still wished and believed she could retain influence in the area, projecting Turkey more as a Middle Eastern actor\(^\text{22}\). Norway and Denmark were more worried on civilisational accounts.

Eventually, Turkey became a member of NATO in 1952. The members of the alliance allowed her entry, mainly because the rivalry between the Eastern and Western blocs had become more acute and Russia’s pressure on Turkey regarding the use of the Straits had become disturbing\(^\text{23}\). The USA became the champion of the Turkish cause in NATO against Great Britain, who had wanted to keep Turkey as a player in the Middle East, and not bring her in the Western equation\(^\text{24}\). It is argued that the major reason behind the USA position was the fear of growing Soviet influence in Asia and therefore the need to balance this influence in other regions, such as the Middle East\(^\text{25}\).

Turkey’s contribution with troops to the Korean War and general overt support of Western policies convinced the US that Turkey would be an interesting ally\(^\text{26}\). It is generally suggested, though, that Turkey’s main asset in her application to NATO was her strategic geographical


\(^{23}\) Idem.

\(^{24}\) Idem, p. 53.


\(^{26}\) Idem.
position, a factor that brought to the fore matters of geostrategic value over civilisation issues. A commentary written in Cumhuriyet newspaper on 18 February 1952 showed that the general opinion was indeed that the Russian threat prompted Turkey’s acceptance into the Alliance: “After the war was finished, Soviet Union made its hostility towards Turkey clear and it wanted bases on the straits. When the ambitions of Moscow appeared, Turkey was almost alone. But the USA and Britain started to support Turkey who rejected the demands of Soviet Union. In May of 1947, the USA decided to give military help to Turkey and Greece. After this decision, Turkey and USA became good friends. Turkey benefited from the Marshall help accepted at the end of 1947. In April of 1947, the 12 states signed an alliance agreement called Atlantic Pact against the aggressor and imperialist policy of Soviet Union. Although Italy, which is a Mediterranean state, was taken to the Pact, Turkey and Greece were excluded and the right wing of this alliance agreement stayed open and defenceless. Turkey had made various attempts since then in order to join the Pact. Formerly, these attempts did not work out. At last in September of 1951 in Ottawa Meeting, it was decided principally that Turkey and Greece could join to the Pact. The representatives of the 12 states meeting in London in October accepted to change the some articles of the agreement. The signed protocol was accepted by the parliaments of the member states. At last on 16th of February the ambassador of the USA invited us to join the pact officially. Today the Turkish Parliament will take a decision about joining the Pact and Turkey will join to the Pact with equal rights and obligations. Thereby the Atlantic Pact will be a valid alliance text from North Ice Sea to the borders of the Caucasian.”

Although geographical terms are not explicitly mentioned, a geographic logic can be identified in the way the issue of joining NATO is presented, particularly when the commentators mentioned that without Greece and Turkey the alliance was open on her Eastern wing. Furthermore, other commentaries were not hesitant in bringing about clear geographic and geopolitical elements:

“Turkey is the East wing of the defence wing of the Pact. If we consider the East and West coast of North Atlas Ocean as the centre of the Pact, our country is the farthest country from this centre. (…) Turkey’s front is more important than Europe both for Alliances and Reds. For the Alliance, the Turkey front is the key position to the Mediterranean, Middle East, sources of oil, the Suez Canal; for Soviet Union it is the key of Ukraine and Caucasian which are most valuable lands of Soviet Union.”

What these fragments show and suggest is that in the process of negotiating her participation in Western structures, Turkey gradually had to find for herself a niche in order to be accepted. During these years it started to be defined as a geopolitical factor. However, no matter how much importance this element gained in subsequent years, Turkish elites have always been

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28 Editorial, 1952, “The victory of the Government”, *Cumhuriyet*, 18 February. This idea was also later confirmed by Admiral Sezai Orkunt of the Turkish army in 1974, in a article titled “The interalliance relationship and Turkey”, *Foreign Policy*, 4(1), p. 87. “Turkey had joined NATO as a result of the Soviet demand for military bases on the Turkish straits”.

careful to associate it with the civilisational project on which they had embarked. Thus, as Pinar Bilgin noted in her article about Turkey’s intellectuals of statecraft, throughout the Cold War the country’s membership of NATO was emphasised as an accession to Western civilisation. NATO was seen as a cultural alliance as well as a security one. Turkish analyst Ali Karaosmanoglu affirmed that “Turkey’s decisiveness to join NATO derived mostly from a profound belief in Western values an in the virtues of Western political systems. NATO membership solidified Ankara’s Western orientation by establishing an institutional and functional link with the West”).

This remark was made in light of affirmations made by Turkish decision - makers before and after joining NATO. Thus, the decision to send troops to Korea in the 1950s had been framed as an attempt by Turkey to become a respectable member of the international community as represented by the UN; NATO accession, as has been shown, had been celebrated as an institutionalisation of Turkey’s progress and Westernisation process; during the 1970s different decision - makers, varying from members of the national assembly to former ambassadors stressed that “our membership in NATO is first of all an important stride in our Westernisation movement. The frontiers of Europe now begin from Eastern Turkey”, and that NATO membership signified Turkey’s place in the Western civilisation. These affirmations were generally presented in Turkey’s second oldest foreign policy journal, edited by the Turkish Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, which periodically gathered decision - makers, academics and policy experts as analysts of the evolution of Turkish policy. It is important to take note of this detail because as Pinar Bilgin remarked, all these analyses contributed internally to a particular articulation of Turkey’s Western identity throughout the Cold War.

The connotation chains of this articulation linked the geopolitical situation-the image of the shield of the West-a high degree of civilisation- the image of the frontier, further associated with NATO membership and the Marshall Plan. This essentially created Turkey and Europe as dialogue partners, Turkey in the role of the one who knocks on the door, pushing for entry and Europe tirelessly replying “yes, but not yet”.

Signing the Ankara agreement of 1963, through which Turkey was initiating the process of joining the common European market (a process that is still ongoing), was similarly seen as a way of confirming the country’s Western aspirations:

“Turkey has tried to be a Western country since the 19th century and the foundation of the republic. This is not an easy effort and sometimes it has been faced with insensitivity by the Western countries. Despite that, this act has gone ahead step by step and developed. To stay out of the Common Market means stopping the movement towards being a part of Europe. There may be some people in Turkey who

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33 Ismail Soysal, 1977, “The influence of the concept of Western civilisation on Turkish foreign policy”, Foreign Policy, 6(4), pp. 3-6.
34 Pinar Bilgin, 2006, op. cit., p. 58.
want this to happen. In such desires there are elements of nationalism, fanaticism opposed to the West. But these kinds of reactions are mostly emotional and any policy could not be built on an emotion. The resource of our desire to be part of Europe is due to our effort to be part of the Europe.\textsuperscript{35}

Therefore, associated with the effort of defining a certain Western identity, was the development of the idea of Turkey as a flank country and protective outpost of Europe, especially since Russia was constructed as Turkey’s main source of threat and “other”\textsuperscript{36}. The affirmation quoted a few paragraphs above, that the frontiers of Europe started from Turkey, was completed by others, emphasising Turkey’s contribution to Europe’s security:

“Turkey’s ability to ensure an effective defence on the southern flank of NATO and to continue to play the important role of stability factor in the region is closely connected with the evolution of her economic and military capabilities.”\textsuperscript{37}

or

“Turkey has played a pivotal role in the defence of Europe and the Middle East.”\textsuperscript{38}

Turkey’s geographical location was increasingly identified as a crucial attribute and guarantor of a “special” role in NATO, as “the most critical NATO country in the Eastern Mediterranean and South Eastern Europe”\textsuperscript{39}.

The question is, of course, what ideas existed behind these affirmations regarding Turkey’s unique position and role, regarding her geography. Were they echoing older constructs, or had they been developed as of the birth of the Turkish Republic? In Romania and Ukraine, modern decision-makers had particular historical figures and moments with which they could connect and whose ideas they could re-articulate as relevant to a particular discourse, especially the one regarding liminal imagery. Modern day Turkish decision-makers, with their aim of joining Europe could not say,

“Mehmet II an his conquest of Constantinople in 1453 represented the Ottomans’ desire to get close to the Pope” or “the 1683 siege of Vienna was a sign of their wish to bring together Asia and Europe”\textsuperscript{40};

most of the decisive moments of the Empire had occurred in rivalry to Europe, which is why the Turks were constructed as Europe’s Other (as Iver Neumann showed). Hence, the moments to which modern Turkish elites could appeal were the beginning of the modernisation process,

\textsuperscript{35} Osman Okyar, 1963, “Should we join the Common Market?”, Cumhuriyet, 2 May.

\textsuperscript{36} Pinar Bilgin, 2004, op. cit., p. 48.


\textsuperscript{38} Engin Oba, 1993, “Turkey and Western European security in the new era o international relations: a politica and sociological appraisal”, Foreign Policy, 17(1), p. 54.


\textsuperscript{40} Although there are Turkish historians who claim that Westerners have misunderstood the thrust of the Ottoman Empire, whose leaders, in fact, sought close association with the West at the time of Mehmet II and Suleyman the Magnificent. Kilic claims that to become part of the West had always been part of the Ottomans aims. Quoted in Ferenc A Vali, 1972, A bridge across the Bosphorus, London: John Hopkins University Press, p. 69.
as well as the functions that the Empire fulfilled towards the end of its existence, which meant they were starting from an inferior position. Hungarian lawyer and Turkey expert analyst Ferenc A. Vali showed that Turkish elites saw the Ottoman Empire at the time of its decline as a huge buffer state or crush zone, whose balancing posture was well exploited by Ottoman diplomacy in preserving a certain status quo\textsuperscript{41}. Nuri Eren, former Turkish ambassador, also pointed out the general opinion held during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, as coined by Karl Marx:

“Constantinople is the golden bridge between the East and the West, and Western civilisation cannot go round the world without passing that bridge, and it cannot pass it without a struggle with Russia”\textsuperscript{42}.

The fact that Eren used this quote in a book that aimed to analyse where Turkey found herself and where she came from, suggested that the image of finding herself between East and West, as a bridge, had existed for some time and found an echo in her situation after World War II. In fact Eren was giving an abstract dimension to an idea he had formulated somewhat differently in 1951:

“Why is Turkey so important? First let us consider her position geographically. She stretches all along the underbelly of Russia. Both of her northern frontiers are interlocked with the southern extremities of the Soviet domain. Any attempt by Russia to stretch to the South will be met with the Turkish obstacle. The Straits are another factor. Napoleon said, “he who controls the straits controls the world”. These are the two elements which make Turkey key to the defence of the Middle East and consequently of the free world in a contest with Soviet imperialism (…) Turkey occupies a pivotal position in the defence of the free world”\textsuperscript{43}.

As director of the Turkish information office in New York Eren skilfully played emerging geopolitical notions of the “free world” with older ideas regarding Turkey’s geographical advantages with the aim of underlining her uniqueness and important value to the West; concepts such as “key” and “pivotal” position must be remembered because they shall be heard throughout Turkey’s relations with the West. “Pivotal” referred specifically to the idea that the country could be used as a linchpin against the USSR should that be needed. However, the terms pointed to the contours of a liminal imagery that stressed mostly the defensive values of Turkey’s geography. Eren’s ideas were equally important because of his diplomatic function; through them he was sending a message to Western powers about the kind of role Turkish elites believed their country could play. Furthermore, the timing of this text -1951- namely one year before Turkey was finally accepted into NATO and was strengthening her efforts towards it, supports the idea that Turks had made a choice regarding what was to be emphasised in strategic terms. This focus was equally present in Vali’s analysis, where he claimed that Turkey’s historical role and relative political importance rested, largely, on her incomparable geographical location\textsuperscript{44}. The term “incomparable” referred to the fact that

\textsuperscript{41} Idem, pp. 45-47.
\textsuperscript{43} Nuri Eren, 1951, “The Middle East and Turkey in World Affairs”, \textit{Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences”}, 276, pp. 74-79.
\textsuperscript{44} Ferenc A. Vali, 1972, op. cit., p. 44.
“the owner of the Anatolian hinterland eventually conquered the lowlands along the straits and the Sea of Marmara, including Constantinople. An Anatolian state that did not control the “bridge toward Europe”, would only be another country of the Middle East; united with this historic region it is bound to play a more eminent role”\textsuperscript{45}.

This idea was another way of reflecting what Nuri Eren had otherwise explained:

“The Turkish peninsula, known to the ancients as Asia Minor, is a meeting point between the continents of Asia, Europe and Africa and the waters that surround it offer access to three seas, the Mediterranean, the Aegean and the Black Sea. (...) This intercontinental position has proved an element of strength as well as of weakness”\textsuperscript{46}.

There is an element of determinism in this way of expressing things that pointed to the way in which gradually such images would become dominant in geostrategic thinking, to the point of being able later on to combat other geopolitical figurations, that would emphasise less rapprochement with the West and Europe, and more other features, such as relations with the Middle East.

Thus, these paragraphs contained the basic coordinates of a very widespread Turkish view of Turkey and a very important trajectory, which lead form the notion of a “special” geography to the idea of a defensive liminality: the country as a meeting point, acting as a gate, a passage, a facilitator of sorts and a defender, barrier, outpost and flank; at the same time, this position was recognised as a potential source of troubles and weaknesses. In conjunction with the affirmations quoted above, it is possible to identify two main strands connected to Turkey’s sense of self: one, related to her modernisation and Westernisation process and a secondary one, meant to define the role and function Turkey may have on the international scene. This dynamic could also be noted in the Romanian case.

Throughout the Cold War the effort to depict Turkey as of the West was constantly sustained; the hesitations that the West had in this respect pushed her leaders to develop the ideas around her “special” geographical location, so as to prove her usefulness. It was somewhat ironic that this position slowly developed as decades of relationship with the West, and NATO in particular, went by, whereas in the beginning there was the attempt at suggesting that Ataturk’s reforms mattered more for Turkey’s place in the Western world than did her geographical placement. In fact, one of the threads that will be underlined throughout this analysis is how a geopolitical deterministic thinking has taken a relatively strong hold on the ideas of the Turkish civil-military establishment, to the detriment of a more dynamic outlook on foreign policy matters.

\textsuperscript{45} Idem, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{46} Nuri Eren, 1963, op. cit., p. 227.
In light of Nuri Eren’s analysis, it is easier to understand why that was the case:

“Turkey is Western in orientation and instinct, yet in the Councils of the West an imperceptible but nonetheless effective curtain separates her from the other members. (...) Afro-Asian countries regard her as more European than Eastern and look upon her presence among themselves as anomalous. With respect to the Muslim group, Turkey, vitally secular in her new instincts, does not regard herself as part of the group, and is not acknowledged as such by that group; Turkey is a lone wolf, with no instinctive allies or friends” 47.

His lines suggested a continuous internal struggle fed both by inner contradiction and adverse gazes from the outside; it was equally an inexplicit identification of the dialogic nature of Turkey’s identity formation, and how dependent she was of definitions coming from the outside. What is important in all the texts quoted above is the indication of the images of bridge, flank and outpost, all building towards a liminal imagery that eventually grew to be relatively prominent in the past two decades. As I have previously mentioned, these metaphors did not automatically appear in Turkish discourse, but rather developed over time, as Turkish elites were more and more forced by sceptical views from Europe to find a justification and a role for their country. However, such ideas could also evolve because a particular reading and interpretation of Turkey’s geography already existed during the decline of Ottoman times. Yahia Sezai Tezel, economist and former member of the Turkish government, explained that the idea of Turkey as a bridge country consolidated during the 1960s48; such a chronology is in line with the beginning of sustained Turkish efforts to join the European Community.

The question arises with respect to the “companion” elements that existed along liminal images, namely the way in which the relationship between the various subjects participating in the discourse was perceived. Given Turkey’s enthusiasm for modernisation and Westernisation, it is not surprising to find a significant amount admiration for Europe, but more importantly, “the West”; in fact, it is very interesting to see that until the 1990s, although Turkey wished to join Europe, it was an idea of the West, with its particular values that fascinated her. The texts that I have examined and presented in this section all speak about Turkey’s modernisation and Westernisation project, but the image which results from their language suggests that it was the values as represented by Europe which were appealing, more than even Europe itself. There is a sense in which Turkey emphasised more the values of democracy, liberalism, secularism beyond their geographical span; this is also due to the fact that Turks had devised their own way of acceding to these values, namely Kemalism. Kemalism could be summed up in a few key notions: Republicanism, Secularism, and Nationalism49. These notions, in turn, developed under Atatürk’s deep conviction that

“there are many nations but there is only one civilisation. For the advancement of a nation it must be part of this one civilisation...We wish to modernise our country, All our efforts are directed toward the establishment of a modern, therefore Western, government”50.

47 Idem.
48 Interview with Yahia Sezai Tezel, April 2006.
50 Idem, p. 38.
The idea of “the one civilisation” suggested rather that Turkey’s being liminal would not be good enough for Atatürk (hence perhaps the lack of such references in his statements and speeches); however, just as Turner’s boy who had to be stripped of his clothes in order to be able to join his new community, so had Turkey to rid herself of her “old clothes” and acknowledge the new ones before putting them on. Progress was therefore clearly associated with being Western-like at all levels, beginning with the governmental one. Remembering Atatürk’s credo can help make sense of Turkish elites drive towards modernisation as Westernisation and can explain better the survival of Kemalism (albeit in parts) to this day. In 1968 President Sunay echoed this idea in describing Turkey’s relationship with the West and its values:

“The Turkish nation has acquired the quality of becoming a Western community of its own will and option...The Turkish community will attain the contemporary civilisation level which it desires and deserves only through the path of wisdom and science. The Turkish nation will perpetuate Kemalism, its own ideology with full confidence and enthusiasm and will definitely realise its aims. To think or do otherwise is to deny Turkdom and the history of reforms” 51.

From this, it is possible to identify a logic according to which being part of Europe was the way to become Western, which was somehow a bigger dimension than just being European.

This is why, even if texts definitely expressed a desire for modernisation, they did not present an image of Europe such as in the case of Romania, for example, where “Europe” was seen as the great arbiter of civilisation, the dispenser of appraisal and criticism towards Romania. Even during the contemporary era, when the Turkey-European relationship became much more subordinated, with the EU indeed acting as an evaluator of Turkey’s progress, Turks show a reluctance in accepting Europe’s verdicts and often accuse it of unfairness and practicing double standards. Yet, that did not mean that leaders, and particularly Atatürk, were not sensitive to comments and criticism coming from Europe, as had happened when European writers had affirmed that the Turkish democracy was Western in form but Eastern in practice 52. However, the age-old relations of rivalry rather than submission seemed to inform Turkey’s aspiration of being treated as an equal. There were intellectuals, such as Ceril Meric, who suggested that East-West divisions were irrelevant:

“The East-West conflict is an irrelevant conceptualisation of the West. If West is (thought of as) the motherland of independent thought, then at times East turned out to be West. Ibn Khaldun, who lived in the fourteenth century, is much more Western than Bossuet of the seventeenth century” 53,

this affirmation supporting the idea expressed above of the sense in which the West and Europe for Turks was more than just a geographic reality.

51 Quoted in Ferenc A. Vali, 1972, op. cit., p. 70.
This is also what explains the fact that a dynamic image of Turkey is definitely in focus, more so than a negative, passive one. All the texts quoted above, although they emphasised the need to continue with reform and progress, did not dwell on what were Turkey’s negative traits, even if these were implied by the very proclamation of a need to reform. On the contrary, Turkish leadership underlined the fact that even when it felt spurned by Western powers, as it happened in several instances throughout the Cold War, it remained faithful to the basic tenet of Turkish policy, which was alliance with the West and modernisation. Questionings about both Turkish progress and European attitudes seemed much more intense after 1990, when, as shall be shown, the dynamic of relations had changed and intensified.

Overall, the decades before 1990 witnessed the development of a strong discourse regarding Turkey’s modernisation and Westernisation processes, along which an imagery composed of liminal metaphors and cues regarding Turkey’s role also evolved, although not with the same intensity as during the post-1990 period. The images were generally that of a barrier, bulwark or flank against the Russian menace, not unlike images developed in the Romanian case during the initial phases of the liminal imagery. (Images that were equally attempted by Ukrainian leaders in the early 1990s).

The discourse on the modernisation process had roots in the period of decline of the Ottoman Empire, but also in the initial years of the Turkish Republic, which had given birth to Kemalism, an ideology that structured Turkey’s way to modernity and the West. Articulated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the first president of modern Turkey, it promoted secularism, democracy, and separation of powers in the state and most other principles to be found in the makeup of Western states. It also provoked a great upheaval in Turkish society, particularly with respect to secularism. After World War II Kemalism was “updated”, and the principle of neutrality in world affairs that it had advocated was abandoned in favour of a closer cooperation with Western countries and eventually membership in NATO.

Indeed, at the start of the new Turkish Republic in 1923, one of the tenets of foreign policy enounced by Atatürk was “peace at home and peace in the world”, a phrase that coined a renunciation to imperial Ottomanism, pan-Islamism and pan-Turanism, as well as abstention from offensive alliances or a reactionary attitude, such as wishing to recover lost lands and provinces. This attitude persisted throughout the inter-war era and even during the World War Two, when Turkey waited literally until the last minute in 1945 to enter the war. Atatürk’s determination not to follow an “adventurous” route remained strong even after his death, and President Ismet Inönü kept this path. However, experts (historians and political analysts) agree that with the end of the Second World War, Russia’s threatening demands and Turkey’s

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increasing dependence on Western material and military aid, Kemalism’s neutral stance waned and was replaced by a firm alignment on Western principles and actions, and the ardent desire to join NATO\textsuperscript{57}.

It is at this point that liminal images started to emerge stronger, mostly in response to Turkey’s need to define a role in the Western Alliance, and a resignation to the fact that, after all, geography did matter, along with culture, civilisation and politics in the geopolitical make up of the world. However it is my suggestion that Turkey’s liminal imagery in this era was “rediscovered” and reread during the years that I shall examine in detail.

Compared with the Romanian and Ukrainian cases, one very important difference arises in the examination of the historical roots of liminal images. It was impossible for me to find a reference to a book or a treatise or similar material, which would specifically speak about such matters. Romanians could go back centuries to find the correspondence between Stephen the Great and the Pope regarding the principalities role as defender of Christianity and other subsequent writings; Ukrainians could go back to the 19\textsuperscript{th} century geopolitical treatises, yet the Turks, even if they mentioned the matter, did not seem to have a common starting point. This is not to say that there were no writings on Turkey and what she should be, but they were largely concerned with the Herculean internal reform that was taking place. Certainly, Atatürk had enunciated a foreign policy principle which was “peace at home and peace in the world”, that was underscoring Turkey’s neutral stance during World War II; however, neutrality, just as alliance with the West were essentially new ideas, which did not seem to draw their roots on any older conceptions.

The appearance of a liminal imagery seemed to be embedded in a wider narrative, whose leading thread was the modernisation process, and announced goal was acceptance in the civilised world through means of membership of its most notable structures, NATO and the European Economic Community. As pointed out in the Ukrainian case, the existence of a narrative framing a country’s actions is crucial to the development of discourses and sub-discourses because it gives them direction. This does not mean that there should be just one narrative; there can be competitive ones. The narrative is an ordering element for discourses. In its absence, they often are just a collection of images at pains for articulation or re-articulation. In this case, the narrative of Turkey’s becoming part of the modern civilised world “hosted” the evolution of liminal imagery as one of the elements of a foreign policy discourse. Liminal images constituted an indication of what were Turkey’s intentions but also what was the degree of rapprochement with Europe or the West, as shall be more amply shown.

\textsuperscript{57} Both Mustafa Aydin and Cengiz Otman stress domestic and systemic factors as determinants of this shift. The systemic external factor was principally the Soviet Union, whose policy was seen as forbidding Turkey the possibility of a neutral stance, given her geopolitical placement; on the domestic front experts count the attraction of the Western democratic model, as well as the transition to a multi-party system (strongly encouraged by Western powers), and economic needs fuelled by the necessity to build a strong military position.
Main images and ideas between 1952-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Both domestic and foreign</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject positioning</td>
<td>Turkey Frontline facing the USSR; East wing of the NATO alliance; key position to the Mediterranean and the Middle East; Eastern Border of Europe; member of Western Civilisation; most critical NATO country in the Eastern Mediterranean and South East Europe; along the underbelly of Russia; pivotal position in the defence of the free world; meeting point between the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicate analysis</td>
<td>Europe In the West; embodiment of Western Values; ultimate goal; holder of democratic values;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liminal images/references</td>
<td>Bridge; shield; bulwark; frontline; southern flank of NATO; pivotal</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that although liminal images were present throughout the period under scrutiny, they were not numerous; they were embedded and often swallowed by more pressing concerns, such as the wish to affirm Turkey’s Western qualities. There is also a clear dominance of images suggesting defensive attributes, tying in to a particular description and subject positioning at the point where the idea that is evoked is: Turkey is active in joining and staying connected to the West by playing a defence part in the latter’s structure and system of values. The texts are about what is (at the time) and not about what could be (as it became later). However, before detailing this idea and others further, I would like to point out that the decision to look at the matter in a historical perspective has revealed important elements for the main analysis. Historical texts have provided insights as to why geopolitical metaphors evolved as they did,
and crucially, provided the initial stages of a story that would give context to the images used later on. Unlike the Ukrainian case, where I shall show that such stories were absent, in Turkey they existed and made the matter thicker.

Perhaps some of the reasons behind a relative scarcity of liminal images, and even of texts expanding on other related elements can also partly be explained by the fact that the 1952-1990 period was characterised by a couple of decades of detachment and even cold rapports between Turkey and the West. Indeed, between the early 1970s until the mid-80s a feeling of “désamour” can be said to have existed on both sides of this story.

Several reasons lie behind such developments. Very importantly, after the 1960 military coup and the reconstruction of a constitutional government, the appearance of a multi-party system effectively ended with the Republican party and intelligentsia’s monopoly on foreign policy issues; this fact brought into discussion elements such as the unconditional alliance with the West, and what to do about relations with the Soviet Union or the Middle East. The withdrawal of the US’s Jupiter missiles from Turkey as a trade-off move for Soviet missiles in Cuba disappointed the Turks, as did the 1963 ignition of the Cyprus question (an issue plaguing Turkey-West relations to this day). In 1964, when Turkey was envisaging an intervention on the island of Cyprus as a response to events which the Turkish elite considered unacceptable for the Turkish population living there, the US sent the famous Johnson letter in which the US president was forbidding the use of US equipment in such an operation and was warning that no support would be granted to Turkey should her belligerent move elicit a Soviet intervention. Experts agree this was a turning point in Turkey – US relations, culminating in the 1974 US arms embargo in reply to Turkey’s operation in Cyprus.

In addition, the emergence of a socialist movement advocating a severance of ties with the West as well as the development of relations with countries members of the non-aligned movement and possibly the Soviet Union encouraged a rapprochement with the latter. At the same time, the Turks also perceived the thaw in US-Soviet relations as a good sign. By the 1970s Turkey had developed a “multi-faceted” foreign policy, which included an improved relation with Middle Eastern countries, namely increased support to the Palestinian cause and better trade relations with oil producing countries. However, experts also point to the fact that the principles of identification with the West and the general wish to remain attached to it persisted throughout the turbulent 1970s period. That is why it was possible to find high profile military personnel and government officials affirming Turkey’s basic orientation, and upholding it precisely through images outlined above.

The 1980s represented a period when difficulties arose in specific connection to the EC.

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60 Idem, p. 107; Mehmet Gonlubol, 1975, op. cit., p.17.
61 Mustafa Aydin, 2004, op. cit., p. 73.
Alarmed by the state of Turkish democracy, which had received a worrisome blow from the 1980 coup and military rule, Europe did not hesitate to criticise Turkey on this particular issue as well as her poor human rights record. In 1982 the association Agreement of 1963 was suspended by a Resolution of the European Parliament pending the improvement of the political situation and respect for human rights in Turkey. This gave rise to an ambivalent feeling. On the one hand, Turkey still very much cared about her Western credentials, and therefore reacted strongly to the kind of pressure European countries were exerting by their harsh statements; on the other hand, elites responded to such pressure by orchestrating diplomatic and propaganda campaigns in the West aiming to explain Turkish behaviour and to prevent further criticism. In 1986 relations began to return to normal and in 1988 the Association Agreement was resumed. The important thing to remember at the end of this troubled period is something on which experts tend to agree: these years marked the beginning of the dialogue between Europe and Turkey as we know it today, with Turkish elites becoming sensitive to European observations, which seemed to trickle down into domestic reforms.

This very brief account that does not go into the details of the various Turkish foreign policy transformations (as this is not the place for it) is meant to offer historical context to the discourse that developed between 1990-2006. It is also meant to shed a little more light on why there is not an abundance of texts on the liminality issue, although the ones that exist clearly express the Turkish elites’ opinion on the matter.

Another, very important element that this period introduced and left as an intellectual legacy for Turkey, was the use of geopolitical thinking as a deterministic and uniquely explanatory factor in Turkish foreign policy and later, even domestic policy. In a recent article Pinar Bilgin outlined how geopolitical thinking and geographical determinism has been key in the way foreign policy was envisioned and formulated by both military and civilian elements. Bilgin explains that geopolitics was hailed as a “new science” in Turkey at the same time as the advent of World War Two and has never truly been disowned ever since, even if in the West geopolitics came to be discredited. This vision was similar to the Romanian way of thinking and of looking at geopolitics, which, as shall be discussed, was also considered very insightful as regards to Romania’s mission and position in the world. Unlike Turkey, however, geopolitics was not initially introduced by the military, but was dominated by academics, and particularly geographers and sociologists. This particularity gave it an even greater power of persuasion, since the uses of geopolitics did not seem to be motivated by military strategy or perspectives. The similarity between these two cases suggests that perhaps geopolitics was a useful tool for

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69 Idem, p. 743.
countries and states that, for a while, had few other arguments to explain their situation and, more importantly, aspirations, especially regarding the West. It was also a sign of connecting with the West, since geopolitics had really come from there. Interestingly enough, Ukrainian elites did not seem to tap into this parlance much, trying to devise their own Ukrainian geopolitical rendition of their situation; in doing this, they also signified a more tenuous link with the West.

However, returning to the Turkish case, Bilgin also tells us that geopolitics was introduced in military manuals and in high-school books, where geographical determinism is linked to geopolitics. A 2004 manual affirms:

“the Turkish republic, because of its geopolitical position has had to face schemes devised by external powers. The Turkish youth needs to be prepared to deal with such schemes”\(^ {70} \).

The acceptance of such pronouncements signified the fact that the civilian establishment was itself co-opted to the geopolitical deterministic perspective on things, using it especially in the forging of foreign policy. Bilgin tells us this started to happen as of the late 1950s, when entry into NATO and association with the West was justified with the help of geopolitical arguments\(^ {71} \). Texts and fragments quoted above support this idea, also confirmed by contemporary texts, as shall be shown in the following section.

There were voices who opposed the abuse of geopolitical arguments and who emphasised the need to be more active on fronts other than the geographical one for the progress of Turkey:

“We continue to rely on the West by virtue of the opportunities our geographical position provides them. We seldom consider the fallacy in this. The first step to take towards keeping up with a developing, advancing and changing world is to shed off the passive stance of relying upon our geography and our friends”\(^ {72} \).

Interestingly, this position was also re-iterated during the 1990s and 2000s, when different analysts called for Turkey to enhance her geographical arguments with real political and economic reforms, thus recognising the limits of a deterministic approach.

Overall, the period until the 1990s represented a rich background providing many cues for the development of subsequent metaphors in the 16 years under examination.

**In the eye of the storm: Turkey after the Cold War. Liminal images and metaphors**

This section of the case study on Turkey focuses on the 19 (1987-2006) years of turmoil and intense transformations that were ushered on the international scene by the end of the Cold War. For Turkey they represented a period during which she had to face the seeming

\(^{70}\) Quoted in Pinar Bilgin, 2007, op. cit., p. 746.

\(^{71}\) Idem, p. 747.

\(^{72}\) Quoted in Pinar Bilgin, 2007, op. cit., p. 748.
devaluation of her strategic position as a bulwark against the Soviet Union, the continuous rejection and criticism coming from the European Union and the intensified unrest amongst her infamous neighbours in the Middle East, in particular Iraq. Dealing with all these issues brought into focus many elements, including the matter of a liminal imagery, which was much more developed during these years than in previous decades. As part of foreign policy, the liminal imagery surfaced in the case of the redefinition of Turkey’s strategic position, her relation with the EU and the role she attempted to define in relation to the Middle East.

Therefore, this section will examine the discursive trend that constitutes the background of Turkey’s tribulation, which is essentially concerned with her geostrategic position and identity, and various episodes which pointed to different aspects of her geopolitical exploration, such as the two Gulf war crises, the policy initiative of the “Alliance of Civilisations”, sponsored together with Spain as of 2005, and the debate of whether Turkey is a model or not for other Muslim countries. The reason I mention a discursive trend and not trends regarding foreign policy, is that research has yielded an interesting result, as I shall show: although Turkey has a natural succession of parties in power, their foreign policy direction has never strayed away from a general pro-Western and pro-European stance. Even if the relationship with the same West and Europe has experienced a fair share of ups and downs, the fundamental nature of the relationship has not changed, Turkey never completely severing ties with Europe or the West and the West and Europe never fully accepting her. Even if at a discursive level one could occasionally identify utterances that seemed to announce a radical departure from the established ties, they eventually seemed to fit even more what has been often termed a “love-hate” relationship73. To give a comparative example of this, let us take the case of Romania and the very important episode of the 1999 Kosovo bombings. Through their decision to support the NATO operation Romanian elites were conscious of changing something in the way they thought and acted, which ultimately brought a change in the nature of the relationship between Romania and the West, bringing them closer and more trusting of each other. In Turkey’s case, neither EC’s rejection of membership in 1989, nor Turkey’s support during the first Gulf crisis changed the fundamental relationship between Turkey and the West. The 1995 customs union agreement might have brought Turkey closer economically to Europe, but this did not mean acceptance of her candidacy for membership in EU in 1997 at the Luxemburg Conference. This is why the episodes existent in the relationship between Turkey and the West seem to confirm a certain idea rather than being symptomatic of change. Hence, a first part of this section will look at the general idea of what Turkey is and does and subsequently will examine how and if different peak moments add or subtract something to it. The examination of episodes such as the Gulf crises and specific policy initiatives will be done in order to show how particular instances reflected the liminality issue.

A notable change for the 1990-2006 period was a growing emphasis on relations with the EU,

73 As termed by Meltem Muftüler Baç, 1997, “Turkey and the new European order”, Turkey’s relations with a changing Europe, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
rather than the “West”, as the prime target of Turkish foreign policy. Relations with NATO and the US were also hotly debated, but they did not include liminal images, largely because cooperation in NATO and with the US was principally a strategic and military question, not so much an identity issue (although the fact that Turkey is leaning more towards a democracy constitutes an important factor). As NATO membership stopped being a reliable indication of Turkey’s Western character in European eyes and she was no longer the “southern flank” of the alliance, this quality became merely a good historical argument for other liminal images. This is also the reason why this chapter also includes a relatively extensive section on the way both Europe and the US have been portraying Turkey, although this chapter does not focus on that issue.

Materials used for this part of the analysis are diverse, ranging from speeches, statements, interviews and declarations made by decision - makers to media editorials. A remarkable element concerning the Turkish case is the amount of sources that exist directly in English, without the mediation of translation. The fact that, compared to the two other cases, Turkey had a democratic system (even if limited in certain aspects) for longer than 20 years during the 20th century, definitely encouraged a richness of debate and analysis manifested in public life. Furthermore, because they had to argue their points relentlessly to their Western counterparts, Turks have become relatively adept at presenting their positions in English, which is why, presumably, a significant amount academics and experts write in this language. Moreover, Turkey boasts a very reliable and established English language newspaper, Turkish Daily News, since the 1980s, together with other newer papers such as Zaman online. The most important national newspapers also have a limited online edition in English. Ultimately, the strategic relationship between USA and Turkey (which had started with membership in NATO) fostered the creation of centres of Turkish strategic studies, which constitute a precious source of information and analysis. I have nevertheless used articles written in Turkish as well, just as I used Ukrainian materials, in order to confirm and verify that the ideas expressed in the English language were not reflective of only one part of the existent opinions.

The texts in the list below represent a comprehensive mix of government documents, publicly expressed opinions of officials-mainly pertaining to the Prime Minister’s office and the Foreign Affairs Ministry-, policy experts and analysts, as well as editorials written by political figures or specialised journalists. I have selected them from the most prominent sources of information, varying from national newspapers to government websites, and peer-reviewed foreign policy journals. It is worth noting that, just like in the Romanian case, a certain number of political figures write in newspaper columns and journals, which makes the task of identifying their opinions somewhat easier. I believe these texts are representative of the view of Turkish elites and their perspective on the geopolitical relation with Europe. It shall be noted that all the texts are directly concerned with the liminality and positionality issue. They are extracted from a much larger range of texts concerning foreign policy issues, which, in general, do not contradict the ideas and principles expressed in them (the selected texts).
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Turkey’s desired place in the world

Before delving into the actual analysis of liminal images and metaphors, I wish to emphasise that although Turkey wanted to make the “degree of civilisation” and the country’s modernity the focus and the measure of her position in the relationship with the West, it is relatively apparent that geography remained the backbone of liminality images and has become the driving argument behind Turkey’s integration march, not least because geography is harder to change than any of the other elements included in the liminality discourse, identity and security. This is perhaps also the reason why, consciously, or not, the geographic element of Turkey’s position appears as the main ingredient of all other arguments, such that the interplay of images constantly sends one to geographic features and implications. This might have to do with the fact that state elites and intellectuals of statecraft in general still operate with deterministic categories and structures of thought, particularly in certain ambiguous cases, such as that of Turkey. However, it must be said that efforts are made to change the deterministic logic into a more flexible one. A good example of this will be given later on in this section, in the analysis of the image of Turkey as a transport corridor for natural resources, with emphasis on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, in which a political logic prevailed over a geographical-economic one, proving that it was indeed possible to change perspectives.

In the introduction to this section of the chapter I have mentioned the existence of a discursive thread including liminal images, metaphors and constructs, able to provide indications regarding the general perspective in relation to the issue of the liminal. The main reason for which I speak of a thread and not several discursive trends in this respect is that, no matter how many (occasionally contradictory) voices it harbours, it essentially emphasises the diversity of Turkey’s position as an element reinforcing her claim to European identity, as underlined by Ambassador Ozdem Sanberk in London: “Turkey is not looking for alternatives to Europe. Our European policies have always been complementary to the other dimensions of our foreign policy and vice versa”.

Unlike the case of Romania, where, despite a discursive commitment to European and Western ideals, it was possible to discern different trends of argumentation, some omitting certain images purposefully and some purposefully emphasising them, in the instance of the Turkish discourse it is interesting to find often the same images; differences are introduced by the way in which these images are harnessed together, but there are no arguments along the lines of “Romania is the centre of Europe”, which in the Turkish discourse would potentially amount to saying “Turkey is not a neighbour of the Middle Eastern region, it is fully in Europe” (although there are variations that emphasise Turkey’s placement at the centre of a tumultuous region, for example) or similar, element which would have eliminated liminal references. The oscillations in the Turkish discourse are neither as drastic and extreme as the Ukrainian ones,

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in which liminal images disappear almost completely, due to a lack of an envisioned role or narrative for the country’s becoming. Even in the darkest hours of Turkish-EU or Turkish-Western relations, the liminal persists, signifying an underlying and enduring relationship, or in any way, an enduring, if slowly evolving, sense of self.

The period under examination benefits from another element that did not exist in the other two cases: continuity. The 1990s’ discourse was direct heir to almost 70 years of pro-Western narrative of modernisation, membership in NATO and efforts to join the EC/EU. Even if it had to adapt to the radical transformations in the wake of the Cold War, the discourse was still determined by much the same aims, drawing on similar resources, with a political and intellectual elite used to public debate and arguments. This constituted a significant feature, because it provided for a rich community of ideas, and offered the space for the repetition and consolidation of some images.

I have identified three main areas or branches that constitute the elements of the discursive trend in the years 1990-2006: geopolitical thinking, issues of identity and debates on security. In reality it is hard to completely isolate the aforementioned themes from each other, since most of the time a geopolitical affirmation might have implications for both identity and security policy, and vice versa, but structuring texts according to this separation will help in yielding a clearer idea of the issues. I shall look at each of these aspects in turn, equally pointing out how various moments and episodes in Turkish foreign policy influenced them. I wish to stress that geopolitical categories were embedded in the modernisation narrative and were constructed in such a way as to constantly re-inscribe Turkey in a progress towards Europe, in such a way as to effectively prevent the solid development of other alternatives, such as a sustained rapprochement with the Middle East or the Caucasian states (as shown below).

Geography and geopolitics of Turkish desires

Opinions and ideas concerning Turkish geography and geopolitics can be separated in those concerned with what Turkey was and is and with what she could be, or the geopolitical role she could be playing in the future. The White Book made public on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (with the declared aim of informing both Turkish and foreign publics—hence being written in English) resumés accurately these ideas, as well as the fact that liminal images appear in different instances, from geography to security policy. First and foremost it shows that just as in the Romanian case, in Turkey geographical determinism shapes ideas about her place in the world and her potential function. The preface of the book outlines: “Turkey is located in the centre of a region full of instabilities and uncertainties, such as the Middle East, Caucasus and the Balkans, where the balances are in process of change; Turkey is located at the centre of the triangle formed by the Balkans, Caucasus and the Middle East, where new threats and risks are concentrated. Turkey is in a region where the interests of the global powers intersect.

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This situation, stemming from Turkey’s geostrategic location has not changed until now and is not likely to change in the future. It is evaluated that the importance and place of Turkey in the new world order will become even more strengthened\textsuperscript{78}—such a formulation constitutes a modern and unrelated version of Romanians’ own take on their geography, which placed their country “in the way of all misfortunes”; it was also phrased as a response to those who would claim that Turkey’s value had diminished after the Cold War. Significantly, this fragment also reminds us of the trend that had been put into place during the period before the one under examination, namely that of prioritising geopolitics and geographical thinking over all other kinds of arguments.

The book goes on to explain that Turkey “has the attribute (emphasis mine) of being an island of peace in such a region, one of the rare democracies located in the vast geography extending from Europe to the Pacific Ocean and to the Middle East”. Furthermore, Turkey is described as a “natural bridge for transporting the natural resources of the Caspian and Central Asia to the West in the next century and is a key country from the aspect of the realisation of the Trans-Caucasian Transport Corridor”\textsuperscript{79}. Concerning her identity, the Book went as follows:

“The Republic of Turkey, which has adopted the finest aspects of humanitarian values in her territories which have the characteristic of a geopolitical crossroads throughout history constitutes superb synthesis of various cultures. A democratic, affluent and stable Turkey is striking evidence that the values of the East and West can be integrated and live together. Both the Eastern and Western aspects of Turkey are showing themselves in the variety of international organisations in which it is a member. Turkey is the only state, which is member at the same time of NATO, the European Council, OECD, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the D-20 and the Islamic Conference Organisation. Turkey, just as she is a part of the East from the aspects of her history, geography and culture, is also indisputably a part of the West when she is evaluated with the same criteria”\textsuperscript{80}.

In addition to all this, Turkey is said to “connect the well established democracies and market economies of the West with the promising new democracies of the East”. It is already possible to identify the connotation chains linking membership of Western institutions with an advantageous geopolitical placement, thus illustrating pragmatically Turkish aspirations.

Regarding security issues, Turkey is presented as a centre of attraction and a driving force of change for peace in the troubled geography where she exists. She has

“a special place within the Atlantic-European and Eurasian zones and her function is of bringing together reconciliation, peace and cooperation”\textsuperscript{81}.

It is also clearly stated that Turkey has provided significant contributions to the European
security and defence since 1952 and deserves a place in any new European security structure\textsuperscript{82}. Most importantly for the future

“Turkey is a model country with her secular and democratic regime and will continue to preserve these attributes in the twenty-first century as well. She will continue even more effectively in the twenty-first century her successful function of being a bridge of various aspects between East and West”\textsuperscript{83}.

This official text is significant for a number of reasons. First of all, given its very nature, it aimed to represent what was the official vision of decision-makers. Second, it is useful, because it showed in how many realms liminal images were used, and under what form. Third, it showed that liminal images and metaphors were and are very much present in the minds and pens of Turkish decision-makers. The notion of the bridge was associated with that of crossroads, and both were associated with connecting, linking and integration activities. There is a clear sense of the East and the West and of Turkey being found in between, ready to undertake the function, which seemingly followed from such a position. Another interesting association was between Turkey’s position and her being “special” and “key” to developments in the region. Equally significant was the deduction that because of her membership in Western organisations, Turkey’s identity was Western, which, as far as Europe is concerned constituted more wishful thinking than anything else.

This text was echoing in a more detailed and technical fashion an earlier official one, written by the MFA in 1998, on the occasion of Turkey’s 75th anniversary. Titled

“The Republic of Turkey, Crossroads of Civilisations” the text claimed: “The Turkish Republic occupies a strategic position of utmost importance. As the land bridge between Europe and Asia, and the protector of Straits between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, Turkey is quite simply the most important country in the region. (...) Developments around its borders have reinforced Turkey’s value as a stable, democratic country committed to the West”\textsuperscript{84}.

The idea of the “protector” of the Straits was reminiscent of both 19\textsuperscript{th} century and the Cold War era, and perhaps not entirely appropriate; however, the metaphors of the bridge and the crossroads were very present and seemed to reflect the thinking existent in all quarters, as shall be shown below. Significantly, the Turks also worked with large categories, such as “civilisations”, East and West, suggesting a place in the long historical “durée”, notions that were generally absent in the Ukrainian discourse, for example.

If one considers 1999-2000 as a threshold period in terms of Turkish foreign policy, since in 1999 the EU granted Turkey candidate rather than applicant status, thus producing a significant shift in the quality of their relationship (although not in its nature), it is interesting
to remark that liminal images and metaphors are equally present on both sides of this temporal division.

In April 1987, when Turkey, against the EC’s recommendations, decided to apply formally for EC membership, one of the arguments President Turgut Ozal used for proceeding with the application anyway was that

“Turkey is applying to contribute to the well being of the European family of nations and to act as a bridge between the East and the West in economic, political and security fields”\(^{85}\).

During the last years of the Cold War, it was not exactly clear about which East president Ozal could be talking, given that, as it was known, Turkey had constructed Soviet Russia in the image of her “Other” and that relations with the Middle East had been fluctuating throughout the past thirty years. It is likely that Ozal was purposefully ambiguous, since both possibilities had become stronger by the end of the 1980s. In 1989, Ismail Soysal, foreign policy analyst suggested

“sur le plan géostratégique la Turquie assure sans doute par sa présence une plus grande stabilité. L’Occident et l’Orient ont un intérêt commun à en finir avec la guerre et le clivage entre ces deux mondes depuis les croisades. La Turquie est peut être le seul pays qui puisse jouer un rôle à cet égard”\(^{86}\).

In the years following the rejection of Turkey’s application for membership to the EC, the idea of the bridge continued to be present, in various instances, as well as was the reminder that Turkey was an important element on NATO’s southern flank\(^{87}\). Furthermore, optimists were generally of the opinion that Turkey will not lose her strategic important in virtue of her “sitting partly in Europe and partly in the Middle East, controlling the straits”\(^{88}\).

These images were circulated as Turkey was trying to find a new role for herself in the new world order after 1990.

“We do not know what kind of new role Turkey can and will play in the new world order but we do know that the seeds of her participation might well be seeded at Camp David, where Bush will meet Ozal”\(^{89}\).

It had become clear, however, that if she were to be considered part of the West, Turkey had to find a use beyond defence for herself, since the demise of the Soviet Union had cancelled the main source of threat against which she constituted a valuable asset. Thus, in 1992 an editorial

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in the Turkish Daily News proposed the idea that Ankara is a new power centre rather than an old bridge.

“The Republican generations of Turkey grew up with the belief that this country is a bridge between Europe and Asia. But inexplicably that bridge has been used to pass to the West. This country as a friend of the West in the utmost East is feeling annoyance at not sufficiently being interpreted in the Western capitals (...)”[^90].

One year later, the same author was outlining Turkey’s position as

“Turkey, being in the centre of a triangle of instability formed by the Balkans, Caucasus and the Middle East has to be strong country”[^91].

Such ideas proved to be strong enough as to be echoed in the Turkish government official position (see above) but were also underscoring the process of negotiation of Turkey’s geopolitical identity, as well as the frustration felt at the contestation of it. As could be seen, this phrase did not necessarily emphasise a liminal aspect; instead, it expressed a view that sought to underline the country’s centrality in a particular area, a strategic perspective that also lingered in Turkish official discourse, and which became more important after 2006. It did, however, point to the mix of influences and strategic interests that made Turkey liminal, offering a different final reading of it.

Whether contested or not, the metaphor of the bridge persisted throughout the 1990s in geopolitical talk. Thus, in 1995, in an interview granted to the Middle East Quarterly, Tansu Ciller, then Prime Minister, promptly stated that

“The Anatolian peninsula’s unique geographical location makes Turkey a bridge between Asia and Europe, Middle East and the Balkans, and, above all, between East and West. As a Muslim country, Turkey’s commitment to a secular democratic political system and also to the general ideals of the West introduces a further dimension to her role”[^92].

The passage is interesting because it is one of the few outlining which are the geographical elements that Turkey is bridging, as well as the grander categories of East and West. It is equally significant because it introduces a parallel between Turkey’s geographical position and her being a secular Muslim country, thus creating the idea of correspondence between the function of geographical bridge and political outlook.

This idea, concerning geographical characteristics and their link to Turkey’s role in the world, was further publicly reiterated in 1998 by a variety of decision-makers and analysts, at a conference on the theme of Turkey’s place in the 21st century organised by Ankara University and NATO. Thus, Sukru Gurel, Minister of State and government spokesman stated,


“Turkey’s unique geographic location ascribes it a multitude of associations. It is a European, Balkan, Caucasian, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and Black Sea coastal state all at once...and it was inevitably driven by the new environment at the epicentre of a very sensitive geography.”

In this opinion he was joined by Turkey’s former foreign minister Osman Olcay:

“I take it as a matter of “geographical determinism” that Turkey is the only country in her area which has boundaries or is part of the Balkans, Europe, the Caucasus and the Middle East. So it is a link in between. Whether we like it or not, whether our friends in the West, in Europe, like it or not Turkey is part of this continent of this area. So, Turkey is part of the West. Also, Turkey is part of the Middle East. (…) Turkey is part of both continents. It is like a child and the child is the person in between. The person is part of both cultures; part of both parents and you cannot expect them to be an exact copy of either of the parents. Turkey is to be a part of both.”

A consequence of this placement, was the “diversification of Turkey’s foreign policy” and the fact that she took an active interest in developments in all her neighbourhoods.

As can be seen, the two opinions emphasised a kind of causal logic, which placed Turkey’s geographical characteristics at the root of her function in the world. Whether correct or not, they seemed to reflect a generalised perspective within the establishment according to which Turkey was determined to act primarily by her geography. In fact, as mentioned before, this was no surprise, given the kind of intellectual inheritance contemporary Turkish elites had. These images merely showed that determinism was still going strong in terms of foreign policy formulation. This was also clearly expressed in a speech given by Hikmet Sami Turk, Minister of Defence, at the Washington Institute:

“Surrounded by three seas and bridging two continents, Turkey occupies a unique and strategic geographical position. Turkey is a European, Balkan, Caucasian, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and Black Sea country at the same time. Turkey has not only turned its face to the West, but also enjoys traditional ties with the Islamic World. She takes her roots from Central Asia, the Middle East, Anatolia and Europe. In short, Turkey is an Eurasian country. In this connection, Turkey constitutes an example that, in the face of mutual interests and common values, the East-West distinction can be minimized.”

The series of interlocking texts presented above have in common a vivid awareness of Turkey’s geography and the conviction that it crucially determined her place in the world. The Romanian case exhibited similar ideas, with the famous leit-motif of the country being placed in the way of all misfortunes, suggesting that geographical determinism was the main factor in imagining a role for the country. The difference between the two cases is subtle, in that Romanians had both history

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94 Osman Olcay, 1998, Discussion, in Mustafa Aydin, Turkey at the threshold... , p. 48.
and geography to draw on when constructing their image, whereas Turks, despite a few references to the past, had only geography and Europe itself to rely on in the articulation of their geopolitical image.

A question that arises about geopolitical texts until 1999, is why there is a marked absence of both official speeches and media analyses on geopolitics in the 1995-1998 period; these years were full of internal political and foreign policy turmoil, comprising both the signing of the Customs Union with the EU in 1995 as well as the 1997 Luxembourg rejection of Turkey’s renewed application for EU membership. The answer is that the focus shifted heavily on questions of Turkey’s identity and participation in Europe’s security system, which is where metaphors of the bridge appeared, as shall be shown. However, for the moment, bearing this detail in mind, I shall continue with the examination of geopolitical texts and references post-1999, when Turkey was formally invited to become an applicant to EU membership.

EU’s invitation certainly had a positive impact on Turkey’s general outlook, but the increase in geopolitical texts was not exponential. With Turkey’s official position explained on the MFA website, most texts and iterations repeated these ideas in order to strengthen them both in Turkey and abroad. One notable difference with texts until 1999 was the emphasis on what role Turkey could play geopolitically, especially with respect to energy politics. In 2000, on the occasion of the Conference on “Turkish Foreign Policy in the year 2000 and beyond” organised by the Foreign Policy Institute in Ankara, a series of high level decision-makers and analysts expressed their vision about Turkey’s geopolitical situation. Their ideas converged on the notion that

“she will always serve as a global bridge and corridor in air, sea and land communications and transport”96,

“Turkey will serve as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East, being the only country who is a candidate to the EU and a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference”97

“It is a well known truism that Turkey has been a historic bridge across continents”98.

All these ideas represented a continuation and a reinforcement of the ones expressed during the 1990s, but they equally constituted a geopolitical projection to be fulfilled by Turkey in the conditions of a rapidly worsening security environment.

“Turkey is situated in a very valuable geostrategic location, that is a major asset as well as a liability. While in times of crisis, Turkey’s international value increases, enhancing its standing in the Western defence system, this is also a liability as it attracts enmity. We have to be a social and political bridge between the East and the West, as well as a geographic link”99.

98 Yuksel Soleymez, 2000, idem, p. 73.
The fact that the two notions were separated indicated awareness of the fact that they did not necessarily presuppose each other and, more importantly that they were not at the same stage of development at the time the article was written. It also signified that geography continued to be the backbone of liminal imagery.

In the aftermath of the 2001 events in the USA the Turkish elite seized the opportunity to present their country as an important element in establishing communication with the Islamic world, and to give the geographical features of their country a renewed strategic sense. During the 1990s Turkey’s position had been very much the same; however, in the absence of an immediate threat such as the Soviet one, her geopolitical value was rather more difficult to stress as essential, despite many efforts to present her bridging quality as an asset. After September 2001 circumstances became more favourable for an emphasis on geopolitical value, and the opportunity was firmly seized. It is interesting that whatever transformations Turkey’s perceived position had suffered, they were presented in a continuity framework:

“Actually, for many decades Turkey’s geographical location has always been of highly strategic significance for Europe. Turkey’s role in NATO in protecting Western Europe from a Soviet attack has been vital for decades. With the detente period and then for a short period following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Turkey’s role was still significant. But, with Gorbachev coming to power in the Soviet Union; the Perestroika; the Glasnost, which was some what influential in the disintegration of Soviet Union, Turkey’s role has, in my view, partly diminished. It has partly transformed from one of being a flank country in NATO “neighbouring” the Soviet Union to one of a front-line state in the Middle East actually “neighbouring” countries in the Middle East where the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has gained pace actually with the disintegration of the Soviet Union”\(^\text{100}\).

The message was clear: Turkey’s geographic location should never be ignored because it will always be an important factor, no matter what the international configuration is; it was also presented as the source from which a variety of Turkish roles would flow. This partially explained how a constant and particular reading of geography favoured the proliferation of particular images (namely liminal), which in turn favoured a particular foreign policy option, namely the European one.

This perspective was equally spread in academic analyses written in the period, which stressed the fact that Turkey had historically occupied a special position, ever since the Ottoman Empire. Mustafa Aydin, one of the most important foreign policy analysts in contemporary Turkey clearly states that the Turkish Republic had inherited from the Ottoman Empire the “historic role of serving both as a land bridge and fortress between Europe, Asia and the Middle East” and that this factor directly influenced and determined the country’s foreign policy\(^\text{101}\). Furthermore, he stressed the idea that

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\(^{100}\) Mustafa Kibaroglu, 2003, “Roundtable discussion on Turkey-EU relations”, Turkish Daily News, 17 June.

\(^{101}\) Mustafa Aydin, 2004, “Turkish Foreign Policy Framework and Analysis”, SAM Papers No.1, Ankara: Centre for Strategic Research, December, p. 12.
“Turkey has undergone profound changes since the 1920s, but one thing that has not changed is her location and her strategic value. Even if her relative importance to other states has changed, the perceptions of Turkish decision-makers regarding their geographical importance and the perceived threats resulting from this particular location have not yet radically changed.”

In subsequent paragraphs he went on repeating ideas already mentioned above, relating to Turkey’s multiple character and neighbourhoods. Aydin provided a crucial piece of information regarding the endurance of Turkish leaders’ perceptions, which explained why geopolitical references were present in such a standard form during the period under examination.

Indeed, looking at the language used, it is striking in its repetitiveness, immobility and consistency. Even when occasional commentators aimed to project a different image than that of the bridge, the preferred one being that of the centre, the former one prevailed. Pinar Bilgin has, in fact, identified the image of Turkey as centre as an alternative geopolitical image amongst Turkish elites. However, she also acknowledged the predominance of the bridge one, as belonging to pro-European elites. As shall be shown below, the main reason behind this was that although Turkey found herself in the middle of a diverse geography, for her elites, the most important feature was the connection to Europe, which seemed to trump other connections, no matter how strong. This meant that the image of the bridge would prevail. Ironically, the choice of geopolitical imagery in Turkey shows that, in fact, geography is not necessarily all determining of a country’s choices in foreign policy, but rather the way in which elites choose to interpret it. The fact that the terminology used is uniform gives the impression of certain static. The lack of dialogue with other historical images (only rarely mentioned) suggested an almost ahistorical understanding of geography.

The fact that the image of the bridge was the one that predominated, despite the fact that it was occasionally contested, suggested that Turkish elites had a particular idea of how to represent in geopolitical terms the liminality of their country. As suggested previously and as specified in further sections of this paper, the bridge symbolised a movement of exchange and influence, of access and encounter that sought to represent, incompletely perhaps, the stage of relations with Europe. This could be understood further in terms of identity arguments.

The long way to Europe: Turkey’s story without end

Identity questions are notoriously difficult to disentangle and they do not constitute the focus of this thesis, which is why I have not treated them as separate issues in the other two case studies. However, in Turkish foreign policy discourse questions of identity appeared heavily connected to liminal images, which is why I decided to examine them closely and separated

102 Idem.
103 Another recent analysis of Turkish foreign policy uses almost the same words to describe the Turkish situation: “Geopolitics has been the most constant factor in the discussion of Turkey’s ties to the world around it. At the crossroads where the two continents, Europe and Asia meet through the straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, the country is placed at a location that overlooks and controls major passage ways.” Meliha Benli Altunisik and Ozlem Tur, 2005, Turkey Challenges of continuity and change, London: Routledge-Curzon, p.88.
from other matters. By “questions of identity” I mean more precisely the ongoing debate regarding Turkey’s European-ness, which revealed itself to be replete with liminal references, in virtue of the fact that it dealt with Turkey’s single most important foreign political and economic relationship with the EU.

Most analysts agree that the Turkey-EU relationship has been a tense one from the beginning, giving rise to many strong feelings and extensive soul searching. During the post Cold War period this tension increased significantly, although, as Pinar Bilgin suggests, the strained dialogue about Turkey’s geopolitical image and identity was not new to the 1990s, but rather reminiscent of debates concerning the identity of the Ottoman Empire\footnote{Pinar Bilgin, 2004, op. cit., p. 277.}, which were temporarily resolved by Atatürk’s firm pro-Western policy and by Turkey’s membership of NATO and the Council of Europe during the Cold War. As shown above, participation in Western institutions had been seen and projected by Turkish elites as confirmation of Turkey’s Western credentials and her aspirations to be a part of Europe\footnote{Idem.}. Meltem Muftüler Bac, analyst of the Turkish-EU relationship tells us that

“at the root of Turkey’s problematic relationship with the EU is the dichotomy of Turkey’s place in Europe before and after the Cold War. When Europe was reorganised at the end of World War II Turkey’s participation in the new European order was crucial for maintaining stability in South-East Europe and for making Europe’s boundaries “set” against the communist other. During the Cold War Turkey’s position was secure despite various ups and downs in relations with Europe. (...) Turkey’s absorption into Western practices was never quite complete and herein lays the problem. (...) As European identity has gone through transformations, Turkey’s “Western” identity was replaced with a perception of Turkey that is now almost of “the other”\footnote{Meltem Muftüler Bac, 2000, “Transformation in security and identity after the Cold War. Turkey’s problematic relationship with Europe”, 
*International Journal*, Autumn, pp. 23-24.}.

Pinar Bilgin confirmed this idea, pointing that during the 1990s Turkey suffered a type of “ontological insecurity” when Turkish elites questioned the country’s identity and geographical location. This dilemma stemmed in a discrepancy between Turkish decision-makers’ preferred place in the world (Turkey in Europe) and the position accorded to Turkey in EU policy maker’s discourse (Turkey in Non-Europe)\footnote{Pinar Bilgin, 2004, op. cit., p. 276.}.

However, the boldest affirmation about Turkey’s relationship with Europe, and perhaps the most relevant to my analysis, is that made by Bahar Rumelili, foreign policy expert and academic, who plainly stated that in connection to Europe, Turkey would be a prime example of a liminal state\footnote{Bahar Rumelili, 2003, op. cit., p. 221.}. She sees in Turkey’s contentious institutional relations with the EU (marked by application rejections, a half-hearted customs union and an ambiguous acceptance to become a candidate) ambivalence with respect to Turkey’s identity, characteristic of relations between liminals to a community and the respective community\footnote{Idem.}.\footnote{Idem.}
“Liminals as identities positions are insecure. Identities are sustained through recognition by significant others and liminals fall between identity categories, failing to obtain unequivocal recognition of their identities”111.

Bearing all these elements in mind, this section examines texts that illustrate the liminal case by bringing liminal images in relation to Turkish identity.

What this section is not is a detailed account of Turkish identity in its multiple dimensions, nor is it an analysis of how these developed. It constitutes rather an illustration and examination of texts in which Turkey’s geographical situation is linked with her identity, which is expressed through various liminal images or metaphors. It also includes a preliminary discussion about the kind of images the West (Europe and the US) has put forward in their own dialogue with Turkey, influencing Turkish self-perceptions and discourse.

Turkey and the West: portrait of a long-term ally

Narratives generally involve a series of interknitting identities, and even in the case of narratives focusing on one entity, they bring together elements of a “supporting cast” that are meant to illustrate the way the protagonist relates to the world and who informs its identity. This section focuses on how images of Turkish identity held by other entities are voiced and fed into the main Turkish discourse.

Iver B. Neumann has amply developed on the construction of the Ottoman Empire as one of Europe’s “others” and has documented the many (negative) ways in which it was portrayed: as a lower class kind of civilisation, a rather primitive (un-modern) society, cruel, treacherous, blood thirsty etc.112 He also told us that

“European powers continuously demanded a widening and deepening of domestic changes toward conformity with European standards. (...) the Turk was expected to learn new tunes in order to play in the “concert of Europe”. Thus Ottoman reforms were introduced at critical junctures in European concert diplomacy”113.

Turkey, as the successor state of the Empire has almost by default inherited the images, prejudices and demands elaborated by Europe in this respect and has been struggling with them since the very beginning of the Republic in 1923. However, in no other period of history has this become more apparent than in the post Cold War years; as proof stand not only the constant debates about Turkey’s European qualities, but also the amount of academic studies discussing its otherness, or the acceptance of the idea that Turkey “has always been considered as Europe’s other”.

111 Idem, p. 222.
The question naturally arises, how is this other seen and constructed, especially in relation to Turkey’s negotiations for EU accession? Beyond the answer, there lies a further question, about what are Turkish elites doing with the images produced by their European and Western counterparts, if anything at all.

**Turkey in America’s eyes 1990-2006**

Turkey became a member of NATO in 1952. After an initial rejection in 1949, the members of the alliance allowed her entry, mainly because the rivalry between the Eastern and Western blocs had become more acute and Russia’s pressure on Turkey regarding the use of the Straits had become disturbing. One of the factors that made Turkey’s acceptance difficult, was precisely the difficulty, which European powers and the US had encountered in classifying her; was she a middle-Eastern or a European country? Thus, it appears that the question of the country’s identity already posed a problem, both in virtue of its geography and internal make up. Turkey’s contribution with troops to the Korean War and general overt support of Western policies, however, convinced the US that Turkey would be an interesting ally. It is generally suggested, though, that Turkey’s main asset in her application to NATO was her strategic geographical position. As part of NATO, Turkey’s position was that of a flank state, a barrier to the Soviet Union.

A 1987 report on the US’s strategic vision pictured Turkey as

“a rock of stability and reliability in the Eastern Mediterranean”. Furthermore, the country was described as a “barrier to Soviet expansion” and a “bridge between the Western and Muslim worlds, which enables it to play a stabilizing role in the volatile Middle East”. It must be noted, however, that the report had been written in order to persuade the American Congress to be less strict about Turkey’s demand for military aid, and therefore it is likely that its author somewhat exaggerated in his description, as his rather flowery language suggests. Nevertheless, this document is significant because it circulates the arguments and images that have always been used in relation to Turkey and why it is useful and necessary for the Western world. A barrier in the way of Russia and a bridge to the Muslim world. Also, a model for secularism and democracy, as well as “an anchor on NATO’s Eastern flank, guarding one third of the 3,600 mile front with the Warsaw Pact (...”).

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115 Idem.


117 Idem.


120 Idem, p. 2.
This text aptly pictures the sense that US administrations have given to Turkey’s geographical position and the roles that they attributed her. It shows how the US understood and read Turkey’s liminality, by allowing her multiple roles within a relatively restrained field of action.

Another text written by Bruce Kuniholm in 1991, a period of reconsideration of Turkey’s strategic importance in the world, summarises what the view from the US political and academic establishment was:

“Turkey, a long-standing US ally and staunch member of NATO, has played a pivotal, if at times delicate role in the defence of Europe and the Middle East (...) it provided a massive land barrier to Moscow’s ambitions (...)”\textsuperscript{121}.

The image is unequivocally connected to Turkey’s geographical position, spanning two continents and two theatres of the Cold War\textsuperscript{122}. Nevertheless, the author also points to the fact that, given the changes occurred and the demise of the Soviet Union, Turkey’s role will be redefined, especially in relation to her Middle East context\textsuperscript{123}. The important thing to note is the fact that the geographical position is clearly seen as a determining factor in the kind of role that Turkey could play, but within that determination, depending on which other contextual elements are active, the role can change, from a barrier to a bridge; from Turkey being a front state to being a flank state.

In the past 16 years numerous variations on these themes have occurred in the US discourse on Turkey. In 1995 Andrew Mango, a well known scholar of Turkey, described it a “peripheral bastion of NATO” that, with the end of the Cold War became the centre of a new area of instability\textsuperscript{124}. In virtue of this perceived modification of Turkey’s position, the US discourse became more nuanced on the idea that Turkey could be a bridge to and a model for other Muslim nations, rather than a front state of NATO or a barrier. Several factors encouraged this vision: the first Gulf crisis and the continuous tensions with other Middle Eastern nations; the development of the “clash of civilisations” argument; and, Turkey’s own behaviour with respect to US’s strategic vision and with respect to the EU.

In 1999, President Clinton’s National Security advisor, Sandy Berger affirmed:

“Turkey’s relationship to the United States is more important now than it was in the Cold War -- certainly as important. Turkey, by reason of geography, by reason of demographics, by reason of religious diversity, will either be in the 21st century a bridge, a democratic bridge of stability between East and West, between the Islamic world and the non-Islamic world, or it will be a source of instability, of conflict, both with respect to its neighbours and the region”\textsuperscript{125}.

\textsuperscript{121} Bruce Kuniholm, op. cit., p. 34.
\textsuperscript{122} Idem.
\textsuperscript{123} Idem.
\textsuperscript{125} Harun Kazaz, 1999, “White House says Turkey will be bridge or source of instability”, Turkish Daily News, 14 November.
This declaration points to the elements that are most important in the US vision on Turkey:

- the country’s geography: the fact that the advisor did not even mention what particular feature of the geography is important reveals the assumption of a common understanding of what is particular about Turkey’s position, thus presenting the issue as a resolved one, not subject to debate. This attitude makes direct reference to what is “received wisdom” about Turkey’s situation, its placement between two continents and touching upon multiple geo-strategic areas. It also grants primacy to the idea of geographical determinism in this respect.

- demographics refer to Turkey’s growing population and the fact that this will make it a true economic force in the future

- the religious diversity is ambiguous, because Turkey’s population is 98% Muslim; the affirmation could have referred to the fact that Turkey is a secular state, tolerating communities other than the Muslim one.

However, the image given in this affirmation is not fully positive. It rather captures the idea that Turkey is seen as oscillating between the influences which she harbours in a way that could sway her in two opposing directions. The image of the bridge between the non-Muslim and the Muslim worlds is seen as positive and in contrast to the more abstract notion of “instability” towards neighbours and in the region. In 1999, it seemed to the US that Turkey could follow either path.

In the same statement, Sandi Berger also specified that the US supported Turkey’s bid to EU membership, in order to further anchor her to the West and to help her become a “model of progressive, moderate, Islamic-Muslim leadership”\textsuperscript{126}. In this context, the advisor makes a clear link between Turkey’s opportunity to become a bridge and a positive model and EU membership. If none of the images are new, it is notable that they seem to have firmly entered official US discourse by 1999, and as we see below, continued to be part of it.

In a question and answer session in 2000, Marc Grossman, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs squarely affirmed that Turkey is seen as a model:

“yes, we do see Turkey as a model for the Muslim world. Turkey is a country that is simultaneously secular, democratic, and Islamic. How Turks deal with that balance is their business, but it certainly is in the interest of the United States and of Europe. Our objective in Turkey is to make it a success because it is important to the United States. We are interested in a democratic Turkey with a free market and respect for human rights”\textsuperscript{127}.

This stance has also been taken up by successive US administrations, and could be heard during various occasions.

\textsuperscript{126} Idem.

In December 2002 Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy secretary of Defence did not hesitate to state that: “Turkey’s success could demonstrate to the world’s 1.2 billion Muslims that there is a better path—a far better path—than the path of destruction and despair that the terrorists offer. When Europe’s leaders stand by Turkey, they will be making a great contribution to the war on terror and to building what President Bush called “a better world beyond.”

“The stakes are huge. People who share the values of freedom and democracy that grew out of European civilisation are seeing increasingly that these are not just Western values or European values. They are Muslim and Asian and universal values as well. They are the bridge that spans civilisations. Turkey’s democratic model can also serve as an inspiration to Iraqis” 128.

The aftermath of the 2003 US-Turkish crisis brought, beyond a temporary cooling off, a multitude of analyses developed in US academic and policy research centres evaluating Turkey’s importance for the US and the wider strategic environment. Along with official statements coming from President Bush, Colin Powell or Condoleezza Rice, all praising Turkey as a model of Muslim country that is also a democracy129, studies elaborated by US think tanks detailed how Turkey’s strategic value had evolved, whilst nevertheless, keeping the same essential characteristics.

The image conjured to evoke Turkey’s strategic role are quite familiar: the country is a pivotal state, because of its capacity to influence the states around her, and is particular because of her peculiar ties to the West130. However, her ambiguous identity is also noted, especially in relation to Europe. Larabee and Lesser quote a former EU official as having said that:

“Turkey has never been fully considered a European country, but neither is it considered fully Asian. It is at the crossroads of two cultures, two continents, two destinies”131.

This denotes that the authors accept the dichotomy, which seems to condition Turkey’s outlook. They adopt this particular vision of the country, although they do not encourage a Huntingtonian approach to it. In adopting this European perspective they accept to interpret Turkey’s position as determined by its geography and they cultivate the idea that, given this situation, the country’s political and strategic itinerary is not a foregone conclusion; there is a permanent condition of in-between-ness that is acknowledged. Carl Dahlman also criticises a Huntingtonian approach to Turkey, pointing out that it is not a “torn country” which is constantly pulled between one world or another132, but one that is constantly negotiating its identity in order to reconcile the multiple influences it harbours.

However, if there seems to be agreement about Turkey being placed in a peculiar geographical position, favouring a certain duality and ambiguity of outlook, there is no consensus about her value as a model for the Middle Eastern countries. A study elaborated by the British centre for European Reform claims that although Turkey’s unique political make-up certainly makes her an asset for the EU, she cannot be considered as a model to put forward for the rest of the Middle East\(^{133}\), because she simply does not share most of the characteristics of the countries of that region, her history and political development having brought about a secularism, and an institutional profile that is not matched in the other countries\(^{134}\). Another study, written under the aegis of the Brookings Institution in 2003, also discusses the idea of Turkey as a model for the Muslim world. Its author, Omer Taspinar, a Turkish academic and visiting scholar, brings a significant amount nuances to the idea of Turkey as a model\(^{135}\). The most interesting element he brings, however, is to explicitly link Turkey’s difficult geographic position to her becoming a model, even if, as the author himself speculates, sui-generis, and with little potential for successful reproduction\(^{136}\).

Taspinar affirms that Turkey

“has always been a frontier country”, “does not fit any of the clear-cut geographical categories that Western scholars have drawn in order to study a complex world”, and “the country straddles the cultural borders of Europe and Asia without really belonging to either”\(^{137}\).

This, the author adds, has created an “in-between” identity that is further complicated by historical factors and evolutions. These few descriptions best illustrate the key elements constitutive of the image of Turkey in the eyes of the United States and the West writ large. Nevertheless, as Graham Fuller warns in his study, one is to be sceptical about the myths connected to the idea of Turkey as a model\(^{138}\). Boldly, Fuller claims that Turkish secularism, democracy and seeming fit to US strategic aims in the region in the past were little more than a myth. Beneath appearances lay a top down control by the state of the political life in its most minute aspects and a significant amount tension between Islamist movements and the secular political elite\(^{139}\). However, Fuller asserts, lately, Turkey has moved more towards becoming a true model in virtue of having let the democratic cogs and wheels function and of having acted as a country that wishes to become both a Western and an Eastern power\(^{140}\); even if this

\(^{133}\) Steve Everts, 2004, An asset but not a model: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East, Centre for European Reform, London, October, p. 7.

\(^{134}\) Idem.


\(^{136}\) Idem, p. 15.

\(^{137}\) Idem.


\(^{139}\) Idem.

\(^{140}\) Idem.
means that the issue of Islam is more involved in the politics of the country than US officials would like, or that Turks, occasionally, will not act as their allies would want them to, the 2003 US-Turkey crisis over Iraq being a case in point.

What Fuller’s analysis does, aside from presenting perhaps a rather optimistic account of Turkish democracy and outlook of future Turkish strategy, is to show, together with the other accounts mentioned above, that there is variation and mismatch even within the “Turkey as model” discourse. If officials seem to favour the idea that Turkey is a model that could be followed by other Muslim countries, which denotes a rather simplistic view of the workings of the country, scholars and political analysts are aware of the difficulties that the idea of model comports. That is why views tend to be separated into “model for something” and a “model of something”, or a prototype. For researchers, Turkey seems to be a “model of something”, of reconciling or attempting to reconcile two continents and two “destinies”, without subsequent possibility or need of imitation. For policy people, Turkey is an example to be instrumentalised. In both cases, though, the important element is that Turkey is a model because it is unique, it achieves something in a unique fashion. That “something” is implied, is her extraordinary geographic position, which makes her subject to different influences and a strategic entity; however, what Turkish political elites choose to make of this “something” is equally important, and this is why it is useful to know how they react to the cues that come from the outside (a matter examined further below). The important point to retain is that Turkey’s liminal position is seen as an asset to be used.

The United States thus contributes to portraying Turkey in a liminal position in a different way, when compared to the European Union. Because they are not involved in a direct and explicit identity relationship (to a certain extent the United States is seen as having left this task to the European Union, since if Turkey conforms to its standards, it would be acceptable to the United States too), the instrumental and strategic aspect of the connection is emphasised. Hence, the insistence on Turkey as a model and as a strategic partner rather than a potential identity-challenger.

**European views**

In 1963, when Turkey signed the “Ankara Agreement”, the document based on which she still negotiates her European membership, the cry of the media and the Turkish public was “We are Europeans now”\(^\text{141}\), a status and condition that had been openly and officially pursued since 1923, with the advent of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to power. The European response was less enthusiastic, but not negative; Walter Hallstein, the then president of the European Economic Commission, affirmed: “Turkey is European”\(^\text{142}\), an idea which was not particularly developed or strengthened in the following two decades\(^\text{143}\). At the same time, it

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\(^{143}\) Müftüler Baç describes relations between the EU and Turkey in the 60s and 70s as “at best rocky”, op. cit., p 30.
must be pointed out that the Europe of then is different from the one of today, it was a much
looser association, less concerned with identitary issues and more worried about the red peril
of the Soviet Union. In fact, it is generally accepted by both Turkish elites and political analysts
that Turkey was then wanted because of her geographical position, and anticommunist stance,
with Europeans worrying less about the country’s internal status and condition. This idea was
far more explicitly expressed and upheld by the US and its strategic apparatus, which, from
the very beginning of relations with Turkey, emphasised her geostrategic importance in the
fight against the USSR\textsuperscript{144}. For the US Turkey appeared as a

"formidable barrier to the Soviet expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean and the
Middle East region"; its "pivotal location was the Eastern linchpin of the NATO
security perimeter"\textsuperscript{145}. "Its value as a Western ally has hinged on its geographic
reach"\textsuperscript{146}

and for Europe, faced with Soviet military might, Turkey was seen as potentially blocking
the Soviet Army in the Black Sea and holding Warsaw Pact forces down, should need be\textsuperscript{147}. As
shown this was an opinion echoed by the Turkish press at the time, and later on mentioned in
both histories of the time and articles written by experts.

Turkish analysts do not hesitate to recognise that the country’s elites have amply used this
image and situation in order to get all the advantages available: membership into NATO, an
agreement with the EEC, financial help packages from the US etc. However, this image as
created and cultivated by Europe has changed in the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.
This was a natural process that affected the entire area of international affairs, which entered a
period a transformation and adjustment to the new conditions. As Turkey fought to figure out
what was her new strategic and political outlook given the new situation, so did Europe, who
had entered a deep re-evaluation and re-negotiation of its identity and values. This process
did not start as of the 1\textsuperscript{st} of January 1990, but rather was an emergent discourse of competing
images, from which periodical messages were sent to Turkey, especially during the periods
when the latter expressed her intentions of joining the EU.

In 1989 the EU suggested Turkey should postpone her application for membership, fact,
which greatly angered her elites. However, that did not prevent various European officials
from claiming that Turkey is part of Europe, she is important for Europe and she should not
feel put down by the Union’s decision. In 1991, Turkish Daily News published an interview
with the Swedish ambassador to Ankara, who affirmed: “Turkey is part of Western Europe”\textsuperscript{148},
passing a very strong message to a recently rejected country. Admittedly, Sweden did not

\textsuperscript{144} See Amanda Akçakoca, 2006, \textit{EU-Turkey relations 43 years on: train crash or temporary derailment}, EPC Issue Paper
No.50, November; Hasan Kösebalaban, 2002, “Turkey’s EU Membership: A clash of security cultures”, \textit{Middle East Policy},
9(2), pp. 130-146; Bruce Kuniholm, 1991, “Turkey and the West”, \textit{Foreign Affairs}, 70(2), pp. 34-48; James Philips, 1987,
\textit{Turkey, an increasingly key strategic asset for the US}, 14 October.
\textsuperscript{145} James Philips, op. cit. p. 1.
\textsuperscript{146} Bruce Kuniholm, op. cit. p. 34.
\textsuperscript{147} Idem.
\textsuperscript{148} Interview with Swedish Ambassador Lennard Dafgard, 1990, \textit{Turkish Daily News}, 5 February.
become part of the EU until later in 1994, but as a state, it was firmly considered as Western and therefore, although not generalisable, its stance on Turkey had legitimacy and comforted Turks in their quest for Europe. Throughout the 1990s and after, messages referring to how the EU saw Turkey gradually multiplied. Most of the significant ones seem to have been elaborated in the late 1990s and early 2000s, not least because 1999 brought about Turkey’s acceptance as a candidate country to the EU. Messages of this kind were given before, too, but not in the same number or with as far reaching consequences as the later ones. They were not homogenous, nor always positive. As relations between Turkey and the EU waxed and waned, a few very strong opinions about how and what Turkey is, emerged and are still persistent in public political consciousness.

To start with the negative images, among them, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s affirmation that Turkey is not a part of Europe and that this country’s entry in the EU would spell the latter’s demise149, remained very vivid in the mind of many Turks to this day. In 2004 the Dutch Commissioner Frits Bolkenstein upheld that letting Turkey in Europe would render the 1683 liberation of Vienna pointless, thus angering not only a large number of Turks but also fellow European MPs and Commissioners150. Although such opinions stirred debates, which ultimately suggested that these thoughts were more personal rather than representative of a general opinion trend, they pointed to the fact that many European countries are ambivalent in their attitudes and therefore the images they have of Turkey. This ambivalence is nowhere better seen and expressed than in the stance of the German political elite, which is probably amongst the most divided on this issue.

Whereas the social democrats tend to present a positive image of Turkey, being amongst those who see it as a potential bridge or portal between the EU and the Middle East151, the Christian democrats have rather flirted with the idea of offering Turkey a “special partnership” with the EU. Angela Merkel and Edmund Stoiber are largely quoted to be against full Turkish EU membership152. Even though Chancellor Merkel lately has mellowed her position on the question of the “special partnership”, the position on Turkey’s accession is not very convincing. However, the interesting thing about the divergence of German opinions on Turkey is that those who are for EU membership of the country use the image of the bridge to promote a potential role for her in the Union, whereas the opponents do not truly offer an alternative role. They reject the country’s full membership saying that Turkey is special and should be kept close to Europe, but do not really propose a role or an image in the positive. They generally stress that culturally and civilisationally Turkey is different and therefore has no place in Europe. Indeed, affirmations such as Bolkestein’s not only emphasise the otherness of Turkey, but also give it a negative connotation, as the enemy; thus, in fact, Turkey is not allowed the possibility

149 Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, 2002, Interview in Le Monde, 9 November.
150 Frits Bolkenstein, quoted in Ian Traynor, 2004, “In 1683 Turkey was the invader. In 2004 much of Europe still sees it that way”, The Guardian, 22 September.
of evolution or improvement, due to its intrinsic quality of being Turkey, a historical negative other. In this type of discourse, the country is fully constructed as the opposite, the negation of Europe, which is why letting her in would mean the “death” of Europe, as we know it.

However, other European politicians often counter this image, being willing to defend Turkey’s European-ness and place within the EU. A good example is given by Guy Verhofstadt, the Belgian Prime Minister, who affirmed that Turkey is the remedy to a potential clash of civilisations153. The way Turkey could do this, Verhofstadt suggests, is by being a model of a Muslim country that is also a democracy:

“Turkey can be an example to demonstrate there is a way to have an Islamic country and a modern state, democracy in public life and separation of church and state by respecting human rights. The most important thing is that we do everything there is to do in order to avoid a clash of civilisations. In that way Turkey’s membership in the EU can be a big remedy. It can well be an example to a number of countries not to fall into extremism and to underline that one gains more, certainly more freedom, and wealth by cooperating”154.

Gerhard Schröder expressed the same idea:

«A democratic Turkey which makes a commitment to respect European values would be clear proof that there is no contradiction between the Muslim faith and a modern and enlightened society»155.

Joschka Fischer, foreign affairs minister in 2004 emphasised the strategic role the Turkey had played for 50 years in Europe, saying that Turkey lays at the intersection of strategic axes156. He specifically stressed Turkey’s security value for Europe, and urged Europeans to fulfil the commitments they made towards Turkey, just as she goes on with reforms.

The British view on the matter also seems to rejoin these opinions. In 2005 a Guardian article explained the British position on Turkish accession as follows:

“What fuels this British enthusiasm is that Turkey offers the tantalising possibility of exorcising the «clash of civilisations» ghost. If there were a secular, democratic, economically successful Muslim state it would kill off intense arguments about the incompatibility of Islam with democracy or Islam with human rights and modernity. Furthermore, 80 million Turks within the EU would also kill off the EU’s credibility deficit in the Muslim world, where it’s seen as a Christian, white club with a dodgy imperial past (although the latter is as much a Turkish problem as a European one in the region). Finally - the coup de grace - it would strengthen the claim of Europe’s 15 million-strong Muslim minority to a home in Europe. In sharp contrast to the US, Europe could shape a new, prosperous and peaceful accommodation between Islam

153 Guy Verhofstadt, 2004, “If we like to prevent the clash of civilisations Turkey is the remedy”, Zaman Online, 16 December.
154 Ibid.
and the secular West”;

on the 16th of December 2006, in the context of heated debates on whether to suspend accession talks with Turkey, Tony Blair affirmed that

“Turkey is placed right between the Middle East and Europe and if we needed no other reminder of the strategic importance of Turkey to the European Union it is what is happening in the Middle East today”\(^{157}\).

The Belgian foreign minister stressed on the same occasion that:

“It is of major importance that Turkey remains a stable, secular democracy. Joining the Western club, which is the European Union, would send a very strong signal to the world that the ‘clash of civilisations’ is not inevitable”\(^{158}\).

What all these opinions show is that the image of Turkey as a bridge or transmitter between continents, civilisations and strategic areas is actively promoted and articulated by important European political elites. There are a few elements that need to be emphasised in relation to it.

First of all, the idea that Turkey is a bridge does not always appear clearly expressed. It would be fair to say that Chancellor Schröder is the one who uses it most often, while other political figures prefer to suggest it by pointing to Turkey’s dual or multifaceted nature. There may be a conscious reason why this is happening. The metaphor and image of the bridge is a difficult and delicate one. As Georg Simmel explained, the bridge sends one to the idea of communication, of bringing two points in contact, of creating a relationship where previously there is none. The bridge is also an area in between realities, where one does not usually stop to create a settlement or to expand. A bridge is trodden, it is a communication route, a way of access. Hence, although it may constitute a very appealing embodiment of the liminal, it is also dangerous, in terms of what it implies for the entity that claims to be a bridge. As shall be shown below, these implications do not seem to have been thought through either by the Europeans who claim Turkey is a bridge or by the Turks who affirm the same thing.

Second, Huntington’s argument, whether contested or not is the one which has provided or opened the discursive space for imagining a role for Turkey in connection to the “clash of civilisations” and therefore most of the metaphors about Turkey’s role revolve around avoiding such a clash. This is why images of reconciliation between cultures, of mediation, or of linkage abound. However, this is also why images of monolithic incompatibility or mutual exclusion between Europe and Turkey exist too. The problem of the “horizons of meaning” as specified in the methodology section appears quite clearly in this case. When there are none, or few, common positive cultural and historic references, ties take longer to form and to last. Turkey is in fact posing a great challenge to Europe. As she is advancing on the attributes that make her more European or more acceptable to Europe, her elites ask the latter to accept the possibility

\(^{157}\) BBC News, 2006, “Turkey’s membership is vital for Europe”, 16 December.

\(^{158}\) The New Anatolian, 2006, “Belgium: Turkey should be given ‘honest chance’ to continue EU talks”, 15 December.
of a success story there where seemingly Europeans thought there would be none. Europe has
to remain Europe, while accepting in its midst what formerly she considered her Other. This
has to happen so that it can stay true to itself and to them, in the process, the Turks say.

Nevertheless, remaining in the positive, what one can conclude about what European
political elites think about Turkey is first of all that they are very divided and second, that
both pro and contras generally offer civilisational arguments in order to further their position.
On the side of the pros, the clearest image depicted is that of the bridge, although it is not the
most often advocated. The most frequent, although less specifically drawn one, is of Turkey
as a palliative to the clash of civilisations. In this context, the country’s position between
Europe and the Middle East is specifically linked to the benefits she can bring, in other words,
her liminality is considered an advantage and therefore encouraged. The fact that Turkey
is considered to possess certain characteristics proper to the Middle East, such as religion,
a communitarian spirit, a common history, a common geography, and a similar civilisation,
and some of the features of what B. Rumelili calls “acquired” Europeanness159, even if they
are not all equally developed, makes her liminal to both these entities. Seeing her as a bridge
emphasises these facts, but does not necessarily encourage their synthesis. A bridge leads from
one place to another, but also keeps these places separated, to the extent that they communicate
but do not necessarily blend together. At best they meet on the bridge. In this fashion Turkey’s
role is almost strictly beholden to her geographical position. This image is therefore reductive,
since it does not give Turkey the opportunity to create its own version of being European. It
keeps the monopoly of identity creation firmly in the European core, thus keeping Turkey in
the periphery, merely as a communication instrument.

In fact, this is exactly the kind of process that Bahar Rumelili outlines in her examination
of identity and differentiation production by the European Union160. Her thesis is that Turkey
has occupied a liminal position with respect to the European Union, precisely in virtue of the
latter’s way of constructing its collective identity. Rumelili upholds that the European Union
creates the idea of difference according to two sets of characteristics: inherent (geography,
religion, culture) and acquired (democracy, liberalism, secularism, human rights, freedom of
expression) and that the entity tends to apply them selectively161. These give birth to what
Rumelili terms as inclusive/exclusive identities, or what she calls the Other seen as non-self
or as a lesser self, respectively162. Taking this into consideration, Turkey is, by consequence,
seen both as a non-self, given her geography, culture and predominant religion, but also as
a potentially improving lesser self, depending on her capacity to acquire the non-exclusive
characteristics mentioned above163. This partially sheds light on the dramatic oscillation of
opinions amongst European leaders about what Turkey’s place actually is for Europe, but also
why, Turkey, on the receiving end, also projects conflicting discourses in this respect. (A matter

161 Idem, p. 39.
163 Idem.
examined further below). In any case, given this context, the image of the bridge could be seen as representing certain European leaders’ attempt at transforming the Other-as-lesser-Self into a messenger of the Self, thus incorporating them into the Self without assimilation.

**Turkish articulations of identity around the liminal**

Having outlined the different views on Turkey’s liminality from the outside, this section continues with the analysis of texts in which aspects of Turkey’s identity are connected with liminal images.

The postponement Turkey faced at the hand of the EC in 1990 was hard to take, but eventually accepted. The reasons given by the EC had seemed plausible: the community had just enlarged by taking in Portugal and Spain and was not economically and politically ready for a new addition of Turkey’s magnitude. However, it was felt in Turkey that economically, the country was ready to join and that in fact she had been rejected based on the fact that she was not a Christian country with a culture and civilisation similar to other European countries’.

Turgut Ozal, Turkey’s president at the time wrote a book titled “Turkey in Europe and Europe in Turkey”, which was published in 1991, little after Turkey’s rejection. In it he stated boldly:

> “Turkey has been and is in Europe. That is sure. We are a member of all European organisations. We have an associate agreement with the EC which, being basically different from all other similar agreements with other countries envisages full membership. But is Turkey of Europe? One may say that this question should have been answered before concluding the Association Agreement. Indeed, it was answered positively at the time. But since some circles wish to reopen the question Turkey should not take refuge behind legalistic arguments. Although Westernising reforms to a great extent transformed Turkey into a European country, primarily politically and economically, the question remains whether Turkey is culturally European as well” ¹⁶⁴.

These lines are interesting for several reasons. First of all, this fragment is not unlike Nuri Eren’s own musings in the 1960s about Turkey, proving that, even if they were aware of Turkey’s progresses, her leaders were also aware of the gaps that existed in perceptions of Turkey by Europe, as well as of the fact that culturally she was different. The questions regarding identity had not been resolved and were coming back to the fore with a vengeance in 1990. Secondly, these lines reminded the reader that Turkey drew her Western qualities from her participation in Western institutions, admitting the influence they had had in her transformation.

Throughout the book Ozal also enunciated most of the elements that would continuously show up in subsequent arguments regarding Turkey’s identity. He mentioned the fact that Turkey was a secular nation-state with a Muslim population¹⁶⁵, and that

> “the Turks have inherited some part of the culture of every civilisation which

¹⁶⁵ Idem, p. 328.
flourished here since prehistory. They have evolved a synthesis derived from the cultural legacy of Anatolia, Central Asia and from the Muslim religion. Their talent for synthesis and their ecumenical character have enabled them to blend these three strands together”

He further specified that Turkey was the first country with a Muslim population to establish a republican regime, create a nation-state and become democratic. He also mentioned Turkey’s geopolitical location as having potential impact on the Middle East, the Balkans Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

What Ozal achieved with his description was to give an image of Turkey that suggested capacity for synthesis, connection and bridging, fully corresponding to his earlier affirmations that she could be a bridge between East and West. He skilfully combined traits that at the time were (and are still) considered incompatible, such as a Muslim population and a secular democratic state, putting them in parallel with Turkey’s geopolitical situation, thus projecting a mix of elements which became stronger as debate about Turkey’s identity and relationship with the EU intensified. Such opinions were not new to the 1990s. They had been previously expressed, for example, in 1977, by Ismail Soysal:

“While some countries which were geographically situated in Europe could not be admitted to the membership of the Council of Europe or were later dismissed from it because they did not have a democratic system Turkey has been able to maintain its place. Turkey is considered European because it believes in the democratic system of government, implements it and keeps the pace with contemporary civilisation. As the only Islamic European country, it will keep its European identity so long as it fulfils the requirements of our present civilisation”

An element to be remembered and which perhaps unwittingly transpires from these words, is that Turks seemed relatively aware that their European-ness was acquired (see Rumelili on European enlargement in the methodology section) and not a given, and therefore had to constantly work on it. Ozal’s remarks point to the achievements of Turkey, suggesting this was what made her European. In this he was joined by Turkkaya Ataob, analyst, who wrote that apart from historical legacy, Turkey’s Westernising reforms and Turkey’s membership in several European bodies should be enough to qualify the European identity of the Turks.

Bahar Rumelili noted that debates about Turkey’s identity and issues of her liminality heated up between 1995-1999, as Turkey’s liminal status became very pronounced and debates about her European-ness and EU membership got very contentious. As a country of liminal status, Turkey’s elites manifested resistance against identity articulations other than their own (in this case coming from a Europe doubting Turkey’s European credentials) and tried

166 Idem, p. 345.
167 Idem, p. 357.
168 Idem.
to impose another view of Turkey. The way they responded to an attitude which viewed their liminality as negative, as a dangerous position in between identities, was to recast it in a positive light, by insisting on Turkey’s achievements and bridging potential.

In 1995, Meltem Muftüler, writing in the Turkish Daily News, underlined what the problems were that Turkish elites were facing. They could no longer take advantage of the position of bastion against the Soviet Union and had to face the fact that in the post Cold War world it was not sufficient to appear to be European by applying to all the right “European clubs”; something more was needed, and that was more democracy, more attention to human rights and more openness than had hitherto been non-existent in the system. In their absence, Muftuler thought, the security card for Europe could no longer be efficiently played and

“any state that ignored the new principles would be ostracised, regardless of its importance as a bridge between East and West or its strategic position”.

With this affirmation, Muftüler echoed an opinion expressed during the 1950s, when a high-profile analyst of Turkish policy warned against reliance on a geographical argument. He considered it static, and that is precisely what Muftüler underlined in her article. This text essentially recapitulated what were the core beliefs of the Turkish establishment and enounced what was to be done if physical, geographical characteristics were to be translated qualitatively into efficient politics. It also emphasised the idea that Turkey, the bridge between East and West, was an image that had to be rearticulated in order to be made politically efficient. Unlike the 1950s, circumstances

In 1996, Tansu Çiller, Prime Minister, offered a version of how this might be done. In an article about Turkish foreign policy she reminded of Turkey’s former position as a “steadfast ally and bastion of democracy against communism” and of Turkey’s intentions to continue participating in the construction of Europe. As a consequence of that, Çiller followed, Turkey can act as a bridge between the European Union and the Islamic world. More eloquently and more purposefully, in 1997, Onur Oymen, undersecretary of the minister for foreign affairs, affirmed:

“Turkey’s European campaign is centred on the multidimensional thrust of her foreign policy. It is the product of her geo-strategic position as well as the uniqueness of her character, an alloy of successive civilisations that have reigned in Anatolia down through the centuries. She is thus in perfect harmony with her deep links with the Muslim countries of the Middle East and with the Mediterranean with which she is developing new links. The same is also true of her neighbours in the Balkans and Central Asia”.

It is possible to observe in these texts a convergence towards the idea of Turkey’s location as a prime determinant of her unique identity, which is equally presented as a synthesis of

172 Idem, p. 225.
174 Idem.
176 Onur Oymen, 1997, “Turkey’s European foreign policy”, presentation at the seminar on Turkish-EU relationship in the post Cold War era, 6 January.
cultures and civilisations. It is also clearly suggested that Turkey’s role as a bridge derives from this identity. An interesting element is the fact that the East that Turkey is supposed to link to the West gradually shifted to mean the Middle East, and more clearly, the Muslim world. This was a consequence both of the Gulf crisis of the 1990s and of increasing misunderstandings between Western countries and Muslim ones. Another significant characteristic of this fragment is that it counts amongst the few that did not outline what Turkey’s geostrategic position was and why it was unique, thus using this expression as an encoding which presupposed the knowledge so often detailed in other texts. This feature actually introduced more dynamism in the argumentation, shedding off a certain static schema.

The texts mentioned above also tend to give a relatively negative image of Europe, as an unreliable and ungrateful partner who, at the moment of truth, refused to recognise Turkey’s progress, coming up with new criteria for admission to membership. It must not be forgotten that these texts were elaborated during a tense period in Turkey-EU relations, when Turkish elites aimed to contradict European views of their country, offering an alternative image, as above. This tendency continued after the 1997 Luxembourg summit, when Turkey’s application to the EU was again rejected, and Turkey temporarily broke off relations with the EU. It is, in fact, a testimony to Turkish determination and belief in the basic aim of joining the EU and be recognised as European, that even when relations were at their lowest, Turkey’s elites did not stop projecting the same image of their country as they had done until then.

Thus, in 1998, a senior adviser to the president of Turkey did not tire in repeating that Turkey’s unique location provides certain leverages for international influence. He listed the factors which made Turkey important: she stabilises the Black Sea region, serves as a south Eastern anchor for NATO, she balances Russia, plays an important role as energy bridge, serves as springboard for Western values further Eastward, and offers an alternative to fundamentalism. Cakar’s text is significant because it is one of the few that offers images other than the bridge, such as anchor and springboard, at the same time focusing on the actions that are corollary to these functions, such as linking, transmitting, conveying and stabilising. He does, however, later on in the text come back to the image of the bridge and the leit-motif of Turkey’s geo-strategic importance:

“The importance of anchoring Turkey to the West and incorporating the future of an undivided European continent with a strong presence of a geo-political and geo-strategic crossroads between East and West is self-explanatory. Turkey definitely belongs to Europe. (…) It was stated that Turkey served as a bulwark for democratic values in this part of the world and struggled to defend them when they were threatened. Today Turkey is a bridge conveying these values to new geopolitical regions. However, the decision taken at the Luxembourg Summit indicates that some leaders of the EU states have unfortunately not understood Turkey’s concerns and rightful expectations.”178

Ismail Cem, foreign minister of the republic in 1998 confirmed these views, stating:

“situated at the confluence of Europe, Asia and Africa and three seas of historical

178 Idem, p. 3.
significance where a blend of cultures shaped our modern civilisation, Turkey has traditionally assumed a prominent role on the “old continent”\textsuperscript{179}.

He also mentioned Turkey’s Cold War role as an outpost, upholding that in the post Cold War era his country’s geopolitical role had become even greater at the centre of a “turbulent geography”. Interestingly, Cem addressed the debates on where Turkey might be located by saying that they are not useful, because Turkey is the embodiment of all the regions surrounding her, fact that constituted her uniqueness, richness and strength\textsuperscript{180}. He also showed how in his view that Turkey fulfilled the idea of being European from a geographical, historical and even cultural point of view (through her adoption of democracy, pluralism and human rights). Yet, internal voices suggested that the issue was not necessarily that clear cut.

In 1997 Ilnur Cevik, foreign policy analyst, wrote with reference to the evolution of Turkey’s internal reform:

“Turkey is trying hard to remain a Third World country with Western clothes. There is serious resistance in the ruling conservative circles against democratic reforms and freedoms. Thus, instead of being in a position of being a good example to the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe, we have become a bad example that NATO officials also prefer to forget”\textsuperscript{181}.

He was joined in this opinion by Sirma Evcan, who later wrote

“In fact, everyone, including the officials in Turkey, knows very well that there hasn’t been much improvement in the human rights situation despite the promises of the governments that have come and gone throughout the years. Furthermore, as the pressure continues from Western Europe, there is a growing tendency on the part of Turks to be on the defensive”\textsuperscript{182}.

Essentially, these analysts pointed to the issue Bahar Rumelili designated in her article as the problem of the liminal: finding oneself in between identities. Through their remarks they suggested that indeed Turkey had not accomplished all the progresses she claimed she had and elites were turning a blind eye to these deficiencies, which debilitated her in the claim of being fully European. There existed a growing divorce between the image that the Foreign Ministry and, in general, the establishment wished to project of Turkey, and what internal critics perceived the country to be. In fact, this problem was not unlike the one encountered in both Romania and Ukraine, where internal reforms lagged behind intentions and declarations. These issues constituted the negative dimension of being liminal.

Such differences in opinion as well as the European rejection gave rise for a while to a cooler

\textsuperscript{179} Ismail Cem, 1998, “Turkey setting sail to the 21st century”, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{180} Idem.

\textsuperscript{181} Ilnur Cevik, 1997, “Turkey is emerging as the odd man out in Europe”, Turkish Daily News, 17 September.

\textsuperscript{182} Sirma Evcan, “Couldn’t facts change in parallel with attitudes?”, Turkish Daily News, 26 September.
attitude of the Government towards the EU and gave birth in some intellectual circles to the idea that Turkey did not need to be a member of the EU in order to be European\textsuperscript{183}. However, by 1999, the inertia of Turkey’s primary aim of acceding to the EU had slowly returned on track, and renewed discussion had been enhanced. Ozdem Sanberk, Turkish ambassador to the UK had clearly stated in 1998 that Turkey was not looking for alternatives to Europe. Turkey will keep its essential links with the EU and will develop the politics that arise from its geographical ties with Eurasia\textsuperscript{184}. However, he had warned against Europe’s negative approach, as potentially dangerous for the perilous area in which Turkey was bringing stability.

President Suleyman Demirel hasted in 1999 to re-gild Turkey’s tarnished image and came back to the well-known images and metaphors, calling Turkey Europe’s most valued strategic partner situated at an over troubled political junction\textsuperscript{185}, as well as a potential bridge between Europe and Eurasia\textsuperscript{186}. He was also the diplomatic means through which the Government sent a message of patience to the EU, saying that Turkey ultimately believed she would become a member and understood a need to be patient and operate necessary reforms. The 1999 invitation to become a candidate extended by the EU seemed to be the confirmation of the right attitude adopted by Turkey.

In 2004, an analyst with the left wing Radikal newspaper made an interesting observation. He remarked that in the aftermath of September 2001 something had changed in the quality of debates about Turkey’s identity, pointing out that “Where is Turkey” had gradually become “What is Turkey”\textsuperscript{187}. The gist of the argument was that in view of the ensuing tensions with the Islamic world, particularly with the Middle East, Turkey’s importance had become to be understood differently both within Turkey and abroad. Indeed, a closer look at the texts harvested in relation to the liminal and Turkish identity, shows a subtle but clear change in perspective. Perhaps Mete Belovacikli’s question in June 2001 of “where is Turkey? Is it at the Western tip of Europe or is it at the Western tip of Asia?” was amongst the last of its kind, because after that the focus shifted on what benefits Turkey could bring as a potential member of the EU. Thus already in 2002, Ugur Zyial, undersecretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs portrayed Turkey as a “window”\textsuperscript{188} on European values, through which her Eastern neighbours could peer and learn, and presented Turkish membership as an advantage in developing a coherent European policy towards the Middle East\textsuperscript{189}. Seyfi Tahan, foreign policy analyst, described Turkey as a “pivotal state” sitting

“in the middle of a fault line which crosses between developed, industrialised, democratic countries, respectful of human rights, and other countries which are

\textsuperscript{183} Sami Kohen, 1998, “Turkey and Europe, integration or alienation”, \textit{Policy Watch}, No. 329, 4 August.

\textsuperscript{184} Ozdem Sanberk, 1998, speech “The outlook for relations between Turkey and the European Union after the Cardiff Summit”, 20 July.

\textsuperscript{185} Suleyman Demirel, 1999, “Europe and Turkey cannot do without each other”, \textit{Turkish Daily News}, 5 May.

\textsuperscript{186} Suleyman Demirel, 1999, “A role model at turbulent crossroads”, \textit{Policy Watch}, No. 387, 30 April.


\textsuperscript{188} See similarity with Romania’s argument for being a NATO window, implying the acquisition of the necessary qualities.

\textsuperscript{189} Ugur Zyial, 2002, “The Middle East, a Turkish perspective”, \textit{Policy Watch}, No. 655, 11 September.
autocratic, backwards in terms of the economy and development”\(^{190}\).

The images used were similar to those used by Romanian elites at the time when Romania’s accession had become a little more of a probability and they are striking because they go beyond the idea of bridging and linking, attributing greater responsibilities to the country. Equally, the issue was no longer just about geography and physical location, but finally, about political, geo-political positioning. Interestingly, Tahan used a language reminiscent of Huntington’s “Clash of civilisations”, by mentioning fault lines. As shall be seen from further texts, this was intentional, since Turks seemed to hold dear the idea that they are able to disprove Huntington’s thesis.

Foreign affairs minister Abdullah Gül confirmed this trend by affirming in a speech that aside from being an energy, transportation and communication bridge Turkey had the capacity to create harmony between cultures and religions by bringing about a propitious atmosphere\(^{191}\). This position was re-iterated by Turkey’s Ambassador to the EU who straightforwardly stated that Turkey’s membership would clearly disprove the “clash of civilisations argument”. In so doing, Gül was echoing affirmations made by European officials and seized on the opportunity to articulate a position around an argument that resonated with both East and West.

“Turkey will, so to say, be a strong shield against waves of instability which could come from these unstable regions. Europe now has the intention of becoming a global actor in the world. It cannot be so without Turkey”\(^{192}\).

In fact, Abdullah Gül articulated a complex position around these arguments, which he skilfully presented with every opportunity available. He combined the idea of Turkey’s strategic importance for geographical reasons with her capacity for building a culture of reconciliation in the region.

“By providing the West with an insider’s input from the East, and providing the East with an insider’s input from the West, Turkey is a unique asset for the EU, the transatlantic partnership and the regions within which Turkey has been historically interacting”\(^{193}\).

It is interesting he used the word “shield” against “waves of instability”, which is a term that at first sight could seem out of place, given its ideatic similarity with the idea of being a “barrier on the way of barbarous hordes”; however, it was propitiously used at a time when fears around such “waves” were reignited, particularly with respect to terrorism. However, in contrast to an older view of the function of the shield, the Turkish foreign minister proposed a more dynamic aspect, emphasising the inside/outside movement as well as inscribing Turkey firmly on the “stability” side of the stability/instability dichotomous pair. Support for these

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\(^{190}\) Seyfi Tahan, 2002, “Turkey moves from marginality to centre”, Policy Watch, No. 650, 19 February.

\(^{191}\) Abdullah Gül, 2004, “Keynote address by Minister of Foreign Affairs and deputy Prime Minister of Turkey”, at the symposium Turkey and the EU looking beyond prejudice, 4-5 April.

\(^{192}\) Amb. Demiralp, 2004, Interview, ABIG, 13 April.

\(^{193}\) Abdullah Gül, 2004, “Turkey’s EU membership, seeing the transatlantic gains”, Zaman Online, 16 December.
ideas also seemed to come from civil society. Ilnur Cevik, one of the most long standing analysts and observers of Turkish policy coined the general opinion by writing in one of his editorials:

“Turks have always boasted of being the physical link between the East and the West, but we feel it is time Turkey also became a genuine bridge between Western civilisation and the Muslim world.”

All the above texts and affirmations were written in 2004, revealing this as a crucial year for Turkey, since in December the EU decided to open accession negotiations with Turkey in October 2005. Therefore, they were written with hope and the feeling that Turkey was on the right way to success. However, the confident tone that transpired from these fragments was due to the fact that between 1999 and 2004, and particularly since the advent of a new government in 2002, Turkey had made massive advances on the path of reforms. Everyone inside and outside Turkey was amazed at the fact that a third of the constitution had been modified in an extremely short time, the death penalty had been abolished, the issue of national minorities had at least started to normalise, and education and broadcasting in Kurdish were becoming accepted by the establishment. These represented major advances on the Turkish internal scene.

A few remarks are in order in connection to this matter. The year 2002 brought about not just a new government and administration, but for the first time it brought to power an Islam based political party who for the first time in a very long time enjoyed a majority in Parliament, a fact that helped in the promotion of reforms. However, for many, the mystery and the danger loomed further, because it was very hard for staunchly secularist and Kemalist members of the establishment to believe that Islamists would actually be pro-EU or would truly promote reforms in such a way as to favour the country’s entry into it. Indeed, history was showing that important Islamist leaders, such as Abdullah Gül, the foreign affairs minister, had held consistent anti-EU views. In 1995 Gül claimed to be proud of being part of the only party that did not approve of Turkey’s customs union with the EU, identifying the latter with a “Christian Club”. Turkey’s better alternative would be to have closer ties with other Islamic countries. (The EU should pursue closer ties with other Islamic countries, or Turkey?) Whilst his party had been part of a coalition government until 1998 (when it was ousted from the coalition) their opinions were often against Europe. However after 1998, a reform started to unfold within the party, bringing in its discourse positive references to the West.

Saban Taniyici suggests that this change occurred in connection to the case that the Islamist party brought to the Constitutional Court in Turkey, when the legal experts defending the party’s right to participation in political life argued for freedom of expression with Western terms. The president of the party at the time also made a relatively explosive declaration:

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196 Idem, p. 472.
197 Idem, p. 477.
“Those who called themselves Westernists until today (when it comes to the closure of the party) say that Turkey has unique conditions. Now we have to become Westernists. We want secularism as it has been implemented in the West. We became pro-Western because we do not want Turkey to go back to a repressive regime.”

To this kind of affirmation were added Abdullah Gül’s opinions that the EU was right not to invite Turkey’s candidacy at the 1997 Luxembourg summit, since the country had not really reformed since the 1963 Ankara Agreement.

Surely, the transformation of the Islamic party’s discourse is not the stuff of fairy tales where the bad characters suddenly see the errors of their ways and decide to become good, but it signifies the possibility of adaptation and learning of new norms and ideas, especially if this learning happened through a “personal” experience, such as pleading their rights in the terms used by those who were hitherto seen as the enemy.

This gave rise in 2002 to the idea that the Islamist Party, AKP, was promoting a “light, one calorie” Islam, whose main concern was to prove the compatibility between Islam and democratic norms. AKP definitely impressed through the reforms mentioned abroad, and through an active foreign policy oriented towards the EU.

I believe it is therefore important to point to the fact that a Western orientation was not purely instrumental on behalf of Turkish elites, and it rather became a resource when the “darker” side of the establishment threatened to engulf whatever progress had been made on the road to modernity and democracy. Perhaps an even better example of this is the publication in 2005 of a report by the European Stability Initiative NGO, which called the Kayseri community of Anatolia the “Islamic Calvinists” of the East, in an effort to show how much more similar Turkish culture and religion was to the Western one. The report speaks about the “other Turkey”, that of the Central Anatolian plains, which has always been perceived as the “real” Turkey by many European leaders, the unchangeable, backwards, not EU worthy, part. It shows that over the past two decades this region has known an impressive economic development, particularly in the textile and furniture industry, which is slowly doing away with the more prominent obstacles common in many Islamic societies, such as high illiteracy and disrespect of women’s rights, thanks to something that Anatolian Turks themselves compare to a “protestant work ethic”.

This is considered the home of the AKP party and the birthplace of Turkish democratic conservatism, as defined by Tayyip Erdogan, former prime minister: “a significant part of Turkish society desires to adopt a concept of modernity that does

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198 Zaman, 1997, 9 October.
203 Idem.
not reject tradition, a belief in universalism that accepts localism, an understanding of rationalism that does not disregard the spiritual meaning of life, and a choice for change that is not fundamentalist. The concept of conservative democracy is, in fact, an answer to this desire of the Turkish people.”

This report was hailed by Abdullah Gül, then foreign minister, who also affirmed:

“The name of this concept is Calvinism in Christianity. In different religions it has different names. They compare the sociological situation in Kayseri to this. They explain it in this way. It is very true.”

This report, as well as the attitudes which it sparked, constituted a relatively good indication at least of the new leadership’s intentions towards the EU, which until the end of 2006 and even well after were confirmed. It also showed an effort at identification that went farther than saying “we are Western because we are part of Western institutions”; it rather aimed to point to where there are compatibilities and identity similarities, that could be convincing of Turkey’s synthesising identity.

These advances seemed to also help the Turkish elite and intellectuals of statecraft to define an even more precise niche for her geopolitically, announcing ever more often that she intended to complete the physical link that she was between East and West with a political and cultural one. Looking in more details at the quoted fragments, it is important to note that if the geographical link was between the East and the West, the political link seemed to emphasise a vector in the other sense, from the West to the East, or from Western civilisation to the Muslim world. This meant that Turkish elites started to talk about being capable not only of internalising Western principles, but also of spreading them, which would allow for a real East/West exchange to occur. In terms of the images and processes outlined in this analysis, the subtle change that occurred was that finally, the political establishment had started to accumulate more elements allowing it to start converting convincingly Turkey’s geography into a credible multiple identity. A two way dynamic, which was not present in geopolitical writings, or in identity-related ones until then, appeared and signified an evolution in geo-strategic thinking. For example, the word “genuine” used in a text quoted above suggests the fact that there was an awareness about Turkey’s shortcomings in fulfilling a bridge-like function, and that that was a matter of self-confidence and real assimilation of Western ideas.

I also wish to suggest that, being more confident in their European path, Turkish elites could start speaking more clearly as if part of the Western world. They had certainly tried to do so until then, but recognition had not come. It is also important that old images of the bridge, or the crossroads were not discarded, but rather enhanced or rearticulated together with a notion developed in the West, that of “clash of civilisations”. It is difficult to identify what exactly was the logic behind its use by Turkish decision - makers and commentators, but it likely it had to do with agitating a kind of scarecrow that would be credible to the West because it had been born there. It is also worth noticing that the tactic was similar to that of

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204 Idem.
mentioning the danger of a new iron wall, except the metaphor had evolved into something more relevant to current events.

In 2005 and 2006 texts and speeches flowed along the same lines, stressing the historical decision EU had made and how this would allow Turkey to finally play her bridging role to full potential. It was all inscribed in the continuity of Turkey’s “1000 years of history in Europe”. However, it must not be understood that things had suddenly changed, or that dilemmas and doubts both in Turkey and outside had disappeared. In 2006, a national survey suggested that internally, Turkey was certainly not feeling as confident as her leaders about her identity. Elif Safak, writer and political analyst drafted a telling synthesis of it. “Then the question that hovers over the heads of numerous Turks becomes: Do we have to make a choice between Westernness and Easternness once and for all? Can’t we just keep being equally pro-European Union and suspicious of the Europeans? Can’t we just have a pro-nationalist ideology and yet at the same time yearn to transcend the boundaries of the nation-state? Can’t we carry on with this deep homophobia and at the same time wholeheartedly keep welcoming all these Turkish popular icons who are visibly, openly, homosexual or transsexual? We are a society of quite irrational fusions that oftentimes defy academic explanations and expectations made by positivistic scholars. And deep inside we ponder:

“Can’t we just stay happily situated in this unreasonable synthesis of ours? These are the questions no survey heretofore has been able to answer for us”

In his words, Safak was talking about the liminality that never appeared in official speeches and texts, not least because it was difficult to coin with one image or metaphor. He was also hinting at something another veteran Turkish scholar had mentioned:

“Turkey is unfortunate in that in the course of the EU accession process it has come under pressure to switch to a system of supranational democracy while it was still suffering from the troubles of having embarked on a path of democratisation before completing its nation-building process”

This indication is extremely important, because it describes the fundament on which Turkish elites were building their arguments and explains why they occasionally appeared so shaky. A propos of the same survey Elif Safak mentioned, not all analysts were pessimist. It was rather suggested that Turkey’s temporary oscillations to the East and seeming paradoxical relation with the West and the EU was not structural of political life and foreign policy, which would be guided by a fundamental Western drive capable of overcoming periodic disillusionments and disagreements.

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208 Burak Bekdil, 2006, “Directionless Turkey: Quo vadis?”, Turkish Daily News, 3 May. “Turks are in a very bizarre state of mind: They are allies with the United States but they see Washington as the biggest security threat; they want to join the EU but they don’t trust it; their military is their most trusted institution and at the same time cooperates with the Israeli military “in depth” while they feel hostile to the Jewish state; some of them see Russia as a hope but most of them sympathize with those who kill Russian children; some of them see Iran as a potential partner, but the Tehran regime appears on top of their National Security Council’s threat paper; their government’s genes are truly Islamic but it shyly courts what most of their religious extremists see as the Satan: The United States (…) Although the basic features of the “confused Turkish thinking” are largely
Overall, identity arguments tended to strengthen the ideas developed by geopolitical logic, providing them with a dynamism stemming in the fact that they were conceived with a particular goal in mind (EU accession) and in a dialogue with the EU, or better yet, occasional spats provoked by different episodes in the relationship. The liminal images of the bridge and the crossroads were stubbornly present in all texts seeking to prove Turkey’s usefulness, associated with terms that suggested dynamism, determination and self-confidence. As prospects to join the EU improved, this could be spotted in the way liminal images were mentioned and articulated. They went beyond the “bridge” and the “crossroads”, to become “anchor”, “stabiliser”, but all, still as a result of Turkey’s location. Furthermore, the linking function gradually gained a larger dimension, getting a character akin to a myth when it became about disproving the “clash of civilisations” thesis. The metaphors of “anchor” and “stabiliser” had the merit of suggesting a fixing of the identity that was not present in previous images; being a bridge or a crossroads implies oscillations. This evolution in language was not random, and one of the ways it can be verified is by drawing a parallel with the Romanian case, where similar images also appeared when relations with the EU became tighter and Romania’s future integration more certain. Being an anchor and a stabiliser suggests being on the inside rather than the outside and socialised enough in particular norms as to be able to uphold them.

To a large extent this role was seen as a natural continuation of Turkey’s protective function during the Cold War, and in this sense the discourse kept continuity with previous periods, mainly through the fact that notions developed in geopolitics found a way to be translated in identity-related terms. In virtue of these ideas, the Turkish government participated in an initiative that aimed at giving them a practical representation.

The Alliance of Civilisations

The “Alliance of Civilisations” initiative is comparable in the framework of this analysis to the Romanian policy initiative concerning the security triangles. However, unlike the Romanian case, this idea was not Turkish in the making, but rather enthusiastically adopted by Turkish elites. The idea of an “Alliance of civilisations” was the brainchild of Spanish authorities. The initiative was put forward by José Luis Zapatero’s government to the UN secretary general Kofi Annan209 in September 2004. It was meant as a means to overcome the apparently increasing cultural and civilisational gaps existent in our contemporary world. This initiative included the idea of the creation of an institutionalised dialogue between different groups on the themes

of culture and civilisation.

The Turkish government was invited to co-sponsor this initiative\textsuperscript{210} and enthusiastically accepted. It was no wonder, since the discourse behind the “Alliance of civilisations” had been conceived with the idea of combating Huntington’s “clash of civilisations” argument, which was considered a very destructive contribution to international relations\textsuperscript{211}; Turkish elites had tried for some time to cast the role and image of their country as a proof that Huntington was wrong. In a speech in 2003, the Prime Minister Recip Tayyip Erdogan had affirmed that

“the decision by the EU to launch accession talks with Turkey will be the victory of the message that democratisation is the starting point of the project of harmony of civilisations”\textsuperscript{212}.

In June 2004 at a NATO summit in Istanbul he further stated,

“Under the current circumstances, with East and West moving ever closer to each other, Turkey’s unique role is being strengthened. We derive the strength that will help us succeed in that mission from our history, our multidimensional cultural riches, our democratic and secular system and our dynamism in unifying the West (...) Turkey will be a symbol of harmony between cultures and civilisations in the 21st century, with its role of fostering an East-West rapprochement becoming even stronger”\textsuperscript{213}.

These were the kind of affirmations and images that were also used in texts regarding Turkey’s identity and largely capitalised on a series of images and ideas constructed around the country’s history and geography. Therefore, the Alliance of civilisations idea seemed to fit the Turkish discourse like a glove, providing an institutional form at an international level for something that existed in Turkish minds for a while. It was particularly significant that Turkey was invited to participate, symbolically, because to a certain extent, this meant recognition of Turkey’s potential status and role. This was not unique -as shall be shown in the section dealing with the West’s opinion of Turkey-, but was important because it happened at a time when Turkey’s relationship with Europe improved.

Unfortunately, there were no texts that I could find detailing the rationale behind Turkish acceptance (similar to the texts existent in the Romanian case about the security triangles), but the few texts referring directly to this initiative indicated a fit between discourse and intentions. In a speech given by Abdullah Gül about Turkish foreign policy initiatives, he mentioned the Alliance of Civilisations as an example of an initiative

“that responds to a broad consensus across nations, cultures and religions that all societies are interdependent, bound together in their development and security.

\textsuperscript{210} Idem.
\textsuperscript{211} Idem.
\textsuperscript{212} Recep Tayyip Erdogan, 2003, Democracy in the Middle East: Pluralism in Europe, address at Harvard University, 30 January.
\textsuperscript{213} Recep Tayyip Erdogan, 2004, quoted in Turkish Daily News, 29 June.
With this initiative, we will aim to root out prevailing cross-cultural misconceptions and to offer a better understanding of problems, so as to enable effective action to address them. That is no small task. If we can, in time, mobilize collective action across diverse societies and cultures to reverse the dynamics that prevent cross-cultural harmony, then we will have taken steps in the right direction.”

The message was rather clear, and it focused on what Turkey could do in order to diffuse current problems; the speech only briefly mentioned usual elements, such as Turkey’s location and complex foreign policy needs, and they were embedded in the speech in a way that suggested previous knowledge and affirmations of these issues. The mention of the Alliance of Civilisation project represented the step further beyond acknowledging Turkey’s special position and into giving it a meaning and value.

As specified above, although this was a high profile project and initiative, it did not yield that much material in Turkey, perhaps because its principles had been outlined so many other times before. Most intellectuals of statecraft agreed it was a good idea, although some also pointed to its weaknesses, such as under-determination, the difficulty of defining civilisations and, more pragmatically, the fact that Turkey had yet to truly make civilisations meet in her own land. If she were to design any project aimed at reconciling different perspectives on the world, as the alliance suggested she might, she had to achieve some reconciliation at home.

“Turkey needs to have a solid record on basic freedoms and especially the freedom of faith. It has to have taken the necessary legal and practical measures to remove religion’s influence over the state through French-style laicism and prevent state influence over religion through Anglo-Saxon secularism. The state needs to be at the same distance to all religions. The religion of the majority should learn how to live with others instead of just tolerating them. As long as there’s a continuation of the current practice of discriminating against Alawis and other sects, perceiving all missionary activities as a sort of spying and small groups constantly voicing the worst possible insults at the Orthodox Church and acting like they are part of Sunni Muslim club, such global initiatives can’t be convincing. Those who are responsible for such a spectacle are not only a handful of ultranationalists. The assertive intellectual who dismisses the re-opening of the Heybeliada (Halkı) theological school for a small Greek Orthodox community, noting the unsolved headscarf issue, is also part of this choir. The government decision to impede the co-celebration of the Feast of Saint Andrew, which has been held since 1967 at Fener (Phanar) on Nov. 30 every time a new pope is elected, should also be seen in this light. Not to mention the discrimination against different sects and religions, including women’s wearing of headscarves in public life”.

The above represented but a few of the inconsistencies still existent in Turkey at the time and,

more importantly, alarm signals regarding Turkey’s credibility in the Alliance of Civilisations. The period until the end of 2006 did not offer more commentaries or actions about this initiative, but it certainly put it on the mental map of analysts as the partial manifestation of a role Turkey’s elites had envisaged for their country. The idea of alliance of civilisations had, however, echoes in other fora, such as the World Economic Forum on Turkey, where the whole argument about Turkey’s future revolved around her being a bridge between civilisations and a driver of intercultural dialogue. “Under the right conditions, and if the right tone is set, Turkey could enhance the EU’s sphere of influence through the country’s traditional relations with others in the region. Along these lines, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey stressed the importance of the recently announced “Alliance of Civilisations” with Spain, which aims to be the 21st century initiative for global peace and prosperity”\textsuperscript{216}. The mention of the bridge metaphor along the Alliance sufficed to firmly bring together older ideas, containing liminal references, and the new initiative. Therefore, it can be said that despite obvious weaknesses, the Turks were not going to let go of this opportunity to affirm what they believed was their specificity. The follow-up in 2008 came in the shape of an international conference in February in Madrid, showing this was not a dead project and was still pursued by Turkey.

**Turkey’s security card**

Security has always constituted a strong issue for Turkey’s elites. This section does not concentrate on all aspects of the security debate in Turkey, but rather on the ideas, which brought together security and liminal questions. In short, the argument that I shall make in this section is that whenever Turkey’s security value was seemingly downgraded or considered less important for Europe or the West in general, the argument put forward by Turkish intellectuals of statecraft was that her geopolitical location and her multifaceted situation would always constitute an advantage and an asset for any security architecture. In doing this, the theme of Turkey’s liminality was kept in the limelight.

The fact that Turkey had joined NATO in virtue of the protection and ultimate security that she could provide the West, gave her at least one dimension in which doubt of her European-ness was not possible, or not legitimately admitted: Turkey felt definitely indispensable within the Cold War security architecture of Europe. As Pinar Bilgin noted:

> “Turkey participated in the maintenance of security in Europe during the Cold War by virtue of her strategically significant geographic position, the size of its army and the pro-Western orientation of the Turkish regime that helped bolster the identity of the West”\textsuperscript{217}.

In 2002 Tarik Oguzlu noted that the Cold War era security identity of the EU allowed


EU members to co-exist with Turkey within NATO in such a way that both sides perceived each other as security providers. For Turkish elites, as long as Europe and Turkey saw each other as such, Turkey’s European-ness would go uncontested. However, as commentators remarked, by the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s perspectives had changed about Turkey’s strategic value. European powers considered her less important as the power of the Soviet Union subsided and eventually collapsed. Echoes of this idea resounded in Turkish society too. Already in January 1990 decision-makers and military commanders were debating the question of the country’s value. Some argued that Turkish value had in no way diminished with the end of the Cold War, and they brought as a determining argument her position as “part in Europe and part in the Middle East, and controlling the straits.” Others were less optimistic and, sensing the change from an emphasis on security to an emphasis on political identity, did envisage a decline in her strategic value. The EC’s rejection of Turkey’s application for membership compounded existent fears, especially since the Community had focused on Turkey’s democratic deficit (human rights, freedom of expression, death penalty) as one of the reasons to make her wait. Yet, the security argument seemed to somehow be able to save the day. In an editorial, İlnur Cevik claimed “at least they still want us in NATO,” stressing the fact that “they” (the EC), despite treating Turkey as a “second class citizen” had at least realised that the country was necessary in NATO, as a security member, in virtue of her capabilities and geographic position. The Gulf War (which shall be examined further down in the chapter) seemed to support the view that Turkey continued to be valuable, as did developments in the Balkans. However, by the second half of the 1990s Europe had moved towards developing a common defence policy that did not seem to include Turkey.

However, before delving into that matter, I wish to underline that generally, discussion of Turkey’s significance for security architecture in Europe and the West occurred, and included a mention of her special position and how that special position translated into security assets. This was perfectly reflected in the affirmations of the Minister of Defence in 1999:

“Geographic destiny placed Turkey in the virtual epicentre of a “Bermuda Triangle” of post Cold War instability and uncertainty, with the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East encircling us. Rather than isolating ourselves from the pressing conflicts at our doorstep, Turkey decided to assume a pivotal role in promoting regional peace, stability and cooperation in contributing to vital efforts to end human suffering and conflicts.”

This fragment is eloquent regarding the Turkish position. Not only does it bring to the fore, again, the complexity of Turkey’s location, but manages, without mentioning the word “security” to suggest that is Turkey’s main contribution. By creating an antithetical image

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219 Idem, p. 67.
220 See footnote 66.
221 Idem.
222 İlnur Cevik, 1990, “At least they still want us in NATO”, Turkish Daily News, 10 January.
of the “Bermuda triangle” (suggesting uncertainty and danger) opposed to “regional peace and cooperation” as promoted by Turkey, it successfully depicted the country as a security provider. Furthermore, the terms of the speech perfectly echoed other official declarations, which were not necessarily connected to security matters, but related to Turkey’s identity as a pivotal state and democracy projector.

Nevertheless, such self-portrayals did not necessarily impress EU officials who had started to think about the creation of a European common security defence. The idea of a common European security mechanism had emerged in the early 1990s. In the following paragraphs I shall provide a brief history of the evolution of this idea, in order to give an etching of the kind of new factor that Turkey had to confront during the 1990s. The European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) was a concept developed in the 1990s, within NATO. Behind it was the wish to strengthen the European security pillar in the Alliance and to give Europe the possibility to act in places where NATO would not be engaged224. The Treaty of Maastricht of 1992 provided the legal framework for ESDI, bringing into being the Western European Union (WEU) as the defence component of the EU225. In 1997 the Treaty of Amsterdam strengthened the link between WEU and the EU and included more specific tasks for EU to perform in humanitarian crises and peacekeeping missions226. Following the Cologne and Helsinki Summit in 1999, the ESDI became The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), which aimed at developing an autonomous decision capacity and at participating in circumstances where NATO as a whole was not engaged227.

Dr. Ramazan Gozen examined the significance of these transformations for Turkey, and concluded that Turkey’s connection with the evolving European security architecture was structured in three dimensions: Turkey was at the centre of the European security architecture through NATO; however, she was somewhat distanced as an associate member of the WEU; finally, she was marginalised by the ESDP, which emphasised the necessity to be an EU member for a country to be able to participate in its decision making228. This third dimension, a result of the evolution of European strategic thinking, constituted a great disappointment and anger motive for Turkish elites. Not only did it rob them of a historical claim that linked Turkey to the West through her NATO membership, by making NATO also a place for the non-Europeans, but also complicated matters by linking the security question firmly to the European identity question. As is well known, Turkey’s European identity was and continues to be a matter of contention, a fact that further complicated matters.

The response of Turkish intellectuals of statecraft has generally been to counteract European leaders made with an emphasis on why Turkey should not be ignored and neglected in any new security architecture. Thus, in 1998, experts claimed,

“Turkey’s geographic location can be considered an enviable strategic and military

225 Idem.
227 Idem.
228 Ramazan Gozen, 2003, Turkey’s delicate position between NATO and ESDP, Unpublished material, Ankara University, p. 16.
asset. It offers Turkey the opportunity to act either as a bridge or as a barrier over critical routes of transportation”229,

and

“a Turkey which is integrated in Europe economically is socially powerful and stable, would be a bridge that unites the values of pluralistic democracy of the West with the East, and would constitute an antidote to theories of cultural conflict”230.

In 2000, Meltem Muftüler Bac enumerated the strategic and security assets that stemmed from Turkey’s geographical location: security by blocking crisis from the Middle East (to be later examined separately), closer cooperation with Israel as well as the Organisation of Islamic States countries, the roles played in South Eastern Europe and the Caspian region231. All these arguments were very similar to the ones made particularly by Romanian decision-makers, suggesting that the countries in the region were in some respects of the same mind.

After September 2001 and after the US intervention in Iraq the same kind of arguments strengthened with respect to the security architecture, and were crystallised in various circumstances. In 2003, Ali Engin Oba, Turkish Ambassador made a presentation regarding Turkey’s role in the new world order:

“ce rôle stratégique de la Turquie, à la jonction de l’Est et de l’Ouest, et à la confluence des régions sensibles que sont les Balkans, le Caucase et le Moyen Orient est plus que jamais valable dans le contexte international de l’après Guerre Froide. Ce rôle est devenu particulièrement important sur l’échiquier Eurasien. (...) La Turquie, en tant que lieu stratégique est devenue intéressée au premier chef par les développements en Europe. On peut dire même qu’aucun pays n’est situé dans une position aussi vitale pour les intérêts européens”232.

These ideas were reiterated in 2006 in a speech given by the Turkish Minister of National defence in March. Starting from Turkey’s position at “the centre of the intersection of three continents”, he historically retraced Turkey’s steps to the West, emphasising her contribution to European security, only to mention of the present:

“Turkey, being conscious of the responsibility arising out of its history and unique location at the crossroads between East and West, continues to contribute to peace throughout the Eurasia region. (...) Turkey’s membership process also highlights the possibility of harmony, tolerance and peaceful coexistence among different cultures, and sends a strong message to those who believe that an unbridgeable fault line divides faiths and cultures”233.

These texts regarding Turkey’s security value for Europe complete the picture drawn by the statements and analyses in the identity and geopolitics sections, confirming that the three issues were interlocked within the foreign policy discursive thread dealing with liminal images and metaphors. By promoting a dynamic image of Turkey, engaged in making the most of her special and unique geographic location, security related texts were to be found in harmonious agreement with previous ones. As Pinar Bilgin noted, Turkey played the “security card” strongly in response to Europe’s hesitations regarding her EU accession; it is therefore no surprise that security texts emphasised a historical approach to the matter, which added more depth to the arguments exposed. In a certain way, security texts picked up where geopolitical and identity arguments left off, by enhancing them and giving a direction in which they could be projected. As could be noted, security related arguments used less abstract notions such as “East and West” and explained more concretely the advantages brought by Turkey.

Among security related initiatives aiming at convincing both Europe and the US of Turkey’s value it is worth mentioning the BLACKSEAFOR and Black Sea Economic Community, both Turkish diplomacy brainchildren, each with a certain degree of success in the region. Although not much material exists about the details of their initiation, available texts and statements suggest they were indeed created with Turkey’s geopolitical position in mind. Captain Orhan Babaoglu, working in the Plans and Policy division of the Turkish Navy explains in an article relating to the role that Turkey can play from a security point of view:

“In order to promote a policy of a stable Black Sea, Ankara has used its position as an honest broker that takes care of all regional security interests to found the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and BLACKSEAFOR”234.

By stressing Turkey’s value as a “gatekeeper” of the Black Sea, Babaoglu emphasised the importance that Turkish elites give to the Black Sea in their security policy. However, unlike Romanians, who made out of the Black Sea a very high profile issue, emphasising the need for a European and a US presence to what they called a “crossroads of civilisations”, Turks, recognising the Black Sea potential, want to keep it at best a regional affair, in which, together with Russia they keep a predominant role.

Thus, the BLACKSEAFOR force was created as a task group in charge of rescue missions, mine clearing and environmental protection235, in which other countries with a Black Sea coast participate. Furthermore, in response to the potential presence of US troops in the Black Sea, Turkey has proposed and enacted the creation of operation “Black Sea Harmony” in 2004, which is an international counter terrorism force modelled on operation “Active endeavour” in the Mediterranean236. In 2006, “Black Sea Harmony” was offered as an alternative to the


236 Idem, p. 9.
extension of operation “Active endeavour” in the Black Sea. Mevlut Katik, analyst of Turkish political and military strategies tells us: “In recent years, the Black Sea’s geopolitical importance has risen, as nations have come to increasingly value its potential as a conduit for energy exports from the Caspian Basin to Europe. Ankara is interested in raising its regional strategic profile in the hopes that doing so could secure a larger share of the potential economic spoils for Turkey. The establishment of a substantial US military presence in the Black Sea would complicate Turkish efforts to play a leading role in regional security initiatives, some Turkish analysts say237.

Irrespective of the Turkish reasons for countering American initiatives in the Black Sea, the aforementioned security policies represented a very concrete enactment of Turkish claims of being a key factor in the stability of Europe. Interestingly, these initiatives were not argued with the discursive panache that other ideas were; they were simply done, a fact which imposed a certain Turkish perspective, whilst at the same time sending the message that Turkey was confident about her strategic logic, as expressed by Real admiral Cem Gurdemiz at a congress in Venice in October 2006:

“In this context Turkish approach to Black Sea maritime security is based on two pillars: “First of all, full cooperation and coordination should be obtained well among all Black Sea littorals in the field of maritime domain. Secondly, security is indivisible. Therefore the security of the region should be integrated into the Euroatlantic security system”238.

The second pillar was particularly important, because it reiterated the arguments and principles that Turks had always voiced in favour of their inclusion within the European security system, thus effectively inscribing the Black Sea initiatives within the realm of security discursive threads connected to the liminal. Turkey’s decisive attitude in this respect also demonstrated self-reliance and presented an image of determination and ability to deal alone with a given situation, suggesting she was talking with Europe from a relative position of strength in security matters, which had always been Turkey’s strong suit.

This vision was reconfirmed in 2008, in a speech held by Prime Minister Tayip Erdogan at a conference on security policy, where he associated these Turkish security initiatives, who “have been institutionalised” with her geographical location and the need to enhance security for Europe:

“Turkey has been closely affected by all these developments I have mentioned because of its strategic location straddling three continents, three seas and different cultures. We are making serious efforts to resolve the political conflicts and enhance


economic cooperation in our surrounding region. (...) Geographical location also bestows upon Turkey the responsibility to provide uninterrupted transportation between Europe and the Caucasus, the Middle East and Central Asia”239.

As can be seen, reference points and images (“straddling three seas, and different cultures”) mentioned in previous years very much remained the main lines of argument in official discourse that continued to maintain the liminal dimension as an important factor, suggesting the latter was considered an adequate and productive element.

Dissonant voices on Europe

An important observation I would like to make concerns groups of Turkish society which might be against European membership. Does their attitude have an impact on the presence of liminal images in public discourse and debate? The most important group opposing Turkish EU membership, or rather being Eurosceptic, were the Islamist political parties, which seemed to have a basic civilisational objection to Turkey’s membership. As such, they did not touch liminal images, because these were very much part of the drive to accession discourse. However, as previously mentioned, it is important to remember that Islamists went through a process of reform of their thought and particularly discourse, at the end of which they actually took up liminal images and even extended them, as shown above. Abdullah Gül, foreign minister and head of the Islamist party, became one of the most fervent advocates and promoters of a pro-European foreign policy and therefore of liminal images. It is perhaps because of his political and civilisational beliefs that he could bring a new spin on the old bridge discourse by adding the antidote to the “clash of civilisation” argument. The idea appeared more credible coming from someone of this kind of background rather than from a secularist politician or member of the military, the two groups traditionally supporting EU membership.

Two groups of Eurosceptics, whose position seems to have become louder after the Helsinki summit in 1999, are some members of the military establishment, involved in the national security question, and Turkish nationalists. Turkish nationalists tend to oppose “European impositions” and claim to be fighting against imperialism and foreign dominance240. A major fear is the loss of Turkey’s specificity241 and a major criticism is that of Turkey’s indiscriminate bowing to European desires and commands242.

On the other hand, worried by the potential loss of sovereignty and control in case Turkey joined Europe, military people emphasised the idea that Europe does not really want Turkey and that the price to pay for membership was too dear to be worth it. Although neither groups

241 Idem, p. 142.
242 Idem, p. 144.
mention liminal images, they certainly stress the difficulty of Turkey’s placement in the world, which, paradoxically, is also the reason why they do not necessarily want her to join the EU: they claim that the threats she has to face requires the kind of security that the EU would undermine, because it no longer focused on hard security issues, such as military capabilities, whereas Turkey still needed to do so.\(^{243}\)

Ironically, some of those who oppose accession to the EU use the same kind of geographic arguments as those who are in favour, emphasising Turkey’s geographic value.\(^{244}\) This comes to show that geography remained a determining and deterministic element in arguments, irrespective of their orientation.

The question necessarily appears, then, if these protesting voices and groups are more in touch with the Turks and their preferences, and whether the discourse on liminality is the property of a very small minority at the top. The answer is as complex as the question. Clearly, Turkey’s road to Europe has never been and is not unambiguous, as the above section shows. Some have gone as far as saying that the pro-European stance appears to be built on somewhat weak foundations. In the not so distant past there was little debate about what EU membership entailed,\(^{245}\) not least because it seemed so far away. Changes and prospective costs were not evaluated, as the Turkey–EU debate was couchèd in abstract broad and geopolitical terms, or historical notions such as “becoming part of Europe”. In fact, in many cases, EU matters did not even constitute main campaign issues for parties before the acceptance of Turkey’s status as a candidate for membership.\(^{246}\) This information is precious, because it suggests that whatever opposition is against Europe in Turkey, arises not with respect to geopolitics, as in connection to the day to day details that come with EU integration. However, as Gamze Avci tells us, the period since the beginning of candidacy status has been fraught with a high politicisation of the debate on Turkish EU membership not so much about whether the country should join, but more concerning the actual terms of accession.\(^{247}\)

Very often, debates on the EU become ideological questions, in which, generally the nationalist parties and sometimes the military expressed doubts about what accession would bring. However, Avci points out that, based on voting records in parliament, for example, despite ardent talk against the necessary reforms that would pave the way towards Europe, ultimately most parties voted for them in Parliament in 2002, with the exception of the nationalists.\(^{248}\) Even more interesting, when the AKP (Islamist party) won the elections in November 2002, it had not been elected on a EU agenda (even if EU related issues were present, the AKP representing EU as a catalyst for necessary reforms), but it felt it responded to Turkish public


\(^{244}\) Pinar Bilgin, 2007, op. cit., p. 748.


\(^{246}\) Idem.

\(^{247}\) Idem, p. 157.

\(^{248}\) Idem, p. 163.
opinion by strengthening it\textsuperscript{249}. Furthermore, it is to be noted that staunchly nationalistic parties that opposed certain EU issues, and were somewhat inflammatory in this sense, did not even make it into Parliament\textsuperscript{250}.

In a study of the geography of EU support in Turkey, Ali Carkoglu showed that despite increasingly polarised debates in public by the political elite of major parties there is little significant difference in their constituencies on EU matters. In most major parties, with the exception of one pro-Islamist party, a majority of members support EU entry\textsuperscript{251}. Dis- or misinformation is the basic root of lack of EU support, and parties in their various constituencies can easily manipulate that\textsuperscript{252}.

Carkoglu also points to a referendum paradox, due to the Turkish representation system. He explains that although a majority prefers to become full member of the EU, without changing anybody’s preferences, sub groups or sub constituencies may be distributed in such a fashion as to contain majorities that are against the EU\textsuperscript{253}. This, he affirms can happen because the political elite can ignore the preferences of the public or manipulate them. However, reforms introduced to electoral law in August 2002 aimed to remedy this situation.

Having conducted a survey of MPs’ opinion regarding EU entry before November 2002, Meltem Muftuler Bac and Lauren McLaren discovered that even at the height of the pro- and con- debate, when it seemed there was significant opposition to Turkish full membership, an overwhelming 64% of the selected sample claimed to favour accession\textsuperscript{254}, even though it also became apparent that a large number of those were relatively ignorant of the EU in its detailed structure and functioning\textsuperscript{255}.

All the above studies and results were published under the huge caveat that, really, there is comparatively little known about mass opinion concerning the EU, apart from a few opinion polls. In 2006 another large survey tended to underline similar kind of contradictions.

Indeed, the extensive survey compelled Elif Safak to elaborate an interesting idea:

“Who exactly are the Turks? Are we a Western society and if so, why do the Europeans treat us like a different species? Are we Middle Easterners and if so, why do we feel so aloof to their ways? Are we the symbol of “in-between-dom” and if so, in today’s increasingly polarized world is it possible to take up one’s abode in a threshold? The thresholds, after all, are culturally believed to be the domain of the djinni. Old

\textsuperscript{249} Idem, p. 166.


\textsuperscript{252} Idem, p. 187.

\textsuperscript{253} Idem, p. 188.


\textsuperscript{255} Idem, p. 211.
women believe they are no good for human beings”256.

Safak’s description is not only skilful, but it also sends one to the definition of the liminars as provided by Ann Norton. As one remembers, liminars, due to their in-between status, are difficult to define and therefore are threatening for any core entity. However, they also constitute a place of productive initiatives and possibilities, which is what the abundance of images used suggested.

However, if in 2006 questions as outlined by Safak persisted, one of the suppositions that can be made is that Turkish elites were not divorced from their people, but rather they struggle very hard to reconcile their preferences in a coherent identity that could be credibly presented to the outside world, as well as inside. In this context, the liminal images presented in foreign policy discourse seem to echo relatively well the questions and doubts that Turks had about themselves.

The following table sums up the terms, expressions, and images present in the main discourse concerning liminality.

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256 Elif Safak, 2006, op. cit.
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A brief look at the above table provides an interesting observation: the texts which used most liminal images were the ones concerning geopolitics and identity, whereas the security related ones emphasised the actions related to the images used in the other categories. This corresponded to the generally more dynamic tone and message intended in connection with Turkey’s security role. Another very important feature indicated by the table, which is present throughout the Turkish texts, is the tension and difficulty encountered in converting geopolitical advantages in to a convincing European identity. Indeed, it appeared that the characteristics that were perceived as advantageous in geopolitical terms, such as being a part of two civilisational compounds or an intersection of great powers interests, were difficult to translate in a stable and credible identity (two of the major attributes identity ideally exhibits). The resulting ambiguity was not only stated by experts, but exhibited in the language and images used in subject positioning, which did not always correspond to the realities of the field, but often to the hopes of the elite. If geopolitical images exhibited a clear option towards the linking aspect of Turkey’s position, images present in texts referring to identity questions occasionally reverted to the defensive and shield like quality, thus appealing to older historical images in the obvious hope of strengthening Turkey’s positive meaning to Europe. The identity argument equally enlisted organisational affiliations, which, as the reader recalls, were central during the Cold War era when Turkey was trying to consolidate her Western credentials. There were also attempts at going beyond the “bridge” or “crossroads” ideas, in an effort to convince of Turkey’s capacities. This strategy was in fact reasonably logical, given that an identity can be contested somewhat easier than a geographical position and therefore it needs support from a variety of angles in order to be convincing.

It must, however, be noted that towards 2004-2005 identity related texts became stronger and included more often images that referred to Turkey’s synthesis capacities, and therefore her potential role as an antidote to the clash of civilisations scenario. The reason behind this were as much the reforms that the government had encouraged, as Turkey’s leaders art of capitalising on them as examples of what could be done in the name of a liminal identity.

The security aspect of the Turkish discourse has an interesting status. On the one hand, security constituted for a long time the master card in Turkey’s anchorage to the West and it is one of the elements through which Turkish elites claimed to have actively participated in the construction of the contemporary European identity; on the other hand, security also constitutes the element upon which many in the political elite, and especially the military, are least inclined to relinquish sovereignty in case of EU accession. Turks are wary about Europe’s tendencies to leave them out of its security architecture but at the same time are also rigid about her participation in it, preferring an enhanced role for NATO, where Turkey has a much more established stance.

I wish to suggest that this tension can be better understood if one sees the security question also as a matter of securing a certain identity, of entrenching it. I have stated above that security related texts tended to pick images present in geopolitics and identity related ones and reinforce them. There was also more emphasis on the securing actions that Turkey could perform rather than images. This leads to a certain division of labour among the sub-discourses
concerning liminality: geopolitical texts state what is, in the almost ahistorical present, identity related texts aim to show how geopolitical factors are understood and what Turkey is trying to affirm, whereas security texts aim to show the way in which Turkey can secure and ensure that the elements present in the previous two categories are respected and developed: first, by being part of the European security system and second, by identifying clearly who or what is a potential threat (which can be done easier if a clear affiliation is established). Also, since the security card represented for so long the lowest common denominator between Europe and Turkey, it was of course anguishing to see it slip away.

What do all these images, ideas and processes tell us about liminality then? A first and most obvious observation would be that liminality in relation to a geographic or geopolitical position can gain positive connotations and even advantages more easily than liminality in relation to identity matters. As Bahar Rumelili tells us, liminals are seen as dangerous entities by those to whom they are liminals; concurrently, having entered this relationship, liminals become dependent and highly sensitive to opinions about them. Being neither here nor there or exhibiting fundamental contradictory features proves to be a crucial difficulty in terms of accepting an identity. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that the way in which the discourse on European enlargement is structured, as well as any pilgrimage of identification of the Other to the Self, creates the liminal state as a matter of necessity in the transition process (as explained in the Methodology section). The fact that the most emphasised image is that of the bridge, which, unlike the case of Romania, has trouble in evolving firmly into something else, signifies that Turkey-European relations are getting stronger in terms of identification, but still have some way to go. The bridge suggests the possibility of access, links, and is somewhat better than a shield or a bulwark, because the latter can also exist in a mercenary mode, without many ties other than the functional ones. The bridge mode presupposes exchange and knowing the Other and the Self. The following sections illustrate instances in which Turkey attempted to pierce negative European arguments and sought to go beyond the image of the bridge towards a more convincing synthesis.

The Gulf War crises and Turkey as a model for the Muslim world

From the end of the 1980s and on through the 1990s represented a time when Turkey sought to redefine herself, and the image of the bridge was present to a relatively high degree. After 1990, in particular, Turkey was presented with a series of opportunities to redefine her geopolitical function with respect to the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Balkans, and of course, the West, Europe and NATO. Despite a declarative élan and a decisive stance on the situation in Bosnia, not to mention the desire to become a “model” country for the Turkic nations recently freed from under the Soviet yoke, Turkey did not manage an impressive change of image. In these cases, geographical realities of proximity and cultural affinity could not be transformed into solid geopolitical assets. It is suggested that Turkey’s orientation towards the West did not allow foreign policy resources to be re-directed in other matters, as no coherent strategy had been elaborated about how to use post Cold War opportunities. However, as the 1990s unfolded, these opportunities helped articulate Turkey’s geopolitical role towards the EU (which it aimed to integrate), even if it yielded the “strange” result of posing as necessary for the EU as a “model” for the Middle East.
In 1990, when the first doubts about Turkey’s strategic value appeared both at home and abroad, President Turgut Özal saw in the Gulf Crisis a golden opportunity for Turkey to prove that she was highly needed in the New World Order, despite what some strategists might have thought. Therefore, Özal was very eager to help the US in their Gulf intervention. Contrary to those in the establishment who advocated a cautious attitude towards the Middle East (which was a traditional position in Turkish foreign policy), Özal argued for a flexible, initiative taking and more active foreign policy line. He affirmed that Turkey could no longer afford to act like an ostrich, and pretend the crisis would not affect her. It was up to her to make sure she controlled as much as possible how that was going to happen. After seemingly endless debates and disputes in Parliament, the Turkish President succeeded in imposing his agenda and Turkey lent her help to the Allied intervention by offering her air bases at Incirlik and by closing the oil pipelines running from Iraq. It was equally claimed that behind such an attitude was the idea that Turkey’s strategic location, reinforced by her neighbouring position to Iraq and the existence of both Iraqi oil pipelines and NATO military installations in her territory meant that she could not have avoided being dragged into the conflict.

The crisis underlined Turkey’s value for the Middle Eastern theatre, rather than the European one, which was a new, not necessarily desirable feature for Turkish elites, and sparked the idea that Turkey could become an important role model for the countries in the region, as a democratic country with a Muslim population. This idea was interestingly contextualised by a former Turkish Ambassador in an analysis of Turkey’s position in the crisis:

“It has been repeated in the last years in official declarations that this country is a “bridge” between Europe and the Middle East. The slogan is also widely quoted by foreigners to flatter Turkish pride. Turkey is of course geographically a bridge, as its territory, extending from the Bosphorus and through the Black Sea to the Mesopotamian Borders provides very important lines of communication between two continents. But it cannot be said today that the claim is justified on other grounds. Europe, or for that matter the Middle Eastern countries do not need Turkey’s help or intercession in their economic or political dealings. Western countries and in our time the United States are well entrenched in the Middle East, in situations inherited from the colonial era or created by the petrodollars system of relations. But if Turkey is to become what metaphorically may be called a bridge, this will be in the future before us, through the cultural bond if this country and the nations of the regions understand the value and the meaning of concertation and solidarity in their efforts at renovating their traditional societies.”

The former ambassador struck several important notes in his affirmations, by pointing to Turkey’s potential to be a model to the Middle East, the importance of her geographical location, but also to the fact that the latter had to be supplemented politically and culturally.

258 Idem, p. 25.
260 Idem, p. 75.
in order to be more than a physical reality. These lines show that indeed, the beginning of the 1990s represented for Turkey a new opportunity to redefine the meaning of her location, with the Gulf crisis introducing an interesting dimension for this process. It also meant the resurgence of the Middle Eastern issue in Turkey, with which her elites were not necessarily comfortable, as it detracted attention from the European dimension they so dutifully sought to emphasise.

By 1995 Turkish decision-makers seemed to be willing to promote Turkey as a model of a secular democracy in a country with a predominantly Muslim population, but mostly within the EU Mediterranean initiative. In 1997, Meltem Muftuler Bac explained why Turkey could be seen as a model for Muslim countries, but also an unusual case:

“Turkey is the only secular democracy with a market economy that is also Muslim. For many Europeans this is a contradiction in terms.”

It was not until after September 11 2001 and the ensuing second Gulf Crisis that the issue of model for the Middle East was better articulated. However, before delving into its details, a few observations about the matter of the US intervention in Iraq in 2003 and the Turkish controversy. As with the first Gulf Crisis, my first intuition as a researcher was that the second Gulf Crisis must have brought to the fore the question of geographical location and possibly liminal images. However, as much as geography and geopolitics seemed to have been debated in Turkey at the time, they were present more from the perspective of how much Turkey would have to suffer, again, from supporting an adventurous US enterprise in Iraq. Certainly, her geographic location was discussed, yet not in relation to its connecting or separation features, but rather as a liability in this particular case. Bearing in mind all the disadvantages (economic- in terms of revenue losses from closing the pipelines from Iraq- and political) that Turkey perceived from her involvement in the 1990s Gulf Crisis, debates concentrated mostly on this question. Even the last decision, taken by the Turkish Parliament, not to support the US operation was not phrased in terms of being more European, or follow the line of European countries, but in terms of Turkish national interest and public opinion, which were firmly against the intervention. As in the previous case, the question of support to the US bitterly divided Turkish society. However, when accused of not being faithful allies to the US, the Turks were prompt in reminding their US counterparts that they should not reproach Turkey for acting democratically and respecting the decision of her legislative body, which was, in their eyes, a very powerful example of how the country was different from all the others in the region.

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This stance definitely brought forward the “model” question, which could be seen for the purposes of this analysis as an offshoot of identity issues as developed above. Meliha Benli Altunisik, foreign policy analyst, remarked about the model thesis that it emerged after the end of the Cold War. At the time, Anthony Blinkmen, President Clinton’s Special Assistant and Senior Director for European Affairs at the National Security Council had stated that

“Turkey sits at the crossroads—or, if you prefer, atop the fault lines—of the world. Because of its place ... its history ... its size ... and strength, and most important, because of what it is—a nation of mainly Islamic faith that is secular, democratic, and modernising—Turkey must be a leader and can be a role model for a large swath of the world.”

Altunisik also tells us that the notion of Turkey being a model for Islamic countries re-emerged more forcefully after September 11264. However, he also warned that despite many iterations, it was also a largely undetermined idea, which made many of its critics feel uncomfortable, as they claimed that Turkey’s experience with democratisation was sui generis and therefore impossible to reproduce265.

The thesis of Turkey as model was coined in one of Tayipp Erdogan’s speeches, Turkish Prime minister:

“with its own stable and successful model of development, its place in the Western world, and its rich historical legacy and identity, Turkey will be a symbol of the harmony of cultures and civilisations in the 21st century. Turkey will achieve this not merely through its economic and military power, but its ability to make contributions to the universally accepted values and facilitate their dissemination and interaction among various parts of the world. I do not claim, of course, that Turkey’s experience is a model that can be implemented identically in all other Muslim societies. However, the Turkish experience does have a substance, which can serve as a source of inspiration for other Muslim societies, other Muslim peoples. Muslim societies have to find their own solutions to their problems, and each country should determine for itself what is to be done as well as its method and speed. But the time to make that decision has come. We speak about this with all political leaders we meet, and we express this in all of the meetings we attend. Muslim societies cannot solve their problems by blaming outside forces because, first of all, we all have to accept our own responsibilities, and we also have to take upon ourselves that responsibility. On the other hand, Western countries need to be more sensitive toward societies they consider to be non-Western, and have to rid themselves of unfair generalisations and historical prejudice. It is important in this context to note that developed nations have an obligation to act in recognition of the fact that possibilities and freedoms they see as right for their people are also basic human needs for other societies”266.

265 Idem.
The issue of Turkey’s location is not even mentioned in these lines, but the fact of her European aspirations is clearly marked by the idea of her “place in the West”, and her “stable development”; it is interesting that as these notions were associated with the question of geography and geopolitics elsewhere, they were still resonant of these elements and infused the idea of the model. In 1996 this link had been made clearer by Suleiman Demirel, then President, who associated Turkey’s location in Eurasia with her part as a role model for surrounding countries, due to her secular democracy. Demirel reiterated Turkey’s value as a model also because he believed that

“Ordinary people in Turkey do not see themselves as living in a land torn between East and West. They relish variety and they see their country as a land enriched by a multiple heritage.”

Recep Tayip Erdogan and his foreign minister Abdullah Gul in the period 2004-2006 articulated a position around these ideas, combining the instance of the model with the image of an active Turkey, purposefully seeking to make the most out of her location and the values she had developed:

“The Turkish experience might serve as a source of inspiration for countries of the region. We have sought to achieve democracy, civil rights and liberties, respect for the rule of law, civil society, transparency and gender equality. (…) In light of Turkey’s experiences we believe it is time we mobilised the dynamics of Middle East cooperation.”

Interestingly enough, the model debate in specific relation to the Middle East was to a certain extent echoing a former model argument, which had been developed in relation to Central Asian republics in the early 1990s. With the dismantlement of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s the Turkish elite saw a great opportunity for their country to become a “model” to be followed by the recently seceded Central Asian republics. President Turgut Ozal himself presented this to the Parliament as the moment to transform Turkey into a regional power. The euphoria that gripped the Turks with respect to that matter, given the cultural, linguistic and religious ties they enjoyed with the new republics was also encouraged by Western powers, who were fearful of their potential to become radicalised in Islamic politics (like Iran); therefore, they promoted the idea that the Turkish Republic could represent an economic and political model to be followed. A Turkish International Cooperation Agency was created and the first Turkic Summit was held in Ankara in 1992.

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financial and technological means were too weak to really be able to compete with the strong economic and political ties that existed between Russia and these countries. Soon encouragement towards the new republics proved insufficient in the creation of a Turkic Commonwealth, as the ambition had been initially. In a 2008 article, a well known analyst, Bulent Aras, also suggested that during the 1990s Turkey’s foreign policy agenda was far too taken with EU issues to actually pursue a truly active policy with respect to Central Asian republics.

The latter represents a crucial element because it suggests that the EU orientation is deeply ingrained in the views of the elite, to the point of being able to demobilise initiatives that are not directly connected to it. Indeed, it is easily observable that the Middle East model discussion benefits from a European frame in a way in which predecessor did not, for a variety of reasons: Central Asian states were not a problem for Europe in the early 1990s and Turkey herself could not “sell” a special relation with them as well as a relation to the Middle Eastern states. In addition to that, Russia held her grip on the region.

The way in which the “model” arguments fit into the greater liminal imagery promoted by Turkish elites is not straightforward. It is not a case of direct and explicit link between geographic location, identity and itself; it is more helpful to conceive of it as a derivative of the identity-liminality question, because it does not use clear liminal references, but it does develop and build upon them, by using the logic of “and-and”. This meant that what Turkey could do was conceived of in an accumulation- she could be an example of harmony of civilisations and a source of inspiration due to her geographic position, and development and experience. In addition to this, Turkish elites believed themselves capable of addressing both developed and developing countries, feeling apt to address their shortcomings-Western arrogance and non-Western victimisation (see Erdogan’s speech). The idea of a model implied example, whilst at the same time suggesting uniqueness. It also suggested the risk that it might not be replicable (as critics of the idea claimed). The affirmations regarding the model also further fed an image of Turkey as active and capable of synthesis, which represented another connection to the liminality question. An interesting feature was not only the ideas expressed, but also the way they were articulated. The Turks were careful not to seem arrogant or too submissive, but a real go-between, holding the key of understanding between sides. In 2005, together with Spanish authorities, they initiated a policy, called “Alliance of civilisations” (see above), in order to operationalise the model concept further.

**Turkey: the East-West energy corridor**

Along with the “Alliance of civilisations”, another idea gained ground in the late 1990s and early 2000s, concerning Turkey’s potential as an energy corridor between East and West. As some of the texts examined in the previous sections show, Turkey’s quality as an energy
bridge or corridor was often remarked upon, even if not always in great detail. This idea represented a very material manifestation of the manner in which Turkey could be a bridge, especially since particular projects, such as the construction of pipelines from Central Asia to the West was implemented. In July 2006 Turkey inaugurated the completion of the pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC), meant to transport Azeri oil to Turkey’s Mediterranean coast. The speech given by the Turkish President at the time pointed to the full scope of this project:

“Welcome to our country, where East and West intersect and welcome to the Ceyhan Terminal, the rising star of the Mediterranean. We gathered here today for the inauguration of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline that has been called the “project of the century”. As the pipeline enters into service, our country’s centuries-long significant role in history at the intersection of Europe, Asia and Africa surfaces brighter today. (...)Our country lies at the intersection point of energy transport routes, at the centre of Eurasia, one of the world’s new strategic regions for its oil and natural gas reserves. As such, it lies at the centre of an emerging global energy map. Being aware of the responsibility that its geographic position brings, Turkey aims at building necessary energy and transportation corridors in cooperation with its neighbours and partners with a view to creating new possibilities for regional stability and welfare”.

This speech fitted well with the geopolitical and identity related texts, which aimed to show a connection between Turkey’s geography and her geo-strategic value; furthermore, it spelled out the belief in a responsibility conferred by her position and an intention to act on it, which for the purposes of this analysis is significant, because it indicates a link in Turkish psyche between the function of the bridge and the country’s situation. A close examination of the language used in the speech shows elements common to other texts, and the almost ubiquitous “meeting of East and West” inscribes it in the wider ethos of Turkish geopolitical thinking. To a certain extent, the BTC pipeline represented a very material occasion on which to show how Turkey was a bridge. This idea is reinforced by the knowledge that the BTC pipeline had always been primarily motivated by political reasons, rather than economic and profit ones.

As Tuncay Babali, Cabinet Chief of the President of Turkey explained, the BTC has always been more popular with statesmen rather than businessmen, because of its geopolitical implications: denying Iran the main part as a Caspian energy exporter, reducing Central Asian dependency on Russian pipelines and bolstering regional economies, particularly those of the countries involved, Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan. The fact that diplomats could eventually prevail over commercial and cost-related hesitations of Western oil companies and get the pipeline to be constructed constituted a crucial example of how geography was not an all determining factor, but rather an enabling one for political projects.

277 Idem.
The BTC pipeline had been a project strongly encouraged by the Clinton administration ever since 1995. It took around five years to finalise agreements around the construction of the pipeline. As the actual process started, more texts were written around the idea of Turkey becoming an energy hub and bridge. However, not many of them discussed the idea in much detail, often limiting themselves as the mention of the idea and how it tied with Turkey’s location. When details were provided, they expanded along the same lines as geopolitical texts did. A good example is a 2003 text, coming from the Turkish petroleum company:

“geographical location makes Turkey a natural bridge between Europe and Asia. Its location on two continents plays a central part in Turkish history and gives the country a major advantage in serving the markets of Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa. Turkey shares common borders with Greece and Bulgaria on the North-West, with Georgia and Armenia in the north and East, with Iran to the East and with Iraq and Syria to the South. Three sides of Turkey are surrounded by seas: The Black Sea in the north, the Aegean in the West, the Mediterranean in the south and, just south of Istanbul, the Sea of Marmara. These are connected by the Bosphorus. Turkey is located at a strategic place between the Middle and Near East where rich oil and natural gas reserves prevail and the Western world where the main energy consumption takes place. Turkey has made remarkable contribution to the establishment of co-operation for the stability of the region and still keeps on maintaining her said policy. It is accepted that creating a balanced international co-operation setting is an important factor at acquiring more reliable energy supply policies.”

After the 2006 inauguration of the BTC and subsequent energy crises, the relevance of Turkey as an energy transportation alternative increased, confirming the affirmations and aspirations of Turkish elites. By the end of 2006, texts concerning this issue were only just starting to become more substantial. However few and under determined they were, the texts pointed to another instance in which Turkey’s oft mentioned bridge role could be concretely observed and enacted.

On the whole, Turkish initiatives concerning the model issue as well as the energy corridor stand proof of the strength of the pro-European discourse in Turkish foreign policy. Since liminal imagery is associated with this discourse through the indications it gives about Turkey’s progress towards Europe, it can be said that by upholding liminal images, Turkish elites have effectively weakened other policy possibilities as dominant in their choices. In other words, although other policy initiatives are undertaken in order to develop good relations with the Middle Eastern region, the Caucasus and even Russia, none of these options were considered by the end of 2006 as alternatives to a progression towards Europe and the West, a principle, which has been constantly voiced by Turkish elites.

Out of Europe: Subject positioning, hailing processes, and predicate analysis

The three companion elements to liminal images and metaphors are, in Turkey’s case, as complex as the intertwining of geopolitical, identity and security ideas.

One major element to be remembered is that the initial development of a sustained series of liminal images and metaphors was contemporaneous to a most crucial change in Turkey’s subject positioning in the beginning of the 1990s, the period that Pinar Bilgin called “ontological insecurity” in reference to the search for Turkey’s place in the world. At the time, Turkey’s more or less secure place in Western security identity and architecture was shattered by the demise of the Soviet Union, and her role hitherto as guarantor of the southern flank of NATO started to be questioned from the outside. Essentially, Turkey, who used to be considered “in” on Western security, saw herself confronted with being perceived as “out” or at best “almost in” by her partners in NATO and the West. This was the situation in the early 1990s at the time of the EC’s postponement of Turkey’s candidacy, as the vehement reactions of Turkey’s President Turgut Özal and other members of the establishment, showed. Indeed, quoted above in the three sections on liminal imagery, their interventions and opinions aimed to redress a certain loss of terrain on Turkey’s way to the West by insisting on her qualities and status as a key country in the geopolitics of the new world order. When İlnur Cevik, a noted editorialist, wrote an article titled “At lest they (emphasis mine) still want us in NATO” 280, he was underlining the split that had occurred between Turkey and the West, when Turkey could no longer say “we” and refer to her partners and herself; the “we” had become the “they” and “us”. Arguably, this had been the case even before, especially in relation to the EC; however, the insistence with which Turks emphasised their usefulness and the unfairness of their treatment by Europe suggested there was more distance than before in the relationship.

Subject positioning is, as specified in the Methodology section, also connected to the kind of narrative that is told in the discourses under examination. In this case we are dealing with a narrative of progress, following Turkey through her advance towards EU membership and therefore it is natural to meet both reflexive positioning and the positioning done through the affirmations of EU leaders. Reflexive positioning tends to emphasise Turkey’s positive qualities, whereas interactive positioning tends to challenge what Turks say about themselves, forcing a dialogue and sometimes tension. Moreover, I would like to suggest that the tension which exists in the conversation between Turkish and European elites arises from the fact that Turks, in their discourses and acts wish to distance themselves from an essentialist image, from being the Other, whereas Europe seems to have difficulty with reconciling the possibility of multiple selves that is a reality in both Europe and Turkey’s cases. If Turkey’s journey is a journey of identification with Europe, the discourse on liminality provides the landmarks of her advancement or retreat towards her goal.

280 See footnote 222.
SUBJECT POSITIONING

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geopolitics</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Security</th>
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<tr>
<td>Centre of a region full of instabilities; where interests of global powers intersect; strategic position of utmost importance; centre of a triangle of instability; part of the West; part of the Middle East; unique and strategic position; surrounded by three seas;</td>
<td>Ambivalent place in Europe; Ontological insecurity regarding place in the world; between identities; member of all European organisations; confluence of Europe, Asia and Africa; Europe’s most valued strategic partner; in the middle of the fault line between developed and underdeveloped countries; insider in the East and West;</td>
<td>Epicentre of Bermuda Triangle; junction between the East and West; crossroads between East and West;</td>
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In 1977, Ismail Soysal had affirmed that as long as Turkey continued to believe in democratic processes and continued to implement measures allowing her to keep the pace with contemporary civilisation, she was more European than other countries that were so through an accident of geography, but not necessarily by political affinity. As such he pointed about 14 years earlier to the distinction that Bahar Rumelili has made between the exclusive criteria for European identity, namely geography, culture and religion and the inclusive, “acquired” attributes, such as democracy, human rights and rule of law. This shows, once again, such features were not new to the 1990s, but part of a more protracted process. Soysal circumscribed the quality of being European and “in Europe” to the “right” intentions and actions rather than to a physical feature. Therefore he was positioning Turkey within the mental and political map of Europe. Refusing to make her a member, amounted to denying the efforts that the country was supposedly making towards modernisation and democratisation, thus not accepting the road, which she had walked since 1963, and the Ankara Agreement.

Relegated to an inferior position and suddenly out of Europe in the accession process, the Turks were relatively quick to react and try to make inroads anew. The wish to participate in the first Gulf War as well as the appeals directed towards Europe demonstrated a willingness to establish a new and better positioning, which was to be obtained as much by being active as by calling the bluff of Europe’s perceived double standards and harsh treatment of Turkey.

In his 1990s book, Turgut Özal challenged Europe to rise above ethnocentrism (manifested in Ozal’s eyes as an excessive focus on its Christian past) and behave in as secular a manner as Turkey would, by accepting the latter’s application for membership. In doing so Özal introduced a dimension which was often absent from geopolitical writings, namely expressing opinions

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281 See footnote 33.
about what Europe was and represented, a feature which is almost always encountered in texts relating to identity issues. The Europe towards which the Turks aspired was described as a

“complex whose attribute is to bring together the greatest diversities without confusion and to associate opposites in a non-separable manner. That which underlies the unity of European culture is not the Judeo-Christian-Graeco-Roman synthesis but also competitive and antagonistic interplay between these separate traditions, each of which has its own logic”.282

Essentially, a Europe flexible enough to be able to accommodate the kind of contrasts Turkey was host to. Ironically, a Europe that in the Turkish eye was more like Turkey or the Ottoman Empire than it was comfortable to admit. The subtlety to be noted in this passage was the suggestion that Europe did not live up to Turkey’s expectations of it, which in turn, had been cultivated and supported by Europe’s own self proclaimed high political and economic standards. This position persisted throughout the period under examination and it was possible to note evidence of it in the critical 1996-1997 interval, when relations between Turkey and Europe reached a new low.

The texts mentioned pertaining to this era tended to give a relatively negative image of Europe, as an unreliable and ungrateful partner who, at the moment of truth, at the Luxembourg Summit, refused to recognise Turkey’s progress, coming up with new criteria for admission to membership. This tendency continued after the 1997 Luxembourg summit, when Turkey’s application to the EU was again rejected, and Turkey temporarily broke off relations with the EU. Even closer to our day, in 2003, there are critics who question Turkey’s desired subject positioning as a member of the Western community, claiming that even her membership in NATO and cooperation with the EC were an illusion fed by strategic reasons rather than a real acceptance in the community of the West283. Umit Ozdag, head of the Eurasia Strategic Research Centre even claims that a potential entry of Turkey in EU would cause a “foreign body reaction”, because of EU’s largely Christian population, thus suggesting, essentially, that subject positions cannot change, or rather should not change, or at least not too quickly. Indeed, in the same article Ozdag claims that Turkey’s accession would change the geopolitical value of Europe, due to his country’s advantageous geographical position, therefore making the EU a real “superpower” who in its turn will change its positioning284. Moreover, Ozdag fears not so much a subject positioning change as a change of the subject, namely Turkey, whom he sees as “brainwashed” into believing the EU solution is the best, when this, in his view, is clearly not the case. In this case, the rejection of Turkey’s desired Western position is done from the inside, showing that the pro-Western orientation was not unanimous.

In fact, as shown in the discussion about the elite’s preferences, the fear of Turkey’s internal change, i.e. the change of the subject, is one of the main reasons why certain European reforms or requests were still opposed; therefore, it is perhaps easier to understand why the metaphor

282 Ozal quoting Edgar Morin, op. cit., p. 356.
284 Idem, p. 9.
and image of the bridge is extensively used, since it designated a position that was acceptable for a majority of people, even if, as mentioned previously, it did not go uncontested. Protests against this image generally came from people who would like Turkey to move beyond ambiguity, in one direction or another.

Another important element for subject positioning is that on the whole, Turkey’s geography is perceived and described as difficult, surrounded by instability and danger. Just as in the case of other images, geographic position constitutes a source of subject positioning in that it suggests the hardships with which Turkey is confronted and feeds the reflexive discourse. Thus Turkey appears as a misunderstood actor, who is assigned by others a place that is beneath that which she deserves.

Examining the particular images and metaphors she proposes for herself also provides some indications regarding subject positioning. The insistence on the notion of bridge suggests the idea of mobility and transitionality. Even if this image is sometimes criticised by certain representatives of the elites, as explained before, it is in fact very practical, because it is an open position, which can change at any moment, according to the kind of evolutions occurring in relation to other countries and entities. Thus, it can become a crossroads, a Bermuda triangle, an anchor or a stabiliser. The shortcomings of the bridge image are mobility and volatility, pointing to the lack of identity stability that Europe essentially reproaches Turkey. It is also important to note that the subject positioning changes in Turkey’s reflexive discourse, whereas in the cues coming from Europe this does not really happen. European leaders seem to have become somewhat attached to the bridge idea, not least because it is distanced enough as to be safe and close enough as to allow influence.

As has been shown, Turkey’s response to this attitude was to try to make inroads by proposing different other images, such as that of antidote to the clash of civilisations and possibly a model for Middle Eastern countries, signifying the desire to acquire a different status and therefore a different position on the mental map of Europe. However, a pervading logic is that all of the abovementioned statuses can be reached by taking advantage of Turkey’s geographical placement; any other additional characteristics come as complements to this major one.

Another interesting feature of the game of subject positioning is the presence of the civilisational notions of East and West, existent also in the Romanian and Ukrainian cases. As noted previously, Turkish elites saw their starting point as the East and are hoping their end point (although not their end) to be in the West; certainly, it is all about a metaphorical and political voyage towards the West, wherefrom development could continue on Western lines. This detail is very important, because neither Romania, nor Ukraine, consider their starting points to be the East, but rather the in-between East and West; hence, the distance they have to walk is smaller, both in the minds of their European partners and their own.

Meltem Ahiska explains that “from its initial conception in the process of defining Turkish national identity from the late 19th century to this day the “West” has been contrasted to the “East” in a continuous negotiation between the two constructs. The West has either
been celebrated as a model to be followed or exorcised as a threat to indigenous values.”

Furthermore, and perhaps even more importantly, she points out to the fact that Turkey, hailed as a bridge between the East and the West, has an equally difficult relation to the temporal signifiers of East and West, namely backwardness and progress respectively, fearing that she might be stuck in between the two, whilst trying to cross the bridge. Therefore, the present is articulated around a mythical core, which has been and still is a source of confusion and frustration.

Indeed, the roots of modern Turkey leave a heavy inheritance to overcome, which, as mentioned before, strikes back as soon as it is ignored or willingly buried. Elif Safak pointed out very well that

“We effortlessly believe that we are the heirs to the great Ottomans, but we have nothing to do with them or their mistakes,”

thus explaining why the Turks seem to be stuck on their way, in a position of in-betweendom, beyond which it is hard to evolve or be accepted. However he is also amongst those suggesting that

“After feeling uncomfortable, if not embarrassed, about our “Eastern” ways and pretending to be Western and nothing but Western, we do know now that indeed Turkey is a Westernised and Western country that embodies myriad elements from the East and culturally, socially and politically combines its Muslimness and Westernness. After so many years of resistance and insistence, it is only now that the Turkish elite are accepting the fact that we are a synthesis, an interesting, if not unique blend, and we are a hybrid culture, and that in itself is an asset.”

In these lines Safak gives the scholar important hints regarding the evolution of Turkish thought regarding Turkish identity and position. First of all, he alludes to the fact that gripped by enthusiasm for modernity, Turkish elites in the early era of the Republic claimed that the reforms they had undertaken had made their country Western. This was the essence of Kemalism, which saw membership into the Western system of institutions and the reforms undertaken as a reliable indicator of the country’s transformation.

However, Turkey’s fall from Eden in the early 1990s had brought to the fore the inconsistencies and vulnerabilities of her partial modernisation, which could only be faced by facing history and the remnants of former times and political systems. The images suggesting hybridity and synthesis in 2006, even if terminologically similar, pointed to a different quality than they did in 1990s and even in earlier eras, because they started to be substantiated in a different manner. Ironically enough, during the 1960s and 1970s, when civilisation-related criteria where emphasised by the Turks, geographical realities seemed to yield most political

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286 Idem.
287 Elif Safak, 2006, April, op. cit.
capital, and during the 1990s and 2000s, when geographical elements were stressed, the need for more substantial internal reforms became more pressing in order to give them clout.

In fact, Safak suggested that, once Turkey’s Eastern-ness was accepted, it would be easier to project a credible image. He also underlined a trajectory similar to that of the Romanian case, in which geography had to become geopolitics not because of structural pressures or circumstance, but through a conscious choice of inner change that brought another value to the country’s position.

Therefore, the road undertaken by Turkey seemed to be going always from East to West. The gaze of Turkish geopolitical decision-makers was largely oriented in this sense. No text affirmed that Turkey is a bridge between the West and the East, much as Romania was not to be found at the gates of the Occident, but at the gates of the Orient. This detail constitutes a significant indication of what Turkish elites think is their trajectory, namely, from East to the West, bringing something of the East to the West in matter of creation of links and connection. During 2002-2006, opinions changed somewhat, emphasising Turkey’s centrality and importance in the synthesis between West and East. Abdullah Gül’s speeches as well as other texts mentioning Turkey’s role focused more on the encounter of different trajectories in the country, by emphasising the idea of crossroads, nexus, or even model.

This qualitative change had also been observed by a Turkish analyst who affirmed that after 2001 the question of “where is Turkey?” changed into “what is Turkey”?, thus taking the focus away from what consequences geography can have on a country and placing it onto what consequences can internal change have on geography.

As a result Turkish identity received a positive spin, underlining a strong capacity for synthesis and projection of Western values. Texts coming from different sources, analysts as well as decision-makers, exhibit a high degree of convergence and agreement about what Turkey’s image is in Turks’ eyes at least. Not only do these texts agree on ideas, but also even the structure of the logic leading to these ideas is similar. There was always the evocation of Turkey’s role in the past, during the Cold War and how it should be translated in the new world order. Elements of geography were skilfully blended with ideas concerning the meeting of cultures suggesting the power of synthesis that Turkey had as a country. The general idea was that if, internally, Turkey has achieved such a result of harmonisation, and this could be translated internationally, in her role as a linking bridge, as a platform from where Western values could be irradiated. This is why the attributes associated with such actions depicted Turkey as a dynamic and enterprising entity with a clear purpose. Yet, in relation to Europe, she also appeared as an actor expecting approval, a slighted partner who believed they have done everything that was expected of them, only to find out this was not enough. Indeed, the disappointment expressed by all these texts with respect to Europe’s seemingly unjust treatment of Turkey in her quest for EU membership indicated a certain powerlessness and a mentality along the lines of “the ball is in your court now”. Furthermore, just as in the Romanian and Ukrainian cases Turkish elites used the analogy of the Berlin Wall or the Iron Curtain in order
to describe what Europe was doing by rejecting Turkey’s candidacy. However, out of the three, she was the only one that had been on the other side of the curtain during the Cold War. The fact that the “blame game” had similar terms in all of these cases will be analysed in detail in the chapter comparing them, but it points to the fact that in all cases the aim was to impress or push into action with the help of powerful images evoking betrayal, injustice and perceived historical errors that had brought about a significant amount hardship. Surely Europe did not want to be likened to its Russian other in terms of committing injustice.

Because to a great extent geography cannot change, but geopolitics can, identity-related texts constituted the measure of Turkish elite’s success and struggle to give a positive value to their country’s geographical situation. Overall, the texts had the same starting point and image, which they converted depending on the message they wished to convey: Turkey is located in a geography which borders several geopolitical and cultural entities; her position can constitute a convergence point, but also a fault line, depending on the perspective adopted. Turkish elites have adopted a rather positive view of their geography, seeing it invariably as a bridge, nexus point, or crossroads, whilst at the same time suggesting that this is somehow a given, an unchanging fact determined by geographical realities. Few are those that invoke the potential negative consequences of Turkey’s placement and even they bow to the idea of geographic inevitability. Translated in identity terms this location meant for Turkish elites the creation of an entity capable of reconciling and synthesising contrasts; in security terms, it became a guarantee against potential chaos and instability (as symbols of the Other which Turkey no longer wanted to be).

Although the terms used were repeated tirelessly, in the same order and structure of thinking (Turkey’s difficult geography is always mentioned first bordering various regions, then the bridge image, and the vector of orientation is almost always from East to West) in all three categories of texts, the general image which obtains is dynamic, not least because it was created in response to ideas and opinions coming from outside, mainly the EU. This is the point where a major characteristic of the Turkish discourse on liminality intervenes, in that it is mainly conceived as a dialogue and interaction with Europe rather than Turkish history. Unfortunately, this element equally constitutes a weakness, because each time Europe expresses doubts about the Turkish claim, there are very few other fall back options, such as historical examples or traditions. As Elif Safak (quoted above) mentioned, denying the Ottoman past en bloc for a long time has also meant denying the possibility of reconstructing certain historical moments as positive examples of a pro-European position. (The classical references to the Tanzimat and judicial reforms are scarce and not enough). However, contemporary efforts invested in showing how Anatolian culture and development could be compared with the development of a Protestant ethic in Europe point to attempts at changing tack.

Nevertheless, even this strategy shows that the major provider of images and discursive cues is Europe, in reaction to which Turkey constructs herself as a country with a difficult mission, well intentioned in her wish of joining the West. Europe’s image was somewhat

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tarnished, because it was portrayed as a disappointing partner, incapable of recognising Turkey’s merits, and occasionally as a Christian Club who did not allow Turkey to go beyond her former condition as the “Other” of Europe. Therefore, the relation between the two was at times adversarial, as suggested by occasionally accusatory remarks; nevertheless, the overall nature of the Turkey-EU relationship was such that it encouraged the proliferation of liminal images, not least because on the already self-conscious perspective the Turks had of themselves as in between civilisations, cultures and geographies, Europe superimposed the enlargement discourse of “almost Europe”, as detailed in the case study section of the Methodology chapter.

Interestingly, in comparison to the Romanian case, most Turkish texts insisted on explaining in detail what Turkey’s special position was; in the Romanian case, after a while, the country’s complex situation was alluded to only through the expressions “strategic position”, “unique position”, “special situation”, that were carrying within them a long line of argumentation. In Turkey, these expressions certainly existed, but they were generally used along with the elements which they substantiated. Incessant repetition and reiteration gave a certain static impression in the discourse. It also created a cumulative effect, impressing the message not necessarily through the quality or originality of the images used, but through the fact that they were present in texts addressed to all publics and in numerous circumstances. No further reasoning seemed to be added, and the liminal images seemed to be impervious to whatever changes in relations between Turkey and the EU occurred. Of course, modifications intervened, as for example after the 1999 invitation of Turkey’s candidacy, when the terms of discourse became bolder, more self-assured, and went a step beyond the bridge argument. However, the fact that the image of the bridge was predominant throughout the 16 years was significant of the fact that EU-Turkey relations had not fundamentally progressed. The bridge, just as in the Romanian case, indicated a rapprochement beyond the barrier, a dynamism beyond protection, but did not indicate integration, rather being “on the way to”.

The specificity of the Turkish case in reference to subject positioning is an active presence and occasional dominance of interactive positioning over reflexive positioning. The dialogue with Europe about Turkey’s position is more nuanced and more developed when compared with the Romanian or Ukrainian cases. As mentioned before, one of the reasons behind such a situation is the fact that Turkey must establish herself as European, coming from a non-European background and history, and in addition to that, must show she can become a “good” European through her acquired qualities and reforms.

Another specificity of the Turkish case is that reflexive subject positioning changes, even if only subtly, in geopolitical, identity and the security related texts. Geopolitical and security texts seem to be more at ease in presenting Turkey as an equal to Europe, a necessary equal, with a unique position granting unique abilities. In these cases, talk was more about Turkey being a centre and a crossroads, an active actor upon which crucial things depended. Identity related texts, on the other hand, were far more sensitive to Turkish vulnerabilities, and expressed those by using terms which referred to Turkey’s ambiguous situation, such as “fault line”, “in-between”, “confluence”, these terms suggesting an uncertain and ever-
changing positioning. The fact that there exist oscillations between these three types of texts also indicates that subject positioning is not fixed at any given time and moving between multiple identities often means moving between subject positions. Turkey as a member of the European security establishment acted on more solid ground (in virtue of common history) than Turkey as a potential EU candidate, for example.

The development of the initiative concerning the “Alliance of civilisations” and the re-activation of the model image provoked a change in Turkey’s subject positioning insofar as they gave way to a greater strength of argument and seemed to create a more balanced positioning between Turkey and the EU. They did so by suggesting that Turkey could be a platform from where ideas and initiatives could stem and irradiate, and not merely a receptor of the “acquis communautaire”, be it legal, political or cultural. Turkey’s exchanges could start being multidirectional, and to a certain extent she would not be just an end point, but also a starting one. This transformation in perspective and discourse was necessary if Turkish elites wished to eventually going beyond being liminals, into being closer to the core. This is a logic which was clearly expressed and upheld by some Romanian decision-makers, who affirmed unequivocally that their ultimate aim was to make sure that Romania was no longer a bridge, a barrier or a margin, by pushing positive European features and principles beyond the borders of their country. Moving beyond the liminal is the ultimate aim of most liminals.

The constitution of the abovementioned subject positions was achieved through hailing processes that created a particular identity with a particular point of view. Through the use of the ambiguous “we”, Turkish intellectuals of statecraft (be them policy makers, experts, analysts or academics) welded separate audiences into a single identity, which seemed to make sense for everyone. A close examination of the texts shows that most of them use “we”, “our”, “us” interchangeably referring to Turkey, bringing together elites and “the people”; alternatively, authors speak about “Turkey” as about an entity that is unified and homogeneous, that needs to be respected and well taken care of. Even when contradictory points of view are expressed, underlining a dissonance of opinions, each opinion holder tends to speak as the custodian of the truth about his country. For example İnur Cevik affirmed “Turkey is trying very hard to remain a third world country in Western clothes”, when in fact what he meant was that certain sections of Turkish society were considered backwards in comparison to European requirements or criteria. On the same tack, Umit Ozdag, quoted above, complained of Turkey being “brainwashed” into being pro-European. This metonymical use of “Turkey” created an impression of unity that was not always representative of processes on the ground. This could be both an advantage and a disadvantage: if assessments were positive, “Turkey” won acclaims, if they were negative, “Turkey” was definitely on the losing side. Only very rarely authors spoke about the “Turkish people” or the elites, and it was usually to explain the different and contradictory currents that characterised the country. These texts were very useful in general, because they added necessary dimensions to often univocal arguments.
In connection to liminal images, the metonymy of “Turkey” was used abundantly because it was simpler to link various characteristics to her as a whole. Thus “Turkey” was a bridge, a crossroads, an anchor and then an antidote to the clash of civilisations. However, unpacking “Turkey”, one discovered that her liminal quality was also given by the contradictory features of her internal development; it must be remembered, nevertheless, that the preference went towards a unitary approach of the subject, typical of centralised systems dominated by the political and intellectual elite.

Predicate Analysis

Ever since the first articulations of Turkey’s discourse on liminality, the attributes accompanying the images designating her position sought to create the portrait of an active state, with an elite strongly inspired by European ideals and a population capable of following them. As specified in the historical section, although Mustafa Kemal Atatürk proclaimed the need for radical modernisation, he placed the emphasis on Turkey’s capacity to fulfil it, rather than her weaknesses. During the 60s and the 70s the focus turned to Turkey’s achievements, her membership in Western organisations, as symbol of her worthiness and active modernisation efforts. In comparison, Europe appeared as the custodian of the values that Turkey aspired to, but not necessarily their only real representative. Some intellectuals suggested that certain Turkish features, such as intellectual boldness and independence - as symbolised by historical figures of scholars - were sometimes more Western than those of other European countries. In 1977, Ismail Soysal mentioned proudly that while certain countries that were considered to be a part of geographical Europe could not become members of the Council of Europe (one of the main symbols of Europeanism), Turkey succeeded in maintaining her place in the organisation because she believed in democracy and implemented its principles. The preoccupation with showing that Turkey had the necessary level of civilisation and modernity to be considered European was central to most descriptions or analyses of what Turkey was. It lasted well into the 2000s, when, for example, Abdullah Gül, foreign minister, listed amongst Turkey’s main qualities and assets the fact that she had experience in implementing reforms and modernity.

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<td>Connects East and West; member of almost all Western institutions and some Islamic ones; brings together civilisations; ensures stability; talent for synthesis; democratic; stabilised the region; anchors the region in democracy; balances Russia; offers alternative to fundamentalism; traditionally important role on the old continent; third world country with Western clothes; ambivalent reforms; global actor in the world; promotes peace; enviable strategic and military asset; contributes to peace;</td>
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290 See p. 13.
However, if modernity and civilisation were central elements throughout Turkish contemporary history, the predicates attached to liminal imagery were more complex than that. They involved a whole spectrum of nuances that suggested that being at the limes, on the threshold of being considered European, meant for Turkey a continuous struggle of self-invention and re-articulation of images. Thus, from the initial stages, when she was considered a “barrier” and a “bulwark” against communism, these images were associated with the active stance of a guardian, a restless seeker of the West and a staunch ally of democratic powers. Even in times of tension with Europe and the US, the association with the Western world prevailed as a source of strength and direction. This was an attitude that had been instilled by Mustafa Kemal himself, who, at the beginning of his modernisation project said that “the lethargic mentality of the past centuries must be abandoned” and Turkey should adapt to the speed and movement that define our century\textsuperscript{293}. There was a feeling of urgency experienced by Kemalists and by the establishment, to work for something which did not exist as if it existed and make it exist\textsuperscript{294}. This might explain, for instance, why texts tirelessly mentioned that Turkey was a democracy, and had a democratic regime, at moments when this was clearly not the reality.

During the 1990s and 2000s Turkish texts sought to develop an argument on why Turkey was still needed for the Western security and strategic architecture, by extolling her capacities for reconciliation of contraries, quick and reliable reaction, and her image as a stabilising factor in a troubled region. There was a prevalence of terms seeking to contradict the idea that Europe seemed to have that Turkey was unstable and unreliable because her internal reforms were only superficial, and her democracy rather fragile, especially in view of the fact that the military were always poised to intervene; thus, there was also an insistence on the fact that Turkey was misunderstood and unfairly criticised by a partner who was short-sighted, ignorant and had double standards. Certainly, there were also internal critics who pointed to the fact that there were inconsistencies between Turkey’s claim to democracy, for example, and the fact that the human rights situation was far from positive. However, even these positions served to highlight the insistence with which Turkish elites understood to present their country as worthy of European membership.

All these ideas were associated with the images of the bridge, the crossroads, the anchor and the link between East and West.

**Conclusion**

What does the liminal tell us about Turkey and what does Turkey tell us about the liminal? In terms of the method of research, the Turkish case yielded a wealth of results, suggesting that looking in the proposed locations was a good decision. It has also revealed the power of deterministic approaches to geography and geopolitics, confirming O’Thuatail and Agnew’s affirmation that geopolitical thinking and language actively affects foreign policy and the lenses

\textsuperscript{293} Meltem Ahiska, 2003, op. cit., p. 367.

\textsuperscript{294} Idem.
through which it is perceived. From the point of view of the literature on liminality, Turkey seemed to fit many of the characteristics and processes outlined as liminal. Most importantly, the liminal imagery developed throughout the 20 years under examination circumscribed the realm of possible and impossible in terms of geopolitical and geo-strategic figuration, encouraging certain policy options and signifying when others would not be productive or in accordance with wider Turkish discourse. The strengths of the liminal images also came from their tight association with a pro-European discourse. Since this was the discourse that essentially took over foreign policy, it made liminal images connected to it stronger.

Unlike the Ukrainian case (examined further on), Turkey’s elites did not exhibit an excessive degree of mismatch between their statements and their deeds. Mismatch certainly existed, but the matter seemed to be more of “catching up” with promises and commitments (rather than a fundamental divorce between interests and declarations), fact which was accomplished in many respects by the end of 2006, although more is to be done. However, the mismatch did underline the problem of the “horizons of meaning” between Turkey and Europe. Professor Kirikoglu coined very well the basic problem encountered in Turkish European relations:

“Croats are not being asked whether they are Europeans. There’s no doubt that Turkey and the Ottoman Empire have been part of European history. We feel very injured when (French politician Nicolas) Sarkozy says that Turks are not Europeans and have no place in Europe. This is very different from completing the environmental chapter”295.

This was a question that was certainly not asked of the Romanians, or even of the Ukrainians. The chapter on European voices outlined the variety of opinions that were voiced on Turkey, and showed how this particular case is special in the current analysis: the dialogic aspect of identity and policy construction is much clearer than in the following two cases, because it is explicit. Of course it can be argued that both Romania and Ukraine were in a dialogue with Europe on their identity through the official reports that were published, diplomatic exchanges and a myriad of other ways. Nevertheless, none of them sustained an intense and public dialogue of the kind that could be seen in the Turkish case. This dialogue gave Turkish elites the impulse to try and find alternative horizons of meaning with Europe, connected more to “acquired” European attributes, than the given ones. Success came in various degrees.

With respect to the development of the liminal, Turkey is a case with a strong presence of it in foreign policy and geopolitics discourse. A variety of images evoke liminality, varying from the defensive, margin metaphors, to those emphasising links and projection of values, such as the bridge or the model. In some respects, the case is similar to the Romanian one inasmuch as there is an evolution from the defensive to the linking aspect; however, Turkey falls short of accession to the EU for the moment, so the discourse kept developing new articulations around

the metaphor of the bridge, rather than consolidating alternative images such as those of the anchor or the stabiliser. The challenge faced by both Turkey and Romania was of transforming the mental map of Europe concerning their positioning, by transposing a particular geographical set-up into a meaningful geopolitical asset. This process comported, amongst other elements, a liminal dimension, which was translated in the practical policy language as diverse images and metaphors used in order to illustrate and promote a certain placement on the mental map of Europe. In both the Romanian and the Turkish cases it is possible to speak of a discourse on liminality, because it was possible to identify trends and episodes that had enough liminal references as to provide a framework of meaning and understanding of a certain geographical and political reality.

The location of the discourse is primarily with foreign policy decision-makers, such as foreign affairs ministers, prime ministers, members of the military, foreign policy experts, experts writing on geopolitics and political science analysts, indicating a well recognised monopoly on foreign policy making by a relatively restrained elite; however, editorialists and intellectuals also participated in the debate on the issue, bringing very interesting insights and indications. The materials used in the analysis were official documents, stemming from the foreign ministry, as well as speeches and declarations made by various official with respect to the issue. Other texts, such as analyses, articles and newspaper editorials were useful because they brought supplementary dimension to ideas and images that were expressed officially, by providing historical background, sociological detail and political depth. The public for which these texts were meant was varied. Texts written in Turkish, particularly newspaper editorials, mentioned liminal images comparatively often, suggesting this was not just an elite concern, even if it was mostly intellectuals writing about it. The fact that a significant amount materials were written in English also suggested that one of the main publics to whom they were destined was an external one, particularly European; this equally emphasised that the liminal question was indeed relational, and Turkey’s main interlocutor had to be informed of the elite’s self-conception in order to provide cues and feedback.

The Turkish discourse on liminality comports several phases. A first point of articulation could be found during the 1950s and 1960s, when the country’s elites pushed for her membership into NATO and other European organisations. That was a period when the structure of argumentation started to include liminal images, such as the “barrier” and the “bulwark” that was to protect the civilised world from the barbarous influence of the communist East. It is important to note that the main notions with which liminal images were associated were the “civilised West”, “democratic values”, the “Turkish state” and Kemal Atatürk or Kemalism. Although they were not dominant, since the main focus of Turkish elites at that time was proving their country’s level of civilisation, liminal references remained present even in times of political and military coolness between Turkey and Europe, thus showing a certain solidity.

The first half of the 1990s opened the space and the need for a re-articulation and a consolidation of liminal images, because, lost in the “ontological insecurity” of the post Cold-War era, Turkey had to find a plausible and acceptable image for herself. Thus, texts re-activated older defensive images and tried to adapt them to the new international climate by pushing
for the idea of linking and communication, embodied mostly by the metaphor of the bridge. Geopolitics, identity and security related arguments, all concerted to suggest that Turkey’s complex geography held the key to her geopolitical value and to her important role in Europe. Turkey’s multi-faceted civilisation and culture was presented as a precious synthesis between East and West, a metaphor of what an ideal Europe (in Turkish eyes) would be. However, given the coolness of Europe’s reaction to these ideas, quite a few Turkish experts and analysts called towards the middle of the 1990s for a re-articulation of the discourse on liminality, in the sense of substantiation. They pointed to the fact that geographical realities were not enough in order for Turkey to become a “genuine” bridge between East and West; to that end Turkey needed to embark on significant internal reforms that would signal her intention of becoming a true synthesis. This painful process can be said to have started in the aftermath of the 1997 Luxembourg Summit, when the EU rejected Turkey’s candidacy, and reached its peak in 2002, when a substantial package of reforms was passed, and Turkey could be said to have initiated a process of combination of East and West. Throughout this period, geographical coordinates and images of the bridge and the crossroads continued to constitute the backbone of identity and security related texts, strengthening the idea that the latter stem in a somewhat deterministic reality. After 2002, with a newly regained confidence, liminal images started to evolve into ideas that conveyed the power of projection and transformation.

It is important to remember that the development of a liminal imagery was embedded in the wider discourse of Turkey’s modernisation and Westernisation. The liminal gains a new dimension when seen in association with the progress narrative that outlines Turkey’s journey’s to the West, whose ultimate end is seen as membership of the EU or at least a formal recognition of the country’s European qualities. This element helps understand why the notions of East and West are intimately tied to liminal images and why the latter also participate in the creation of particular subject positions for Turkey and Europe. Indeed liminal images act as a companion in making sense of Turkey’s displacement from the East towards the West and also signal when the latter seems to be “stuck” on her way. To the extent that this is happening, Turkey’s liminal images are less weakened by their imperfect rendition of geographical and geopolitical reality.

The discourse on liminality produces the subject of Turkey as an entity in perpetual struggle to attain her ultimate goal of being accepted by Europe, of which she conceives as both an equal and a teacher that sometimes fails to understand her. Its objects are geographical realities, identity issues, and security matters ordered in such a way as to suggest that geography lays at the root of Turkey’s position in world affairs, being the source of both advantages and liabilities existent in both identity questions and security debates. Together they participate in the creation of the “geopolitical imagination” of Turkey’s intellectuals of statecraft, which enters into direct dialogue and occasional conflict with the cues provided by European leaders’ own “geopolitical imagination”, giving birth to a constant negotiation of identity and position in the world. One of the main differences with the Romanian case is that liminal images are not constructed and developed in relation to the past, to Turkey’s own history, but rather in relation to what Europe thinks of her, which makes Turkey’s situation vulnerable sometimes, since Europe’s ideas are themselves dependent on internal changes and political currents.
This also means that Turkish history tends to be ignored and discounted, which leaves her elites with the need of starting anew each time their position is discounted, which is why it is possible to notice the repetition of the same arguments and the development of few.

The merit of this discursive technique is to create clear connotative chains, bringing together particular notions: “Turkey’s difficult geography”, the barrier/bulwark/bridge/crossroads image, membership in Western institutions, modernity, civilisation, security, democracy, progress; these notions are in turn associated with foreign policy decision-makers, the military, intellectuals and ultimately, the people. The images that come through suggest that the liminal is intimately connected with the road towards the West and modern civilisation.

A last important element is necessary to this conclusion, and that is a note about how issues have evolved after the end of 2006, when the current research and analysis effectively stop. The question that arises is, of course, have liminal images discussed above persisted in discourse? The short answer is yes. The long answer is yes, but… In other words, a brief survey of analyses and articles in the period post 2006 has revealed the repetition of the bridge and the model images, as favoured by the organisation of an “Alliance of civilisations” summit in early 2008 and various punctual occurrences. For example, as late as the 4th of September 2008, a North-American analyst was asking if Turkey could be Europe’s bridge to the Muslim world. In this context, he actually asked a very interesting question: would Turkey’s EU membership not, in fact, preclude the abilities she had now as a bridge in negotiations with Iran or Syria, for example? In other words, should Turkey adopt her liminality as a productive end in itself?

It seems that some members of the decision-making circles have an alternative view. In the past two years, the metaphor of Turkey as a power centre has gained in importance and visibility. As pointed out in a previous section, it did exist in parallel with the liminal references. Nevertheless, since one of its staunch defenders, professor Ahmet Davutoglu, is a personal counsellor of the AKP and Prime Minister Erdogan in matters of foreign policy, the metaphor has made enough appearances so that also the foreign press and decision-makers noticed it. Thus, the idea that Turkey should emphasise her potential (especially commercial and trade-related) with regard to the East has become stronger. Davutoglu is also known to have said that Turkey should become pivotal in her region. He also says: “Turkey can be European in Europe and eastern in the East because we are both”. To a certain extent, he does not contradict the idea that was pronounced by many of his contemporary and colleagues, except he chooses not to use references akin to the liminal to represent it. Furthermore, he seems to want to add a dimension to Turkish foreign policy and not to erase the European one: “Turkey’s foreign policy is simply diversifying. It’s not an either-or problem. It doesn’t mean that Turkey is sacrificing its relationship with Europe or the United States. Our geography has required us to engage and be part of those regions that we have neglected for decades”.

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Turkey’s attractiveness to Europe is built on becoming an independent actor that is able to draw strength from sources other than a relationship to Europe. However, this connection continues to remain strong in Turkish foreign policy. It must also not be forgotten that Turgut Ozal also had an initial élan, which seemed to push Turkey further towards the East, a policy line that weakened over the years. Time will tell if Turkey will give herself the, material and political means, to truly “beef up” her eastern policy in complementarity with her European one. What is important to observe, however, is the fact that linguistically, at least, geography is still perceived as a determinant factor in foreign policy strategy.

Geography already plays an important role in the strongly emerging energy transportation issues in Turkey’s region, and in the Caucasus as it unfolds after the recent tensions of the summer of 2008. Turkey is poised to take action and capitalise on her geographical but also political situation, as the only big stable country in the area.
Romanian geographer and historian Gheorghe I. Bratianu affirmed during the 1940s:

“At first sight, the history and unity of the Romanian people is explained in great part through its geography; the relief of Danubian Europe map clearly marks its traces (...) The destiny of the Romanian countries is inscribed in the very landscape of their geography”\textsuperscript{1}.

I believe this remark very much frames the findings that I am outlining in this chapter, and provides a first and important element as to why, for Romania, the issue of the liminal has been about transforming geography into geopolitics, and above all, how.

As a case study, Romania represents a very good example of elites engaging with the issue of the liminal. This chapter shows the roots of the discourse on the liminal and how it eventually evolved to become a strong way of ordering geographical realities, gradually shutting out other policy options. As stated before, liminality is not a notion that is consciously used as such by policy practitioners or even academics. This analysis aims to show how the idea of the liminal was discursively created and upheld throughout the better part of Romania’s modern and contemporary history. To this end, I shall examine the series of images and metaphors relating to this idea that were used and vehiculated publicly in relation to Romania’s status in the past 16 years, as well as the way in which they connect with older frameworks and systems of reference developed on this theme. This case study, therefore, comports two major sections: a first brief historical analysis of the origins and development of the images and discourses which have participated in the creation of the idea of the liminal and a second one, delving into the details and inner workings of contemporary discourse on the subject.

The materials upon which I base my analysis vary in nature. I have used primary sources, in the form of public speeches by decision-makers, articles and memoirs, analyses and opinion pieces. I have also examined academic pieces, manuals and histories, as well as ideas voiced by the military in security matters. I have considered all these materials as primary sources, representative of ideas and views current within the political establishment. As mentioned previously in this analysis, liminality is a relational and positional concept, in this particular case, concerning the relation with the European space; therefore, I have emphasised in my research aspects of foreign policy concerning Europe (where relevant, the “West”), and security issues. Where possible, I have also conducted interviews with contemporary policy makers and historians, in order to supplement and nuance information existent in other sources. However, the bulk of the material under examination is in written form, ranging from official documents to papers produced as academic research with policy relevance.

I have used secondary sources to a greater extent in the writing and conception of the historical part of this chapter, partly due to the difficulty of accessing relatively old documents and partly due to the fact that many of these sources actually contain documents quoted at length. Other secondary sources are histories and geographies of the period under review, which give a context for the analysis.

In the case of the contemporary sources I had the choice of official statements, speeches and interviews given by successive Romanian presidents, prime ministers and foreign affairs ministers, parliamentary debates, analyses written both by politicians and political analysts, and memoirs by the aforementioned characters. In addition, articles and analyses published by experts with various positions in the decision-making process. It is worth noting that the variety of sources present in the contemporary era illustrates better the scope of the ideas analysed. However, this is not to say that similar ideas were not equally known or debated in previous times; the evolution of the political system, as well as of technology and social practices has made them more visible and easily accessible to a wider public in the contemporary epoch.

Concerning a certain hierarchy within the source categories, I have granted priority to public speeches, statements, interviews and written opinions by policy makers, as primary examples of the circulation of the ideas examined; as a second line of analysis came analyses written by academics and policy experts in their capacity as observers and contributors to the transformation of ideas; as a third line came works on the history, geopolitics and geography of Romania, indicative of how the ideas present in the first two lines were socialised and perpetuated below the policy making level. However, I would like to draw attention to a feature present in different degrees, in all three case-studies: a certain number of materials were written by persons whose status within the policy making process varied throughout time. Hence, some papers were produced when the person was part of the political administration, or when they were writing as an expert. A case in point in Romania

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2 This is a situation relatively typical of the Romanian political establishment, where a purely political or diplomatic career (to
is Adrian Severin, a very prolific public person, who voiced his opinion as foreign minister, as presidential counsellor, as diplomat, as an academic and a policy expert. Depending on his different positions, he illustrates the richness of the discourse on liminality, while the entire situation testifies to the various ways in which it (the discourse) penetrated the public realm.

In terms of the fashion in which the materials were studied, I identified certain characteristics of the manner in which ideas and events unfolded, suggesting that the most advantageous way of structuring them was in discrete episodes and discursive threads, which together, participated in the construction of the liminal idea. This was due to the fact that particular moments seemed to coagulate and develop images and discourse on liminality, while specific discourse threads permeated public debate, without necessarily peaking in a defining instant.

As a consequence, for the historical section I have looked at an emergent discursive trend, with several threads concerning liminality, as well as episodes illustrating the elite and collective reflection around it; in the case of the contemporary section, I have examined the discourse threads present between 1990 and 1996, concerning Romania’s position and status in relation to Europe; those present between 2000 and 2004, concerning Romania’s redefinition of relations with the EU and NATO; those present between 2004 and 2006, focusing on security policy and re-calibration of Romania’s international position.

In terms of concrete episodes and policy initiatives, I have looked at the 1996-1997 initiative on trilateral cooperation agreements with neighbouring countries; the 1999 Kosovo crisis and its impact on Romanian foreign policy; the 2004-2006 Black Sea policy.

Although I write about these subjects separately, it should be understood that there is an underlying interconnectedness amongst all of them. I shall underline and emphasise some of the connections, and will mark the ways in which contemporary discourse resonates with older ones.

As a last and important methodological note, I would like to stress the fact that in the materials I examine I look for several elements that I believe have a direct rapport with the liminal question: the interpellation of the subjects of the texts/discourse and the subject positioning of the “actors” (for example, the positional relation between Romania and Europe), the chains of connotation associated with the liminal and the ways in which texts hail different meanings and create connections with other texts. Predicate analysis is also an important part of the analysis because it gives indications about the features that are associated with the various actors and therefore ties in with the question of positionality. As a rule, I have kept subject positioning and predicate analysis in tables summing up the respective characteristics and provided a detailed section on these issues at the end of the chapter. I have also looked at the quantity and quality of texts, in terms of their overall number, who delivered them and who was their intended public; where possible, I have examined the ratio of texts concerning give but two examples) does not seem to have developed, thus giving rise to a relatively high number of cases in which there is an accumulation of functions and statuses, particularly in the case of academics with specialties relevant to policy making. (The same applies to “business people”, who unfortunately often profit illegally from their political involvement). Other systems also include such cases, but to a lesser degree.
liminal issues to texts concerning other matters, in order to establish how high or low their position is on the priority list, and what is their general context of existence.

With respect to the way in which I have grouped the results, I have respected a division suggested by the different ideological influences that have impacted discourse in the period 1990-2006. This is a strategy different from the one used in the Turkish case, but similar to the Ukrainian one. Although the Romanian discourse was rich in images and had a relatively long history behind it, they seemed to revolve around particular ideological positions, rather than themes, such as geopolitics, identity, or security. Such themes existed, indeed, but, as shall be shown, they were less developed. Hence, the different set up of results.

Setting the framework

It can be said the Romanians have always been acutely aware of their liminal condition and have tried to deal with it as best they could. Unlike Turkey and Ukraine, Romania experienced and started to express her awareness of being liminal from relatively a different historical stand. The time of the articulation of a discourse perpetuating (!) images suggesting liminality can be roughly established between 1772 and 1859, the moment of the unification of two out of the three Principalities, gathered under the official name of Romania.

The Romanian Principalities preceding the existence of the Romanian state were not political entities of great power or sway on the European scene. On the contrary, they were often pawns in the great powers’ games; as such, placed in the space where empires ended and influences were dangerously mixing, Romanians forged their political identity(s) against an ambiguous context, which they had to circumnavigate in order to survive. Monica Spiridon, comparative literature and semiotics professor, points out that

“Romanians have been constantly open to the idea that there is a logical and a symbolical significance to be read into their geographical location in the world. This location was primarily understood as a space torn between West and East - two highly different halves of the European civilisation and culture. This awareness provoked a strong commitment to Western values, perceived as the genuine European ones, while the symbolic borderline between the European and the non-European area progressively acquired an essentially ideological significance”.

Thus, Romanian elites perceived their condition as being in a liminal space even before they had managed to constitute a country named Romania. The latter inherited this vision, which, as shall be detailed below, became a constitutive part of her being.

Another, crucial thread which ran and still runs through Romanian history was the issue of the modernity project, inextricably linked with the question of liminality. Modernity project is

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3 Contemporary writer, Stelian Tanase affirms that “The histories of the Byzantine Empire, of the Ottoman Empire as well that of the Russian Empire virtually ended in Bucharest”, using the city metonymically as the symbol for the rest of the country.

what Romanian analysts have called the Westernisation process, which started in the Romanian principalities around the middle of the 18th century. By no means a process unique to Romania, this is the kind of long-term undertaking present in most countries of her region, including Turkey. In general, it refers to the cluster of political, economic and social reforms which would bring about the existence of the modern state; it also comprises a more difficult to determine element, the matter of the change in mentalities and general attitude to life. Romanian analysts and historians tend to agree on the fact that modernising the country is a work in progress, a project, whose main, but not final, goal is the advent of a truly democratic state. The reason why the question of liminality is intimately linked with the Romanian, as well as the Turkish modernity projects (as we shall see) is because their geographic and geopolitical value has had a substantial influence in terms of who wanted them, and what influences were cast over them. Often, as shall be shown, they found themselves to be in the centre of geographical maps, but at the periphery, or in the margin of mental maps, and picking their battles right up from where the two kinds of maps stopped coinciding. In other words, both Romania and Turkey could argue relatively convincingly their presence in a particular geographical arrangement related to Europe; however, it was harder for their elites to claim membership of a geopolitical and economic Europe, which could exist more in terms of practical achievements (given and acquired qualities) rather than simple geographical positioning. The modernisation process undertaken by both served, therefore, as a guiding light through which they could claim a strengthening connection and membership within the European civilisation. The modernity project provided some kind of a roadmap, with landmarks and a goal to be reached that created the discursive space for liminal references to occur; in conjunction with the EU accession discourse (mentioned previously), the modernity project constituted fertile ground for liminal images. The modernity project has also projected Europe as a “disciplining power” who surveyed the “objects” which used to join it in order to measure their progress and improvement.

**Brief history of an enduring idea**

Discourses are known to be built on images and cues which predate them, a fact that makes the examination of history a crucial part of a discourse’s analysis. This part of the chapter on Romania represents a study in the genealogy of the discourse on liminality, looking at the elements - ideas, references and images - which existed before 1990 in elite discourse on Romania’s position and which were later on used as hooks and links with the past. Before delving into the analysis, I wish to clarify that out of the three cases, Romania holds the richest past in terms of discursive cues on liminality. The reason behind this is that throughout her history she has had a position that fostered the development of what Razvan Theodorescu has called transactionism, or a tendency to negotiate her status with the powers stronger than her by promising or doing things that were occasionally contradictory to each other.

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Unlike Turkey, which at the time was the Ottoman Empire, (and to a large extent Romania’s ruler), and Ukraine, which spent the better part of her history as part of Russia, the Romanian Principalities had enough power and strength as to not be annexed or transformed into a Turkish raya or pashalik\(^7\), but not enough to be completely independent; this meant that they maintained a precarious autonomy, paid expensively by inordinate amounts of money and fake obedience. This situation created the feeling of being in between, of always having to choose something or other for survival, also because it seemed difficult to be able to choose something and stick to it. Therefore, the image of the frontier, barrier or outpost corresponded best to the perpetual angst of being surrounded by permanently overpowering and ill-willing neighbours, in the space where empires ended\(^8\).

Romania’s question of liminality is inextricably linked with the creation of Europe’s East or Easts. 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\(^9\). The language appeared to be a mixture of various other languages, in particular of Italian and Latin\(^10\). 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\(^11\).

Most of the accounts recorded by Wolff presented this eastern region of Europe as a land of mixes and surprising contradictions, which the observers invariably translated in the dual language of the Enlightenment - barbarism versus civilisation, poor versus rich, ignorant versus cultivated - to name but a few of the categories which emerged from these explorations. However, these oppositions were never seen as absolute and complete, as in the case of Turkey, for example; there was always the idea that the shred of civilisation and religious affinity which existed between western Europe and the eastern lands should be preserved and encouraged.

The historical section of this chapter includes the study of several discursive trends spread within a 80 years span, starting at the moment of the 1859 union and ending in 1939, with the beginning of the Second World War. An additional section talks about the communist period. Given that the focus of the case study is the contemporary period, this part will deal relatively briefly with the texts using liminal images and references, its function being to provide a frame for the understanding of the 1990-2006 interval. However, in my analysis, I shall be looking at much the same elements as in the contemporary section, such as what liminal images are used, how they participate in the production of subject positions, how they fit into the predicate characterisation of the subjects, how they resonate throughout time and how they change. The number of texts examined is more limited, however, due to both difficult access and the

\(^7\) An administrative unit of the Ottoman Empire.

\(^8\) Contemporary writer, Stelian Tanase affirms that «The histories of the Byzantine Empire, of the Ottoman Empire as well that of the Russian Empire virtually ended in Bucharest», using the city metonymically as the symbol for the rest of the country.


\(^10\) Idem, pp. 177-178.

\(^11\) Idem, pp. 189-190.
fact that fewer texts were produced at the time. Wherever possible I have examined speeches, letters or parliamentary interventions of decision-makers of the time; I have used histories of the period in order to establish the context in which texts were elaborated. For the years of the early 20th century, I have also had access to geopolitical treaties and histories written, which constituted additional material for the study. The first period under study, composed of the discursive trend of the 1850s and the 1877-1878 debate on Romania’s independence is not very abundant in texts; it was, however possible to recover certain letters, articles and parliamentary debates, published in histories of the period or collections of documents.

Before delving into the analysis of the texts, I wish to specify that they are relatively limited in number and do not have many authors. The reason behind this was brilliantly underlined by a Romanian historian and political figure of the time, who wrote:

“(…)the emancipation of the Romanian Provinces was the achievement of a few personalities who strove to surpass all the obstacles. They wished to improvise everything: schools without teachers, without books or buildings; theatre without scene, actors or script; national emancipation without the freedom necessary to its manifestation. A gigantic struggle was mounted by a few noble minds to break the darkness that was obscuring every horizon”

However, the authors quoted and analysed below are not the only ones who expressed opinions on the matter under examination; they are those whose texts were most representative and accessible. They represent a mix of Moldavian and Wallachian state men, decision-makers, historians and analysts. During this period, these functions were easily interchangeable, as there were not many people with higher education and responsibilities in government.

<table>
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Historical context

The first official mention of Romania as a frontier of sorts between East and West was traced back to the 18th century and was strongly connected to the issue of the unification of the Moldovan and Wallachian Principalities, which had been a project developed and upheld by the elites of these two entities for several centuries. The idea of the union of the Principalities had officially appeared in the reform and political programmes of the Moldavian and Wallachian elites ever since 1772. Its necessity had been expressed in the 1831-32 constitutions of the provinces, which also gave a modern definition to the nation. The unionist idea was present in most of the political programmes post 1831, irrespective of their ideology. In the period between 1848 and 1859 the problem of the union appeared in hundreds of books, reform projects, petitions under different guises: either as a call to repeat the past and fulfil a Romanian historical right, or as a call for the future - as a guarantee for the progress of civilisation in that area - or as a call to equilibrium in the area of the Danube, which the Romanians saw as a shield in the way of the “barbarian” menace coming from the North and the East (Russia and Turkey). That which is important, however, is the fact that throughout this crucial century, the issue of the necessity of the moldo-wlach union was also associated with a discourse which represented the two units as a buffer zone, a frontier or a crossroads that needed to be strengthened if the future of Europe was to be safeguarded. Thus, the texts and ideas connected to the liminal position can be considered as a sub-discourse working to the ultimate goal of union and self determination of the Romanian peoples, separated into three provinces, Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania. The other associated sub-discourses concerned the unity of the Romanian language and traditions, as well as the use that Europe could have from a strong and sovereign political entity in the South of the Danube.

Liminality as barrier

The discourse of the Romanian provinces as a useful frontier and protective outpost for Europe was, as previously mentioned, tightly enmeshed with the idea of Romanian unity; whilst it is difficult to identify a first date or a first text mentioning this idea, the memoir addressed to count Orlov - the man in charge of the Principalities’ protectorate - in 1772 by Moldavian and Wallachian boyars asking guarantees for an autonomous status for the Romanian Principalities is considered to be the first official document introducing the idea that the two entities could constitute a buffer state between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire as well as a strong guarantee of stability for Europe. Mihai Cantacuzino, historian and political figure,

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13 Besides recognising the common origin, religion, language and the common interests of Moldavia and Wallachia, the constitutions also institutionalised a common moldo-wlach citizenship, V. Georgescu, 1992, *Istoria Romanilor*, Bucuresti: Humanitas, p.129. In 1857 this definition was to be updated: we have the same beginning, the same language, same religion history, civilisation, institutions, the same laws and customs, the same fears and hopes, the same needs to fulfil, the same borders to guard, the same pains in the past, the same future to ensure and lastly, the same mission to fulfil. –the ad-hoc diwan of Moldavia.

proposed the creation of an independent entity, under the protection of Russia, Austria and Prussia\textsuperscript{15}: a buffer Romanian state

“would at the same time serve as a frontier between everyone, being protected by all of them, so that all scandals be erased”\textsuperscript{16}.

In 1807, in a memoir addressed by anonymous authors to Napoleon the idea is present of a

“barrière redoutable entre le nord et le midi, sous un seul chef, protégé par toutes les puissances pour que toute influence soit intérieure soit extérieure y cesse à jamais”\textsuperscript{17}.

By asking for such a status, Moldavian and Wallachian elites hoped to extract some form of recognition for their political entity and sought to obtain re-assurance from at least one potential enemy, i.e. tsarist Russia. The status of buffer zone was not upheld by the Russians, but this idea did not die in the minds of Romanian elites, and could best be found in later day memoirs addressed to the great powers of Europe, and particularly Napoleon III, in the late 1840s and 1850s. Liminal references were associated with other ideas, such as a “mission in the East” and the fact that the Principalities had been placed by God in the way of all misfortunes. In 1723, Dimitrie Cantemir, Moldovan historian mentioned the role of the protective barrier he believed these entities fulfilled with respect to Europe\textsuperscript{18}. These ideas were also upheld by the Moldovan political elite, who, by 1848 had equally co-opted their colleagues in Wallachia to the idea that their Principalities constituted a “wall of Europe” against both Ottomans and Tsarist Russia\textsuperscript{19}. In 1848 in the French newspaper “Le national”, Wallachian boyars published an

“Appel du peuple valaque aux peuples de l’Europe”, which claimed “notre petit groupe est la clef de voûte du grand edifice européen (...) nous sommes donc les martyres de la liberté, nous sommes les ennemis nés de la seule puissance en Europe qui ose élever une voix contre le mouvement liberal de l’Europe, sentinelles avancées de la regénération sociale”\textsuperscript{20}.

Between 1849 and 1859, the theme of the mission in the East grew exponentially, with many texts mentioning it (quoted below).

\textsuperscript{15} The idea of a political union stemmed from an older intellectual view held by Moldo-Wallachian elites (in particular historians), which had in previous centuries affirmed the unity of origin of all Romanians and the Latin character of their language. The request of political union was found mentioned for the first time in an 1772 letter written by Mihai Cantacuzino, historian and political representative of his country, to the Austrian delegate to the Focsani Congress: (…) regardez d’un autre côté l’heureux climat et la grande fertilité de ces contrées et vous trouverez que les deux principautés réunies par un bon prince et protégées par les deux plus grands empires de la chrétienté peuvent en peu de temps former un état capable de se soutenir et d’opposer une barrière au torrent qu’a si souvent menacé le mot chrétien d’une entière ruine.”, in V. Georgescu, 1970, Mémoires et projets de réforme dans les Principautés Roumaines 1769-1830, Bucarest, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{16} Quoted in Vlad Georgescu, 1972, Ideile politice si iluminismul in Principatele Române 1750-1831, Bucuresti: Editura Academiei, p. 158.

\textsuperscript{17} Moldovan Memoir to Napoleon, 1807, pp. 415-419.

\textsuperscript{18} Vlad Georgescu, 1972, Ideile politice si iluminismul in Principatele Române 1750-1831, Bucuresti: Editura Academiei, p. 78.

\textsuperscript{19} Idem, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{20} Idem.
In 1849, Wallachia’s special envoy to London, Dimitrie Bratianu, Romanian politician and diplomat, was continued to set the scene in a work titled “The Danubian Principalities”\textsuperscript{21}. In it he described these entities as the 

“most powerful shield of civilisation and Christianity against the numerous invasions of Asiatic barbarians and fury of Mahomedan fanaticism”\textsuperscript{22};

in the name of this status, he was asking the great leaders of Europe to grant Moldova and Wallachia the right to unite and form a strong country, guardian of Europe and the mouths of the Danube.

It must be specified that this mémoire was coming in 1849 on the steps of the 1848 revolution, which had swept through the Romanian Principalities, much as it had done through the rest of Europe. Wallachia, in particular, had had a relatively strong and relatively successful movement of revolt, insofar as it made the demands of the revolutionaries heard, and some reforms were introduced. Although they had not made the demand of union with Moldova explicit (since it was felt that too many requests would have rendered the agenda impossible to achieve), they certainly drew the attention of the Western powers to the problems and hardships that the Principalities suffered, such as an antiquated, quasi feudal property system, inequality of political rights and a permanent interference from foreign powers (particularly Russia, in this case, which was “protecting” Wallachia and had a consular representative there, but also the Ottoman Empire, which had suzerain power over it).

An interesting element about this 1849 text, and subsequent ones, is the reference that it made to the past, when the Romanian principalities supposedly played an important role in the defence of Christianity. To understand the reason behind that, it is necessary to mention that the 1848 revolution aimed to re-instate in both Moldova and Wallachia an independence from foreign powers and a certain order of things which had existed around the 14\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} centuries, eras when both Wallachia and Moldova were independent. Therefore, the 1849 memoir invoked in fact a particular idea, supported by a specific body of texts: a 15\textsuperscript{th} century correspondence between the Voivod of Moldavia, Stefan, and Pope Sixt IV. This correspondence constituted in the eyes of subsequent generations of Romanian elites and people the proof that the Romanians had a mission they must accomplish. In it, Pope Sixt IV called Stefan “Christ’s Athlete” (because he was defending Europe against the Turk) and Stefan himself described his country, Moldavia, as “the gate of Christianity” that needed to be protected so that in its turn, it can protect Europe\textsuperscript{23}. It is possible to notice in this case the combination of the sacred and the mundane that Norton hails as one if the characteristics of the liminars. He also saw Moldavia as a “wall” for Hungary and Poland\textsuperscript{24}. The importance of this documented exchange cannot be underestimated for the purposes of the analysis, because, in subsequent centuries it

\textsuperscript{21} Dimitrie Bratianu, 1849, \textit{Documents concerning the Danubian Principalities}, London.
\textsuperscript{22} Idem, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{24} Idem.
was many times mentioned, quoted and analysed, be it by chroniclers or other leaders of the Romanian principalities. Vlad Georgescu speaks of a “crusading spirit”, which started in the 14th century and lasted until the 16th although in with lower intensity. To a certain extent, the Wallachians and Moldavians of the 19th century were reviving these ideas. A recent analysis of the image of Stefan cel Mare in school histories of the Principalities during the period 1857-1924 also showed that the Voivod became the symbol of Romanian resistance to the Turk and of the “gate of Christianity”. He embodied a golden period in history when it was possible for Romanians to stand up for themselves and for Europe. Moreover, for the intellectuals (and therefore political figures) of this period, who associated the idea of the union with the modernisation of the countries, the idea of Europe was taken as a basic framework. During the Romanian middle ages political leaders and intellectuals had the permanent awareness of the tight connection with Europe, of belonging to Europe. Mircea the Old, Stefan the Great or Michael the Brave considered themselves flank representatives of a Christian Europe, stretching from the Atlantic to the Bosphorus, and which they were protecting not only from heathens, but also from the oriental area of civilisation. They considered themselves a shield at the eastern border of Europe. The echo of this image is very strong, since, as shall be seen, it is present even in contemporary texts relating to the liminal question in Romania. In terms of discourse it represents the kind of cue, which is invariably and incontestably picked up by all generations and participants to the dialogue with history, as a fundamental framing element.

One of the best examples amongst those who used past images and discursive cues in order to create a coherent image and a discursive variation on the question of liminality is given by the political writings – speeches, articles and letters - of Ion C. Bratianu, active political figure that was deeply involved in the campaign advocating the union of the Romanian Principalities. In a series of writings published in the early 1850s, he made a relatively powerful argument in support of his cause, which was largely based on the interlocking of a few images and elements: the Romanian Principalities as a past defender of Europe, the connection with the West and the potential which stemmed from their geographical position and historical experience, the major reason for the great Powers of Europe to support the union of the Principalities. Thus, in an article published in 1855 in Paris, titled “Memoir about the Austrian Empire in the Oriental Question”, Bratianu described the history of the principalities as follows:

“Forever drowned in a sea of inimical peoples, (Romanians) never conceded defeat faced to them, and they were always victorious. They fought the Greeks of the Byzantine Empire, the Russians, the Hungarians, the Tatars, the Poles and their reputation was great in those bloody epochs. And when the Turks came too, they found in Romanians their worst enemies. During this terrible invasion, the principalities of Moldova and Wallachia were, more than any other country, the defenders of Christianity. When Pesta was a Turkish pashalik, the Principalities were independent.”

25 Vlad Georgescu, 1972, op. cit., p. 76.
27 Vlad Georgescu, 1972, op. cit., p. 36.
He linked this particular destiny to the difficult geographic position that Romanians had

“which made their misfortune, but also contributes to their greatness and indicates
the role which they are destined to play”\(^{29}\).

This interpretation of the Principalities’ history lead Bratianu to conclude that, despite their
small size, they represented the

“key to the Orient, because all those who wished to dominate the Ottoman Empire
had to rely on Romanians”\(^{30}\).

In fact this 1855 text was echoing two earlier texts elaborated by Bratianu with respect to
the question: a 1851 article published in a Romanian newspaper, titled, simply, “Romania”
and a letter to Emperor Napoleon III, titled “Memoir about Romanians given to Emperor
Napoleon III”, sent in 1853. In these texts, Romania was talked about as if she were an
actual political entity (when in fact it was still just an uncertain aspiration of Moldovan
and Wallachian elites); moreover, she was presented as an unique construction:

“Romania was created in the name of an idea, was destined to represent democracy
in oriental Europe, although this mission could not be accomplished because of
difficult historical conditions.(…) Romania personifies democracy in the East of
Europe, her mission was an initiatic mission that today became so great, that without
Romania, the new Gospel would be for long closed for the people around her and
therefore, there would be a great separation between Orient and Occident, which
would stop the further development of civilisation”\(^{31}\).

This thesis was upheld in 1853, when Bratianu wrote to Napoleon III:

“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”\(^{32}\).
As a side note in relation to Ann Norton’s definition of liminars as louder and more eloquent than others, more flamboyant and demonstrative, it can be said that the pronouncements made in this period certainly fit the description. The emphasis on the productivity of the Principalities’ situation was also at a high point and was re-iterated in other statements.

In 1855, Mihail Kogalniceanu, political figure, historian and member of the Moldovan diwan was writing:

“The union of the Principalities was the golden dream of the great men of Romania, Iancu Huniad, Stefan the Great, and Michael the Brave (…) it is therefore the wish of a great majority of Romanians (…) and the only solution to stop future conflicts on the shores of the Danube and the Black Sea, to consolidate peace in the Orient”\(^33\).

In 1857, after the Paris Congress that had entrenched the end of the Crimean War, and when the rulers of the Romanian Principalities were still lobbying for the permission to have at least autonomy, if not unity, political activist George Busueceanu affirmed:

“Wallachia and Moldova, through their geographic position, through their racial alliance with some peoples of the Occident are for Europe not only a material question, but a question of moral interest, of Turkish independence and European peace (…) Romania strong through union will step on the way imposed by progress and will fulfil her mission”\(^34\).

I have generously quoted the various fragments of these political activists’ writings because they articulated an image which used both older cues regarding liminality - signified by the mention of historical experience and the idea that the Principalities could again be strong, implying a previous period when they were powerful - and projected new ideas, such as the need for the provinces’ unity for a best employment of their potentialities. Geography, history and civilisational arguments were all used as anchors in the creation of this image. Thus, by stressing the Latin element, Bratianu suggested strong connections with Western Europe (iterated also by Kogalniceanu and Busueceanu), which made more credible the claim that Moldova and Wallachia were messengers of democracy in their region; by recalling their difficult history and geography, Bratianu restated the old barrier and protector of Christianity role that Romanian elites cherished with respect to their history; by describing the intentions which they had, of playing the barrier role again in a unified political entity, Bratianu programmatically exposed the ambitions of generations to come (as shall be seen below). The image of the barrier was attractive also because it implied strength that would come from the fact that the Principalities knew the sides in-between which they found themselves, from the combination of the two. At the same time, a barrier has two sides, two faces.

\(^33\) Mihail Kogalniceanu, 1855, article about the necessity of the union in Steaua Dunarii, 1 Octombrie, published in M. Kogalniceanu, 1967, Texte social-politice alese, pp. 184-185.

As can be seen from the texts, the image of the two Principalities was relatively dynamic, two entities fighting the difficult conditions that geography and history brought upon them, even though there is an element of fatalism involved in the descriptions: Romanians have been “drowned” by enemies, geography “brought misfortunes”. In relation to the great powers of Europe, however, the Romanian Principalities appear as a junior political partner, a younger brother, asking for help. The very fact that they pleaded their cause to the ruler of France, Napoleon III, constituted solid proof of the positioning; other formulations, such as “if the Occidental powers want”, also suggest the position of political dependency in which Romanian elites, and therefore provinces, found themselves. The continuing claim of being the messenger of democracy and European values and civilisation, manifested through expressions such as “we personify democracy in the east”, “our mission is to represent the Latin element in the east” or “we are the key to the peace of the Orient” suggested a spiritual affinity which merely needed to be re-affirmed, and the best way to re-affirm it was, in Bratianu’s and his colleagues eyes, through the unification of Moldova and Wallachia. Indeed, in the period immediately previous to these texts, in intellectual circles had been developed the idea that the Romanian Principalities belonged to the great family of Europe, to which she tried to return 35.

In 1854 the Crimean War started, and Russia practically ran over the Romanian Provinces, on its way to battle the Ottoman Empire. However, in 1856, due to favourable circumstances at the Congress of Paris, the Romanians obtained from the Great Powers the right to hold independent elections and to be spared the Russian protectorate, even though they remained under Ottoman suzerainty. This allowed the provinces to hold elections in 1859, whereupon they elected the same ruler for both Moldova and Wallachia, thus presenting Europe with a fait accompli, which had been partly encouraged by benevolent powers (Britain) and partly obtained through the brash actions of Romanian elites. It would be unrealistic to claim that the result of 1859 stemmed from the discourse about how and why the Romanian Principalities should be united. Documents suggest rather that the antagonism and contradictory interests the great powers had regarding this area opened a breach in terms of what was considered acceptable for it, breach which was exploited by the Romanians to achieve their own goals. However, the latter would not have made much sense if they had not been inscribed in some kind of justification or narrative, which would explain their necessity and desirability. This is where the ideas and images present in the quoted texts made sense and opened a space for decisions: because they inscribed events and policies in a wider modernisation process (that was associated with the idea that Romania’s geographical position was both a blessing and a liability) which political elites had embarked on, and were determined to achieve despite the numerous obstacles in their way (see quote above). The best proof of the viability of the discourse was its re-appearance in 1877-1878, a crucial year for the newly constituted Romanian kingdom.

I say re-appearance because in the period after 1859 and until 1877 the political debates of

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35 Vlad Georgescu, 1972, op. cit., p. 38.
the new country were mainly related to internal reforms and measures which were needed in order to transform Romania in the strong actor which her elites had claimed she could become (and which unfortunately she was failing to do). Having achieved the main goal of the union, justifying it to the outside powers was not felt to be a priority any longer, consolidating it had become one. As Vlad Georgescu noted, the intensity of the liminal arguments and associated ideas decreased, although it stayed on in the memory of elites, to be revived some twenty years after, on the occasion of Romania’s bid for independence.

Romania found herself during this period in the middle of a very complex situation. Russia, unhappy with the settlement of the Paris Conference in the aftermath of the Crimean War, constantly tried to erase the disadvantages which she considered herself a victim of, such as a lack of power over the Black Sea Straits and a damaged reputation. The declining Ottoman Empire put into question the newly acquired union of the Romanian Principalities, especially after the decrease of French power in the area, in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war. These two influences, coupled with the interests that the Austro-Hungarian Empire had regarding the management of the Danube - one of the main commercial arteries of Europe at that time - were enough to make Romanian elites nervous about the status of their country. This became evident in 1877 when Russia and the Ottoman Empire entered a bloody war, in which Romania was literally the middle ground and a battlefield. As part of her operations against the Ottomans, Russia was envisaging having troops passing through Romania to combat the Turks, whilst the latter staged skirmishes near Romanian harbours.36

At this point Romanians felt cornered, as so many times in their history, and had to face for the first time in twenty years a serious challenge regarding their union. In 1877 Russia had demanded, or rather informed, Romanian authorities of her wish to have troops passing through Romanian territory in order to battle the Turks.37 At this point, Carol I, king of Romania since 1866 asked the Tsar to delay the sending of troops, in the hope of formalising these demands at home.38 The logic behind this demand was relatively clear: the Russian armies would have gone through Romanian territory with or without permission from the leaders of the young country, simply because their capabilities did not allow for an effective opposition. With this in mind, it was nevertheless important to officialise the permission of the troops’ passage at a symbolic level, because this would have strengthened Romania’s international legal position, by allowing her to act “as if” she had the power to say no, if she wanted to. (As we shall see later on, the “as if” logic functioned in other crucial moments for Romania). However, the reality of Romania’s incapacity to resist did not prevent the stirring of a very heated parliamentary debate on whether the country should remain neutral in the war, since her neutrality had been guaranteed by the Congress of Paris in 1856. The victorious argument in this debate was the one advocated by those who were against neutrality, both because it was a virtual impossibility and not desirable if the next goal on the Romanian agenda was to be achieved: the independence of the country.

37 Idem, p. 89.
38 Idem.
In a series of speeches on the matter Kogalniceanu eloquently expressed the view of a majority of his colleagues:

“If Turkey had not been so stubborn towards the Bulgarians and the other Christian peoples, things would have been different. However, the big men of Turkey did not understand that it was in their interest for us to be strong, that even Europe wanted us to become a boulevard, a buffer stopping the clash between the great powers who surround us. (...) and now today they ask us to keep our neutrality?”

As a conclusion to this elaboration, he explained that

“we wish to be independent because we want to live our own life, because we wish to be a boulevard against war at the mouths of the Danube”.

Most of the political class was supporting this idea, which is why, eventually, Romanian troops participated in combat, and, given that Turkey was defeated, the country succeeded in obtaining her independence. These fragments can be considered as a logical continuation of the ideas which were voiced in the 1850s, because they related to a certain extent to the operationalisation of the new concept of Romania. The 1877-1878 war represented an ideal opportunity to say “look, if you (Europe, Turkey and Russia) had supported us fully in becoming stronger, we could have truly acted as a buffer” and it served as an example of what would happen if this were not the case. It was also a good occasion to show consistency with previous arguments.

It can be said that Romania’s portrait in the span of two decades exhibited a range of variations on the defensive theme, the Principalities and then the country being presented as barrier, buffer, boulevard, shield, fortress, sentinel, apostle and martyr in the way of the war and dangers coming from the North and the East. All these terms suggested the conscience of being caught in between opposing influences. As historian Vlad Georgescu mentioned,

“most of the Romanian intellectuals saw the historical evolution of the Romanian people as a struggle between Orient and Occident, between European and Asian forms of organisation and civilisation”.

There is a mix of determinism and resignation in the way this situation is presented, compensated by the fact that Romanians claimed to want to take their destiny into their own hands, by making the most of a difficult condition. Thus, affirmations such as

“God has placed us in the centre of difficulties”, “through our geographical position we are the centre of a great movement that is thousands of years old and which without our will (emphasis mine) drags us into an action that is far greater than the size of our country. I speak of the great fight between the Orient and the Occident”.

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40 Idem, p. 118.
41 Vlad Georgescu, 1972, op. cit., p. 158.
“our geographical position imposes us to be the carrier of a great historical principle, of the confrontation between the Orient and the Occident; as Russia is the great mediator between Europe and Asia, we need to be the representatives of Europe at the mouths of the Danube” 43,

“if you want to have good politics, look first on a map, it should inspire you” 44,

were frequently associated with others suggesting that Romanians needed to take their destinies into their own hands, should stop paying for other people’s errors and whims 45, they are a “power element against Asiatic barbarism”, “a serious barrier between Russia and Turkey” 46 and the “master of the mouths of the Danube” 47. The conflation of geographical and civilisational coordinates directed the gaze towards the positional thinking of decision-makers and to their tendency of seeing space as a determinant, as an almost insurmountable obstacle on the way to the fulfilment of their national aspirations. It was not the Turks or the Russians that Romanians feared, but the overwhelming and ever advancing space encompassing these civilisations, who permanently threatened to engulf anything in between. The Provinces (and later Romania) did not perceive themselves as a point of break between the territories of the Great Powers that surrounded them, but, much as the Roman limes (who had once passed through that space) used to be,

“une limite de l’Empire qui distingueait non pas deux territoires mais “deux rythmes de temps, le temps des hommes dans l’ordre des humains et le temps des monstres dans l’ordre de l’inconnu” 48.

Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania were seen as the last outpost of a civilised world.

The analysis above therefore points to a few elements, which will be important to retain for the further development of my arguments. First of all, Romania’s liminality in this period was largely framed in a defensive mode, developing the metaphor of the barrier in its various degrees. Second, in terms of discourse productivity, it suggested a relationship with Europe based on a teacher-student, parent-child interaction, in which Romania had the secondary role. This was mainly achieved through the action of seeking approval from Europe and through the descriptions which appeared in texts about how the different speakers saw Europe. A quote from an 1859 speech reinforces this idea:

“Gentlemen, Europe gave Romania her rights back, but she also watches our gestures. She demands that our country has a solid army. Let us conform with Europe’s wish, so that she can see we are worthy of the status she gave us” 49.

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43 P.P. Carp, op. cit., p. 70.
44 Idem.
46 I.C. Bratianu, 1853, op. cit., p. 36.
47 I.C. Bratianu, 1855, op. cit.
It is hard to find a phrase that more faithfully conforms to what Merje Kuus termed as the “observing-monitored” relationship that Europe has established with its Eastern European neighbours. Interestingly enough, she made this remark 145 years after the above one was uttered. This fact shows that Europe has established this way of interaction long before the formal enlargement process of the EU started, which explains a pervasive and lasting sense of the liminal, at least insofar as Romania is concerned.

Regarding the relationship with Romania’s main neighbours, the Ottoman and the Russian Empires, their negative image is easily discerned in the analysed materials. Whether alluded to in a veiled fashion, such as the “barbarous Orient”, or named explicitly as oppressors and illegitimate interference in the internal affairs of the principalities and then Romania, The Ottoman Empire and Russia were also presented as a liability for Europe. Since the Principalities had been placed

“in the way of all ills, at the crossroads of nefarious influences coming both from the North and the East”

Romanians, as a people with experience of these threats to Europe recommend themselves as a most useful tool in containing them.

The barrier status was used as both a means and an end in the wider narrative of achieving union and independence. Thus, the status was invoked as age-old, at least since the 1400s, whilst at the same time it was claimed that it needed material reinforcement (in the form of the union of the Principalities) in order to be better exercised and fulfilled. To the extent that union was achieved, the discourse on the barrier quality of Romanian territories can be said to have been successful, particularly in providing legitimacy to the Romanian claims.

At a time when small nations were negotiating their future with the Great Areopag of Europe, arguments had to be skilfully constructed in order to be convincing. The Romanian discourse was suggesting a role that the new country could play, a function that she could perform as part of the body of the civilised Occident. It must not be forgotten that the ideational context into which all this developed was still nurturing ideas of Europe as an organism of interlocking peoples., on which the Romanian Principalities wanted to figure.

It is impossible to say whether that was a determining factor in the decision of European powers, and particularly France, to grant the Romanian wishes, but it certainly provided an argument that made sense. It would have probably been more reflective of the truth if Bratianu, or Carp or any other leader had said

“we are sick and tired of paying tribute to the Turk, and extremely annoyed that Russian soldiers and impertinent ambassadors tell us what to do and do not let us lead our countries as we best see fit, and therefore we want to side with France and Great Britain because they do it in a less unnerving fashion”;

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however, this would not have supported the claim that Romanians wish to join the Occidental civilisation, and would have certainly suggested there was no larger project and greater political thinking other than fulfilling short-sighted political goals.

It was precisely in virtue of this spiritual dimension that I.C. Bratianu could say that Romania is a country of the Orient and could not renounce this space, whilst at the same time being the dignified carrier of democracy amongst barbarians; she represented an Oriental power with an Occidental soul\(^51\) and that is what gave her a special status.

It was suggested that they had earned this position due to their placement on the way of all evils that came towards Europe and to the choice they had made of acting as a barrier against these evils. Furthermore, it was suggested that Europe had not always lent a helping hand to these lands during their battles, restraining itself at written encouragements (such as the Pope calling the leader of Moldova “Christ’s athlete”) and no material help. This had left the inhabitants of the Principalities with a bitter taste, but had not extinguished the hope that someday Europe would take a real interest into their needs, because their strategic position was of “European interest”\(^52\). This why, in the 1850s, they brought back (they had done it before in 1600, with limited success) to the attention of the Great Powers of Europe their demand for unity, enlisting as justification for their request the crucial geographical position of the Provinces, as well as their unconditional aspiration to espouse the principles and political forms of Europe, of the Occident. The main trump cards, which Romania was believed to hold, were the mouths of the Danube and the vigour of her people. If the country succeeded in becoming a strong economy and democracy in this part of Europe, she would be able to act as the buffer zone she claimed to be and would receive the necessary support from European powers in times of need\(^53\).

In this period, the Romanian space was mainly read as a battle ground, as a point of confluence between competing spaces, but not of synthesis or reconciliation. The unity of the Provinces was desired precisely in order to create some form of meeting point, to “carve out a permanence” that could put a stop to confrontation and would be able to guard the achievements of the European civilisation, towards which Romanian elites were so eagerly aspiring. Salvaging the European space meant guaranteeing the possibility that a Romanian one could exist. The principalities had to become a place of security. As will be later seen, this idea encouraged the emergence of a discourse representing Romania as a security broker in the Balkan area, first expressed in the early decades of the 20th century and subsequently refined and developed in the late 1990s. In the terms couched in the methodology section, this represents the presupposition phase of the wider discourse. The ideas developed in the 18th and 19th century created a particular view of the world with respect to Romania’s position in it, set out the priorities of the state (national unity) and created spaces of action for its elites. At the same time these ideas positioned Romania as a liminal country in relation to Europe,

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\(^{51}\) I.C. Bratianu, 1932, Acte si cuvântari, Bucuresti: Cartea româneasca, p.113.

\(^{52}\) Idem.

as a protective margin, as a last outpost of civilisation before the realm where dragons lie. By fighting for the constitution of a national state, its elites also aimed to place Romania as an equal compared to other countries in civilised Europe; an equal with a very heavy responsibility, which needed to be strengthened and respected.

**Liminality as frontier**

Another important moment in the Romanian liminality discourse can be identified in the period 1915-1943, generally seen by historians and analysts as a time of democratic consolidation and development. In public memory, these two decades and a half represent a golden age of economic prosperity and political effervescence, abruptly interrupted by the Second World War and subsequently the advent of communism.

A first notable difference with the previous period was that geopolitical thinking was more structured, better articulated and distributed. Reflections with respect to Romania’s position in Europe were no longer grouped with other political or economic concerns, but received emphasis of their own, by a variety of authors: geopoliticians, geographers or military leaders. The great absents in this period were, surprisingly, those who were protagonists of the discourse a generation earlier, political figures. This did not mean that liminal images and references completely dropped from political debate, but they were no longer developed there as a primary locus. Politicians merely mentioned the “geographical position”, without delving into details, leaving this activity to more specialised authors. Some of those were political figures, as for example Gheorghe I. Bratianu, representative of Romania in Germany, but they were not as prominent as their predecessors. Thus, the texts below are a gathering of ideas and statements coming from the “second echelon” of intellectuals of statecraft, who were deeply concerned with rationalising and giving both a spiritual and a geopolitical meaning to their country’s position in the world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C.I. Bratianu, geographer,</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Însemnatarea hartei nationale pentru economia României</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>analyst and political figure</td>
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<tr>
<td>C.I. Bratianu</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Însemnatarea istoriei nationale pentru edificarea militara</td>
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<td>Vintila Bratianu, Romanian</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>Pentru constiinta nationala</td>
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<td>Prime Minister 1927-1928</td>
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<tr>
<td>M. Kogalniceanu, MP</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Intervention in the House of Representatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Porumbaru, Geographer</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>Mémoire sur la question du Danube</td>
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<td>Ion Conea, Geographer</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Geopolitics</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Bratesco et al, geopolitical analysts</td>
<td>1943</td>
<td>L’unité et les fonctions du pays et du peuple roumain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mihai David, geopolitical</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Consideratiuni geopolitice asupra statului Român,</td>
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<td>analyst</td>
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<td>Simion Mehedinti, Geographer</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Premise etnografice in istoria românilor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vintila Ionescu, Geographer</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Les fonctions geopolitiques du pays et du peuple carpathique roumain</td>
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A second difference is that the barrier role of Romania was de-emphasised, in favour of the notion of frontier, suggesting more permeability, openness and projection capacity. However, this was a change that could be progressively noted by looking at texts on both sides of a crucial moment, the 1918 unification of Transylvania with Romania. Up to 1918, occasional texts and speeches still largely spoke of Romania as a barrier, an obstacle in the way of “geographical enemies”, always on stand-by for an invasion. The need for the country to be strong was closely invoked with her mission of bringing peace and civilisation at the gates of the European Orient. Romania was also presented as the “rock against which successive waves of invaders broke” and, generally an indispensable element in the defence of Europe in virtue of her position as a potential projector of civilisation to the East. Most texts of the period also claimed that in order to achieve this, Romania needed to be allowed to be strong, in order to be able to perform this function by herself. The allusion to the need of obtaining Transylvania was barely veiled, given that this goal was considered a precondition of Romania attaining her full potential. To a very large extent, it was natural that the barrier image should be emphasised, because this had been the argument which had framed the first “wave” of union and was expected to yield similar results in the question of Transylvania. Besides, without it, Romanian elites considered that the project of a united Romania could not move forward.

It was argued that the very geography of the area imposed this course of action, (union with Transylvania) since every space of a country had to include

“those points and regions without which a nation cannot fulfil either her historic mission or the possibilities which make up her destiny”.

So, until 1918, Romania’s liminal position was largely constructed along the same lines as in the 19th century, in a defensive framework, undergirded by a passive/active connection to Europe, although the frontier potential was highlighted through insistence of the civilising role of the Danube, as a river favouring the economic development of the entire Europe.

The Danube had, since 1856, been an issue for Romanian elites, who actively participated in the creation of a Danube Commission and fought hard to avoid complete control of the river by the Austro-Hungarians. The story of the Danubian Question, as it came to be known, was, as most things in the area, complex and laden with antagonistic interests. If the Black Sea had Russia and the Ottoman Empire at loggerheads, the Danube had Russia and Austria-Hungary in rival positions. Deprived of her position on the straits, Russia wished at least to be able to control the mouths of the Danube. The 1856 Congress of Paris internationalised the Danube issue by creating an international commission which would govern navigation on the river. In Kogalniceanu’s words

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54 C.I. Bratianu, 1901, Însemnatatea hartei nationale pentru economia României, extras din analele Academiei Române, seria II, Tom XXIII, Memoriile sectiunii stiintifice, Bucuresti: Institutul de arte grafice, pp. 409-415.
55 Idem, pp. 415-421.
56 C.I. Bratianu, 1905, “Însemnatatea istoriei nationale pentru edificarea militara”, extras din analele Academiei Române, seria II, Tom XXIII, Memoriile sectiunii stiintifice, Bucuresti: Institutul de arte grafice, p. 82.
59 M. Kogalniceanu, 1882, Intervention in the House of Representatives, 1 Mai.
“the reason why Austria accepted this commission was because it contributed to the paralysis of Russia in the Black Sea and on the Danube”60.

However, as Romanian territories happened to find themselves in-between these competing interests, Romania insisted in becoming a member of the commission, and succeeded in doing so in 187861. Furthermore, Romanians believed that it was their duty to play an important role at the mouths of the Danube:

“(…) this question is the very great fight between two powers that are our neighbours. It is the rivalry and fight for influence between Austria and Russia over the Balkan Peninsula. This is at the root of the Danube Question. And what is our duty? Our duty is to stop at our borders this fight, because only by doing this can we justify our being and existence”62.

Unfortunately, the commission was supposed to end its existence in 1883, which was against Romania’s interests:

“La Mer Noire, lien entre l’Occident et l’Orient, ou pour mieux dire, entre l’Europe et l’Asie, et le Danube, étant la prolongation de ce lien, il est facile de comprendre combien l’Europe a d’intérêt à ce que ce fleuve soit libre et ouvert à la navigation de tous les pays; la cause de la Roumanie est juste, elle ne demande pas de droits exclusives mais préfère se solidariser avec l’Europe entière au sujet de cette large voie”63.

Thus, the question of the Danube was a very good practical illustration of what it meant for Romanians to be in-between or at the border of competing entities. To a certain extent, this matter encompassed all the ideas that were involved with the liminality question, restating the barrier element, but also ushering the possibility of more permeability through the connection to Europe. Romanians’ insistence on occupying a significant place in the Commission of the Danube and their lobbying for the extension of its existence represented a good example of how policy was taking in the realities of geography, and as can be seen, it seemed to be framed by the belief in Romania’s mission and her connection to Europe. Perhaps the most telling element in this case is indeed the subject positioning to the latter, which continues to be that of a junior partner needing support, but at the same time seeking to affirm its identity. As shall be seen in subsequent sections, echoes of the Danube issue trickled down to the contemporary era, both in its rapport to Europe and as a symbol of Romania’s strategic placement on the map.

After the Versailles settlement in 1919, and by the beginning of the Second World War, liminal images comported several visible changes, articulated in a much more structured fashion. They were no longer to be found in occasional speeches or newspaper articles, but rather in specialised books and treatises. One notes the emergence of a Romanian geopolitics school, echoing the German and British schools, placing great importance on the effects of geography

60 Idem.
61 Idem.
62 M. Kogalniceanu, 1882, op. cit.
63 E. Porumbaru et al, n.a., Mémoire sur la question du Danube, p. 31.
and physical features of landscape on politics. Thus, Ion Conea, first amongst geopolitical experts in Romania at that time expressed what he believed a Romanian geopolitics should look at:

“(…) Romanian geopolitics should be in between a scientific and a militant approach. Therefore, it is important to direct research towards the geographic realities of the Romanian space. Politically, the goal of such research should be the study of the geopolitical conditions which enhance the natural elements of the political and spiritual life and the study of the geographic and political conditions which allow the economical mastery of the territory. (…) Therefore, the sense of geopolitics for Romanians stems in the attempt of fulfilling the historical life of the nation in its natural bed of existence” 64.

An interesting mix of determinism, signified through the insistent references to the importance of geography, and agency, suggested by the idea of struggle towards the fulfilment of the nation’s destiny, characterises this perspective. The emphasis on geography is reminiscent of earlier times, when it was considered the crucial element conditioning the destiny and outlook of the country. Moreover, this view also explains the focus on the nation and its becoming as a geopolitical factor; the idea behind it was that the nation and its movement towards self affirmation enhanced the potentialities provided by geography (the implications of this discussed below).

Since the political goal of the union was achieved in 1918, detailed development of arguments concerning Romania’s need for it decreased and therefore so did reference to her liminality, which was less present in political speeches or debates. Romania’s condition was often reminded and invoked by the simple mention of “our geographical position”, or “our difficult position”, or “our historical mission”, all these linguistic constructions serving as hailing mechanisms and referring to larger bodies of argumentation as previously outlined. This discursive practice suggested one important element: the knowledge of Romania’s situation and its implications was considered alive and present enough in political elites’ minds as well as the larger public, so as to not need full reiteration. An interesting consequence was the presence in parliamentary debates, for example, of arguments other than those referring to the country’s geography. Indeed, the period 1918 to 1939 shows a greater preoccupation in political and decision-making circles with practical matters such as with whom to ally in the eventuality of a new war, or what economic initiatives to adopt. The absence of debate on Romania’s geopolitical value was indicative of self-confidence and not of the disappearance of its importance.

This idea was supported by the fact that in other mediums, such as expert analyses, one finds a development of what Romania’s position could mean. Romania and Romanians were portrayed as a transit country and nation, a place that facilitated exchange between the East, “quasi Asiatic in mentality and the Europe situated at the west of the Ponto-Baltic Isthm”65. It was stated that the transit function was somewhat inhibited by the East’s backwardness and

64 Ion Conea, 1939, Geopolitics, Craiova: Editura Ramuri, pp. 131-133.
65 C. Bratesco et al., 1943, L’unité et les fonctions du pays et du peuple roumain, Bucuresti: Cartea Româneasca, p. 64.
Romanian territories greatly suffered because of that, not being able to take fully advantage of their placement “au carrefour du continent”. The transit potential was historically inscribed, and authors went a long way back in history to prove this, as far as Dacia, perceived as the oldest geographical proof of this instance.

“The bordering of the Empire towards the continental façade is the environment of the Romanian people’s ethno-genesis, who, through the synthesis between the geographic movement of the Romans and the geographic movement of the Empire received its first geopolitical definition: Romania in the margins of Europe”.

It was further stated that, as history progressed, Romanians and Poles were designated by fate to become the gatekeepers of European civilisation, and eventually, after having to fulfil also the role of barriers during the centuries of Ottoman and Eastern invasions, it was time for them to become nexuses from which democracy and stability can be projected.

“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, recouvraient vite leur importance économique de jadis parce que placées sur le chemin le plus court de l’Asie.”

However, it was believed that such a role could not be fulfilled, unless Romania stayed united and strong, able to perform her two vital geopolitical functions: the protection of the Carpatho-Danubian-Pontic space and

“unifier positivement ce carrefour européen par la neutralisation des forces disparates qui se heurtent à lui. (...) il est donc de toute evidence que ce vieux peuple de montagnards établi dans ce carrefour a eu largement le temps de s’adapter au multiples exigencies de l’endroit, et sait atténuer les antagonismes et neutraliser les forces et intérêts en presence dans l’espace carpatho-danubien.”

Thus, it is important to note that in fact the barrier image of the country was supplemented by the crossroads and transit images, suggesting that these dimensions had been activated by the full reunification of the provinces. Much of this type of argumentation was supported by nationalist ideology which sought to counter revisionist claims about Transylvania, but was also a continuation and a development of earlier arguments. It is not difficult to
identify in the above quoted texts formulae and ideas that were already present in the discourse on the liminal.

The important thing to note is that the general message of most of these geopolitical studies was that after centuries of “being in the way of all misfortunes”\(^{73}\) and having their fate determined by enemy influences and greed\(^{74}\), the union had brought the opportunity to exercise Romania’s power and capacity to determine her own destiny. Indeed, most analysts insisted on the fact that, having had the chance of fulfilling her dream of unity, Romania now had to live up to it, had to make the most of her crossroads status, by favouring contacts between the three civilisation areas which she connected: the western, the eastern and the northern one\(^{75}\). This was thought to be a fundamental task in the maintenance of the balance of peace in Europe, since it had been “proved” that whenever this area of land had been dominated by any of the three empires surrounding it, this situation had caused protracted conflict and destruction\(^{76}\). There was a feeling of almost messianic mission.

“The meridian of history is moving towards the East, and we are exactly at a critical juncture, where this meridian will soon be passing.”\(^{77}\)

Nevertheless, the contact with olden ages and traditional images was still tightly kept, as a reminder of where all these bold ideas came from. A good example of how this was done was to be found in the writings of Gh. I Bratianu, Romanian historian and politician. In his book on the “Origins and the formation of Romanian unity”, the first chapter dealt with the historical figure of Stefan the Great, outlining all his correspondence with the papacy and the debates on being the guardian of Christianity. Subsequently, he delved into the geographical and historical details that completed his analysis. Therefore, one can truly speak of an evolution and of elements of continuity in the way Romania’s image was articulated.

All these ideas and opinions were developed throughout the 1920s and even more explicitly towards the end of the 3\(^{rd}\) and the beginning of the 4\(^{th}\) decade of the 20\(^{th}\) century. It is important to specify that they evolved at the same time as an active foreign policy period for Romania, providing the support and justification for her actions. Indeed, from 1923 until 1936 Romanian foreign policy was preoccupied with creating a network of alliances and connections that would strengthen the country’s position in the region and would capitalise on

\(^{73}\) This phrase is a good example of the kind of construction that was used to summon an entire body of collective memory without needing any further references or explanations.

\(^{74}\) “Située aux confins de ces deux mondes antagonistes la Roumanie a eu à en souffrir non seulement politiquement mais aussi économiquement. Ses ressources de pays de grand transit offertes par sa position ont été étroitement limitées. Sa place si enviée au grand carrefour du continent a été, ces dizaines d’années une formule purement théorique”, Bratesco et. al, op. cit., p. 69.

\(^{75}\) Vintila Ionescu, 1939, op. cit., p. 90.

\(^{76}\) Idem.

\(^{77}\) Simion Mehedinti, 1922, op. cit.
the geopolitical advantages that she had to offer. However, just as in the previous section, it is hard to establish a pattern of productivity of the discourse regarding liminality into Romania’s actions. Most of the alliances initiated had as a primary discourse the need for regional security and the need to combine the forces of newly formed small states against big and greedy powers. They were about preserving a certain state and right, rather than about projection of power. Thus, the Little Entente or the Balkan Alliance were created with a specifically defensive aim. However, the fact that Romania was instrumental as the initiator and supporter of such constructs attested to her elite’s wishes to enact the country’s potentialities and especially the image of peace-seeker and peace-maker. When examining the materials of this epoch the feeling is that the discourse about Romania’s need to be active and visible at an international level was super imposed on the older one concerning her value as a barrier and frontier. However, there was no explicit link made between Romania’s geographic position and her actions. Yet, it cannot be said that the existence of all these references was insignificant and only of rhetorical value. As specified in the methodological question, they acted as a form of signifier, of indicator of where Romanian elites believed themselves and their country to be placed in relation to Europe.

In terms of subject productivity, this period was marked by the coexistence of the image of the barrier and that of the frontier and unifying crossroads, with a slight emphasis of the latter, as symptomatic of more peaceful and propitious times. Regarding the relation with Europe, the rapport was relatively hard to establish because Europe was no longer mentioned in the same vein or with the same intensity. As Romania came into her own, the need to justify herself faded. World War One and the great sacrifices that the Romanian people made in order to achieve unity empowered the elites to assert a historical and inalienable right to it, which had been more understated previously. The time of the verbs relating to Romania’s role changed, it was no longer the future of “Romania will be a barrier”, “when she will be united Romania will be strong” etc., but the present of “Romania must take her destiny into her hand”, “Romania is a crossroads”, which appeared with higher frequency than before.

The image of the enemies also changed, and became more abstract. The disappearance of the Ottoman Empire left an elusive East to play the part of the threat, but not only. Far more dreaded and fought against were revisionist states, those who contested the decisions and settlements of the Versailles Treaty. They were often presented as the real and immediate enemy because they had direct interests on what were now Romanian territories (i.e. Transylvania and Bessarabia). However, their threat was not perceived in grand civilisational lines, like the Turkish and the Russian empire in the previous century. Given this situation, it was logical that Romanian elites, with a view to appeasing these discontents tried to construct a role for their country that would stress openness, communication and the opportunity of advancement for everyone through the mutually beneficial use of her (favourable) geographical position.

Unfortunately, in the two short decades between the two world wars, Romania failed to become a strong democracy and to a certain extent failed in her ambition to prove that European powers had been right in helping her achieve the unity goal. However, the idea of using her position in the margin of Europe did not disappear.
Looking at the 1850-1859, 1877-1878, and 1918-1940 periods, it is right to say that they placed the argument regarding the liminal on a continuum of transformation, from the image of the barrier to that of frontier and unifying crossroads. This transformation was also accompanied by the modification of the positioning with respect to Europe. Thus, from student-teacher the relation seemed to graduate to that of equals, at least in right if not in capabilities. This was signified both through predicate characterisation and the change in the chains of connotation associated with the two entities.
Predicate analysis in a first phase indicated the Romanian Provinces were seen as relatively weak compared to Europe, a victim of unfriendly geography and history, yet courageous and perseverant in their goals. Thus, they had been “drowned in a sea of inimical neighbours”, which, nevertheless, they had managed to repel, even when other nations were submerged; destiny had placed Romanians “in the way of all misfortunes” impeding their development. The interesting element is also the fact that Romania’s weakness is not always clearly expressed, but rather implied by the relatively frequent invocation of the need to be worthy of the union, worthy of the trust Europe might place in her, worthy of the mission of defending Europe at the mouths of the Danube, all these implying in a first phase that the worthiness has not been reached yet. By the same token, the portrait of Europe that appears is as the bastion of civilisation and source of approval. Thus, the connotation chains in a first period read as follows: Romanian Principalities-glorious past as defender of Christianity-barrier-brave-victims of great power antagonisms-potentially great and powerful- mission to spread democratic values if allowed. Europe-the Great Areopagus-arbiter of development-custodian of democratic values. Ottoman Empire, Russia-Asiatic-barbarism-greedy- dishonest-unwise.

In a second phase, Romania’s image changed, suggesting more self-confidence on the part of the elites. Romania was seen as an open frontier-crossroads-started fulfilling her destiny as a defender of democratic values. Europe was not often mentioned, suggesting that Romania was no longer in pursuit of approval from it (although this was not entirely true, as shall be seen below). Also, the characterisation of enemies subsided, with the Ottoman Empire being dismembered and Russia in the middle of a revolution. The negative images were kept in the past.

I would like to conclude this section by drawing attention to an element of similarity between the Turkish and Romanian cases, namely the predominance of a geopolitical deterministic thought in the statements made. Although in Romania the military was not monopolising geopolitical thought, the civilian establishment seemed firmly convinced about its power. Many of the pronouncements showed this conviction, as well as the belief that geography was the explanation for Romania’s fate in the world. Perhaps if Romania had not gone through 50 years of communist rule that interrupted much of the logics developed previously, geographical deterministic thought would have had a long life within the establishment, as in Turkey. In the contemporary era, nevertheless, leaders had to adapt quickly to the fact that geography was not enough for a dynamic geopolitics, which is why I have titled this chapter “The road from geography to geopolitics”.

The liminal during the communist period

As Prof. Zoe Petre remarked in the interview she granted me, if there were a period in Romanian history when Romania was not to be found in a margin, it was the communist one. Secure in the country’s position as a recognised sovereign state, the communist political
elite found another outlet for enacting what was believed to be Romania’s “special” position. It was translated in an attitude which has been often termed as maverick-like. Within the socialist camp, the fact of stressing autonomy and non-interference in other countries’ affairs won Romania respect and allowed her to proceed on a set of regional and bilateral treaties which testified to Bucharest’s will to play the part of a diplomatic “plaque tournante” in the area. Ceausescu stressed the notion that the communist states of the southern tier had common interests and should take a regional approach to matters of economic development, environmental issues and security. Romania also wanted to initiate relations with Greece and Turkey as part of its Balkan programme, in order to prove that the country’s autonomy was such as to allow it to ignore ideological boundaries between systems. An insistence on sustained relations with the Balkans had been a feature of Romanian foreign policy ever since the 1870s; it had manifested itself in the inter war era and was being reactivated in the 1970s too. This had to do with the vision that Ceausescu had regarding Comecon countries: he saw them divided in the industrialised North and the agrarian South. Czechoslovakia and Poland were part of the first category, whilst the Balkans and Romania were part of the second. His wish to strengthen their cooperation had to do with the strategy that aimed to diversify Romania’s foreign relations and therefore confirm its pivotal position in the region.

By initiating the national communist project (an ideologically paradoxical and ostrich-camel like product) and by playing dissenter to Moscow’s strategic decisions Romania certainly tried to redefine is geopolitical strategy and by consequence position. One can no longer talk of a border-like quality being stressed during this period, but more about an outsider-like mentality and actions. Romania’s aim was not of reaching a better condition, because it was considered she had already reached the “glorious socialist future”. Leaders promoted the idea that the country was acting on a higher plane, aimed at superseding the petty conflicts between capitalists and communists.

Striving for autonomy and trying to prove Romania could be a good “courroie de transmission” capable of galvanising different influences and using them to its advantage, brought communist leaders to make the most out of the Sino-Soviet split, for example.

The connection with the West was gradually reinforced throughout the 60s and the 70s in the name of cultural and civilisational affinities, but also in the name of a historical tradition which stressed the idea that Romania was strategically placed in a geo-political transitional point allowing her to mediate a dialogue between East and West, and hence between the two opposing camps of the Cold War. To a certain extent, however, there also existed the idea that Romania was somewhere above that dichotomy precisely because it had gathered within influences coming from both sides, and therefore was capable of producing something superior. It must be stressed that the liminal metaphor was not played during communist times as in the

79 Idem, p. 212.
previous period, largely due to the fact that national-communist ideology took a greater part in both the discourses and practices of the leadership.

There are voices, however, which claim that during the communist era, Romania was liminal in a different way than the one examined in this study.

“Hybridity, double-codedness, and ambiguity were ingredients of everyday life under the Ceausescu regime, when experience was double-coded since an early age”82.

Adrian Otoiu, literary critic, affirms that the double linguistic and practical life that Romanians had for such a long time, led to a permanent state of liminality. Although this did not apply necessarily form the point of view of this analysis, it is an important element that influenced the subsequent period, after 1989.

**Redefining liminality in the post-communist era**

The post-communist period, which constitutes the main focus of this case-study, is relatively rich in elements of the discourse that brings together images of liminality. One of the main factors favouring this situation is brought by the fact that in the aftermath of the Cold War the structure of the international scene changed in such a manner as to allow more freedom of strategic choice than the communist or even the previous periods ever did. With Romania firmly a national state, whose legitimacy and territorial integrity was not seriously threatened, her elites could afford to have a foreign policy that went away from a nationalist rhetoric. As detailed in a previous analysis on Romania’s strategic choice, in the 1990s, Romanian elites gradually learned how to practice a politics of the national interest, rather than that of the nationalist one, meaning that they did not concentrate on explaining and justifying Romania’s existence, but sought to carve a place for her according to what they perceived to be her needs as a country in her own right. This included re-tying the knot with the interbellic era and its discourses as a legitimate precursor to contemporary Romania. Nevertheless, post-1989 Romania was an inextricable entwinement of leftover communist practices and mentalities, projects for a democratic state and a pervasive fear of being caught anew in the middle of overwhelming security arrangements, or excluded, again, from a prosperous future. Both policy and discourse reflected these fears, revealing a rather confused state of mind and course(s) of action. Within this context, the liminal was represented in a variety of ways: through images, narratives, metaphors, and also through somewhat conflicting actions and decisions.

In order to analyse them, I have chosen to look at two kinds of moments, which I have classified in episodes and discursive threads. Episodes are those instants of policy and action that have a comparatively short duration in time (2-3 months) and are specifically presented or felt by decision-makers as discrete within the larger canvas of discourse; I have considered policy initiatives also as episodes, because of their specificity and limit in time. On the other

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82 Adrian Otoiu, 2003, “An exercise in fictional liminality: the Postcolonial, the postcommunist and Romania’s threshold generation”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 28 (1,2), p. 93.
hand, discursive threads are lengthier manifestations, which are not connected to a specific event, but to the wider trends of policy and thought. They can exist for years, even decades, and, as shall be shown below, they might wax and wane in different forms depending on those who uphold them, and which position they defend within a discursive trend.

For the purposes of my analysis, I have identified two discursive trends, which manifested themselves between 1990-1996, 2000-2004 and 1996-2000, 2004-2006 respectively, and several episodes - the 1996-1997 trilateral treaty initiative, the 1999 Kosovo crisis and the 2005-2006 Black Sea security policy initiative. Just as in the Ukrainian case, and unlike the Turkish one, the materials found are better understood when analysed from an ideological perspective and chronological perspective, rather than a thematic one. The reason behind such a state of affairs is that neither in the Romanian case, nor in the Ukrainian one, are there enough materials to be included in a category of their own, such as geopolitics, identity and security; often, texts make reference to the three elements at the same time, or to none, explicitly, and it is easier to spot an ideological thread rather than a thematic one. This does not mean, however, that I do not follow the presence of the same elements, but rather that looking at them from this particular perspective gives a better chance to understand the changes and evolution of the discourse on the liminal. Therefore, I analyse the 1990-1996 and the 2000-2004 periods in juxtaposition, as I do for the 1996-2000, 2004-2006 ones; the reason behind that is that the two first intervals were dominated by parties ideologically closer to the Romanian Communist Party, who also had a heavy membership coming from the second echelon of the Communist nomenklatura. Although they claimed a wish of rapprochement with Europe, they exhibited many hesitations and slowness in implementing democratic reforms. The other two intervals, were dominated by parties, which were ideologically closer to democratic parties in the West and were more inclined to implement reforms. As I shall show, these basic differences impacted the discourse on the liminal, and presenting them as such best reveals how liminal references evolved into an unavoidable policy view and options.

1990-1996: Hovering at the margins of Europe, dilemmas of the early nineties

The early 1990s represented for Romania, as well as the entire post-Soviet bloc, a period of acute uncertainty and the beginning of a painful phase of transition from a communist system to a democratic, liberal one. Indeed, it must be stressed that the fall of the Ceausescu regime gave rise to an almost unanimously expressed desire regarding the values that Romania was to pursue: democracy, human rights, and a market economy, as modelled by the Western countries of Europe and North America. However, unlike some of her neighbours who seemed to make great strides towards a reformed system, Romania was notoriously slow at picking up the pace of reforms, not least because former communists held political power after the 1989 events. Ideological barriers as well as political and economic interests prompted these leaders and decision-makers - a large part of whom had been members of the second or third echelon of power in the Communist Party - to espouse attitudes which could at best be qualified as ambiguous regarding both political and economic issues. On the economic front, measures that were deemed necessary for the advancement of the country into a liberal system were not
taken, such as privatisation of big state enterprises, the restitution of confiscated property or the reform of the agriculture, to name but a few. Politically, the new leadership did not express a clear option for democratic values, preferring rather a combination of communist practices and very gradual liberalisation. For example, while allowing the existence of multiple political parties, it still kept a firm grip on national television, thus preventing the general population from getting to know anything else other than what was convenient for its (the new leadership) interests. Ion Iliescu (president of Romania 1990-1996) made notorious and infamous the notion of “original Romanian democracy”, making reference to a reformed type of socialist system, in which concepts such as private property or political decentralisation did not fit. In terms of foreign policy, as shall be seen below, the 1990s leadership’s options were also ambiguous, oscillating between a choice towards the European Union, in general the West, and a more familiar orientation towards Russia, the East.

This situation polarised Romanian society and political life, creating two major political forces: the abovementioned neo-communist leaders and former active members of the Communist Party, grouped under the National Salvation Front party, and what were termed as the “historic” parties, meaning right wing or centrist political forces (Liberal party, Christian-democrats), which had been silenced with the advent of communism in 1944-1947 and had been reinstated in 1990. It is important to retain this differentiation because it significantly impacted the kinds of images and metaphors that were used throughout the 1990s in relation to Romania’s geopolitical status and foreign policy.

**Choosing a place in the new world order**

Having briefly outlined the political situation in the post-1989 period, this section concentrates on the materials I have collected in relation to the issue of liminality. The discursive trend under scrutiny is the one manifested in the 1990-1996 and 2000-2004 intervals, which represent the periods when the left wing political forces (generally considered heirs to the Communist party) were in power. For the 1990-1996 period itself divided into two periods, 1990-1994 and 1994-1996, the analysis is largely based on the public speeches delivered by the president at the time, Ion Iliescu, at various internal and external meetings; his declarations with respect to foreign and security policy issues; interviews granted to newspapers and national and international television stations; public speeches, declarations, interviews and memoirs produced by Adrian Nastase, foreign affairs minister during a part of that period; memoirs written by Theodor Melescanu, foreign affairs minister in 1995-1996; declarations made by army leaders and analyses made by certain experts on foreign policy. It must be borne in mind that this period was that of a gradual freedom of expression, when there were not many specialists and analysts of foreign policy other than the ones who also made decisions. The texts below represent the statements and opinions, which were made in specific reference to liminal images, in the absence of a generalised public debate on the issue (that developed later on).

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83 Throughout the 1990s the party underwent many schisms and transformations, splitting eventually into the National Party of Social Democracy and the Democratic Party, main actors of the political scene in the 2000s.
As can be seen, the range of primary sources is somewhat restrained, because at the time, Romania did not yet benefit from a free market of ideas and debate. Even a cursory look at the press showed there were few, if any, truly qualified analysts capable of engaging with events and their subtleties (This constitutes a significant difference with Turkey, at that time, which exhibited a relatively developed public arena of commentary and analysis, proving this was a feature of the system which had evolved enough to be democratic) Furthermore, think tanks, which are generally institutions circulating discourses and emerging ideas, did not exist or were not active yet. However, given the structure of decision (-making?) in the country at the time, this state of affairs does not constitute an impediment for the analysis; the elements of discourse were voiced largely by decision-makers, the administrators of the “regime of
truth” at that moment. That was not an ideal situation, but it did reflect the reality of power in post-1989 Romania: still centralised in very few hands, with active censorship controlling or trying to control the circulation of ideas and opinions. As Romanian democracy consolidated, this state of facts did change, opening the space for debate and a multiplicity of alternative views, which shall be exposed later in this chapter. The materials existent for the 2000-2004 interval stand proof to this, since in addition to the kind of primary sources mentioned above, there are more analyses and comments coming from specialised think tanks or columns in the newspapers, as well as histories and geopolitical essays and conferences. One must bear in mind the fact that this second interval came in the aftermath of what was known as the first truly democratic legislature, from 1996 to 2000, which had brought significant changes in this respect. These changes will be discussed in the section and mentions of the 1996-2000 period will be made in order to make them understandable. However, a special analysis will be granted to this time in a subsequent section.

The most important point to bear in mind about the 1990-1996 period is that, in fact, the leaders of the time shied away from the frontier idea and its corollaries. This meant that although they subscribed to the notion that Romania had fulfilled the role of a barrier and frontier in her past, they did not picture her present or future in these terms; as shall be seen, they tried to posit that Romania was part of Central and not Eastern Europe and wished to suggest she fully shared in the European family of values. Therefore, a discourse comprising liminal images did not fit in their image strategy. However, it is important to study this interval because it inscribes itself in a continuity with earlier liminal images (even if it tries to keep them firmly in the past), it is a precursor to the 2000-2004 period, which exhibited significant changes in terms of the use of liminal metaphors (shedding an interesting light on the early 1990s) and also because, ironically and despite the leadership’s efforts, Romania had at the time an attitude that could easily be associated with a liminal position.

In an account about what Romania’s geostrategic choices were in the early 1990s, Theodor Melescanu, former foreign minister from 1992 to 1996, presented them as a three zone option:

“Romania could go East, West, or she could remain in a grey zone between the two. We chose to go with Europe because it was the natural option”\(^{84}\).

In this particular fragment, it is interesting to note the implicit association between Europe and the West, and the fact that the Romanian dilemma was cast in broad existential categories: East or West?, unlike the case of Ukraine, for example, where this dimension seemed downplayed, in favour of pursuing more technical goals such as a market economy or a democratic state\(^{85}\). The above opinion widely voiced throughout the political spectrum at the time, largely motivated by the notion that, after having spent a long time in the margins of history and geography, now was the moment for Romania to escape that unfortunate situation, which was perceived as an even greater evil than “being placed on the way of all misfortunes”; the idea of the grey zone


\(^{85}\) Not that the Romanians were not pursuing the same goals, but they were inscribing them in a wider framework.
constituted anathema for the political class, because it meant a strategic option that looked neither East nor West, and was a painful reminder of moments when the country had acted in an ambiguous manner: during WWI negotiations when the debates about which camp to join had been notoriously protracted and undecided until the very last moment, during WWII, switching allegiance from one camp to another, not to mention during communist times, when Romania had become known as a maverick country (see above). The grey zone which many Romanian decision-makers dreaded was not a neutral area or a place where there would be a synthesis between various influences, but rather a zone of geopolitical uncertainty between the democratic West and the despotic East where both kinds of principles (democratic and non democratic) could apply depending on the opportunism of the leaders.

To a certain extent, however, the Romania of the early 1990s was such a place in relation to the rest of Europe and the West, despite what was said at a declarative level. Whilst the rest of the countries of the former communist bloc firmly supported the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Communist Economic Community, President Iliescu expressed concern at such an eventuality and generally tried to reinforce ties with Moscow\textsuperscript{86}. Furthermore, Romania only officially agreed with the demotion of the Warsaw Pact in February 1991 (much later than all other countries) and political leaders had negotiated (but did not sign) a treaty with Moscow in early 1991, which stipulated in article 4 that Romania

“will not do anything against Russia, and neither Russia nor Romania will be members of opposing alliances”\textsuperscript{87},

which at the time clearly signified there would not be a rapprochement between Romania and NATO\textsuperscript{88}. The double speak and act of Romanian leadership became visible well into 1993, when between January and July the Romanian president as well as military leaders said in very close succession that “Romania is interested in becoming a NATO member”\textsuperscript{89},

“Romania is interested in following both the possibility of a tight cooperation with Russia and NATO”\textsuperscript{90};

“Romania cannot have tighter connections with NATO than with the Russian Federation”\textsuperscript{91},

“Romania wishes to become a NATO member”\textsuperscript{92}.


\textsuperscript{88} Armand Gosu, 2006, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{89} Ion Iliescu, 1993, NATO reunion in Brussels, January.

\textsuperscript{90} Ion Iliescu, 1993, interview with CNN, 1 March.

\textsuperscript{91} Dumitru Cioflina, Head of the Army, 1993, Declaration upon return from an official visit in Moscow, July.

\textsuperscript{92} Nicolae Spiroiu, Defence Minister, 1993, declaration to a NATO delegation visiting Romania, August.
These contradictory, successive statements were very representative of the general lack of direction in matters of foreign policy decision-making at the time. The language in which they were cast underlined that no specific decision had been taken, and that, in fact, Romania’s geopolitical position was still being negotiated. An important point is that unlike in other epochs, these declarations did not indicate a sense of being “in-between” or at a frontier, but did project to the outside world an image of Romania as being indecisive and at a crossroads about her choices. The case was similar to Ukraine’s situation in the early 1990s, when the latter proclaimed the adoption of a “multi-vector” foreign policy, except in Romania the elites’ oscillations were not termed as such. Consequently, their manoeuvring appeared suspect and ambiguous.

The process of negotiation of Romania’s geopolitical situation at a discursive level presupposed different mediums: official speeches, official declarations, television, and the written press. Efforts were made especially towards a foreign public, to whom political leaders repeatedly tried to explain what Romania’s place was in the world, thus indicating at the same time who was the interlocutor in the dialogue on liminality. However, in comparison to later periods, the number of speeches and declarations dealing with this issue was comparatively low; for example, in the case of the president’s speeches and declarations93, on an average of 24 speeches (excluding interviews, declarations etc.) a year, only 2 mentioned Romania’s geopolitical situation and none were especially or exclusively dedicated to this. (the distribution was not even, depending on the issues which were “hot” at any one point in time) The vast majority amongst these texts were geared towards a foreign public, at international meetings or conferences. This situation went hand in hand with the fact that Romanian leadership did not have a clear strategy regarding the country’s image, or foreign policy for that matter, at the time. Nevertheless, the presence of mentions concerning the frontier problematic in highly visible texts indicated that this element was not ignored, but rather selectively downplayed, since it did not relatively uphold the “we are the centre of Europe” thesis.

The main directions of the leading geopolitical argument in the early 1990s were that Romania was “by vocation” (this expression indicating the acceptance of a reality as such, and potentially, why there was no internal debate on whether Romania was European or not) a European country, and that it belonged rather to Central Europe, and not to its East, as some would suggest (the “some” would always remain undefined, although Western European countries and certain Central European intellectuals and politicians would be always implied through this vague appellative).

“Romania is in Europe” triumphantly declared Adrian Nastase, foreign affairs minister in 1991, when the country had been invited to participate in various European fora.

“The prodigal son-Romania- finally took the place that was deserved in the European House”94.
In 1992, at an international conference, Adrian Nastase also affirmed:

“The idea that my country would belong to the post Cold War Eastern Europe is just an odd invention of some minds who waste energy in order to explain to those willing to listen to them that the former Eastern Europe should be divided in a multitude of sub-sub regions. To support their points of view those voices highlight all kinds of irrelevant elucubrations. They are called to prove in an infallible manner that the “European vocation” would be a plant that only grows under the particular skies of a sub-region”\(^95\).

A few things are to be noted in these phrases: a) Romania is projected as the “prodigal son”, implying she has been previously rejected from the good life - whilst being special and misrecognised by the community of European peoples -, b) she has a natural European vocation that is incontestable, c) Europe is again seen as the “Great Aeropagus”, under the guise of the European House, that needs to be accessed. (see historical section). At the same time one notices a difficult relation with the concept of Eastern Europe, which is simultaneously recognised and denied as a place of belonging\(^96\). So far, these affirmations were relatively reminiscent of older positions, developed in the inter war era and even before. However, they also denoted a certain fear that Romanian elites at the time had about being left out of the construction of the new Europe, and pointed to the idea that political leaders wanted to project Romania as a Central European country. The reason behind this was that the idea of “Eastern Europe” had negative connotations of backwardness\(^97\) and, more importantly, Central Europe had recently become the place to be for former communist countries, due to the constitution of the Visegrad Group.

The Visegrad Group was constituted on 15 February 1991 by Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia (at that time), as an association of Central European countries, claiming their right to be considered European and declaring their intention of undertaking prompt reforms and regional cooperation in order to be able to join the EU and NATO. As Timothy Garton Ash suggested, one of the main reasons behind this initiative was to “sell” these countries better to the West\(^98\). One of the more or less expected results of the constitution of the Visegrad Group was the birth of the idea at a general European level, that amongst former communist countries there were better and worse candidates for democratisation. (These results were also resonant with the idea of the creation of Easts as developed by Merje Kuus, mentioned in a previous section)

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\(^{96}\) An issue equally stressed later on in this section and chapter.

\(^{97}\) Adrian Nastase developed a lengthy argument defending the idea that Eastern Europe was a notion which corresponded ideologically to the Cold War era and had no place in the geostrategic vocabulary post-1989, since Romania belonged to Central Europe. In order to uphold his point, he mentioned, although did not specify, that even Western intellectuals had recognised this fact in the inter war era. A. Nastase, 1992, op. cit., p. 133.

Romania had tried to put forward a similar project in February 1991, in which she suggested the constitution of a “Central and Eastern European Union”, which would comprise Bulgaria and Romania in addition to the other three countries, but this idea did not seem to appeal to any of the Visegrad group members. In exchange, Romania tried to join the Visegrad group in 1991, who added insult to injury, by refusing her membership, due precisely to the kind of behaviour and declarations that were exemplified above in 1990-1992. Romanian decision-makers took the rejection very badly, because they felt their country was automatically relegated to a lesser category. The affirmations quoted above were also implicit reactions to this event. Romanians did not want to be seen as second-class citizens of Europe, and even less to be the East of Europe.

In the period 1990-1994 this fear was very present and could be identified first in the insistence with which the president would declare that Romania was a Central European country in the neighbourhood of the difficult region of the Balkans, thus delimiting Romania from the “chaos” of this area, and second, in repeated warnings against the exclusionary movement that Europe (meaning the EU) was creating by separating former communist countries in at least two classes of candidates. In an interview granted to the Italian television a year before, President Iliescu affirmed that

“there are processes which bring a new barrier between the West, the Centre and the East of the continent, which constitutes a sad reality in the aftermath of the disappearance of the Iron Curtain”.

The processes he was referring to were the criticisms and hesitations that both the EU and the US had with respect to Romania’s reform, political and human rights records. These were manifested through a sluggish acceptance in the Council of Europe as well as the US’s delay in granting the country the Most Favoured Nation clause, not to mention various public criticisms addressed through the international press.

These being the conditions of the early 1990s, the discourse on Romania’s position was relatively vague and mainly reactive. The fact that it was oriented mainly towards foreign

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100 This situation reminds one of Ukraine’s own efforts at the creation of a similar project, which did not elicit many echoes, emphasising the confusing times, involving multiple and competing agendas, that the countries in this area were experiencing.
104 Romania applied for entry to the Council in 1990 and was accepted only in 1993, largely because of the civil unrest provoked by the intervention of the miners in political affairs during 13-15 June 1990, and September 1990, as well as due to problems in managing the minorities and private property questions.
publics (as the quoted sources show) also points to its apologetic nature and testifies to the lack of an active strategy regarding the country’s leaders’ definition of her geopolitical condition. Therefore it is no surprise that almost no mention of liminal images existed. Usually, they appeared when they could fulfill a particular function, when they could serve a clearly defined goal, and define a position, as the need for the unity of the country (in 1859, 1918), or an active role in this part of the world. In the 1990-1994 interval it was felt that although a goal had been established - joining Euro-Atlantic political and economic structures - the motions to achieve it were mostly symbolic and unsubstantiated by systematic progress. It was simply not clear what the Romanian leadership wanted (although some cynics would say that what they pursued were their own enrichment goals and little else). One might argue that when an administration is too busy not taking decisions and trying to mitigate contradictory tendencies this can be the only result.

I consider the year 1994 a turning point as far as mentions of liminal images are concerned. This does not mean that Romanian leadership suddenly acquired a coherent discourse in which re-instating older talk of the frontier-states had a purpose. After all, just one month and a half after signing the Partnership for Peace agreement with NATO in January 1994 and declaring that Romania actively pursues membership in the Alliance, Ion Iliescu told CNN international that “Romania envisages a close relationship with both NATO and Russia”\textsuperscript{105}. However, what did emerge was a discourse shaped by the recent direction given by accession to the Council of Europe and the signing of the Partnership for Peace with NATO\textsuperscript{106} - in which liminal images participated as a framing element of the past that had been overcome. Therefore the argument would run along the lines of, yes, in virtue of her geographic position and difficult history Romania has been a frontier of Europe and a protective barrier for it, but now she is part of Central Europe. The implications of that position were not expressed in terms of what that meant for the geopolitics of Romania in the present and future; the important thing seemed to be avoiding the psychological East at any cost, and therefore the frontier/barrier status that would come with it.

The best illustration of the above was given by President Iliescu’s speech given at the Bucharest Crans Montana Forum in April 1994. Although not unique in its kind, this speech was important because of the public attending the event - high-level officials from European countries and the US, amongst others - and for the exposure that it received in the media. President Iliescu had the opportunity of mentioning the protector role that Romania had fulfilled throughout her history due to her geographic position, the placement at the confluence of Great Powers’ interests and conflicts and the great sacrifices she had to undergo due to foreign invasions and battles\textsuperscript{107}. This was the only time that some kind of reference was implied to older texts and times, when the image of Romania as protective barrier was extensively vehiculated. The

\textsuperscript{105} Interview with CNN International, 1994, 1 March.


interesting point is that he linked this traditional view with Romania’s European vocation, but, more importantly, he mentioned this in order to underline and seemingly justify why Romania was still behind compared to other former communist countries.

“Romania’s disadvantage has been her position at the confluence of Imperial interests, who have battled for influence in this area”\textsuperscript{108}.

Furthermore, Iliescu did not hesitate to suggest that due to Romania’s sacrifices, Western Europe could advance and protect its achievements. This constituted a subtle echo to another of the President’s favourite thesis, that of the economic and political discrimination of Romania by the states of Western Europe. (see above) At the end of the speech he also took the opportunity of offering a lesson in the geopolitics of the continent:

“I would like to bring a correction to the geographic and geostrategic notion of Eastern Europe. This syntagm has received negative political and ideological connotations after WWII, designating the former USSR. Geographically, this is not supported. If you look on the map of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals and the Caspian sea you shall see that Romania is not only in the Centre of Europe, but in the centre of Central Europe; the Black Sea is not in the East of the continent, but is an European sea. From a geostrategic point of view, despite all the historical inconvenience, Romania’s position at the mouths of the Danube and the Black Sea present a special interest for European economic development, including the Black Sea- Mediterranean connection and the connection with South East Europe and the Middle East. This position inspired us to hold this forum here…”\textsuperscript{109}.

Ion Iliescu deftly managed to reunite in this speech Romania’s imagined past, present and future and by the same token enunciated what could be seen as the manifest of his administration’s view on Romania’s geopolitical situation. Note that certain parts of this 1994 speech echoed a thesis which had also been actively upheld by A. Nastase in 1990-1992, that Romania was not part of Eastern Europe, which, in any case, it was argued, was an outdated notion. (see above) It is relatively clear that the image of the frontier and its corollaries were to be avoided in connection to the present, in order to avoid the marginalisation of the country. Therefore, in subsequent speeches until 1996, the same pattern was replayed: whilst Romania was acknowledged to have had different liminal positions and functions in the past, the present and the future were expressly connected to her being a “nucleus”, “the heartland of Europe”\textsuperscript{110}, or the confluence of North-South, East-West axes, these positions always being associated with her being part of Central Europe or “the heart of Europe”\textsuperscript{111}. Another important feature to be noted was that, generally, the liminal images that were acknowledged focused on divergence, dissonance, disagreements and clashes, of which, naturally, Romania would be a victim. No wonder the rush to get away from them seemed so natural.

\textsuperscript{108} Idem.

\textsuperscript{109} Idem.

\textsuperscript{110} President Iliescu quotes “geostrategists” (without making specific references, but showing awareness of traditional geopolitical principles) in support of this idea.

\textsuperscript{111} Ion Iliescu, 1994, Speech at the international conference on the Middle East, 1November, \textit{Toamna Diplomatica, Septembrie-Decembrie 1994}, 1995. Unknown binding; speech at the French International Relations Institute, 29 November, in \textit{Toamna}...
Adrian Nastase confessed that he saw Central Europe (the geographical space in which he considered Romania inscribed) as an ante-room, where countries waited for Western expansion to happen through European integration; he therefore believed that this area would disappear soon as a geopolitical concept\textsuperscript{112}, whilst at the same time implicitly accepting the fact that such a mentality was induced by the very process of EU accession, that created these different levels of “almost Europe”. More importantly, he explicitly warned that, should Romania miss “for different reasons”\textsuperscript{(unspecific)}\textsuperscript{113} the movement towards Euro-Atlantic integration she would enter,

“inevitably, in the extended space of Eastern Europe, represented by the space of the former USSR”\textsuperscript{114}.

This affirmation was one of the rare moments in which the danger of remaining in the Russian sphere of influence was acknowledged. After six years of hesitations, pressures, pushes and pulls, the Romanian leadership could at least define a zone of comfort and danger in connection to the country’s position. However, as has been shown throughout the section, this did not mean that a clear policy and strategy had been developed, that would allow one to understand if the liminal still had a place in the leadership’s strategic thinking or not.

At a first glance, one would be tempted to say that liminal images (frontier, barrier) were invoked exclusively in a historical perspective, with specific emphasis on the fact that they did not belong in the present, because the political leaders sought to promote the idea that Romania was at the centre of Europe and not at its limes. However, specific declarations and attitudes regarding Romania’s foreign policy choices tended to suggest a liminal behaviour of trying to reconcile contradictory tendencies, which would fit the liminal definition. Hence, it can be concluded that although liminal images were not developed or strengthened as in previous epochs, they remained present in the overall strategic discourse (unfocused and erratic as it may have been).

**Pulling threads together**

The main idea that needs to be mentioned at this point is that whatever liminal images and metaphors were present, they were inscribed into the larger strategic discourse; they were not articulated in a specific discourse, as they had been in previous epochs. This sends us back to the remark that in the Romania of the early 1990s, liminal images were not structured as in Turkey, around particular themes, but rather drowned into the larger strategic discourse, which made their presence more sensitive to wider policy trends.

Regarding the sources of references to liminal images, their number is limited, as well as their nature. As explained in the introduction of the section, the particular type of political structure that Romania inherited from communist times lent itself to the existence of a very limited number of “administrators of truth”, particularly in matters of foreign policy, which were generally managed by the President and the foreign minister. This meant that primary sources in the matter came mainly from these personalities; furthermore, the absence of think

\textsuperscript{112} Adrian Nastase, 1996, “Tablete de politician”, *Cronica Româna*, 1 Aprilie.

\textsuperscript{113} Idem.

\textsuperscript{114} Idem.
tanks, a specialised press and experts also meant that very few qualified commentaries (which could have amounted to a consolidation or negation of elements of discourse) were made on the decisions that were taken or the declarations that were made. Certainly, there was such a thing as the voice of the opposition, whose role was played at that time by several centre and right wing parties; however, given the youth of the pluralistic party system, and the fact that a majority of the mass-media was still controlled by those in power, their voice was not often heard, and hence was not influential. This does not mean that opposition parties did not protest or have an opinion, for example when the administration seemed to get too close to Russia, and too far from NATO and the Council of Europe, or when President Iliescu invited the miners to Bucharest in order to crush the civil protest against his presidency in 1990. However, their criticisms and opinions were largely reactive and punctual, lacking in strategy just as much as the administration did. This was also a function of the fact that at the time Romania was in a period of transition, when internal matters would usually weigh more than external ones. A good example was the trip that the most prominent Romanian opposition leader took around some European countries in 1993. Whilst pressing for the country’s acceptance in Euro-Atlantic structures, he did not stress the geostrategic value of the country, but rather the need to push Romania to internal reforms through membership in these structures. Hence, the only reliable sources concerning the issue of liminality remained those stemming from the leadership of the period.

A second, very important characteristic of the context in which liminal images appeared is that it was somewhat fractured into two periods, from 1990 to 1994 and from 1994 to 1996. The first period hardly provides direct references to them. However, the actions and declarations undertaken in that period give a sense of in-between-ness and indecisiveness that can be associated with the negative connotations of being liminal (hesitation, adoption of contradictory policies in an ambiguous geographic position). The second period brings references to liminal images in a historic perspective, suggesting there is no application to the present. Therefore, it is fair to say that, in general the discursive trend of 1990-1996 did not develop liminal images, but kept them at a minimum, and in the past.

Another interesting feature of this interval was the fact that whatever references existed to liminal images, and foreign policy, they were inserted in texts or interviews directed primarily at a foreign public (generally officials of the EU, NATO or the US). Of the 17 texts quoted and examined in this section, 16 were delivered to foreign audiences, which indicates that at that time the leadership did not think necessary to debate or even voice these issues in front of a domestic public. This was a symptom of the centralised and extremely restricted monopoly on decision-making in this area; it was also a sign that the leadership did not feel comfortable with the issue it had to tackle. The fact that none of the texts exclusively dealt

with geostrategic issues, but were always embedded with wider internal, economic and social questions also indicated that Romania’s position was not well thought out, and came in the bag of other things to be resolved later. The question of the country’s geostrategic situation was as much in transition as the rest of the issues.

However few in quantity as they might have been in comparison with other topics (like internal reforms and similar matters), the texts tended to be convergent in the opinions they voiced, as well as the manner in which they were expressed. This meant that the idea of Romania’s situation in central Europe was constantly correlated with the denial of her placement in the East of the continent, as well as the warning against the stimulation of “discriminatory” acts towards her. (both President Iliescu and minister Adrian Nastase iterated this in their speeches). These opinions were also unwittingly echoing similar concerns encountered in the Turkish and Ukrainian cases, where the fear of being marginalised equally existed, fact which pushed Turkey (and Ukraine to a certain extent), as well as Romania, to reject the Eastern dimension of their geography.

Insofar as the wider methodological framework is concerned, this first period confirms that without a clear story behind them, liminal images appear unconvincing and tenuous. Since their capacity to represent linguistically the reality of the field is relatively limited due to the very nature of language that cannot encompass it all, they hinged extensively on the discursive context in which they existed. If the latter was not very well articulated, they lost in strength too.

2000-2004 - La même Jeanette autrement coiffée?\(^{116}\)

The reason I juxtapose the analysis of the 2000-2004 interval to that of the early 1990s is that during this particular period the people who were in power immediately after 1989 re-claimed the political leadership, after a four year break, during which the former opposition forces had the reigns of the country. As far as this analysis is concerned, the two intervals are part of the same discursive trend, insofar as they have largely the same authors. Given that, as I shall show, there are important continuities and changes occurring in the positions and images they vehiculated, I believe the examination of the two periods in adjacency to be appropriate to the construction of my argument.

The list of analysed texts exhibits, therefore, many of the “usual” suspects of the previously analysed interval. In addition to official declarations and speeches, I have also introduced memoirs written by former participants in the decision-making process, members of the Romanian Parliament and analysts. Therefore, this group of texts gathers both high level opinions, as well as echoes ideas that existed amongst “intellectuals of statecraft”, such as geopolitics analysts, policy experts and historians of culture.

\(^{116}\) Although this is an expression in French, it is largely used in Romania as the equivalent of the “plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose”.
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<td>Mircea Geoana, foreign affairs minister 2001-2004</td>
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The main continuity to be noted in terms of the context for the discourse under examination is the fact that the same presidential and governmental team held the directions of the country. Ion Iliescu was President anew, Adrian Nastase Prime Minister, and many other former decision-makers were shuffled around in different positions. Ideologically speaking, these were still the actors who had been part of the secondary echelons of the Communist Party and had voiced the opinions previously outlined.

Several notable changes altered the environment in which they operated, however. First of all, the Romanian market of political and strategic ideas was liberalised, as the system became more democratic and more open. This meant that in addition to official positions on strategic issues, other voices could be heard and could make a difference: the opposition parties, civil society organisations such as think tanks, press articles and analyses written by experts, parliamentary debates (available online), new histories and geographies, memoirs, collections of writings, speeches and interviews. It also became easier for the researcher to have access to key decision-makers. As a consequence, the number of sources available for examination for this period is significantly higher and more varied. I have used for it presidential speeches, the books written by Ion Iliescu in reference to his administration, memoirs, speeches and articles by Prime Minister Adrian Nastase, speeches by foreign affairs minister Mircea Geoana, analyses by various experts (military, political, geo-strategic, see list), parliamentary interventions and academic analyses on geopolitics. In 2004, Mircea Geoana, the foreign affairs minister, expressly recognised the role that think tanks and research groups had in the promotion of Romania’s image and policies. This was relatively a novel attitude insofar as it admitted the contribution that experts had made to the debate on the country’s position and voiced an invitation for them to continue to do so. It also suggested that the monopoly on the discourse was no longer officially held by decision-makers exclusively. The fact that references to liminal images and even developed arguments on the issue existed in such a variety of places attests to the fact that they were relatively widespread within the political establishment and, more importantly, that the liminal was a vibrant issue of concern in decision-making and analysis.

However, the most important change and discontinuity with the first period under examination, which is also the element that sheds light on why all of the above occurred, is the fact that between 1996-2000 the Romanian leadership firmly set the country onto a clearly defined strategic path of Euro-Atlantic integration, effectively nullifying in the discursive and afterwards (huh?) policy realm the possibility of alternatives; the use of a liminal imagery contributed to this outcome because it served to entrench the EU accession discourse. As shall be discussed and shown in a later section of the paper, a few crucial decisions coupled with an intense discourse concerning Romania’s geostrategic status changed the country’s hesitant outlook and lead to results which were reaped by the 2000-2004 administration (such as Romania’s entry into NATO, for example).

One feature of the liminal references in the 2000-2004 interval was that they conveyed a “thicker” image of Romania and a more detailed role for her in international affairs, which interacted in the public space, within a more dynamic process. Indeed, at this point one can speak of texts being developed, providing an image of Romania, but also a role, going together with that image. This was a very notable difference with the 1990-1996 interval, which allowed me to identify two kinds of texts.

I considered that texts, which included affirmations about how, what and where Romania is, referred to the country’s image, to the elements which made up her identity and self-perception. On the other hand, texts which referred to how and what the country does referred to her role, which could stem from her identity, but which was not a unique version or possibility of what the country could be doing. Generally, the image tended to be accepted, with debate intervening with respect to the role she might accomplish.

In order to best represent the main continuities and changes between the two discursive trends, it is interesting to evaluate them along the same coordinates; therefore for the 2000-2004 interval, I have looked at the issue of Romania’s geostrategic placement and how it was represented, the occurrence or recurrence of liminal images and the subject positioning towards Europe (EU) and NATO and the US. In addition to the features present in the previous discursive trend, I have looked at questions relating to the geopolitical role of the country. One important thing to mention is that this period is separated by the year 2002, when Romania was officially invited to join NATO; it is not a separation such as the one between 1990-1994/1994-1996, but more a peak year, which concentrated the occurrence of some images, signified the fading of others and opened the space for yet others to intensify and develop beyond an embryonic reference. 2000-2004 also tells the story of Romania’s move from the negative aspects of liminality to its positive ones, from the bad side of history to the good side of history (as we will hear one of her minister declare). As I shall show below, this was done through a discursive relocation of the country on both the geopolitical and the mental maps of Europe, which was done precisely with the help of liminal images and references.

Regarding Romania’s position in Europe, between 1996-2000 the right-wing leadership sought to mitigate the visions of the first Iliescu regime - which tried unsuccessfully to squeeze Romania into Central Europe - with the ones coming from outside (EU and the US), which placed Romania in Eastern Europe. By repeatedly using the term ‘south central Europe’ (as shall be detailed in the section dealing with the 1996-1999 discursive trend) they re-instated a geopolitical category which had been developed by Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga between the two world wars. This term constituted a happy medium, and seemed to represent best the fact that, although placed in the neighbourhood of the Balkans and Russia, Romania had characteristics which were similar to those of other Central European countries, such as an aspiration to Western values and civilisation.

Razvan Theodorescu, influential historian of culture and minister of culture in the second Iliescu administration (2000-2004), edited a book gathering various opinions about Romania’s place in the world. In it, he himself set to pacify the tensions that had previously arisen around the concept of Eastern Europe and explained in which way Romania was part of the South-East of the continent. First of all, he dismantled the idea that Eastern and Western Europe existed
as notions produced by the Cold War, which apparently was what American analysts and decision-makers believed\textsuperscript{118}; he gave back to the concept of Eastern Europe the civilisational merits which it had traditionally had:

\textit{“N’importe quelle fût la modalité de “lire” la carte européenne, son Orient a tenu toujours une place bien délimitée dans la construction qu’on appelle Europe. Une place qui n’a pas été forgée telle qu’on le croit trop souvent, par les temps très récents de la vassalité muscovite (…) Face à une Europe atlantique, protestante et catholique, qui représentera la façade océanique vers le Nouveau Monde, s’est trouvée une Europe orientale, orthodoxe, et en partie musulmane, bâtie sur la tradition de ce que le professeur Dimitri Obolenski appelait le “commonwealth byzantin”, suivi et imité par l’Empire Ottoman”\textsuperscript{119}.}

This argument was a necessary set up for subsequently explaining why Romania was in a good position in South-East Europe and made acceptable this way of seeing her placement:

\textit{“A son tour cette Europe Orientale était scindée en deux sous-zones: celle du Sud-Est Européen, mettant ensemble l’espace balkanique et celui carpato-danubien, avec la tendance toujours plus évidente d’extension vers l’espace pontique. Celui ci représenta la deuxième sous-zone de l’espace européen oriental, impliquant toujours un dialogue entre le monde orthodoxe et celui de l’Islam, malgré tant d’exaltations fondamentalistes avérées dans l’ex Yougoslavie. L’intérêt de ce sud-est européen, définies jadis dans un sense très large comme un espace géopolitique situé entre le point le plus septentrional de l’Adriatique et le point le plus septentrional de la mer Noire. Odessa, tel qu’il fut conçu depuis Karl Haushoffer jusqu’à Rupert von Schumacher, remplaçant le concepte traditionnel des Balkans, s’est accru et il est plus grand que jamais, vu le rôle majeur qu’il tient dans la politique planétaire”\textsuperscript{120}.}

I believe it was important to quote at length Prof. Theodorescu’s views because, as a member of the Iliescu government in 2000-2004, he represented the change in perspective that had occurred since 1990-1996 in a very articulate manner, which was able to reveal a few adjacent elements. Thus, aside from acceptance of the fact that Romania could by no means be considered, geographically or civilisationally, as purely Central European, this text indicates that Romanian authorities now engaged in interpreting their country’s position in an active fashion, seeking ways of proving how their placement at the confluence of several worlds could be useful. Gone were the instances when the argument would run as follows: Eastern Europe is a region with negative connotations that does not even exist, Romania has a natural inclination towards Europe and cannot possibly be part of Eastern Europe, hence she is part of Central Europe. In this alignment of ideas liminal images could not even fit, let alone be developed. On the contrary, in the newer vision, the notion of Eastern Europe was inscribed in a historical narrative, which offered a relatively convincing explanation of why Romania was an important place; as part of a region which had traditionally participated in the construction of Europe (writ large), it could retrieve a status of point of dialogue and convergence between


\textsuperscript{119} Idem, p. 29.

\textsuperscript{120} Idem, p. 30.
various influences. I do not suggest this was the “true” image of Romania, or that is how she should have been seen. What is important is that this line of argument opened up (or kept open) a discursive and geopolitical space in which an image of Romania in her various liminal stances (frontier, nexus, anchor, etc.) made sense, fitting in logically. It is interesting to note that Theodorescu does not even mention the name of “Romania”, but suggests her through references made to the carpato-danubian and pontic (Black-sea) spaces (which are traditional descriptors of the country’s position); by doing this, he expressed himself in spatial categories, somehow implying that Romania is the custodian of these reference points, going beyond her territory, a fact which immediately increased the perceived value of the country.

The difference between these two kinds of approaches fits very well with the explanation that Kenneth Gergen gives on self-narration in social life. He suggests that since narrative accounts are the stuff through which the world is made sense of, then acceptable narratives and stories have to follow particular criteria: establish a goal, an event to be explained, or they must have a “point”\textsuperscript{121}. The idea that Romania was part of Central Europe instead of Eastern Europe did not exhibit much of a point, especially since her past seemed to be seen a irrelevant to her future; however, when Romania’s position started to be put in the context of a wider history and of a role that she could fulfil for Europe, the story became richer and had a stronger point. The introduction of broad civilisational categories, such as the East and West enlarged the discursive space and allowed the possibility to imagine alternative situations in its flexibility, whereas narrower terms, such as Central Europe brought more rigidity and gave less space for manoeuvre.

This is why now, texts such as the following one became the norm, rather than the exception:

“A neo-Latin island in a Slavic region, Romania belongs to Central Europe and to South East Europe, areas that for centuries have been a melting pot of different cultures, trade routes and political interests. At the crossroads of these two intermingling, although strategically distinct and significant European areas, Romania enjoys a natural position as a transit corridor between them”\textsuperscript{122}. “

This paragraph gathers a few crucial coordinates of the image that was promoted of Romania between 2000-2004: “a neo-Latin island“ suggests the connection with Europe’s romance countries, it also refers to Romania’s olden role as the outpost of Roman civilisation on the way of barbarian invasions, namely the Slavs. This situation is further seasoned with attributes such as melting pot and crossroads, which seem to naturally point to the idea that Romania is a transit corridor between Europe’s different zones. The image is far more complex than depicted previously, and it even develops into a role for the country, that of strengthening security and political cooperation through the trilateral agreements Romania had initiated in


From geography to geopolitics, Romania’s journey along the liminal

1996-2000\textsuperscript{123}. This is a significant opinion to remember, because it exists as a continuation of policy and discourse initiated before the second Iliescu administration (and which shall be detailed in the next section. It also resonates with speeches and writings of various decision-makers, which show just how substantive the change in discourse had been on their side.

The first notable change I wish to point out is in President Iliescu’s own rendition of the meaning of Romania’s geographical location. Unlike the opinions voiced in the 1990-1996 interval, which distinctly lack an engagement with what Romania’s historical position meant for her future, in 2003 he could be found waxing on this issue:

“our definition as “frontier nation” bears the proof of our history. We developed at the confluence of important civilisation and geostrategic spaces- the Russian space, the Western and oriental space, defined on the Middle East-Black sea axes. (...) The Romanian nation, situated at the contact of the three tectonic plaques survived and gave birth to a special spiritual and civilisational matrix, which is active and creative. However, from a social and economic point of view, this placement, supremely disadvantageous, due to the frequent power changes at the three poles, has moved us sometimes from the periphery of the East to the periphery of the West, making us pay through serious delays in economic and political matters”\textsuperscript{124}.

This paragraph includes some novel elements insofar as Iliescu’s conceptions, and some old ones, carefully crafted in. Thus, the former President became more willing to acknowledge the idea that Romania’s frontier status actually had an impact on her as a country which went beyond the past; he pursued the logic of the frontier positioning in its positive consequences, emphasising the “special” qualities this brought Romania. Another, more subtle change, was the depiction of his country with adjectives indicating an active stance; thus he associated the frontier situation with an active people, who survived and gave birth to a spiritual matrix. However, this did not prevent President Iliescu to keep some of his favourite lines of argument alive, by juxtaposing them to the fresh image he depicted; the idea that a difficult history had a large impact on Romania, swaying her from one side to another\textsuperscript{125} toned down the optimism and dynamic image produced a few lines above, indicating the still difficult relation the President had with this question, which was also reproduced in the difficulty with which he dealt with the concepts of Central and South-East Europe, that he used interchangeably, as if to still uphold the idea that Romania was part, in fact, of Central Europe. Indeed, in one speech, President Iliescu admitted that he used the term South-East Europe in a conventional way, because, in fact, he believed it to be wrong, and merely the product of a “political context” rather than “objective” geography\textsuperscript{126}. Nevertheless, the President’s affirmations unwittingly

\textsuperscript{123} Idem.


underlined a tension, which existed as a result of a mismatch between the mental map of Europe and its conventional geographical map. No geographer would contest the fact that Romania was considered as part of Europe; however, what many analysts would contest was that she was part of the democratic Europe of values which she aspired to, and which was considered to be the “real” Europe, a geopolitical and civilisational construct that was not co-terminus with its geography.

It is interesting to note that although this argument never surfaced as such in decision-making circles, it did lie in between the lines of some geopolitical analyses published in that period; “Romania’s Geopolitics”, a treatise on contemporary geopolitical matters concerning Romania, undertook an elaborate survey on the dilemma of the definitions of Central Europe, concluding that there is no definitive opinion on the question and therefore it is not established if Romania is part of it\[127\]. This was an important opinion to uphold, because it gave Romanians hope that they might get there soon. Yet, however divided opinions might have been on this subject, the general idea that Romania was placed in a “zone of contact”, or that she “belonged organically to two different political and economic zones” which she was meant to reconcile\[128\] was accepted and further perpetuated.

In 2001 Ion Iliescu explained the official position of the establishment on this issue, by affirming that “Romania is important for the space in which she is because she makes the link between the South-Eastern European space and Central Europe. In this area of Central Europe Romania and Poland have equally important roles, Poland to the North, Romania to the South. (...) through her geostategic position and through her historic role as a factor of equilibrium Romania is a very important country for her region, including for solving the problem of the adjacent space in South–Eastern Europe (the Western Balkans)”\[129\]. Long gone was the hesitancy of 1990-1996; this text uses a well known hailing mechanism, of mentioning the “geostrategic position” in association with the idea that Romania links different regions of Europe and is a factor of equilibrium, thus bringing together the notion that there are benefits to be reaped from this situation; this was an association of ideas that the President did not use in his previous mandate, since he was more focused on stressing the divergence aspect of a liminal position, rather than the convergence one. This idea was further echoed in his 2003 writings, quoted above, where, along with talking about the frontier nation, Iliescu gave details about how this feature was important:

“I believe that the place where our region is on the map is destined to play a crucial role in the future. (...) Personally, I think that Romania’s role of “plaque tournante” in intra- and extra- European relations should play a role in the evaluation of the country’s geostrategic utility\[130\]. As is well known, Romania owns a large portion

\[127\] Silviu Negut, Vasile Cucu, 2004, Geopolitica României, Târgoviste: Transversal, p. 188.
\[128\] Idem, p. 163.
of the Black Sea shore; through the Black Sea’s connection to the Mediterranean, Central Asia and the Middle East, this area becomes an important link”\textsuperscript{131}.

This is one of very few occasions or texts in which President Iliescu spent more than a paragraph on what Romania’s significance was from a geopolitical point of view, bringing the connector feature she seemed to enjoy, into a future value. Liminal images such as “plaque tournante” did not fit awkwardly in the text and even offered a novel image, as compared to the older crossroads, nexus or confluence. It signified not only a somewhat reformed vision of the President, but was also echoing a more general feeling that Romania could participate in a redefinition of her own position, one that would bring in a more dynamic image, based on old coordinates. Indeed, as of 2000, other decision-makers also made their views heard, portraying a Romania that was a trait of union (trait d’union) between various Europes, but at the same time European herself.

Petre Roman, foreign minister for a brief spell of time in 2000-2001, offers an interesting illustration of that vision. In his book, “Libertatea ca datorie” (Liberty as duty) he wrote at length about what Bucharest, the Romanian capital, represented in its past:

“Bucharest was (in the inter war era) an almost natural trait of union between Orient and Occident. (…) It offered the image of a unique combination between Western culture and rationality and joyous Eastern life, representing a type of civilised Orient, in which the qualities of the two worlds were mixed in a refined synthesis”\textsuperscript{132}.

The reason why I quoted this paragraph is that Bucharest is in fact used as a metonymy for the entire country, about which the author says, a few pages later:

“Romania’s destiny as a free nation is inextricably linked with her Western orientation, especially towards Europe. Certainly, it is not to say that we should copy the Occident in a servile manner (emphasis mine). (…) we should, on the contrary, bring it our better part. We are a far away extension of the Occident, in another horizon and history, infused with other essences”\textsuperscript{133}.

Such was the ideational matrix from within which Petre Roman was found to argue in a subsequent speech that: “we have a strategic role as a catalyst for the projects which aim to connect the European space with the central Asian and the Caspic one. We are a country of Central East Europe and our participation in the economic projects of this area must reflect actively our strategic bridge position towards the East and the energetic fluxes of this space. We are a connection bridge between the geographic space of the Baltic States and the Black Sea, we are situated at the confluence of Adriatic and Danubian interests, and this can complement a new attribute of our geostrategic dimension in the South European flank\textsuperscript{134}. I believe these two extracts relatively adequately showed the contours that members of her elite intended to

\textsuperscript{131} Idem, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{132} Petre Roman, 2000, Libertatea ca datorie, Bucuresti: Paideia, p. 157.
\textsuperscript{133} Idem, pp. 165-166.
\textsuperscript{134} Petre Roman, 2000, Speech at Conference on Foreign Policy and Romania’s Euro-Atlantic integration”.
give Romania. It abounded in liminal references, and, more importantly, in indications that
decision-makers intended to give her a more dynamic outlook. They introduced connotative
chains around the Western orientation - Central and East – Central Europe – the image of the
bridge as strategic position. Unlike the 1990-1996 interval, when there seemed to be no thought
given to what Romania could do with the geographical situation she was in, this period was
much richer in options. Mentions of a role for the country also became more frequent. In 2001
foreign minister Mircea Geoana was expressing the wish of the administration

“that Romania, as expression of the spirit of Western Europe, is ready to assume the
role of translating the simple geographic figuration of the so-called Eastern border of
the EU in a launching board for democratic values in the neighbouring spaces”\textsuperscript{135}.

He drew the image of a linchpin, whose main task would be to irradiate European values
in its neighbourhood. At the same time, Geoana iterated the idea that finally the mental
and conventional geographies of Romania’s place in Europe started to coincide. It was this
coincidence which allowed for a more substantial engagement with what Romania’s role
would be in the future.

The fact that after 2000 liminal images such as exemplified above abounded was a double-
edged sword. It indicated that decision-makers acknowledged Romania’s liminal position
AND they wished to capitalise on it; it also indicated that there was no clear way on how to
do it, which is why it enjoyed so many expressions. It could equally be considered to indicate
the fact that Romanian elites had not yet found the language or actions through which the
coincidence of geopolitics and geography could be enacted. Economic, political, military
factors, everything seemed to count in one way or another (these were all elements of the
country’s identity, but their equal emphasis produced a dispersed image), which was also a
reason why it was difficult to identify a consistent image or theme by which to classify texts,
in this context an ideological classification made more sense.

Perhaps the best example of the aforementioned failure was the occasion of Romania’s
invitation to NATO accession, in 2002. This was an event which had been awaited for 13 years
by the Romanian people. The country had missed a first wave of enlargement in 1997, mainly
due to the hesitations and ambiguity of the early 1990s\textsuperscript{136}. George W Bush gave a speech in
front of Romanian crowds and amongst many congratulatory statements he also made a very
bold one, in which he suggested that one of Romania’s potential roles as member of NATO
was to be a bridge towards Russia and the East:

“Romania will strengthen our lives as a bridge towards the new Russia. For centuries,
Romania’s geography was a source of dangers. Now you can count on our alliance,
stretching a hand of cooperation over the Black Sea.”\textsuperscript{137}


\textsuperscript{136} Current declassified documents tend to suggest that the army was not allocated enough funds for the necessary modernisation
in that period, suggesting a conscious and de facto refusal to join the Alliance, despite declarations to the contrary.

President Bush did not give much detail about what he meant with this statement, but it did send Romanian political elite into frenzy, trying to understand what the American President wanted to say. The ensuing debates brought forward the confusion that existed, but also a better definition of possible roles the country could play. Beyond that, another element that Bush’s speech revealed was the echo that the Romanian discourse on the predicaments of her geography had obviously had with foreign publics; out of many other issues the American President could have emphasised (improvement of the army, democratisation, economic progress, system efficiency), he chose the geopolitical one, thus already giving a particular status to what Romanian accession to NATO meant.

**From the periphery of Europe to the margin of NATO**

Whilst trying to understand what George Bush had meant, Romanian elites revealed one crucial element: in just one political move (the invitation to be part of NATO) Romania had achieved a great geopolitical leap, from hovering at the periphery of Euro-Atlantic values to becoming, to a certain extent, their guarantor from the in-side of the Alliance. As explicated previously, an invitation to become a member of NATO amounted to an official recognition that Romania was a trustworthy and functional democracy. The country had not moved an inch geographically; however, in the geopolitical mental map of Europe she had taken a giant step, from the out-side to the in-side. This recognition did not go wasted on Romanian elites, who seized the opportunity to portray it as an important step forward on the country’s way to complete and strengthen her modernisation project.

“For Romania -and not only- accession to NATO represent the fulfilment of a historical dream: that of confirming her belonging to the family of civilised Western nations. Even as early as the birth of the Romanian states, this oriental Latinity, combined in her proceedings with the only Latin orthodoxy, has looked for alliances and her future in the West. In the same vein, Romanians have strived to get rid of ottoman rule and the threat of Russian expansionism. (…) This is why the wish to stop being isolated from the family of her own destiny in the periphery of Europe and history was what pushed Romania further”138.

Severin’s text aptly summarised the discursive trends which had been present in the definition of the country, thus placing the accession to NATO in continuity and resonance with Romania’s modernity project. All the main elements were present: the Latinity of the people – a sign of connection with other romance countries - the constant struggle against rival empires, the running away from a peripheral spot in history.

Such ideas were equally present in analyses written by experts of newly created research institutes, as, for example, the Centre of Security and Strategic Studies. In an article titled “The Romanians and the modern West: synchronisation, isolation, and Euro-Atlantic integration”

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the author presented a brief history of relations between Romania and the West, affirming they were characterised by a stage of synchronisation, when Romania tried to adopt Western values in the late 1700s until 1939, isolation, for the 1944-1989 period and an attempt at re-integration in the post-communist era. For this last period he stressed that acceding to NATO represented the fact that Romania had seriously (emphasis mine) opted to get out from the grey zone of Europe and become a regional stability factor\textsuperscript{139}. Two indications are provided by this text. One, that indeed, the peril of Romania remaining in a grey zone had been widely acknowledged and feared throughout the establishment (this also represented an implicit recognition of the result that early 1990s policies had yielded); two, that the country’s elites seemed ready to move away from it, as another text from the same series seemed to suggest:

“axiomatically, we can now define the geostrategic position of Romania as the South-East frontier of NATO”\textsuperscript{140}.

Even more significantly, this same text noted that if Romania had been in the way of all hardships (specifically mentioning the old chroniclers who had instated that expression), now it had moved “at the intersection of Europe’s priorities”\textsuperscript{141}; in saying that the analyst quoted Bruce Jackson, the US secretary for NATO. I believe this text illustrates in a very telling manner the kind of dialogue and exchange that was unfolding around the liminality issue in Romania. Once the tie with older images had been reconnected, they found a place in debates about the present and the future. Their use also allowed the construction of a progressive narrative from one state to another, the identification of a sense in Romania’s evolution and development.

The dialogue was echoed in parliamentary debates subsequent to the 2002 event, which proudly declared that

“this step marks Romania’s return to the great family of European democracies and values, from where history has brutally chased us away (…) Romania’s geostrategic role becomes ever more important, as a necessary connection between the north, centre and the South-East of Europe, with access to the Black Sea and the commercial routes of Central Asia and the Caucasus”\textsuperscript{142},

and

“the United States of America have granted us the role of outpost and bridge over the Black Sea to Russia”\textsuperscript{143}.

All these references pointed to the big victory of being finally accepted, and signified the appearance of texts where Romanian elites developed the voice of an insider - with less talk


\textsuperscript{141} Idem, p. 73.

\textsuperscript{142} Iosif Armas, 2002, Member of the House of Representatives, Speech in the house of Representatives, 22 November.

\textsuperscript{143} Norica Nicolai, senator, 2002, Speech to the Senate, 26 November.
of us and them, and more talk of us within - but also underlined the tension existing between finally belonging to a long desired family, yet being the member of that family who is first or most likely to be in touch or contaminated by influences coming from outside. Also interesting to note, in this momentous event Romania’s agency was ignored, most texts reverting to the idea of a third entity, “history” or “destiny”, that had finally turned a favorable eye on her; the complex of the ill-loved prodigal son still lingered, faced with a brand new can of worms: how to go on after achieving one of his main goals.

The post-2002 years saw the establishment coming up with a few proposals, embedded in a variety of texts. Claudiu Degeratu, a well known sociologist and political analyst offered a potential role for what Romania could be in the aftermath of her NATO accession:

“At the edge of NATO, Romania must become one of the models for the new profile of the countries invited to join, a source of inspiration in the field of military reform and must continue with the record established in the past years of being a reliable partner in important operations or international coalitions”144.

The ideas were abstract, but what mattered was the acceptance of the fact that Romania was to be found in the margin of the Alliance - and therefore had to find a role for herself as such - and the newfound potential part of model for other countries. Indeed, the possibility existed that, once accepted in the Alliance, Romanian elites would re-iterate the idea that their country was Central European and would seek roles other than based on her actual geographic position, namely on the South-Eastern flank of NATO. However, the position of being inside and at the margin was rather more comfortable than being on the outside of the margins and therefore this type of suggestion further opened the discursive space for developing the margin issue, and along with it, a seemingly more determined attitude on the international scene.

Mircea Geoana, foreign minister, started talking about a “geostrategic vocation” that Romania had, and about the responsibilities that came with it:

“(the vocation) determines us to have a voice in the wider Middle East, where we wish to contribute to the spread of Euro-Atlantic values” 145.

As can be noted in this text and others, he spends no time in detailing what the geostrategic vocation means, because, as in previous eras, the assumption is that through this expression, all the coordinates of Romania’s position are known and understood. Not only does he make this assumption, but as of 2003 one witnesses an interesting change in texts; the geostrategic situation is increasingly associated with responsibilities that Romania supposedly has towards her neighbors, in spreading democracy and stability (although not fully developed until 2005-2006)146. Even further, for the first time in official texts, the foreign minister admits that

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144 Claudiu Degeratu, 2003, editorial, “Culoarul de securitate Marea Baltica-Marea Neagra”, Ziua, 4 Aprilie.
146 The foreign minister does mention occasionally the help Romania wishes to bring to the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine,
Romanian elites ultimate goal is soon to end Romania’s position as a frontier of NATO and eventually EU, by encouraging further enlargement to the East and the Western Balkans.

“It is important that Romania does not remain for long the Eastern border of NATO and the EU, although for us this is a remarkable historical achievement. Our interest is that European enlargement goes as far as possible, and only then Romania could indeed be in Central Europe, both geographically and strategically. Romania needs a secondary route to the West, through the Balkans, and a secure zone of peace and stability around her”¹⁴⁷.

I believe this speech is important because it spells out allusions which were made previously in 2002 and even before, and it is subsequently echoed in more frequent mentions about how Romania will be useful for Europe and herself in the future. For example, in a 2004 intervention presenting the activity of the Romanian foreign ministry Geoana even explained why the country adopted this position: “Romania has been for far too long at the border between empires, between systems and cultures. Romania’s interest is to be a catalyst of change for other countries, in order to help them in the same way as Western countries helped her”¹⁴⁸. Acknowledging Romania’s interstitial condition as something which has brought hardship on the country, but also the potential of being a “catalyst for change”, summed up the double aspect of her liminality; it also signified that in the view of Romanian leadership, accession to NATO offered the opportunity to activate the positive side of her geostrategic positioning, leaving behind the negative one.

This idea trend tied in perfectly with the re-inscription of Romania’s geopolitical value in the wider historical trends of modernization and the rush to the West. “Geography was finally generous with Romania” ¹⁴⁹ an analyst said, while Mircea Geoana affirmed that

“in an instinctual way, naturally, based on the original myth of our Latinity and romanity, Romanian elites of yesterday and today rushed to the West, in order to anchor their country to the world to which they have always aspired, and about which they have always wondered whether it accepted them as full equals or as peripheral relatives. (…) This is why NATO accession is a historical event of great proportions, after centuries of identitary meandering and national questioning.”¹⁵⁰.

The leitmotivs of the natural tendency towards Europe combined with the marginality question were both present, both echoing texts which had been uttered throughout the late

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1990s (as shall be shown) and the early 2000 (see Severin, Roman-2000-2002). The terms of “identitary meandering” and “national questioning” brought an unusual illustration of what being at the intersection of history and geography seemed to have meant to the Romanian people, and especially its elites: an issue of definition of identity, and the development of a series of initiatives in order to negotiate and eventually affirm it. Their iteration made a full circle in terms of being present at a moment when a new discourse was launched, marked by the gradual transition from a political discourse emphasizing Romania’s NATO accession to a substantiation of the member status, by showing what benefits Romania could bring as a new member and what interests she intended to promote. However, what this kind of texts also showed was how dependent Romanian elites where on the European gaze and actions, which would accept and approve the proposal made by them, or not.

**Pulling threads together**

On the whole, the texts and opinions expressed in the 2000-2004 interval exhibited a greater engagement and concern with the question of Romania’s positioning in terms of liminal images and references. The improved nature of the political system favoured multiple voices to be heard and consolidated various views on this issue. Indeed, compared with the 1990-1996 years, the number of those who spoke on the issue had substantially increased. Over xx (don’t forget!) texts, less than half belonged to Ion Iliescu, and about xx (don’t forget) belonged to the foreign minister, Mircea Geoana, while the rest belonged to various other decision-makers and analysts. It seemed that decision-making and the “administration” on the discourse on Romania’s position had been transferred to the executive branch. The variety of speakers also implied a variety of publics; the most important change in this respect was the fact that the Romanian public was targeted far more often than before, making the issue more present in debates. No matter how much the latter varied in form and substance, there seemed to be a consensus about the fact that Romania was indeed a country in an interstitial strategic position, whose history had brought her to an important phase of her modernisation process, that of substantiating her European identity and fully developing a role for it. The 2000-2004 texts show the journey that the country undertook from being at the periphery of the mental map of Europe to integrating its community of values and becoming its margin; essentially, it was about making all the way from the outside to the inside, and about making the mental map of Europe coincide with its geographical one.

Yet, the crucial point that must be remembered in connection to this period, is that it could not have been possible without the 1996-2000 years, which constitute the subject of the next section.


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### From Geography to Geopolitics, Romania’s Journey Along the Liminal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1990-1996</th>
<th>2000-2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nr.of texts/nr. of authors</td>
<td>18/6</td>
<td>25/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Mostly foreign;</td>
<td>Foreign and domestic publics. Roughly equally spread;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject positioning</td>
<td>Romania-Central Europe inferior to Europe; “poor relative”; thwarted attempt at being considered central European;</td>
<td>Europe/West arbiter of democratic values; source of guidance, approval or condemnation; Romania-Central South East Europe empowered, more balanced rapport with Europe; still has to catch up with modernity project; attempt at shedding the “poor relative” complex; Europe/West perceived more like a partner;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicate analysis</td>
<td>Romania placed on the way of all difficulties, has “suffered” the hardships of history, underdeveloped, waiting to be accepted in Euro-Atlantic structures, carrying a difficult communist inheritance, generally reactive and passive; static image</td>
<td>Europe/West reaping the benefits of having been protected by the countries of central/Eastern Europe, richer relative, occasionally ignorant and unwise in its rejection and criticism of Romania, provider of Benefits, arbiter of democracy; dynamic image Romania pursuing the modernity project, active, emitting interests, proposing outlooks for the future of NATO and Europe, “on the good side of history”, wishing to get rid of the “enfant mal aimé” complex, defining her own area of belonging in Europe, participating in the European project, partner, joining the family; Europe/West partner, interlocutor, family, destiny;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liminal images/references</td>
<td>Exclusively in the past: position at the intersection of great power interests and clashes thereof, through mention of protection of Europe, reference to the barrier quality; emphasis on divergence</td>
<td>Zone of contact, melting pot, crossroads, frontier nation, link, factor of equilibrium, bridge, plaque tournante, trait of union, periphery, border, connection, model, window, promoter; emphasis on convergence and power of projection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table indicates that the two periods examined are opposed in ideas and arguments. They constitute a good example of selective memory with respect to how elements of discourses are picked and chosen from existent cultural and historical material. They also show that whereas in the first period the dialogue with past utterances was negative, leaders were trying to distance Romania from the old liminal images, and tried to initiate a dialogue with Europe by attempting...
to convince everyone that Romania was part of the geopolitical notion of Central Europe. In the second interval, a positive dialogue with past utterances had been established, and they were re-stated and rearticulated in new connotation chains. As could be seen throughout this section, the subject positioning between Romania, Europe and the West in general did not radically change, although it did evolve to a certain degree. The reader remembers that at the end of 1996 Romania was left in a position of ambiguous and grudging inferiority in relation to Europe, with her leaders denouncing a potential new Iron Curtain descending to isolate her from a newly found way to prosperity; as in olden days, Europe continued to be seen as the source of all things civilised and democratic, and therefore the arbiter of progress in this part of the world, but also as an almost unjust, bigger brother, whimsical and inattentive to the efforts done by his poorer relatives to catch up. On the other hand, Romania was portrayed as a victim of an unfair history and difficult geographic position, trying to get back to the family to which she felt she naturally belonged, but being treated harshly. No explanation was given for her ambiguous flirtation with undemocratic values, other than a “difficult inheritance” from the communist regime and a rough history. What role did liminal images and references play in this picture of passive stubbornness?

The role was relatively small, although not completely neglected. This was mainly due to the fact that Romanian leaders, and particularly Ion Iliescu, were bent on the idea that Romania had to be seen as a Central European country, and not as being part of the East of the continent. Associating East Europe with the negative connotations of the Cold War, necessarily produced a rejection of images, which, by stating the country’s interstitial situation, would also point to her marginality or peripheral situation. Therefore, the compromise that was found was to acknowledge the liminal status of the country in the past, without implying that this status had a particular relevance for her future. As has been shown, this pushed the texts in various uncomfortable corners, and cut the dialogue with past discourses that had been ongoing in other epochs (see historical section of the chapter).

However, if in the first period Romania was associated with Central Europe-stability-troubled neighbourhood, whereas in the second period the chain became thicker: Romania was associated with South-East Europe, with being a bridge, an anchor and a contact zone promoter and Upholder of values. In addition, she appeared more active than passive. Essentially, however, the most important thing had been the country’s relocation on the mental map of Europe, made through the acceptance of objective geographical coordinates in combination with regional and cultural influences. Significantly, the discourse on the liminal during the second period had become strong enough as to preclude other possibilities in the realm of policy, such as a rapprochement with Russia, for example, or a turn away from democratic reforms.

The images used and re-iterated started to fit and represent better Romania’s liminal condition also because they were, by now, accompanied by narrative threads and descriptions that gave them more depth and sense. They were also more accepted and more acceptable to the decision-makers, who had understood that it was necessary to own up to their situation before they could change it in real terms. In other words, Romania’s liminal characteristics had
to be integrated in order to make them truly useful for her and for Europe. Their strengths and limitations had to be known.

Their strength came from the fact that they were connected to the European project, to the European idea; they could act as markers on the way to reaching it. Indeed, because Romania exhibits a case of a full trajectory from outside barrier of Europe to inside frontier and self-proclaimed democratic anchor (as Poland), it is easier to observe the way in which liminal images slip into each other, constituting a grammar of sorts of the discourse of the liminal, as outlined above.

**Picking up the pieces - relocating Romania on the mental map of Europe 1996-2000**

This section of the chapter on Romania takes a step back chronologically and focuses on the 1996-2000 interval. As previously mentioned in sections above, this period represents a turning point in Romanian contemporary history and political discourse, because it signified the undertaking of a clear and firm commitment towards a sustained relation with the West, in particular the EU and NATO. Given the hesitations and ambiguous attitudes exhibited by the first Iliescu administration, one cannot stress enough the importance that the declarations and acts of the new president, Emil Constantinescu and his new team, had in order to reclaim the trust and confidence of Western powers in Romania. I shall not go into the detail of the situation Romania was in. Suffice it to say that the country had a still shaky economic condition - rising unemployment, insufficient privatisation, mismanagement of public funds (to say the least) - a political scene in which public institutions such as the national television and the written press were not entirely free, the issue of private property was not solved, nor that of geopolitical allegiance. The reform of the army was stalling compared to other NATO aspiring countries, and, foreign policy wise, the attitude of the Iliescu administration towards the war in former Yugoslavia had been at best ambiguous and at worst duplicitous. All these factors had sapped the trust that Western powers might have had in Romania and presented her new democratic right wing political leadership with a significant challenge ahead of them.

President Emil Constantinescu and his team were coming from a coalition of right, centre right and social-democratic parties, who had come to power on a reform agenda and on the specifically declared orientation towards Euro-Atlantic institutions. No matter how incomplete the reforms had been in Romania, the Constantinescu administration performed in a system that was more open than before. Therefore, it was possible to hear the opinions and texts on different issues coming from a variety of sources. However, it must be stressed that they remained in the hands of an elite public and intellectuals of statecraft. This was also the case with the liminal images and references, which started to emerge in public discourse.

Below, a list of texts that I examined in order to trace the presence of the liminal. There is evidence suggests that Romanian authorities condoned exports towards Serbia when the latter was under embargo, and President Iliescu could be heard multiple times affirming that Serbia was not performing ethnic cleansing, since in fact the conflict was based on religious, and not ethnic criteria. The point was that he was using semantics in order to avoid to publicly condemn the Milosevic regime.
a variety of authors, but a similarity in the sources of the statements examined. By 1996 the sources of information and debate on foreign policy had increased, but not exponentially, as expertise had yet to develop on many issues, and think tanks had not gained solid ground yet in the area. However, these statements are representative of the wider debate amongst Romanian elites, since they gather not only presidential texts and Parliamentary debates, but also articles published in the media as well as books written on the subject. The secondary literature supports the pervasiveness of this type of arguments at the time. Texts were addressed both to a domestic and a foreign public, indicating the widening of the political debate, especially necessary given that during this period a crucial shift in geopolitical shift occurred, as shall be shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emil Constantinescu, Romanian President 1996-2000</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>România în pragul noului mileniul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emil Constantinescu</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Caspian Energy to Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emil Constantinescu</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Interesul national si politica de securitate a României in perspectiva secolului XXI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emil Constantinescu</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Speech on the occasion of national festivities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emil Constantinescu</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Speech at Council on Foreign Relations of the Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emil Constantinescu</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Securitatea Europeana, mosteniri ale trecutului, sfidari ale viitorului</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emil Constantinescu</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Speech at the NATO + 5 Consacrata reconstrucției Europei de sud-est</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emil Constantinescu</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Speech- Lansarea Programului National privind realizarea unui coridor economic intre tarile Asiei Centrale si Europa cu tranzitarea României</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emil Constantinescu</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Speech about the end of the war in former Yugoslavia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emil Constantinescu</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Speech on Bringing Caspian Energy to Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emil Constantinescu</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Speech at Chatham House</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adrian Severin, foreign affairs minister, 1996-1997</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Locurile unde se construieste Europa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian Severin, as political analyst</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1998 Anul diplomatici eseistice in România</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe Petre, presidential Counsellor</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Interview with author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrei Plesu, foreign affairs Minister, 1997-2000</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Cortina de oboseala, newspaper article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandru Nicolae, House of Representatives</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Intervention on the issue of sending troops in Bosnia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugen Nicolicia, House of Representatives</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Intervention on the issue of sending troops to Albania</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
That which is necessary to know about texts and discourse in this period is that they refer to a discursive trend, dealing with the positioning of Romania in Europe and the world, and two decisive episodes, which have been crucial in determining that very positioning. The two episodes are the policy initiative of initiating trilateral treaties with neighbouring countries and the decision to support the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999. These three elements are relatively tightly interwoven and therefore difficult to separate into discrete sections. I have looked at the discursive trend as the more general context in which the two policy initiatives occurred. In addition to all this, it is important to know that arguments were developed with NATO and eventually EU accession in mind, in that order respectively. Although it had become relatively clear by 1996 that Romania was not going to be invited to join the alliance in 1997, the card which the new leadership played was to act as if that were an event that would sooner or later occur. This period is the one during which the discourse on the liminal re-introduced historical references to the issue, consolidating the existence of references, thus strengthening certain avenues of the possible, such as a Western orientation, above others, gradually making these unconceivable, or at least illegitimate, as the Kosovo episode will show.

**Breathing new life into old concepts**

Andrei Plesu, former foreign minister and presidential counsellor, suggested in 1996
that Romania was in dire need of a change of image. Lamenting an East-West divide in Europe, which he considered a rather new fact (instituted with the advent of the Cold-War) he advocated for Romania a return to Europe that would be done not through blind imitation of it, but rather by bringing back the values of the East to it: capacity for invention and for quick improvement. For Romania, it was also time to go from living in the realm of the possible, of endless projects, to living in the real world. This argument might not sound or look new in this analysis, since its presence was noted in a previous section, but it is in 1996-2000 that it started to be heard and translated into action.

Another argument that is known to the reader by now is the (re)positioning of Romania in South-East Europe; it was present in the 2000-2004 period, but it had been (re)launched by the Constantinescu administration. An interview with Professor Zoe Petre, historian and active political figure of the late 1990s (due to her role as presidential counsellor) shed an interesting light about this relocation. Professor Petre affirmed that one of the first things she and the President had to do after receiving the reins of power in 1996 was to negotiate a new vision of Romania’s position with the senior staff of the foreign ministry, who were still bent on upholding the idea that Romania was a Central European country. Instead, what was aimed for was the substitution of this unconvincing idea with a geopolitical reformulation that had been elaborated in the interwar era by the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga, and which was considered more adequate by the new leadership. Professor Petre thought that it offered Romania the opportunity of saying: “we are not of the Balkans and we are not of Central Europe, but as a space in-between we can find a way to reconcile these two zones of influence into something productive”. The aim was to portray Romania as a space of productive dialogue. However, in adopting this view, the 1996 leadership was itself developing an important dialogue with the voices and opinions of the past, thus initiating Romania’s re-inscription into the narrative of her own destiny. By insisting on this, it showed how necessary the reconnection with traditional arguments was in order to be able to imagine a future that made sense for the country. The single most important indicator of success for this move was that even when the democratic alliance forces fell from power, those who had initially refused to engage the past, the second Iliescu administration, took up the idea of Romania’s South-East European position, and sought to develop it even further (see Theodorescu, Pop, Geoana). A relevance of the past in the case of present decisions was also underlined in one of the first serious foreign policy moves that were undertaken in 1996.

In 1996 the leadership decided to send Romanian troops to join the SFOR operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for the peace-keeping mission undertaken by NATO. This decision was made roughly a year after the new government came to power and was intended to signify the country’s wish that her pro-NATO declarations be taken seriously. This decision did not go by uncontested by the voices of opposition, expressed particularly in Parliamentary debates; however, public opinion, in general supportive of NATO policies, and the democratic

154 Idem.
155 Interview conducted in March 2006.
156 Letter sent by the President to the Parliament in December 1996.
majority managed to get this project through. It constituted one of the more notable occasions in which the Romanian leadership of the moment chose to reconnect with what it saw as Romanian history and tradition and brought the past back into the debate about the present and the future of the country. During parliamentary debates when members of the opposition condemned the idea of supporting NATO troops in Bosnia, especially given that Romania was not even part of NATO and had slim chances of being invited to join the alliance, one of the main counterarguments was historical; they referred to the fact that both in the First and Second World Wars Romanian troops had fought outside the territory of the country, thus proving their commitment to causes greater than Romania’s short term interests. Sending troops to support the NATO operation in Bosnia seemed to fit within this logic, parliamentary debates suggested, and at the same time provided the opportunity to make a connection with the past, which had not previously been stressed. In addition to that, some of the Parliamentarians added that Romanians had to be aware of the fact that NATO did not aim to integrate armies, but countries, which meant that beyond military prowess, the country had to step up and undertake the necessary democratic and economic reforms. Making these connections opened the space for bringing back in liminal images and references in connection to Romania’s destiny and identitary path, as some of President Emil Constantinescu’s speeches showed. On several official trips to the United States, where he addressed the US Congress and the students of Columbia University, he spent a significant amount of time explaining his and his administration’s vision on Romania’s geopolitical value. In June 1998, at Columbia, he affirmed:

“(…) Romanian history and civilisation represent the products of a synthesis. A synthesis and a bridge between Central Europe, Eastern Europe and South Eastern Europe. This is how N. Iorga, Romanian historian, saw the ultimate sense of Romanian history: as a passing space, a place of confluences and beneficial merging of ideas and experiences (…). We understand better what the Romanian civilisation represents in Europe and in the world: an outpost of Latin civilisation at the border of the Roman Empire, Athleta Christi, a combatant, a citadel against Ottoman expansion; but also a space of fertile syntheses, which I shall mention because they are to be found in the destiny of my country between two millennia: the synthesis which inscribes Romania in the space of Central Europe, manifested through good relations with Poland and Hungary, the synthesis between Central Europe and Southern Europe, which gave birth to the unique concept of South-Eastern Europe, close to the Balkans, but different from them precisely because she integrates, at the north of the Danube, the connection spaces between Romania and the centre of the continent (…), and the synthesis of the Black Sea. Romania, connected to the Pontic-Mediterranean space through the Constanta harbour, but connected through the Danube, to the whole of Europe up to Rotterdam, becomes, in this context an essential “plaque tournante” of the great axes of the future (…)”\[157\].

Steps towards Euro-Atlantic commitment

\[157\] Emil Constantinescu, 1998, Speech, Columbia University, 10 June.
As part of its mission to revamp Romania’s image, the Constantinescu administration designed an initiative aimed at the creation of “security triangles” - security alliances with the country’s neighbours - having at the centre Romania, e.g. the Poland-Romania-Ukraine, Romania-Austria-Hungary, Greece-Bulgaria-Romania, Bulgaria-Turkey-Romania triangles. The constitutive principle of this structure was precisely the idea that Romania was placed at the intersection of several areas of confluence and she should be using that to her advantage. The underlying message was that Romania could bring stability and foster dialogue “through the creation of regional structures that would ensure a friendly neighbourhood for NATO”\(^{158}\).

I believe this initiative constitutes evidence of utmost importance for this analysis, because it is one of the few tangible policies which aimed to operationalise the oft mentioned idea that Romania was valuable in virtue of her geopolitical position; it is also important because it signified the realisation that in order to make Romania an interesting player on the political map, her leaders understood that there was an itinerary to follow, actions to be undertaken. To a large extent this policy initiative represents the discourse on liminality in action. In it, there are also the germs of what in the period 2000-2006 became a more developed argument around Romania as a security provider and democratic anchor for the region.

Several things are interesting about the trilateral treaties initiative. In relation to Romania’s liminality, it was for the first time that an explicit connection was made in policy making between her position and a particular concrete initiative. Certainly, in previous ages connections were made or suggested, through ideas such as

“because Romanian principalities have always been a protective barrier for Europe, Romania will be a strong state by becoming democratic and economically viable” or “Romania, strong through her unity and geographical position will be a model of stability”,

but no concrete initiatives were linked to her geographic situation. Even in the inter war era, which had been alliance time par excellence, the Little Entente and The Balkan Alliance had been connected to a discourse about the necessities and power of small states, rather than the consequences of geography. Equally, the 1991 attempt at the creation of a Union of Central and Eastern Europe had been a pale attempt at offering an alternative to the Visegrad Group and did not even try to use Romania’s position as a factor.

A second interesting thing was the way in which this link was made. Adrian Severin, then foreign affairs minister and therefore one of the decision-makers on this issue, described the way in which the decision to construct these triangular structures came about:

“we made the inventory of what were the advantages which Romania could bring to an alliance like NATO, and we realised that some of them were “natural” and some could be developed. The natural ones were given by our geographic position and the energetic security in the area. The other ones were to be built”\(^{159}\).

“(…) we presented what were our trump cards, our sub-regional politics, showing


\(^{159}\) A. Severin, 2000, op. cit, p. 58.
that we were constructing sub-regional security structures which will be able to be integrated in NATO and we were constructing a friendly neighbourhood in such a way that NATO would not extend up to the border with an enemy, but with a friendly neighbour” 160.

These affirmations were fully supported by Professor Petre in the interview that she granted me, where she stated that the primary aim of this initiative was to make Romania interesting to the US (and implicitly NATO), by showing she was not a liability, but a source of strength in her region. Looking back at the initial framework in which decision-makers were working, that of redefining Romania’s position along the idea of a South-Eastern Europe, the trilaterals seemed to illustrate in an adequate fashion Romania’s potential.

As Severin stated, this was relatively a novel way to look at foreign policy, first because it presupposed a marketing of Romania that had not been previously done and second, because it entailed a dynamism which had not been tapped before. This initiative was not only about valuing Romania’s position, but about overhauling her entire foreign policy making, through embracing it (the position). Adrian Severin made this idea clear in his book, when he lamented the fact that Romania “has always been looking for a static form of security. The defence of our right has always won. We have tried to stay in one place whereas others have evolved. This is why we have refused debates, new ideas, and even involvement. Relating to our alliance to NATO

“(…) we realised one cannot ask for something whilst at the same time saying: I am weak and incapable of bringing anything. If one wishes to ask and receive one must say: I am strong, powerful and these elements will determine you to give me what I am asking for, because it is to your advantage too” 161.

Very clearly, the 1996-2000 leadership sought to distance itself from the kind of discourse which claimed exactly the opposite of a dynamic attitude; this text could be seen as a direct response to President Iliescu’s older theses, according to which everyone, and especially the West, should be indulgent with Romania because she had a turbulent and damaging past. Interestingly enough, both these stances had at their base precisely the country’s position in a major nexus point of Europe, thus proving how different geopolitical readings can be, depending on the ideological and practical agenda which one aimed to follow and achieve.

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” 162. As a consequence, it was believed that Romania should come with her own vision with what would be good for the region, precisely in order to show how her placement there brought added value to understanding the area.

160 Idem, p. 110.
161 Adrian Severin, 2000, op. cit., p. 57.
162 Idem, p. 284.
President Constantinescu in his turn characterised this type of co-operation as “the political and strategic expression of the whole complex problematic involved in Romania’s geopolitical situation”\(^\text{163}\).

According to him, a trilateral structure brought a plus of balance in relations by favouring dialogue and by erasing the competition spirit which characterised so many of the relations between countries in Central and Eastern Europe. He thought that Romania’s good relations with most of her neighbours could thus be put to good use, at the same time seeking to resolve the country’s remaining tensions with Hungary and Ukraine. On a more general level, Romania aimed to become a necessary point between the aforementioned regions, thus making the most of its geographical position\(^\text{164}\). I believe in this case the image of the bridge is used to suggest the action of mediation and facilitation, in view of the idea that Romania found herself at the centre of several agreements, which essentially were trying to form a partnership between the countries of Central Europe and those of Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

The success of this initiative was relatively limited in practical terms, as Adrian Severin himself noted in a 1998 article, written as a political analyst and former decision-maker. The various trilateral agreements had simply not been activated after their signing, and only the Balkanic ones yielded some cooperative results.\(^\text{165}\) However, dormant as it may have become, this policy survived enough as to be mentioned in 2002 as one of the more notable plans created by the Romanian foreign ministry\(^\text{166}\), presenting the country as “the spinal column of this interlocking network of triangular relations”\(^\text{167}\). Overall, whether successful or not, this episode is very important, because it represents a point of articulation of the various liminal images and references into a discourse, a conscious attempt to substantialise what had hitherto been a series of images more or less loosely tied together. From that point on, a precedent was set in trying to work along those lines. I would go as far as suggesting that in Romanian history until 2000, the single other similar (and stronger) point of articulation had been the campaign which resulted in the 1859 union of the Romanian Principalities.

However, despite the significant strides that Romania had made in terms of both foreign policy and internal reform, Adrian Severin was right to note at the end of 1998 that “our foreign policy has AGAIN oscillated between the fear of isolation and fear of assimilation, between the wish to participate and the reluctance to engage ourselves, between the temptation of expressing ourselves and the fear of upsetting, between servile imitation and proto-chronist provocation, between understanding the fact that we shall not be received in other alliances without changing and the fear that through this change we abandon a security system, without being sure of getting a better one”\(^\text{168}\).


\(^{164}\) For us Romanians, there is no doubt that the cheapest and shortest itinerary for these energetic resources goes through Romania, going up the Danube and the Rhine, up to the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Constantinescu, op. cit., p. 262.


\(^{166}\) Adrian Pop, 2002, op. cit., p. 189.

\(^{167}\) Idem.

\(^{168}\) Adrian Severin, 1998, op. cit.
Severin’s AGAIN was referring as much to the period immediately previous to 1996, as to older times, when, as illustrated in the historical section on Romania, the same dilemmas and half-measured gestures had occurred. Through the use of antonymic pairs he relatively successfully managed to represent the type of difficulties that Romania was going through and, again, the sentiment of in-between-ness and negative liminality, which came from those kind of oscillations. Essentially, he was referring to the fact that the opposition forces did not agree with President Constantinescu’s pro-Euro-Atlantic stance, manifested first through the support of the SFOR operation in 1996, the signature of a much needed treaty with Ukraine (aimed at normalising the tense relations between the two countries), and a normalisation of the minorities situation within Romania. On all these issues confrontation was relatively fierce, because the opposition was mustering nationalist and extremist forces that were the reluctant voices behind a rapprochement with NATO. Unlike in the 1990-1996 period, the opposition was much stronger and its voice louder, enough as to create a tension between what was declared and projected - an active Romania in her region -and what was done, or not.

1999 constituted a crucial year in this perspective because it presented the leadership with the opportunity of setting a spotty and hesitant record straight in relation to NATO. Romania had missed the 1997 NATO enlargement wave and at the time it was felt that the EU was also relatively critical and hermetic towards her. Opinions about this situation were roughly divided into two camps, along ideological lines: the political leaders in power, considered to be liberal democrats, saw this situation as the result of years of ambiguous policies and the turgidations introduced even under their own administration, (as outlined above) which had to be remedied, whereas the left wing opposition parties (read former communists) and the nationalists espoused a discourse which emphasised the victimisation of Romania, the fact that leading a policy that went along EU’s lines provoked losses for the country (referring to the treaty with Ukraine and Hungary) and sending Romanian troops to Iraq for the operation Desert Storm would not grant an illusory membership in NATO.

For President Constantinescu, to answer positively to the US request for flights permission to bomb Serbia was a matter of political destiny and a turning point for Romania in her foreign policy. As he explained in his memoirs,

“For our country there are no other strategic options. I chose the way of firmness because in her history, Romania has suffered for too long because from adopting equivocal positions, because of hesitations and because of switching directions according to circumstances”.

As a result of this mise en abîme, he explained the decision to support NATO as a change in the old historic habit that the Romanians had of “wait and see” before going into action. Constantinescu was the one who launched the idea, later enthusiastically upheld, that Romania should act in the Kosovo case as if she were already a member of NATO. As Claudiu

169 Parliamentary debates, give dates.
Degeratu pointed out four years after this momentous decision, in virtue of her aspiration to become a fully fledged NATO member, Romania acted to present herself as the new NATO window\textsuperscript{170}, with a duty and responsibility to have a good and constructive relationship with all her neighbours.

“Placed in the margin of the NATO space, Romania must be one of the models for the new profile of the countries invited to NATO, it must be an inspirational source in the field of military reform and must continue the tradition initiated in the past years, of being a reliable partner”\textsuperscript{171}.

The window metaphor was crucial in conveying the particular strategic message, both within and without Romania. It comported two major elements. Firstly, it expresses a new way in which Romania wished to deal with the old strategic reality, of being geographically and geopolitically placed at the intersection of three major geopolitical spaces: Western Europe, Russia and the Middle East. Secondly, unlike previous epochs, Romania was seen as a window of something, reflecting the attributes of the community she had chosen, rather than a window to something, a mere passage place.

The President considered that given Romania’s previous hesitations in the Yugoslav conflict, as well as the material proof which had appeared lately and showed that the previous administration had not respected the embargo against Serbia, this was the best way to show the West that his country was nevertheless committed to the alliances which she claimed she wanted to join\textsuperscript{172}. The issue at stake was whether Romania was able to respect her promises and leave the grey zone of indecision. Constantinescu also admitted in his mémoires that all throughout his life he was obsessed by the idea that hesitation has been the curse of the better part of Romanian history. His affirmations and actions about the necessity to intervene in Kosovo constituted therefore a dialogue on multiple levels: at a macro level, a dialogue with political actions and hesitations from the past, which had been frequent enough as to create a recognisable imprint; at a micro level, a direct response to the tergiversations and hesitations which had been expressed by a large part of the political opposition during the better part of the 1996-1999 period; an echo and re-iteration of the logic that supported the NATO operation in Kosovo. The Parliamentary debates that surrounded this issue constitute a good proof of the above. As previously mentioned, as of 1996, when the President wished to make a move proving Romania’s commitment to NATO by sending Romanian troops to the stabilisation force in Bosnia, contrary opinions made themselves heard very quickly. The same situation occurred in April 1997, when the discussion was opened about sending troops to Albania. Again, opposition members protested against this, under the pretext that even countries which were favourite for accession, such as the Czech Republic and Poland or Hungary, refused to send their own troops.


\textsuperscript{171} Idem.

\textsuperscript{172} Quote Parliamentarian saying we can’t just expect things from NATO and not giving anything back
In response to that, one of the supporters of the idea asked

“Is Romania a regional power or not? Do you wish us to remain a small country at the mercy of whomever? We said we want to be not only security consumers, but also security providers. Was this just words? Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland are not sending troops. It is their problem, not ours. If we do not contribute, if we do not make our actions agree with our promises then the best we can expect is a grey road and a fate to be envied by no one.”

Another member of the House of Representatives stated:

“This is a chance for Romania to demonstrate her attachment to values such as solidarity, humanism, stability. We must be present.”

The leading thread throughout these interventions was the need to get out of the grey zone, by not exhibiting an ambiguous behaviour and the sense that Romania was at an identity defining point of her history, when she was finally going to separate from the negative aspect of her liminality. These fragments also tackle the question of the mismatch between declarations and deeds, present equally in the Turkish and Ukrainian cases. We are given an interesting insight as to one of the reasons this may be the case, namely the fear of being too bold, or assuming too much, in other words an insecurity about how to deal with a liminal situation. Such an element precludes a simplistic reading of the kind that suggests that there is simple instrumentalisation of arguments, indicating that in many cases an action does not have the same meaning for the different sides of a debate. The issue of the horizons of meaning arises again with the idea that they need to be harmonised if understanding and coherence are to be reached. This also suggests that statements might indicate intentions, whilst actions the limitations of a given situation.

The feeling mentioned above was present in 1999 during debates about whether Romania should grant the US access to her aerial space in view of attacks on Serbia. Petre Roman, in this period member of the House of Representatives and through the irony of Romanian politics, associated with the democratic forces, firmly affirmed

“At this moment we believe that Romania’s position represents her national interest, but at the same time her position must be active, we must implicate ourselves in that which we understand best through the strength of our history and Europe’s history, in which Romania has represented an outpost of stability, peace and quiet, we must be more active.”

In this, he was joined by Calin Popescu Tariceanu:

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“Romania must have the courage to choose on which side she situates herself, and this according to her national interest as dictated by the wish to join the Euro-Atlantic structures.”

I believe these declarations were representative of the range of arguments which were at that time associated with the question of Romania’s fence sitting, and illustrated well the general framework in which they were inscribed.

Although this moment was not directly connected to liminal images, it was referring to one of the negative consequences of Romania’s liminal placement, namely the traditional tendency of her elites to wait and see, to not commit themselves to actions that were seen as risky. It also constituted a symbolic episode of important proportions, of how Romanian political leaders intended to move their country from the grey zone of values and attitudes in which she had stagnated, to a firmer more decisive stance. It is for this reason that historical references and the need to inscribe this action in the longue-durée were present and intimately connected to the justification of why Romania should support the NATO action; she was going to become the guarantor of her own actions, and not just the eternal student who counts on the ups and downs of the system she wanted to join for haphazard success. The message conveyed was that being in a geopolitical and, some would argue, geographical margin does not necessarily mean a country was marginal in the area of the values she espoused. The movement had been changed, in the sense that political leaders no longer tried to stretch geopolitical imagination in such a way as to include Romania in Central Europe, or even Western Europe, but translated the idea that Romania belongs to the Western civilisation through the process of trying to bring the latter’s values to a difficult and challenging location. Romanian leaders accepted they had to engage their difficult but potentially useful strategic situation and were willing to take the necessary steps on the map to achieve their goal.

This moment also introduces an interesting point of comparison with the Ukrainian case, where debates on the attitude to adopt on Kosovo also raged in the Ukrainian Parliament. As shown in the Ukrainian case study, for Ukrainian elites the dilemma was not framed in terms of historic destiny or wider geopolitical trends, but in terms of an internal competition for power, between pro-NATO forces and anti-NATO, more pro-Russian ones. Certainly, this does not mean that in Romania the same kind of rivalries did not exist, but what is important is how they were framed in so far as references were concerned. Romanians had a distinct penchant towards thinking in existential terms, connecting to the narrative of the modernisation process and therefore implicitly giving a status to the use of liminal images as indicative of their progress towards their goal. In the Ukrainian case things did not unfold as such, suggesting less of a preoccupation with this kind of elements.

Pulling threads together

Overall, the 1996-2000 period was extremely rich in liminal references and images, especially when compared to the years that immediately preceded it. The difference stemmed from a variety of directions. In the first place, as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, the political climate and system became more liberalised, a fact which allowed more opinions to be expressed and heard. From a technical point of view, it was also easier to have access to these opinions, first because they were recorded and second, because it was possible to find them either on the web - as was the case with Parliamentary debates - or in newspaper archives (web based or hard copy). Regarding parliamentary debates, I would like to add a technical note. The website of the House of Representatives is far better organised and user-friendly, whereas the Senate’s website has only spotty records, generally abridged and very hard to search. However, I had access to the transcripts of the common sessions of the Parliament, from where most of the interventions I have used originate; the texts were relatively representative of the opinions that were vehiculated. At the same time, analysts and opinion makers had more space to express themselves, whether in newspapers or special publications. However, even if the range of people having a significant opinion about foreign policy and decision-making expanded, this remained a highly elitist affair, about which public opinion could read in the newspapers or see on television.

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The above table shows the connotation chains that were introduced in the 1996-2000 interval, linking Romania to the geographical notion of South-East Europe, the metaphors of the bridge, passage, nexus, contact zone, and, more importantly, to the idea of historical destiny, which had been downplayed if not ignored in the first period after 1989. Indeed, the period under examination in this section was to a large extent about reconnecting with the past in a positive fashion, reinstating firmly the narrative about joining Europe. In the theoretical terms developed by Ann Norton on liminality, it can be said that Romanians moved from the “invisible” feature that sometimes characterises liminars, to visibility, action and self-affirmation as liminars, choosing to emphasise the positive potential of such a placement, rather than its negative consequences. This progress was coined by an analyst, quoted below, as Romania’s re-entry in history.

The 1996-2000 interval created the conditions for the transformation of the discourse of the political and ideological opponents of the Constantinescu administration. It equally introduced a dynamic geopolitical logic, rather than a deterministic geographical one, by explicitly acknowledging that being in one place is not enough merit for a country, that needs to know how to complement it by actions.

Regarding the quality of the texts a few elements are to be noted. Although the institution of the Presidency still seemed to have a heavier say in foreign policy decisions than the foreign affairs ministry, as the genealogy of the trilateral treaties seems to suggest, the rapport was more balanced than in the previous era. The foreign/domestic publics balance also became a little more even, since texts aimed both at redrawing Romania’s image abroad, and tried to explain to a larger Romanian public what different initiatives meant for her future. Also, it was very important to garner public opinion support behind initiatives such as sending troops abroad, which was part of the reason why the domestic public became more involved. The insight given by Parliamentary debates was of course unique to this era, but it confirmed the general opinion trends that were expressed by other sources.

Regarding the content of the texts, some crucial features (re)appeared and were developed. First of all, there was an explicit and sustained reconnection with elements of past discourses that emphasised the importance of Romania’s geographic position to her 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. Essentially, they were reinscribed in Romania’s modernisation project, which had been abruptly interrupted by the communist era with the bold claim that the country had been modernised by adopting the communist system. 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.

Although analysed in this paper in a chronologically inverse manner, it is relatively apparent by now that 1996-2000 are the years when most of the images and arguments developed in 2000-2004 were initiated and rekindled. However, I wish to stress that the discourse in itself and the images that were used were not new to the 1990s. Any member of the right wing parties which formed the coalition that was in power during this period could testify that this stance had been constructed along these lines from the beginning of Romania’s
transition to democracy. The great difference was that for four years they could be heard and their arguments became the dominant discourse, which was acted upon. The success of this discourse can also be measured by the fact that it was continued, developed and consolidated - with different accents - by those very political forces, which, to a certain extent, had kept it quiet in the beginning of the 1990s. This was also done in virtue of the decisions that the 1996-2000 leadership had taken, which inscribed Romania on a firmer Euro-Atlantic course. As previously stated, this interval raised the discourse on the liminal to the kind of status it enjoyed during the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, when it was one of the pillars of national self-promotion; there was a positive reconnection with history, which allowed this discourse to make other policy options increasingly remote, until they disappeared during the 2000s.

The 1996-2000 years have gone down in Romanian recent history with a mixed record. Many felt deceived by the fact that the Constantinescu administration did not live up to its promises of reform and radical change. However, no matter how mixed its results, how dormant its initiatives (i.e. the trilateral agreements, the oft criticised treaty with Ukraine, and many failed internal reforms), it managed to restore Romania’s image and to bring her back into the geopolitical calculations of Europe and NATO. Its legacy, as shall be seen in the next section, pervaded subsequent years to our day (or in the case of this analysis, end of 2006).


The 2004-2006 interval represents the last period under study in this analysis. As explained in the introduction to the chapter, it comprises a discursive trend and a policy initiative. These two years were deeply marked by Romania’s formal accession to NATO in 2004 and the upcoming - but uncertain until very late in the game - accession to the EU. Foreign policy discourse, which was the primary source of liminal images and references, was deeply marked by the idea of Romania’s responsibility as NATO and future EU member. One of the most important features of the administration that was now in power was the fact that it was not belonging to a particular ideological orientation. Fifteen years into Romania’s transition, enough divisions, camp switching and party splitting had occurred on the political scene as to produce a rather heteroclite political force, called the Alliance for Truth and Justice, which was combining elements from both right wing, centre and centre left parties. Some former political rivals were working together, whereas some former allies found themselves on opposing sides. Therefore the texts and opinions voiced comprise a mix of the ideas that existed throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. As expected, these years exhibit the richest amount of sources, ranging from speeches of the President, foreign minister, prime minister, parliamentary interventions from senators and House of Representatives members, newspaper articles, expert analyses, think tank analyses, geopolitics and history manuals. I have also had the opportunity to conduct interviews with two members of the Presidential team in charge of strategic planning who wished to remain anonymous; an additional interview with Gen Rtd. Mihail Ionescu was also particularly insightful about what are the general underpinnings of the current conception on Romania’s image and geopolitical position in international affairs.
Below a list of the texts analysed

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<td>România, promoar ce a stabilitatii si securitati regionale-de la Balcani la zonamarii negre</td>
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<td>Serban Orescu, analyst</td>
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<td>Adrian Severin, Analyst</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<td>Theodor Melescanu, Senator</td>
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Discursive echoes, new beginnings 2004-2006

The change in power that occurred in 2004 was not as traumatic as the previous changes had been, in the sense that there was no feeling that again, Romania had passed from black to white or vice-versa, but rather that the political class had reached a certain maturity and were ready to get on with Romania being a member of NATO and a candidate for the EU. This was what the new prime minister’s first official speech in front of the Parliament emphasised/ explained (or something):

“With the 2004 elections the Romanian transition ended. We are starting the modernisation of the country through EU integration and the reconstruction of the welfare state. Today’s governmental team is not replacing former teams or former political algorithms. All political forces have contributed to Romania’s evolution; some have made great mistakes, missed opportunities and deceived the population. However, now we are at the frontier between a controversial transition and the relaunching of the Romanian modernity.”

It was relatively clear therefore that the policy and discourse which the government intended to develop was based on an active stance, in which Romania would capitalise on her new status and assume her responsibilities. However this did not mean that the Romanian leadership had forgotten about the past. On the contrary, the dialogue which had been (re)initiated in 1996 with the past seemed to remain as a solid foundation to what was currently happening. Although texts no longer included mentions of the origins of the Romanian people or to the many ways in which Romania enacted her liminality, historical references persisted. This was best proven in the interview I had the opportunity to conduct with a key member of the presidential team who wished to remain anonymous. To my very general question regarding Romania’s real or imagined quality of border or frontier, he immediately proceeded to inscribe this issue in the wider historical tapestry of Romania. References to the Roman period, to Stefan the Great’s crusading spirit in defence of Christianity, to the 1859 union, all seemed to be leading to the visions that were inspiring contemporary decision-making. The idea of progress and advancement toward an age-old goal, the acceptance and recognition of Romania amongst the “civilised” nations, pervaded all the answers. This was also the reason why, having accomplished one important step on the way to that goal, NATO acceptance, Romania had to go where she had never been before and redefine her role from the in-side.

This is why the prime minister would sustain that

“Romania is an active NATO member and a source of stability in the region of the Balkans and the South-East Europe.”


178 This particular reference ties in with other similar ones, going back to Prof. Zoe Petre’s argument and even further back to the pre-1990s periods, which actively used it for the initial official build-up of the liminality argument.

by this affirmation he was making a wish for the future. More importantly, this quality was associated with the impending modernisation of the country, which was going to be fully achieved through EU membership. Mihai-Razvan Ungureanu, foreign minister at the time, echoed the idea by reiterating it in one of his official statements:

“Romania’s foreign policy reflects a tenacious action of involvement in regional and global processes. (...) Romania’s foreign policy directions are based on a series of coordinates. First of all, her defining geopolitical features: NATO membership, future EU membership and last but not least, her geographic position and the specific expertise which comes from it for our country”\(^{180}\).

This paragraph was relatively crucial because it summed up the series of transformations that Romania had gone through in the past 15 years, her itinerary from geography to geopolitics, signified what were the new coordinates of her policy, but did underline that the foundation remained the same, Romania’s geographical position; crucially, the experience which was supposed to come from this position suggested Romania was well equipped to deal with the issues of her region. The fact that it was not detailed suggested that the author of the text implied the common knowledge of what that meant, thus bringing the whole body of previous texts behind this construction. This was not a new way of doing things, since this hailing method had been occasionally used at all stages of the discourse on liminality, but it was significant because it was placed in direct connection to the notion of Romania’s geopolitics, rapprochement which had rarely been distinctly expressed in official discourses, but which now signalled a new awareness of the itinerary that had been Romania’s until then. Enunciating it also allowed Ungureanu to detail which was the new foreign policy agenda that the country’s leadership intended to pursue:

“The strategic and priority objective relevant to Romania’s security policy is finalising the definition of action lines for the consolidated NATO profile of the country. The fundamental premise is that Romania can present an inventory of qualities that would distinguish her in Europe and the Alliance. Thus she is capable of flexibility, creativity, to act as a gate, as a strategic springboard and as focalising element for the security and stability projects of the pontic area and further. At the same time, Romania resonates with her neighbours’ wish to connect functionally to the EU space, the political, economic and cultural offers coming from this direction”\(^{181}\).

Not only was this speech echoing ideas which had been expressed in parliamentary debates earlier that year - about how Romania was a “stability factor in the region”\(^{182}\) - but it also reminded one of the can-do attitude of the late 1990s, and especially of the way in which the trilateral agreements initiative had been reached. The Romanian elite and political leadership wished to paint a very dynamic image of the country, as the abundant use of adjectives and new images suggested. They all recalled the fact that the country’s geographical position was at the confluence of multiple geopolitical axes, and concurrently evoked the idea of agency and


\(^{181}\) Idem.

\(^{182}\) Theodor Melescanu, 2005, Intervention in the House of Representatives, 21 February.
active projection (as, for example, the notion of a springboard suggested). Again, as in previous epochs, a multitude of terms was not necessarily a good sign, because it also suggested that there was no clear choice on what exactly Romania’s role could be.

This exuberance was equally criticised by other political analysts, such as Adrian Severin (also a member of the House of Representatives), or Victor Roncea, who warned against the tendency to disperse or concentrate on the wrong issues in the attempt to operationalise these new and bold ideas. For example, Severin was critical of what he thought was an overemphasis on the relation between Romania and the US to the detriment of a good relation with immediate neighbours and Europe at large:

“(…) Looking from the US perspective, the only interest that America could have in such a relation is in Romanians’ capacity to contribute through information and through the influence of a locally convenient dynamic to her sub-regional strategies. Here, logically, stems Bucharest’s obligation to find a utility and gain influence at the frontier between the Euro-Atlantic space and the Euro-Asiatic space, as well as to establish privileged cooperation with other strategic partners of Washington. As regional leader, Romania can be a partner to the US, otherwise, she will only be a satellite. Also, as an ethno-political island at the Eastern extremity of Europe, Romania could play a role similar to that of Great Britain’s at its Western extremity. If she does not create links with the East she will not be able to fulfil this mission. The way to the West goes through the East”.

Severin’s criticism was severe because President Traian Basescu had ever since his election insisted on a special relation with the US, seemingly wishing to neglect Romania’s Eastern neighbours. Beyond the pertinence of the criticism, what was important was that it was felt that Romania had not yet found a way to articulate her new position. She had never arrived this far in her history. All the previous periods seemed, in hindsight, rehearsals for this moment, when old arguments were re-used and re-packaged, as has been shown above. Now, however, time had come for Romania to put her money where her mouth was, and it proved to be a rather difficult thing to do. Severin correctly indicated the geopolitical transformation of the neighbouring areas world from the wider categories of East and West to Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asiatic. The transformation of these terms suggested the blurring of clear-cut divisions, and the mix of influences in the area. The modernisation tendencies exhibited in the area, no matter how incomplete, had definitely a little bit (or a lot) of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals. Romania was to be found on the cusp where “a lot of Europe” started to thin down into “a little bit of Europe”, or, as Severin put it: “at the frontier between the Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asiatic spaces”. His proposal was bold, and went certainly beyond the affirmations of other commentators who were just remarking that

“Romania is again served by her geopolitical position. Romania’s Eastern frontier will also be the EU’s Eastern frontier”

or parliamentarians who were stating that

“Romania is now at the Eastern border of NATO and therefore we have responsibilities”.

Certainly, these affirmations indicated that the Romanian elites were willing to embrace the liminal position that gained new meaning, but the old challenge of how to figure this transformation had remained. What was important, though, was the fact that the positive aspects of the frontier were iterated, through association with the function of generator, provider and guarantor of stability and security. One certainly gets the impression of efforts to create an open frontier, rather than a closed one. The interview conducted with the member of the presidential team confirmed this intention by stating an argument which could be heard before, that, in fact, Romania is not to remain the Eastern frontier of NATO or EU for long; the ultimate aim is to favour the spread of democratic values and eventually encourage EU enlargement further. “Romanian leadership legitimises itself through Euro-Atlantic values, and this is shown by the wish to project the country’s image as a security anchor and stabilizer of the Balkan region, a kind of outpost of the West in the Balkans”185. This constituted an adequate description of the leadership’s intentions.

The one initiative which galvanised the energies of the administration in this direction was the attempt to revive the Black Sea region.

The Black Sea - the new frontier

The Black Sea issue in Romanian historical and geopolitical thinking constituted a dormant topic that would always be present in geographical and geopolitical arguments, but not always active, or actively dealt with. The Black Sea question was intimately connected to the issue of the Danube and the fact that Romania had always been considered by her elites as the “guardian of the mouths of the Danube”, as shown in the historical section. When the topic became prominent in foreign policy debates starting with 2004-2005, the most important historical studies and arguments were republished and the ideas expressed therein where used to frame the rationale of bringing the Black Sea region centre stage. In their “Romanian Geopolitics” book Silviu Negut and Vasile Cucu spent many pages quoting and analysing what former generations of geopoliticians had to say about these matters. The general idea concerning the Danube was that it was the river

“predestined by nature to establish relations between the industrial countries of Western Europe and those in Central Asia, Mesopotamia, India and Asian Mediterranean”186,

idea which led the author of the book to conclude that for Romania, the mastery of the mouths of the Danube, which opens an advantageous opening in the Black Sea space, constituted a vital geopolitical factor insofar as it offers a connection both with Western Europe and the Near East187. The linking action is stressed throughout the entire argument about the

Danube and is seen as inextricably connected with its second but also very important function, that of a frontier. Indeed, the Danube is seen as the line past which Romanians have been able to defend themselves historically. Concurrently, it was also the artery of connection with Europe, which in any case could not be separated from Romania’s position on the Black Sea. To this end, Cucu quotes Nicolae Iorga, affirming that

“The Danube is a kind of addition to the Black Sea, and, in some cases, vice-versa. They are two interconnected elements, which is why the Danube problem is the Black Sea problem and the Black Sea problem cannot be solved by anybody without us.”

The dialogue with the past not only continued in the case of the Black sea question, but past readings of it seemed to constitute the backbone of the framework within which Romania could act in the future. There is no discussion of whether these ideas were correct or not, but rather of how the current Romania leadership could work to enact and illustrate them. Following this logic, Vasile Cucu concludes:

“For Romania, the position on the Black Sea represents more than simple spatial and geographic coordinates. The geopolitical sense of this position is revealed by the fact that Romania belongs organically to two politically, economically, and culturally distinct - yet complementary - profiled zones.”

The idea of double belonging, intimately tied with the sense of Romania’s identity remained the centre of the geopolitical argumentation and the motor for new initiatives. In order to illustrate this multiple belonging, the axes which Romania’s position on the Black Sea are enumerated:

-the NW-SE axis- the Rhin Main Danube canal

-N-S axis, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, the amber road - mentioned by President Constantinescu in his speeches

-NE-SW axis, from Russia and Ukraine

-E-W axis, from the Caucasus, making the Constanta harbour a gate towards Central and Western Europe

-SE-NW axis, from Turkey and the Middle East to Europe, through the “Romanian gate”

-Far East- Eastern Europe axis, making the Romanian gate in Japan’s fourth gate to Europe

-Caspian Sea-Black Sea - Mediterranean axis, necessary for oil transportation

This enumeration does not show elements that were in existence, but rather testified to the creative thinking that was put, at least by theorists, into devising a role for Romania’s future. If

188 Idem.
190 Vasile Cucu, op.cit., p. 163.
191 Idem, p. 170.
nothing else, this text showed that there was a tradition of geopolitical analysis regarding this topic, thus proving that the notion of Romania’s proteic position at the intersection of multiple geopolitical axes had always been a factor present in the geopolitical figuration of the country by her elites. Reliance on olden texts also suggested that no new thinking had been instructive enough about what was to be done in the future, yet. This constituted merely a beginning.

However, as previously mentioned, this did not mean that the Black Sea issue had not been envisaged or thought about at all during the contemporary period (post 1990). On the contrary, as of 1992 the Black Sea Economic Community brought the question of the Black Sea onto the official agenda, even if not very high up. Thus, it is possible to trace mentions of the merits of Romania’s position at the Black Sea in Adrian Nastase and Ion Iliescu’s early speeches, even if this was largely done in passing or bundled up with other subjects. There was no specific articulation of what Romania could do as a Black Sea country; most often, there was an acknowledgement of the growth in importance of the area, of its becoming a “coagulation centre”\textsuperscript{192}, or its part as a connexion element:

“Through her connection with Central Asia and the Middle East the Black Sea becomes especially important in the actual context, as a strategic link”\textsuperscript{193}.

The Constantinescu period also recognised the importance and nexus-like quality of the region, but did not focus on it particularly either.

Therefore, scholars were right to decry the fact that a true region had not developed around the Sea\textsuperscript{194}, despite it being a place of “mixed tendencies and trends”\textsuperscript{195} and pointed to Romania, favourably situated next to it so as to play the role of “plaque tournante” and bridge for European relations and North-South East-West connections\textsuperscript{196}. The general feeling in relation to this reality was that it had yet to be fully defined and put to good use. Indeed, it was generally believed that the

“Black Sea area has never played its role until the end, never capitalised fully on its position that separates and unites two great bodies of religion, cultures and mentalities”\textsuperscript{197}.

C. Onisor and M. Ozun claimed that

“this position needs to be clarified in order to spare Romania from becoming a victim of geographical fatality”\textsuperscript{198}

and to help her make the most of her situation. It was therefore suggested that the way in which to achieve this goal was to redesign Romania’s security policy, by transforming the


\textsuperscript{195} Idem, p. 11.


\textsuperscript{198} Idem, p. 40.
country in a stability factor at an intercontinental level. The “access gate to Europe”, it was thought, must be secured, thus at the same time cushioning the impact of different civilisations that converge in the area and amplifying the clout of common interests that exist there\textsuperscript{199}. In a special volume dedicated to the Black Sea issue the Romanian journal “Geopolitics” examined the various arguments surrounding it from a Romanian perspective. The most important point that could be understood was the way in which Romanians read the sea’s importance. A majority of articles underlined the fact that the Black Sea was a “bridge between Europe, Asia and the Orient”\textsuperscript{200}, “a buffer zone that awaits to be valorised”, which until now only has a “resonance” geopolitical architecture, rather than a self-sustainable one\textsuperscript{201}; a transit space for energy resources but also an energy producer\textsuperscript{202}. To a certain extent, many of the attributes that were used to describe the Black Sea were the same as those that had been used to describe Romania’s own position, which gave to a certain extent the idea that the geopolitical destinies of the two went together.

Mihai Razvan Ungureanu inscribed the Black Sea initiative that was started in Romanian foreign policy in the country’s quest for a new consolidated role in NATO.

“A major consequence of NATO accession in matters of foreign policy was the redefinition of Romania’s profile and external identity. The search for the new identity started even before accession, but became a leading concern in the first years of NATO membership. We were persuasive in showing we had the profile of a real Euro-Atlantic ally, with a strong regional identity, given our strengths, focused on securing and anchoring our neighbouring regions, the Balkans and the Black Sea”\textsuperscript{203}.

With this affirmation he was admitting and hailing the advent of a new Romanian strategic concept, and was echoing one of President Basescu’s first speeches, in which the latter sustained that

“the Black Sea region is a civilisational power centre, and a crossroads, as well as the theatre of many conflicts throughout history. This region begins now a new phase of its history. Its geostrategic position makes this area an indispensable part of Euro-Atlantic prosperity and security”\textsuperscript{204}.

With this in mind, President Traian Basescu, supported an aggressive campaign meant to radically transform Romania’s image at the Black Sea and to make her a pivotal element in foreign and security policy. There was also an explicit connection made between Romania’s geographical position and her potential role in the region:

\textsuperscript{199} Idem.

\textsuperscript{200} Cosmin Lotreanu, 2005, “Marea Neagra, trecut si prezent”, Geopolitica, aprilie, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{201} Gheorghe Vaduva, 2005, “Pivot or margin?”, Geopolitica, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{202} Vasile Marin, 2005, “Zona marii negre si fizionomia sa geopolitica”, Geopolitica, aprilie, p. 60


“(...) for the security of a Romania placed at the intersection of interest vectors of the big global and regional powers, a strategic partnership with the US is vital. (...) here stems Bucharest’s obligation to find an utility for itself and to gain influence at the frontier between the Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian spaces.”

Traian Basescu, the Romanian president also explicitly linked European security to security in the Black Sea area, thus bringing into this arena all the ideas that already existed in connection with the country being a security and democracy provider, as well as a factor of stability at the intersection of grand axes. These ideas were articulated in the proposal of creating a stability pact for the countries around the Black Sea, in which Romania and Bulgaria, as members of both NATO and the EU, would encourage the spread of Euro-Atlantic values with Turkey and Russia, as the largest countries as partners.

The press and policy experts have enthusiastically taken to the debate, as have indeed foreign audiences, including the EU. In December 2005, the Romanian press noted the fact that Bruxelles had finally decided to look into the possibility of creating a new geopolitical space, of the extended area of the Black Sea. From the declarations made at the time, it appeared that Romania and Bulgaria were considered as the pivot area capable of giving direction and substance to this project. Therefore, it can be said that the Romanian discourse did resonate outside the country and the idea that Romania could play a role for which she had lobbied for 150 years. The irony was that whilst its idea was highly appreciated and the potential benefits were clearly spelled out, by both academic and political circles, from these same areas voices arose doubts on Romania’s capacity to actually fulfil these plans. To the end of 2006, the discourse on the Black Sea had indeed only yielded a few conferences and a significant amount of ink. However, one of the interesting facts about it is that through this discourse new subject positions were consolidated, that had existed previously only in embryonic form.

One of them was in relation to the United States, who appeared to separate from the general “West” and become a special centre of interest for Romanian leaders. This is why they started talk about a strategic partnership, especially in the aftermath of Romania’s accession to NATO. Talk about a rapprochement with the US, specifically by president Traian Basescu, who famously claimed he wanted to place Bucharest in a London-Washington axis, rapidly developed into a debate. This further fuelled ideas about how Romania could be more active, about how she should render herself interesting to the superpower. To a certain extent, a full circle was achieved, since in 2006 the questions were not so different from 1856 when the Romanian Principalities were lobbying for unity. The actors had somewhat changed, but the intentions were still the same: projecting Romania’s advantages by capitalising on her geopolitical position. Now the new challenge was how to bring the Black Sea region closer to Europe, which might be why so many of the attributes concerning Romania were transferred to this wider zone.

From geography to geopolitics, Romania’s journey along the liminal

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This table indicates the fact that Romanians had become more relaxed about the country’s achievements and the possibility of attaining further goals. Connotation chains were similar to the 2000-2004 ones, indicating however, the passage to a series of images that went above and beyond the liminal, although related to it, such as anchor, generator of values and principles and guarantor. To a certain extent, this represented the next phase, since as of 2007 Romania became part of the EU and therefore no longer needed to emphasise the liminal so much, although technically, she did become the EU’s eastern frontier, and is going to remain so for awhile to come. However, she was on the in-side, at last, and that made a difference. In October 2008, the Romanian foreign affairs minister Lazar Comanescu said that he hoped the Black Sea will not remain the EU’s frontier, and that the EU itself should not be happy with just reaching the Black Sea. This attitude confirms a certain constant in contemporary Romanian strategic thinking, mentioned previously in the statement whose source wished to remain anonymous, and who stressed the necessity of pushing Europe as far as it can reach. The following section explains why the liminal is still likely to pervade Romanian mentality for a long time.

Nous sommes ici aux portes de l’Orient où tout est pris à la légère…(Raymond Poincaré)

Little did Raymond Poincaré know that his phrase, pronounced during a voyage in Romania, would become somewhat of a branding motto for the inhabitants of the country. He certainly could not have predicted how ingrained it became in the way Romanians see themselves, and especially how often they would quote it as an explanation of why things are as they are. The most cursory of browsing on the internet shows that it is used in all types of texts and documents, ranging from parliamentary debates to entries on personal

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began. Mateiu Caragiale, a famous interbellic writer, made it the motto of his book, which dealt with the subject of the mix of Western aspirations and Eastern mores of the Romanian elite, a fact which guaranteed its perpetuation and presence in everyday conversation and argumentation. However, what does this phrase mean and why has it encountered such success? Furthermore, how is it important for this analysis?

“Translated”, this phrase means that Romania’s geographical position at the intersection of Eastern and Western civilisations has favoured the birth of a society and a country where no one system prevails upon another, where rules are not fixed and where, therefore, nothing is considered with seriousness. It is appealing for a majority of Romanians because it confirms the idea that geography has had a crucial impact on their outlook. This is where the significance of this phrase for my analysis stems; Romania is the only one amongst the three countries which I examine where there is a link made between liminality and the way in which politics is conducted. If in Turkey and Ukraine one speaks of a difficult or special position which might have implications on what decisions are made, in Romania, people publicly affirm that implications exist also in how these decisions are made. There are in Turkish texts occasional references to “byzantinism”, which send one to the convoluted manners of conducting politics, considered characteristic for the Ottoman Empire; however, they are not nearly as present as the phrase in question about Romania. In a debate, when nothing is left to say, when perplexing decisions have been made in the midst of seeming chaos, the idea that Romania is at the Gates of the Orient is reiterated as the only possible explanation available. The metaphor of “the Gates of the Orient” seems supremely adequate in its imagery, since gates can swing open for influences coming from two directions, East and West. The specification “of the Orient” betrays the Western origin of the dictum and the Western-Eastern vector of geopolitical imagination and suggests that beyond Romania one finds the Orient, leaving her inhabitants to choose, if possible, the direction in which the gates might swing.

Hence, this expression is also relevant as an element in the issue of subject positioning examined below, since it specifically states Romania is not at the gates of the Occident, which would imply an evolution vector from the East to the West (as in the Turkish case), but at those of the Orient, implying Romania as a receptor of Western influences first and foremost, although permeable to Eastern ones too.

Razvan Theodorescu, cultural historian, has developed an interesting explanation that connects with this phrase, which he termed as transactionism. His assertion is that, placed at the crunch between empires, elites in Romanian principalities and subsequently, Romania, have developed a transactive mentality, according to which they would negotiate opportunistically with the power that seemed to bring most advantages at a certain point in time. By maintaining a precarious autonomy in relation to the Ottoman Empire, they were able to obtain advantages by playing influences against each other, the Russian and the Ottoman
for example, or the Western and the Ottoman ones\textsuperscript{207}. Thus, a mentality of muddling through developed, which some claim could be traced down to our days. Indeed, it was not hard to interpret for example the oscillations of the early 1990s as a symptom of “we are at the gates of the Orient...” and a sign of lack of serious commitment to European values. Later on, with Romania having nevertheless decided upon a Euro-Atlantic course, Romanian elites still managed to create confusion through their behaviour in the case of the International Criminal Court, whose treaty they refused to sign, mainly because NATO accession was approaching or by accepting to send troops in Iraq in 2003. All these acts determined Adrian Severin to conclude that “with her few traditions of verticality and loyalty Romania has often decided to show her loyalty by encouraging the imprudent US, mechanically following their option, refusing to show them the errors of their ways, reneging on old friends, ignoring European solidarity”\textsuperscript{208}. Moreover, in 2005 he also aptly characterised the way in which Romania was apprehended internationally: “for Europe Romania is too pro-American, for the US she is too pro-European. For the West, Romanians appear as too oriental, for Russia they appear too occidental. For the Serbs they are too pro-Albanian, for the Albanians, too pro-Serbian”\textsuperscript{209}.

These affirmations do not bring the geographical position to the forefront, but the latter is present in the subtext, because it is understood that these results are at least in part caused by being at the gates of the orient, more specifically, by what Romanians chose to do with this situation.

Paradoxically, Romania’s task remains the same as she has assigned it to herself two hundred years ago, that of truly bringing East and West together on her territory and body politic. The much hailed synthesis of values and practice cannot be said to have been achieved, mainly because right now she is a country who has made a Western choice, without having succeeded to reconcile her Eastern side with it (either in values or practices). To a certain extent, she is entrapped in the liminal condition, even if she can envisage ways and strategies to put it to a positive use.

\textsuperscript{207} Razvan Theodorescu, 2004, \textit{Two Europes, an intellectual divorce?}, Bucharest: Romanian Institute of International Studies, pp. 46-47. “(...) in the Romanian are at the time of the first modernity, disconcerting alliances, opportune betrayals, unrestrainable corruption, forever withered only for it to flower even more, are hand in glove with flattery, with the hyperlaudatory phrase addressed not only to the native voïvod, king or party First Secretar, 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 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”.

\textsuperscript{208} Adrian Severin, 2004, “Prea pro-american?,” \textit{Ziua}, 27 aprilie.

\textsuperscript{209} Adrian Severin, 2005, “Romania în lume-veriga slaba”, \textit{Ziua}, 13 februarie.
Making it through: Subject positioning, hailing processes and predicate analysis

Prof. Razvan Theodorescu was quoted above mentioning Romania’s “exit from history”; for scholars of Romanian history, this expression refers to the long centuries of dependence and living in the shadow of Great Powers that the Romanian Principalities and then Romania went through; it also points to the numerous attempts undertaken by the country for affirming her specificity and geopolitical goals in what has always been an extremely difficult context; it ultimately points to all the failures suffered when trying to achieve these goals. The discourse on liminality represents one of the tools through which Romanian elites have tried to make it back on the European map and into European history. The 16 years under examination in this analysis produced a discourse on liminality that witnessed Romania’s return into the history of civilised nations, not least because it is tightly connected with subject positioning, being one of the first elements of foreign policy discourse to be sensitive to changes in this area. Therefore, if in the Turkish case subject positioning associated with the discourse on the liminal signified Turkey’s journey from East to West and the obstacles encountered on the way, in the Romanian case, subject positioning consistently lined the efforts of (re) entry into history and staying there. In the Romanian case it is possible to note much more reflexive, self-positioning in relation to others, than in the Turkish case, in which the dialogue with Europe is a much more solid source of positional cues; history plays as a more eminent and visible interlocutor for Romanians, who often use it to construct their arguments much more often than the Turks do with theirs, who naturally, cannot appeal much to a time when they were considered Europe’s Other.

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<td>In the East of Europe, guardian of one of the access routes to Europe, surrounded by inimical big powers, between East and West, at the mouths of the Danube; “clef de voûte”;</td>
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As the historical part of the chapter shows, Romanian elites have always seen themselves as part of Europe, even if the less fortunate part of it. The discourse on the liminal at the time underlined 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. 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. Romania asked to be recognised as European, which was different from the Turkish case, where what was asked was the recognition of the progress that Turkey had made from East to West, towards joining Europe. During the 19th century, Romanians also asked the possibility and encouragement for becoming more than a barrier and a buffer, namely a bridge and a strong outpost of Western values. When Romanian elites felt this was denied to them, they occasionally slipped into “us” and “them” categories, pointing to Europe’s ingratitude and ignorance, as did their precursor Stefan the Great, and as will their heirs, in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, there would always be a “them” that was worse than an obtuse Europe, and that would be the Turks or the Russians. Therefore, no matter how ignored, abandoned and estranged Romanians felt in relation to their wiser sister/brother Europe, they would always be in starker opposition to these Others. On the whole, the 19th century discourse on the liminal was dominated by a student/master positioning between Romania and Europe, which was perceived as a great holder and dispenser of values and civilisation, as well as an arbiter of Romania’s progress on the path of modernisation.

The early 20th century saw a much firmer reflexive positioning of the country, in the South-East of Europe, with aspirations of becoming a regional power centre and plaque-tournante of political and democratic influence. Therefore, the images created were of an equal to Europe, a trustworthy member of it. Summing up the trends and evolutions during the historic period of the discourse on the liminal it can be said the movement went from a relation of complementarity (signified through the image of the protective barrier and guard against barbarous influences) to that of similarity (as the outpost of Western civilisation in the East) and eventually rapprochement toward identity with the West, through the images of plaque tournante or interface of the continent.

After 50 years of communism and break with the discourse on the liminal, Romanians seemed to have regressed or withdrawn from what seemed an ineluctable march towards the goal of democratisation. The subject positioning during the early 1990s was more antagonistic towards Europe than in previous epochs.

The hailing through which subject positions were articulated was done by invoking the us-Romanians and them-Europeans characters and by suggesting a relationship of dependency/duty between these notions. A predicate analysis of the relationship shows that Romania was generally described as an actor who had suffered the changes of history, upon whom things generally happened (see Iliescu’s reading of Romanian history, as a
series of consequences determined by conflict between empires, communism, European discrimination; in addition, see the “battle” to avoid being assigned to the East of Europe, also signified in A. Nastase’s texts; her actions were mostly reactive, or conditional whereas her partner in the relationship, Europe, was presented as an active and powerful counterpart, that had to dispense help and understanding.

Romania’s “natural” choice towards European political and civilisational structures was also repeatedly hailed (Nastase, Iliescu and Melescanu), although there was no development of what exactly would be her role within them. This feature imprinted the reactive character to the entire discursive trend and, very importantly, was associated with a lack of liminal images. To explain this idea better, it is important to remember that in the past, when Romanian political elites attempted to articulate a geostrategic position for the country, it was generally with the help of liminal images: barrier, frontier, crossroads, nexus point, bridge, outpost, beacon. Between 1990-1996, the lack of liminal images seemed to go together with a lack of a better-articulated strategic position; attempts at alternative positioning were made, through the hailing of Romania as a Central European country. However, the lack of echo that this idea had abroad (in Europe) and even the doubt with which it was received at home did not make for a very convincing reflexive positioning.

Therefore the connotation chains present during these 6 years were relatively poor relative to the liminal. The role of frontier or barrier was firmly associated with the past, on which texts did not dwell. The future seemed to be associated with Romania’s undefined role in Central Europe, which anyway was seen as a posture before the joining the “real Europe” (see Nastase’s affirmations). Eastern Europe was seen as an almost demonised zone - belonging to Cold War notions - and therefore de-legitimised, or worse, used by Western European countries to create a new Iron Curtain (as suggested by both Iliescu and Nastase). In any case, it had to be avoided (“The idea that my country belongs to Eastern Europe is the invention of an odd mind”- Nastase, see above).

The early 1990s texts still represented Europe as a beacon of civilisation that needed to be reached by a sluggish Romania, suffering from the injustices of history. However, the subject positioning reflecting a master (Europe)-student (Romania) relationship was occasionally supplemented by an oppositional relation, in which “they” the Europeans, failed to understand the hardships that Romanians had to go through for five decades; in one of the speeches quoted above, President Iliescu went as far as to suggest that Europe owed Romania for her historical sacrifices (See Bucharest Crans Montana speech); this was not a new idea, but it had never been too visible amidst other liminal images and references, because it was controversial. However, it fit relatively well with the reactive and almost reactionary tone of the early 1990s Romania. Such a discourse was not dissimilar to the Turkish one in the same period, when, as shown, the elites quickly reverted to an “us” and “them” mode of expression, not least because they felt the pressure coming from Europe in that sense. I wish to suggest that, had Romanians continued to uphold
the idea that Romania was a Central European country, then, as in the Turkish case, the main source of cues on this issue would have become Europe and its vision of Romania. However, as shall be specified below, turning back to historical elements, Romanian elites eventually reconnected with traditional liminal image and references, making history an important element of the dialogue that had been established in the construction of a new image for Romania. This was an important detail, because it made the Romanian stronger in moments when doubts were raised about the country’s real intentions or attitudes on the international scene.

With respect to the 2000-2004 interval, its single most important role/function was to retie the connection with the past images and references to the liminal, and even continue a dialogue with them. More accurately, this period allowed a certain part of Romanian political class to retie the connection, which had been explicitly reworked by the 1996-2000 administration. It also marked a significant paradigm shift for the members of political forces which but four years before, had a position which was almost diametrically opposed to the one they espoused in 2000-2004. This was achieved mainly through a modification of the subject positioning between Romania and Europe, but also through a change in the rapport with the past. Thus, not only was there an attempt to portray Romania as less of a “poor relative of Europe”, but the processes through which she was going were inscribed in the “natural” progression of her modernity project; connecting with the arguments of history meant that liminal references and images were brought back into focus and the narrative of Romania’s way became richer and more intelligible.

I found evidence of attempts at balancing the positions between Romania and the West in the explicit affirmations of the foreign minister, calling for an end of the “enfant mal-aimé” syndrome, and in the celebratory remarks that “Romania has stepped onto the right side of history” (Petre Roman, see above). However, the most important sign of the wish to be seen more as an equal rather than as an entity that needs help could be noted as of 2002 in the way in which the Romanian leadership engaged with the potential role the country could have as member of the NATO alliance, as border country on its southern flank. Mentions of the potential and willingness to export Euro-Atlantic values and stability, coupled with the express wish that Romania should not remain the border of the alliance, but become a “catalyst of change” for her neighbourhood introduced a more active register, which was clearly dissonant with the victimisation of earlier texts. Verbs were no longer used in the conditional, “Romania could do or be…”, nor in the future tense “Romania will do…”, but in the present or past tense, “Romania is a facto of stability” or “has shown herself capable of clear choices”; furthermore, the adjective and adverbs that were used expressed more decisiveness and determination: “Romania will become a source of inspiration”, “a necessary connection”, “her belonging to the family of Euro-Atlantic values is confirmed”. 
In addition to these elements, the geographical and historical reinscription of Romania’s position was, I believe, the factor which most contributed to reclaiming power and respect for herself. As the affirmations of Razvan Theodorescu showed, placing Romania’s evolution into a narrative that explained her predicament whilst at the same time showing how the country contributed to the creation of Europe - writ large - also gave a deeper meaning to her geographical placement. Presenting Romania as a “zone of contact” between the various civilisational and political entities of Europe kept the discursive space open for the development of other notions, such as “frontier nation”, which suggested that the Romanian people embodied their geographic position, or “connection” between the various geopolitical axes of the European continent, which already suggested how to put to good use her placement.

The discourse became articulated enough as to accommodate the narrative of Romania’s modernisation, which had been ejected from the texts of the 1990-1996 interval. Thus, it was possible for decision-makers and analysts to iterate the itinerary that Romania had undertaken, from being at the periphery of Europe to integrating its structures and becoming its margin or edge, almost its guarantor. An important element to retain is that liminal references and images were regularly associated with the idea of Romania’s road to Europe, as a constitutive part of that journey. They were correlated in texts with the original myth of Romania’s Latin origins, the “return” to Europe and the role that the country fulfilled in the past and would fulfil in the future. They were not always the same, ranging from the image of the bridge to the East to southern flank of NATO. This pointed to the fact that Romania’s image was itself up for negotiation and different interpretation, with no general consensus upon which image should prevail. Indeed, if anything, the texts from 2000-2004 show that within the general framework of the argument regarding Romania’s position, there was no homogenous voice, but rather a multiplicity of voices, each emphasizing different aspects of the liminality question, however. Thus it was possible to have President Iliescu speak about a frontier nation and at the same time keep up the claim of Romania’s location in Central Europe, Razvan Theodorescu re-inscribing her in the ambiguous South-East of Europe and qualifying her as a contact zone, and eventually, Mircea Geoana, declaring Romania should strive to go beyond her status of border by encouraging the enlargement of NATO and EU further. However, they were all inscribed in the same logic of capitalising on Romania’s geography, transforming it from a negative attribute into a positive quality. Therefore, if in the 1990-1996 period emphasis had been placed on how disadvantageous geography had been, the 2000-2004 years stressed ways in which this could be improved.

Reflexive subject positioning was predominant, with occasional nudges and nods coming from Europe in the form of European Commission reports or recommendations. However, the exchange did not reach the proportions it had in the Turkish case. Furthermore, as time progressed, the dialogue with the US faded, even though the latter remained an important interlocutor.
Having mentioned the presence of multiple voices, I wish to point to the fact that the leadership of 2000-2004 kept up a dialogue with older voices (including the 1996-2000, and interwar era ones), which had not been the case in 1990-1996. From a Bakhtinian perspective, it can be said that the conversation with the past, through the use of olden references, and schemes of organising meaning (such as the particular way of seeing the country’s geographic position) helped contemporary elites reconnect with the narrative of Romania’s progress on the road of her final destination: civilised Europe. In the process, however, they also changed this old narrative and the images it had put forward hitherto.

The 1996-2000 interval brought the real break in the subject positioning of Romania, by bringing the focus on Romania’s position on the geopolitical map of Europe and on what she could be doing for herself and the world, rather than what the world could do for Romania. There was a definite divorce from the 1990-1996 years, when Romania was portrayed more as a victim of a difficult history, faced with a powerful and careless Europe. Now the emphasis was more on how Romania behaved, what image she projected, what obligations and duties she had. Certainly, she was still cast in a junior role, the role of a student who had to pass tests, but to a Europe which was hardly visible in texts. For example, one would no longer say “Europe has asked that from us” but rather “We (Romania) have promised to…”, thus implying the presence of Europe but emphasising Romania’s agency.

This was done through a complex process of hailing and interpellation. The first part of this process was the re-inscription of the country on the geopolitical map of Europe through the revival of the concept of South-Eastern Europe, where it was claimed, she lay. To this end, the theories of historian Nicolae Iorga were actualised, and were brought to show how, through her placement in this zone, Romania had always contributed to the existence and consolidation of Europe. One remembers this idea was echoed later on, during the 2000-2004 era, when the idea of South-East Europe was reiterated and associated with the new role Romania could play in the area.

The second part was the correlation between history and geopolitical tradition with the present and the future in order to signify Romania’s becoming and stepping forward. Almost all the quoted texts have a historical mention in conjunction to what should be the future, especially when liminal images are involved. Whether this was the enumeration of the different stances of the liminal throughout the centuries or a reminder of the negative effects that a liminal placement has had, history was always the starting place for framing present and future action. In most cases, texts signified the road that needed to be taken to move from the negative consequences of liminality (indecision, victimisation, passivity) to its positive consequences, which were projected through the idea of outpost of stability, security exporter, guarantor of democracy and key to the regional peace. The initiative of the trilateral treaties and the 1999 decision about the Kosovo crisis represented best this
From geography to geopolitics, Romania’s journey along the liminal

attitude, supported by a background framework of statements and declarations which emphasised the need for more decisiveness and, more importantly, the need to pick a side. This constituted a very interesting situation, because, although not explicitly, it is suggested that whilst being a country placed at the intersection of many influences and interests, Romania had to give up acting as if in-between places and must be liminal (in so far as it is gathers and synthesises different threads, without being a core) and at the same time firmly on one side. Essentially, she had to become from a bridge or a crossroads, a border, a margin of the in-side.

During the 1996-2000 interval, Romanian elites achieved the feat of constructing their country as a reliable partner for Europe and the West (even if that image was periodically shaken subsequently), recovering some of the terrain lost at the beginning of the 1990s. Romania had become a worthwhile interlocutor, not least through the fact of associating herself with particular initiatives (see the Kosovo instances) and, more importantly, by making her statements coincide with her actions and executive decisions.

This was a significant element, since it made the liminal discourse productive and more credible in its claims of solidity and intentions. This tendency continued during the last interval in the case study, 2004-2006. Essentially, this period strengthened the positioning acquired previously, and presented Romania as a solid junior partner, with reliable intentions and capabilities.

The build-up of policy initiatives around the Black Sea as a frontier zone where Romania had much to offer, but also much to gain from, signified the transfer to other images and references that played on the liminal idea, but at the same time went beyond it. Thus, there were more frequent mentions of Romania being an “anchor” and a “pivot”, as well as a corridor, a frontier of EU and NATO and a generator of values. The difference at this point was the point of view of the insider that was used, signified through the use of “us”, meaning Europe, NATO and Romania, and the fact that Romanian elites spoke about their country’s contribution to general European security, as part of her new identity (hailed, as has been shown above, through accession to NATO and the EU). Part of the articulation of a new identity and therefore a new positioning was the continued inscription of the Black Sea region, and therefore Romania, in the larger picture of civilisational arguments; thus, by describing the Black Sea as an important crossroads for civilisational axes, Romanian elites were attempting to set the policy and security agenda for the future, thus showing that indeed Romania could become an active contributor to a strategic vision and action in the area. In terms of subject positioning by the end of 2006, the discourse on the liminality and importance of the Black Sea sealed a particular trajectory for Romania, from almost opposition towards Europe and the West in the early 1990s, to complementarity in the periods from 1996-2004, and identification with Europe, its values and strategic vision in the 2004-2006 interval.
Predicate analysis

Predicate analysis of Romania and Europe along the development of the discourse on the liminal offers correspondences which are relatively similar in nature to the ones encountered in the Turkish and Ukrainian cases.

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<td>Placed on the way of all difficulties, has “suffered” the hardships of history,</td>
<td>Participating in the European project, partner, active, developing new image;</td>
<td>Europe/West reaping the benefits of having been protected by the countries of central/Eastern Europe, richer relative, occasionally ignorant and unwise in its rejection and criticism of Romania, provider of benefits, arbiter of democracy; dynamic image</td>
<td>Active, willing to compromise, decisive, has initiative, willing to improve previously bad relations with neighbours, willing to be anchored to Europe</td>
<td>Pursuing the modernity project, active, emitting interests, proposing outlooks for the future of NATO and Europe, “on the good side of history”, wishing to get rid of the “enfant mal aimé” complex, defining her own area of belonging in Europe, participating in the European project, partner, joining the family</td>
<td>Active, flexible, creative, tenacious, generator of security and stability, consolidating identity, having initiatives;</td>
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Thus, for the historical period, the images of the barrier, buffer and guardian of Europe were associated with an active image of the Principalities, portrayed as eager to have their status as independent entities recognised; at this time, the actions of the Romanian elites suggest a resourceful and enterprising attitude, which is well matched by the image of Europe, as the beacon of values and dispenser of knowledge worth sacrificing for. Indeed, even if momentary descriptions decried Europe’s occasional “unfeeling” and ungrateful attitude, it was generally portrayed as the measure of things, teacher and a guide for the Romanian Principalities, as well as a source of values and civilisation. As the country of Romania appeared on the European
map, she kept a balance of relations with Europe, becoming less of a small sister and more of an equal, or at least aspiring to be perceived as such. In the beginning of the 20th century, Europe had kept its glorious portrayal, but Romania caught up, being presented as a more accomplished, more active, actor, proposing policy initiatives. This occurred not least because Romanian intellectuals of statecraft had started using other liminal images in relation to her function, namely those of the frontier, passage, nexus or plaque tournante, which implied more movement and dynamics. As specified elsewhere in this analysis, the images related to the barrier and those related to the frontier are different first and foremost in the dynamic they imply and then in the relation between agents they imply. Being a barrier protecting an entity does not necessitate identification or even sustained relations with it (even if these might occur); however, being a linking element, such as a frontier, did imply exchanges in what the actor would be doing in order to fulfil that role, and hence a more active part. It is to be noted, however, that in both phases, Romanians continued to perceive themselves as an essential element of European stability and future, whether using the idea of the “clé de voûte” or that of the “key” to their region.

The 1990s re-introduced the discourse on the liminal in foreign policy discourse, but through the back door. During the early 1990s references to the liminal were firmly presented as being of the past; however, since these images were often relating to the function that the country could fulfil in relation to Europe, and they were in this case missing, it was no surprise to discover that the attributed given to Romania were less bold, and often suggested a passive, victim-like stance, a sufferer of history, rather than an agent of it. This impression was created through self-characterisation as “victims” of history, and formulations which suggested that Romania was not in control of her own destiny and needs to be understood and accepted as such. This image was not all pervasive, since it was occasionally counterbalanced by opinions that affirmed Romania to be an element of stability and democracy in a troubled neighbourhood, but neither actions nor words gave a convincing image of her. Using images such as the “prodigal son” did not inspire necessarily positive ideas, but rather the image of a country who expects to be received back into the fold through the magnanimity of the father or brother, and not because of her own actions. Coupled with this, a relatively negative image of Europe, depicted as ungrateful and uncaring, suggested a rather grudging attitude. In addition, the ambiguous actions undertaken by the leadership during this period seemed to be in agreement with the image of a disoriented country with no clear goal. (similar to the Ukrainian case).

The re-introduction of liminal imagery and references corresponded to a rectification of this situation, as of 1996 onwards. By re-connecting with historical images of the barrier, the bridge and the frontier, Romanian elites also re-introduces a dynamic characterisation of their country, as well as a friendlier image of Europe. To a certain extent, for the purposes of the NATO and EU accession processes, the master/student images continued to exist, even with occasional rebellions from Romanians when they felt they were too harshly criticised by the West; however, there predominated a feeling of eagerness to join the West, not only through the insistence on liminal images that suggested the idea of linking and exchange, but also through predicates that indicated openness, availability for change and a willingness to (re)think Romania’s usefulness from a geopolitical point of view.
This trend went strengthening, although Romanian elites had acknowledged the difficulty to figurate the transition from one geopolitical position to another, within the frame of a slightly incongruent geography. One of the first elements revealed by the analysis is that Romania was presented in terms that suggested dynamism, drive, determination. She was a “plaque tournante”, an “agent”, a “key”, a “generator of democratic values”, an “anchor of Western values”, “the most important bridge to Central Europe”, she was “strong”, single minded. Her actions were spelt much more often in the present and the future modes, rather than the past, as in the previous period. Thus, Romania “is” (not “has been”), “proposes”, “ensures”, “projects”, “guarantees”, “contributes”; she also “must be more active”, “must be inspirational”, “must be decisive”, “must no longer hesitate”. Also, in opposition to a previous period, the emphasis went on liminal images which suggested synthesis and confluence rather than disunity and divergence. This also implied an active performance. An alternate way of suggesting an active image in some of the texts was the mise en abîme with moments of her past when she acted passively, hesitantly, thus enacting the negative connotations of her liminal placement. Furthermore, the policy initiatives which her leaders undertook were inscribed and framed within the idea of the necessity of a more dynamic stance, which culminated in the policy initiatives undertaken during the 2004-2006 interval, particularly regarding the Black Sea ideas. These illustrated both Romania’s commitment to the historical chance that had been given to her - of finally being allowed to be part of the European family -, and her willingness to bank on her placement at the confluence of civilisations and geo-strategic axes, an attitude that belied any suspicion of hesitancy or ambiguity on her part.

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped the existence of the discourse on the liminal in the Romanian case, from its historical roots, through its evolution to our contemporary era, exploring how this foreign policy sub-discourse has created images and references that have successfully ousted other possibilities, in terms of foreign policy options.

As a case, Romania fit many of the liminar’s characteristics. The methodological framework revealed itself useful in uncovering the different nuances of the liminal, especially focusing on the opinions and statements of analysts and experts, which added significant depth and understanding to the images used. It could be said that, without the presence of those particular texts, it would have been difficult to identify the conflicts and threads that turned around the liminal. Just as in the case of Turkey, analysts and experts represented a kind of dynamic repository, keeping the intellectual history and often pointing the connection between the different uses of liminal images. In fact, both the Romanian and the Turkish cases emphasise the need for such kind of material if any sense of depth and context is to be recovered for the discourse on the liminal, and, indeed, any discourse. In the absence of such texts the Ukrainian case proved to be much harder to clarify.

Romania also confirmed the importance of geopolitical thinking in the formulation of foreign policy discourse, but there seemed to be more flexibility than in Turkey concerning the need to get away from a deterministic point of view, emphasising the political more than the geo- somewhat more quickly than the Turks.
The main guiding threads for the development of a liminal imagery have been a narrative of progress doubled by the periodical mention of the modernisation project undertaken by Romanian elites midway through the 18th century, and whose ultimate aim was acceptance amongst the civilised European nations. As Europe itself changed shape, along with the requirements as to whom could be part of it, so did Romania have to pursue a road rife with obstacles (self-created as much as coming from the outside) in order to achieve a goal enunciated 150 years ago. The liminal imagery developed during this process stands proof to the endurance of this aim and, just as in the Turkish case, to the Romanians’ desire to be taken seriously in their intention.

The most used images in the Romanian discourse are those of a barrier, then bridge and then that of the frontier, illustrating an evolution in both discourse but also relations with Europe. During the articulation phase of the discourse on the liminal it was necessary to start “selling” the Romanian position based on past experiences, on past exchanges with Europe, and that is why the image of the buffer and the barrier made most sense. It suggested solidity and reliance, whilst at the same time acknowledging the fact that the Romanian Principalities had not yet reached the level of European-ness necessary; however, emphasising the barrier function suggested contact and awareness, and built a necessary function for the future, which could be, and was, as was shown, a good base for proposing other images.

The image of the bridge intervened as relations with Europe improved and Romania’s standing did too. Other variations suggesting the linking quality of the bridge, such as the nexus, plaque tournante, corridor, passage-way, all emphasised a rapprochement with Europe but still a form of liminality and in-between-ness, turned positive. The image of the bridge predominated throughout the discourse until the present day, not least because relations with Europe were practically severed in the sense of accession for around 50 years. When the times opened anew, an initial resistance and lack of direction intervened and brought back the images of the buffer and the barrier, without necessarily pursuing an advancement in this condition. It was only after decision-making elites retied the knot of history that the liminal imagery was consolidated again, evolving to the image of the frontier of Europe and NATO, role which presupposed belonging and an identification with the values, principles and systems of the West. Becoming the Eastern frontier of the EU as of 1st of January 2007 was the crowning of almost two centuries of efforts to join Europe.

The liminal imagery was the result of an intense dialogue and exchange with other historical images and utterances. As specified previously, Romania, unlike Turkey, did not have to contend with the doubtful European gaze about her quality as a European country; tradition, history, culture, religion and geography recommended her as such, even if, being considered of the East, there were doubts raised about the nature of her European-ness, a process which was strengthened by the EU accession dynamic (as suggested by Merje Kuus). Therefore, just as Europe constructed its new image in relation to its former, past, self (see Thomas Diez article), Romania built contemporary liminal images on her own past, receiving fewer or almost no cues on it from Europe, in this area, at least. Hence, even when criticism was strong on her reforms performance, it did not weaken the arguments concerning her liminal place, because they did not affect her deep identity.
Here also intervenes another difference in comparison to Turkey, since the latter was much more sensitive to European criticism that could destabilise her image. Therein lays the separation between geographical, identity and security elements in the Turkish case - in the fact that Turkey fulfilled different functions towards Europe, each not necessarily encompassing the other. The fact that Turkey had been the buffer and the outpost that protected Europe did not mean she was or was considered European; similarly, if security-wise she was part of the European system, this did not make her European. On the contrary, when Romania presented herself as a barrier and protective agent, she was positioning this attitude as necessary to the protection of HER OWN identity, the kind that Turkey was hoping to acquire through being a barrier.

The liminal was also connected in the contemporary era with a “return to Europe”, similarly to the Ukrainian case, except Romanian arguments appeared more convincing, again, due to a more substantial historical record of relations. The subject positioning present throughout the discourse traced Romania’s re-entry into history, not the road from East to West, not least because Romanians always felt they had been caught in between. The evolution in subject positioning confirmed the opposition-complementarity-identity dynamic corresponding to the buffer-bridge-frontier evolution in terms of liminal images. In accordance to the above mentioned evolutions, predicate analysis indicates a constant in describing Romania as an active agent of history, attempting to carve a place for herself in Europe; this did not mean that there were no moments when her image was less than perfect, also because of the actions undertaken by elites.

On the whole, this chapter has shown that the discourse on the liminal contributed in the gradual exclusion of other possibilities by insisting on certain images which upheld a particular view of history, and therefore made those appear as most natural and in accordance with the history, imagined mission and vocation of Romania. There was therefore no coincidence that in many statements there was the association between the determinism of destiny, vocation, and liminal images, which were directly connected to the joining of Europe project. This was the great success of the liminal images, namely that of naturally linking liminal images to Europe, presenting other choices as less legitimate. The discourse on the liminal also produced Romania as a subject constantly striving for progress; however, this did not mean that occasionally, liminal images did not also underline where her weaknesses were, indicating how they could be addressed.

In the aftermath of Romania’s accession to the EU, references to liminal images subsided, although not completely. There are periodical calls, coming particularly from analysts and experts, for Romanian authorities to truly make their country a bridge and anchor of democracy for the region. The case of the Moldavian-Transnistrian conflict is a very tangible test for Romania, which, many say, she has failed, because she was effectively excluded from debates and negotiations on the area. Nevertheless, the leadership remained active on the issue of the Black Sea and the recent NATO summit in Bucharest confirmed Romania’s intentions, at least, to remain active on this front. During the tensions of summer 2008 Romania has remained very silent and discreet concerning the Russian-Georgian conflict, preferring to rally on the
common European position on the issue. Internally, this attitude was appreciated as mature, particularly since it avoided any “adventurous” statements that could get the country into diplomatic problems.

Overall, the idea of Romania’s linking capacities were not abandoned, since as late as June 2007, president Basescu stressed his country’s potential of playing a connecting role between the EU and the countries in the region that are still to join it, such as Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia Herzegovina and Croatia. However, it is interesting that the aspects that are emphasised in this sense are less political and more concerned with educational and cultural exchange programmes.
In the Ukrainian case results concerning a liminal discourse are more ambiguous than in the Romanian and Turkish cases. In fact, it is possible to speak of a liminal imagery, rather than a fully-fledged discourse, because the images and metaphors used are not strong enough as to produce subjects or a set of rules enabling or obscuring certain actions. One cannot speak about the liminal as structuring the parameters of the possible because it cannot be said it precludes certain directions of action as opposed to others. The mention of liminal images resembles more the exploration of potential discursive and policy avenues, with no firm direction espoused by the end of 2006. This situation might be linked to several factors; the ones I think are significant are the lack of a clear narrative framing Ukraine’s evolution within a historical “longue durée” and the strong competition between contradictory currents of thought and political options within Ukraine. These elements often leave the impression that nothing in Ukrainian policy, and especially foreign policy can be taken for granted or as stable. If in Romania, despite opposing political options, leaders were generally in agreement about the necessity of a pro-European orientation and about the country’s role, and in Turkey Europe remained an incontestable goal despite very low moments, in Ukraine neither the European nor the Russian, nor any other option seemed to garner generalised support. Therefore liminal images developed enough as to become a possible trend, but not an unavoidable way of seeing the world.

Notwithstanding this situation, I have sought to follow the same pattern of inquiry and research for this case, as for the other ones. I have looked at discursive threads, identifying four of them (1991-1994—the buffer thread; 1994-1999 multi-vectorism; 1999-2004—“to Europe with Russia”; 2004-2006-after the Orange revolution) and episodes, identifying two (1999-Kosovo intervention; 2006-the Feodosiya incident). When possible, I have looked at official speeches and declarations made by the Presidents, foreign ministers or prime ministers of the country, other
political actors, such as Parliament members and participants in the decision-making process, and experts analysing the situation in Ukraine. I have also examined documents produced by think-tanks and opinions expressed by governmental experts in the press. I have conducted media analyses in order to identify the presence of liminality related images and metaphors. Unfortunately, unlike in the Romanian case, I have not been able to tap into Parliamentary debates; they do not seem to be accessible in their entirety either online or archived. There is, nevertheless, a publication, called “Holos Ukrainiy” that publishes reports and analyses about the way parliamentary debates unfold, and within it I have occasionally found useful pieces of information. I have been able, however, to take advantage of a feature which is common to both Ukraine and Turkey, namely the relatively extensive research which has been done in the past 16 years on the foreign policy evolution of the country. Unlike the case of Romania, both Ukraine and Turkey seemed to have stirred a significant amount of interest amongst foreign analysts, who have produced a multitude of documents, of varying degrees of depth. The great advantage presented by these works was the amount of sources quoted and used, which proved of particular importance, especially for the early years of Ukrainian independence, from 1991 to 1999. Thanks to this type of documents and all the sources mentioned above, the case study on Ukraine is quite rich in detail, although not in the same fashion as the Romanian case study is. For example, I was not able to count the number of overall speeches given by the president or the foreign minister on the topic of foreign policy, nor to estimate how many of these concerned liminal issues. This was largely due to the fact that they were not grouped together, like in the Romanian case, for example, where it was easier to identify an approximate total number. However, I made the assumption that if the discourse on liminality were strong, it would appear so, regardless of the number of sources (provided that they were more than two) available. If I excluded Parliamentary debates in Romania, for example, the presence of the discourse would not appear diminished, perhaps only a little poorer in nuances; in the case of Turkey, the absence of Parliamentary debates does not undermine the fact that the bridge metaphor constitutes a relatively strong presence, in newspaper articles and speeches. Ukrainian documents, such as presidential or foreign ministers speeches tend to suggest that the liminality question exists, but it is not dominant. After all, if the argument were prominent, the latter would constitute the ideal places to voice and promote it. I wish to stress this idea, because I do not believe the scarcity of sources to weaken conclusions. It does, nevertheless, omit some of the nuances, which might otherwise be observed.

In order to clarify this issue, I point out that within the period under study, 1991-2006, the 1991-1999 interval is not as rich in sources and details as the 1999-2006 one, chiefly because within this span of time the nature of information as well as the possibility to access it changed substantially in Ukraine. As in the Romanian case, Ukrainian society progressed during this period from a closely controlled flow of information and opinion, to a more open and permissive scene of public debate and intellectual exchange, concurrent with the attempts at democratisation of the Ukrainian state. However, an important note is in order, insofar as the production of more documents did not necessarily mean the absence of censorship. The Razumkov centre, a policy analysis think tank in Kiev produced in 2002 an interesting analysis, illustrating the stages of political censorship in Ukraine: stage 1, from 1991 to 1994-witnessed President Kravchuk’s attempt at political censorship by closing down the TV
channel Hriva that was presenting the activities of his rival, Leonid Kuchma; this happened at a time of relative freedom of speech and pluralism of thought in the media. Stage two, from 1995 to 1998, was seemingly characterised by the gradual formation of the oligarchic mass-media and by the manipulation and control of the kind of information that was imparted to the public, depending on who owned what information source. Stage three, from 1998 to 2001, was characterised by economic pressures applied to opposition media and in 2000 by the scandal of the murder of a journalist, which President Leonid Kuchma was alleged to have supported. Stage four, which was considered to start in 2002, did not seem to get any better, since the press continued to be dominated by oligarchic interests and political messages. It is important to bear these elements in mind throughout the chapter, because, as shall be seen, a majority of documents and texts come from the decision-making elites and there are in fact few indications of a vigorous intra-Ukrainian debate on foreign policy, in the way it is present in the Turkish or Romanian cases. Indeed, most texts, whether written in English, Russian or Ukrainian, that do not come from decision-making officials, do not often mention liminal images, although they do mention the East and West problematic. It is suggested that liminal images did not trickle down to the level of the popular debate, even if elements persisted. In addition, it is hard to speak of a unified vision, since political life seemed to be roughly divided in groups with solid and often opposing stances, representing the differences between Ukraine’s Western and Eastern populations. Nevertheless, it shall be shown that liminal images were embedded in a wider debate on Ukrainian identity, torn as it was between a closer association with Russia or Europe or both.

I have therefore kept in line with the idea of identifying in public discourse threads or episodes that are related to the issue of liminality. As such I could loosely group the following: 1991-1994 the Kravchuk Presidency, dominated by nationalist rhetoric, rejection of Russia and the CIS and a certain élan towards the West; I have juxtaposed to it the 2004-2006 period of the post Orange revolution, which represented a re-birth of a pro-Western stance, and could provide an interesting platform for comparison in terms of evolution of images and ideas, because it included both elements of continuity and novelty when compared with the first years of independence. The 1994-2004 interval is a political period dominated by President Leonid Kuchma and his team. It can be separated into two other periods, corresponding to L. Kuchma’s two Presidential mandates; the first Kuchma administration was dominated by the idea that Ukraine had to have a multi-vector foreign policy; 1999-2004 represented the second Kuchma administration and the appearance of a firmer Western orientation in foreign policy; the 1999 Kosovo intervention episode is analysed as a policy moment in what it seemed to represent for the political elite; the 2006 Feodosiya incident related to NATO troops episode exhibited the extent to which Ukrainians were still in doubt about their foreign policy preferences and orientation. The 1991-1994 and the 2004-2006 periods present similarities in the sense that they both exhibit a more pro-European approach which gives more space to liminal images, although they find themselves at different ends of the evolution of contemporary Ukrainian political thinking. The first period adopted and proposed rather clear images, that

of the buffer and the barrier, whereas the last period dabbled with the idea of bridge, without necessarily making a firm commitment to it. I looked at them together, however, in order to show how the pro-European stance varied in terms of liminal images. The Kuchma years represent a bloc in themselves and have an internal coherence of their own. They represent a break with the other threads, since Kuchma’s advent to power was in opposition to Leonid Kravchuk and the Orange Revolution happened in order to break with Kuchma’s rule.

Much as in the Romanian case, I have also looked further back in Ukrainian history in order to identify any “seeds” of discourse connected to liminality. These two periods (1991-2006 and the 1870-1920 - this latter period was chosen because it spanned roughly the moments of birth of an active Ukrainian identity or attempts at defining one; after 1920 Ukraine was incorporated into the USSR until 1991) brought together lead to the conclusion that, indeed, a certain discourse including liminal images and metaphors in connection to Ukraine exists and has existed in its political tradition. However, as shall be seen, it is nowhere near as strong or as well articulated as either the Romanian or the Turkish one, and it lives in an environment of strong competitive discourses, concerning Ukraine’s belonging to Europe and alternatively, to a Slavic, Eurasian world. Until the end of 2006, when my exploration ended, it was not possible to say which of the discourses were gaining ground, if any. What could be identified was a transformation of the idea of Ukraine being a buffer (characteristic of the early 1990s) into that of potentially being a bridge; however, as shall be shown, the image was not clearly developed.

Ukraine or Little Russia: looking for a place in the world

As shall be shown below, most political writings relating to Ukrainian independence and policy outlook deal with the relation to Russia and concentrate on the social aspects of what it means to be Ukrainian. I have selected for analysis those texts, which develop arguments related to the liminality question.

It must not be believed that because Ukraine’s statehood is of a relatively recent date, the country has not had intellectuals and political men thinking about her independence and its meaning. The idea of Ukraine survived for four centuries (since the 1650s) in peoples’ conscience, even if it was not always expressed or acted upon. This fact was supported by the emergence of different temporary political units claiming statehood on the territory of Ukraine after the implosion of the tsarist empire in 1917: in 1918 the creation of a Hetmanate proclaimed the existence of a Ukrainian state in the Eastern parts of the country, which lasted for only eight months before being toppled by an insurrectionary movement called the Directory; the Directory assumed power in 1918 in the Ukrainian National Republic. However, the Directory had a shaky position with different, other political movements, including the Bolsheviks, trying to capture power. In the West of the country, various parts of her went to Poland, Hungary and Romania as a result of the war. The remaining parts of Eastern Galicia became the West Ukrainian National Republic in 1918.

Since the cause of the Ukrainians was not seriously considered during the peace negotiations

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3 Idem, pp. 358-359.
4 Idem, pp. 367-368
5 Idem, p. 368.
of the First World War, the West and East Ukrainian governments united in 1919 against the Bolsheviks who had infiltrated the county in the hope of gaining independence. They were eventually defeated. However, the unfolding of these events proved that the Ukrainian people had developed a national consciousness, even if it varied from one side of the country to the other. “National consciousness, which had been limited to a part of the intelligentsia, spread to all segments of Ukrainian society.” In 1922, Ukraine became part of the Soviet Union.

This brief and non-exhaustive mention of Ukrainian attempts at independence was meant to emphasise the fact that the idea of independent statehood did exist in society and by the beginning of the 20th century, it had become strong. As the volume

“Towards an intellectual history of Ukraine” shows, ever since the 1700s, thinking about this issue had progressed. Although not as rich and well documented as the Romanian case - Ivan Rudnytsky pointed out that “research in the history of modern Ukrainian thought is still largely an unexplored virgin land” and that “no editions of the collected works of leading Ukrainian political thinkers exist (…) publications of documents pertaining to the ideologies and activities of Ukrainian parties and other political organisations are with few exceptions also non-existent” -

the Ukrainian one is not empty. One of the possible reasons for such a difference in quantity of documents, resides in the fact that, unlike the Romanian Principalities, which had a precarious, but precious level of autonomy allowing for the development of a national idea and doctrine, Ukrainians spent most of modern history under the domination of various surrounding empires (Habsburg, Russian), who very efficiently crushed many of the budding independence or statehood ideas. As Ilya Prizel suggested,

“Ukraine’s national identity differs fundamentally from that of either Poland or Russia. Both of these neighbours and former colonial masters were endowed with a conscious political elite, a distinct language, and a clear collective memory of nationhood. These elements, which enabled them to take their right to statehood for granted, were absent in Ukraine. While Poles were debating whether the positivist or the romantic tradition was the appropriate path toward independence and Russians were determining their country’s place in world civilisation, Ukrainians had yet to develop a distinct political identity. Such an identity did not fully emerge until the very end of the nineteenth century, with independent statehood alternatively viewed as either unnecessary or as an unattainable dream.”

Many factors are considered responsible for such a state of affairs, but in Ukrainian collective memory there seemed to be agreement about the moment that initiated it, namely the 1654 Pereiaslav Agreement between the Zaporozhian Cossacks (rulers of Ukrainian lands seeking protection from the Poles and the Ottomans) and Muscovy. The “myth of Pereiaslav”,

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6 Idem, p. 372.
7 Idem, p. 382.
as Rudnytsky calls it\textsuperscript{10}, suggested that the Agreement signified the beginning of the end for Ukrainian independence, and eventually brought the “ruin” of the country\textsuperscript{11}, because it brought Ukraine from the Polish orbit into the Russian one\textsuperscript{12}. However, as most historical myths go, it is in fact unfair to credit the Pereiaslav moment with such significance. Both Ivan Rudnytsky and Orest Subtelny underlined the fact that in its particular political and historical context, Pereiaslav represented a strategic move undertaken by an enterprising leader in order to maximise his power and capacity to protect his people at a central point in time\textsuperscript{13}. Subtelny outlines the five main ways in which the Pereiaslav Agreement has been interpreted in both Soviet and Ukrainian historiography: as a personal union between Muscovy and Ukraine, granting separate governments to the two entities; a union between Ukraine and Muscovy; a form of vassalage, whereby Ukraine would pay tribute and military assistance to Muscovy; a temporary military alliance; and the “culmination of the age-old desire of Ukraine and Russia to be reunited”\textsuperscript{14}. Nowadays, the multiplicity of visions continues to exist, with some Eastern Ukrainian historians still favouring a pro-Russian perspective, thus proving how divided seminal views of history still remain\textsuperscript{15}. They are mirroring in fact the divisions existent in political ideas, too. To a certain extent, perhaps it is fair to say that despite the various readings of the meaning of Pereiaslav, what transformed it into a crucial moment in Ukrainian history was not so much its advent, but the advent of the timely death of its artisan, Hetman Khmelnytsky, who could no longer undo the mechanism that his decision unwittingly set in motion: the eventual domination of Ukraine by Muscovy for centuries to come.

All in all, these interpretations suggest two important facts: the Pereiaslav moment constitutes a nodal point in Ukraine’s history, which, as shall be seen, repeatedly comes to haunt even present discourses and, second, it is a complex moment that can easily be misunderstood and manipulated. For the purposes of this analysis it is important because it indicates, in hindsight, an important turning point in Russo-Ukrainian relations, and emphasises the role that Bohdan Khmelntsky and the Cossacks had in the creation of Ukrainian statehood\textsuperscript{16}, which later on provided a significant platform for the reconstruction of Ukraine as an independent state in the 1990s.

Having clarified the fact that Ukraine is an entity which, for various reasons, had a relatively weak development of national doctrine, I would nevertheless want to turn to those texts and ideas that did exist with respect to that, and to focus particularly on the images and metaphors that would suggest a self-perception as a liminal entity. A preliminary note is necessary,
however. Volodymyr Zviglianich, senior fellow of the Ukrainian Institute of Sociology and analyst, pointed out in a commentary that Ukrainian identity and identity formation has been primarily studied abroad, in the United States and Canada. This, he believes, has led to a situation in which modern Ukrainian studies of Ukrainian identity have remained largely written in a Marxist reductionist fashion, while Western studies of Ukraine have applied different approaches to the matter. This is why the texts under study in this section are an unexpected combination of writings coming from the founding fathers of Ukrainian thought and of modern and contemporary scholars, who have studied them and have also written about Ukrainian identity. In a study concerned to find out how salient or not a certain imagery is, I have considered it useful to see where exactly the liminal appears. Studying them together does not mean they are considered of the same importance, but it indicates precisely how important or less so the idea of the liminal was in Ukraine. Depending on whom mentioned it, whether a member of the Brotherhood of St. Cyril and Methodius, or a much later scholar, it is possible to identify a certain genealogy of the idea. Furthermore, more recent scholars have important insights about earlier epochs.

These texts come from a compilation of the major political writings in Ukrainian modern history and from various other texts citing fragments or full versions of Ukrainian political thought. Although by no means exhaustive, I believe they are representative of the general preoccupations and arguments of the intelligentsia in those times. I have chosen texts that I considered touched upon the question of the liminal, even sometimes in a tenuous fashion. The texts belong to philosophers and historians of Ukraine, as well as contemporary Ukrainian historians writing about the beginnings of the independence idea in this area. I would like to point out particularly the presence of Mykhailo Hrushevsky, whose monumental history of Ukraine was translated and published recently, and who represents a great national symbol, as the author of a first systematic history of Ukrainian lands.

<table>
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<th>Mykola Kostomarov, Ukrainian historian</th>
<th>1846</th>
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<td>Mykola Kostomarov, Ukrainian scientist and political figure</td>
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<td>Two Russian Nationalities</td>
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Before launching into a more detailed analysis of the ideas provided by the aforementioned texts, a few remarks about what elements I was searching in them. The preliminary research I had conducted on the case of Ukraine suggested there was no abundance of clear references to a liminal imagery, as in the Romanian case. Therefore, I had to be looking for other indications, such as a particular view of Europe or Ukraine, an ideological struggle or another set of images that would point to the liminal question. The findings suggest that although there are no systematic references to the liminal, certain national features and stories, such as that of the Cossacks or particular geopolitical plans, present affinities with it.

What’s in a name…

A first element worthy of being noticed in the Ukrainian case is that a very important metaphor related to the idea of liminality constitutes the very name of the country: “Y kraine” means in Ukrainian and Russian “at the edge”, or “frontier”. Romania and Turkey have relatively complex narratives about how their countries have sometimes been frontiers, borderlands, bridges or barriers, but Ukraine, through the choice of this name seems to adopt or to wish to project a certain essence about herself. I am talking about a choice, because the country Ukraine has not always borne the name of “Ukraine”. Studies suggest that although ukraïna was a term used as early as the 12th and 13th centuries to designate various east Slavic lands like Pereiaslav and Galicia and possibly other Principalities of Kievan Rus, as Vitalij Skljarenko and Hryhorij Pivtorak claim, it was not systematically used to designate a country until the 19th century, when Nikolai Kostomarov, historian and member of the nationalist Brotherhood of St Cyril and Methodius started to use this name in reference to the Ukrainian lands. However, there was no immediate and wide acceptance of this term, which, as Frank Sysyn suggests, was forbidden and contested by Tsarist Russia, who preferred the designation of Ukrainian lands as Malorossija, or Little Russia. In his preface to Mykhaylo Hrushevsky’s impressive

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19 A gathering of a dozen members of the intelligentsia furthering romantic nationalist ideas about Ukraine, Subtelny, op. cit., p. 236.
history of Ukraine, Sysyn was keen to emphasise the significance that the use of the term Ukraine had for the moment when this work was first written in 1898.

“The very title of Hrushevsky’s work was a programmatic statement. A history of Ukraine-Rus’ emphasized the continuity between Kyivan Rus’ and modern Ukraine. Written at a time when most Western Ukrainians still called themselves Rusyny (Ruthenians), the title served to ease the transition to the new name, Ukraine. In selecting a geographic name, Hrushevsky was defining the categories employed by his contemporaries. Ukraine was not an administrative entity at that time. In Russia the term was forbidden, and even the accepted ‘Little Russia’ often did not encompass all the territories inhabited by Ukrainian majorities. To Galician Ukrainians, Ukraine often meant the territories in the Russian Empire. (...) Hrushevsky defined the borders of his Ukraine as the lands in which Ukrainians had traditionally constituted the majority of the population, the object of the striving of the Ukrainian national movement. Most importantly, his use of the term ‘Rus’ and the emphasis on continuity with Kyivan Rus’ also challenged the monopoly that Russians had on that name and tradition in scholarship and popular thinking”.

This comment underlines how new the use of “Ukraine” was and that it signified a political choice aimed at differentiating a political and cultural unit. However, it is not very clear if “Ukraine” was chosen as a name reflecting the frontier-like character of the society that inhabited those lands, or because it was a term that had been present throughout history to different degrees and was distinctive enough as to satisfy the need of separation from Russia, Poland and the Habsburg Empire. Mikhaylo Hrushevsky affirms in his History that:

“(…) the names of Ukraina and Ukrainian gradually came into widespread use. In the 16th century, this ancient term which in the period of the Old Rus meant “borderland” was applied exclusively to the Dnipro which by the end of the 15th century had become a dangerous borderland indeed, subject to the attack of the Tatars. The name Ukraine received special significance in the 17th century when this region of Eastern Ukraine became the symbol of the Ukrainian revival and concentrated in itself the hopes of modern Ukraine. The name Ukraine became indissolubly linked with the exuberant outburst of Ukrainian life which became later for generations a luminous torch and inexhaustible source of national consciousness. During the 19th century literary revival the name Ukraine became a symbol of Ukrainian national life. As awareness of the continuity of ethnonational life grew the Ukrainian name gradually came to encompass the entire history of the Ukrainian people”.

From this explanation, it would appear that although the original borderland meaning of Ukraine was acknowledged, it was not necessarily associated with a borderland function, or rather that function became supplanted by national ideas, in such a way that “ukraina” (borderland, frontier) was no longer coterminous with “Ukraine”, the latter term becoming infused with further more symbolic and political meaning. In fact, Roman Szporluk, Ukrainian historian and academic, holds that

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21 Idem.
“the decision to adopt the Ukrainian name for a people living under several jurisdictions where those people lived as one country, Ukraine, had nothing to do with that newly imagined country being a borderland to any place- a literal meaning of the word Ukraine, common both in Russian and Polish parlance for centuries. Ukraine came to designate a geographical space extending from the land of the Don Cossacks to the northern counties of Hungary, from the mouth of the Danube to points north of Sumy and Kharkiv. Even a casual glance at the map of Europe will show that such a vast theory cannot be a borderland or periphery to anything, (this in itself is an arguable point, since Ukraine could be border like in terms other than geographical) The fact is that for the new and large country they invented – it existed only in their heads- the originators and first promoters of Ukraine defiantly chose the very name that denied them the very dignity of a nation”\textsuperscript{23}.

This is likely the reason why, ultimately, liminal images, although present, are not always the focus of the discourses of the national. Whereas in Romania liminal images and metaphors were explicitly and repeatedly associated with the nationalist project, in Ukraine, home to a wider variety of ideas and perspectives, (as shall be shown) these images competed with those of pan-Slavism, for example.

However, there is in the history of Ukraine one instance of an explicit connection between the name of the country and the frontier, liminal function, and that is the period of the Hetmanate of the Zaporozhian Cossacks.

Cossacks, the frontier men

The first sentence of Subtelny’s history of Ukraine tells its readers that Ukraine means borderland,

“an appropriate name for a land that lies on the south Eastern edge of Europe, on the threshold of Asia, along the fringes of the Mediterranean world and astride the once important border between sheltering forests and the open steppe”\textsuperscript{24}.

To what extent could such a geographic situation give rise to a people or a structure that embodied the function of the frontier? It would appear that the constant appeal of the fertile steppe regions to the south of the region of Kiev created a movement not unlike the Westward expansion on the North American continent some 200 years later, in which vast areas of lands were colonised by peasants and land owners in search of more riches\textsuperscript{25}. The steppe was, however, subject to the periodical and deadly raids of Tatars, which meant that powerful incentives had to be offered for people to go there, implying the granting of freedoms that were not common in the Polish Commonwealth, and the possibility of free land use for 10 or 20 years\textsuperscript{26}.

\textsuperscript{24}Orest Subtelny, 1988, op. cit., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{25}Orest Subtelny, 1988, op. cit. p. 106. Polish and Polonised (meaning Ukrainian noblemen whose lands were part of the Polish Commonwealth) magnates obtained territory in the east.
\textsuperscript{26}Idem.
Gradually, what Subtelny calls a “frontier society” emerged in these places, in the sense of the existence of social structures that were more flexible and permeable than at the centre, because they had to deal with the constant dangers of foreign attacks. At the frontier of this frontier society emerged the Cossacks

“originally referring to the free, masterless men who lacked a well-defined place in society and who lived on its unsettled periphery—runaway peasants, burghers, defrocked priests and impemcious or adventure seeking noblemen, mostly Ukrainian” 27,

who, living far on the outskirts of the steppe gradually evolved into a society of their own, whose main function became the protection of the lands that were owned by noblemen and peasants.

As Subtelny shows, the Cossacks were not a homogeneous stratum of society, and even when they started to organise themselves as a result of their increasing responsibilities, there were differences between the Cossacks that had adapted to the administrative system of the Polish Commonwealth, being registered and part of the bureaucratic life, and the poorer ones, who were more susceptible to perform subversive activities28.

However, the important factor to remember is that by 1648 the Cossacks had become a distinct political and military entity and feature of the Ukrainian lands; as such, they entered into official relations with the Polish Commonwealth and eventually revolted against it in 1648, when the exploitation by Polish and Polonised magnates intensified in the frontier lands29.

The “frontier knights” as Zenon Kohut calls them, entered around 1648 a period of struggle and strife through which they attempted to define their role and place within the Polish Commonwealth30 and eventually succeeded in imposing self-rule31. Various fights and need for alliances led the best known of the Hetmans of the Cossacks, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, to sign the (in)famous Pereiaslav Treaty of 1653/1654. However, more importantly, his and the Cossacks’ tribulations were the factor that led to the consolidation of a sense of Ukrainian nationhood and fight for the affirmation of their interests in a time when the Polish szlachta was overpowering and oppressive.

Even if the Ukrainian national poet Taras Shevchenko harshly criticised Khmelnytsky and accused him of handing Ukrainians over to Russia32, the significance of the Cossack organisation and structure cannot be underestimated in Ukrainian history, especially if the post-1990 efforts at nation-building are anything to judge by. It is important to retain this moment because it is perhaps the only one in Ukrainian history where an explicit and sustained association existed between the frontier function of the Ukrainian lands and the society that inhabited them. In her study of liminality Anne Norton explains that those

28 Idem, pp. 110-111.
29 Idem, p. 124.
31 Ivan Rudnytsky, 1987, op. cit., p. 78.
who inhabit the hinterlands of a political entity become the most evident examples of ambiguous community membership. In her words the frontiersman:

“represents the liminality of those people who recognise his continued membership in their community and extol his exploits. The outlaw represents the frontier in myth because he replicates the ambiguous relation of that territory to the nominally governing centre”.

Therefore, choosing the Cossacks as one of the main Ukrainian national myths indicated at least an unconscious drive of 20th century Ukrainian elites towards a particular positioning on the European mental map. Frank Sysyn tells us that the Cossacks and "their legacy were at the centre of political and cultural struggles in the Ukraine, that fundamentally determined the processes of nation and state building in modern Ukraine”.

This was a process that had started during the 19th century when Ukrainian elites had to infuse a national consciousness into a people who had never effectively been administratively united. It would seem that all Ukrainian political groups, including the early Soviet Ukrainian republic made use of Cossack symbols. As Norton explains:

"the territorially liminal become signs of the nation because they are, territorially, not unambiguously national. They becomes signs of the capacity for conquest, incorporation, and production because they are constantly in danger of being themselves conquered and incorporated into a foreign body, with their nature consequently altered. They signify what they lack. The ambivalence of liminality extends not only to the traits and the ascriptive character of liminars, but to a function of liminality in the political culture as well”.

I find this explanation particularly fitting to the Ukrainian case, where being assimilated by Russia was the case for such a long time, with echoes down to the present. That which is more intriguing in the Ukrainian case is why a more self-conscious liminal logic and imagery did not develop. The next section tries to clarify this issue by looking at the texts that attempted to locate Ukraine on the map of Europe.

**Ukraine between East and West**

Ivan Rudnytsky suggests in his article “Ukraine between East and West” that Ukraine’s positioning on the frontier between Easts- the world of Eastern Christianity and Byzantium and the world of Eurasian nomads- and the West- represented by the Germanic lands between the
North and Baltic Seas to the Danubian valley⁴⁰- encouraged an attempt at synthesising these influences, rather than the projection of Ukraine as “the bastion of Catholicism”, as Poland did, or as the “heirs of the Roman legionaries”⁴¹, which was the Romanian claim.

Rudnytsky also recognises that Ukrainians have failed in their synthesising mission and that is the great task ahead for them.

Perhaps the reason for this is to be found in the sharp variety of opinions, which characterised the emergent national doctrine in the 19th century. The foundations of the Ukrainian political programs are generally set in 1846-7, with the creation of the Brotherhood of St. Cyril and Methodius⁴² in Western Ukraine; however, there were important differences in the degree of national consciousness between Western and Eastern Ukraine⁴³, with the Western being the more active.

With respect to liminal images and metaphors to be found in these developing ideas and opinions, the texts under examination yielded somewhat mixed results. Insofar as I looked at the relation with Europe, 19th century Ukrainian intellectuals seemed to be more concerned with Russia and its influence, than with Europe. Thus, Mykola Kostomarov, prominent historian and writer, focused in his book of Ukrainian genesis on the relationship of Ukrainians with Poles and Russians. Kostomarov claimed that Ukraine wished to live with them as brothers, three republics in one union⁴⁴, although throughout history the former two had sought to oppress the Ukrainians more than anything else. Therefore he claimed Ukrainians, through their spirit of tolerance and tradition of democracy and support of personal liberty⁴⁵ were the ones to sound the clarion of liberation of the Slavic people. Rudnytsky points out that Kostomarov was one of the representatives of Ukrainian Messianism, which claimed that Ukrainians had a mission to fulfil: by liberating herself Ukraine would help the Poles and the Russians renounce their more negative traits and would create a better common future⁴⁶.

Mykhailo Drahomanov, seen as the founder of Ukrainian democratic socialism and a prominent political thinker, brought a little more of the European dimension to the Ukrainian outlook by upholding that Ukraine had always been open to European influences, although after 1654 she entered a zone of shadow through her alliance with Muscovy:

“a wall of tsarist and bureaucratic despotism was erected to prevent the free political ideas then current in Europe, which Ukraine had always welcomed, from penetrating”⁴⁷.

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⁴⁰ Ivan Rudnytsky, 1987, op. cit., p. 3.
⁴¹ I found in my research a rather funny joke about how Ukraine’s destiny had really been sealed by Caesar’s assassins, who through their murder put a stop to the latter’s adventurous plans of expanding the Roman Empire further to the North East and therefore deprived these parts of the world of the salvation of the Latin civilisation.
However, there is no mention of a function that Ukraine might have had in her past or one envisaged in the future, but rather a painful outcry, echoed in the writings of other political thinkers, such as Ivan Nechui Levytsky, novelist, who claimed that

“moving from Western Europe to the east, we find more evil. Crossing the Prussian-Russian border we will see that in Russia the policy of forced denationalisation is running wild”47,

or Mykola Mikhnovski who claimed that since 1654 the Ukrainian nation had been dying, stifled by the oppressive drives of Muscovy48. Even when the latter wrote about the independence of Ukraine, he wrote in terms of the struggle against Russia, and of achieving unity, but did not even sketch the role that Ukraine might have in the world after independence. When considering the international context in which Ukraine found herself at the time, this comes as no surprise. Portions of her territory were not involved in the kind of political exchange with other countries of Europe that might encourage a dialogue or the possibility of unity or secession from Russia. The struggle was very much internal to the tsarist empire, and, as the year 1919 showed, when the Ukrainians tried to have their voice heard, she was not going to get much support from the outside.

However, even if most of the nationalist thinkers were far more preoccupied with Russia and cultural and historical issues, dwelling on various ways in which Russia and Ukraine could be part of a federation of equals, there were three most interesting authors, who attempted to develop a geopolitical thinking with respect to Ukraine. These were Mykhailo Hrushevsky (quoted above), Vyacheslav Lypynsky and Stepan Rudnytsky, all writing towards the end of the 19th century. As Ambassador Kochubei claims in a recent article, this was the period when such writings would appear, because a vision of a sovereign state had emerged49 in Ukraine and it was time to develop a foreign policy idea for it.

Mykhailo Hrushevsky elaborated on geopolitical principles for Ukraine.

“The historic conditions of life oriented Ukraine Westward, while geographic conditions oriented it toward south and the Black Sea. In the south the Black Sea linked our coast with the Asia Minor, and further on with the realms of old cultures, e. g. Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Aegean. The Black Sea rather united than separated coastal countries”50.

He suggested that Ukrainian civilisation belonged to the West and urged Ukrainians to study in the West. Hrushevsky further argued that the geographic peculiarities of Ukraine, “lead to the communication centre” of the Black Sea51. He ultimately suggested the creation of a federation of Black Sea countries who would maximise the potential of the region52.

50 Quoted in Kochubei, 2003, op. cit, p. 56.
51 Idem, p. 57.
52 Idem, p. 58.
Hruschevsky has also, notably, written that Ukraine played the honorable role of defender of European civilisation against the Asian hordes\textsuperscript{53}.

These opinions were echoed by Stepan Rudnytsky, considered to be Ukraine’s first geopolitical writer, who depicted Ukraine as a buffer, to a certain extent, by saying that Ukraine opened Russia’s way to the south and to the West “domination of Ukraine gave the Russian state direct contact with Central Europe” whereas a Russia without Ukraine would make Europe safer\textsuperscript{54}. The buffer function written about by the two intellectuals resembles that evoked by Romanian elites, with the enemy being, very clearly, Russia. Yet, it seems to be mentioned rather en passant, lacking the emphasis observed in the cases of Turkey and Romania.

Rudnytsky also reiterated the Black Sea arguments in a “Geography of Ukraine” published in Lviv in 1914\textsuperscript{55}, emphasising Ukraine’s situation on the Black Sea, with a broad coastal access and therefore a connection to the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

“There is a pending plan to connect the Baltic and Black Sea via Dvina and Dnipro with a channel accessible for sea vessels. In that way the Black Sea will become more open for one important shipping route. They should develop the Black Sea navigation, because it is an obvious necessity for all Ukrainian coastal population which has always been drawn towards shipping”\textsuperscript{56}.

Rudnytsky also upheld the idea that had Ukraine been independent she could have taken advantage of such opportunities and would have become a major European power. It would seem that the transit capacity that the country held great importance in his eyes.

Such ideas did not die, even if the plight of Ukrainians worsened as the 20\textsuperscript{th} century went by. On the contrary, it is suggested that even when Ukrainian lands were under German occupation, and nationalist movements were publicly suppressed, they were further cultivated in Western Ukraine. Before the occupation of Ukrainian lands by Germany Yurii Lypa published in Lviv a book on Ukraine’s geopolitical outlook claiming that “Only South-North is the axis of Ukrainian lands, the defence of the South-North axis is the most important task in Ukrainian history”. He believed in the stabilising role of this axis in world policy\textsuperscript{57}. An interesting detail about Lypa, however, is that he also seized upon Hruschevsky and Stepan Rudnytsky’s ideas concerning the need for Ukraine to extend her influence to the East and become a bridge to it\textsuperscript{58}, showing that the views of all these intellectuals were ambiguous in respect to what exactly Ukraine could be doing with her position.

Other intellectuals followed Lypa’s line of thought on the Black Sea issue during the German occupation, and even created an illegal Black Sea Institute that was meant to circulate the idea

\textsuperscript{53} Mykhailo Hrushevsky, 1898 (1998), op. cit., p 11.
\textsuperscript{54} Quoted in Andrew Wilson, 2000, \textit{The Ukrainians, Unexpected Nation}, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 284.
\textsuperscript{55} Idem, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{56} Idem, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{57} Idem, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{58} As discussed by A. Wilson, 2000, op. cit., p. 294.
of Ukraine’s importance at the Black Sea and her encouragement of concerted efforts in the region. In his article, Kochubei also suggests that reprints of these works during the Cold War signified that these ideas persisted in the minds of Ukrainian intelligentsia, who eventually tried to enact them post 1991 (as will be discussed in a subsequent section).

The interesting elements in all these ideas are the identification of Ukraine’s buffer role between Russia and Europe, the mention of the North-South axis, or the Baltic-Black Sea connection (the amber route) as a geopolitical spinal chord for Ukraine and the Black Sea as a potential major factor in granting Ukraine geopolitical gravitas. Although not dwelled upon as in the Romanian case, the buffer function is underlined, existing as a potential cue to be picked up by potential nation builders or other political entrepreneurs. In fact, an interview I conducted in Kiev with the head of a right wing political party who wished to remain anonymous, revealed a strong awareness of these geopolitical possibilities even nowadays. My interlocutor was intent on the need to revive the connections mentioned above, especially the amber route, because they would bring Ukraine further from Russia and closer to Europe. The connector role constitutes an interesting piece in the Ukrainian arsenal of liminal images, even if not greatly insisted upon. Its attractiveness relied on the fact that it brought solutions to being less dependent on Russia. However, it was relatively clear from the texts which I had the opportunity to examine that because of particular historical conditions there was not much political space for the elaboration of these notions; the overwhelming presence of Russia as the oppressor and annihilating entity, shaped national discourse by determining a strong focus on liberation, rather than negotiation with other entities, which was more the Romanian case. As Ilya Prizel states,

“When modern Ukrainian nationalism finally made its appearance in the mid-nineteenth century, idealists were more concerned with containing Russian centralization and avoiding the total assimilation of Ukrainian culture by Russia and Poland than with anything else.”

Another fact which supports this conclusion is that in most historical accounts which referred to the glorious epoch of the Cossacks- the historic episode explicitly related to the frontier. The images that were exacerbated and the historical cues that were developed were those of resistance to imperial powers and struggle for independence rather than the connection with the borderland function that was acknowledged but not exalted. Furthermore, of the number of texts under study in reference to political thinking, only a minority dealt with geopolitics, and from that minority only a few with issues other than the need for independence or a federation of Slavic peoples. However, those who did deal with alternative questions placed a certain emphasis on Ukraine’s role as a buffer and connector country.

The historical texts explored above provide a few indications about the factors influencing political and geopolitical debates in 19th century Ukraine. One of the most important features,
which differentiates this case from Romania and Turkey is the doubt on whether Ukrainians were a nation or not; indeed, neither Romanians nor Turks had to confront such kind of questions, even if, for example, Romanians lived for a very long time in separate administrative and political entities, and the Turks were heirs to a multinational empire. Ukrainians, on the other hand, had to argue for a separate identity and consciousness from Russia and in addition to that imagine a function for their nation. As it is possible to see in the texts above, most opinions sought to prove in one way or another how Ukrainians were different from Russia, either because of being an older people, having a more refined culture or a better connection to Europe. This line of thought survived down to the 1990s, when authors still asked if Ukraine had a history as a nation. Hence, it is easier to understand why other potential elements of a foreign policy discourse were not strongly developed.

Below, a table with the features identified in historical texts.

| Subject positioning | Stifled by Russia; in a struggle of liberation from Russia, born under the influence of a frontier society and “frontier knights”; administratively attached mostly to Russia; in the Black Sea region; oriented westward; |
| Predicate analysis | Hailing the clarion of liberation for the Slavic people; progressive; open to European influences; reform inclined; separate identity and consciousness from Russia; no defined identity; incomplete national project; |
| Liminal images/references | Potential bridge, communication centre, country of synthesis of East and West |

It is apparent that the history of the Ukrainian nation offers current decision-makers some articulations of liminal images, even if they remained in an underdeveloped state, much as the nation-building project did. As Frank Sysyn remarked Ukrainians inherited from the 19th century nationalist movement an image of themselves as a democratic people, even if anarchic; the image was infused with the Cossack imagery, as well as the idea that Ukraine could indeed play a function within the geopolitical make up of Europe. The possibility of her being a bridge, or a transportation corridor, or a significant power in the Black Sea region were all mentioned, and there was a sense in which the Ukrainian people was expected to be able to take the reins of its own governance.

In comparison to Romania and Turkey, however, this historical survey gives few clues about how a liminal imagery could unfold. There does not seem to be any preference for a particular image or consensus on a role, just as there is no consensus on which direction Ukraine should take: towards Europe or towards a more equal relation with Russia. With respect to the theoretical framework of the analysis, it could be said that looking to the past or to some seminal moments of Ukrainian nationalist thought has not yielded the expected results.

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62 Mark von Hagen, 1995, ‘Does Ukraine have a history?’ *Slavic Review*, 54(3).
or indications regarding the liminal. Nevertheless, I believe the exercise was useful because it pointed where things were unclear and where they were likely to remain so. Indeed, as results unfolded, it can be said that the historical past constituted a relatively accurate precursor to the hesitation and confusion that was a characteristic feature of Ukrainian foreign policy discourse during the 1990s and 2000s.

1991-1994 - exploring the geopolitical meanings of independence

I remarked towards the end of the previous section that one of the main challenges that Ukrainian elites faced was the articulation of a Ukrainian identity as different from Russia. In the years immediately following the split from the USSR, the process of nation-building undertaken by the elites confronted many questions similar to those previous generations had encountered, including the identification of a seminal “Other” that would help with the clarification and construction of a Ukrainian identity. Accepting the fact that national identities are built through both positive and negative identification, in the Ukrainian case, as in many others, the need for an “Other” arose as support for a strong self. However, as Taras Kuzio remarked, in the Ukraine of the early 1990s political elites had difficulties agreeing upon a common (negative) “other” which would help in the coagulation of an identity. Because of Russia’s closeness to Ukraine, Kuzio argues, the former imperial ruler appeared as an obvious choice for differentiation. Furthermore, the fact that the West was initially reasonably sceptical of Ukraine’s viability as a self-sustainable entity, emphasised the tendency to stress difference with Russia. However, Kuzio shows that Ukrainian elites were strongly divided on this issue. Members of the radical left remained quite committed to the idea of Russia and Eurasia as a necessary ingredient for a prosperous Ukrainian future, and considered the West as well as the anti-communist Russian politicians as a negative other; these were Ukrainian communists who in fact regretted the times of the USSR, and invoked the benefits of a fully communist system. On the opposite far right, opinions were radically different, and Russia was presented as the other, “Asian, Muscovite hordes of the East” against whom Ukraine was a frontline state protecting Europe. Moreover, even the Russian speaking population of Ukraine was seen with suspicion and hailed as a potential subversive “other”. At the centre of the political spectrum opinions were also divided on Russia, because some saw it as part of Europe, and

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64 “Millions had abandoned the use of their native language in every day life and some did not even know it. Among the well-educated, knowledge of national culture and history was limited, while most others did not even have the simplified, shared image of national identity common to most Central and East European peoples. Regional differences were so pronounced that the collective identity “Ukrainian” could not transcend them. For much of the population in the southern and eastern Ukraine, “Ukrainian” merely connoted ancestral roots. Collective loyalties to a Soviet people and to an East Slavic family coexisted with a Ukrainian identity that was often devoid of linguistic, cultural, or historical content. (...) the process of modern Ukrainian nation-building started in the 19th century had never been completed, and had been reversed during the Stalinist terror”, Frank Sysyn, 1991, op. cit., pp. 852-853.


66 Idem, p. 349.


68 Idem, p. 352.

69 Idem, p. 353.
therefore as likely as Ukraine to join it, whereas others saw it as part of Eurasia, and therefore not entirely European. It is important to remember these substantial divisions on the seminal issue of Ukrainian identity, because they explain why, as different parties succeeded to power in Ukraine in the past 16 years, foreign policy decisions emphasised different preferences, which sometimes gave the impression that whatever statements were made on a topic were largely instrumental and void of real intent and commitment (as shall be later discussed). Indeed, this situation raised, in fact, an essential question not only for Ukrainian state building, but for any state-building process in general, namely: in the absence of a common identity and history, what makes people unite and adopt a common position? The Ukrainians tried to say that it was the goal of a better future. Nevertheless, they failed to agree on what the source of that situation might be, not least because en-bloc rejection of a Russian past did not correspond to the truth of feeling of a big majority. I believe that in fact, during this period, Ukrainian elites being ideologically, politically and economically divided did not manage to reach a chorus of voices on foreign policy issues (and therefore on the liminal question), but rather produced a cacophony in which occasionally some voices were stronger; they did not however assimilate the others, merely temporarily covering them.

In the words of philosopher Charles Taylor, mentioned previously, it could be said 1990s Ukrainians seemed to lack the necessary “horizons of meaning” giving them a sense of why their leaders made the choices they made. More accurately, they were in the presence of conflicting horizons of meaning, which were difficult to reconcile and fuse in a larger, shared one.

From 1991 to 1994, president Leonid Kravchuk and the national-communist elite around him privileged a nation-building project that presented Russia as a negative “other” to be feared and rejected, a fact that opened the discursive space for the existence of the liminal images of the “buffer” and the “barrier”.

This section explores the first years of Ukrainian independence. It is based on primary sources such as speeches by president Leonid Kravchuk, and analyses conducted by Ukrainian analysts of the 1991-1994 period. Although there are not many primary sources, lacking for a variety of reasons - access limited by both availability and the language barrier, insufficient recording of sources - I would like to stress that many analyses include original documents, such as speeches and written texts, which they quote at length and which proved to be a notable source of information for this interval that is otherwise relatively poorly documented. I have not inscribed the secondary sources, which include primary evidence in the list of examined texts, but throughout the analysis I acknowledge what primary texts are included in the secondary analyses. The criticism might arise that these sources belonged almost exclusively to the decision-making elites, and no other sources, such as newspaper editorials, history analyses, geographies or independent opinions coming from civil society. However, it must be borne in mind that, just as in Romania and Turkey, foreign policy decision-making was indeed an elite affair, especially in a post-soviet society where civil society was not developed yet, and where former Communist party and Soviet structure members were still in a position of

70 Idem, p. 354.
power. Alla Nastych remarked in 2003 that Ukrainian civil society was weak and apathetic\textsuperscript{71}, quoting a renowned political analyst, Pokohalo, who affirmed that Ukrainian population remained largely post-soviet in mentality and behaviour, by remaining disinterested in the progress of democratic reforms and political participation\textsuperscript{72}. To a certain extent, this was the situation in Romania, too, in the early 1990s, when, statistically speaking, texts originating from the decision-making elites were numerically overwhelming compared to texts from other sources; the difference which stimulated a quicker growth (?) was that Romania had an initial experience with democracy at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, which had persisted in the collective political memory for long enough as to support reforms in the early 1990s. It cannot be said that in Ukraine no opinions other than elite ones existed, but rather they were heard less and were not strong enough as to create a strong echo and a position in the discourse. Below, the list of texts under examination, not including secondary analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leonid Kravchuk, President</th>
<th>1991</th>
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<td>Leonid Kravchuk</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>A new Ukraine in a new Europe</td>
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<td>Leonid Kravchuk</td>
<td>1992</td>
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<td>Leonid Kravchuk</td>
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<td>Leonid Kravchuk</td>
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<td>2001</td>
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</table>

A small note on the inclusion of certain scholarly articles, such as K. Wolczuk’s above amongst the primary sources: Although they do not bear the same weight as the statements of decision-makers, I have mentioned in the methodology section that academic studies participate in the community of “intellectuals of statecraft” to the forging of certain ideas and their perpetration. Through their writings many scholars participate first hand in the process of image creation of a country, particularly in the case of the geopolitical discourse.

Ukraine became an independent state on 22 August 1991, when Parliament adopted the Act of Independence of Ukraine. In December 1991 the Ukrainian people validated this new legal


\textsuperscript{72} Idem, p. 304.
situation through a referendum. Historians and analysts have, however, not failed to note that the independence of Ukraine was effected in a somewhat reluctant way, the leadership of this country having supported the 1991 putsch in Moscow and being amongst the more sluggish in proclaiming independence, especially when compared with the Baltic republics, for example. Andrew Wilson tells us that

“Ukrainian independence came as much by accident as design, and largely as a result of events occurring elsewhere. A specifically Ukrainian politics existed therefore only in embryonic form in December 1991. Political parties, state institutions, the very shape of the polity were all in very early stages of development”.

President Kravchuk upheld this in one of his public speeches:

“we need to develop the philosophy and ideology of New Ukraine. However, we lack a modern philosophy reflecting our tradition and historical roots. (...) To be frank, we have virtually no experience to capitalise upon. There are no large state structures because Ukraine has all the time been in someone else’s custody.”

With these affirmations he was practically bringing home the point that in post-Soviet Ukraine state and nation building had to be done from scratch, which is what he set out to do in the years of his presidency.

It is therefore no surprise that, with such a daunting task at hand, the political, economic and geopolitical situation of Ukraine did not look optimistic during this initial period. Regarding both nation and state building, Ilya Prizel correctly remarked that Ukrainians did not have a usable common experience to build upon, or common myths. As a consequence, efforts to develop the idea of a nation which could be embodied in a state became a rather large melting pot of ideas, in which nationalists could make their anti-Russian and pro-Western voice heard, with the support of former communist and nomenklatura members who were prepared to make deals with any devil in order to remain in control of structures. However, as Frank Sysyn reminds us, given the differing perspectives of the world in Ukraine, largely rooted in regional and political differences, the results of such a process were rather mixed.

The result insofar as foreign policy and geopolitical discourse were concerned was mixed. (repetitive from previous sentence) Ilya Prizel emphasizes the fact that President Kravchuk used foreign policy issues in order to divert attention from more pressing internal matters such as economic and political reform; yet, whatever the intentions of the President, his speeches and policies etched a certain image of Ukraine which appeared pro-Western and rather anti-

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Russian. The question might arise about the value of such affirmations, which seemed to be rather instrumentally used and not genuinely representing a set of core beliefs. I wish to suggest that even if Leonid Kravchuk and certain members of his team did not truly believe what they were affirming, they made a choice as to what kind of images and arguments they thought might serve their nation-building project. By choosing those they showed an understanding that a process of othering (you making up verbs?) Russia was a tool that historically and discursively already existed; they placed it more firmly on the political discursive map of the new Ukraine.

Svetlana Kobzar, writing about various themes in Ukrainian foreign policy post-1991, identified the myth of a “return to Europe”, which aimed to convince both foreign and domestic publics of Ukraine’s belonging to Europe, and particularly Central Europe80. However, this “return” could not be invoked as in the case of Romania or other former communist countries, as a return to normality or a former golden age, mainly because, as previously specified, there were no collective memories that would serve such a purpose81. Therefore there was an inclination towards stressing the cultural and civilisational aspects of relations to Europe, rather than foreign policy ones, even though, as shall be shown, President Leonid Kravchuk did his best to articulate an image in which the connection with Europe would also gain strong geopolitical connotations. Thus, as early as December 1991 he declared:

“Ukraine is a European state. This is the major factor determining the priorities of our foreign policy. It is the countries of Europe with which Ukraine has the closest political, economic and humanitarian ties, so expansion of these ties on a qualitative new basis is our chief priority”82.

Yet, having relations with an entity does not make one part of that entity. In choosing these words President Kravchuk was depicting a situation that underlined rather Ukraine’s distance from Europe, even if no one chose to see it from this angle. Although no further details were provided as to how ties were going to be consolidated, it is important to note this remark was made at a highly symbolic meeting of the Supreme Council of Ukraine, which was basically setting the governing programme of the new country, associating the question of independence with her European-ness. More or less detailed developments of this position followed in other speeches, in which Kravchuk claimed, without specifics, that Ukraine would occupy her due place in Europe83, identified what Ukraine meant for Russia,

“all intellectual, transport and economic roads to the West come through our country. Ukraine means the Black Sea, the Danube…It is now very advantageous for Russia to use Ukraine for access to the West”84

83 Idem, p. 20.
and, ultimately, boldly claimed that

“Ukraine is located at the centre of Europe. She occupies an exceptionally advantageous geographical, geopolitical and strategic position as a crossroads of tourist, cultural and economic ties.”

Pronounced on different occasions and in front of both domestic and foreign publics, these speeches show an evolution and a strengthening of the European argument. Nevertheless, if gauged against the rest of the other speeches, their appearance is rather thin. Admittedly, just like in the Romanian case, other matters, such as internal reforms needed more emphasis, especially for the Ukrainians, who were not so taken with foreign policy issues. However, President Kravchuk cannot be blamed for not trying hard enough to defend his message. In 1993, he, as well as the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine approved the official documents of Ukrainian foreign policy, stating integration with Europe as a long-term goal. They also presented east-central European countries as intermediaries helping Ukraine in this endeavour. This was certainly intended as a statement of intention, even if later developments did not necessarily support them. Kravchuk did his best in his speeches to articulate Ukraine’s troubled history with her European vocation, claiming that the country had roots in European culture and therefore could contribute to the European project. Much like Romanian leaders, Kravchuk is also known to have tried to project Ukraine as a Central European country, attempting to improve relations with Poland and the Visegrad group. In doing this he espoused the nationalist point of view that Ukraine was a Central European country, whose

“basic sphere of Ukrainian geopolitical interests has been Central Europe and the Black Sea Mediterranean basin.”

However that policy, as I shall show below, was short lived. On the whole

“Kiev anticipated that the West would welcome Ukraine as a prize in the post-Soviet world. Having exerted numerous resources for decades to contain the Soviet threat, Kiev reasoned that the West would quickly embrace Ukraine, providing not only security but also political and economic assistance to prevent any future Russian threats.”

This calculation turned out to be off track and left Ukraine in an uncertain place.

In terms of liminal images, the Kravchuk speeches which I had the opportunity to read and analyse did not indicate the idea of buffer or bridge or any other related one. Yet, the President

86 Ilya Prizel, op. cit., p. 352.
insisted on Ukraine’s neutral status\textsuperscript{91} as a necessity related to Ukraine’s difficult position, which somewhat contradicted his overtly pro-European and anti-Russian stance. Indeed, Ukraine’s neutrality status was enshrined even in the Declaration of Sovereignty: (Ukraine) “will be a permanently neutral state, taking no part in military blocks”\textsuperscript{92}, even though as early as 1991 Ukraine joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council\textsuperscript{93} and manifested overt sympathy for NATO. However, that was because the emphasis was on non-bloc status rather than neutrality in the strict sense, since Ukraine viewed her security as being enhanced through active, impartial engagement rather than in distancing herself from European issues. Ukraine endeavoured to translate this position into a positive political force binding it into the European fabric\textsuperscript{94}. Yet, there was no clear indication or explicit connection between Ukraine’s geographical position and the need for a neutrality policy. As Popadiuk suggested, this attitude was largely used in order to signal to Russia that Ukraine had no hostile intentions. (In fact, her neutrality gradually dwindled down until the late 1990s, when a clear statement of intention towards NATO was made).

However, Kravchuk’s association with the nationalist and the centre right parties that upheld Ukraine’s European and anti-Russian orientation brought to the fore a number of liminal images. Nationalists popularised ideas such as expressed by a former dissident, Mykhailo Horyn, that “Ukraine has saved European civilisation more than once from the onrush of Eastern nomads, Tatar-Turkic expansion and Russo-Eurasian lust”\textsuperscript{95} and a “respected political analyst”\textsuperscript{96} is reported to have said the following in 1991:

> “Ukraine has to be integrated in the European security system in order to protect Europe from Russia. Russia is the major threat to Ukraine’s security. Without Ukraine the rest of Europe is vulnerable to Russian irredentism”\textsuperscript{97}.

The message from the nationalists was therefore clear: Ukraine had to become a buffer between Europe and Russia, as this feature was believed to be the one which best “sold” Ukraine to the West. Mykhailo Horyn stated that

> “our historical mission is to be the doctors who cure Russia of its imperial ambition. Ukraine is a European power. Russia is not. It is sitting on top of the Ural mountains looking East and trying to tackle its problems”\textsuperscript{98}.

This was a bold expression, not to mention arrogant, considering Horyn was talking about Russia. The image of the doctor was also unique, and did not necessarily relate to liminality, even though it was inscribed in the wider discourse which comprised liminal images. The

\textsuperscript{91} Leonid Kravchuk, op. cit. p. 39, p. 40, p. 177.
\textsuperscript{94} Roman Popadiuk, 1996, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{95} A. Wilson, 2000, op. cit., p. 284.
\textsuperscript{96} Eugene Rumer, 1994, “Eurasia letter: will Ukraine return to Russia”, Foreign Policy, no. 96, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{97} Idem.
\textsuperscript{98} Idem, p. 139.
insistence on the buffer aspect was surprising, coming from a country as weak as Ukraine at the time. Analysts and experts writing about this period have noted the decisiveness with which nationalists insisted on this idea, which was perceived as relatively dangerous for the country. According to Dmytro Vydrin, former presidential adviser, a typical line of reasoning which was quite widespread during the first two years of independence was:

“Ukraine will distance herself more and more from Russia, both in economic, political and military terms. The West will to the best of its ability help Ukraine in this because it sees Ukraine as a buffer between itself and a potentially aggressive Russia.”

Indeed, nationalist parties upheld the idea that

“Ukraine’s territory, along with that of Moldova, Belarus and Lithuania makes up a vast buffer zone that separates the European states from direct contact with the Russian Federation, which has yet to shed the vestiges of empire.”

President Kravchuk also showed support for this line of thought when he affirmed that Ukraine could become the force that defends the West from Communism, echoing the position of the Rukh party whose slogan was

“the Ukrainian state as the Eastern forepost of democratic Europe.”

As Ilya Prizel noted

“although the nationalists were by no means monolithic, they virtually all agreed on foreign policy matters. They espoused Mykhailo Hrushevskyi’s theory of a unique Ukrainian identity grounded in an anti-Russian, pro-Western orientation, rejecting the Russian interpretation of the 1654 Pereiaslav Agreement as an act of “reunification” with Russia, and viewed Ukraine’s reintegration into Central Europe and the West as essential. Furthermore, they called for a policy of standing up to Russia, not only to carve out an independent international profile for Ukraine, but also to establish an image as a European outpost defending the civilised world against Asian Russia. Specifically, the nationalists viewed integration into Central Europe as the most effective means of guaranteeing stability and long-term integration into the West as a whole. Not only would integration help to anchor Ukraine’s identity firmly in the West, it would also provide security against Russian advances.”

In the scheme of this analysis, such arguments are very similar to the arguments that Romanian elites used at the beginning of their fight for national unity and independence. It is suggested that the stronger the need for recognition, the more radical and uncompromising the images are, in order to elicit a more powerful response. After all, it is possible to extend the

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99 Idem.
102 A. Wilson, 2000, op. cit., p. 284
103 Idem.
comparison and affirm that Ukrainian elites of the 1990s had just begun the long dialogue with Europe that Romania had started a century and a half ago. Historical circumstances showed, however, that Ukraine had to crash through what would otherwise have been a protracted process, and rather rapidly moved on to the image of the bridge. Yet, before proceeding to that next stage, I must point out that neither the buffer imagery nor the wider return to Europe argument were dominant in Ukrainian elites’ mind. Even though President Kravchuk had enlisted the support of the nationalists and the former nomenklatura for the sake of state building, the pro-buffer stance was not generalised. Left wing parties, covering roughly half of the country were not necessarily backing this idea. They emphasised the common bond with Russia and Belarus and were opposed to a hostile politics towards Russia. They also stressed the Eurasian character of Ukraine. Serhiy Sherghin, analyst with the Ukrainian institute of international relations maintained that as a result of a Eurocentric mindset, Ukraine was adopting a Eurocentric linear view of history that distorted both Ukraine’s Oriental niche and her relationship with the West. Indeed, an insistence on the European dimension cut down on the linguistic and discursive game that Ukrainian elites could play in order to forge a position for their country that would be more akin to the reality of her geographical and geopolitical positioning. To a certain extent, the emphasis on the European dimension was similar to the Romanian leaders’ tactic during the early 1990s, when they tried to convince Europeans that Romania was a fully Central European country, not an Eastern European one, a fact which closed more doors than it opened, proving ultimately a rather unproductive way of acting.

Kravchuk lost the elections in 1994. His anti-Russian rhetoric was not agreed on overall, especially since internal reform had failed to take off. Yet, another, more common sense reason seems to have affected the buffer discourse. In the post cold war world, a Manichean stance did not make sense in the geopolitical game; furthermore, given Europe’s interest in good relations with Russia, it did not pay for Ukraine to make an enemy of her greatest neighbour.

Before delving into the subsequent period, I wish to examine what were the practical results of the buffer foreign policy and geopolitics discourse.

In 1993, Ukraine suggested the creation of a zone of stability and security in Central and Eastern Europe, extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea. This proposal presupposed a loose

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105 “The national Slavic concept, which began in the Russophone areas of Eastern and southern Ukraine, differed from the Central European concept in several ways. While supportive of Ukrainian independence to end what was perceived as Russia’s economic exploitation and hegemony, the national Slavs continued to argue that independence was a means of attaining equal partnership with Russia, rather than escaping the Tatar East. In general, the national Slavs firmly believed in Ukraine’s distinct culture and value system, and most accepted Hrushevskyi’s thesis of Ukraine’s distinct historic origins. Proponents of this view, however, argue that regardless of Moscow’s claim to the inheritance of Kievan-Rus, Ukraine and Russia are bound by Byzantine Orthodox Christianity, common ancestry, three centuries of common statehood, and shared experiences, such as World War II. This has produced a cultural and human commonality that cannot simply be abandoned for either Central Europe or the West”. Ilya Prizel, 1998, op. cit., pp. 366-368.

106 Ilya Prizel, 1998, op. cit., quoting Serhiy Sherghin, Ukrainian analyst who emphasised the need to acknowledge the Eurasian dimension of Ukraine, p. 390.


economic, political and security alliance, and the managing of national minorities questions. A series of consultations rather than formal ties would have bound the members\textsuperscript{109}. The reason behind this initiative was, as Kravchuk suggested, that the “security vacuum” left by the disappearance of the Warsaw pact had to be filled\textsuperscript{110}. This position also represented another nationalist point of view, which advocated the creation a Baltic-Black Sea commonwealth, extending from Estonia to the Caucasus, which would provide a strong shield in case Russia became aggressive anew\textsuperscript{111}. The Hungarian leadership initially supported this idea\textsuperscript{112}. President Kravchuk and later, Deputy Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk, both affirmed that this initiative was not geared against Russia. The latter said that such a zone would function as a “bridge between Russia and Europe”\textsuperscript{113}. This initiative was eventually ignored, largely due to the fact that Ukraine’s potential partners in Central Europe focused on other issues\textsuperscript{114}, such as NATO accession and speedy EU integration. At the same time, Ukraine’s ambiguous attitude towards the Lisbon Protocol concerning nuclear disarmament did not send an encouraging message about her security intentions. Yet, what is interesting for the purposes of this analysis, is the association between Ukraine being a potential buffer/bridge between Europe and Russia and a policy initiative. Unfortunately, I do not benefit in this case from the same kind of evidence as for the policy of trilateral agreements initiated by Romania, which presented in detail the reasoning behind it, but this fact showed that a certain logic of liminality started to be explored and put into place, which could potentially frame further initiatives and policies. Furthermore, even if these ideas were not generally adopted and supported, the fact that a certain voice monopolised official discourse for a while firmly brought on the scene various images and metaphors connected to the liminal. These were to persist in public debate for years to come.

Pulling threads together

I wish to point out that between 1991-1994 it was possible to speak with respect to Ukraine about discourse and even competitive discourses, but it was not really possible to identify a narrative, a story about why, how and where exactly Ukraine found herself. Despite the competitive claims from the nationalists, who saw Russia as the evil Other and wanted to return to Europe, and from the more left wing oriented politicians, who wished to acknowledge Russia in Ukraine’s past, present and future, the fact that the country had to undergo a serious process of both nation and state building blurred differences, encouraged unnatural ideological alliances and created confusion. It was hard to find a story with a beginning and a projected end about Ukraine. The historiography disputes that Ukraine’s

\textsuperscript{109} Roman Popadiuk, 1996, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{111} Andrew Wilson, 1997, op. cit., p. 177.
\textsuperscript{113} Financial Times, 1993, 22 April.
\textsuperscript{114} Roman Wolczuk, 2003, op. cit., p.88.
independence brought about were the best example of how hard it was to find a unifying narrative for the whole country; even if each of the opposing sides had a more or less clear idea of how they wanted to read the past, the future was profoundly unclear.

This problem brings to the fore another difficulty for my analysis, which is identifying subject positions. How did Ukraine place herself in relation to Europe and Russia? Based on the analyses above and the remarks made at the beginning of this section, I think it would be fair to say that different ideological groups created different reflexive subject positions for Ukraine. The positioning towards Russia was perhaps easier to understand, because the immediate needs of national building (nation-building? State-building?) dictated the need for an Other, in this case very oppressive and imperialist. Russia fulfilled the part. The nationalists covered that ground quite well and they were joined by a majority of the political class in a first phase\(^\text{115}\). This position attempted to re-inscribe Ukraine in Central Europe and had espoused a certain narrative which implied a “return to Europe” and acknowledgment by the latter as a goal; within this discursive space it was possible to introduce the images of the “buffer” and the “barrier”, which even made a lot of sense if Russia was pictured as a dangerous enemy. However, equally strong were the subject positions stemming from other ideological quarters, such as the radical left or the centre parties. The radical left, as mentioned before, saw the West as the enemy and a potential coloniser, whereas the centre parties were more moderate in their picturing of Russia and the West. They created a repertoire of opinions that attempted to bridge the two radical positions (as shall be discussed later on in the chapter), but unfortunately failed to provide a clear inscription of Ukraine’s position in the world. All of the above positions were roughly on equal footing. Studies suggest that Western Ukrainians tended to espouse a rightist nationalist attitude, which included a rejection of Russia\(^\text{116}\); on the other hand, Eastern Ukrainians, having more economic, cultural and linguistic ties with Russia tend to be favourable to a rapprochement with it, therefore positioning Ukraine closer to it and more distant towards Europe. The fact that Leonid Kravchuk and his team attempted to reconcile these positions by associating their aims as former national communist elites with the nationalist discourse, which was best adapted for a nation-building project, resulted in an ambiguity that makes one wonder how meaningful the declarations of the elites actually were, in the sense of how far they actually believed in them.

To take but one example about how Leonid Kravchuk intended to portray Ukraine’s rapport with Europe, an article written by him on “A new Ukraine in a new Europe” (used in this case as a metonymical tool), gives very little information about how Ukraine wishes to return to Europe. With such a title, one would count on propitious waxing about how Ukraine perceives Europe, what is to be done for their rapprochement, or what is their relationship. However, the article merely contents itself with saying

“We look to Europe for our model. But modern Ukraine can also make its contribution to the European project”

No explanation on how and why Europe is a model; no mention of it being a mentor or an arbiter of Ukraine’s democratic efforts. We do not know what Ukraine really thinks of Europe, beyond taking it as a model. What is suggested is rather a detached and reluctant type of equality. Kravchuk also adds that

“our strong economic potential, a developed infrastructure and the excellent geographic position of the country provide good reason for concluding that it is impossible to imagine full-scale European development without Ukraine.”

A passing nod is made in the direction of reforms needed in Ukraine. This speech, as well as most other texts which I could access, points to a certain unease in the Ukrainian elites regarding their potential positioning. Blaming Russia for turning Ukrainians into an “invisible nation” made them hesitant about entering another “little brother-great master” relationship. This is why the notion of equality was so prominent in this particular speech (suggested by saying Ukraine was a stable and reliable partner to Europe, indispensable to Europe’s development) and why all other pronouncements, even from the nationalists who were fully pro-European, were done in a logic of equals rather than a student-master relationship. Kravchuk’s speech also underlined the ambiguity of Ukraine’s aims in relation to Europe. If on one page he affirmed that Ukraine wished to be integrated economically with Europe (This specification in itself being problematic, because it raises the question why not cultural and political too. One answer could be that it was implicit that Ukraine was already European in that sense; however, in most cases, one would specify those details) on a subsequent one he affirmed

“as we are a European state, independent Ukraine is trying to build a bridge between itself and other European states and in this way to contribute to the building of the new Europe”

If Ukraine were European, the bridges with other European states would exist, therefore emphasis would be put on their re-activation or consolidation, rather than their creation. I would say that in this case, Kravchuk was betrayed by his own words, which depicted an accurate image, but were intended to suggest a greater affinity with European values than Ukraine had at that moment. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to base all conclusions on just one text, produced in 1992. I believe its use resides in illustrating the divorce between Ukraine’s projected image and her reality at the time, a fact that was necessarily reflected in all other discourses connected to her.

118 Idem.
121 Idem, p. 181.
In relation to all of the above, it is correct to say that at least in the beginning of the 1990s, Ukrainian elites positioned their country in an ambiguous spot towards Europe, acting like a reluctant debutante on the international scene. One of the reasons behind such scarce and confusing indication in terms of subject positioning was that in Ukraine there does not seem to exist an intellectual tradition of extolling European values, like in the Romanian case. Romanians could say “the prodigal son has returned”, but Ukrainians had not projected themselves as sons of Europe. At best, they admitted important influences coming from Europe, through relations with the Polish Commonwealth and the German part of Europe, but did not proclaim themselves as stemming from Europe. As Ivan Rudnytsky pointed out, while the Poles called themselves the defender of Christianity and the Romanians reclaimed a Roman filiation, the Ukrainians admitted that what they considered their essential European character had been strongly influenced by the east (Byzantium and Eurasian nomads). Whilst most other countries perceived the elements of the East more like a contamination and a dilution of their European characters, Ukrainians sought to produce a synthesis that would reconcile contradictory elements, also because some of them did not necessarily view Russia as an essentially negative element of their past. Even when historians talked about Kievan Rus, the glorious moment in Ukrainian past which symbolised both independence and influence over the Eastern Slavs, they presented it as a polity Eastern in spirituality and religion and Western in terms of social and political structure, stressing the fact that the political Byzantinism was lacking from it; thus, precedents, were more about a synthesis rather than a clear belonging east or West.

Certainly the question arises, what of the nationalist claims that Ukraine was European? It must be understood that nationalist parties stemmed mainly from Western Ukraine, whose historical experience had been much more tied to Europe than the Eastern lands’. Most of Western Ukraine had been incorporated in the Polish Commonwealth and later on in the Habsburg Empire, a fact that explains why current day Ukrainian nationalists felt a pull towards Europe, thus giving rise to very powerful declarations and claims. Yet, as previously mentioned, this state of mind was not generalised, and did not represent how a majority felt; one could think of this situation as an instance when a particular voice, proclaiming the priority of Ukraine’s European dimension, became temporarily dominant, not least because it was tied to the nation-building process. With this in mind one understands why it is so hard to pin down what exactly Ukrainian elites, as a whole, thought of themselves and their relation with Europe in the early 1990s, particularly when their actions did not always match their words, as in the case of the tergiversation related to giving up the nuclear arsenal. (Although Ukraine formally agreed to renounce her nuclear arsenal, it took quite a long time for her leaders to ratify the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and dispose of her nuclear weapons in 1996. Some of her leaders argued that

122 Ivan Rudnytsky, 1987, op. cit., p. 3.
123 Idem, p. 10.
renouncing nuclear power status would weaken her stance in international affairs, a fact which slowed the disarmament process). It was possible to identify what the Western Ukrainians believed, what the Eastern ones believed, but extremely hard to identify views that would be common for both, regarding identity and history.

One notable element lacking, which is very present in both Romanian and Turkish cases, is the issue of a modernisation or Westernisation project. Ukraine does not seem to have one as such. Romanian and Turkish documents are replete with references to this project, whether it advances, stalls or is reversed. Romanians can roughly estimate its beginning around 1848, at least at a political level; Turks generally link it to the Tanzimat reforms in the 19th century, gaining a new élan and impulse of 1923 with advent of the Turkish Republic. In Ukraine, such a project is not mentioned; even if nationalist discourse speaks about a return to Europe and the fact that Ukraine’s development has been arrested by Russian domination, there is little reference to modernisation or Westernisation. One of the reasons behind this might be the idea that Ukraine is modern already, and claiming otherwise would make her less desirable in the eyes of Europe. Yet, paradoxically, not insisting on the need for modernisation makes Ukraine suspicious in the eyes of her potential partners.

How does this detail tie in with the issue of the liminal? Having a modernisation project provides an ideal and an itinerary towards that ideal; it also constitutes the umbilical chord through which in this part of the world countries have chosen to relate to Europe. Typically, countries start by being considered on the fringes of modernity or civilisation, and liminal images provide a measure of where they are in relation to Europe. In the case of Ukraine liminal images existed in the 1991-1994 period, but they did not seem to resist for too long. Certainly, the intention to have a rapprochement with Europe, the EC and later EU existed, but it was ambiguously expressed, and not generally framed as the ultimate goal for Ukraine. On the contrary, in the two other cases, this was expressed as such. I do not make these remarks as a criticism or as an indication that Ukraine was doing something wrong. Rather, I wished to point out that particular factors tied to the liminal issue in the other two cases were missing in her case during the first years of her independence. Nevertheless, as previously stated, this did not prevent liminal images to appear and get articulated into a voice, even if only partial and shaky.
The table below brings together the elements I could identify in that voice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1991-1994</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nr. of texts/nr. of authors</td>
<td>10/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Balanced between domestic and foreign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject positioning</td>
<td>Ukraine, Central Europe, newly independent, building state with no solid precedent behind, wish to “return to Europe” (advocated by nationalists), “indispensable to the full development of Europe”, has protected Europe from invasions; links with Eurasian world (advocated by Eastern Ukrainians); neutral, non-bloc association (nationalists and centre-right); sister-nation to Russia; part of Eurasia (leftists);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicate analysis</td>
<td>Ukraine great potential and power, asset in terms of resources and infrastructure, active in pan European security policy, proposing security plans, reliable, solid, cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E u r o p e / W e s t Partner, model</td>
<td>Europe - not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia-oppressive other (advocated by nationalists) Neighbour, partner, historic links (advocate by left wing and some centre parties)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liminal images/ references</td>
<td>Buffer (most often mentioned), “doctor” that will “cure” Russia of imperialism, protector, outpost of democracy against communism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table indicates that even if liminal imagery was relatively weak, it cannot be said that it did not produce a particular articulation and connotative chains that were associated with a subject position, and most importantly with a potential political choice. Indeed, perhaps the most important achievement of the presence of liminal references is the indication that an alternative political choice to that of being with Russia appeared; thus, Ukraine’s re-inscription in Europe by Western nationalists articulated a possibility that had been erased during the Soviet era. This possibility was associated with a hostile view of Russia and with a perception of Ukraine as a Central European country who could capitalise on her European connections to integrate Europe, that was seen as a potential social and political model, but also a potential receptor of contributions from Ukraine. This position was placed(?) by Leonid Kravchuk and his nationalist allies in contrast to that advocated by the pro-Russia elites, who saw the former master as closer culturally and politically to Ukraine and a better choice for the future in terms of economic and political situation. Significantly, Russia, unlike Europe, did not come
attached with a series of difficult to achieve conditions and “yes, but” clauses. In many ways, it represented a known evil that Ukrainians knew at least how to play. In this period centrist parties were weak, because moderate positions had not yet fully developed, and were hovering over the benefits of association with both Europe and Russia. One interesting element amongst the pieces that constitute the inchoate discourse on liminality is that within the connotative chain that associated Ukraine with Central Europe, and with the idea of a strong state full of potential and indispensable to the complete development of Europe, there was almost no mention of democracy or reform. Whereas Romanian and Turkish discourses on liminality insisted on the democratic dimension even when this was questioned from the outside—as their democratic system was incomplete—in this case the term of democracy was hardly mentioned in connection to liminal references of the buffer and the barrier; this instance was quite ironic, given that if Ukraine were to be a guardian of something, it would be of democracy against the “Asiatic hordes”.

However, knowing that Leonid Kravchuk’s team was the product of a relatively unnatural alliance, between former Communist party members who were afraid of losing their monopoly on the reigns of power124 and nationalists who provided a discourse that was best adapted for the process of nation building, it is easier to understand why talk of democracy did not come naturally in texts. The priority project was building a nation first and then possibly making it democratic.

By 2004, when the Orange Revolution occurred, this intention became more prominent, which is why it had become possible to overthrow the 10 year leadership of Leonid Kuchma, who had tried to introduce in Ukrainian politics an approach that wished to reconcile a pro-European with a pro-Russian stance, and therefore brought a new spin on liminal imagery.

The Orange Revolution - a Ukrainian rebirth?

The reason why I chose to juxtapose the analysis of the post-Orange Revolution years to the first period of Ukrainian independence is that these two intervals had in common a distinctly pro-European rhetoric illustrating a certain continuity of references and metaphors. This is not to say that the leadership during the two periods was the same; rather, the inclinations towards Europe and democracy gave rise to a similar élan, which built on previous images. However, fewer references to the liminal were made, certain texts mentioning in passing the term of “outpost” or bridge, suggesting that recourse to liminal images was ignored. Several possibilities could explain this; I believe the desire to completely break with previous discourses existent during the 1990s in Ukraine, as well as a lack of clear strategy about how to attain the goal of European membership were partly responsible for this state of things.

I wish to specify that the period leading up to the Orange Revolution, from 1994 to 2004 (examined later on in the section), was characterised by ambiguous foreign policy discourse and actions, which attempted to reconcile a pro-European and a pro-Russian trajectory; in
addition, it was an interval when high level corruption was widespread, and at the end of which there was a general feeling of disillusionment.

The end of 2004 brought Ukrainians new elections and what has been termed a revolution, insofar as the peaceful meetings and manifestations from the Maydan square introduced a change in the political system by confronting the high-level corruption which had become generalised during the previous 15 years, and supported the advent to power of the democratically elected candidate Victor Yuschenko. Insofar as my analysis is concerned, the period between the end of 2004 and the end of 2006 represented a rebirth of foreign policy discourse, which was paralleled by a rebirth in political discourse and policy. Indeed, the Orange Revolution introduced a breath of fresh air and a lot of hope regarding Ukraine’s democratic evolution; as soon as he got into office, Yuschenko promised to substantiate Ukraine’s European and pro-NATO choices, which had been hailed by his predecessors, but not consistently pursued. Before delving into the details of the refreshed discourse, a few technical elements are in order regarding this period.

First of all, as expected, the number of available sources significantly increased, since official speeches and texts were available, mainly through internet, on the websites of various institutions and newspapers. As freedom of expression and academic and political research developed, more think-tanks and experts posted their analyses, and more individual pieces written by policy makers could be found. Therefore, the multitude of sources provided the possibility of an accurate image of foreign policy discourse, in the sense of its reliability and generality. A few remarks are, however, in order, regarding these texts. Although the number of people having and expressing an informed opinion about foreign policy increased and diversified, debates concerning Ukraine’s role in the world remained the privilege of the few. Texts analysed below include largely decision-making officials and analysts from independent think tanks; occasional newspaper editorialists are also included. My document research, including of Ukrainian and Russian texts suggests, however, that the number of those actively discussing Ukrainian policy in meaningful terms remained limited. Furthermore, the foreign policy process remained un-transparent, as an analyst suggested:

“Who shapes Ukraine’s foreign policy? A year ago the answer was definite: Kuchma, Medvedchuk and Orel. Prime Minister Yanukovych, NSDC Secretary Radchenko and SBU Chief Marchuk were consulted on a limited scope of matters. Foreign Minister Hryshchenko had no decision-making authority whatever: he and his ministry fulfilled orders from [the Presidential Office in] Bankova Street. Foreign policy experts regularly surveyed by the Centre for Peace, Conversion and Foreign Policy, maintained unanimously that Ukraine’s foreign policy was made in the Presidential Office. That policy was non-transparent, and its legality subject to doubt. At the same time it was fairly predictable. Today, no expert will venture a guess about a focal point where foreign policy is developed and approved, because there are several such points: the Cabinet of Ministers, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Presidential Secretariat and the National Security and Defence Council. The Presidential Office’s monopoly has been broken up, but a new democratic and legitimate procedure for foreign policy decision-making is yet to be established”125.

In this period, nevertheless, the discourse and imagery relating to Europe were extensively developed, a fact that determined a more detailed subject positioning, which, in its turn, provided an opportunity for the definition of a more concrete role for Ukraine in Europe and in the world. New liminal elements also appeared and older ones were mentioned, although not with the insistence one would expect from a pro-European orientation. Perhaps the most interesting development during these two years was a reopening of historical arguments, not with the intention of rewriting history, but rather with the goal of deepening certain trends and giving them more of a narrative spin. Borys Tarasyuk’s (foreign affairs minister again under President Yushchenko) speeches constitute a good illustration of this instance. Overall, a clear intention towards a European course of action was expressed and manifested. There was even one policy initiative, which although did not receive a great amount of coverage was nevertheless indicative of the direction in which Ukrainian elites seemed to want to stir their country, namely the creation of the GUUAM group, a Ukrainian and Georgian initiative. Another episode during this brief interval, the Feodosya incident, showed that there were still important reminiscences of anti-NATO sentiments in Ukraine.

The two episodes mentioned above, as well as the revived trend in foreign policy discourse, suggested that the liminal could be a possible geopolitical option, without being overwhelmingly espoused. The fact that amongst the abundance of new materials there were relatively few that explicitly related to the liminal tended to suggest there was no clear adoption of this idea as unique or even dominant. By the end of 2006 Ukraine had not found a perfect definition for what she wanted to be, but the leadership had thrown in the public space important indications of what would be the elements of that definition; they included notions of corridor, transport country, bridge and security provider. Most importantly, there was less feeling of confusion and more determination to untie the complicated knot of Ukraine’s geopolitical situation.

Below, a table with the texts under examination for this section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victor Yuschenko, President</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Foreign Policy, the right to a European choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor Yuschenko</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Europe lacks Ukraine, BBC interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yulia Tymoshenko, MP; Minister</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Ukraine’s Orange Christmas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borys Tarasyuk, Foreign Affairs Minister</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Ukrainian Foreign Policy: A discussion with Borys Tarasyuk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borys Tarasyuk</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Abstracts from meeting with international media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borys Tarasyuk</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>New Ukraine on the road to European integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borys Tarasyuk</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>The Orange revolution six months on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oleg Ryabchuk, Minister for EU integration</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Ukraine and the EU, how close how soon?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oleg Ryabchuk</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>EU neighbours towards closer integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oleksandr Shushko, analyst</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>End of the honeymoon?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inna Pidluska, analyst</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>A difficult balance, Ukraine between Russia and EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgiy Kryuchkov, analyst</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Why I believe NATO membership is not in Ukraine’s best interest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A new élan 2004-2006

Even before he won the elections in 2004 Victor Yushchenko announced what were his intentions for Ukraine’s foreign policy and role:

“Ukraine’s foreign policy can be neither “pro-Western” nor “pro-Russian.” It can only be “pro-Ukrainian.” Undoubtedly, while building our foreign policy, we will include the interests and positions of our strategic partners, but the key issues remain Ukraine’s national interests. Our goal is to become a transport state, guaranteeing energy, shipping and communications, and resolving security issues. This ties in with our interests and those of the European Union, the Russian Federation, and the U.S. The realisation of mutually equitable projects will dictate further cooperation with our strategic partners”126.

It is interesting that the presidential candidate at the time used the same kind of phrase as President Kuchma had done during his years in power (despite the fact that he was representing the opposition to Kuchma’s party and legacy); it is hard to estimate how intentional the use of the phrase was, given that it was generally perceived to have a negative connotation, but the importance of its re-iteration lay in the idea that as an expression of foreign policy intentions it did not have to be associated with ambiguity and vagueness. Just like during the Kuchma period, Yuschenko attempted to re-inscribe Ukraine outside the East/West dichotomy, into a space of independent states mastering their destiny irrespective of their geographical position. This is why a “pro-Ukrainian” foreign policy was announced to focus towards a very concrete goal, that of becoming a “transport state resolving security issues”, which was meant to take advantage of geography but potentially eschew questions of civilisational belonging. Thus, in this construction “pro-Ukrainian” no longer stood as a signifier for a reactive stance, but as a signifier of a proactive one, proving that the articulation of particular interests could accommodate a rhetoric that was already present by giving it a new meaning. Yet, it is also noteworthy that in enumerating Ukraine’s strategic partners the presidential candidate did not mention them as vectors of foreign policy, distancing his ideas from this clearly negative notion. Of course, Yushchenko did not provide details about what it meant for Ukraine to be a “transport” country, but it is suggested that the underlying idea was that of exploiting the country’s position as a contact area.

The same aspiration towards a clearer and less confused policy was expressed in Yulia Tymoshenko’s text at the time of elections, when she affirmed that the peaceful Orange Revolution was about gaining clarity of purpose and renouncing the existing confusion127. If one compares with the language of texts previous to this moment, the contrast is apparent, and, I believe, consciously constructed to mark a decisive break with the previous period. The same intentions are to be noted in the speeches and texts of Borys Tarasyuk, who was appointed foreign affairs minister after Yushchenko’s election.

In the next few paragraphs I shall analyse some of Tarasyuk’s speeches, which I believe are representative of the kind of transformations that permeated foreign policy discourse and eventually policy.

The very first thing to be noted was the framing of the events at the end of 2004 and what followed after them. Like Yushchenko and Tymoshenko before him, Tarasyuk was careful to describe them in contrast to the developments until then: “Instead of incessantly speaking about European and Euro-Atlantic perspective that found little response from European and NATO counterparts in the previous decades, primarily because of democratic incompatibility, the new authorities articulated clear-cut foreign policy priorities and backed them up with a trustworthy agenda and actions”\textsuperscript{128}. The effort to mark a complete break with the previous administration was clear, particularly by associating the “new” with notions such as clarity and reliability, as opposed to the “incessant” and unproductive performances from before, marked by a general incompatibility of goals and means to achieve them. The series of opposition continued in contrasting pairs, “undemocratic” previous regime versus “transparent and fair” present political system, “censorship” versus “free speech”.

More importantly, this new image was purposefully and insistently associated with Europe and the European project. “Ukrainians have given their Orange revolution as a present to Europe. In the rich palette of explanations of this phenomenon let me add just this: Could it be that elusive European identity, which people and politicians have been trying to catch in the last half a century? The Orange revolution is, in fact, a part and parcel of the big European project. The project enshrined in the European Constitution. The project, which will have its new benchmarks until the ultimate unification of Europe without dividing lines\textsuperscript{129}. Also, “The essential meaning of the Orange Revolution is that it is part and parcel of the grand European project. Without any exaggeration, I would put it in one line with the EU Constitution and its enlargement. Not only because of its importance as an individual event in a given country. But because - as somebody rightly phrased it - the Ukrainian Maydan, the central square of Kyiv had been the heart of Europe”\textsuperscript{130};

“the Orange revolution demonstrated a political and cultural choice made by Ukrainians in favour of European civilisation, where our nation historically belongs. It was an explicit manifestation of Ukraine’s decision to live in the Euro-Atlantic family of democratic nations”\textsuperscript{131}.

Borys Tarasyuk had always been a well known pro-European within the Ukrainian political decision-making establishment, a characteristic which had cost him his position in 2000 when Leonid Kuchma opted for a more pro-Russian policy. Yet, even compared with his


\textsuperscript{129} Borys Tarasyuk, 2005, Abstracts from meeting with international media (Geneva Press Club), 15 March.

\textsuperscript{130} Borys Tarasyuk, 2005, “New Ukraine on the road to European integration”, Santiago de Chile, 27 April.

\textsuperscript{131} Borys Tarasyuk, 2005, “The Orange Revolution, six months on”, Address at the 22nd International Workshop on Global Security, 11 June.
earlier speeches, in which he mentioned Ukraine’s return to Europe and her vocation, these fragments suggested that change had intervened at a deeper level, pushing for the articulation of a new Ukrainian stance within Europe. In other sections I noticed the absence of the idea of a project from discourse linking Ukraine to Europe. Now, this idea emerged strongly and clearly expressed, as a more energetic echo to the tentative word missing made by another former foreign affairs minister, Anatoly Zlenko in 2002 (see below). By connecting the Orange Revolution to the idea of Europe, Tarasyuk adopted a rhetoric which was more familiar to Europe and initiated a narrative that was inscribing Ukraine on the better known discursive course towards it. In this context, the very constant Ukrainian appeal toward political and security unity of Europe, which had been a feature of discourse ever since 1991, made more sense; it was no longer a desperate appeal, the last thread ensuring that Ukraine would not be lost to Europe, but a framework within which the country could find a place to complement that unity. The Orange Revolution was also the only moment that explicitly linked Europe, Ukrainian identity and political transformation. The moment of independence in 1991 had been so ambiguous and disputed, it could not fulfil that purpose; the 2004 moment acted as a re-calibrating and seminal event, bringing Ukraine on track towards Europe.

It was no surprise, therefore, that in the context of the reformulation of Ukrainian discourse, a place could also be found to describe what functions she might fulfil on the European and international scene. Thus, Tarasyuk did not hesitate to urge the outside world to see Ukraine as an outpost in the post-soviet world,

“(…) as Ukraine is seen as an outpost of democracy in the post-soviet space, and beyond it we stand firmly for freedom and human rights”132.

He also stated that

“Ukraine will embark on a mission to promote the area of freedom, democracy and justice in its neighbourhood. Ukraine’s regional policy can and should become an integral part of the European Union Eastern policy. That will mean a real contribution of Ukraine to the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Security and Defence Policy. A key objective of Ukraine is to help establish the area of stability and co-operation homogeneous with the EU and stretching from Vitebsk down to Baku”133.

His phrases were ever more similar to the ones expressed by Romanian decision-makers during the 1996-2000 period, which marked the beginning of a clearer articulation of goals for their country. It is remarkable, in fact, that Tarasyuk avoided both the image of the bridge and that of the buffer, not least as a sign of transformation from previous musings. However, this does not mean that he fails in conveying a strong message about Ukraine’s aims: using her geographical and geopolitical position as a factor in transforming the country in a messenger and outpost of values in the post-soviet space. In a sense very similar to Romanian authorities he presented Ukraine as a bearer of stability and democratic values.

133 Borys Tarasyuk, 2005, Abstracts from meeting with international media (Geneva Press Club), 15 March.
Connected to this project, the Ukrainians, in collaboration with Georgia were quick in coming up with a potentially very prolific idea, namely the creation of a “Community of democratic choice” (CDC) in the post-soviet space. Tarasyuk described its rationale as followed:

“Either this region will be finally transformed into a natural part of Euroatlantic civilisation, based on common European democratic goals and values, or it will develop into a separate quasi-civilisation – with quasi-democracy, quasi-goals and quasi-values. It is our national interests, our responsibility and our mission to ensure that the first way is chosen, not the second.”

Based on the already existing structure of GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova-countries that had decided to form a structure in 1997 that would promote democracy and a market economy in post-soviet countries), this Community was meant to prove that Ukraine was actively committed to democratic goals and, more importantly, to doing something about them. It is interesting that the foundation for the CDC was the fear of remaining a grey zone of “quasi-democracies” and a will to encourage development around itself:

“Our mission is to promote democracy and culture of democracy, tolerance and non-violence in the post-Soviet space. As well as to support democratic forces, to cooperate with civil society and nongovernmental sector. Our objective is to clear out our region from all remaining dividing lines, from violations of human rights, from any spirit of confrontation, from frozen conflicts and thus to open a new era of democracy, security, stability and lasting peace for the whole of Europe, from the Atlantic to the Caspian Sea.”

This fragment and initiative indicated a preference towards an imagery, which jumped over the liminal, into the idea of being a promoter and a projector of European values, even if it was not explained how this would happen in the absence of a plan to truly become part of the European family. Indeed, O. Shusko, analyst of Ukrainian foreign policy pointed to the fact that the CDC was still empty of a “constructive and substantive plan of action”, and that the dilemma turned around whether Ukraine should try to project democratic values beyond the members of the CDC or just within the community. Ideally, it would have been both, but starting with a first phase of internal democratic consolidation.

Beyond whether this semi-formal organisation became effective or not, its creation was significant for several reasons; first, because Ukraine had understood that the way to Europe will always be through her region and the role she would perform there, second, because Ukrainian authorities actually mustered enough political will around them to enact this initiative, as opposed to similar ideas which had been voiced in the early nineties but had come to no result. Furthermore, if Tarasyuk spoke of a mission, it was no longer as his predecessors did, “to be a buffer” between Russia and the West, but to do something, to promote, which introduced a subtle but important transfer to a dynamic approach to foreign policy. Indeed, there was now less talk of what Ukraine was and more of what she could do.

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134 Borys Tarasvuk, 2005, Speech at the Centre for International Strategic Studies, 19 September.
135 Idem.
136 Olexandr Shushko, 2005, ‘Ukraine’s search for a regional foreign policy, one year after the Orange Revolution’, PONARS Policy Memo No. 377, Centre for Peace, Conversion and Foreign Policy of Ukraine, December.
This change could be equally noticed in speeches delivered by other policy makers.

“My country is no longer on the crossroads. The Ukrainian people secured fair elections and made their own choice. This choice is to build a new Ukrainian society - open, democratic, European. (...) Ukraine is ready to move on from advocating common interests to establishing common values and standards”\textsuperscript{137}.

It is important to note that being at the crossroads was associated with a more passive attitude, that of advocating rather than establishing principles. It also signified being at the crossroads of choices, rather than a geographical crossroads. Having articulated that development, it was possible to go further and state boldly:

“Our strategic goal is to become a focal point of Europe for international transit and to integrate into global transport network\textsuperscript{138}.

The merit of such an affirmation lay less in its novelty-after all, it was a more or less obvious role for Ukraine, given the infrastructure and economic connections she had- and more in the determination with which it seemed to have been chosen. There did not seem to be oscillation anymore. However, Europe did not really respond to these “advances” other than with its policy for the European neighbourhood, a fact that left Ukraine somewhat cold in her tracks\textsuperscript{139}. This attitude might therefore offer a possible reason why images of what Europe meant for Ukraine and her advancement did not proliferate in statements and speeches.

Furthermore, experts picked up on the fact that a more decisive sounding discourse did not necessarily mean a truly competent foreign policy. Oleksandr Shushko, political analyst and long time observer of Ukrainian political life rightly pointed to the procedural difference in terms of how foreign policy used to be done during Kuchma administration and during the newer Yuschchenko one.

If the Kuchma years were witness to a relatively highly centralised and opaque foreign policy, which was very predictable in its ambiguity, post revolutionary foreign policy did not have a centre or a coordinating agency.

“Summing up, policy support for our country’s course towards Euro-Atlantic integration is inadequate. Instead of mobilizing and concentrating resources (organisational, material, human), the new authorities use them inefficiently, sometimes even neglect them. Meanwhile, the post-revolution euphoria is abating. Unless Ukraine thoroughly re-evaluates its strategic priorities and identifies clear mechanisms for their implementation, unless it revises its current personnel and institutional policy, it risks remaining a “promising country” for ever”\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{140} Olexandr Shushko, 2005, op. cit.
italicize this quote?). This rather damming criticism warned against riding the wave of enthusiasm concerning foreign policy and suggested its aims were not as clear as they seemed.

Indeed, as 2005 and 2006 drew on it became apparent that whatever attitude was projected, it was not necessarily strongly supported. A survey of the interviews and speeches delivered by President Yushchenko were abundant in describing Ukraine’s intentions, the Orange Revolution, and the democratic principles which she respected, but did not very much insist upon ideas such as those expressed by Tarasyuk. For example, when asked in an interview about relations with Russia, the President affirmed that they should be constructive and necessary for a balanced relation with the EU, but did not use this opportunity or subsequent ones to expand on what other roles Ukraine was aiming for. The question arises about the reason behind such a silence and one of the possible answers is that insistence on a European agenda was used to drown what Ukraine could do for Europe, at least until something beyond declarations would be mustered. (I don’t understand this sentence)

In an analysis at the end of 2005, Inna Pidluska, expert Ukrainian political analyst, summed up the situation in her country as followed:

“For the past 14 years Ukraine has often been referred to as a large country in Europe between Russia and the West, with a difficult historic past, uncertain present and even more uncertain future. The slogans of European (Euro-Atlantic) integration have been used and abused by politicians in internal debates and elections. The metaphors of a “buffer zone” or a “bridge” were used depending on the circumstances of debates. Ukraine has declared its pro-European choice and approved a number of documents stating that integration with the European Union is its strategic goal. Following the breakthrough presidential elections of 2004, and particularly after the adoption of the EU-Ukraine Action Plan in February 2005, the EU-Ukraine dialogue has become more dynamic and meaningful. However, the questions “where is Ukraine?” and “where is Ukraine going?” are still on the agenda – if not for Ukraine’s state leadership, then for many of its citizens”.

The last remark of the above fragment is a very useful indication, suggesting that if the question about Ukraine’s positioning disappeared somewhat from official speeches, as some of the texts above showed, this was not necessarily true about wider musings on Ukraine; Pidluska points to a potential divorce between political elites and the Ukrainian people, irrespective of whether they are of pro-European or pro-Russian orientation. This fragment is equally useful because it designates what were the potential roles between which Ukrainian elites had oscillated for 14 years and because it reminded those who were interested that Ukraine was not out of the woods yet. It is also interesting because Inna Pidluska was the representative of a civil society project called Europe XXI, one of the few contributors to the Ukrainian foreign


policy debate, which was not always accessible to all Ukrainians. Pidluska’s opinion ties in quite explicitly with Shusko’s image of Ukraine as an “eternally promising country”, which provides a unique but apt illustration for the idea of liminality, in the sense that Ukraine had the potential to reform and democratise, but remained in a state of preparation and inaction. This liminal image referred more to a state of internal affairs rather than to a geographical position.

The Feodosyia incident, which occurred in the summer of 2006, constituted a powerful indicator of the divorce that Pidluska had hinted at. Sparked in June 2006, the incident was related to the presence of US military troops, stationed in the port of Feodosyia for an exercise within the NATO framework. It was quickly discovered that the troops had no formal approval from the Ukrainian Parliament (which the law required) to be stationed on Ukrainian soil. Taking advantage of this lapsus, anti-NATO Ukrainian forces staged prolonged protests, encouraged by Russia. This situation unleashed many from the Ukrainian communist party to express openly their disagreement with their country’s leadership desire to join NATO and to demand the dismissal of those who had allowed US troops in Ukraine, for example the foreign affairs minister and the defence minister. Most famously, Georgyi Kryuchkov, leading member of the Communist Party, outlined the reasons why Ukraine should not join NATO in an article of the Ukrainian Observer, thus bringing back into the public debate the question of how well understood NATO actually was by the Ukrainian population and how deep or how shallow that knowledge was. The reasons outlined by Kryuchkov were mainly the fact that there was no popular support for NATO membership (which was confirmed by various opinion polls) and the potentially damaging effect membership would have on the Ukrainian defence economy, as Ukraine would no longer be able to export her weapons. Another reason provided was the “shameful Kosovo situation”. Overall, the arguments against were as technical as the ones favourable to NATO membership, suggesting there was no wider historical or existential soul searching about what acceptance (I sill don’t think this is a word.. why not ‘acceptance’ or rejection might mean. Without going into further detail, what the Feodosiya incident showed was how fragile the Ukrainian position was on foreign policy, even after the Orange Revolution. Arguably, the source of this fragility was to be found mainly within the internal situation of the country, which had been a source of incertitude for the past 15 years. In fact, the events of the summer 2006, bringing a prolonged political crisis and absence of effective government silenced foreign policy for a substantial amount of time, proving Ukraine had still a long way to go before becoming the promotor of democracy and stability that she wanted to be in the region (you need to fix this sentence, you’ve changed tenses).

Pulling threads together

The 2004-2006 interval marked a break with previous administrations, principally through the appearance of more decisive declarations and speeches. As has been shown, decision-makers made an effort to construct Ukraine’s image in opposition to what it had been until the Orange Revolution, by suggesting a clearer, more focused stance. The post Orange revolution interval was positive towards Europe, but included very few liminal images, and even fewer historical references including them. This period was constructed particularly in opposition with the 10 years of Leonid Kuchma’s rule (examined below), when the liminal was rather more deeply explored. It is therefore understandable that liminal images were avoided, not least because they did not seem to yield many results in previous cases. However, the reason behind that might have been the lack of a clear vision, rather than the use of the wrong references. The 2004-2006 years kept the continuity of overall goals, modifying the way in which they were to be attained. Thus, the chains of connotation in relation to Ukraine changed in so far as Europe and NATO appeared to be the main partners, and there were no more associations with the idea of the possibility of Eurasia or Eurasianism. The ambiguity and vagueness of the previous era were replaced with expressions of determination, focus and strength. There existed occasional mentions of liminal images, such as outpost, or transit country, but, overall, they were mentioned even less than in texts from other periods. This was largely due to the fact that the dilemma of Ukraine as a buffer or as a bridge had been shelved, as part of the “old” way of thinking about foreign policy, and because, in fact, the questions of what is Ukraine and how will she be in Europe still had to be answered. What this period also showed was that an insistence on the European project and on the technical aspects of achieving it did not automatically help develop a wider geopolitical vision. Attempts were, however, made, through the creation of the “Community of Democratic Choice”, which although not extremely successful, indicated where Ukrainian elites intended to move forward. That Ukraine was by the end of 2006 still a country divided on many crucial issues, such as accession to NATO, was proven by a minor incident, which was enough to bring painful questions to the fore. Below, a table showing a comparison of the two firmly pro-European orientations until 2006.
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<td>Nr. of texts/nr.</td>
<td>10/4</td>
<td>12/7</td>
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<td>of authors</td>
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<td>Public</td>
<td>Mostly foreign;</td>
<td>Foreign and domestic publics. Roughly equally spread;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject positioning</td>
<td>Ukraine, Central Europe, newly independent, building state with no solid</td>
<td>Russia-oppressive other (advocated by nationalists) Neighbour; partner,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>precedent behind, wish to “return to Europe” (advocated by nationalists),</td>
<td>historic links (advocate by left wing and some centre parties);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“indispensable to the full development of Europe”, has protected Europe</td>
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<td>from invasions; links with Eurasian world (advocated by Eastern Ukrainians);</td>
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<td>neutral, non-bloc association (nationalists and centre-right); sister-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>nation to Russia; part of Eurasia (leftists);</td>
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<tr>
<td>Predicate analysis</td>
<td>Ukraine great potential and power, asset in terms of resources and</td>
<td>Russia-imperialist drives (as seen by nationalists)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>infrastructure, active in pan European security policy, proposing security</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>plans, reliable, solid, cooperative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liminal images/</td>
<td>Buffer (most often mentioned), “doctor” that will “cure” Russia of</td>
<td>Focal point; no crossroad; no bridge;</td>
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<tr>
<td>references</td>
<td>imperialism, protector, outpost of democracy against communism.</td>
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The connotative chains in the 1991-1994 interval articulated Ukraine’s position around Central Europe—a national project—a return to Europe, all these elements being strongly associated with the institution of the Presidency and occasionally the foreign ministry. These ideas were associated with the liminal image of the buffer, strongly favoured by Western Ukrainian nationalists, who were sternly anti-Russian and therefore found in this image an ideal selling point towards Europe. There was, however, little mention of democracy or reform in connection to these ideas, although they were often implied in speeches. This absence of an explicit and emphasised commitment towards democracy combined with the actual lack of internal reforms greatly discredited the nationalist discourse and the images that went with it. Perhaps therein lies the explanation of why, the 2004-2006 interval, although staunchly pro-European, at least at a declarative level, left behind the images employed by it predecessors.

Thus, during this period Ukraine was associated with the European project, suggesting (but not explicitly mentioning) connections with the processes of democratisation and modernisation, and a more realistic geopolitical attitude, defined as “pro-Ukrainian”, and not pro-East or pro-West. Liminal imagery did not accompany these articulations, this period inheriting them rather as negative ideas than useful and productive.

Overall, these two periods, although both firmly pro-European, exhibit different ways of relating to the European idea, one, excluding liminal imagery from its discursive realm. As a result, Ukraine seemed to wish to be considered rather in the middle of things, of processes bringing her closer to Europe, than in a margin going towards a core. Perhaps the lack of an institutionalised dialogue with the EU (beyond the neighbourhood policy) precluded the appearance of a dialogue that would introduce the “almost Europe” discourse so many other Eastern European states had to mitigate; as a result, liminal imagery did not really seem to have its place in the ideational constructs of Ukrainian decision-makers after the Orange revolution.

The study of these two differently pro-European periods also indicates that the liminal is certainly not inevitable in the geopolitical imaginary, even in relation to Europe. Concerning the theoretical framework proposed for the analysis these two intervals also emphasise the limits of images, such as the bridge or the buffer, in their power of representing liminality. In the absence of a story that would substantiate how Ukraine can be a bridge or a buffer, they indeed point to an element underlined in the methodology section, namely the fact that language cannot perfectly represent reality. Therefore, even if Ukraine in many ways fitted the portrait of a liminar, as drawn by Ann Norton, certain geopolitical notions did not necessarily synthesise adequately these attributes, especially since they were not accompanied by a narrative in which they would make sense. Interestingly enough, during the first period, the image of the buffer, for example, exists, without a well-developed story to contextualise it. On the other hand, in the 2004-2006 interval, there is a story of joining Europe, which by-passes the liminal images, such as that of the bridge or the frontier. This might indicate a conscious choice to avoid it, but also draws attention that without a liminal imagery neither attitudes were really convincing, or solidly anchored.
The following sections concentrate on a period in which Ukrainian leadership did not have an unambiguous European stance. In contrast to the periods examined above, Russia or a Eurasian option were very present during these years, a fact that made the choices and behaviour of Ukrainian elites seem extremely uncertain and difficult to gauge.

1994-1999 From buffer to bridge through multi-vector foreign policy

The 1994-1999 interval constituted for Ukraine a period of important changes, oscillations and decisions. Within the analysis of liminal images, it brought about several, either by naming them or by suggesting a state of affairs or actions connected with liminal images. It was also a period when the presence of multiple and often contradictory discursive threads expressed the Ukrainian leadership’s desire to keep all foreign policy and geopolitical options open, or at least in the realm of the possible.

As Taras Kuzio noted, the ideological landscape in those years was roughly divided between Westernisers and Slavophiles. Both these camps seemed to be separated in turn into romantics and pragmatists.145 Romantic Westernisers were those political figures like Mykaylo Horyn and Vyacheslav Chornovil who suggested that Ukraine should concentrate exclusively on her relationship with Europe in order to build her future; they were overtly anti-Russian and favoured the idea that Ukraine would be a buffer between Europe and Russia.146 Furthermore, they specifically did not agree with her being a potential bridge between Europe and Russia,147 thus espousing a quite radical position. They also emphasised cultural and linguistic factors and were staunchly against Ukraine’s participation in the CIS, which they saw as a new instrument of Russian imperialism.

Pragmatic Westernisers, were considered those who, while having a definite inclination towards the European option, were nevertheless capable of recognising that having a poor relation with Russia would not help Ukraine along her way. They did not see Russia as a dangerous Other against which Ukraine should be constructed as a buffer, being of the opinion that

“Without Russia we may not save our economy; without the West we may not build a law-governed independent state.”148

Such a pronouncement illustrated the Ukrainian basic dilemma as framed by the material realities of the day: economic ties with Russia and a juridical model needed from the West. This led to a position in which the road to Euro-Atlantic integration was encouraged, as was closer cooperation with Ukraine’s Eurasian partners.149 On the whole, however, both pragmatic and romantic Westernisers had an overwhelmingly pro-European choice, and various degrees of suspicion towards Russia. The great difference was in how they chose to deal with it: isolation

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146 Idem, p. 65.
147 Idem.
or integration. Mykola Ryabchuk aptly summarised the Westernisers’ position by saying they had accepted the West European utopia, because it ran deep into the roots of Ukraine\textsuperscript{150}.

On the other end of the spectrum, Slavophiles were also split into romantics and pragmatics. The romantics, named as such because of an absolute, radical vision, backed a full reformation of the former USSR, and looked at Russia for guidance and were suspicious of Western aid, claiming it made Ukraine a Western colony at the mercy of the IMF\textsuperscript{151}. Pragmatist Slavophiles (seen as such because they claimed to wish to deal with the realities of the situation rather than an ideal set of circumstances) adopted a position closer to the pragmatic Westernisers, emphasising the need to acknowledge Russia and the Eurasian dimension, but also standing firmly by Ukraine’s newly acquired independence and statehood\textsuperscript{152}. What is important to note about all these groups, however, is that they definitely took Europe as a major factor for their country’s future and they all envisaged some degree of integration with it, thus placing a European option high on the political agenda. This meant that a European economic, political and social system was preferred to the one proposed by Russia, not to mention the possibility of a state based on the rule and respect of the law.

Leonid Kuchma’s advent to power after the 1994 elections set the country away from a fully pro-European/anti-Russian foreign policy course onto a more Eurasian, and what has sometimes been termed, balanced approach to the matter. For the purposes of this analysis, I should say the image of a buffer between Russia and the West encouraged by Leonid Kravchuk was eroded and substituted with the idea of a balancer or bridge between the same. In fact, more alternative images sprung in foreign policy discourse at this time, which shall be discussed. With respect to the sources available for this period, they are more numerous, ranging from punctual affirmations made by President Kuchma to speeches delivered by foreign affairs ministers, counsellors and ambassadors; analyses of this period are also more substantial and richer, providing more indication about the developments of policy. The general idea to be retained concerning this interval is that contrary to President Kravchuk’s emphasis on an almost exclusive relationship with Europe and the West, Leonid Kuchma insisted on a balancing act, focusing equally on Ukraine’s European intentions and her Eurasian character and its implications. The result was “multi-vectorism” or “multi-vector” foreign policy, which was not necessarily a good feature for Ukraine, mainly because it gave rise to further confusions about what her intentions really were\textsuperscript{153}. Multi-vectorism was in fact a feature which characterised both Kuchma’s presidential mandates (as we shall see); however, for the

\textsuperscript{150} Mykola Ryabchuk, 1994, ‘Between civil society and the new etatism: democracy in the making and state building’, in Michael Kennedy, 


\textsuperscript{151} Taras Kuzio, 1999, op. cit., p. 71.

\textsuperscript{152} Idem, p. 72.

\textsuperscript{153} “The goal of multi-vectorism was to expand relations with Europe while maintaining stable relations with Russia and continue to build a strategic partnership with the US. (…) The policy was driven by a strong dependence on energy resources and a huge interdependence between Ukraine and the post-Soviet industrial complex. At the same time the nation had a strong European and pro-US orientation. This period might be described as a time of increasing corruption, including the appearance of Ukrainian oligarchs and a background of poor strategic leadership and lack of will to move on reforms in all areas of the state. It was a period of sound proclamations but not much progress”, Oleksandr Buniak, Lieutenant Colonel, Ukrainian armed forces, 2006, 

purposes of this analysis, I examine the two separately, not least because multi-vectorism was coupled during the second mandate with another slogan, “To Europe with Russia”, which gave it a slightly different nuance. Multi–vectorism as a term appeared in Kuchma’ official discourses signifying the pursuit of several vectors in Ukrainian foreign policy. It was quickly taken over by experts and political commentators, who gave it a very negative reputation and connotations, as shall be shown. A case in point representing Ukraine’s multi-vector approach to foreign policy was illustrated by the Razumkov Centre’s study on Ukraine’s practice of proclaiming strategic partnerships, “Ukraine’s strategic partnerships with other countries: assessments and approaches”154. In this study, analysts suggested that Ukraine had strategic partnerships with 19 countries, although in most cases, this form of association did not bring about an intensification of bilateral relations with these states155; furthermore, it was so often used that it had gradually become almost an empty term, “negatively perceived from both the inside and the outside”156. As such, the policy of strategic partnerships seemed to synthesise very well the difficulty of multi-vectorism.

Coupled with a sluggish reform process, multi-vectorism gave rise to what some experts have called “Ukraine fatigue”, manifested through mistrust and lack of encouragement, particularly on the part of the EU. By 1999, when Leonid Kuchma was getting ready for a new mandate, both internal and external critics were hailing the failure of multi-vectorism and expressed themselves against its perpetration. As a consequence, at least at a declarative level, a firmer pro-European choice was made. This section concentrates on how liminal images and metaphors appeared or disappeared (like the notion of buffer) in the context of multi-vectorism, and to what extent this policy can be viewed as a manifestation of the liminality issue. It also examines the 1999 Kosovo intervention of NATO as an episode in Ukraine’s discourse on liminality; similarly to the Romanian case this represents a significant moment in connection to the balancing act attempted by Ukraine. Below, a list of texts used for examination. The texts include official texts and speeches given by president Leonid Kuchma, counsellors, such as Volodymyr Horbulin, the ambassador to the US, Yuri Scherbak, other decision-making officials and members of Parliament, as well as independent experts expressing their opinions in individual pieces of writing or newspapers. This section includes rather more opinions coming from outside the decision-making circles, addressing both a Ukrainian and an international public. However, this does not mean that in the period under examination civil society or a lower level intra-Ukrainian debate had strongly developed on these issues. As previously specified censorship and social and political apathy made for debate concentrated in the high realms of power.

154 Razumkov Centre, 2001, Ukraine’s strategic partnerships with other countries: assessments and approaches, National Policy and Defence, Kiev.
155 Idem, p. 50.
156 Idem.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>Leonid Kuchma, President</td>
<td>2003</td>
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Eurasianism in the balance

Leonid Kuchma won the 1994 election on a Eurasian platform in foreign policy, pitting himself against Leonid Kravchuk’s pro-European and Russophobic arguments, purposefully painting the latter as more pro-European and anti-Russian than he was. Not only did Kuchma criticise his predecessor’s inability to promote true reform in Ukraine, he also espoused the argument that Kravchuk’s insistence on an exclusive relationship with Europe would damage the country’s standing in international affairs, because essentially, a good relation with Russia was needed for good relations with the rest of the world. In his inaugural speech Leonid Kuchma stated:

“Historically Ukraine is part of the Euro—Asian cultural and economic space. Ukraine’s vitality and important national interests are now concentrated on this territory of the former Soviet Union. We are also linked with the former republics of the Soviet Union by traditional scientific, cultural, informational, and family ties.”

Through this kind of affirmation, Leonid Kuchma re-inscribed Ukraine’s orientation within the Eurasian space and re-activated a pro-Russian stance publicly. (the fact that he was elected to it proved a certain resonance with the electorate) In saying that he was echoing a position which he had espoused during his electoral campaign:

“Ukraine [must not] play the role of political intermediary between the countries of Europe and Russia, but the role of a leader and integrating element in the centre of the Eurasian region that will lead Ukraine into a group of prosperous, civilised countries.”

These fragments provide indications about how Leonid Kuchma understood to engage with Ukraine’s delicate geographic position; it involved a divorce from the buffer formula, which he saw as unproductive, and a cultivation of Ukraine’s multiple potential geopolitical orientations. As initial statements they also signified the opening of the discursive space for alternative chains of connotation. Ukraine started to be associated not only with the idea of Europe, democracy, prosperity, but also with the Eurasian region, the idea of regional power, other CIS countries, balancing and bridging. This meant that opinions favouring a positive attitude towards Russia and its Eurasian appeal coexisted with opinions favouring a European course, which had not been silenced by the demise of Leonid Kravchuk.

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158 “Not surprisingly, the specific goals of Kuchma’s foreign policy reflect this fundamental philosophical shift away from Kravchuk and the Central European school. Whereas Kravchuk viewed military weakness and potential Russian aggression as the main threats to Ukraine’s sovereignty, Kuchma argued that priority should be given to fostering a healthy political and economic life to ensure the longterm viability of the Ukrainian state. As a result, while both schools of thought understood the importance of Russian recognition of Ukraine’s legitimacy and the primacy of the Russian threat, they offered different prescriptions to address these needs. The Kravchuk camp argued for a «return to Europe» and the creation of a bloc to contain Russia. The Eurasian school, on the other hand, believed that closer ties with the West would provoke a Russian attempt to reassert control over Ukraine, pointing to previous examples such as the clash between Latin Catholicism and Orthodoxy in the seventeenth century”, Ilya Prizel, op. cit., p. 390.
159 Ilya Prizel, op. cit., p. 391.
After his election, however, Leonid Kuchma did not adopt, as had been feared, an overwhelmingly pro-Russian stance; this idea was best illustrated in his attitude to CIS issues, which, much like Leonid Kravchuk, he downplayed by avoiding to become overly involved in economic and political arrangements of the structure. Yet, this did not prevent Kuchma from improving relations directly with Moscow, particularly on an economic and military level, whilst at the same time trying to make some kind of inroads towards integrating Euro-Atlantic structures. This is why in 1997, three years into the first Kuchma mandate, Volodymyr Horbulin, National Security adviser affirmed “Ukraine is destined to pursue a policy of balancing within the fields of geopolitical interests.” Leonid Kuchma attempted to rearticulate Ukraine’s position between extremes, and even more interestingly, attempted to present it as inevitable as the nationalists had claimed their option to be. This achievement was due to the fact of capitalising on the similarities between the different ideological currents that crystallised on the Ukrainian political scene post-1994 (see above), as well as the general fears that otherwise Ukraine would remain an isolated entity, who would be affected by movements in which she did not participate.

The ideological divisions present in Ukraine help understand why the multi-vector foreign policy of Leonid Kuchma was born; it represented at a practical level a summation of the different orientations mentioned above, as it sought to pacify and bring together equally powerful voices and discourses. It tried to reconcile a deep suspicion of NATO, shared by left wing parties, with the right wing political forces’ desire for the West and its structures; this was manifested through a gradually evolving relation with NATO, through a 1994 Partnership for Peace agreement, and a 1997 development of a Special Partnership, as well as upholding in 1996 and 1998 a platform prioritising EU integration; on the other hand, gestures of rapprochement towards Russia were also accomplished, such as the signature of a special agreement with her on economic issues and certain military ones. Taras Kuzio warns, however, that multi-vectorism was also a short-sighted type of policy, which during Kuchma’s second mandate in power meant the attempt at reconciling the interests of various members of the oligarchy rather than the satisfaction of any ideological imperatives. (As shall be explained later). This might explain why multi-vectorism gave rise to many contradictions, the starkest one being the simultaneous affirmation that “Nobody awaits us in the West” and that Europe is the main vector of Ukraine’s foreign policy. This kind of attitude reflected the very confused meaning of multi-vectorism.

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162 Ilya Prizel, op. cit., p. 397.
Ukraine: the bridge that never was

Although multi-vectoral foreign policy was a very popular idea in the 1994-1999 interval, I have found no text that specifically connected its existence with Ukraine’s delicate geopolitical position. The concept of multi-vectorism seemed to have been popularised by its extensive use by analysts and foreign policy experts, who coined it as a logical evolution of the idea that Ukraine had to deal with multiple vectors in her foreign policy, which was mentioned in some official speeches. It was, however, implicit that the country’s particular situation inspired the need for a multi-vectoral policy. In 2000, Petro Parypa, Ukrainian analyst, stated that this label and the nature of this foreign policy stemmed from the identification of three vectors in Ukrainian foreign policy, namely pro-Western (?), neutral, or pro-Eastern. The result was that Europe did not understand what Ukraine wanted from it. The texts to which I have had access suggest this idea, at the same time introducing liminal images and metaphors in association with multi-vectorism.

The first set of texts on which I wish to concentrate belong to Yuri Shcherbak, former Ukrainian ambassador to the US during 1994-1997. I believe his texts, which are a gathering of various speeches given on diverse occasions, are significant for my analysis because he was acting in a key position, as a messenger who had to convey a particular image to one of the international actors about which the Ukrainian elite cared the most. I did not make the assumption that the message Shcherbak conveyed was truer than others pronounced for other publics, but rather, given the importance that Ukraine placed on a relationship with the US, I did make the assumption that his messages would be comprehensive and explicit about Ukraine’s position on various topics. In an ideal world, I would have had access to the statements and affirmations of the Ukrainian ambassador to Russia for the same period. However, it must be said that at the time exchanges with Russia seemed to be done at a Presidential level, at least on the Ukrainian side. Foreign policies related to Russia were far too important and delicate to be left to lower echelons, it seemed. Thus, President Kuchma’s affirmations towards Russia did not disprove Yuri Scherbak’s pronouncements, especially in view of the fact that Kuchma wanted to keep all possibilities open (as shall be shown below).

A survey of the Russo-Ukrainian relationship at the time also showed a tense atmosphere, particularly due to the final stages of Ukraine’s reluctant nuclear disarmament and disagreements over Crimea. At the time, the peninsula was in the throws of an internal conflict that also had a bearing upon Russo-Ukrainian relations. The fact that the Russian Black Sea Fleet was stationed in Crimean waters, whilst at the same time the peninsula was under Ukrainian sovereignty from under which it tried to depart brought to the fore the military and political entanglements that complicate relations with Russia. Ultimately, Crimea achieved autonomy status under Ukraine sovereignty and the Black Sea Fleet was allowed to continue its stationing there. As a consequence of these issues, it is possible to assume that Scherbak’s pronouncements were substantiated by ideas elaborated in Ukraine, since the need to define a role was becoming ever more pressing.

In the introduction to the volume gathering his speeches, Shcherbak enlisted the support of famous international experts and their views on Ukraine, emphasising the key strategic
role that his country was believed to have in Europe; thus he quoted Michael Mandelbaum, who pictured a healthy Ukraine as a “buffer before Russia and the rest of Europe” and a guarantor for a peaceful Russia\textsuperscript{165}; Strobe Talbott, seeing Ukraine in 1995 as “key” to stability in Central Europe\textsuperscript{166}; and Madeleine Albright who saw Ukraine as a potential “vigorous” partner in 1997\textsuperscript{167}. When reading these opinions, it is easier to understand why for a while Ukrainians invested energy in projecting themselves as a buffer and why they actually believed in it. It is also easy to understand why Shcherbak used them to frame his arguments, which were that Ukraine’s delicate geographic position has gotten her “caught between empires”\textsuperscript{168}, lying

“at a crossroads, which for centuries has been an important strategic factor determining the significance of the land”\textsuperscript{169}.

Shcherbak’s text is one of the very few explicitly linking geographic position to geopolitical importance, yet its importance goes beyond that. In his text, he makes specific historical references to Yuri Lypa, the interwar geopolitical writer and his emphasis on the north-south axis and the importance of the Black Sea for Ukraine, thus proving that members of the Ukrainian establishment were aware of historical precedents relating to geopolitics and had the option to use them. One notes a wish to establish historical continuity, as Shcherbak did in his speech at the Harvard Ukrainian Studies Institute, in which he affirmed “Ukraine has a unique and key location in Europe irrespective of its name-Kyivan Rus, or the Ukrainian People’s republic, a province of the former Russian or Soviet empires, or just “Ukraine”\textsuperscript{170}. In this same speech Shcherbak equally stated

“Geographically, Ukraine is a state within the Central and Eastern European region, and, by God’s will, it is destined to be a bridge, a joining link between political east and West. It would be a national tragedy if Ukraine finds itself between two conflicting political blocs”\textsuperscript{171}.

Several important elements are to be noted about this fragment. First of all, it used the same kind of deterministic argumentation as we have seen Volodymyr Horbulin use in 1997, claiming it was Ukraine’s destiny to be a bridge, suggesting no other possibility is available. In 1996, US Ambassador to Ukraine Roman Popadiuk said that in view of how international policy had evolved by that moment, Ukraine appeared, indeed, to be

“destined to continue balancing its interests between East and West and has the potential to grow as an unofficial bridge between the two”\textsuperscript{172}.

\textsuperscript{165} Michael Mandelbaum, 1994, ‘Preserving the new peace. The case against NATO expansion’, \textit{Foreign Affairs} 74(3), pp.10-11.

\textsuperscript{166} Yuri Shcherbak, 1997, \textit{The strategic role of Ukraine}, Cambridge: Harvard Ukrainian Studies Institute, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{167} Idem.

\textsuperscript{168} Idem, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{169} Idem, p. 18.


\textsuperscript{171} Idem, p.31.

As a representative of the US, Popadiuk, even if expressing personal views, showed that the bridging issue resonated also outside Ukraine as a position that made sense. At the same time, insistence on the idea of bridge clearly signified the death of the buffer image, especially since there was explicit fear of being caught in between anew. Thus we see Shcherbak quite intent on a liminal imagery, which he explicitly connects to both Ukraine’s geography and history, at the same stressing his country’s “unique” position. Yet, his arguments are similar to arguments employed in Romania during the 1996-2000 period, proving, as I have previously stated, that Ukrainian elites acquired and developed a language related to the liminal relatively quickly. Furthermore, I believe this proves that although the possibilities in the liminal are rich there are a few favourite images that obviously have political appeal and are repeatedly used.

Having renounced the buffer image, Shcherbak did not, however, renounce a motif that was present in the early years of Ukrainian independence; the idea of the danger of a new “iron curtain” descending that might isolate the country from Europe. “In Ukraine there is concern about discussion of a possible new division of Europe into “spheres of influence” and that Ukraine might become some sort of “payment” to Russia for loss of influence in Central Europe”. Let me recall the warning of President Kuchma against the erection of a new “Berlin Wall” on the borders of Ukraine.”

Although in 1993 it had been declared that Ukraine was to be a neutral non-bloc country, her leaders publicly declared that she had nothing against NATO expansion, nor did she think anyone outside (read Russia) should have a veto right regarding this matter. Furthermore, Ukraine was considering the possibility of a Partnership for Peace agreement, which she eventually signed in 1994-1995. By 1997, Shcherbak could say that Ukraine would not necessarily remain a non-bloc country, but that, as Horbulin had said in 1996, she was not ready to join NATO yet. On the other hand, by 1994 Ukraine had finally ratified the treaty concerning renouncement of nuclear weapons, and had improved relations with neighbouring countries along the North-South axis, which, seemingly, she was trying to revive. Yet, President Kuchma’s declaration that Ukraine favoured cooperation and a “special partnership” with European structures rather than full integration - thus somewhat contradicting the “return to Europe” idea – introduced further confusion about what Ukraine’s real intentions were. In doing this, Ukraine’s behaviour was similar to Romania’s hesitant behaviour of the early 1990s.

173 Yuri, Shcherbak, op.cit., p. 32.
174 Idem, p. 32.
Can it be said to be a “liminal” behaviour in the sense of attempting to reconcile contradictory policy push and pulls? The answer is that in fact Ukraine was to a certain extent more direct than Romania in trying to build a stance in international politics. Instead of trying to join both sides, or keeping the illusion of possibly joining both, she was trying to find a way to keep relations with both without joining either, and was explicit about it. The behaviour was not duplicitous, as the Romanian one (1990-1996) might be qualified. Certainly, a gradual movement towards the European option by 1998, as we shall see, undermined this already untenable position. It is interesting to observe how two countries, whose elites had similar views about their position on the international scene, developed different ways of dealing with it, influenced by their different history; both countries confirmed, however, that a choice had to be made, which is why by 1996 in Romania and 1998-1999 in Ukraine a more clearly European choice had been made, at least at a declarative level.

Shcherbak’s texts introduced a general picture of the image that Ukrainian elites wished to project, showing a slightly changed chain of connotation, which substituted the image of the bridge and therefore the activity of linking to that of the buffer and barrier erecting. They also signified the introduction of a wider palette of policies, which brought the Eastern dimension in Ukrainian policy. The next texts under examination will provide more details about how that dimension was introduced, but also how the Western dimension evolved.

These texts are principally speeches delivered by various foreign policy senior officials, detailing the Ukrainian perspective on relations with NATO and the country’s role in Europe. They are particularly interesting because they were delivered on the same occasion in subsequent years, from 1995 to 1998, namely the NATO annual conference; as such their language is a useful indicator of how political views evolved in Kiev during these five years. The main themes of elaboration were collective security in Europe, with its corollary fear of a new economic and political division of the continent (as mentioned by Shcherbak too), the need for a clear relation between Ukraine and NATO and NATO and Russia, and Ukraine’s place in Europe. Throughout these texts it is apparent that Ukraine’s discomfort with her potential isolation in Europe gradually faded, as she defined her relationship with NATO more courageously and clearly. However, they also exhibit a remarkable lack of liminal images or metaphors.

Thus, in 1995 Boris Tarasyuk Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs affirmed

“we consider this relationship (with NATO) to be of special significance to the future of European stability, to security in general, and to the current discussion on the enlargement of the Alliance. Since many believe that, in order to secure its stability, Europe should remain undivided, Ukraine’s relationship with NATO and also the NATO/Russia dialogue have a unique part in the general European security debate”177.

Such phrases were embedded in a context where Ukrainian elites felt caught between NATO and the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty, initiated within the CIS;

“Conditions for this coexistence (between NATO and Tashkent Treaty) are not clear at this time. Ukraine, while not a part of the Tashkent arrangement, is promoting bilateral ties with CIS member-states. The fact that Ukraine may find itself in the position of “buffer state” between an expanded Alliance and the Tashkent arrangements is a point of special concern”\textsuperscript{178}.

This passage illustrates the kind of political dilemma Ukrainians seemed to face at the time, which they hoped to resolve by making their issue a European-wide question. This was the reason why the text abounded in references to a European collective effort (mentioned in six paragraphs over a three page text), and why it was claimed that Ukraine’s efforts at internal consolidation and enhanced relations with “the West” should not be seen as an alternative to “friendly cooperation with neighbours”\textsuperscript{179}. The message that went through was that Ukraine desired a closer cooperation with NATO, although not fully owned yet, but was worried about Russia’s reaction. Above all, however, she wished to go far away from a potential buffer status.

In 1996, at the same kind of conference, Hennadyi Udovenko, Ukraine’s foreign minister upheld and strengthened the same kind of arguments as in the previous year his colleague did, using the same discursive cues as before “Ukraine’s natural part in Central Europe”, “just return to the European fold”, “sensitive geopolitical location”, “fear of becoming a buffer”, “need for stability”\textsuperscript{180}. He also reiterated the fear of isolation argument.

“Europe, as well as the rest of the world, is now multipolar. We must avoid the worst possible development: a new division of the European continent. While multipolar, Europe is also united, indivisible, and our only

common house.

" We must comprehend this reality that both multipolarity and unity can now be seen in all the complex integration processes ongoing in Europe today-within the EU, WEU, and NATO”\textsuperscript{181}.

In 1997, the same Udovenko, sounded much more confident about Ukraine’s role in Europe’s security architecture, upholding that his country, “a natural part of Central and Eastern Europe” was actively involved in the construction of a new security for the continent, which at the time was done through NATO enlargement, by developing a clearer relation with this institution, as well as with Russia\textsuperscript{182}. He squarely declared that Ukraine’s main goal

\textsuperscript{178} Idem.
\textsuperscript{179} Idem.
\textsuperscript{181} Idem.
was “full integration with major European and Euro-Atlantic structures”, echoing and hereby strengthening affirmations which he had made in 1996, according to which

“Ukraine must have stability and security to ensure that it does not become a buffer zone between the two communities. This will only happen by activating its relationship with the European structures, including NATO. We expect our position and our interests to be understood”\textsuperscript{183}.

The tone was definitely growing in self assurance in 1997, and it became more so in subsequent years, when Boris Tarasyuk spent more time in his speeches detailing the various ways in which Ukraine had contributed to European security (such as contributions to various peace keeping operations, being active in the Black Sea Organisation or offering good offices in the mediation of conflicts in Georgia or Armenia), as an illustration of Ukraine’s “pivotal role in Europe”\textsuperscript{184}. The confidence also came from the fact that in 1998 Leonid Kuchma had reiterated his statements of 1996, declaring Ukrainians’ intention of joining the EU\textsuperscript{185}, which, this time, he also embedded in a political programme of reforms. Regarding the linguistic level, the evolution in tone can be observed through a change from the early speeches (95-96), which expressed many things and actions that Ukraine “must accomplish”, “must do”, “must have”, “must not miss a historic chance”, to later ones (96-98), which enunciated significantly fewer items that “must be done” and specified more that were already achieved.

At a macro-level, concerning Ukraine’s views and intentions these texts indicated her intentions and perspectives, but were not very rich in explaining how the general goals were to be attained. It was possible to know what Ukrainian elites wished to avoid- becoming a buffer between Europe and Russia- but not what exactly they wished for or how to enact it. Ultimately, by the end of Leonid Kuchma’s first mandate in 1999, this fact transpired and led to the general conviction that the multi-vectoral policy of friendliness towards both Russia and the West led to no results. Yet, it must be acknowledged that the discourse had slightly mutated from an equidistant position between Europe and Russia to a more pro-European stance. This, however, did not mean that strong pro-Russian voices did not remain in Ukraine, as the 1999 Kosovo issue - which shall be detailed below - showed.

In any case, by 1999, most internal and external analysts noted that a dwindling discourse and ambiguous policies ended up in an unproductive deadlock for Ukraine. Examples of such instances were the signature of the non-nuclear treaty and strengthening relations with NATO in 1994 and 1997 through the Partnership for Peace whilst at the same time Ukraine signed a strategic partnership with Russia; refusal of full membership in CIS, but agreements of joint air defence and economic cooperation; proclamation of a European course but failure to implement reform that would favour this course.

\textsuperscript{183} Hennadiy Udovenko, 1996, op. cit.
Taras Kuzio noted in May 1999

“Ukraine remains stuck – it cannot move either forwards to Europe or backwards towards Eurasia, as the Parliamentary leadership hopes. The Ukrainian executive and leadership continue to reiterate Ukraine’s desire to integrate European and Trans-Atlantic structures while restricting its activities with CIS to economic cooperation. In this respect Ukrainian foreign policy has changed little from the Kravchuk era, except now it is no longer portrayed as an anti-Russian buffer but as a bridge linking Europe to Russia”186.

Another Ukrainian analyst Olexiy Haran, suggested that in fact, Ukrainian elites were still trying in 1998 to determine whether Ukraine was a buffer or a bridge, pointing out that neither were in fact fortunate metaphors187, especially since bridges could be destroyed in times of strife. Typically, however, no clear alternative was offered to what Ukraine could be, aside from a country continuing to perform a balancing act of

“political drift to the West, but accompanied by good gestures in favour of Russia”188.

I find the word “drift” particularly adequate for the situation in which Ukraine found herself at the time: performing small incremental steps towards the West, in such a way as not to upset the strong left wing opposition and taking some pro-Russian measures so as not to damage the relationship with Russia.

Although the texts which I had the opportunity to examine do not dwell extensively on the bridging issue or Ukraine’s position in between East and West, Kataryna Wolczuk, in her analysis of the official narrative of identity in Ukraine states that elites were concerned about proving the East-West dichotomy that they believed existed in Ukraine. Thus, she affirmed that an accepted view of the country was that Ukraine’s identity was a result of an East-West dialectic, which made it impossible and unwise to eliminate the Eastern dimension form the country’s history or identity make-up (like the national democrats had attempted to do during the first years of independence)189. Leonid Kuchma himself also held that

“one cannot interpret our European choice in too simple a way. We must not turn our backs on our neighbours and our past which connects us with them”190.

Thus, the idea was not to be against Russia, but rather help Russia get rid of her autocratic and imperial legacy191. However, it was said that Russia’s evolution towards a more authoritarian regime pushed Ukraine into making a more clear choice towards NATO and the West, in order

188 Idem, p. 47.
190 Idem, p. 684.
191 Idem.
to avoid becoming a grey buffer zone between the West and Russia. Yet, as Wolczuk notes, not everyone agreed with this position in the president’s entourage and amongst the political elite; two of the closest Kuchma collaborators, Volodymyr Hryniov (presidential adviser) and Dmytro Vydryn wrote books about how Ukraine should join the Eurasian space and go back to Russia, doubting her viability as an independent state. Although they were marginalised and there seemed to be agreement amongst the members of the elite that Europeanisation was the way to go, this did not mean that consensus reigned.

The fact that Ukraine -like Romania- in 1999 was still sharply divided, particularly about the issue of her road to Europe and the West, was confirmed by the great debate that the NATO intervention in Kosovo stirred in the Ukrainian Parliament. Much as in the Romanian case, the Kosovo issue brought to the fore the fact that a significant part of the Ukrainian political elite was actively seeking for a pretext to part ways with NATO. What is even more significant, is the fact that Ukraine did not have to face a question like Romania, of whether to allow NATO planes to fly over national space or not, but a part of her politicians seized this as a matter of principle.

Thus the Ukrainian Parliament reacted to the NATO announcement before the bombing even began. It voted overwhelmingly on March 24 against agreement with NATO over the attack. It followed with another vote to ratify the Black Sea naval agreement with Russia, which allowed a Russian military presence for 20 years in Ukraine. The Parliament effectively yielded to a condition set by the Russian government for approving the important treaty through which Russia recognizes Ukraine and its current borders. Also on March 24, the Parliament voted to ask the president and Cabinet to propose a draft law that would repeal Ukraine’s constitutional ban of nuclear weapons from its territory. The Parliament voted for it, knowing that Ukraine did not have enough funds to acquire fuel rods for its nuclear stations, let alone to pay for a new nuclear arsenal.

In his speech at the annual NATO workshop in 1999, Borys Tarasyuk presented the evolutions in the Ukrainian Parliament in March as an attempt by the left political forces to take over Ukrainian foreign policy and steer it in an anti-NATO direction. This text is in fact extremely interesting, because in it Tarasyuk is agitating the threat of leftists coming to

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192 Vasyl Kremen, quoted in Kataryna Wolczuk, op. cit., p. 684.
193 Idem, p. 685.
194 Jaroslav Koshiw, 1999, “Left uses NATO to turn Ukraine back to USSR”, Kyiv Post, 1 April.
195 Borys Tarasyuk, 1999, Opening Remarks, NATO XVI Workshop, Budapest. Available at http://www.csdr.org/99Book/workshop1999.htm. Accessed December 2007. “(...)NATO’s actions in Kosovo have been truly a gift for the left. The leftists have become confident because they have had the majority of the population behind them, a majority that did not approve of NATO’s air strikes. Even in Western Ukraine, where people traditionally favor a European course, they had big doubts about NATO’s actions against Yugoslavia. The anti-NATO hysteria peaked on 26 March 1999 when the left-dominated parliament adopted a resolution on Ukraine-NATO relations. You are lucky not to have seen the first drafts of this resolution. If it had been approved, I would not be here today. But even the approved text contains provisions that may hamper our cooperation with the Alliance. Developments in Kosovo handed a trump card to the leftists, who will use it during the presidential elections in October 1999. With their anti-NATO campaign, they are also putting into question my country’s relations with the entire West, making no distinction between organizations, sabotaging cooperation with Western countries, turning people against the European Union, and spoiling constructive dialogue with the Council of Europe”.
power in Ukraine, thus potentially undermining collaboration with the West; it is somehow suggested that the West can help Ukraine prevent that situation and the speech is effectively a demand for Ukraine not to be neglected or treated with the cold shoulder, as Tarasyuk claimed she had been:

“For one, we should stop putting artificial obstacles in the way of Ukraine’s development as a strong democratic state. We should abandon the double standard that exists for Ukraine. For half of the last year it seems as though international organizations have been competing with each other to make life more difficult for the executive power in Ukraine that wishes to effect a pro-Europe policy line. We also believe that Ukraine should be invited to be a full participant in the Stability Pact for SouthEastern Europe. Ukraine fully supports elaboration of the Pact and can make a valuable contribution. There are both political and economic reasons for our participation. To put it very mildly, we are not satisfied with the role that has been given to Ukraine in the Pact. (…) For many years Ukraine has been knocking on Europe’s door. We consider it unfair and even dangerous to keep Ukraine outside the European perspective. It is not so much the issue of reconstruction, but more the goal of being invited to integrate with Europe. That is why we believe it is so important for Ukraine to participate more fully in the Stability Pact”.

As can be seen, Tarasyuk suggested that Ukraine found herself on the outside of European policy and politics because she was not let in; yet, as he himself expressed in the speech, it seemed more important to a certain part of Ukrainian elites to be invited to integrate with Europe, rather than actively participating in the process of reconstruction of its south-east—which was the pretext of Boris Tarasyuk’s complaint. The message which transpires form this fragment is that Ukrainians were very much interested in symbolic moves—which undoubtedly had their importance—but were less able at substantiating and backing them with reforms an policies that would actually strengthen a particular position.

In a way that was similar to that of Romanian elites, the Kosovo moment was used by all political parties in order to further their agenda. In Romania, the left wing political forces criticised NATO and attempted to reintroduce a contrary and nationalist attitude; in Ukraine, it would seem the left wing forces wished not only to reverse the country’s course, but also to steer her in a different direction altogether, towards Russia. In both cases, the conflict of opinion between pro-NATO and anti-NATO supporters showed how fragile any consensus was on foreign policy and how ambivalent internal positions were about how to join the West. Yet, a crucial difference between the two cases ensures that the Kosovo episode was a significant landmark in Romanian recent history whereas in Ukraine it remained one of the many balancing acts the leadership performed in order to keep the country on her hesitant course towards Europe: the way in which the debate was framed by those who essentially won it. In Romania, the question of letting NATO planes fly over national space became more than a matter of policy orientation, it became a matter of national destiny and a symbol of how Romanian elites understood to lead their country towards Europe; this moment was also presented as a chance to differ from previous historical choices, and to show that although in the margin of Europe geographically, Romania could act as a European and Western core country. This constituted one of the decisive steps from geography to geopolitics. In the
Ukrainian case, the incident was presented more as a failed coup against the democratic state, which only narrowly escaped the danger of reactionary former communists seizing power, rather than anything greater. Certainly, it can be argued that not letting the country fall into their hands was quite crucial to Ukraine’s destiny and pro-Western course, but the fact that it was not framed as such was indicative of the fact that what was a matter of destiny either had not been spelled out or had not been expressed, potentially because no clear destiny had been defined by either opposing camp holding a vested interest in Ukraine’s becoming.

For Ukraine, the Kosovo issue also marked a dramatic conclusion to President Leonid Kuchma’s first mandate in power, sharply emphasizing the challenges still ahead for the country: the necessity for real political and economic reforms, as well as a firm decision on where the country was headed.

For the purposes of this analysis, the Kosovo episode illustrated the previous balancing trend, and also underlined the fact that the definition of Ukraine’s foreign policy course happened in a discursive context that was rather barren with respect to subject positions, especially concerning Europe, and did not exhibit much of a narrative or a dialogue with history, be it even recent. Thus, if we repeatedly encounter Ukraine described as a “non-great-power”, who is a “natural part of Central and Eastern Europe”196 with a “specific geographic, military and politic situation in Europe”197 (although not many details are given about this specificity), which also “suffers from the constant attacks of the left-wing political parties”198 (as if these forces were somehow alien and not intrinsically part of post-Soviet Ukraine), we almost never encounter Europe described in its meaning for Ukraine. The message that Ukraine wishes to eventually join European and Euro-Atlantic structures is certainly expressed in a more or less clear fashion; however, it is never evident why Ukraine wishes to do so. Romania and Turkey have an immediate answer to this, by placing EU and Euro-Atlantic integration as an end goal on an age-old process of modernisation and Westernisation; Ukraine cannot or at least does not explain it. This is probably why Europe is hardly ever presented in attributes that might explain Ukraine’s attraction to it. It is not portrayed as a source of values, guidance, or even pressure. The closest a Ukrainian official came to describing Europe or its actions was in 1999 when Boris Tarasyuk chastised Europe for keeping her on the outside, “knocking on Europe’s door”. There was the accusation of bringing new artificial barriers on the continent, but no explicit details of why Europe was good for Ukraine. NATO is not well described either. On one occasion it was characterised as a “pillar of European security”, but no more than that. Yet most texts wax on Ukraine’s need and desire to join it.

It could be said that the nature and style of the documents were not conducive to this kind of linguistic and discursive development. However, I have identified a similar kind of document at the NATO workshop from 1995, coming from the Romanian leadership. Elaborated at a

197 Idem.
time when Romania’s own position could be considered ambiguous towards Euro-Atlantic structures, it nevertheless conveyed what seemed to be the country’s basic wishes, inscribing them in a grander narrative, of Romania’s becoming part of Europe. The country’s participation to the 1995 workshop was presented as symbolic of the reshaping of Europe, and Romania’s participation in the Partnership for Peace operations are projected as a way to further re-integration with European values and there was already mention of Romania’s projecting of security in her region. Arguably, this was possible because political elites had declared what were their country’s aims and therefore it was possible to construct a narrative of how and why they would happen. In the Romanian text of the 1995 workshop it is possible to find subject positions for Romania, NATO, the PfP programme and in a broader sense, Europe.

“Partnership for Peace represents an enduring enterprise that will strengthen relations and enhance cooperation for ensuring security for all of Europe. (...) Partnership for Peace has projected a way for Partner states, most of which are countries in transition, to re-integrate with European values, practices, and goals, and thus complete the deep political and social changes that began with the collapse of communism. PFP has also provided a vehicle for the Alliance to further adapt to the new European realities. To all peoples, PFP has brought hope that Europe will soon return to its natural geopolitical and historical boundaries and acknowledge that its security is indivisible.”

Pulling threads together

The image that appears from all the texts under examination in this section is rather imbalanced in favour of Ukraine in the sense that they bring forward elements about her, without explicitly showing what was thought about her partners, or even potential adversaries, namely Russia. There is not much talk about “us” and “them”, or a story mentioning a project, only the aims that Ukraine pursues; yet aims expressed in an under-specified context tend to underline a certain lack of both strategy and tactics. Thus, aside from being positioned as a country with a pivotal role in Europe, Ukraine is also characterised by attributes such as “active”, “most important factor of European security”, “consistent and responsible”, “consolidating East and Central Europe”, “proposing initiatives”. There are also some indications that in virtue of the balancing act that Ukraine felt she needed to perform, her elites wished to project her as a potential bridge between the West and Russia. Yet, this imagery is not extensively used, nor are there any synonyms or equivalent terms to be found for the idea of bridge. What is clear, nevertheless, is that Ukrainian elites wished to get rid of the idea that their country might be a buffer, because it was unproductive and even potentially damaging. This happened both by specifically affirming Ukraine should not be a buffer and by not mentioning this image. Significantly, Ukrainian elites also wished to downplay the neutrality factor, which still lingered in the country’s official status, but was rapidly waning in actual policy.


200 Idem.
On the whole, the 1994-1999 period was a time of relative progress in foreign policy discourse, even though Ukraine’s course did not become necessarily clearer; on the contrary, some experts criticised Leonid Kuchma’s policies for being too ambiguous, although he at least managed to normalise relations with Russia and other neighbours - which was a necessary action in order to be able to progress in relations with the West. In this period liminal images were not predominant, but kept a relatively significant presence in discourse, such as to remain a possible solution to a role for Ukraine. With regard to a dialogue with the past and the identification of potential continuities, this existed insofar as a new historiography and history were being written and outlined. Thus, as Kataryna Wolczuk suggested, certain historical episodes were selected and emphasised in order to transmit a particular message, while others were neglected or downplayed. The period of Kyivan Rus was emphasised, as well as that of the Cossacks, symbolizing the times when Ukraine best succeeded in reconciling East and West in her provinces201; moments during Ukraine’s soviet history were less examined, and continuity with pre-soviet Ukraine was far more stressed upon202. This, however, served in the construction of identity, which relatively rarely mentioned liminal images, even if, to a certain extent, a liminal idea seemed to lurk in the background. There was the occasional affirmation that “Ukraine was destined to be a bridge”, but not many other ideas which would inscribe this in a narrative that would make sense in the same way as Turkey or Romania’s discourses did. This does not constitute a criticism towards Ukraine or an assessment that things should have been done in a particular way, but rather an observation of how her case is different. One is definitely aware of Ukraine’s aims, but not knowing exactly where they come from and how they are framed leaves one with a feeling of under-determination.

“To Europe with Russia” 1999-2004

1999-2004 represents Leonid Kuchma’s second term in power as President of Ukraine, and marks the appearance and development of various discursive trends and images. Amongst them, the slogan “To Europe with Russia” pointed to the fact that Kuchma sought to improve further relations with Ukraine’s big Eastern neighbour, sometimes to the detriment of internal reforms, which would bring the country closer to Europe; it also underlined a certain disillusionment elites had with Europe. However, this interval also exhibits a sustained discursive trend upholding Ukraine’s European intentions, a fact which emphasised the bankruptcy of a multi-vectoral policy, by creating uncertainty about the direction the country was following. Indeed, as Petro Parypa noted, the fact that Ukraine tried to remain neutral might have brought her further away from Russia, bit did not necessarily bring her any closer to Europe, because, essentially, a country of her magnitude cannot truly remain equidistant in world affairs. Before delving into the details of these trends, some other technical elements need to be clarified. First of all, this period registers a significant increase in the number of both available texts and sources. Thus, I was able to access political speeches originating from

202 Idem.
decision-makers, the text of Ukraine’s security strategy (not the national security strategy, but rather a series of principles elaborated by security experts), analyses written by policy experts, and opinions expressed by political figures. The increase in the number of texts ensures a greater reliability of results.

Texts suggest that 2002 represents a cut-off point, when the Ukrainian leadership formally declared its intention of becoming a NATO member, even if subsequent policy did not necessarily support this choice. Multi-vector foreign policy continued to be an issue of contention, particularly amongst experts and commentators, although its end had been hailed in 2002. Within this context, images of Ukraine as a bridge or a nexus persisted, although it cannot be said they took over discourse. An element that became clearer, however, was the development of more distinct voices in favour of particular directions. Thus, personalities such as Borys Tarasyuk or Anatoly Zlenko became constant messengers of the European choice. This does not mean that previously it was impossible to know who was adopting what position, but rather that at the end of the 1990s there existed consolidated voices, that had a certain past of affirmations and traceable positions, which was a natural result of an evolving democracy and public space. This feature was of course valid for voices on the whole spectrum of political orientation.

On the whole, the difference between those who advocated a firm pro-European stance and those who were more pro-Russian became clearer, which gave rise to different chains of connotation. Thus, the pro-Europeans would include more liminal images in association with Ukraine’s role, and the need to renounce unproductive neutrality, whereas those with a weaker inclination towards Europe would uphold a neutral status. President Kuchma could be identified occasionally to adopt both kind of stances, element that indicated that, on the whole, Ukrainian elites were generally pro-European and pro-Western, but varying in their degree of commitment to these causes. Kuchma’s affirmations could be also extremely confusing, showing, in fact, that no clear choice had been made about Ukraine’s direction:

“We do not want Ukraine to become a buffer. Love from two sides can become a squeezing. At the same time I do not want Ukraine to become a bridge because many will trample on her”.

One element that remained constant in the beginning of this period was the fact that Europe and NATO were still not clearly positioned according to Ukraine, this meaning that her aims to join them were expressed, but not the reason why, as if it were implicit and not necessary to specify. There are however, as shall be seen, indications that a “project” to join Europe started to be more developed.

Generally, this section will look at the discursive trends around EU and NATO accession, will examine the 2002 moment, when Leonid Kuchma formally declared Ukraine’s will to join NATO, and follows the gradual emergence of other ideas towards the end of his second

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Presidency. The conclusion regarding the presence of liminal images is that, generally, they were no more frequent than in previous years, but they were used with more purpose. This meant that they were either used to illustrate a particular instance, or were denied, as exemplified by President Kuchma, by claiming Ukraine will not be a buffer. The rationale behind this subtle change was a certain familiarisation with a particular geopolitical language; at the same time, the crystallisation of certain positions allowed a more precise, if still scarce, use of the images. Also, the multi-vectoral behaviour that was considered a reflection of Ukraine’s liminal position came under increasing criticism.

Nobody awaits us in the West

In his articles evaluating Leonid Kuchma’s second term in power, Taras Kuzio was very critical of the multi-vector foreign policy that was conducted. Summed up officially as a foreign policy which was “neither pro-West, nor pro-East, but pro-Ukraine”\textsuperscript{204}, Kuzio criticised it as in fact being “pro-Kuchma”, in the sense that it was exclusively geared towards the fulfilment of the President and his allies’ short-term goals, rather than as a response to domestic needs and factors\textsuperscript{205}.

Kuzio explains this situation by asserting that ever since the early 1990s Ukrainian elites had suffered from an inferiority complex, first in relation to Russia, and then, after 1997, when Russia finally ratified the treaty which recognised Ukraine’s borders, in relation to the West\textsuperscript{206}. Kuchma was reported to have said that “Ukraine would not integrate with Europe as a younger sister. We have already gone through this”\textsuperscript{207} and Yanukovych that “we would never accept to be anyone’s younger brother. We must never allow Ukraine to be humiliated anywhere”\textsuperscript{208}. From this point of view, any criticism coming from the EU on democratic practices in Ukraine, or any other sensitive matters was received with suspicion and diffidence. Indeed, if one admits that Europe’s entire discourse regarding integration is based on a “little sister/big brother” dichotomy, as well as an “almost Europe” grading system, Ukraine was bound to have issues with that. It is equally interesting to notice how the concept of “little brother” had come to represent centuries of Russian domination and was used as both a scarecrow and an excuse for not implementing reforms. It was assimilated to the idea of humiliation and the inscription of Ukraine in a lower category of states.

Backed by this kind of philosophy, Leonid Kuchma could in 1999/2000 run for elections on a European Union ticket, only to get further away from Europe in subsequent years, thus performing a similar U-turn to the one he had done after 1994, when he won elections on a pro-Russian platform\textsuperscript{209}.

\textsuperscript{204} Taras Kuzio, 2005, “Neither East nor West, Ukraine’s foreign policy under Kuchma, Problems of Post-communism, 52(5), p. 61.
\textsuperscript{205} Idem.
\textsuperscript{206} Idem, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{207} Quoted in Kuzio, 2005, op. cit., p 62.
\textsuperscript{208} Idem.
\textsuperscript{209} Idem, p. 65.
The second half of 1999 and the beginning of 2000, which represented the period of electoral campaign and elections in Ukraine, exhibited the country’s grey-zone situation acutely. A Ukrainian political analyst described it as follows:

“When it comes to the less-lofty level where real Ukrainians live, President Leonid Kuchma has long been turning Ukraine away from the West. Eight years after independence, Ukraine is at odds with practically every single organization promoting Western norms and values, such as democratic accountability, human rights, rule of law, free media and free trade. The root of the problem is the discrepancy between the words and deeds of the Kuchma administration. This summer has illustrated the pattern. First, at the beginning of July, the Ukrainian president lambasted the European Union for failing to support economic reform in Ukraine. The EU’s response was delivered this week, in Kyiv, by Finnish Premier Paavo Lipponen, who expressed his ‘admiration for the leadership of President Kuchma and the concrete achievements of Ukraine in the past five years.’ At the same time as their political boss was playing geopolitik, EU officials and Western experts working in Kyiv explained to me that Ukrainian violations of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement today are, in fact, on the increase: unfair trade and investment barriers, discrimination against foreign companies, arbitrariness in the courts, insufficient legal framework for establishing and doing business here, poor implementation and overload of laws. Last summer, the EU rebuffed Ukraine’s request to be upgraded to associate membership in the EU. One year later, associate membership is an even more distant goal. One example of Ukraine-EU ‘cooperation’ is enough to prove that: as one of the conditions for a recent ‘balance-of-payment-support loan,’ Ukraine eliminated the discriminatory registration fee for pharmaceutical products (up to one hundred times higher for foreign companies). The EU finalized the first tranche of the loan - only to realise that the next day the Ukrainian government had reinstated the fee! (…) Council of Europe rapporteurs have accused Ukraine of ‘not taking the Council of Europe seriously,’ and the comments from Borys Oliynyk, chairman of the Ukrainian CE delegation and Adam Martynyuk, deputy chairman of the Rada, that Ukraine would not lose much from exclusion (from the EU), show as much. Friedmut Duve, the media ombudsman of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is decidedly unimpressed after his visit: ‘Ukraine cannot expect Western help if it does not allow free debate’210.

I have quoted this article at length because it summed up adequately the elements which brought Ukraine into the uncomfortable position of finding herself in between the affirmations of her elites and its deeds. It was not a case of being in a bridging or buffering position, but rather of having a liminal behaviour, in the sense of allowing the contradictory existence of policy measures which did not correspond at the declarative and implementation levels. This reminds one of Ann Norton’s characterisation of liminars, built in contradiction, louder than most, poorer than most and trickier than most; the paragraph above described a liminal place in the sense explained by Philip Smith, where everything and its opposite would co-exist, almost to a laughable degree.

210 Editorial, 1999, “Kuchma has already turned Ukraine away from the West”, Kyiv Post, 29 July.
In 1999 the National Centre for Strategic Studies published a book in English outlining the principles of Ukrainian security policy, and, most importantly, explaining what were Ukrainian perceptions of the international realm in which the country was placed. One of the most important elements of this book is the acknowledgement of Ukrainian policy as multi-vectoral,

“characterised by a competition between pro-Russian and pro-American forces within the elite”\textsuperscript{211}.

There was, however, no further explanation of why the existence of these forces should produce such a policy, and not a synthesis or reconciliation. As a consequence of this acknowledgement, the book used extensively the terminology of vectors, dimensions and axis, suggesting there are several of each that Ukraine needs to take into consideration: the South-Eastern vector, the Eurasian vector, the Euroatlantic vector (which were also seen as dimensions), the East-West and the North-East axis.

It is interesting to note the different concepts of “vectors” and “axis”. Vectors appear only in the Ukrainian case, seemingly indicating a possible direction of foreign policy, and a potential length; axis is mentioned more often, in the Turkish and Romanian cases too. If one examines the primary senses of these words, which are scientific, a vector implies a size and a direction, whereas an axis implies a fixed line around which elements perform a rotational movement. Metaphorically used, as in this sense, vectors seem to be the more vague of the notions, because no one can be sure of their size, direction or sense; an axis is fixed, although it also can offer different vantage points from which to act and observe.

It was suggested that the presence of so many factors lead to the fact that Ukraine had “no real and reliable strategic allies”\textsuperscript{212}, not least because she had been

“neglected by the West, who did not appreciate her as a Central European state, despite her always being a part of European civilisation”\textsuperscript{213}.

Furthermore, no further guarantees had been given to her for her future (and especially not by Europe), which was why Ukrainian elites felt the need for a balancing act. However, very importantly, this book placed the “revival of a European identity” as a first geopolitical goal\textsuperscript{214}, which was going to be pursued in a very technical manner through the multiplication of agreements, partnerships, and an adoption of “Euro-Atlantic values”\textsuperscript{215}. Although authors spoke about the adoption of European cultural aspects and about entry into the European socio-cultural space, what appeared again as very notable was the lack of symbolic terminology, of a perceived inscription in the “longue durée” of history, which was so common in the Turkish and Romanian cases.


\textsuperscript{212} Idem.

\textsuperscript{213} Idem.

\textsuperscript{214} Idem.

\textsuperscript{215} Idem.
It was also stressed that, having revived her European identity (as opposed to a Eurasian one), Ukraine pursued a policy of “active neutrality”, without, however, developing a clear geopolitical strategy. For example, even if experts mentioned the potential of a North-East axis of geopolitical action, it was admitted this was a little articulated foreign policy concept\textsuperscript{216}. Liminal images and allusions were not frequently mentioned, but they were structuring of the text, affirming that due to her situation Ukraine had evolved as a “frontier civilisation”, which placed her in danger of occupying a “grey zone”, especially since she was positioned “at the crossroads of three geopolitical masses, and strategic oil and gas routes”\textsuperscript{217}.

Although a full liminal imagery was not developed, it was interesting that the notion of crossroads was introduced, in addition to the bridge and buffer ideas. Overall, however, beyond being a useful collection of statements and positions, which had been made on previous occasions, this book did not have very bold suggestions about how Ukraine would behave in international politics beyond a balancing act. It is important, though, that it introduced and acknowledged the issue of the grey zone and the frontier in what was a semi-official document, thus showing that these dimensions were present to a certain extent in the thinking of decision-makers. Another indication that this text was echoing positions already expressed, was the insistence on the neglect that the West seemingly manifested toward Ukraine, which also translated into a fear of new dividing lines on the European continent.

An interesting element of this book was that it exhibited Ukrainian views on the international geopolitical environment; it was one of the few texts found in my research that spelled out opinions about Russia, Europe and the US. Thus, Russia was depicted as a former colonial power seeking to recover its past glory and strength; counterbalancing NATO expansion; seeking to neutralise the Baltic Bloc; seeking to establish new geopolitical axis in Eurasia; seeking to establish economic domination of Transcaucasia and Central Asia.\textsuperscript{218} The West was seen as a keeper of status-quo, who felt threatened by the rise of “messianic” states and strove to preserve Western civilisation and strengthen cooperation amongst its representatives. It was in the context of such relatively antagonistic relations that the authors affirmed Ukraine’s position:

“Having European roots, Ukraine has historically emerged on the frontier of the collision with nomadic cultures and is still often regarded as the zone of struggle for domination between two superpowers”\textsuperscript{219}.

I would like to point out how the authors of this document managed to avoid assuming or implying a position for Ukraine, by saying “it’s often regarded”, rather than “it is”, or “it was”. In addition to that, an important admission was made:

“Public sentiment is torn in a severe struggle between the proponents of western and north-eastern directions for Ukraine”.

\textsuperscript{216} Idem.
\textsuperscript{217} Idem.
\textsuperscript{218} Idem.
\textsuperscript{219} Idem.
This simple phrase coined 10 years of hesitations and ambiguity in Ukrainian foreign policy, important impediments in the creation of a viable foreign policy strategy.

After his re-election, President Kuchma proclaimed in his inaugural speech that EU integration was a foreign policy priority for Ukraine, yet, polls amongst the Ukrainian population suggested that although the elite was relatively pro-European, there lingered what experts called an inertial preference for the east amongst the population.

“Therefore, in the consciousness of Ukraine’s establishment, the multi-vectored foreign policy has noticeably transformed in favour of the European choice. Adherents of priority contacts with Russia, the CIS, and the USA (altogether 39%), are in a clear minority, as compared with the advocates of European integration. However, the foreign policy leanings of Ukraine’s elite somewhat differ from the sentiments of the population, the overwhelming majority of which (57%) gives preference to cooperation with the CIS and Russia. There is a kind of “parity” of sympathies in society regarding some key foreign policy directions (EU, Russia). Of importance is that almost one-third of Ukrainians (29%) is sure that relations with countries of the European Union should be a priority (...) The results of the expert poll show that Ukraine clearly lacks a target-oriented PR-campaign in support of the integration of our country into the European community”.

This last piece of information is crucial in understanding why most of the official speeches regarding cooperation with Europe and NATO were oriented towards a foreign public, particularly an elite of decision-makers. The Ukrainian elite did not seem to consider necessary to inform the people of why going with the West was beneficial to the country, perhaps because it was not that clear even amongst its ranks.

It is likely that this situation favoured the instauration of a new foreign policy slogan, which was encouraged and re-iterated in various instances: “To Europe with Russia”. According to Taras Kuzio, this was a self-serving slogan advocated by Leonid Kuchma and the group of oligarchs who gradually captured power after 2000, which allowed them to justify why they would pick and choose between recommendations offered by the EU and NATO and benefits offered by a rapprochement with Russia. For the purposes of my analysis, this slogan represents the way the elite found to reflect linguistically and discursively the balancing act that it felt compelled to perform. I consider it a good signifier for what started to happen from 2000 onwards: a discursive offensive towards Europe and NATO and an increasing rapprochement to Russia. As I shall show, from this point on, an effort was made, at least at a discursive level, to move Ukraine beyond the bridge or buffer images into more sophisticated ones, such as outpost or guarantor of democracy.

In 2000, foreign minister Borys Tarasyuk re-iterated Ukraine’s commitment to cooperation with NATO, specifying that

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221 Idem, pp. 2-3.
“Today I would like to speak on Ukraine’s relations with NATO; I will not speak about Ukraine’s relations with Europe, because Ukraine is part of Europe. Our strategic foreign policy course to integrate with European and Euro-Atlantic structures is a natural result of the historical, cultural, and geopolitical realities of Ukraine’s development.”

This fragment pointed towards two elements: first, that one of the reasons why speakers almost never waxed on why Ukraine should be part of Europe and what Europe represented for Ukraine was that they meant to deal with the issue from an equal footing and second, the beginning of Kuchma’s second mandate brought optimism regarding Ukraine’s evolution, not least because he had won elections on a European ticket. The message delivered in this fragment was that of optimism, particularly in view of the idea mentioned above, according to which Ukraine should deal with her partners and neighbours from a position of equality and strength rather than submission.

Yet, by 2001, matters no longer looked as clearly pro-Western. Tarasyuk (a political figure recognised as staunchly pro-Western) was ousted from his position as a foreign minister, being replaced by a more moderate pro-European, Anatoly Zlenko. In 2001, political analyst Bohdan Hawrylyshyn pointed out that Ukraine continued to have a confusing multi-vector policy, which needed to be abandoned if the country were to pursue “the only real geopolitical option that she had”, namely Europe.

“Ukraine must shed any ambivalence, if only implied, about its European choice. Statements that Ukraine’s foreign policy is multi-vectoral or that it is neither pro-Western, nor pro-Eastern, but pro-Ukrainian may help maintain reasonably friendly relations with its Eastern neighbour, but can also confuse the Ukrainian people and raise questions in the West about Ukraine’s determination to pursue its chosen Western path. The policies, pronouncements and actions of Ukraine’s government must be subordinated to its strategic, geopolitical Western choice.”

This idea was echoed in the conclusion of a workshop held in 2001 in Brussels with Ukrainian experts:

“Generally, it is not clear enough for Europe, what Ukraine wants from it. Recently, President L. Kuchma said in his interview to the Slovak newspaper “Pravda” about the potential Ukraine’s accession to the Russian-Belorussian Union: “We have chosen our union: it is the European Union”. However, despite such declarative statements of Ukraine’s authorities on its European choice, most analysts think that our society did not give a clear-cut answer to this question, and they identify three orientations in it: pro-Eastern (pro-Russian), non-aligned with any bloc (neutral) and pro-Western (Euro-Atlantic). Obviously, the notorious Ukrainian multivectoriness in the foreign

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224 Idem.


policy ensues from this. The attempt to unite several areas of the country’s geopolitical development largely fails and results in a fuss around tactical rather than strategic foreign affairs.”

These two fragments suggest that multi-vectorism arose from the incapacity of making a clear decision about priorities; at the same time, the fact that this notion was constantly associated with terms denoting ambiguity, vagueness, and lack of clarity gave it a distinctly negative connotation. Nowhere was it stated, however, that multi-vectorism was a natural or a logical policy given Ukraine’s geographic position.

Hawrylyshyn evaluated Ukraine’s options as East - Russia, and West - the EU and NATO. The reason why he thought that a closer cooperation with the East was not a good option for Ukraine was that “The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is not the type of entity which is capable of acting as a genuinely integrative institution that could lead to the creation of a type of European Union.”

nor did it offer a democratic model which would be beneficial for the consolidation of Ukraine as a sovereign European state. It is interesting that instead of suggesting a solution in-between, of Ukraine trying to reconcile both east and West in her policies, the analyst believed that a firm commitment to the West would actually solve the country’s issues to the east, too, because this would also help Russia become more democratic. This argument echoed the position of the nationalists in the early 1990s, except it did not bring in either the image of a buffer or a bridge. It was, however, suggested that by going more firmly to the West Ukraine could actually act as a messenger of democratic values in the area, which is an argument that, as shall be seen, her elites learned to put forward more boldly, at least when talking to a European public. Hawrylyshyn also acknowledged in his article the North-South axis, which some Ukrainian politicians had stressed, namely the Baltic-Black Sea connection or the GUUAM (back to two ‘U’s)? association, but he did not consider them as valid alternatives to integration into the EU.

In a speech given at Columbia University (not unlike the speeches delivered by Romanian officials) in 2001, Anatolyi Zlenko, foreign minister, offered an image of how Ukrainian decision-makers understood to enact ideas such as those enounced by Hawrylyshyn. Titled “Pragmatism of the Ukrainian Foreign Policy”, the text aimed to explain how Ukrainians had finally decided to pursue their national interest, which they deemed to be a pragmatic, as opposed to romantic, approach. Thus, the first idea was that indeed, Ukraine had firmly opted for European integration, and that whatever other option would arise that would endanger this


228 Idem.

229 Idem.
possibility, it would be dismissed\textsuperscript{230}. Yet, this initial affirmation was followed by an explanation of how Ukraine would pragmatically deal with other issues:

“Once the priorities are set, pragmatism requires also different arguments and techniques. A differentiated approach is most appropriate here. For example, geopolitics, among others, remains a reasonable argument, when we have to deal with such critical issues as the ultimate limits of the EU and NATO enlargements, ABM Treaty and nuclear disarmament, consolidation of Ukraine as a regional leader (...) We say principally same things in Washington, Brussels or Moscow. We say that Ukraine feels nothing about the idea of joining its union with Belarus. And we make it clear for Russians as well. We say that Ukraine is not ready to join NATO. And we don’t make it a secret for Brussels. We say that Ukraine can not support revision of the ABM Treaty. And we put it plainly also in Washington. (...) One can not impose or beg for a strategic partnership. There should be no elder and younger brothers, regardless of differing size or political weight of the nations. (...) When we abandon a lucrative economic contract with a third state to meet the interests of our strategic partner, we expect adequate economic or political compensation for it. We may be ready to accommodate for the economic or humanitarian interests of another strategic partner”\textsuperscript{231}.

I believe this kind of speech kept discursively open the realm of possibilities for what would be considered acceptable in terms of Ukrainian foreign policy and also served as a preparation for other upcoming measures. I believe it also constituted some kind of a warning, or caveat, saying “even if Ukraine will act in a way that would seem contrary to her main declared goal of European integration, this should not be seen as a renunciation of the goal”, or, more plainly, it signified a case of Ukrainian elites wishing to have their cake and eat it too.

How is this relevant for an analysis concerned with finding images and metaphors of the liminal? The answer is quite simple: through their very absence from such kind of texts. Going back to an analogy with Romania (not least because both Romanian and Ukrainian elites tended to have similar venues and publics that they addressed), it is striking that in a speech stating Ukraine’s aims, a role for her was not outlined or even briefly mentioned. After the explanation of Ukraine’s “pragmatic” policy, no conclusion was drawn about what that meant for her part in the world. Following Taras Kuzio’s logic, according to which pragmatic foreign policy only meant a policy that satisfied the short term interests of Ukrainian oligarchs, it seems almost normal that Anatoly Zlenko did not outline a more specific role for his country. His speech marked the hesitation or unwillingness to make a choice, signified by the enumeration of a variety of competing policy choices, which went well with President Kuchma’s affirmation that Ukraine should be no buffer or bridge.

Such hesitation or refusal to engage with what a European role would mean for Ukraine was relatively common amongst Ukrainian political class. A variety of political representatives accepted to answer a survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre in 2001 on the link between

\textsuperscript{230} Anatolyi Zlenko, 2001, \textit{Pragmatism of the Ukrainian Foreign Policy: Current Overview}, Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Harriman Institute, Columbia University, 22 March, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{231} Idem, pp. 2-3.
Europe’s Eastern enlargement and Ukraine’s situation in Europe. The respondents ranged from the Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine, in charge with European questions to ministers and military representatives. Out of eight respondents, only one mentioned the possibility that if Ukraine were not careful, she might end up becoming a buffer zone:

“Another option (to being brought back into the Russian sphere of influence) is to transform Ukraine into a so-called buffer zone that will serve as a boundary between a flourishing prosperous Europe and a destitute and contradictory East, which would be a place where opposing forces clash, causing a great number of negative consequences.”

This fragment is interesting given the connotations it suggests in the perspectives of a certain part of Ukrainian political elites: the East was associated with poverty and contradictory tendencies, implying potential irrationality and therefore negativity, whereas the West was associated with prosperity. The image of Ukraine as buffer in this case appears as negative and undesirable. Significantly, most of the other respondents avoided engaging with this issue at all, preferring to concentrate on the technical aspects of the Eastern enlargement and its impact on Ukraine, repeating almost obsessively the problem of the closing of the borders and what economic effects this might have internally. At best, Olexandr Chaly, at the time Presidential adviser and known pro-European analyst, outlined why Europe and its transformations were useful for Ukraine:

“the main aim for Ukraine is to achieve such a way of life, prosperity, democratic standards, individual’s rights, supremacy of the law, that today exist in the EU and that our Western neighbours are approaching.”

No mention of a destiny understood in grander terms, such as Romanians or the Turks did in almost any text dealing with Europe; no mention of an ultimate goal; just very practical aims. There is of course nothing wrong with such an approach in practice, but the absence of a larger narrative, a symbolic map, equally precludes a more encompassing perspective and gives the impression of an almost soulless and mechanical process to be pursued, which could be abandoned at any time, should other principles appear more appealing or useful. To a certain extent this is also what tended to happen, as Russia seemed at times less constraining and more attractive to a certain part of the elite and the general population.

Yet, this does not mean that liminal images and their corollaries were completely excluded from public foreign policy discourse, since the goal of European rapprochement was not itself abandoned. Rather, they were confined to a very particular branch of the discourse, namely the dialogue with EU institutions and NATO. The speeches elaborated in the period 2002-2004 and geared to an EU elite public, as well as the 2002 NATO moment, when it was officially declared that Ukraine wished to join NATO, stood proof of this. Such an attitude lead me to conclude

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233 Idem, p. 33.
that there existed an overarching goal of joining the EU and Western structures, beneath which the Ukrainian elite hoped to be able to pursue various short term goals and consolidate a certain relation with Russia. A study drafted by the Razumkov Centre in 2002 showed, for example, that foreign policy issues and aims were included in parties’ political programmes, albeit in a very vague fashion, so as to avoid stirring dangerous passions in the population. Another significant finding was that the Right and centre-Right parties, as well as Left and centre-Left parties avoided a clear positioning on the East-West coordinates in their election programmes; they either did not specify it, or placed them on the same footing, without introducing a lot of differentiation; at the same time, they did not contest the priority of the European vector in Ukrainian foreign policy, and did not pit it against the possibility of rapprochement with Russia and the CIS. As the 2004 Orange revolution proved, this kind of tightrope walking could not last forever and a more clear and harmonised choice had to be expressed.

Nevertheless, in the 2000-2004 period, a duplicitous policy was conducted, which lead to the belief that in Ukraine, official affirmations about foreign policy intentions were not necessarily followed. Thus, by the end of 2000 and in 2001, two major scandals marred Ukraine and particularly Leonid Kuchma’s image: the Melnychenko tapes and the Gongadze murder. The Melnychenko tapes were recordings made by some of Kuchma’s security personnel in his office, testifying to various kinds of deeds of corruption and influence traffic that occurred with the President’s knowledge and approval. Also, when a journalist inquiring about precisely this kind of incidents was found dead, another tape emerged in which Kuchma seemed to order someone to “take care” of him. These internal developments tended to support the idea of Ukraine having a double face of pure intentions countered by shady dealings. Furthermore, even foreign policy actions seemed to confirm that, as in early 2002, Leonid Kuchma accepted that Ukraine would join the Eurasian Economic Community, the CIS alternative to the EU, initially as an associate and eventually as a full member, whilst official speeches of the Ukrainian mission to the EU would stress the importance of EU for the country (as shall be shown) and vice-versa. In a 2002 article, experts Valeryi Chaly and Mikhail Pashkov explained that foreign policy was hostage to the internal political crisis, which undermined the declared strategic intentions of the leadership. Another political analyst rather vehemently condemned multi-vectorism:

“Whatever that means, it has never been a foreign policy in the proper sense of the word. The whole thing rather looked like a provincial cardsharp’s tired arsenal of blackmail tricks. Against the West, the government in Kiev had the scarecrow of Russian influence and the prospect of Ukraine turning into another Belarus unless support, mainly in the form of cash, was made available. Against Russia, the effective weapon was cosying up to the West.”

235 Idem.
236 Taras Kuzio, 2002, “Ukraine decides to join NATO at last”, Kyiv Post, 3 June.
237 Idem.
Again, one notices the distinctly negative portrayal of this strategy, casting a rather unfavourable light on Ukraine.

In 2003, another scathing critic outlined the kind of pendulum-like rhythm of high-level official declarations regarding relationships with Russia and the CIS:

“Kuchma himself is often inconsistent. For example, first he stated that “the Eurasian Economic Community is a mine under the CIS”, then we were told that he wanted the nation to join this organization, and recently he said that we wouldn’t join it for all the gas in Russia”.

In January 2003 Leonid Kuchma was elected president of the CIS.

In view of the above, one can imagine how surprising it was in May 2002 the official declaration according to which the Ukrainian establishment proclaimed its firm and concrete intentions to join and become a part of NATO. (words missing in that sentence) After all, in 2001, at the height of the Melnychenko tapes scandal, Kuchma was declaring that “Ukraine has never intended to join NATO” and there were affirmations according to which “the Ukrainian admission to NATO will not be on the agenda in the near future”. All these developments showed the almost erratic quality of decision-making in Kiev, and suggested that a synthesis of all these contradictory trends was rather far from being achieved, which might explain why no particular images were circulated about what and how Ukraine should be.

The May 2002 declaration stirred a wave of enthusiasm amongst experts, who quickly interpreted it as an end to multi-vectorism and a renunciation of Ukraine’s neutral status. It was also accompanied at a diplomatic level with a discursive “offensive” towards the EU.

In the following paragraphs I shall focus on the discursive trend that was gradually developed regarding integration with the EU. They constituted an interesting counterpoint to the various measures undertaken in the period 2002-2004.

A very important feature of the texts under examination below is the fact that they would be the ideal context for the development of a liminal imagery. Yet, although some metaphors and images to that effect exist in them, they were clearly not a dominant trend. Rather, the dominant trend in most of the texts was an insistence on Ukraine’s commitment to Europe and her value as a European country, all these specified in the context of the May 2002 public declaration of the intention to become a NATO member.

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241 Volodymyr Kym, 2002, “NATO to Ukraine: the door is still open but the passage is getting narrower”, Zerkalo Nedeli, February 22.
242 Idem. It is argued that, needing Moscow’s support in the case of the tapes, Kuchma was making declarations that would ingratiate him with leaders in Moscow.
244 Anatoly Grytsenko, 2002, “To see light at the end of the tunnel”, Kyiv Post, August.
Thus, there is a series of texts in which Anatoly Zlenko, foreign minister, outlined a position for Ukraine:

“European integration is not only our strategic goal for which we carry our political and economic reforms. For us it has become an inalienable component of our long-term national development strategy, a factor which at the same time gives meaning, purpose and directions to the reforms. We may even think of it as a means of achieving our domestic development goals.”245

In a meeting on NATO Ukraine relations in July 2002, he stated:

“First, European aspirations of Ukraine are completely in line with its geopolitical position on the continent, its cultural traditions, history and mentality of Ukrainians. Ukraine is not just a fragment of the former empire. It is an old European nation and the second largest European country. The perspective of our membership is, in my opinion, a minimal piece of political and historical justice this country has every right and reason to get. In other words, we don’t want to be a long distance runner who failed to reach the finish. On the other hand, we need to have confidence that the distance is open and accessible. Second, to gamble with the Ukrainian card at the frontier between Russia and Europe would be a too risky venture. Neither Ukraine, nor most of Eastern European countries need it. We have sufficient potential to afford NOT PLAYING dubious political games. We shall never be a bargain chip in relations of Russia and the West. Indeed, the constructive relations between them are crucial for stability and prosperity of Ukraine.”246

In another:

“How can Europe remain open and at the same time protect itself from dangers? I think that in order to achieve this, we don’t need new limits that will leave some Europeans overboard. We need new rules of play and a new level of self-discipline that should be demonstrated by any nation claiming a place in new Europe. Ukraine claims such a place. Moreover, it clearly sees its own place in the new system of European security. It is the place of Eastern outpost that stabilizes Europe and at the same time protects it. Even lacking perspective of EU membership yet, we are already performing this mission due to objective geopolitical circumstances.”247

I purposefully quoted lengthy fragments of Zlenko’s texts because they underline an evolution of argument and the etching of a liminal imagery. As noted, the fragments are part of texts which were delivered in chronological order, mainly after the May 2002 announcement regarding NATO. A first feature I wish to emphasize is that Zlenko speaks about EU membership and integration as a process which gives meaning to Ukraine’s being in the world and her internal reforms. It was no longer just a strategic goal, as the previous texts under examination showed; on the contrary, his affirmation represented a step towards defining a project for Ukraine, a kind of narrative explanation for her itinerary that could start to provide sense to policy decisions. Mentions of Ukraine’s traditional and historical

quality as a European state gained a new meaning in light of such words, as a subsequent speech showed. Also, the way in which Zlenko speaks of the historical justice of reuniting with Europe, and the fact that being part of it was “in line” with Ukraine’s geopolitical and historical outlook was bringing a somewhat new element to a line of argument, which arguably already existed in the early 1990s. The differing factor was the fact that Zlenko introduced the idea of the distance that Ukraine had to go in order to reach a European standard (whilst at the same time introducing the idea of continuity), and instead of trying to stick together the images of Europe and Ukraine, as if their respective histories had not brought them apart for a long time (the way that the nationalists attempted to do), he preferred rather to introduce a linguistic game of alternance, affirming that his country should not only be seen as part of an old empire, but also part of the history and the makeup of Europe. (loooong sentence)

The idea of a lone runner running the distance provided a dynamic metaphor, which was anyway more credible and closer to the truth than an illusory Ukraine, equal to Europe; this metaphor also skilfully avoided the painful issue of Ukraine being a “little brother”. More importantly, however, this kind of linguistic association opened the space for speaking about roles for Ukraine, about what she was and what she was not. Thus, Zlenko decisively affirmed that she would not be a frontier bargaining chip between Russia and the West and should be considered as an outpost of Europe, protecting and stabilising it. Admittedly, there is no detail around what it means to be an outpost: a place radiating democratic values, like Romania and Turkey attempted to portray themselves, or a defensive place providing military protection. However, there was the specific declaration according to which “The idea of Ukraine as a buffer zone between Russia and the EU has no future”²⁴⁸, thus putting a clear end to this image in foreign policy uses.

Interestingly, not only an etching of a narrative of how Ukraine should be part of Europe appeared, but some texts spent some time explaining what Europe meant, which, as previously mentioned, was an almost non-existent feature. Thus, in a 2002 article in the New Europe Weekly, the Ambassador to the EU, R. Shpek, explained that:

“The European Union, an embodiment of stability, peace and economic prosperity, based on the rule of law and democracy, an integration which has already proved its viability and potential by having raised standards of living and built internal market. Good economic results of integration allow the EU to turn to political integration that helped to strengthen the Union voice in the world. The EU launched the euro, started to cooperate in justice and home affairs, and to develop common foreign and defence policies”²⁴⁹.

It is important to notice that emphasis went on the technical features of the EU, rather than its civilisational ones. Nevertheless, the crucial point was that Ukrainians started to give a sense to potentially being a part of Europe.

²⁴⁸ Idem.
In 2003, a book collecting the various perspectives that Ukrainian politicians had on Europe and on becoming a part of it underlined precisely this emphasis on technical aspects rather than civilisational ones. Out of the 15 politicians of all orientations interviewed, about half mention the importance of the geographical relation between Ukraine and Europe. Most of them see Europe as a social-political model worthy of following, but do not necessarily link it to an inevitable project. Thus, Leonid Kravchuk, former president, said that Europe represents a social, political, economic and legal standard of civilisation that should be attained and that the EU choice means for Ukraine the opportunity for transformation. Along the same lines, Yulia Tymoshenko affirmed:

“we should love not ourselves in Europe but Europe in ourselves” (this affirmation going more along the lines of a certain equality between Ukraine and Europe) and Victor Yushchenko: “Ukraine’s choice lies not in the geographical dimension of where to move, East or West, but in the main criterion of what is best for person and society”.

All these prominent political figures chose to ignore the historical argument of the return to Europe, suggesting the European choice was mainly dictated by common sense and the need for Ukraine to adopt a viable model. This, however, did not mean that a historical argument was completely shunned. About a third of the opinions expressed on this issue mentioned that Ukraine was an old European country, whose coming back to the fold represented a matter of historical justice. Some, talking about what the country’s contribution would be to Europe mentioned that she could be a bridge between East and West and a factor of stability, depending on how strongly she chose to act on the international scene.

Mikhail Barabash also chose to stress Ukraine’s

“unique geopolitical position, representing an advanced guard in the promotion of democratic standards towards the East. She would be a bearer of democratic standards to the East”.

Others echoed him, calling Ukraine a “heavy mediator between Europe and Eurasia” who is important geopolitically because she borders states that would never be part of the EU. There was also insistence on the idea that politically Ukraine should be a bridge between Russia and EU, but not a buffer. Some politicians also stressed the importance of Ukraine as a transport route for energy resources. These opinions were amongst the few that more or less explicitly linked geography, geopolitics and Ukraine’s role in Europe, distinguishing themselves through the fact that they offered some options to be considered.

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250 Oleg Shushko eds., 2003, European integration of Ukraine as viewed by top Ukrainian politicians, businessmen and social leaders, Warsaw: Batory Foundation, p. 31.
251 Idem.
252 Idem, p. 75.
253 Idem, p. 76.
254 S. Gavryush, Idem, p.80.
255 V. Kononov, idem, p. 81.
The interesting element about these opinions was that they were roughly divided in half between those who did mention geopolitical arguments in the relation between Ukraine and the EU and those who did not, emphasising the value of a model (?) that the EU had for the country. Amongst those who did underline the geopolitical factors, most did toy with a few liminal images, going from bridge to messenger and mediator, without, however, providing many details. This division therefore illustrated that a liminal imagery was part of a foreign policy discourse, but was not predominant, not least because there existed a certain separation between providing historical reasons for Ukraine’s advance towards Europe and technical ones, such as the attraction toward high standards of living; the separation could be said to exist also between two roughly contoured positions: joining Europe as part of a civilisational project and joining Europe as a logical conclusion of a cost-benefit analysis. The two were not mutually exclusive, the question being rather one of emphasis; it was interesting, however, to note that a historical approach was associated with envisaging a role for Ukraine as a bridge, mediator or outpost, whereas the technical one was more reserved in this respect. It must be remembered, though, that both these perspectives belonged to the more pro-European camp of the Ukrainian elite, which was also why they could alternatively be found in speeches meant for the EU.

Yet, a more decisive stance on the European choice did not mean that Ukraine’s outlook improved. On the contrary, some opinions expressed in the media as well as in conferences suggested that the confusion about her perspective was high. At the beginning of 2003, one year before upcoming elections, a vehement journalist characterised the country’s situation as follows:

“Meaningless” is the key word for what is happening in Ukraine. “Meaningless” means “unpredictable, unreliable, mistrusted”, and so rejected. Unfortunately, Ukraine, whose unique way of development is stagnation, is not a bridge between Europe and Asia, not a buffer between Russia and the West. It is Europe’s appendix, an unnecessary part of its body, fraught with purulent peritonitis.”

Admittedly, these were the words of an analyst frustrated with Ukraine’s seeming incapacity to deal with the matter of direction; yet, beyond the obvious bias of the words employed, it is interesting that in a synthesis of what the problems in the country were, the author mentioned the bridge or buffer dilemma. These notions were used as signifiers for two distinct political attitudes: that of the pragmatic pro-Europeans (see discussion in previous section) and that of the romantic pro-Europeans (the nationalists), that had both failed, mainly because none had been chosen. The presence of these signifiers in this fragment suggested that these ideas, vehiculated in political circles, trickled down into the analyses and opinions of journalists and other observers. Furthermore, in the same article, the author alluded to the fact that “only three years ago, Ukraine seemed like Europe’s bridgehead to defend it from "Russian Asians"”, making reference to the élan of the year 2000, when Ukraine seemed to take off on

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257 Idem.
her European choice; mention of this idea suggested that indeed, there had been a possibility to construct Ukraine using the metaphor of the bridge, but internal and external actions had not supported it.

This article, written in early 2003, was in fact a lay rendering of the opinions voiced by high profile policy makers and experts at the Scientific Council of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine in November 2002 at a conference on the subject of “Geopolitical aspects of Ukraine’s European Integration”\(^\text{258}\).

In discussing the problematic of Ukraine’s potential integration to the EU the participants to the conference identified several elements:

- Being on the geopolitical border we have consciously made a choice towards the EU seeing it as our potential ally. But what is to be done that the EU will treat us correspondingly? Until now we have no clear answer to the key question of the European integration of Ukraine, and the road from Kyiv to Brussels should be two-way (A. Zlenko, Minister of Foreign Affairs)\(^\text{259}\).

- we lack a clear understanding of more specific problems related to the European choice, in particular concerning the EU development prospects. We have not fully comprehended now these prospects and do not have a clear idea what the Great Europe is. I think, though I am not an expert in this sphere, that NATO position is also indefinite. (…) We should overcome the feeling of being “less valuable”, an exaggerated dependence on our northern neighbour. (A. Halchynsky, Advisor to the President of Ukraine)\(^\text{260}\).

- (…) Another reason why Europe does not give a proper signal is in us. There are no internal changes in Ukraine yet, first of all in a political sphere. There is no transformation of the political system towards pluralistic European democracy and social economical model. Europe cannot accept the state with such a high level of corruption. (…) We are ready to make decisions to the benefit of the EU, but sometimes we receive more attractive proposals from other partners. Here the question arises: shall we pay for the lunch that will come tomorrow? (O. Chaly, State Secretary on European Integration)\(^\text{261}\).

- So, what did our MPs determine? I think that their understanding of the contents of the European integration course and tasks of foreign policy for its provision is somewhat obscure. Some of them reduce this course only to tasks in the sphere of collaboration with the EU. The European choice is replaced by the notion “Euro-Atlantic vector of foreign policy”. With this approach all foreign policy activities do not agree with the context of the Euro-Atlantic integration. A concept of single-vector foreign policy has been developed. Multi-vector approach of the policy is interpreted as an absence of principles. In reality

\(^{258}\) 2003, “Is it worth paying for lunch, which may come or not?”, *Politics and the Times*, no.1, pp. 81-96.

\(^{259}\) Idem, p.81.

\(^{260}\) Idem, p.83.

\(^{261}\) Idem, p.85
there is noting vicious in this: the number of partners corresponds to the number of vectors. We need urgently to explain and popularise the essence of the Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine and the ways to make it. The European vector alone cannot provide integration. The Euro-Atlantic integration means adaptation of the state to the norms of development and orientation to the Western model of development. This is wider than just European integration. This does not mean that the whole policy must be one-vector. Implementation of the European choice of Ukraine requires a wider collaboration with a number of countries. Development of relations with Russia and China fosters creation of prerequisites for European integration. Historical choice of development must be single and foreign policy - multi-vector. It is not appropriate to be obsessed by the European vector. It is necessary to develop our relations with all vectors (V. Bruz, Professor at the Diplomatic Academy)\textsuperscript{262}.

- It is important that our choice will fall upon asymmetric integration, strategies reaching the West and the east from Ukraine. If we are not working in these directions the Great Europe will be built without our participation (V. Manzhola, Head of the International Affairs Chair, Taras Shevchenko University)\textsuperscript{263}.

- Today we have two models-Eurasian and European. Eurasian model is emotional rather than calculated. It is better to be the third grade in the EU than the second grade in the Eurasia Union (V. Chaly Director of the Razumkov Centre)\textsuperscript{264}.

- To conclude, the problem of Great Europe has not been fully comprehended. What is this? What is the role of Ukraine in development of the Great Europe? Russia has an agreement on free trade zone with the EU. This is the sphere with certain mechanisms for implementation. We need to get back to discussion of this issue (A. Halchynsky)\textsuperscript{265}.

- The only thing that we should have is the will, the will to determine what we want, and this is very important. Mr. Brzezinski talking about Ukraine said that Ukraine couldn’t be the active player in the today’s policy, it could the passive player, like Turkey. It is difficult both to integrate them and not to integrate them. This is our specificity. But we need a will. Once we clearly know the target, we can reach it much faster than we expect. (…) Even if we have a decade ahead before gaining the membership, I am still not sure that we need this membership at all. I am for creating the prerequisites that will give us a possibility to integrate to the EU, but the people of Ukraine may vote against it in that situation. He is writing that the most important for us is to stick firmly to the principles of the European integration course in keeping with the strategic course of the state. I think that this must become the theme of our discussion (O. Chaly)\textsuperscript{266}.

\textsuperscript{262} Idem, p.87.
\textsuperscript{263} Idem.
\textsuperscript{264} Idem, p.94.
\textsuperscript{265} Idem.
\textsuperscript{266} Idem, p.95.
We are talking a lot about European integration, Euro-Atlantic integration but very little we do practically. We need to consolidate our efforts. But where should this consolidation take place? I cannot give a clear answer. As a Minister of Foreign Affairs, responsible for coordination of our work, I feel this gap, failure, and inconsistency of our efforts in this direction (A. Zlenko)\(^\text{267}\).

This collection of opinions published in 2003 is extremely significant because it acts as a counterweight to official declarations and texts, which until then had been quite bold and seemed uncompromising. The semi-official character of the affirmations (granted by the fact that they were expressed by personalities with official functions, but were published in an academic journal, rather than a wide circulation form of print or other kind of media) allows the researcher to observe the kind of examinations and questionings that went on away from the public eye.

The general image that one distils from them is that of a Ukrainian elite that was quite indecisive and admitted to feeling rather incapable of determining a role for the country; to a certain extent, this image met the one created by official texts or public analyses, with the important difference that it provided the sources of confusion: a lack of understanding of the European project and a lack of decision on Ukraine’s long term goals. I believe the rhetorical question asked by O. Chaly, regarding the choice of paying for a lunch that might come tomorrow was fairly illustrative of the fact that Ukrainian elites did not really know which offers it was worthwhile forgoing and which not, precisely because they did not know for what they would forgo them. The choice for Europe was more “psychological and political” rather than substantiated economically or otherwise\(^\text{268}\).

This exchange of ideas could also allow one to understand why a discussion about what potential roles existed for Ukraine had very little place to develop. As O. Chaly pointed out, the elites were still negotiating whether to accept the kind of big/little brother relation that the process of European integration offered; in his opinion, this relation could and should not be avoided, bearing in mind that, unlike the similar relations offered by Russia and the US, the one offered by Europe was not empire creating but somehow liberating\(^\text{269}\). It is perhaps in this hesitation that lies the key to an absence of liminal images. Accepting a “big brother” relation with Europe would have brought the “almost Europe” discourse and potentially with it liminal references.

Another interesting feature was the suggestion that multi-vector policy should be devilified and, in fact, substantiated, whilst at the same time explaining that it is necessary in support of a firm European choice. Such an idea went hand in hand with an opinion that was very similar to that expressed by some Turkish experts and decision-makers, namely

\(^{267}\) Idem.

\(^{268}\) O. Chaly, idem, p.84.

\(^{269}\) Idem, p. 85.
that the EU should be considered a desirable goal, but that democracy should be an ideal to be attained even in the absence of prospective EU membership. Expressing such ideas reflected a certain coming of age and the foundation upon which other opinions could be built, but also signified the adoption of a more mature attitude, in which the motivation for change was not pressure from outside, but a conscious choice for a particular itinerary.

Overall, the image of Ukraine that transpires from these texts is of a quite passive, undecided and weak country, whose leaders admit that there is a long way to go yet. Notions such as “we lack a clear answer”, “we need more clarity”, “we have not fully comprehended”, “no clear understanding” abound, along with formulations that suggest passivity, such as “we need a will”, “there is no internal transformation”, “Ukraine is a passive player”. Furthermore, a long list of questions about what is to be done and how, what choices are to be made, gives the impression of an elite feeling quite lost, much as Anatoly Zlenko’s final remarks convey.

The contrast between official speeches and the remarks examined above was quite remarkable, not because they presented opposite realities of Ukraine, but because official speeches tended to transmit a much more confident feeling that was seemingly experienced. Comparing these notes with the speeches of Leonid Kravchuk in the early 1990s, those of Borys Tarasyuk, Yuri Scherbak or even Anatoly Zlenko in 2002, much more vulnerability transpired; moreover, official texts tended to blame the West to a much greater degree for Ukraine’s predicament-claiming a new kind of isolation was installed. As a footnote to this issue, it is interesting to note that in 2003 and 2004 official speeches towards the EU became tamer from this point of view, focusing much more on what needed to be done in Ukraine, on gaps that needed to be narrowed and on more specific shortcomings the country needed to remediate270.

What did all these elements mean for Ukraine’s liminal imagery? They meant that the space was gradually being created for their development, but that they still remained elusive. As seen in the above remarks, it was generally agreed that Ukraine was to be found on a geopolitical border, and that she had consciously made a choice for Europe, this idea implying that she did not necessarily wish to act as a border. Yet, the detailed discussion about how unclear this European choice remained suggested more detail about this issue could not really exist, in the absence of other crucial decisions. At a certain point in the exchange O. Chaly even mentioned that it was up to Europe to decide whether she wanted a direct border with entities that would never be part of it, or rather a belt of countries with democratic standards. In any case, talk of what role Ukraine would have was scarce.

The pessimistic mood of 2002-2003 continued also in 2004, an election year which was to bring the upheaval of the Orange Revolution. The texts which I was able to gather suggested that 2004 was almost a hiatus year in terms of geopolitical thinking; I found no official speeches or texts that made reference to the country’s potential, but rather analyses which pointed to the kind of disarray foreign policy was in. Yevhen Plakhuta, senior adviser at the Institute of International Security Problems, wrote that Ukrainian officials stubbornly threw themselves against the European wall, not understanding that Europe would not take an interest in Ukraine, not least because she had not initiated real reforms. Furthermore, he criticised the blind commitment to the idea of integration into NATO, affirming that membership in the Alliance would certainly not protect Ukraine from Russia (as her leaders hoped), but rather her own decisive stance would. Another article, “Forget NATO” echoed this kind of idea, bringing into the public debate opinions similar to those voiced in the 2002 conference, according to which membership in the alliance should not be a goal in itself but the means through which Ukraine achieved necessary reforms and progress on the democratic path.

An article written by Olexandr Sharov, analyst of Ukrainian political life, pointed to the fact that Ukraine’s European choice was not indisputable at all. “Indeed, the strategic Euro-integration meets with an ambiguous response in Ukraine. About all political forces agree that Ukraine should be in Europe; from this point on disagreements begin. Those who substitute the geopolitical question by a simple geographical answer speak the loudest: they say that Ukraine is already in the very centre of Europe. Others consider the way to European Community so long and hard that we would better move there together with Russia, or even with all CIS. But there are opponents telling about the “Eurasian choice” of Russia and non-European character of many peoples of CIS, while Ukrainians have been Europeans from the time immemorial.

In his lines he was practically reiterating the basic dilemma that Ukrainian elites had apparently not managed to solve since the early 1990s, or even earlier: what kind of Europe did they believe they belonged to and what kind of Europeans did they think they were? Given this primordial unsolved dilemma, it is easier to understand why other positions did not develop. The general feeling that discussion about this problem gave was that, stuck in the maze of deciding upon their European-ness, Ukrainian elites did not do what elites in other countries did, which was make a choice and then figure out how it fit their particularities. After all, no identity is fixed forever and it is permanently negotiated, not least according to the goals which are established. It is suggested that having imagined a role for their country, Ukrainian elites could have found a way to substantiate it in such a

272 Idem.
273 ___, 2004, “Forget NATO, but keep playing along”, Kyiv Post, 8 July.
way as to reflect a dynamic identitary process. In the absence of that, by the end of Leonid Kuchma’s second term in power foreign policy seemed somewhat weak and indecisive, similar to other internal processes of the country.

**Pulling threads together**

Overall, the texts suggest that the 1999-2004 interval represented a gradual descent into confusion and indecision in Ukrainian foreign policy, despite vocal pronouncements to the contrary, manifested by the expression of pro-NATO and pro-European orientations. The policy of multi-vectorism came under increasing attack from experts and analysts both inside and outside the country, whilst members of the decision-making establishment called for its reformulation, and, more importantly, its proper substantiation (see above). To a large extent, the foreign policy situation was a reflection of failed internal reforms. The fact that Ukraine was a country where censorship of the media and of free speech continued to exist, as did high protectionist tariffs, intervention by the Presidential administration in Parliament, and a suspicious view of NATO as well as other international organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank, sent a variety of mixed messages both internally and externally.

Quid, therefore, of the liminal in this context. As suggested throughout this section, liminal imagery was scarce and therefore not very solid. There still persisted an oscillation between the images of the buffer or the bridge, with the occasional mention of the idea of the outpost or mediator. However, having established that a liminal imagery is an attribute of positionality, it is understandable that it was very thin, since it was publicly acknowledged that Ukraine, despite apparently clear declarative choices had not adopted a definitive position in relation to either Europe, NATO or Russia, or rather was not clear upon how to substantiate the choices she had made. In this context, can multi-vectorism, with its later variant “To Europe with Russia”, be considered an example of the liminal? I think not, because, as a policy, it seemed more geared towards allowing Ukraine not to adopt one position integrative of multiple directions, but multiple inconclusive ones.

In 2002 the declaration in favour of NATO was an important instance; this moment allowed the development of subject positions, at least in relation to Europe, which, as one can remember, was not present as an element in previous texts. Thus, unlike the 1991-1994 and 1994-1999 intervals, officials spent somewhat more time explaining in their speeches or opinions what Europe represented for Ukraine, and occasionally, they even outlined how the two might relate, including the reasons why their country would want to join Europe: high standards of living, and historical as well as geopolitical reasons. As pointed above, I have noticed an interesting separation amongst the Ukrainian political class, within which some members preferred to concentrate on the present rather than the historical past and some insisted on a “return to Europe”, in the name of which Ukraine could fulfil the role of “mediator”, “bridge” between Europe and Russia, or “corridor”; it is worth emphasising
that those who had a historical approach also specified the idea of the bridge or mediator, whereas those who concentrated on the present did not mention these aspects. Such a difference suggests that the historical perspective created the space for a narrative that allowed the projection of Ukraine into some kind of role, whilst focusing exclusively on the present favoured rather the existence of disparate images glued together, but not necessarily in a narrative. This kind of argumentation reminds one of the idea expressed by Volodymyr Zviglianovich, who stressed the fact that Ukrainian thinking was still very much impregnated with a Marxist kind of logic, reductionist, always pointing to categories and potentially antagonistic elements, but concentrating much less on the thick description and story that might be found at the root of people’s options and motivations.

It is possible to understand the hesitation that some politicians had in invoking a historical argument, for fear of sounding too sentimental or of bringing back to attention the fact that Ukraine had for a very long time been a part of an entity that she was trying to distinguish herself from; yet, ignoring one’s past does not guarantee a credible potential for change. That was an element that some decision-makers understood, such as Anatoly Zlenko, who in his speeches and writings started to introduce both a historical perspective and a vision of Europe.

This brought a part of the foreign policy discourse closer to the idea of enunciating a mission for Ukraine, and a modernisation project. However, this was not a generalised trend, even if rather visible on the political scene. Most interesting, however, these ideas opened the possibility for elites to acknowledge Ukraine’s vulnerabilities and therefore to finally start positioning her on the progress continuum, a fact that had not been hitherto done. By the end of 2004 the situation had not really improved, but at least certain leads had been cast so that Ukraine could start moving beyond feeling confused, and towards developing an outlook. The elements certainly existed, as mentioned in the exchange outlined above in the section, and in other examined speeches. Below, a table summing up the terms which existed during this interval.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nr. of texts/nr. of authors</td>
<td>10/8</td>
<td>21/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Foreign and some domestic</td>
<td>Foreign and domestic publics. Roughly equally spread;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject positioning</td>
<td>Ukraine- Central Europe, pivotal state, most important factor in European security, key factor in Europe, specific geographical and political location, sensitive location, non-bloc country;</td>
<td>Europe/West One, indivisible Ukraine, Central Europe, European country, great potential, no “little brother” to any country, important contributor to NATO operations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicate analysis</td>
<td>Ukraine- active, participating in NATO operations, struggling to keep on track of democratisation, under attack from leftist forces;</td>
<td>Europe- operating With double standards towards Ukraine regarding cooperation and integration; Ukraine- passive, confused, undecided, unclear about her aims, unwilling to play “little brother”, corrupt leadership, reluctant to engage on any decisive course, does not fulfil promises, erratic declarations, ambiguous, ambivalent; willing to adopt European standards, looking for a sense to her internal reforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liminal images/references</td>
<td>Specific denial of buffer image, more emphasis on the bridge image, mention of necessity of balancing acts; a few mentions of being “destined” to be a bridge between West and Russia</td>
<td>Specific denial of buffer image, occasional denials of being a buffer or a bridge, occasional mentions of outpost, mediator, crossroads and energy resources corridor</td>
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</table>
The table above shows that connotation chains during the 1999-2004 interval changed significantly, especially regarding the image that Ukrainian elites put forward in their speeches and texts, with a shift from self-confidence to recognition of Ukraine’s vulnerabilities and gaps.

Regarding the liminal imagery, it is present but clearly not dominant to the point of providing a coherent argument. However, it must be mentioned that whenever there is talk of Ukraine’s role, the liminal images appear, suggesting these ideas certainly have a pull on the political imagination. Their scarcity also points to the lack of a project, modernising or not, and to the fact that no explicit and sustained connection was made between geographic position, geopolitical value and role. They are not fully ignored, but certainly not insisted upon. As far as a narrative structure is concerned, it is difficult to speak about one, and there were no observable signs of a constant dialogue with the past; the only notable relation in that respect was the conscious and publicly declared refusal to place Ukraine in a little brother position towards Europe, as a form of reaction to the past, when she was in that type of rapport with Russia. In fact, the exchange on that matter seemed to be fairly important, since it was acknowledged as a significant factor in potential foreign policy decisions.

In terms of the theoretical framework adopted for this analysis, the 1994-2004 interval showed that, even if liminal images were present in the minds and statements of decision-makers, this did not mean they created a clear imagery. Merely their mention did not encourage the creation of a coherent choice that would weaken other possibilities. With respect to where to look for the representation of the liminal, this interval and the Ukrainian case in general, suggests that even if certain ideas might be acknowledged and developed by decision-makers, they are not necessarily echoing lower strata of society, or simply, the electorate and its ideas about how things should be done. The NATO case is a very good example of a divorce between decision-making elites and public sentiment. This is why, perhaps in the Ukrainian case it would have been interesting to look at other materials too, which might provide some indication about the liminal imagery, such as school books (geography and history manuals), or simply wider studies of public opinion, which can better illustrate a general mood or opinions. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian case also supports the initial assumption of the analytical framework, namely that if at all, liminal images, can be found at the elite level. Their success is a matter of how convincingly they are argued and how far they resonate with larger ideas. If in the Romanian and Turkish cases liminal images were tightly connected to the European project, link that reinforced their message, in Ukraine, the absence of such a project also debilitated the development of a liminal argument, and other corollaries.

Subject positioning, predicate analysis, hailing processes

In the Romanian and Turkish cases subject positioning evolved along the East/West axis, the two countries inscribing themselves and being inscribed within the play of these two large civilisational positions; the discourse of the liminal contributed to this inscription, gradually narrowing the choice of policy making towards a pro-European stance. In Turkey’s case, I remarked on the theme of subject positioning a powerful dialogue with Europe, which came
to complete the reflexive positioning and which was the source of great tension, as it was constructed largely in opposition to Turkish desires. In the Romanian case, the feedback from Europe on this issue was weaker and almost non-existent, the Romanians relying quite extensively on a dialogue with their own history, thus producing a very strong reflexive positioning, placing their country towards the West within the dichotomy.

In the Ukrainian case we note a game of subject positioning that cannot be seen as a succession of phases, as in the other two cases, where there was regression or progression, but a process, which resembles in my view a complex dance with no clear rules. Importantly, it is impossible to identify in the discourse of Ukrainian elite one unified subject positioning that would project a particular worldview and relation with Europe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT POSITIONING</th>
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<td>Ukraine, Central Europe, newly independent, building state with no solid precedent behind, wish to “return to Europe” (advocated by nationalists), “indispensable to the full development of Europe”, has protected Europe from invasions; links with Eurasian world (advocated by Eastern Ukrainians); neutral, non-bloc association (nationalists and centre-right); sister-nation to Russia; part of Eurasia (leftists);</td>
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There are at least two contradictory subject positionings stemming from the perspectives of Right wing parties, including nationalists and, generally, Western Ukrainians, and the more Left oriented political entities, including generally, Eastern Ukrainians. These are structured on the opposition between a drive for the Western democratic world and the drive towards the East or Eurasia, as embodied by Russia or the CIS. Neither of these perspectives are generalised throughout Ukraine, although there is a middle ground in both these orientations, which tends to stress the importance of acknowledging Ukraine’s relations and place with the East, and her future in company of Western countries and especially Western principles. These
various positions gave rise to oscillations in the way that Ukraine’s place in the world was projected, inscribing her in the East/West dichotomy on either extremes. The centrist vision of Ukraine, becoming stronger in the late 1990s, tried to abstract the country from the East/West dichotomy, and eventually gave rise to a positioning that placed Ukraine in a kind of “place de l’étoile”, from where so many avenues proceeded that eventually none were taken, until a clearer choice had to be made in order to make the country credible.

The pro-Western and the pro-Eastern perspectives were both constructed through a dialogue with Ukrainian past and history. Of course, each chose to emphasise a different part of the past, one preferring to focus on the Ukraine during the pre-Pereiaslav Agreement period, and the other stressing the significance of having been part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Europe and European countries did not seem to participate very actively with inputs in any of these positions, the main other interlocutor remaining being(?) Russia. With respect to this element, a quite well known example given as an instance of how Ukrainians (of all sides) attempted and occasionally succeeded to define themselves is the historiographic dispute that has existed between Russian and Ukrainian historians and intellectuals for a long while. The debate as to whether Ukrainians were a separate people from the Russians was greatly sparked during the first years of independence, but it had existed for a long time before. The essential arguments seemed to revolve around whether Ukrainians were merely the “prodigal sons” of a single Russian nation or a nation in their own right\(^\text{275}\). Nationalist Ukrainian historians of the 20\(^{th}\) century tended to argue that yes, Ukrainians were a separate nation; they were drawing evidence from the Hetmanate period and the rule of the Cossacks in the 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) centuries, as well as the proto-nationalist movements of the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) centuries, when Ukrainian nobility revived the Cossack chronicles and started utterances about “Little Russian” individuality\(^\text{276}\). As the 19\(^{th}\) century progressed, an anonymous history of Little Russia appeared and later, M. Hrushevsky wrote the history of Ukraine, a name which, as has been shown, was laden with political and nationalist meanings. This evolution eventually lead to a clash of conceptions between those historians who emphasised Ukrainian nationalism and sense of self and those espousing a Russian imperial and later-on Soviet perspective of Ukrainians as subsumed to Russia\(^\text{277}\). These antagonistic perspectives survived to this day, and they could be seen represented in the play of arguments and positions present in Ukraine during the 1990s.

At an all-Ukrainian level such attitudes gave rise to oscillations in public discourse, as well as articulations around multiple allegiances and images, sometimes liminal. However, Ukraine did not seem to engage with the liminal as a geographical issue, which could eventually slip into other instances. In 2004 Victor Yuschenko expressed such an idea clearly when he affirmed that Ukraine had to look beyond geography in her geopolitical positioning, to elements that were more general and to a certain extent a-historical, such as a democratic social and political system. However, the extraction of such dimensions from the political thinking and discourse gave the impression of a certain lack of grounding and a lightness, which pointed to a lack of direction.


\(^{276}\) Idem.

\(^{277}\) Idem.
This is not to say, however, that liminal images were not considered, especially since from outside Ukraine, in the Western world, there were indications that a series of liminal images were suggested, in the same way as the learning of a new language is proposed in order to enhance the communication between two or more entities. Thus, as Yuri Scherbak mentioned in his speeches in the early 1990s, Western commentators proposed different images: buffer, key to stability in Central Europe, linchpin for Western values in the East. In a book about NATO partners, Jennifer Moroney and Stacy Closson extolled Ukraine’s potential as a buffer country, whose position as such even influenced the rise of the “multi-vector” foreign policy (a point with which I do not fully agree, since it seemed the multi-vector policy was geared particularly towards not making Ukraine a buffer, and was quite unsuccessful at that). They went further to suggest that this was not necessarily a bad feature for Ukraine, since she could draw many advantages from this situation. They gave as examples of buffer state behaviour, the contradictory stance adopted by Ukraine in the Kosovo case (mentioned above), as well as economic negotiations with both the EU and Russia. They went on explaining that Ukraine represented a buffer state precisely because, as she is trapped between Russia and the EU, her joining the latter is a very slow process. I believe these kinds of interpretations are interesting for a series of reasons. First, because as specified above, they show how an outsider’s perspective and framework of analysis is pushed on manifestations and affirmations that might not represent what was thought at all. There was no evidence, for example, that in 1999 Ukrainian elites had made a rational choice of first appearing anti-NATO in the Kosovo case, and then, realising the benefits of playing a mediation role, being pro-NATO, as Moroney and Closson seemed to suggest. It is rather implied that, just as in the Romanian case, the Kosovo issue illustrated a clash of two powerful positions, and a temporary domination of one over the other, and an extremely fragile one at that, as the then foreign minister Tarasyuk admitted. Second, Moroney and Closson insisted on saying that President Kravchuk and other leaders repeatedly mentioned that Ukraine was a buffer state, forgetting to pay attention to the almost equal number of times they upheld that Ukraine was not one and should not be seen as such. What I would like to say is that even if Ukraine might fulfil certain conditions to be considered a buffer state, this did not mean that her elites perceived or wanted her as such. After all, this was not a very desirable state of affairs, to be a place of loose ends between powerful states, and it was natural for elites to try to move her towards the status of a barrier, frontier or bridge.

In the presence of such cues from the outside, which seemed to indicate that the adoption of a liminal imagery might just be a language that the West could be receptive to (as for example in the Romanian and Turkish cases) Ukrainian elites did produce a series of liminal images,

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280 Idem, p. 200.

281 Idem.

282 Idem, p. 201.

283 Idem.
varying from the barrier to the bridge, but they were not very convincingly upheld. I have argued that part of the reason for this situation was a lack of an explicit narrative that would inscribe Ukrainian efforts into a time span and a process with a projected end-goal, such as a modernity narrative, for example. As previously iterated, I am not making an assumption that this is the only framework in which the evolution of a country should take place, but rather, in the case where a system is so constructed that it creates processes of assimilation and identification to particular state of affairs, this imposes the development of a certain liminal imagery as an indicator of progress or regress towards a certain aim. By not declaring clearly such an aim, one could say Ukraine attempted to extract herself from the East/West dichotomy, but also somehow from the time defined within these limits. This is why, unlike the case of Turkey and even Romania, one can hardly find references to time, backwardness versus advancement, or too late or in time to catch the NATO train, for example.

Does that mean that one cannot speak of subject positioning in the Ukrainian case? Not at all. I would argue, rather, that in the case of Ukraine one deals with at least two kinds of subject positioning: geographically inscribed and qualitatively inscribed within the democratic/non-democratic pair. Geographically inscribed subject positioning tends to emphasise the ineluctable link to Russia and Eurasia, presenting the nuances of rejecting it, embracing it, or accepting as part of Ukraine’s past but not her future. This is the subject positioning that stems in the nationalist, pro-Russian and certain centrist political entities. However, there is also a fairly visible discourse of those who prefer a technical terminology, which seems to want to avoid geographic coordinates, and talks about Ukraine as a country pursuing a certain model of democracy, and social and economic system, namely Europe. This is in fact not surprising, given the fact that Ukrainian leaders were aware of the lack of a unified view on the national question in their country; as a consequence of this fact it was natural to be in search of values that could potentially have a more galvanising impact because of their universality, such as democracy or human rights. Moving beyond the idea of civilisations or spheres of influence offered the opportunity of a fresh start on other bases.

To these positions correspond the etchings of Europe as a saviour, another potentially colonising “big brother” and simply just a model that is to be followed but in which there is no necessary integration. The flirtation with membership into NATO was more heavily conditioned by a geographical element, namely Russia’s proximity and potential military intervention. NATO was also a difficult matter because years of Soviet propaganda had created an image of the alliance that persisted throughout Ukrainian society, which in its majority felt distrustful of it.\footnote{Taras Kuzio, 2006, op. cit.}

Russia was positioned as a threatening “Other” by nationalists and generally Western Ukrainians, whereas Eastern Ukrainians and the industrial elite tended to see Russia as a partner and a source of cultural, economic and political support; in the centre, Russia was
seen rather as a necessary evil that had to be balanced with a pro-European option.

As a consequence of this variety of voices, certain hailing processes emphasise an “us” (Ukrainian) and “them” (Russian) play, or an “us” as Ukrainians and Europeans. However, these differentiations were not always clear, particularly since the development of an “us” and “them” in the relationship with Russia was effectively tied to the creation of a separate Ukrainian identity, which took a very long time to emerge. The entire struggle to become Ukrainians from “little Russians” was an adequate illustration of this process; in addition to that, the fact that in Ukraine a certain Russian view of Ukrainians persisted, whether through some historians’ or politicians’ views, or a broader popular opinion285, prevented the development of strong, general identifications one way or another.

In the case of Europe, hailing it as a model or as an actor who first listens to Russia before adopting positions towards Ukraine, which are occasionally disappointing to Ukrainian elites, somewhat removed it as a significant interlocutor. There was a distance instituted between the two that made it hard for Ukraine to operate on her elites seeming élan towards Europe.

So, what did that mean for the development of a liminal imagery in this case? Generally, it meant the possibility of the development of a more systematic discourse in this respect; however, until 2006, it was possible to witness rather an etching of a chain of connotations, which brought together images of a barrier-buffer-bridge-multi-vectorism-anchor, with not many further articulations.

Predicate analysis

Associated with these various liminal images were sets of characterisations and predicates that painted Ukraine successively as a determined new country with much to learn about nation-building (1991-1994), an active, democratising state (1994-1999), a passive, confused, corrupt leadership dominated state, yet willing to adopt European standards (1999-2004) and ultimately, a country that regained her bearings by opting for a true democratic path (2004-2006).

On the other hand, depending on who spoke, Europe appeared as a saviour, a model, a community to “return” to, or just another big colonising conglomerate with its own agenda. Towards the end of the period under examination Europe appeared more as a partner and an interlocutor of choice, with which Ukraine finally started a dialogue.

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It is possible to note that a positive characterisation of Ukraine coincided with periods when the liminal imagery, although tenuous, expressed a comparatively clear choice and references. Thus, the image of the barrier and the “doctor” who will cure Russia of its ills was associated with predicates suggesting determination, commitment to democratic values and willingness to embark on a nation-building process. The images of the bridge and the anchor mentioned in the 2004-2006 interval went together with an active characterisation of Ukraine, as if woken up after a long undemocratic sleep. The policy of multi-vectorism was itself associated with a relatively lively description of Ukraine, including decisiveness and a European orientation. However, as the policy of “To Europe with Russia” started to take ground, Ukrainian elites, be they decision-making or analysts and experts, progressively started to describe their country as confused, passive, corrupt and ignorant of the European project.

During all these phases, the image of Europe did not appear too clear, whereas Russia was concisely presented as either a dangerous neighbour, former imperial ruler, with a regressive and non-democratic system, ready to gobble Ukraine up, or as a historical partner, who could not be ignored or acted against. Unlike the cases of Romania and Turkey, in which Europe appeared either as a guiding light or a measure of progress towards democracy, it did not seem that Ukrainian elites had this perspective. Even nationalist statements which claimed Ukraine’s “return to Europe” did not seem to spend much time outlining what Europe was, just as Mykola Kostomarov had spoken in the 19th century about the abstract concept of “psychological Europe”, without giving a lot of details about what this meant exactly. The reason behind this might be, as Taras Kuzio noted, that Europe did not really respond to Ukraine’s self proclamations of European-ness; whether

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286 Taras Kuzio, 2006, op. cit.
this state of facts occurred because Europe was mistrustful of Ukraine, or too concerned about angering Russia, it is clear that the affirmations of the pro-European Ukrainian elites did not elicit substantial responses form Europe, in terms of a symbolic dialogue. In both Romanian and Turkish cases exchanges existed, even if negative, such that within these countries it was possible for a perception and a depiction of Europe to arise: as a symbol of civilisation, an arbiter of democracy, a beacon of modernity, but also as an unfair critic or an elusive entity that asks forever more in order to grant its benediction. Faced with the “Ukraine fatigue” and lack of enthusiasm exhibited by Europe, Ukrainian elites reached the conclusion that “Nobody awaits us in the West”. Even after the Orange revolution, Europe, through its neighbourhood policy, relegated Ukraine on a par with Israel and North-African countries, rather than accepting her integration bid. Therefore, it is no wonder that the image of Europe was not developed, nor was there a very clear subject positioning with respect to it.

As far as Russia was concerned, largely demonised by nationalists, it was seen as a potential partner by a part of Ukrainian elites, and many Ukrainian citizens. As the strategic priorities of Ukraine enounced in 1999, Russia was considered an equal partner, and Ukrainians were striving (relatively unsuccessfully) to be seen as such by it. There was, however, recognition that relations with Russia were multidimensional and complex, involving both rapport of friendship and enmity.

Conclusion

The Ukrainian case poses a set of challenges to this analysis that the other cases have not raised. First of all, although the study was not written in order to prove that any of the cases were liminal, it shows that, contrary to expectations that might be based on superficial evaluations, or on the idea that because Ukraine is placed in a particular geographic constellation she should acknowledge and develop a liminal imagery, it is possible to find a case where the liminal does not seem overwhelmingly appealing as a way of understanding or projecting a peculiar geopolitical situation.

Therefore, one cannot mention the predominance of an image or metaphor, chiefly because the discourse on the liminal is not strongly articulated. Nevertheless, one can affirm that, when compared with the scarce and weak mentions made historically to liminal images, during the initial period of Ukrainian independence in the 1990s the leadership had a distinct preference in favour of the use of the image of Ukraine as a buffer between Russia and Europe. Developed by Western Ukrainian nationalists, this metaphor was trying as much to “sell” Ukraine to Europe and the West as to play on the latter’s reticence and wariness of Russia. The use of the buffer metaphor was reminiscent of the initial stages of the Romanian and Turkish discourses on liminality. Yet Ukraine had almost no examples to illustrate how she would fulfil this function. The idea given by the sources suggested the buffer argument coincided with the sentiments of Western Ukrainians, who had experienced a history of closer contact and

287 Idem.
relations with Europe; it had been adopted by the neo-communist Ukrainian leadership in its state and nation building process, which was the first and primary declared aim of President Kravchuk at the time. The image enabled certain policy proposals, as for example, the idea of creating an agreement including the Visegrad countries, Bulgaria and Romania in a loose security and economic organisation; by applying this logic Ukrainian leaders intended to create a zone of democracy and development that would be placed between Europe and Russia. Unfortunately, this policy failed, as it was not solidly backed up by any of its adherents. This failure, and Leonid Kuchma’s rise to power, indicated the limits of the portrayal of Ukraine as a buffer and made space for the metaphor of the bridge.

The bridge image was closer ideologically to President Kuchma and his administration, because it signified the kind of communication link that he claimed he wanted Ukraine to be between Europe and Russia. This idea could accommodate more easily the type of rapprochement that he cultivated. However, the kind of metaphor that ultimately characterised the Kuchma years, namely the “multi-vector” foreign policy, which came to be abhorred by opposition forces as well as many analysts of Ukrainian foreign policy, strayed away from a liminal sense into a form of centrality that seemed to set Ukraine on a road to nowhere. The problem identified with the “multi-vector” foreign policy was that it declared the wish to make Ukraine equidistant from her options (East or West), seemingly placing her on a path of her own, whilst in practice this could not really be achieved. The reason why the bridge image survived in this period was, nevertheless, that at some point in the late 1990s Europe and NATO became the declared, ultimate aims for Ukrainian policy, and a form of (slow) progress towards them was instituted.

In the post-Orange Revolution era liminal references were rather scarce. Perhaps the reason was that, as Ivan Rudnytsky pointed in one of his essays, Ukrainians have not succeeded in achieving the East-West synthesis, which was part of their self-assigned mission as a nation. To some extent, Ukraine exhibits a case of extreme liminality, amounting to sharp divisions, between the Eastern and Western parts of the country. The use of historical symbols suggests that. Even if Bohdan Khmelnytsky and his Cossacks were chosen as national symbols in the 1990s, this did not mean that the entire Ukrainian population identified with this historical experience that, in many ways, was unique to the Western parts of the country. On the contrary, this indicated rather that a certain part of the country might feel liminal towards Europe, whilst another, might feel entirely alienated and “Other” in relation to it. Indeed, the closeness with Russia favoured such feelings and justified the lack of a strong identification with Europe. The texts from the 2004-2006 interval showed this basic divorce in opinions had merely been temporarily papered over through public enthusiasm, but certainly not solved or reconciled.

The lack of overwhelming choice for the liminal challenges, in its turn, what the potential location of the discourse on the liminal might be. It also proves that it is not inevitable - even if elements of it might exist - and, most importantly, shows that images, in this case, geopolitical images, are imperfect representations of geopolitical reality. Consequently, they would need to be supported by narratives and stories in order to strengthen a particular idea or representation. In the absence of a context to give them depth and sense, images, even if they resonate with the
idea of liminality, remain an incomplete rendition of reality, and as the Ukrainian case shows, inadequate because unfinished. Furthermore, even if some members of the elite use them, it does not mean that they are echoed at a deeper level in society.

However, the Ukrainian case also shows that the potential for the liminal exists, and underlines, through the lack of a developed imagery and a sustained pro-European narrative, the connection between the European project and liminal images. This is not a direct cause to effect connection, since there are too many variables, but it is a co-existence. This co-existence is given by the fact that being accepted in Europe and by Europe amounts to a ritual process such as mentioned by Victor Turner, quoted in the Methodology section; this ritual might involve a transitional period from a state of less European-ness to full European-ness, which can be consciously acknowledged and undertaken, or ignored and prolonged indefinitely. Ukraine seems to lurk somewhere in-between those states, sometimes declaring an active intention to join Europe and sometimes ignoring it. Of course, there is also an important nuance: wishing to join Europe does not necessarily mean wishing to become like Europe. Perhaps this is one of the most notable challenges posed by Ukraine to Europe. Turkey, who challenges the latter to stay itself and at the same time to integrate difference, wants nevertheless, to become European. Ukrainians do not exactly say so. They say they can be part of the European project, they wish to be accepted in and by Europe, they propose from the start an equal-footing relationship, but one can hardly hear a definite “We want to be European” commitment. Maybe this is also why, not having accepted the transformation ritual of becoming European, they also do not stress the liminal that would go with it.

Subject positioning also confirms this type of hesitation, through the fact that positions are not very clearly articulated or designated. In fact, one has the feeling Ukrainians avoid doing so each time they can. From a historical point of view, Ukraine appeared to be struggling in order to free herself from the Russians, so as to start acting on her own behalf. Therefore, Russia was pictured as a stifling “Other”. As Taras Kuzio noted, this was also the case in the initial period of Ukrainian independence in the early 1990s. Hence, there was a Ukrainian “us” and a Russian “them”, placed in a rapport of opposition. Stressing that Ukraine was a “buffer” between Russia and Europe, and at the same time underscoring a protective function towards Europe and European values, indicated the wish to have at least a relationship of complementarity and potential identification with Europe on behalf of Ukrainian elites. Yet, there was an atmosphere of confusion about Ukrainian elites’ aims. On the one hand, their pronouncements seemed to suggest they appreciated and looked up to the European social and political structure and they wanted the benefits that the European rule of law brought to a country. However, presented in very technical terms, there were no indications of how these elements fitted into a grander scheme of things, in Ukraine’s unfolding destiny. As a result, subject positioning was not very well developed, and more implicit rather than explicit.

This is not to say, however, that no one really wanted Ukraine to join Europe. On the contrary, there were some committed voices that wished to project Ukraine as clearly set on a European path, as part of the “European project”. However, even amongst them, few were talking about a vision encompassing a historic destiny. Giving the impression of Ukraine as a lesser actor in history. This reminded one of how Romanians used to feel about their importance in European
affairs, their invisibility and lowness.

This impression was strengthened by the attributes that were used in relation to Ukraine. They seemed to trace a downward slope from the elation of the early 1990s, when Ukraine was seen as full of promises, to the image of a country gripped by indecision and lack of understanding of her own aims. Indeed, leaders even confessed to not fully grasping what going to Europe truly meant. After 2004, there were some attempts at clarifying what Ukrainians understood by the European project. Interestingly, they sought to do so by saying they were “giving” the Orange revolution to Europe, thereby signifying a wish of identification, and asking to be accepted.

Nevertheless, this still happened in a context where the Ukrainian narrative of modernisation was rather weak. This did not mean Ukrainians did not want progress or an improvement of their country along the model that Europe offered. It suggested that Ukrainians had not integrated the modes of interaction that the latter offered, which included the creation of sites of liminality, manifested as “almost” Europe. The Ukrainians were tired of being “almost” something, since they had spent so long being the “almost” better part of Eastern Slavdom (even if they claimed they actually were). By not adopting the liminal terminology, they did not fully contest it, but rather kept the liminal as a potential way of representing their position, but not as a dominant one, as in the other two cases.

As a consequence, the Ukrainian case poses two significant additional questions to the framework of this analysis. The first one is with respect to the reliability of texts and statements, and to the extent of instrumentalisation of arguments. How far are Ukrainian elite interests expressed in their pronouncements and to what extent are they hidden? Short of having two Ukraines and therefore two case studies, as Prof. Liebich has suggested, it can be said it is a question where the horizons of meaning that bring the members of a society together are thin; it can also be said that, in fact, there are competitive and incompatible horizons of meaning, roughly oriented towards East and Russia and, alternatively, the West. The tool-boxes from which interests are built were different, and only a minimum common denominator could keep a unifying position together. Therefore many compromises had to be made, which led to a certain discrepancy between words and deeds and sometimes, even other words. Still, the fact that the images referring to the liminal showed a certain persistence in discourse, even if at a low level of intensity, indicated the potential for development, should Ukraine adopt another approach to Europe. It also pointed to the fact that Ukrainian elites were familiar with the arguments revolving around the liminal and their possible application to the case of their country. From this perspective, therefore, the method applied was useful in revealing the strengths and the weaknesses of the liminal imagery.

Another question raised by the Ukrainian case is that of the existence of common horizons in relation to Europe. As shown throughout the analysis, in the Romanian case, there were enough political, economic, and cultural references that could help a pro-European argument appear relatively convincing, since the reference schemes had elements that related and resonated with each other. Thus, a common history of membership in the Roman empire, from which Romanians drew the myth of their Latinity was a strong factor; in addition, educational exchanges and the fact that gradually Romanian elites learned how to speak the Western
parlance (manifested as much by learning French, English and German as by learning the grammar of the Western civilisational logic) strengthened the Romanian argument.

The Turkish case, in turn, demonstrated how difficult it was and still is to overcome the absence of common horizons of meaning, especially when it came to culture, religion and civilisation. Nevertheless, the Turks were nothing less than exemplary in their undaunted efforts at building alternative horizons of meaning, based on security issues and learning the diplomatic language of the West. They became stronger on the aspect of “acquired” European qualities, such as described by Bahar Rumelili. On the other hand, Ukraine defied expectations and showed that the way in which she could have something in common with Europe was, seemingly paradoxically, through Russia. Anatoly Gutsal, Ukrainian chief analyst of the Russian-Ukrainian relation has, in fact, underscored the fact that

“To «reanimate» one's own status on the continent is a long enough process, and one should not cherish an illusion that the Western Europe will remember any Kyiv or Galytsky princes. The old reminiscences are hardly to be helpful here, though the western people deal favourably with those who preserve their national traditions”.

This might therefore explain in a completely different light the “To Europe with Russia” slogan. Indeed, culturally, there was more resonance between Russian culture and the West than between Ukraine and the West, which could be seen as a potential drawback in Ukrainian Western relations. The lack of solid “acquired” European qualities also magnified the problem.

As an important note towards the end of this analysis, I would like to suggest that at the end of 2006 the Ukrainians were still faced with the task that Ivan Rudnytsky had identified for them, namely bringing East and West together in the ambit of their country. I believe this needs to happen on two levels: bringing eastern and western Ukraine together, and indeed East and West as broader categories of civilisation and geopolitics. The recent internal evolution in Ukraine, during which her Parliament seems to represent a microcosm of wider divisions in society shows there is still much work to be done in both areas, although, at an official level it can be said that a pro-European and pro-Western line seems to predominate. Significantly, on 8 September 2008 Ukraine’s Ambassador to Moscow, Konstantyn Gryshenko, declared that Ukraine had no way to go other than Europe and therefore the latter needs to give his country a clear perspective around which the people and its elites can start to agree for long-term programmes and strategies. Such a declaration is important not only because it was done for Moscow, thus hailing the end of an ambiguous rhetoric, but also because it opens potentially the discursive space for the liminal imagery. Yulia Tymoshenko has perhaps started a trend in August 2008 when, in her role as Ukrainian Prime-Minister, she voiced the idea that Ukraine is capable of becoming a bridge for the countries of Europe. She was referring to the concrete

project of a North-South highway, but significantly added: “This highway is the proof we are starting to build a new Europe in Ukraine and it is a real Ukrainian breakthrough” 292. I find this position extremely interesting, because Tymoshenko was, as highlighted above, amongst the political figures who shied away from talking about a European project or a mission for Ukraine in Europe. Although she has always been staunchly pro-European, she did not express herself in the sense of a project. In her affirmation above, she actually reconciles a previous position of “how is Europe in Ukraine” with the potentially more ample idea of the bridge. However, it is also important to note the future orientation of her phrase: Ukraine “can become”, it is not already, a bridge. I think these affirmations indicate the potential for the development of a liminal imagery.

Overall, perhaps the best lesson the Ukrainian case teaches is not to blindly trust expectations about how a case might turn out to be, merely because it seems to fulfil a particular set of conditions that could pre-destine it to a peculiar outlook. There is no predestination in that sense.

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This analysis was motivated by the wish to understand the conceptualisation of liminality in three particular contexts and to identify what they have to tell us about liminality writ large in international relations; it has concentrated on the linguistic figuration of the liminal in the geopolitical discourse and imagination of elites in three countries.

The starting point of this research has been the small, but growing body of literature that deals with liminality in international relations. In its turn, these writings were based on the seminal work of anthropologists who have succeeded in showing that liminality and the liminal state are a very rich and prolific phase in the existence of an individual, or a collectivity, with potential bearings on its further evolution. The texts I found on liminality in international relations were extremely interesting. However, although they provided concrete examples of states that might be seen as liminal in international relations, there were no cases in which the representation of this condition inside these countries was analysed. Therefore, I chose to have a closer look at such cases in the context of their relationship with the EU, which had been described by the above-mentioned literature as an entity that creates sites of liminality around itself. Since relations with the EU were largely a matter of foreign policy in these countries, I chose to examine a subset of the foreign policy discourse, namely the geopolitical one, as one of the main sites of image creation regarding this issue.

Through the images that were used to represent the perceived liminality in the three countries under study, their elites underscored the liminality creating potential of the European discourse of integration and modernisation. Therefore this concluding chapter will be composed of three parts:
1) comparing and contrasting findings in the three cases under study, emphasising the insights they bring about geopolitical thinking in the region and in relation to Europe;

2) outlining what these findings mean for a wider concept of liminality and its function in international relations;

3) proposing further research in the study of the liminal. This chapter will also provide a commentary on the analysis as a whole.

As outlined in the concluding remarks of each one of the three case studies, the encounter with the liminal has occurred with a certain amount of variation each time, and its linguistic and conceptual articulation was influenced by historic context and the aims of the decision-making elites, themselves products of a historical, cultural and political evolution. The lines along which the three cases are compared run as follows: the location of discourse and its public, elements indicating the scope of the discourse and whom was considered important as an interlocutor for it; the presence and articulation of liminal images, which are the dominant images and what does this indicate; subject positioning and predicate characterisation as corollaries of the liminal imagery showing the kind of subjects that were produced through its use.

Before delving into this brief comparison I wish to make several general remarks regarding these three case studies and the way the methodological framework and the theoretical literature have helped in their analysis. As could be seen in the Romanian and Turkish cases, decision-making elites and intellectuals of statecraft were relatively preoccupied with the issue of the liminal. The literature developed around the issue seemed to be an adapted lens for framing the findings in these cases, because, as it became apparent, Romanians and Turks have accepted to engage with Europe on its terms, and therefore with the liminal status that developed. However, the two countries were different in the way they interacted with this entity. If Romania adapted to the kind of cues that she received and came to define her liminality quite successfully and without it being contested, Turkey often acted in defiance of Europe, and, as Bahar Rumelili told us, resisted the definitions that Europe gave her. Her liminality was often built despite Europe, who sometimes sought to deny a common identity with Turkey. The strategy of looking at statements coming from both European leaders and Turkish elites has allowed me to uncover the complexity of the relationship as well as the depth of the liminal imagery.

On the other hand, Ukraine did not yield the same kind of findings as the other two cases. The methodological framework used, brought to light the existence of some liminal references, but not a fully-fledged articulation, nor were subject positions or a pro-European narrative very highly developed. It underlined, however, a very important element, namely that Ukrainian elites have not engaged with Europe in the same way as Romanian and Turkish elites did. This essentially meant that a liminal imagery and corollary subject positions did not exist, because the dialogue between the two entities (Europe and Ukraine) was different. The Ukrainian case

1 Bahar Rumelili, 2003, p. 222.
also underscored the fact that liminal images gain more depth and meaning when they are accompanied by stories that provide them with a past and a context. Otherwise, they become almost empty signifiers. Regarding the literature that frames my research, Ukraine points to the possibility of including writings on the relations between Ukraine and Russia, in order to identify whether the former has developed a liminal status more in relation to its former imperial master.

Overall, the cases bring rich information about how the liminal can be represented in geopolitical discourse, but also highlight what are the elements which are necessary in order to transform it in a productive discursive articulation.

The location of the discourse on the liminal and its publics

The common element running throughout the discourses and the analysis was the presence of a relation with the West, which actually provided the entity and the idea in relation to which the three countries under examination, Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine, were described as liminal. As indicated in the “Case Selection” section, liminality is a positional and relational notion, and not a given attribute of a particular entity. Therefore, it was necessary to identify a core notion with which they had a rapport strong enough as to create a liminal imagery and a liminal itinerary, namely the West. As the cases show, the latter was seen as composed of two main elements: a particular idea of Europe, as later embodied by the EU, and NATO, as a symbol of military security and US contribution to the wider notion of the “West”. Gradually, Europe and the EU became a much greater focus of attention than NATO (since the ultimate aim was to be considered European), which was often perceived as a first stage and a stepping-stone on the way to Europe. As the Turkish case showed, though, it was a necessary, but certainly not sufficient pre-condition for being considered European and “of the West”. Knowing the location of the discourse on the liminal gives the sense of its scope, how “deep” within the state elites it is spread and how popular it is. It also gives an indication of who are the “agents” that spread and reinforce it.

Liminal imagery is most often to be found in the statements and speeches of high-level decision-makers, preoccupied with projecting for their citizens as well as Europe a particular image of their country, in accordance to what they perceived to be its highest interests, in this case being part of Europe.

In the Romanian case, an interesting evolution took place in the development of the discourse on the liminal. At is beginnings, it was associated and even made a constitutive part of the discourse that enabled the creation of a new nation-state, Romania. It was mainly located with those who lobbied, internally and externally, for its birth and it tended to encompass the whole political spectrum, including intellectuals, historians and geographers. This was equally a function of the fact that these were the very people who were also politically active in parties and decision-making positions. Hence, the discourse on the liminal spanned quite a
large spectrum of the intelligentsia, and was addressed to both Romanian and foreign publics. This indicated a dialogue with both Europe and Romania’s own history in the construction of the liminal, and the wish to co-opt both publics in the beliefs around Romania’s part in Europe.

As Romanian confidence strengthened in the value and position of the nation, it was possible to notice that politicians emphasised less the liminal image, which was taken over by experts, historians, geographers, geopoliticians and analysts, who had become responsible for designing the intellectual framework of its geopolitical outlook. As such, the public changed, becoming largely domestic, a fact which coincided with the aim of building a national conscience around Romania’s role in Europe and in the world.

In the contemporary period, after a 50 year setback that also affected the discourse on the liminal, the high-level decision-makers were those who revived it, despite an initial refusal to do so. However, it was President Emil Constantinescu merit to bring back clearly the discourse on the liminal not only in official statements and speeches, but also in foreign policy design (through the trilateral treaties initiative), and consolidate whatever previous affirmations existed in the 1990-1996 period into a coherent imagery and foreign policy logic. Through the explicit connection he made with historical images and concepts he re-initiated the dialogue with history and allowed for a re-flourishing of arguments on the liminal in a variety of outlets, articulated by a variety of authors. Thus, by the end of 2006, official statements combined with special analyses had built a strong series of images that practically ousted any other possibility in terms of policy choices. In the 1990-2006 interval domestic and foreign publics were relatively balanced, with the exception of the first six years, during which there did not seem to be significant interest in co-opting Romanians to a certain foreign policy vision, not least because the leadership of the time did not actually have a clear one.

The Turkish case is marginally different from the Romanian one. Not benefiting from a long history of friendly relations with Europe, Turkey started developing a liminal imagery in the 20th century, in the aftermath of the creation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Liminal images were primarily born in the same decision-making circles that emphasised Turkey’s belonging to Europe, with army members often evoking them in a first phase, as did popular newspaper editorials. As of the mid-1960s public opinion gradually became liberalised and more members of the intelligentsia began to express themselves on the subject, even if until 1987 this expression did not reach the intensity it did after the end of the Cold War. The main merit of this period was the insistence, especially by army members (who have always considered themselves as the guardians of Turkish secularism and democracy) that Turkey will keep her European orientation, despite occasional cold relations with Europe. This orientation kept liminal images alive. On the whole, the publics of this first set of liminal images were both domestic and foreign, because both needed to be convinced of Turkey’s European-ness. However, it is interesting that quite early on, Turkish decision-making elites as well as academics took to expressing themselves in English or having texts translated in English, indicating the wish to make their cause well known to as wide a readership as possible. Equally, Turkish papers in English make a specific effort to translate editorials published in other Turkish newspapers,
undertaking an effort to illustrate a variety of Turkish opinions in their pages. The interval under analysis showed an active participation in the construction of a liminal imagery coming from the highest rank of government, including Foreign Ministry website, for example, down to writers, historians and analysts. The Turkish chorus of voices on liminality is the most comprehensive and best articulated of the three cases, because there is a sense that opinions feed off each other. This effect was created as much by the style of writing and of the statements as by the fact that the Turkish establishment was to be found in a constant dialogue, primarily with Europe and then the US, about the nature of its democracy. This was an ongoing exchange in which a large number of Turkish members of the intelligentsia participated, showing that the liminal was not just something to be proved to the outside, but also something to build and understand from the inside.

The Romanian and Turkish cases proved the utmost importance that texts coming from outside the decision-making apparatus have in revealing the depth and context of the liminal imagery developed. They often provide the history of a perspective, they show the elements with which it is linked, and review its evolution and practical implementation. The fact that such texts were significantly fewer in the Ukrainian case weakened the sense of depth of the same kind of images in this context.

The Ukrainian case is the one with the weakest presence of liminal images, and a rather vague discursive articulation around them. Its analysis has shown that liminal images in a first instance were mainly present in the writings of the “founding fathers” of Ukrainian nationalism, but not in a constitutive manner as in the Romanian case, or even indicating a desired clear direction, like in the Turkish one. Preoccupied with the greater problem of Russian domination and the need to break from it, Ukrainian nationalists did not have much energy to dedicate to a full-blown articulation of a Ukrainian part in Europe. Recent historical evolutions have shown that this might have also been due to divided national sensitivities, manifested through the fact that a certain part of the Ukrainian population is strongly Russophile and, therefore, it was difficult to define an identity and simultaneously separate and inclusive (huh?) of the Russian element. Historically, then, the few liminal references that existed were geared almost exclusively to a domestic public, intended to build a Ukrainian nation, although they were not presented with an aura of inevitability like in the Romanian case, for example. They were seen, rather, as a potential other solution to Ukraine being the better half of the Eastern Slavs, the half that was more inclined towards democracy, free expression and a certain liberalism.

During the contemporary era liminal references seemed to be the monopoly of only a few decision-makers, and, more importantly, geared mainly to a foreign public, rather than a domestic one. There seemed to be little or no echo in intellectual debates about liminal imagery in Ukraine. Certain analysts who also had political appointments made occasional mentions, but the general sense was that the liminal was not a pervasive issue with (within, or, of concern to?) the Ukrainian public. In the analysis which I conducted, at least two factors seemed to be connected with such a state of affairs: censorship, still a strong feature in Ukrainian society, and the fact that identity debates were, again, more preoccupied with developing a definition
differentiating Ukraine from Russia, rather than stressing similarities with Europe. However, this dimension was not completely absent from internal debates, and there existed a sense of awareness of the possibility of the liminal, which was certainly conveyed to the outside, with various degrees of success. Thus, certain Western scholars and US geopolitical experts were quick to assume that the role of a buffer and then of a bridge would befit Ukraine. Nevertheless, Europe, Ukraine’s declared political and social aim, did not consider her wavering declarations and conduct as a firm indication of her intentions. On the whole, it is important to note that a flirtation with the liminal existed amongst Ukrainian elites, with a limited amount of echo within wider Ukrainian public, indicating a plurality of voices amongst which one had yet to become dominant.

**Liminal images and their articulation**

The presence of liminal images and their intensity indicates how strong the discourse on the liminal is and, indeed, if the images articulate into a discourse capable of producing subjects and positions, at all. The challenge encountered throughout the analysis was to be found particularly at the juncture between images and their articulation into a discourse. I have mentioned in the methodology section that, given its very nature, language does not perfectly represent reality, and abstract concepts are not fully embodied in material manifestations of them. Therefore, the images and terms meant to represent the liminal in the texts and statements studied cannot be said to be perfectly synonymous with the concepts they aim to translate. The very fact that they attempt to translate attests to a certain degree of incompleteness. However, these images, when accompanied by particular stories and narratives, became richer and more adapted to represent the concept of liminality, because it became easier to identify the logic in which they were inscribed. Through the lack of a thick narrative that would glue together liminal images, which ultimately led to a weak articulation of the concept, the Ukrainian case emphasised the importance of this very feature that it was lacking.

The kind of liminal images that are mentioned throughout a discourse indicates where in, relation to their core aim, state elites thought they found themselves. The insistence on the liminal also suggested an intention to keep a relationship and a particular story of progress going.

The Romanian case exhibits a strong presence of liminal images in geopolitical and foreign policy discourse. Historically, they were intertwined with the seminal union project of the Romanian Principalities, as well as Romania’s modernisation process, and they served as reference points in the latter’s evolution along those lines. With the exception of the communist period, when the liminal was ousted from public discourse, all other times in modern and contemporary Romanian foreign policy have kept liminal images presence in public consciousness and discourse to various degrees.

The most used images in the Romanian discourse were those of a barrier, then bridge and of the frontier, showing an evolution in discourse and relations with Europe. During the initial stages of the discourse on the liminal it was necessary to start “selling” the Romanian
position based on past experiences, on past exchanges with Europe, and that is why the image of the buffer and the barrier made most sense. It suggested solidity and reliance, whilst at the same time acknowledging the fact that the Romanian Principalities had not yet reached the necessary degree of European-ness; nevertheless, emphasising the barrier function suggested contact and awareness, and built a necessary function for the future, which could be, and was, as was shown, a good base for proposing other images.

The image of the bridge intervened as relations with Europe improved and Romania’s standing did too. Other variations suggesting the linking quality of the bridge, such as the nexus, plaque tournante, corridor, and passageway, all emphasised a rapprochement with Europe but still a form of liminality and in-between-ness, turned positive. The image of the bridge predominated throughout the discourse until the present day, not least because relations with Europe were practically severed as far as accession was concerned for around 50 years. When relations were re-initiated, an initial resistance and lack of direction intervened and brought back the images of the buffer and the barrier, without necessarily pursuing advancement in this condition. It was only after decision-making elites retied the knot of history that the liminal imagery was consolidated again, evolving to the image of the frontier of Europe and NATO, a role which presupposed belonging and an identification with the values, principles and systems of the West. Becoming the Eastern frontier of the EU as of 1 January 2007 was the crowning of almost two centuries of efforts to join Europe.

The liminal imagery was the result of an intense dialogue and exchange with other historical images and utterances. As specified previously, Romania, unlike Turkey, did not have to contend with the doubtful European gaze about her quality as a European country; tradition, history, culture, religion and geography recommended her as such, even if, being considered of the East, there were doubts raised about the nature of her European-ness. This was an attitude that was strengthened by the EU accession dynamic. As Merje Kuus outlined in her article on the EU enlargement process, the latter, through the assumptions it engendered, favoured the creation of Easts around Europe³, a group of countries who were incompletely European. Through the creation of these Easts the EU controlled the characteristics of candidates to membership and their rhythm of progress. The idea of incomplete modernity and European-ness was upheld relatively strongly within Romania by the local intelligentsia, a fact that further strengthened the resonance of the liminality imagery.

The doubts expressed about the European credentials of their country pushed Romanian intellectuals of statecraft to build contemporary liminal images from their country’s own past, receiving fewer or almost no cues on this from Europe, in this area, at least. Hence, even when criticism was strong on reforms performance, it did not weaken the arguments concerning Romanian liminal place, because they did not affect what was considered her deep European identity.

The liminal in Romania can also be seen in connection to the phenomenon termed by Razvan Theodorescu as “transactionism”, a form of constant bargaining and quid pro quo exchanges with the outside world. As such, it gave rise to a mentality of in-between-ness, of

finding oneself at the place where some things begin and others end, for example “the gates of the Orient”. This conception made possible certain ambiguous behaviours and choices, confirming occasionally the negative implications and connotations of the geopolitical images indicating the liminal.

Regarding the presence of liminal images, the Turkish case presents interesting similarities and differences with the Romanian one. The similarities are given by the fact that Turkey, like Romania, espoused a narrative of progress and modernisation that encouraged the appearance of a liminal imagery; yet, Turkey’s itinerary along it was different. The dominant image in Turkish discourse is that of the bridge, indicating evolution in relations with Europe, but not yet identification.

Turkey was the heir to a great power, which was considered for a long time Europe’s “Other”. In the 20th century her geopolitical value and status changed and Turkey had to rearticulate them. This process started before the appearance of the liminal imagery in Turkish discourse, as Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish republic consolidated a pro-European orientation that focused on Turkey’s progress and modernisation. Liminal imagery appeared around the same time as Turkey decided to renounce its neutral military stance in the world. Therefore, it can be said that liminal images were not constitutive of Turkey’s image in the same way as they were in Romania, where they were intimately connected with the discourse hailing the need for the union of the Principalities; they became, however, constitutive of Turkey’s long road to Europe through their association with a pro-European discourse and policy choices.

The initial phase of the liminal imagery was connected to Turkey’s entrance into NATO and to her security function in the European system. The images of buffer, barrier and shield were associated with attempts at proving Turkey’s solidity and European-ness.

In the interval between 1987 and 2006 liminal imagery experienced a rebirth and intensification. As Turkey’s European credentials were increasingly doubted, the discourse on the liminal developed several strands: geopolitics, identity and security. It seemed that Turkish elites put together a checklist against which they could prove their country’s European qualities, producing numerous texts with at least one of the focuses mentioned above. Having defined their European-ness institutionally in a first phase, they understood that more needed to be achieved if Turkey were to be considered truly European. To a certain extent, it can be said that in the Romanian case, elites wanted to see her European-ness be employed in a function that would prove her worth to Europe. On the contrary, in the Turkish case, there was the hope that the function initially fulfilled by Turkey, as a shield and outpost of the free world, would boost her European qualities.

During the 1987-2006 period the three threads (geopolitics, identity, security) of liminal images successfully combined in a series of images varying from the buffer to the bridge, and sometimes anchor. The dominant image was the bridge, which proved to be most effective in ousting other images, such as that of the model for the Turkic nations of Central Asia, or a Middle Eastern country. By ousting these images, the bridge metaphor was firmly participating in the consolidation of Turkey’s road to Europe, which was adopted even by Islamist political forces, originally thought and feared as anti-European and anti-democratic. The bridge metaphor also proved to be versatile, as it was able to accommodate other images, such as the Alliance
of civilisations or the model of democracy for Middle Eastern countries. On the whole, the domination of the bridge image suggested that relations between Turkey and the EU had become closer to some kind of identification, but were not as tight to allow Turkey to become a frontier, as in the Romanian case.

Ukraine presents us with quite a different image when compared with Romania and Turkey. It is not really possible to talk about the dominance of an image, mainly because the discourse on the liminal is not solidly articulated. However, it is possible to say that, compared with the few vague mentions made historically to liminal images, in the first years of Ukrainian independence in the 1990s the leadership made a clear choice to portray Ukraine as a buffer between Russia and Europe. Encouraged mainly by Western Ukrainian nationalists, this metaphor was meant as much to “sell” Ukraine to Europe and the West as to play on the latter’s traditional vision and fears of Russia. In many ways, the use of the buffer image reminded one of the beginnings of the Romanian discourse on liminality, with the difference being that Ukraine had fewer or no instances to really illustrate how she would fulfil this function. The sense given by the sources available, both primary and secondary, was that the buffer argument was an idea of which Western Ukrainians were convinced, in virtue of a history of closer contact and relations with Europe. It had been opportunistically adopted by the neo-communist Ukrainian leadership in its efforts at state- and nation building, which was the first and primary declared aim of President Kravchuk at the time. Its uses were quite provocative at times, such as when M. Chornovol declared that Ukraine was going to be the “doctor” that was going to “cure” Russia of authoritarianism. The image also made some policy proposals seem logical, such as the idea of creating an agreement encompassing Visegrad countries, as well as Bulgaria and Romania, in a loose security and economic organisation; in this way a zone of democracy and development was going to be created between Europe and Russia. The failure of this policy was the result of several factors, one of them being that the early 1990s was a period when several such initiatives had been proposed (see the Romanian one, or the most successful one which created the Visegrad Group) and most of these were not genuinely adhered to by those who accepted them declaratively. At the same time, this failure, together with the advent of Leonid Kuchma to power, signified the end of the “Ukraine as buffer” era. The metaphor of the bridge was ushered in.

The image of the bridge was more appealing, as it seemed to illustrate the type of connection that the Ukrainian leadership was hailing between Europe and Russia. Nevertheless, the appearance of the “multi-vector” foreign policy, contested by the opposition and critics of Ukrainian foreign policy, pushed Ukraine farther from the liminal towards a kind of central position that oriented Ukraine in a very unclear direction. The problem identified with the “multi-vector” foreign policy was that it declared the wish to make Ukraine equidistant from her options (East or West), seemingly placing her on a path of her own, whilst in practice this could not really be achieved. The reason why the bridge image survived in this period was that, nevertheless, at some point in the late 1990s Europe and NATO became the declared ultimate aims for Ukrainian policy, and a form of (slow) progress towards them was instituted.

In the post-Orange Revolution era liminal references were also very few. One of the reasons behind this might be that, as Ivan Rudnytsky pointed in one of his essays, Ukrainians have not
succeeded in achieving the East-West synthesis, which was part of their self-assigned mission as a nation. In many cases Ukraine is an example of radicalised liminality, if one could term it so, which amounts to downright division, often between the Eastern and Western parts of the country. One interesting example is the very use of historical symbols. Even if Bohdan Khmelnytsky and the Cossacks (epitomising liminality) were chosen as national symbols in the 1990s, this did not mean that the entire Ukrainian population identified with this historical experience that, in many ways, was unique to the Western parts of the country. On the contrary, this indicated rather that a certain part of the country might feel liminal towards Europe, whilst another might feel completely “othered” in relation to the latter. The indications provided by texts recovered until the end of 2006 suggested that there was still a long way to go before a fully-fledged liminal imagery would take hold in Ukrainian foreign policy discourse, if ever.

Overall, the liminal images in the three cases examined bring to the fore several interesting common elements. First, and most important, the liminal imagery stems from a geographical reality of proximity to Europe that political elites attempt to convert into a geopolitical advantage, with varying degrees of success. The geographic becomes geopolitical through the conjugation of the different modes of the liminal, manifested through the elaboration of different figurations, or metaphors, varying from the buffer to the frontier. Second, liminal images are strong when they can be backed up by historical examples or instances when one of the liminal functions mentioned above was fulfilled and when they are explicitly tied to a narrative or story of progress towards a certain core, or aim, in this case, symbolic and concrete membership of Europe. As the Ukrainian case shows, an underdetermined aim seems to be associated with a weak liminal imagery. Third, a liminal imagery participates in opening the discursive space for policy initiatives, which emphasise the co-existence of seemingly contradictory elements or competing allegiances. Fourth, liminal images are connected mostly with the positive attributes and potentialities of the countries - as specified by Ann Norton, who mentioned the fact that liminars focus on the positive of their situation⁴ - even though there are texts affirming the negative aspects of the countries’ liminality, such as duplicity or ambiguity, or, as in the Romanian case “transactionism”. However, no clear images are used to illustrate them, other than some ambiguous metaphors themselves: the “gates of the Orient” or “Byzantinism”, for example. An accurate remark was made, however, by a Turkish writer and commentator, Elif Safak⁵, who pointed that liminality and in-between-ness can also metaphorically be the domain of the “djinni”, genies, trickster spirits whose actions and their effects are never quite predictable. This is an aspect of liminality that would be more emphasised by Europe, the counterpart and interlocutor in all these three cases, rather than by Romanians, Turks or Ukrainians themselves. However, even Europe proved to be receptive to the positive potentialities of its liminars when they were strongly upheld.

As a last remark, it is worth noting that the liminal images used in two of the three cases tended to build on each other, and to have cumulative functions. For example, the buffer and the

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⁵ Elif Safak, 2006, op. cit.
barrier implied a function of protection which was rather static; the bridge introduced the linkage and therefore more dynamic element, whilst at the same time keeping as a foundation the initial buffer function, which presumably created the preconditions of knowledge and identification that allowed the possibility of the development of the bridge; the frontier implied identification, exchange and protection as well as projection of values. It is interesting that in the Ukrainian case the buffer and the bridge were explicitly separated, with Ukrainian elites eventually refusing to consider their country as a protective buffer for Europe. However, adopting one element of the terminology and denying another did not help the Ukrainian cause, which was already weakened by an unclear attitude as to how to adopt European values.

Subject positioning and predicates

Subject positioning and predicates are important pillars in the development of the discourse on the liminal because they show with what kind of actors the images are associated. The indications about whether liminality is seen as a good thing or not also stems in the way subjects are characterised and placed. As suggested earlier in the methodology section, liminality is a relational and positional concept, and therefore understanding what kind of positioning it suggests, helps clarify the kind of evolution and transformation it indicates. This is particularly the case in relation to the advancement or retreat on the trajectory of modernisation and becoming a recognised member of the European community of values, since the liminal illustrated the point at which a particular actor was to be found. As Roxanne Lynn Doty pointed out, subject positioning lines up the possibility of opposition, complementarity or identification. In these three particular instances the main subject positioning to deal with was the one that Merje Kuus outlined as follows:

“The EU is conceived as a disciplining power, operative in the minds of Eastern Europeans even if they are not conscious of it. (...) the relationship between the West and East-Central Europe is construed in terms of the viewing (Western) subject and the monitored (Eastern) object”.

This, in fact, applies quite well to the Turkish case, too. Out of the three countries, Romania has most faithfully and unquestionably adopted the premises of this relationship (although there have been occasionally characters who opposed it). Turkey did not really subscribe to it explicitly, as Romania did, and her relation with Europe has been that of a turbulent student making demands on the master, but a student, no less. Ironically, the fact that in Turkey the remarks of European leaders had so much bearing, strongly underlined the viewing/being monitored relationship. Ukraine, on the other hand, seemed to hover only at the margins of this liminality creating relationship and did not really adopt its terms. The main reasons invoked for this attitude were the fear of having another “big brother” to survey her moves.

In the Romanian case, liminal images accompanied what has often been termed Romania’s “entry into history”, namely the change of her subject positioning and predicates from a

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marginal, passive country suffering the hardships of history, into an active agent of her own destiny, capable of producing benefits for those who accepted her in their midst, namely other European nation-states. This essentially happened twice. Once, during what has been termed the “historical period” of the Romanian discourse on the liminal that presented the moments of its articulation and evolution up to the image of the bridge and the “plaque tournante” of her region. Twice, during the period under extensive analysis, which had to pick up where the previous interval had been cut-off by the advent of communism. The main difference with the first period was the completion of the goal of “entry into history”, through integration into EU and becoming a European frontier. This presupposed the adoption of a relationship with Europe as mentioned above. Hence, liminal images were intertwined with an itinerary of identification with European values, which went from partial recognition, as a buffer and shield of Europe to acceptance and formal identification with Europe through becoming one of its frontiers. In other words, the road from “almost in” to “in”. This process was accompanied by a gradual description of Romania as an active agent of her own destiny, who learnt the hard way that choices have to be made and respected in order to send credible signals to her potential partners. In a paradoxical way, Romania (and Turkey) as a case shows that in order to get rid of a certain behavioural ambiguity which would be traditionally seen as a “symptom” of liminality, of in-between-ness, it was necessary to accept her liminal positioning (geographically) and learn how to translate it geopolitically without being duplicitous. In the game of interlocking identities played with Europe, Romania graduated, to a certain extent, from being the lagging student of “master” Europe to being a worthy recruit of European values. Her task now is to assume the responsibility and the statues (statutes?) of being a European frontier.

The Turkish case is somewhat more complex, because liminal images were associated in a first phase with Turkey being “in”, or rather seeing herself as being “in” Europe and the West, and then with the realisation that indeed being a buffer and an outpost did not mean identification with Europe, but at best complementarity. As mentioned in the Turkey chapter, in the early 1990s, the heavily laboured “we” of the 1950s and early 1960s, which had survived the troubled decades of the 1970s and 1980s, split, and quickly became “us” and “them”, a result which was caused both by European rhetoric and policies, and by Turkish stubbornness and reluctance to reform. This marked the renewal of a Turkish assault on the European bastion, in the sense of trying to re-conquer a sense of community and commonality, which was tantalisingly elusive throughout the 1990s and some of the 2000s. Indeed, the 1990s showed a Turkey who had to start more or less from scratch in terms of her positioning far from Europe, and who had to re-iterate her will for eventual identification with it. If in security and geopolitical terms it was possible to argue Turkey’s closeness and sometimes similarity to Europe, not to mention use, in terms of identity, the gap was widest and most difficult to bridge. There is no surprise then that the “us” and “them” dichotomy continued to exist in moments such as the Luxembourg rejection of Turkey’s candidature for membership, when Europe seemed to Turks to be more like the enemy and double standards referee than the beacon of standard of civilisation they claimed to see in it. Liminal images in those moments were important, because through their repetition and insistent mention, Turkish elites made clear their desire for a continuous relation
and rapprochement with Europe, in spite of the existence of other foreign policy options. By the end of 2006, subject positioning did not move towards complete identification, but the image of the bridge firmly consolidated positions in a relation of linkage and communication. An important element present in the Turkish case was the explicit dialogue with Europe and occasionally the US on Turkey’s value and position, which had a direct impact on how she portrayed herself. European input and responses to Turkish proposals affected the re-scaling of Turkish ambitions, but also the reforms, which ultimately improved Turkey’s standing in the eyes of Europe, proving that the “master-student” relationship was the dominant mode until the end of 2006. However, it is fair to say that Turkey gained in confidence gradually in this relation, as the liminal images and articulations she used also showed.

Predicates in the Turkish case rarely indicated a passive actor. However, at times, certain expressions or characterisations suggested that the Turks were aware of a certain ambiguity, stubbornness and occasional duplicity in their policies, all attributes of a negative liminality.

Ukraine was quite a difficult case to disentangle in terms of subject positioning and predicates, because so many of the available texts seemed to be intent on avoiding clear opinions regarding these issues. Historically, Ukraine appeared as struggling to be able to liberate herself from the Russian yoke in order to become an agent of her own destiny. Hence, Russia appeared as her oppressive “Other”. The insistence on the image of the buffer between Russia and Europe, with an emphasis on protecting Europe and European values, indicated a desire to have at least a relationship of complementarity and potential identification with Europe. However, Ukrainian neutrality complicated this stance, as did the Kuchma years with their multi-vector equidistant foreign policy. From this attitude it was not very clear what exactly Ukrainian elites thought of Europe, or where they placed themselves in relation to it. Their affirmations suggested they admired the European social and political system and they wanted the benefits that the European rule of law brought to a country. However, presented in very technical terms, there were no indications of how these elements fit into a grander scheme of things, in the historical “longue-durée”, in Ukraine’s destiny. Was Europe seen as just a model, or as a teacher too? Was it seen as an equal? Some suggested that Europe’s potential for becoming another “Big Brother” to Ukraine is what put her elite off from grander discourses. As a result, subject positioning was quite under-determined, and implicit rather than explicit. It was clear, however, that Russia hovered in the not so distant background as a menacing former master who would always have something to say about Ukraine’s future.

There existed, nevertheless, some firm voices that were pro-European and wanted to present Ukraine as decidedly set on a European path, thus positioning her on some kind of traceable trajectory, as part of the “European project”. However, even amongst them, few were talking about a vision encompassing a historic destiny, a fact which essentially re-scaled the Ukrainian position to that of a secondary agent, or so was the impression conveyed.

Such was the impression strengthened by predicates referring to Ukraine. They followed a depreciative path from the enthusiasm of the early 1990s, when Ukraine was seen as full of potential and advantages, to the portrait of a confused and directionless country, whose decision-makers did not seem to always understand fully the consequences and meanings of their policy choices, i.e. the pro-European and pro-NATO ones. Much of this state of facts
was also due to the deep divisions present in the country. The post-Orange Revolution elite attempted to rectify the unfavourable image of the country, by putting out a more decided portrait of an entity who has made a firm choice and intended to pursue it. Very few mentions of the liminal were made in this respect, however.

Subject positioning and predicates were the elements that completed the contours of the discourse (or lack thereof) on the liminal because they showed what kind of characteristics pertaining to actors were associated with liminal images; they were the ones which indicated whether the liminal was perceived as a positive or a negative feature and indicated if any transformation or evolution was to be observed in the agents together with the evolution of liminal images themselves. Subject positioning and predicates were also important factors in signifying the presence of a modernisation and progress narrative by showing whether the actors were considered to be “in” or “out”, “passive” or “active”, “modern” or “less modern”, “European” or “almost European”. In the case of Romania and Turkey, it was possible to identify a pronounced such narrative, which in its turn created the discursive space for the appearance of liminal images as indicators of progress along their desired itinerary. This feature was intertwined with the practice of inscribing and re-inscribing liminal images with every opportunity available, which created a cumulative effect of images, to be used as a fallback option in case progress to a superior stage was denied or delayed. Thus, if Turkey were not to be a frontier of Europe, yet, she could still use her former status as outpost of the free world and shield of Europe as an indication of her potential and intentions. The same was true for Romania. If she could not yet be an anchor of democracy, she could revert to her bridging quality and function.

In Ukraine, a weak narrative of modernisation and progress did not mean Ukrainians did not want them. It indicated, rather, that Ukrainians had not fully adopted this language and these concepts to represent the transformation process that affected them. By not adopting this terminology, they also kept the liminal as a potential way of representing their position, but not as a dominant one, as in the other two cases.

According to Ann Norton, liminality is about eluding classifications, it is a blend of lowliness and sacredness, liminars are constructed in contradiction and liminality is politically significant because it transforms weakness into strength and shows that new orders can arise from it8.

The three cases under study emphasise and illustrate differently all the above features. For example, the Romanian discourse in its initial phase insisted to a great degree on the lowliness/sacredness pair, reminding Europe of Stefan the Great’s crusading spirit for the protection of Christianity and of the Romanian sacrifice for the well being and development of a democratic West. Even as late as the 1990s, Adrian Nastase called Romania the “prodigal son” coming back to the European fold.

Turkey emphasised more the constitution in contradiction and the fact that she eluded classifications, producing a great degree of puzzlement both amongst her population and

observers. Turkey poses a special challenge to Europe in that respect, asking it to remain European and different at the same time.

0. The case of Ukraine, in virtue of the history of the country, evidenced the issue of the liminar’s invisibility as well its contradictory aspects. Questions such as “Does Ukraine have a history?” poignantly pointed to a certain invisibility of the nation. A somewhat similar trait was suggested in the Romanian case when commentators spoke about the need to “enter history”, finally.

Significantly, in all three cases (but particularly the Romanian and Turkish ones) the positive potential of the countries’ placement was tirelessly told, retold, recast in different images. It pointed precisely to the proteic character of the liminar, capable of imagining and giving birth to new orders and configurations, first and foremost new liminal configurations, as the Turkish and Romanian cases show.

In the relation between Europe and the liminal, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine show that liminality in this part of the world is a function generated by a particular European discourse which evolves by continuously creating “East” for Europe, in the process of extension of its values and principles. This is a fact pointed out by Ole Waever, Merje Kuus and Bahar Rumelili amongst others, which these cases confirm and illustrate. However, the only reason why this kind of liminality is constantly created is because Europe’s interlocutors accept to participate in the exchange under this particular form, and adopt a language which consolidates the process of creation of the liminal. Romania and Turkey are a good example. By their insistence that their role as liminars is crucial for Europe if it wants to spread its civilisation and if it wants to be heard and understood by Others, they are also implying that a certain core Europe will never be able to communicate and exchange with the rest of the world if it were not for them. Wittingly or not they reinforce the need for ever more liminars and liminality and make of it a necessary function of communication and integration. As Merje Kuus pointed out, there will always be another East to invent in order to prove one’s worthiness. In this, she echoed Bahar Rumelili’s stance according to which the European discourse created constant sites of liminality.9

At the same time, the adoption of liminal parlance and imagery has also proven to be quite successful in the relations between Europe and its candidates, Poland and Romania being cases in point of countries that cultivated a liminal imagery and eventually were integrated into the European fold. Turkey also seems set to be successful, eventually. This does not mean that the adoption of a liminal imagery is solely responsible for success, but rather that, in combination with other pro-European threads of discourse, such as the modernisation one, it proves to be an efficient and intelligible way of communicating intentions. Very important to remember is that the combination between liminal images and an insistence of joining Europe is a practice of mutual reinforcement of these two elements, which eventually de-legitimises or renders other policy options less appealing.

In Victor Turner’s terms, the process of relations with Europe can be compared with the ritual

of change in status suffered by the young person trying to join a new tribe. He needs to get rid of all his old clothes and symbols of former status, being naked and invisible for the community for a while before he emerges in the full potentiality of his new status. It is during this liminality that the full scope of his new role develops.

The merit of a case such as that of Ukraine, where a certain voice did not manage to impose itself, was to show what happens in an instance in which the language of the liminal was not firmly adopted. It revealed that this feature was also coupled with a lack of modernisation and progress narrative, thus underlining the fact that not having a clearly expressed goal prevented the development of landmarks that could measure evolution. It was not clear if the Ukrainians wished to propose another way, another language in which to cast their relationship to Europe, even if, to a certain extent, they did reveal a need for an alternative approach.

Overall, the three cases offered possibilities of representing linguistically a relational notion implying a certain evolution and transformation.

Reflections on the liminal

As specified in the introduction to this chapter, this section will outline what the three cases examined spell for the liminal in general. The analysis worked on the assumption that liminality is a relational and positional concept; as Ann Norton suggested in her writings about political liminality, it is always to be found in relation to a structure or a structural concept (such as class, wealth, ethnicity etc.) In this case, the structural concept was the rather abstract notion of European-ness, which embodied the ideal of modernity, democracy and rule of law as existent in the countries of the EU, and the wider notion of the “West”, that also included the United States. Relations with the EU and NATO constituted the focus of the analysis also because they were the central tenets (plural?) of the foreign policy of the countries under study.

The cases show that liminal images are stronger and more clearly defined when a relation is clearly expressed and narrated in the sense of explicit integration in the public policy discourse, when a trajectory from one point to another exists, when a programme to attain a certain goal is in place. The discourse on the liminal goes along the process and narrative of modernisation, signifying the degree of distance from the “core” through the various images employed.

For example, if we look at Europe and the West as a space of democratic values and principles, the liminal “stick” essentially measured the distance or rapprochement to this space, through the different images chosen to represent it. They all bore a “family air” with the initial sense of the word “limes”, where liminality stems, namely “threshold”; the family air was given by the fact that they all signified some degree of in-between-ness. These images were the barrier/ buffer, the bridge/ plaque tournante and the frontier, all having a certain number of variations, with essentially the same sense. If one keeps the idea of liminality as a measuring stick, it can be said the barrier found itself at the far end from the goal to be achieved, whereas the frontier could be seen at the internal extremity of the “in” side. The “buffer” signifies the existence of contact, presupposition of mutual knowledge and a certain complementarity between the liminar and the entity it is liminal to; it does not presuppose a significant amount of exchange, but merely recognition of existence; the “bridge”
establishes the possibility of exchange and communication, moving closer to identification; the frontier-implies integration and identification, performing a function generally from the in-side. It must be borne in mind, however, that the liminal itself as a state is to be found on a continuum, which has marginality-liminality- in-side as its main elements.

Alternatively, Philip Smith\textsuperscript{10} elaborated on the vision of places as sacred, profane, liminal and mundane, four categories which he considers elementary for places. In this order of things and bearing in mind these particular cases, the liminals in my analysis are essentially trying to reach the sacred land of democracy, prosperity and rule of law, trying as much as possible to avoid profanity, which would alienate them excessively, but also mundanity, which would make them uninteresting and unappealing.

The three cases suggest that the liminal will, in general, not be denied by liminars (or not for long) and that they will turn to represent it as a great advantage and productive feature of their placement. Indeed, it would seem that it is at the moment of acceptance of their liminality that liminars can start to dare go beyond this state, which is never their ultimate desired one.

In view of the above, is it possible, then, to extrapolate the idea that the liminal performs a function in international relations and geopolitics? I believe the answer to be yes. Geopolitics, as well as international relations in general, has much to do with the issue of allegiances that lead to the formation of different configurations of power and interests. Liminars, Ann Norton tells us, are entities who find themselves between allegiances\textsuperscript{11}, often torn by conflicting aims and interests. As such, they introduce in most relationships, and very importantly, in the Self-Other nexus, a vital element: time. Because being liminal is part of a process, a transitional phase (from the incomplete modern and democratic self to the fulfilled modern nation), liminality introduces the possibility of change by accepting the transformation that time can bring. Without liminars, the Self and Other remain essentialised positions that can never quite communicate because they are too entrenched to see that, today, they are already no longer those of yesterday. Liminars are the breach through which time can do its work, and they represent both the past from which they come and the future towards they are headed. They are the carriers of what C. Mouffe has termed the “nomadic identity”. They allow both Self and Other to change without destabilising them, without cutting completely with their former selves. As a result, “The periphery moves beyond the limits of border thinking and the simple polarities of Self versus Other are losing their force”\textsuperscript{12}. Turkey is, perhaps, the best illustration of this instance, because she is challenging Europe to change, without betraying itself.

Two of the cases under examination in this analysis show that liminality is in many ways a matter of time, because it is about giving entities the opportunity to change in order to achieve their desired state. This might also by why entities can be liminal for a very long while: the hope of progress is constantly maintained.

\textsuperscript{10} Phillip Smith, 1999, op. cit., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{11} Ann Norton, 1988, op. cit., p. 53.
\textsuperscript{12} Gerard Delanty, 2007, op. cit.
Shortcomings of the research

As in any extensive research and analysis, there are several shortcomings that have infiltrated my writing and which I wish to acknowledge. The question of personal bias is of course a great challenge for any researcher, as it is an element that is not easily identifiable. The very choice of my research topic indicates a personal interest and an impulse that has constituted the main motivation behind my entire research. My deeper knowledge of Romanian language and history has definitely provided a comparative advantage with reference to the research I had to conduct in Turkey and Ukraine.

Indeed, one of the main drawbacks in these two latter cases has been the fact that I do not speak either Turkish or Ukrainian, nor am I familiar with their cultures to the degree of knowing exactly what to look for and where. During my field trips in these two countries I felt the distinct lack of personal networks, as well as the only partial knowledge of social codes of interaction in terms of soliciting interviews, for example. This has prevented me from acquiring first hand information of the kind I was able to obtain in Romania, for example. I had to appeal to the services of translators in order to be able to use texts that were referring to particular liminal-related themes. However, the advantage of not speaking the Turkish and Ukrainian languages or being overly familiar with their cultures has allowed me to have the detached approach of the outside observer, and I believe this has enabled me to make some crucial findings about the discourse on liminality, because I was not more closely involved with the matter. In the case of Romania, I had to be vigilant regarding the possibility of being too critical, or too indulgent concerning the findings examined.

Another drawback in the analysis is the unevenness in the nature of the sources examined. In the Ukrainian case I have had a reduced access to primary sources, and overall, in all cases, I believe it would have been useful to have more interviews with decision-makers and observers of geopolitical and foreign policy discourses. This would have provided a more first-hand type of information about the ideas and conceptions that shape the decision-makers views, as well as the shared vision within their group.

Regarding the methodological and theoretical frameworks, they both have been challenged by the Ukrainian case. From the point of view of the methodology, the exclusive look at elite statements, academic and media analyses has hit the basic problem of the divorce between public opinion and leadership, as well as the seeming split of Ukraine into eastern and western parts. Also, the opinion surveys conducted by Ukrainian polling institutes are structured around a very technical type of questions, geared at quantitative rather than a qualitative evaluation of public opinion.

In fact, Ukraine underscores more than the other two cases a larger question concerning the liminal: due to its contradictory nature, it is relatively hard to identify what is liminal behaviour, and what is a purely opportunistic instrumentalisation of arguments. In looking at the context for the liminal images and representations, I have tried to address this issue by uncovering the kind of logic in which liminal references could be found.
From the point of view of the literature examined for this study, in many cases it does not apply to Ukraine, because it assumes a certain homogeneity of identity that is not occurring in this country. Also, as I have shown, Ukraine does not seem to have truly accepted the kind of parlance and dialogue that the EU offers its “lesser” partners, and therefore, has not bought into the liminality creation discourse. However, the drawbacks revealed by the Ukrainian case confirm Bahar Rumelili’s basic affirmation that, as long as the EU will project its collective identity and it will attract supporters and potential candidates for its integration, there will always be liminar entities around it.

**Future research themes**

The end of this analysis leaves several open avenues of research connected to the liminal. First of all, keeping largely the same framework and case studies, it would be interesting to extend the research to a wider base of materials rather than just those produced by elites, looking at more documentary sources, such as geography and history schoolbooks, academic conferences, university courses, public surveys, and cultural materials such as popular stories, in order to see how deep the liminal theme runs in the self-perception of a certain nation.

I have mentioned in the Turkish and Romanian cases instances in which a particular representation of the liminal had trickled down to manuals in nation wide schools. In Turkey, it was a particular vision of geopolitics that was taught in high-schools; in Romania the example concerned the way in which a particular historical figure, Stefan the Great, was represented in school books, in connection to his role as a Christian crusader and protector of Christianity. I believe there would be potential in looking more extensively into this type of material in order to identify what were the intentions of state authorities with respect to the kind of ideas they wanted the population to hold about the country. Looking at the other kinds of materials mentioned above would show how successful the state was in conveying a set of visions.

Second, there is a possibility to look at liminality in the same way as suggested by Hankiss, by examining the transitional processes that states and countries go through and comparing them to the different stages of the liminals. For example, one can look at the actions and processes which make an entity entry (enter?) a liminal phase and examine the permanent attempt to catch up with Europe and modernisation as part of it; this type of examination would imply a historical view of political, social and economic trends, extended over a much longer period of time, compared to the periods studied in this case. This is the kind of process that is suggested by Merje Kuus in her article, where she claims that Easts are permanently created through the enlargement of the EU, and therefore there is always a race to “catch-up” that makes particular areas always be in a transitional liminar state.

Third, it would be extremely interesting to extend this type of analysis and framework not

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13 See the case of Turkey and Romania, above.
14 Elemer Hankiss, op. cit.
only to other countries encompassed in Europe’s East, but also to countries who have been part of Europe for awhile, such as Spain, Portugal, or Greece, so as to ascertain if the question of their accession has also been framed in terms of liminality. Has the fact that Spain and Greece are relatively close to Northern Africa and, respectively, to the Middle East, been at all a factor in the discourses concerning their accession to the EU? Are they perceived or do they perceive themselves as liminal in virtue of their positioning? Or have the commonality of their and Europe’s horizons of meaning been so close, so as to fully overcome most objections that could create a liminal image? Were they ‘othered’ and depicted as different by Europe on grounds of the “acquired” or inherent qualities of European-ness, as outlined by Bahar Rumelili\(^\text{16}\)?

Extending the number of empirical cases outside Europe will also help test whether this perpetuation of the liminal is only a European effect, an exclusive experience proper to Europe and those who surround it, or if, as Bahar Rumelili said, it is something that happens in the case of collective identities\(^\text{17}\), which always create liminars around them in virtue of their power of projection and attraction. In order to address such a research question, a useful strategy to apply would be the one suggested by Philip Smith\(^\text{18}\) and Rob Shields of looking into the narratives of places to see the kind of elements they uphold: the absurd, the sacred, the profane, the ludic. By discovering these elements it will be possible to find the indications of liminality or lack thereof.

Fourth, and somewhat remote from this study, there is another possible exploration of liminality, in the field of market studies. My research has uncovered a rather interesting notion: frontier markets.

“The term frontier markets is commonly used to describe the equity markets of the smaller and less accessible, but still “investable”, countries of the developing world. The frontier, or pre-emerging equity markets are typically pursued by investors seeking high, long-run return potential as well as low correlations with other markets. The implication of a country being labelled as frontier, or pre-emerging, is that the market will begin to develop similar levels of liquidity and exhibit similar risk and return characteristics to that of the more traditional emerging markets”\(^\text{19}\).

As such, the markets of Eastern Europe and Turkey are considered amongst this kind of markets, since they are not fully integrated to the international system, but can still yield interesting benefits. The link between the notion of “frontier markets” and liminal states is, in fact, not surprising, if one follows the logic that goes with the process of European integration, for example: countries who want to join have to progressively acquire the necessary attributes in order to be fully fledged members. Until then, they are in a transitional phase. This applies equally to economic integration. However, because “the market” is actually greater than the

\(^{16}\) Bahar Rumelili, 2004, op. cit., p. 45.
\(^{17}\) Idem, p. 43.
EU, the study of the discourse around frontier markets might constitute an interesting test of whether “the market” as a collective identity - made out of discourses and practices - has actually produced the subjects of “frontier markets” in order to designate those entities that seem to be in a liminal phase. If such a concept applies, then it could be said that the notion of liminality has a larger potential than previously thought.
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