A group of well established academics, some famous, others with a rather discrete public presence, met in November 2008 at the „Babeș-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca, under the auspices of several academic and cultural institutions, to discuss the intertwining of national and European identity, resulting in this book of collected papers. Although at a superficial glance the content of the volume may seem heterogeneous, one can easily find the three main motifs of the book which are I might say a representative sample of contemporary Romanian debates on identity, especially when the humanities are concerned: 1) national (i.e. Romanian in this case) identity and the quest for a European sense of attachment; 2) the criticism or the apology of nationalism; 3) the recent waves of international migration affecting Romania and especially the definition of Romania as a nation. Though my frame of analysis could appear to the editors and the authors themselves, as reductionist, the core of this excellently written and edited book is clearly informed by these themes.

One of the main messages of a great part of the authors is stated from the introductory chapter of the volume, written by the editors (Vasile Boari and Sergiu Gherghina) where the quest for the search of Europe's soul is predicated. No wonder that the crisis of the European identity is equated by Vasile Boari in his chapter (The European Identity Crisis, pp. 41-60) to Europe becoming soulless, in fact more and more distant from its own cultural and spiritual specificity, that is the Christian tradition. The argument is similar, although largely unexpected from an economist, in Daniel Dăianu's article (A Strained European Model: Is There an Identity Crisis at Play?, pp. 20-40) which is analysing the prospects of the European social and economic model in the context of the global crisis: grim future expects the European economies and societies if moral values like 'honesty, trustworthiness, honour and respect, loyalty, hard work, education, family, community, altruism, compassion and love for one's country' (p. 38) are not reinstated at the foundations of our societies. Localism based on the spiritual and cultural traditions of the European regions is promoted by Mihai Spăriosu in his essay as a last resort against the levelling forces of global economy with its deadly avalanche of 'malls, consumerism, pop-culture, centralized bureaucracies and technocracies' (p. 76). To the argument that the Christian roots constitute the pillar of European spirituality and should therefore be included into the text of the European constitution Adrian Paul-Iliescu opposed vehemently the issue of the relevance for the future (as opposed to the presumed obsession for the past) and the alternative vision of Europe as an embodiment of open society for which cultural essentialism is not exactly the best recommended ingredient (pp. 110-111).

Andrei Marga in a philosophical tour de force (Identities and Correlation of Identities, pp. 78-
95) makes several important points concerning the topic of identity in contemporary social thinking, all regarding the tensions between European attachments and ethnic identification: 1) pre-1990 social theory largely ignored the theme of ethnicity as compared to other issues like social stratification; 2) ethnic identity has to be integrated into a theory of multiple identities for which Eric Ericsson and Luhmann provide the bases; 3) essentialist conceptions of the states – which usually entail nationalist emotions should be replaced by generative approaches to nation, a narrative of the state in which the focus shifts from the commonalities of the inhabitants to the ‘genesis of the nations’ (p. 84); 4) modernization is hindered by traditional ethnic identifications; 5) European identity has to be understood as a dynamic one, in an on-going genesis through the processes of European integration where multiple tensions and ambiguities are to be expected. Toader Nicoară and Simona Nicoară contemplate the perils that are faced by history as a discipline providing the raw material for the national narrative in the form of collective memory (The Modern Nation, Daughter of Memory, pp. 140-149). The obsessive commemoration of the past and the collective victimization and out-group hostility that are inherent to that (p. 146) should be answered by historians by ‘rediscovering the past as a present that used to be’ (p. 147). An important contribution to disseminating Romanians’ concerns over their collective identity is brought in the book by the review of Gabriel Andreescu (The Paradox of National Identity: Its Cultural-Political Power vs. Theoretical Poverty, pp. 150-167). While other authors approach in an analytic, be that theoretical or empirical, vein the problem of identity, Andreescu endeavours a synthesis of the Romanian studies in this area, where he follows, inductively, two main directions: ethnic and national myths, on the one hand, and self-stereotypes on the other. Whoever needs a cultivated digest on the Romanian national and ethnic ideologies will find this article valuable and even a pleasant lecture.

If the aforementioned articles are at the deconstructing side of the national narratives the two chapters by Ion Aurel Pop and Lucian Boia are at the other side. It is no coincidence that these two articles, written by two of the best Romanian historians, are placed at the end of the book as closing brackets. Ion Aurel Pop for example provides the reader with a brief history of the concept of Romanian identity in Romanian culture. Lucian Boia develops an interesting hypothesis connecting the historical and cultural traits of Romania to a specific geopolitical destiny, that of being at the borderline of civilizations and cultures which entails both isolation (i.e. remoteness) and openness (i.e. mixture) (Romania, A Borderland, pp. 260-268).

The anthropological questioning of identities, in their dynamic, layered and sometimes contradictory structure and existence is also represented in the volume. Aziliz Gouez (‘We Shall Bring You Our Vices’: Shifting Forms and Meanings of European Belonging in Romania and Italy, pp. 113-139) discusses at length the political, cultural and economic avatars of belonging to Banat with a look on both the history of the place as well as on the micro-level effects of macro dynamics as the EU enlargement, transnational migration, economic globalization and the current economic downturn. Identity transformation is again put under analysis by Andrada Costoiu (Romanian Diasporas: Transnational Practices and an Identity between Endurance and Hybridity, pp. 210-243) who investigated the changes in identity suffered by Romanian immigrants in US, making the necessary distinctions between generations of immigrants and between immigrants before and after the fall of communism.

Starting his study from building hypotheses on the relationship between two opposing forms of attachments (nationalism vs. cosmopolitanism) and subjective well-being, Sergiu Bălătescu concludes after the analysis of Romanian Eurobarometer data that ‘all personal and national well-being variables influence the pride of being Romanian’ (p. 205) and ‘both personal and national well-being variables, as well as national identity indicators would influence the subjective well-being of the Romanians’ (idem). Against hasty generalizations and policy recommendations the author highlights that his results cannot make clear the causal relations between the involved variables more analytic effort being required to answer if patriotism can make people happy or,
more likely I would presume, happy people tend to feel stronger links to their communities (National Identity and Happiness: A Quantitative Study with Romanian Data, pp. 184-209).

To conclude, the book is rich in theoretical and methodological concerns and perspectives. Conceptual and historical analyses are combined with normative debates while the readers’ understanding of Romanian discussions over the topic of identity is bolstered by several sound empirical articles. The international scholar could hardly find a better source on contemporary academic debates devoted to the issue of European and national identities. For those looking for certainties reading the volume will bring disappointment: it clarifies some questions of national and European identities without forwarding final judgments and sentences. For example it becomes clear that the status of Christian legacy is critical for the definition of European culture or that setting our national identity in European context requires a reappraisal of Romanian historical narratives (using the generative approach maybe, as proposed by Andrei Marga) but the answer to the dilemmas and tensions in today’s structure of belongings, attachments and beliefs relies in the process of addressing them in an on-going public debate to such critical questions.

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