Angelina Banović-Markovska

Sts. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, Macedonia

Pan-nationalism and the European Union: how to achieve a European political and cultural identity

Abstract: Acceptance of the European Union as the common perspective of the various nationalities, does not necessarily exclude ethnicity; on the contrary, it is an effort that may see implemented a rational and political construct that aims to preserve uniqueness. As dictated by the Universalist concept of the union, peculiarities are crucial in forging the long awaited common *European cultural identity*, as a socio-psychological pendant of the national identities.

Although I acknowledge that all political concepts are surrounded by some level of controversy; I also accept the following conclusion, excerpt from Thomas Meyer's book *Die Identität Europas* [Europe's Identity]:

The E.U. is a creation which, at best, may encounter a rational approval or the will for accommodative participation*, but not an emotive identification*. Identification with the union as an entity and structure of political influence, probably, and always to a large extent, *will only be of a reflexive nature such as that of the postmodern form of political identity* [*Trans., Italics mine*]. (Meyer, 2004/2009, p. 54)

What sort of cultural union is expected to emerge out of the current European project, then? Can this integration be achieved along the lines of an international legal condominium of sorts, or through

a political unification in the form of a superstate or a supranational union? These are some of the outstanding questions that have not been properly addressed yet.

Nevertheless, such dilemmas assure me that acceptance of the European Union[1] as the common perspective of the various nationalities, does not necessarily exclude ethnicity; on the contrary, it is an effort that may see implemented a rational and political construct that aims to preserve uniqueness. As dictated by the Universalist concept of the union, peculiarities are crucial in forging the long awaited common *European cultural identity* as a supernational and global construct of the union that is to give smaller and somewhat forsaken nations a chance. But, let us first trace and consider the origins of this conception.

Although the term *Europenses* was initially coined in the early 8th century, for a long time it had been confined to the realm of allegory. Indeed, it had remained so until the 14th century, when the vision of Europe as a 'family of nations' (referring to a continental community unified in defense against the advancing Islamic threat, a mutual fate of theirs) had resurrected.

The Renaissance-period spiritual geography experienced and described Europe as a continent in expansion, and as the head (*le cap*) or the brain of a large body, the ambition of which did not merely seize with its will to be *a point of departure* (an archetype for discovery and colonization). Similarly, it was understood that this large body would not satisfice with being *an axis* of civilization either, but would also strive to become *the endpoint* and final frontier of all technological advances. Instead of urging unity, *the large family* promoted a myth which, in turn, produced a split in the heart of the continent (that had no clearly defined borders, but owned a powerful vision of what it had yet to become. This myth conditioned the strengthening of their belief that in the 'Great Whole' there is a 'Small Part' that does not quite belong to the former, while existing simultaneously both within and outside of it; similar, yet different.

Known by the designation 'Balkans,' this inner part of Europe was not treated only as a territorial subregion, but also as 'the kingdom of shadows,' as the Id[2] to the western European Ego, and a zone symbolic of the unconscious mind that produced an analogy with Freud's understanding of the *non-identicality of self*. This identification of the Balkans seems to have been the result of the centuries-long stereotyping of the region that suppressed the facts of Europe's cultural provenance. Namely, as the *composition of various distinct determinations* that complete one another to form an *identity of differences*, the Balkans gave birth to the cultural and spiritual assumption of the rise of a European spirit and civilization.

During classical antiquity, the greatest humanistic disciplines (including philosophy, law, literature, democracy, etc.) emerged and flourished in the region

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[1] What is the territorial extent of the geographic and political concept of united Europe? And what are its borders? - The Bosporus, Russia, or even further beyond?

[2] An *inner other* who "*doesn't forget anything and doesn't learn anything; who continues to fight centuries-old battles, while the rest of Europe is busy with the rapid progress of globalization*." (Žižek, 2001, p. 152)

corresponding to the Balkans. They comprised the backbone of the European mentality; nevertheless, that fact is constantly marginalized and disregarded nowadays. If the numerous historical periods that were underway simultaneously, in succession, or separately in the Balkan Peninsula (so-called Southeastern Europe) are taken into consideration, it becomes clear how the complex ethnic and religious makeup of this area was able to succeed in provoking commentaries diagnosing a certain kind of 'disadvantage due to heterogeneity'.

Yet, this very 'disadvantage' was a distinct trait that they had inherited from the Ottoman rule (but in reality from the period of the Roman and Byzantine empires), and which was essentially contrary to the concept of the nation-state, coined in the western lands. The ethnic makeup as a cultural phenomenon is discussed further on in the paper. Here I would consider once again the construct of the *European political identity*.

In one of his public academic lectures, in 1999, French theoretician Étienne Balibar noted that the fate of this 'European identity' was being decided in the Balkans. He thus presented two possible scenarios:

Either Europe will recognize in the Balkan situation… an *image and effect of its own history* and will undertake to confront it and resolve it… Or else it will refuse to come to face-to-face with itself and will continue to treat the problem as *an exterior obstacle* to be overcome through exterior means, including colonization [*Italics mine*]. (Balibar, 2001/2003, p. 6)

Bulgarian theoretician Maria Todorova later explained in her seminary titled "The symbolist geographies of Europe" that in addition to *national identity*, she also considers *regional identity* to be of great significance; as microstructures of sorts, regions often transcend assumed physical borders. Namely, as a subregion of the Eurasian continent (which on its part historically hosted complex interactions between the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), the territory of the contemporary European Union[3] was not merely a 'region of nations', but a center of global colonization and industrialization. (Todorova, 73/19, 2005) Todorova explained further that the term 'Southeastern Europe' carries a negative connotation for the public in the E.U. countries, to the point that it had gained the status of an 'intellectually-void space' in the diplomatic vocabulary of more recent policies.

Such opinions (and stigmatization) prove the necessity for the reintegration of this subregion within the political borders of Europe, and therefore within its democratic public domain that hosts an ongoing *meeting of cultures*. Without this reintegration, the progress of European political thought will stagnate; for all its quests for identity will result in the confirmation and their becoming aware of their own incompleteness. I am therefore deliberating on the means necessary to prepare the Balkans for the novel *transnational identity*, and for a new *"post-national" type of citizenship* (*citoyenneté)*. Finally, which path should Europe take in the future?

In order to attempt an answer to the question posed in this paper's headline – and firmly believing that these digressions haven't distracted your patience - here I will return to the mentioned issue of the Balkan

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[3] Also known as Visigothic Europe.

ethnic fusion and the European construct of the nation-state. Finally, it is widely accepted that the nation and nationalism (both as thoughts and activity) have proven to be the most attractive global phenomena of modern times; similarly, national identity is regarded as one of the most significant means of achieving collective identification and determination. Indeed, these constructs have shaped the world during the past couple centuries and will likely continue to play an important role in the future; the will to facilitate not so much a political, as a *cultural reevaluation* of our *collective identities*, inevitably leads to a paradoxal state.

Namely, there is a form of nationalism that is farther-reaching in scope than the predictable compact nation – *pan-nationalism*. I find evidence of this form in the 19th-century movement known as *pan-Slavism*[4]. Pan-Slavism was essentially an attempt to unite states and peoples in a political, and above all, in a *cultural union*, based on common traits that despite their various peculiarities are able to form a 'cultural family of nations.' As a type of cultural unification, pan-nationalism is less institutionalized (as opposed to a political or economic integration), and can therefore present wider horizons to existing compact national identities; pan-nationalism can also

act as counterweight to the numerous ethnic types of nationalism.

In fact, certain historical milestones (such as the 1992 Maastricht Treaty on the formation of the European Union and its ratification in 1993), conditioned such thinking. Although founded as an economic (by contents) and as a political (by design) integration, the concept of the European Union is based on wider European cultural notions and traditions, including: the similarity of their political customs and institutions; the common European cultural codex based on the inherited Roman law; civil rights and democracy; Christian ethic; Renaissance humanism; rationalism; classicism; Romanticism; etc. These were all molded into a common European cultural heritage that brought Europeans together in a mélange, thereby transcending the various national cultures, and conditioned the emergence of a cultural pan-European nationalism to take them beyond their own nations. Anthony Smith explains in his book:

If a European political union is established that would have following among the people, then we may rest assured that on the basis of the common European cultural heritage, a *pan-European nationalist movement* would be founded; this movement would be capable of coining common European myths and symbols, and values and memories, in a way that they will not compete with the powerful and energetic national cultures. That is the only way in which *pan-nationalism can be the creator of the new type of collective identity that overcomes, but does not abolish the various nations* [Trans., Italic mine]. (Smith, 1991/1998, p. 269)

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[4] Even though it didn't include all Slavic peoples, pan-Slavism was an extensive and influential movement that facilitated a cultural rebirth among those who spoke Slavic languages, and who shared common ideas and sentiments. And while it didn't achieve political success, the project for "Yugoslavism" was one of the attempts at pan-nationalism; but, it was based on wrong foundations. Nevertheless, this is a sensitive topic that requires further elaboration.

Despite this vision, Smith was aware that cosmopolitanism doesn't diminish, nor does nationalism abolish, the powers of ethnohistory and the necessity for collective immortality. Nevertheless, one such *global collective identity*[5]could instill new energy in the specific nations, as members of a continental *family of cultures*, ready to enjoy and tolerate *diversity*. Indeed, only the acceptance of diversity (and even of diverging beliefs) is the key necessary to understand and undertake this ambitious political project in the making – the establishment of a common *European cultural identity* as a socio-psychological pendant of the national identities.

Seen as a universal, post-national, or supernational concept, the construct of the common European identity will promote the idea of open dialogue between East and West, North and South, and between the Balkans and Europe, as our common destiny. That should be among the primary tasks of the public policies of all European countries, because as the European and national identities are increasingly becoming intertwined, it is difficult to speak of national identities without the sense of belonging to Europe.

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[5] According to the constitutional patriotism of Jürgen Habermas, the redefining of collective identities should be based on a common political will, and more specifically to a democratic understanding of society that is based more on common ideas, rather than common emotions.

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Ангелина Бановиќ - Марковска

Паннационализмот и Европската Унија
(или како до европски политички и културен идентитет)

Резиме: Прифаќањето на Европската Унија како заедничка перспектива на различни националности, не значи отфрлање на поимот етницитет, напротив – тоа е настојување со кое би можело да биде имплементирана една рационална и политичка концепција која се залага за зачувување на посебностите. Впишани во глобалниот и универзален концепт на Унијата, тие би биле клучот за реализирање на долгонајавуваниот *европски културен идентитет* како социопсихолошки пандан на националните идентитети.

Клучни зборови: Европска Унија, пан-национализам, европски културен идентитет, транснационален идентитет, етницитет