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**THE CONCEPT OF THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL IDENTITY
AND THE BORDERS OF EUROPE: REAL, IMAGINARY AND
IDEOLOGICAL**

Key words: Europe, the Balkans, identities, borders, heterogeneity

The protohistory of Europe is a protohistory of a *nameless continent* (Denis de Rougemont) populated gradually, civilised and brought to life by people, ideas and crafts, coming from the coast of the Middle East. The Renaissance spiritual geography saw it and described it as an expanding continent, as a head ("le cap") or a brain of a large body whose ambition did not end only in the desire to be a '*starting point*' (an arche for all discoveries and colonisations) or a *centre* (the centre of the centre = civilisation), but also a *final point* (telos = horizon or limit to all technical achievements). Even though it appeared in the 8th century, the term "Europenses" remained for a long time in the area of allegory, up until the 14th century when the atrophied vision of Europe was renewed, of Europe as a 'family of nations', as a continental community united in the common fate – defense against Islam. But, instead of unity, the vision produced a myth which created a vacuum (chasm) in the heart of Europe fortifying the belief that in the Great Whole there is a Small Part which does not belong to it entirely, since it is, at the same time, both inside and outside of it, similar yet different. Known as the Balkans, this part was treated not only as a territorial subregion, but as a 'Kingdom of Shadows', as a zone of the symbolic unconscious of Europe which produced the analogy with the Freudian understanding of the *non-identity of the identity*. It makes me wonder if there is at all a convincing holistic view of a European history in which – at least once – the Balkans will not be seen as the Id of the Western European Ego, as an *internal Other* who "forgets nothing and learns nothing, still fighting battles of centuries, while the rest of Europe is busy with the speedy process of globalisation" (Žižek, 2001:152). Most probably not, although, as a *composite of different identities* which mutually complement each other in an *identity of differences*, the Balkans is, at the same time, both a centre and periphery, both an *ergon* and *parergon* of what is called the European spirit and civilisation.

In the theoretical discourse of Europe, in previous years, the predominant opinion is that the inquietude characteristic of our epoch, draws its excitement from the dilemmas related to the category of *space*, more specifically with a *spatial historiography* foretold in the books of Michel Foucault who, although implicitly, still categorically demonstrates his theoretical consciousness of the importance of crossreferencing history, biography and society. 'The space in which we live – writes Foucault – *in which erosion of our life, our time and our history takes place*, this space which gnaws at us and hollows us out is, in itself, a heterogenous space' (Foucault, 2007: 35-36 – my italics). With this, Foucault also proposes the question

of the place and the role of social subjects in a wider geographical contextualisation. If we take into consideration the numerous historical periods which simultaneously, successively or dispersively have passed through the region of the so-called South Eastern Europe, then it is clear why the complex ethnic and religious mixture of the Balkans could provoke comments which diagnosed some sort of a 'handicap due to heterogeneity'. But, this relative 'handicap', which makes the region more like the East than the West, is a specific characteristic, inherited from the Ottoman (and actually from the time of the Roman and Byzantine) empire, and is contrary to the concept of mono-national states taken from the countries of the Western world. That is why perhaps some British conservatives are right (or close to the truth) when they say that continental Europe today functions as a new version of the Balkanic Turkish empire, with Brussels as the new Istanbul, as a centre of power which creates spatial ghettos within Europe, provoked enough to bring into question even the stability of its borders. In all truth, recent history has not tried to refute this supposition, but the future cannot be that grim. This is so because of a number of reasons but, most importantly, because of the fact that the citizens of South East Europe know the lesson on borders too well (those public ones which guarantee their and the sovereignty of their neighbours) and limitations (those imaginary, symbolic and politically extorted limitations).

Namely, as generators of meanings, *borders* for people of South East Europe, have the face of Janus. Their double, inside/outside nature means that they both unite and divide two sides. They are, at the same time, both a *limitation and a closeness*: limitation of the Self and the Otherness, but also their bonding in a real geographic *chronotope*. Yet, instead of the desired and logical process of hybridisation, borders often produce gaps of cultural and political antagonism. They are negotiated over for a long time from the position of power and authority (as in the case with my country's name, Macedonia), but that is another, very sensitive and painful topic....That is why I will return to the concept of the *European political identity*, which I introduced in the title of my presentation.

In 1999, at one of his public academic lectures, the French theorist (Étienne Balibar) said that the fate of the *European identity* today will be decided on the Balkans and that there *are* two possibilities: 'either that in the Balkan situation, Europe will recognise...the *image and the consequence of its history* and will do something in order to face it and solve that problem..., or it will refute that confrontation, stubbornly believing that the problem is merely an *external obstacle* which should be overcome by external means, including colonisation....' (Balibar; 2003: 27-28; my italics).

Five years later, as part of the seminar entitled *Symbolic Geographies of Europe*, the Bulgarian theorist Marija Todorova clarifies that besides the national, she finds the *regional identity* very important as well because, as macrostructures, regions – very often – surpass even the supposed spatial boundaries. Namely, as a subregion of the Euro - Asian continent (where complex historical interactions between three monotheistic religions have taken place: Christianity, Islam and Judaism), today's European Union (also known as Visigothic Europe) is not just a 'region of nations', but also a centre/pivot of world colonisation and industrialisation (Todorova; 73/19, 2005; <http://www.fabrikaknjiga.co.rs/rec/73/81.pdf>).

Todorova clarifies that the concept 'South East Europe' (known as the Balkans) has a negative connotation in the public. It has even become a 'mental empty space' in

the diplomatic vocabulary of some recent politics. But, such thinking (and stigmatising!) is evidence enough that there is a need for a (re)integration of this subregion within the political borders of Europe, in its democratic public space, in which there is a continual meeting amongst cultures. Without this meeting there is no progress in humanity, or the political thought in Europe, because each *quest for an identity* also confirms the consciousness of *one's own insufficiency*. Let me try to clarify this.

In order for us to understand ourselves, we need the Other, his/her view and his/her readiness to acknowledge and tolerate our *diverseness*. It is this *diverseness* that is one of the most sensitive questions on the Balkans (particularly for us, Macedonians), due to the continuous pressure by one particular country member of the European Union (our southern neighbour, the Republic of Greece), whose intensified discourse of cultural monism denies the constitutional name of my country, Macedonia. Needless to say, the abovementioned *diverseness* does not only entail a difference in attitudes, but also a chance to transform the twodecade long dispute into a compromise, because only the acceptance of diverseness (even the acceptance of differences in opinion) is the key to understanding and implementing an ambitious political project in creation – creating a *European cultural identity*. Understood as a universal, postnational or, if you allow, an *ubernational entity* it will realise the idea of an *open* dialogue between the East and the West, the North and the South, the Balkans and Europe – as our, common (Euro)destiny. Although I am aware that there is no political concept free of controversy, I accept Thomas Meyer's statement who, in his work entitled *The Identity of Europe* says: 'the EU is a creation which, at best, can be met with rational approval or a desire for an agreed participation, *but not with an emotional identification*. The identification with the Union as a unit/structure/element of political activity will, probably and to a great extent, be *only of a reflexive nature, just like the postmodern form of political identity*' (Meyer, 2009:54, my italics). This convinces me that the acceptance of the European Union as a common perspective of different nationalities does not mean the rejection of the term ethnicity. On the contrary, it would be ideal if the diverseness of national identities were to be inscribed into this universal and global concept because it is only in this way that the different European ethnicities could incorporate themselves in the *ubernational perspective of the European cultural identity*. The chance for the small and, I would say, somewhat forgotten Balkan nations, lies precisely in such a *global* concept. Actually, its creation also confirms the idea that the *space* of Europe – its borders – structured as a net of relations and meetings, is the most important issue in the cognitive sphere of the postmodern world in which *culturally diverse identities* coexist. Unfortunately, the reality is different. Namely, while we are persistently trying to prove that we belong in the great European society (waiting for the answer to the hypothetical question: are we, the discriminated living subjects of the Balkans, part of the idea for a European 'civil' project), Europe seems to still have doubts as to whether we belong to the common culture and civilisation. The reasons for this segregation stem from a stereotypisation over the centuries which has suppressed the fact of the roots of the European culture. Therefore, I will not fail to mention that it must not be forgotten that the Balkans is the very place where, in the ancient times, we witness the appearance and development of the greatest humanist disciplines such as

philosophy, literature, democracy, all of which formed the European spirit and mentality.

But, Europe seems to constantly forget this. Reminding us over and over again that it can reestablish the liberated visa regime, as a wall towards the membership in the great family of nations, it tells us that we can still participate freely only in the electronic net. So, if in the 21st century *this type of freedom only* can be sufficient for anyone then we, the 'limited' subjects from the Balkans, are truly happy people who, in the absence of a real, create a virtual projection of a *liberated-from-the-rootphilosophy- of-the-tribal-myth* world. Gilles Deleuze defined this freedom as 'spiritual nomadism' and Hakim Bey described it as 'cosmopolitanism without roots', but both definitions contain, for us, an essential paradox related to the question of borders and identity, taking us back to the beginning of this essay, without a solution for the square surface of the circle. ..

Now I wonder whether this is the way which should prepare us all for the new *transnational identity*, the new postnational *civil status* (citizenship/citoyenneté)? If so, then, we, Macedonians are perfect for the adoption of a decentralised view which would begin a creative destruction of the *European consensus* – not by war or aggression but by creative imagination, cultural diversity and spiritual inheritance of which we should not be ashamed in front of the world. Only so, through a critical attitude towards the standards of the imaginary *European cultural identity* (as a *political entity in creation*) could we realise the long desired dream of returning the Piece to the *Whole*, in which Europe could establish a dialogue with its own interior, its somewhat forgotten Self, without traumas or complexes, without fear of altercations...

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