

## **HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL (NON)- DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE BALKANS**

**Blagoj CONEV**

*University of Skopje*

*\*Corresponding author e-mail: [b.conev@gmail.com](mailto:b.conev@gmail.com), [b.conev@utms.edu.mk](mailto:b.conev@utms.edu.mk)*

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### **Abstract**

When we talk about Europe in its cultural borders, it must be noted that the very same borders largely exceed the political ones of the European Union. Namely, if until now we imagined Europe only as the part that is geographically located west of the rivers Oder, Danube and Sava, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Europe is starting to open to its East and to absorb the territories that historically have always belonged to the continent. Namely, that is the Central part of the continent, but also the Southeast, which is known under its geographical determinant as the Balkans. But, although politically that old Europe is more and more successful in taking over Central Europe, both politically and economically and also culturally, it seems to have a problem with the Balkans.

The focus of research in this text will be focused on the fact that the problem that does not arise because the Balkans themselves is not part of Europe, but because the Balkans themselves, in addition to embodying Europe in a nutshell, ie its history throughout European history, is a blind spot on the continent that has always been a pejorative for the Europeans themselves. Hence the hypothesis that will be proven in this text: "Although it is culturally and politically pejorative, the Balkans is still an inseparable part of Europe". This hypothesis will be operationalized by comparative analysis through the working thesis that: Balkans' culture represents the core of European cultural diversity and provides the foundation of the European motto - In varietate concordia.

*Keywords:* Europe, Balkans, Culture, Politics, Diversity.

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### **Introduction: What are the Balkans?**

The idea of the Balkans first begins with an overview of the common European heritage, ie the classical period of Ancient Greece. The moment when the ancient Greeks began their expansion along the Mediterranean coast, and establishing their colonies in Southern Europe, they began to spread their culture and traditions to the uncivilized part of the continent. This process was continued, in the Hellenistic period, when the ancient Macedonian state, accepting the Hellenic culture and religion, conquered the Balkans, and united the peninsula.

The period of the Roman Empire follows, when the region, although divided into several provinces, is still part of one state form, and politically unites the Balkans. In the next millennium of the rule of the Eastern Roman Empire (Romania), although politically fragmented, the Balkans managed to retain the cultural and religious identity imposed on all peoples by the Romans. This has been achieved primarily thanks to the spread of the Christian faith, under its most ancient form of Greek-Orthodox interpretation, and by imposing it on the Slavic population in the region, to create a separate cultural identity in the Balkans. Together with Orthodoxy, and with the acceptance, ie the imitation of the Byzantine cultural models, in

the Balkans, for the first time, a kind of cultural unity is created between the different groups. The Ottomans, who also give the name of the peninsula "the largest Old Mountain", the Balkans, also bring a period of long and stable political unity for the region.

Today, a hundred years after the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans, the region is again divided, and politically fragmented. Faced with contemporary challenges, Balkan nations and states are still recovering from the effects of the Cold War, whose line of demarcation crossed directly between the Balkan states, creating three different political conceptions. Those fifty years of isolated cohabitation still have a trace on all the Balkan countries and, although they want to keep pace with modern European economic, cultural and social tendencies, they still have some peripheral status in the European family.

Although the Balkan states are officially seeking to be part of Europe, and to show the world that they have long since forgotten their differences, no matter how much this region wants to show that it is united, it is increasingly dividing itself. The Balkan states are still unable to show a unity that will unite them and integrate them into the modern world. Thanks to the various influences that the region has suffered for centuries, from the emirates that ruled the territory, or simply had spheres of interest, the Balkans are still divided.

And if someone says that the region is still living in its past, and that those who gave it its name, determined its fate, it will not be so wrong. Perhaps the Balkans still represent the Ottoman legacy of Europe. Although European culture and values are based on Balkan history, the Balkans have failed to bridge the gap in Europe's five-hundred-year-old stagnation with Europe, thus modernizing and keeping pace with contemporary social and political trends around the world. But it is not only an Ottoman legacy. The Balkans are still dealing with the Byzantine heritage. Namely, "Byzantinism" has the same discourse as "Balkanism", because "Balkanism" has in its essence the legacy of "Byzantinism", ie it lies on the same cultural and social foundations, such as authoritarianism, theocracy, and a number of other values, which are, and will be, the basis of "Balkanism".

This is how the idea that, if Jacques Derrida's saying applies to Europe is accumulating more and more often "il n'y a pas de hors-texte" Derrida, J. (1967), and for the Balkans, can be formulated as a question: qu'est-ce qu'il y a hors de texte" (Todorova, 1997)?

Namely, what is the essence of the Balkans, and how can the idea for Balkanism be applied to the idea for Europe?

### **Historical difference in the perception between Europe and the Balkans on the culture and identity**

There are many epochs in the history of the mankind that testify the development of human civilization and the advancement of society, politics and science. One of the most important periods in the political science and development of international law is the Treaty of Westphalia, signed at Munster (1648). Westphalia. Although at first glance it looks like an ordinary German province, it is still a symbol of our era, a symbol of the modern political order of the world.

The Westphalian peace treaties are also synonymous with security and sovereignty, they are the hope for world peace and international order. These treaties are important not only because they bring peace to Europe after thirty years, and establish a balance in international politics for the

time, but also because this peace limits the power of the Holy Roman Emperor, recognizes the independence of the Netherlands and Switzerland is gradually beginning to lose the role of ruler as a unifying factor of population and territory. With these changes in the international order, a new era in political history begins, an era that continues to this day, and that is the era of nation states. Namely, the epochal result of the Westphalian peace treaties is the creation of nation-states, the modernization of diplomacy and the creation of a new type of international relations unknown until then - between states, not between dynasties, i.e. relations built on the basis of subjects of international law and equality between them as a basis for respecting the religious and national feelings of the individual and the group.

At the same time as the Westphalian treaties are being signed, that is, a new equilibrium is being made in international politics at the time, several other changes are taking place in Europe, which will undoubtedly turn history in another direction. Namely, in that period, the center of international politics shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. This relocation of the previous core was done thanks to the colonial conquests and the change in the trade routes. With that, the Mediterranean loses its former power as an economic, political and cultural center and gradually begins to turn into a periphery, and Western Europe, becomes the core of all developments in the world. Suddenly, the Balkans, which until then had been the core of all continental change as a link between feudal Western Europe and the Orient, lost its role in international politics and entered a period of stagnation.

The epoch-making moments for the future development of the social and political order of the world take place right after the treaties of Westphalia. While Western Europe is in the throes of the development of philosophical, political, and economic thought, and while the most advanced technologies of that time are being created, Eastern Europe is returning to the past, and closing in its borders. This process of stagnation in the region is a result of the differences not only in the way of state organization, but also in the absence of national awareness among the population. The absence of national consciousness is reflected in the inability of the region to engage in new social trends (Мазовеп, 2003). And as Denko Maleski will say: "Through a multi-century process and not without setbacks, human rights and freedoms become part of the political morality of Western Europe. Eastern Europe, on the other hand, has a different development. Geographically located between the West and the East, it combines the Western tradition of separation of powers and the Eastern tradition of concentration of power. Hence the fact that the basic feature of the political life of Eastern Europe is manifested through a strong state with numerous discretionary rights. This is the beginning of the domination of the bureaucracy over the various domains of human life - politics, economics, religion ... And while the conquest of freedom in Western Europe is the work of citizens organized in civil society, that is to say groups that are independent of the power of the state, in Eastern Europe it is the work of the state itself" Малески, Д (2001/2002).

What Cardinal Mazarin began in 1648, the creation of states in which a population living with the same characteristics would live, ended with the Great French Revolution of 1789. After the revolution, the process of creating the identity of the French nation begins. This process of creating the identity of the nation and the state among the French will undoubtedly become a motivation for the creation of a national identity of the population in other countries in Europe and will forever change the history not only of Europe but of the whole world. After nearly 150

years, Mazarin's dream has come true, a French nation-state has been created that could withstand all kinds of obstacles.

Namely, after the revolution, when the people realize that the ruler can end up on the guillotine, the leaders of the revolution realized that a new unifying force must be found for the people and the territories, and they found it in the elements (characteristics) that are common to all and in fact they are the factor that makes the people a nation. It is these elements that contribute to a group of people to realize themselves as a separate nation living within the borders of their nation state.

In the Balkans, on the other hand, thanks to the traditions of concentrating power, ie autocratic rule, largely supported by theocracy (Ottoman Empire), there is a situation of stagnation in the region in relation to the social changes taking place in the West. With the creation of powerful empires that equate ethnicity with religious (which centuries later would reflect on the political situation in the Balkans), the region gradually began to distance itself from political currents in Western Europe and entered a long period of stagnation in relation to social change.

This situation of lack of clearly defined nations throughout the history of the region, starting from the middle of the 19th century until today, returns like a boomerang and hits the relations between the modern Balkan states. All these differences in the social order contribute to the creation of states in the Balkans, not as a result of the ethnic borders of the people that once lived in the Ottoman Empire, but of the military power and interests of the Western European states.

Historical events have led to the formation of states in the region, and then nations. It also influenced the creation of national identities among the various Balkan nations. The past has contributed to the creation of a mixture of cultures, languages and traditions in the Balkans, which even with the most precise demarcation between the modern Balkan states, could not have led to the creation of ethnically pure states. The independence of the new states in the late 19th century resulted in the making of national historiographies aimed at strengthening the national consciousness of the population, and highlighting the diversity of a nation from its neighbors. It was the creation of national histories in the Balkans that was followed by the creation of myths, i.e. the historical connection of modern nations with the historical peoples who lived in those territories, and through those myths and historical connections new national symbols were created that would serve to differentiate peoples until then who lived in the same state (empire). This mythologization of history, and the creation of artificial borders between states, ie the creation of nations in existing states, contributed to the great connection of the nation with the territory, a feature that is manifested in all Balkan nations.

After the creation of national identities and nation-states in Europe, the existing and unchangeable national identity becomes one of the most important elements for the realization of the national interests of the states. Namely, the identity is related to the cohesion of the population and does not allow opportunities for creating situations of civil wars and divisions between members of different religions and ethnicities, because the knowledge of the population that it belongs to one nation, creates a sense of loyalty to the state and thus achieves a state of ethnic stability, i.e. all doors are closed to inflame ethnic and religious tensions.

### **Challenges of the Balkan cultures in the common European culture**

The process of formation of nation-states, although it begins somewhere in the Middle Ages in Western Europe, is still relevant to this day. In that process of creating the nation, the biggest role is played by the ethnicity, i.e. the identity features of the ethnic group that is the basis of a nation. This process is especially interesting in the Balkans, because the ethnic groups are the main drivers of the national liberation movements, i.e. they represent the basic derivative in the formation of all Balkan nations. The national liberation movements, which are characteristic of all Balkan ethnicities in the 19th and 20th centuries, later played the main role in the process of self-determination, i.e. the formation of the nations and states in the Balkans (Roudomentof, 2002). . What is a problem in this part of Europe is what I mentioned above, and that is the mixture of different cultures and languages that are found in each of the Balkan countries.

This mixture of different cultures in one territory makes the Balkans very different from the rest of Europe, in that none of the countries is ethnically homogeneous in the process of nation-state formation, but achieves homogeneity much later, through a phenomenon called nationalism. And if for the modernists, nationalism makes the nation, not vice versa, then for the Balkanists the nation creates nationalism, not vice versa.

In the Balkans, in the process of state formation as well as in the period of their strengthening, and even expansion both political and economic and industrial, the elites who control the institutions and the economy in all those countries manage to subjugate all cultural and ethnic minorities in the state, i.e. to merge them into the main ethnic group. The leaders of all Balkan countries, manage through their state institutions to create a productive-reproductive process, which later creates a specific type of nationalism that is known only in the Balkans (Karakasidu 2011). This specific “Balkan” nationalism aims to demonstrate the unity of the group, and through the (mis) use of the collective memory of that group to create a feeling of complete difference from all other groups in the region. Thus, using the collective memory of the groups, the Balkan statesmen manage to change the interpretation of history, in order to emphasize the commonality of that group in the moments of suffering, which suffering is of course caused by one of the neighboring ethnic groups, which after all features have the same or similar identity as their ethnic group.

The collective memory of each ethnic group in the region emphasizes the importance of the common destiny that the group has experienced throughout history, and through that production-reproductive process it is possible to suppress the individual identity and memory of the individual, so that through a process of

“Sympathy” with the suffering of the whole group to define a clear awareness of his national and ethnic affiliation, and thus to sow the seeds of nationalism (Hobsbawm, 1990).

If for nationalism, Ernest Gellner says that: “he uses the permanence of historically inherited cultures, but when he uses them, he uses them very selectively and drastically changes them “(Gellner, 1983), then the same can be said of Balkanism. In fact, Balkanism stems from nationalism, or at least one of its aspects. Balkanism represents the radical and brutal nationalism, which does not aim to strengthen the love for one’s own group, or to strengthen the compassion for the collective destiny of the group, but aims to raise one’s own group on a pedestal, to make it all segments different from neighboring groups, as well as to disparage the identity of others (Бертош, 2002). That is why in this part of Europe, all definitions fall into the

water. Here, historical science does not serve to interpret history, but is entirely at the service of political elites. And if in Europe the nation and nationalism can on any basis be interpreted as positive elements in terms of strengthening the unity of the group, then here they are used as a means of proving the “divine” and organic nature of us, and the artificiality and the fiction of those who are the same as us, but do not live within the borders of our nation-state.

In the 21st century, the Balkans are still synonymous with the cruelty that has its roots in the Orient. Unfortunately, this association for the region is a result of the bloody and causeless wars and conflicts that the Balkan nation-states are waging today. In the eyes of the whole world, the Balkans are still the place in Europe where borders are being redrawn and where collective identity is superior to individual identity. The Balkans is a country that instead of being proud of its history and its imperial past, abuses it to show the world how cruel man can be today (Conev, 2018).

What the Balkans lack is the will to come out of their own shackles that still hold it nailed as a periphery of an Empire. What the Balkan leaders need to do is move away from the interpretation of nations, identities and nationalism, and allow national historiographies to emerge from the wing of the state, that is, to cease to be fighters for the national cause.

And, although the Balkans is the Balkans and cannot be any other region in the world, it is Balkanism that makes the Balkans pejorative, not the territory. Balkanism which, together with “imported” nationalism, makes this part of Europe cruel and inhuman.

### **Concluding remarks**

At the beginning of the 21st century, Southeast Europe, i.e. the Balkans, showed the world the power of culture. Namely, because culture can be defined as a political category, the Balkans showed the world that nationalism and all its features are still relevant, and that they can survive if they find fertile ground for it. Namely, today our region is still dealing with its past, i.e. it still cannot get out of its shackles. The past of the region, although glorious, records the bloodiest and most brutal European conflicts. Namely, here in the Balkans, the states, i.e. the political elites use the cultures and identities of their nations to realize their “imperialist” dreams. Thus, the Balkan Wars, the Greek Civil War, and the wars in the former Yugoslavia showed the world that the “violent” and state-regulated way of connecting groups with historical and cultural heritage is not just a “naïve” emotional aspiration of elites to strengthen the identity of the nation by recognizing the primordial common values, but in the same way it becomes an invented tool for manipulating the population and creating new identity features (Каракасићу, 2011). This specific “Balkan” nationalism aims to demonstrate the unity of the group, i.e. through (mis)use of the collective memory of that group to create a feeling of complete difference from all other groups in the region. Thus, using the collective memory of the groups, the Balkan political elites, i.e. statesmen, manage to change the interpretation of history, to emphasize the unity of that group in the moments of suffering, which suffering is of course caused by one of the neighboring ethnic groups, which in all respects has the same or similar identity as theirs. The collective memory of each ethnic group in the region emphasizes the importance of the common destiny that the group has experienced throughout history, and through that production-reproductive process it is possible to suppress the individual identity and memory of the

individual, so that through a process of "Sympathy" with the sufferings of the whole group to define a clear awareness of his nation and ethnicity, and thus to sow the seeds of radical nationalism.

If for nationalism, Ernest Gellner points out that he uses the permanence of historically inherited cultures, but when he uses them, he uses them very selectively and drastically changes them (Gellner, 1983), then the same can be said of Balkanism. In fact, Balkanism stems from nationalism, or at least one of its aspects. Balkanism represents the radical and brutal nationalism, which does not aim to strengthen the love for one's own group, or to strengthen the compassion for the collective destiny of the group, but aims to raise one's own group on a pedestal, to make it all segments different from all adjacent, as well as to disparage the identity of others. That is why in this part of Europe, all definitions fall into the water.

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