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Europe in the Balkan Mirror

Summary: The article discusses the three dominant, Europe-wide, constructions of Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and claims that all three found their proponents in the Balkans in the same period, while no specifically Balkan construction of Europe can be identified. The discourses which constructed Europe were transnational, and every search for national discourses must recognize that they are always fractured and contradictory, composed of various elements originating in Europe-wide discourses on Europe. Throughout this period the dominant discourse of Europe was shaped by the discourse of modernity and modernization, not only in Europe but in other parts of the globe as well. Several commentators have already noted that the current chalenge of the interwar construction of Europe – peace, prosperity, democracy and human rights – mirrors the crisis of Yugoslavia, and many examples point to the unsustainability of this construction at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Gadamer's hermeneutics offers a valuable lesson in humility and defines the often repeated phrase of "belonging together" as listening to the other in the belief that the other may be right, which should be taken as a starting point for any future construction of Europe.

Keywords: Construction of Europe; modernity; modernization; anti-modernism; European Union; the Balkans; imperialism; post-democracy.

What is "Europe's" mode of existence? As a geographical category "Europe" is unstable: putting aside anecdotal but still indicative expressions – such as Napoleon's claim that Africa begins at the Pyrenees, or Metternich's that Asia begins in Vienna's *Landstrasse* – the borders of the continent have always been contested: to the east, the continent cannot be limited by any clear demarcation line, and looks more like a Eurasian peninsula than as a self-contained geographical entity; to the west, it may or may not include the British Isles. As a historical category, "Europe" is even more undetermined, and has always been defined relationally: in early modern times, it defined itself as Christendom, as opposed to the Islamic Ottoman threat; in the wake of the waning of Ottoman power, and coinciding with the progressive secularization of European societies and with their grabbing of other parts of the globe – which would reach 84 percent of the world at the peak of the colonial period – "Europe" self-styled itself as "civilization" opposed to barbarism and savagery, thus legitimizing its conquests; simultaneously, it became the "West", as opposed to the colonized Asian "East"; the catastrophe of the First World War briefly put "Europe" back on the agenda, but the ideological, political and military circumstances after the Second World War strengthened the West/East division, the "East" referring this time not to Asia, but to the eastern half of the continent. As a "spiritual essence", as a number of inter-war enthusiasts called the elusive something which allegedly defined Europeanness, or as a set of "European values", as their contemporary counterparts prefer to call it, "Europe" is anything but unambiguous: it invented both human rights and Auschwitz; it promoted tolerance as well as racism and anti-Semitism; it patented democracy and absolutism, Fascism and other forms of totalitarianism; it simultaneously championed liberty and the slave trade; its thought was rationalist as well as irrationalist, religious and mystical. "Europe" exists only as a discursive construction; not as a fact, but

as an interpretation.[1] And as such, it is not one but many – everywhere and at all times. All these various forms of "Europe" shape political, economic and social programmes, or what we grow accustomed to calling identities: who we think we are, what a life worth living is, and where we think we are going.

It becomes even more difficult to reduce these multiple forms of Europe to a single one when we recall that all European nations considered, and continue to consider themselves as part of Europe, and at the same time as something separate, different, capable of defining a relation to it.[2] The only two exceptions seem to be France, which inherited the early nineteenth-century tradition of equating the outcome of the French revolution with Europe, and for a brief period also Austria, which at that same time represented the opposite of French Europe, namely the Catholic, conservative Europe of the throne and the altar.[3] For all other European nations, Europe has meant "all continental nations minus us". We recognize ourselves as slightly different from the picture we constructed as Europe – which is only natural, as this construction is always an ideal, never something to be empirically confirmed – and this difference is experienced as a wound which hurts. At the same time, this wound we recognize as our own identity; we are, both individually and collectively, the map of our scars and wounds. Every psychotherapist can tell about the fear each patient has to overcome at the beginning of therapy: they know that something in them needs to change, but at the same time they fear change because they fear not being themselves any longer afterwards; they want to change and to remain who they are. Hence, therapists must convince them that they are going to change, and feel and live better, and that at the same time they are going to remain the same. It is, of course, a paradox: one wants to preserve what one also wants to change. Nations do not seem to be much different: they also want to change, to partake in this idealization they have constructed and called Europe, but they also want to stay as who they are. This is the meaning of the claim, often repeated in all national debates on Europe, that "we don't want to be drawn into Europe, because we will cease to exist when we become like everybody else". There is something touching, both amusing and sad, in this belief that one can ever become like "everybody else", as if there were only one type of being outside us, as if all European societies and cultures were happily homogeneous, and only we were uncomfortably but proudly different. Hence the "bridge" metaphor, easily spotted in all national discourses of Europe: there are very few European nations which do not imagine themselves as a bridge between East and West, Europe and Asia, Europe and Africa, or Europe and America.[4] As they are all the same

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[1] Gerard Delanty: *Inventing Europe. Idea, Identity, Reality*, London: Palgrave 1995, p.3; Bo Stråth: "Europe as a discourse", in Bo Stråth (ed.): *Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other*, Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2000, pp.13-44.

[2] Luise Passerini: "From the ironies of identity to the identities of irony", in Anthony Pagden (ed.): *The Idea of Europe from Antiquity to European Union*, Cambridge MA: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 205.

[3] Gilbert Weiss: "A.E.I.O.U. – Austria Europeae Imago, Onus, Unio?" and Robert Frank: "The Meaning of Europe in French national discourse", in Mikael af Malmborg and Bo Stråth (eds): *The Meaning of Europe. Variety and Contention within and among Nations*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002, pp. 263-283 and 311-326.

[4] For individual European nations' appropriation of the "bridge" metaphor see chapters by Törnquist-Plewa, Hroch, Jáuregui, Spohn, and Ludlow in Mikael af Malmborg and Bo Stråth (eds): *The Meaning of Europe*; Christopher Browning and Marko Lehti: "Beyond East-West: marginality and national dignity in Finnish Identity Construction", *Nationalities Papers* 35.4(2007): 691-716; Tamás Hofer: "East and West in self-image of Hungarians", in Teppo Korhonen (ed.): *Encountering Ethnicities. Ethnological Aspects on Ethnicity, Identity and Migration*, Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1995, pp. 215-238; Roumen Daskalov: *Images of Europe: A Glance from the Periphery*, Florence: European University Institute, Working Papers SPS No. 94/8, 1994; Antonis Liakos: "The canon of European identity: transmission and decomposition" in Luisa Passerini (ed.): *The Question of European Identity: A Cultural Historical Approach*, Florence: European University Institute, Working Papers HEC No. 98/1, 1998, pp. 53-59.

– the Swedes and the Portuguese, the Irish and the Romanians, the Greeks and the Germans – and only we are different and insufficiently like "them", we can put our insufficiently European part to good use by connecting Europe with something else. The bridge metaphor means: we will change, and we will remain who we are. Our being insufficiently like the rest of them will be only a consequence of our mission: our impurity, our difference from this idealized model, which is at the same time our deepest identity, can be preserved, because as a bridge we are allowed to stand on two different shores at the same time. The only European nation which never thought of itself as a bridge is – again – France, convinced as it is that, as Stanislav Vinaver once said, everything of any value in this world can be traced back to some distant French origin.[5]

Nations construct "Europe" in different ways at different times, and these constructions are never smooth, coherent and consistent. On the contrary, each national construction of Europe resembles a battlefield, a stormy dialogue, a song sang by a choir which has not had enough time to practise: it is always a field in which ideas are put forward and fought over. Small wonder, if we keep in mind that the national debates about Europe most often have as their aim defining or constructing the national identity of the nation in question, its future direction as well as the version of its past which the nation cares to remember.[6] These constructions resemble depositories of images, concepts and ideas, in which images able to arouse emotions predominate over clearly defined concepts and coherent ideas. Those who have constructed "Europe", intentionally or unintentionally, have operated according to the model exploited by advertising agencies: connect images with emotional content, and only then engage rationality. The economic history of the continent, for this very reason, never arouses much passion; but histories which promote connections with emotionally charged images always do. Popular political discourses, as opposed to academic ones, operate in the same manner: it is a pity that those whose jobs entail defining measurements of time have not yet come upon the idea that you can define a second as the period of time between the moment in which a crisis appear anywhere in the world, and the moment someone cries "he is a new Hitler". The politician in question, singled out for regime change, is thus associated with an emotionally charged image, and then the usual mechanism of regime change starts to roll. Rational assessment follows only twenty years later, when this crisis becomes an academic question. But it always follows, if this is any consolation.

There is always more than one "Europe" in any given national discourse, which are often incompatible and on a collision course. Thus, there are several Romanian "Europes", sometimes so different that they have nothing in common; but all of these have much in common with various Polish or Spanish "Europes". If we take a step back from national constructions of "Europe", we see several larger discourses which operate across the continent, and find their proponents in every continental society. There is the Europe of anti-modernists: a Europe of science and technology, the French revolution and secularism, and it allegedly destroys the soul of the nation, or soul as such, and the balance between nature and humans, or the God-given balance between classes, churches and states. There is a discourse of Europe of progress, education, civil liberties and democracy, rooted in the Enlightenment and its offspring, modern science; there is also a Fascist Europe, an integral part of Fascist ideology, which combines elements of the former two. Comparatively new and much less influential is the discourse of Europe of social rights, which still needs to find more vocal proponents. Each of them constructs an allegedly authentic European past and claims that it only furthers what Europe has always been about, and this is the reason why we have never agreed, and never will, which cultural traditions we want to include in our heritage, and which particular one defines Europe.

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[5] Stanislav Vinaver: *Evropa u vrenju. Putopisi i memoarski spisi*, Novi Sad: Dnevnik, 1991, p. 214.
[6] Robert Frank, "The Meaning of Europe", p.311.

All these discourses have circulated in the Balkans since the late eighteenth century: Europe, with its avatars such as the "West" and "civilization", was primarily constructed as progress, development, education, efficient administration, science, rationalism, and secularism. This list is evidence that Europe was a signifier for what in the twentieth century is known as modernity. This discourse was in the Balkans emotionally charged with mourning, shame and regret: the Balkan societies of the nineteenth century clearly perceived their belated entry into modernity, and complaints about being late are the most prominent element of this version of a broader continental discourse on Europe. In this respect, the Balkans are no exception: the same emotional tone, expressed in exactly the same words, can be found in Spanish, Italian, and Polish constructions of Europe.[7] It defined Europe in opposition to the East, Asia and Africa, and Asian societies readily adopted it as their own. In the Ottoman Empire, Japan and India it had the same effects as in the Balkans. It was created as a result of the interaction between the colonizing societies from the north-western part of the continent, with pretty much all other parts of the globe save North America, and disseminated not only by Western travellers, diplomats, journalists and scholars, but by their counterparts in other parts of the globe as well. When it began to dominate – and it was the original and still is the most influential discourse on Europe – and the Balkan elites started to enquire about the reasons for their belatedness, they came up with two sets of answers. They blamed their own mentality – in the exactly the same manner as Spaniards, Italians and Poles – and their geographical position, which enabled contamination with what was non-European. Thus Spain and Italy were too "African" and had to "de-Africanize" themselves; Poland looked into the abyss of economic backwardness and stagnation, poverty, disorder and lawlessness, which for Poles was Russia; and the Balkan societies never tired of blaming the Ottoman Empire, their own East, for historical belatedness. In all these cases, one feature is strikingly similar: in all these societies the nation state was rightly perceived as the agent of modernization or Europeanization – and it was missing everywhere but in Spain, where throughout the nineteenth century it experienced such catastrophic erosion and decay that it could no longer be existent. Paradoxically, when in the early twentieth century Ottoman intellectuals opened the same debate, they too blamed the Ottoman Empire for the non-Europeanness of the Turks, and demanded a Turkish nation state.

What Italy, Poland and the Balkan societies had in common, was that these nations had no empires, and Spain and Turkey joined this club of the like-minded only when their own empires came to an end. This is what the largest European zone – Central Europe – has in common with European peninsulas and Poland. The absence of the German nation state in the first half of the nineteenth century, the absence of an overseas empire and a comparatively late start in industrial revolution, all coalesced into a perfect background on which to develop a lack of confidence – in sharp contrast with the over-confident industrializing and imperialistic north-west – and contributed to the presence of this same discourse of the "West", which was in Germany the preferred name for what in the Balkans was called "Europe". This is why Germany and Austria were, during the Romantic period, the cradle of the second most important discourse of Europe: the Europe of Christianity, of the "soul", especially the soul of the nation, of deep *Kultur* opposed to superficial and materialistic c*ivilisation*. There is nothing exclusively German about it: it is a Europe-wide discourse, and opposed to the Europe of progress and science, as anti-modernism is opposed to modernism. By way of illustration, if for Germans in the early nineteenth century France had stood for soulless *civilisation*, dehumanization, materialism and science, a century later the tables had turned: for Henry Bergson in 1915 anti-European Germany stood for mechanization, science and technology, and European France for culture, spirit and nature.[8]

[7] See chapters by Törnquist-Plewa, Jáuregui, and af Malmborg in Mikael af Malmborg and Bo Stråth (eds): *The Meaning of Europe*.
[8] Henri Bergson: *The Meaning of the War. Life & Matter in Conflict*, London: Ballantyne, 1915.

In 1915, of course, France had good reason to feel less confident, and Bergson only repeated what German Romantics had discovered a hundred years previously: that culture, spirit and nature can be claimed, as a sort of moral victory, by those who are plagued by feelings of insecurity and inferiority.

The equal weight and influence of these two master discourses can be seen even today in the absence of any mention of the dominant, foundational European cultural tradition in the draft of European constitution. Its authors long argued over which intellectual tradition is more central to Europe, the Enlightenment or Christianity, and since they could not reach an agreement, they eventually dropped the issue altogether. [9]

However, these two discourses could be claimed by very different speakers, who tried to isolate their elements – various representations and images – and combine them into new ones. And they need not only be Europeans: the discourse of Europe is as much an Asian as a European construction.[10] Rabindranath Tagore in his book *Nationalism* (1917) eloquently praised Asian spirituality and preservation of the idea of fully human life, as opposed to the materialism, mechanical organization and greed characteristic of Europe, which brought him enormous reputation as an Eastern sage, as it neatly dovetailed with anti-rationalistic currents which dominated our supposedly hyper-rational continent at the beginning of the twentieth century.[11] It seems at first sight that Tagore was yet another Asian anti-modernist, who took at face value the flattering construction of India – put forward by similar European anti-modernists – as the cradle of all religions and spirituality.[12] But Tagore at the same time praised modernization as well, claiming that it was necessary and beneficial. It is very significant that Tagore did so in an address to a Japanese audience, in a country which was modernizing itself at great speed, but without becoming a European outpost in the Pacific. What seems obvious to us today – to be more precise, what is obvious to academics, but what has yet to become obvious in popular and political discourses of Europe – namely, that modernity is not one but multiple, that there are alternative paths to modernity, and that its origin in Europe need not be taken to mean that Europeans have a monopoly over it, Tagore diagnosed by uncoupling Europe and modernity.[13] Modernization and Europeanization was not one and the same thing for him, and his Japanese audience certainly had good reasons to agree. And he was not the only one to put it into words in such an explicit manner: at about the same time, the Turkish writer and sociologist Ziya Gökalp (1876 – 1924) made the same point in his programmatic article "Towards Western Civilization". He accurately diagnosed the historical reasons for Turkish "backwardness", blaming it on the rule of the Ottoman Empire over Turks, and claimed: "There is only one road to salvation: to advance in order

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[9] Tomas Majer: *Identitet Evrope. Jedinstvena duša Evropske Unije*?, Belgrade: Albatros Plus and Službeni glasnik, 2009, pp. 16-17.

[10] Bonnet even claims that the "West" has been entirely the invention of those who considered themselves "non-West". See Alastair Bonnett: *The Idea of the West. Culture, Politics and History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 64.

[11] Rabindranath Tagore: *Nationalism*, London: Papermac, 1991.

[12] Throughout the nineteenth century, this image of India was gradually constructed by various European scholars, editors and translators of the Sanskrit canon. It reached its peak in Friedrich Max Müller's "science of religion", but its main popularisers and disseminators in the West were Indian scholars, such as Vivekananda. The idea of the "East" may have been invented by those who were "non-East", but it eventually proved to be a joint enterprise, just like the idea of the "West".

[13] European and American social science accepted the idea of multiple or alternative modernities only quite recently. On alternative and multiple modernities see, for example, Dili Parameshwar Gaonkar (ed.): *Alternative Modernities*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2001; S.N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities", *Daedalus* 129. 1 (2000) 1-29; Peter Van Der Veer, "The Global History of 'Modernity'", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 41. 3 (1998) 285-294; Timothy Mitchell (ed.): *Questions of Modernity*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

to reach […] Europeans in the science and industry as well as in military and judicial institutions. And there is only one means to achieve this: to adapt ourselves to Western civilization completely".[14] But Ziya Gökalp also pondered: "How can the Islamic world ultimately survive under such conditions? How can we maintain our religious and national independence?"[15] In other words, how can the Turks modernize and remain "of the Turkish nation and Islamic religion"? It is not the point here to conclude that Gökalp worried needlessly, as we can see today that Turks can modernize and become even more Islamic in the process, but it is worth recalling that Europe, even if constructed only as modernization, always and everywhere prompts its adherents as well as its opponents to point out that they themselves happen to be something separate and different, that they are not "like everybody else". At exactly the same time, Jovan Skerlić (1977-1914), a Serbian politician and literary historian, wrote: "For new nations there are but two roads – either to accept Western culture and live, as the Japanese have done, or to oppose it, and be overrun, as has happened to the American Indians and Australian Aborigines."[16] Skerlić was the most fanatical European in the Balkans of his time – the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when there was no shortage of fanatical Europeans in the Balkans – whose whole work can be summed up in the sentence "either the West or death". But he also wrote that Europe was a "cluster of mutually envious, predatory and soulless bullies", imperialist, selfish and hypocritical in its policy, and unable or unwilling to uphold its own values.[17] Yet, "one should be a good European", Skerlić kept repeating. Tagore, Gökalp and Skerlić reveal what the message Europe sent to them was: faced with the threat of being crushed and annihilated by more powerful and already modernized societies, crush and annihilate yourself in order to survive, reinvent yourself in their image in order to be preserved, disappear such as you are in order to live. Skerlić was willing to sacrifice in the process whatever particularities his nation may have had; Gökalp worried about preserving his Turkishness and Islam; but Tagore – and these different scales of acceptance, worry and rejection most probably resulted from the different global standing, richness of tradition and confidence of their respective societies – rejected Europe as an imperialistic menace, from which other societies could be protected only if they managed, like the Japanese, to modernize while simultaneously preserving their cultural difference. Indeed, his book *Nationalism* should have been more accurately entitled *Imperialism*, as this is what he wrote about, which brings us to the third important discourse of Europe: the mighty continent which rules the world. While the previous two discourses are still very much with us, this one is quickly becoming historically redundant. Europe as the world empire – this was the third construction of Europe, which circulated at its fringes and in the rest of the world, but in the metropolitan areas of Europe as well. Pretty much as the former two discourses, this one could also have been accepted with pride or rejected in disgust and fear.

All these European constructions of Europe were also the Balkan constructions of Europe. There is not a single construction of Europe which can be said to be a specifically "Balkan" one. From the early nineteenth century, all Balkan societies were busy modernizing themselves by importing Western models, this importation being driven by the discourse of Europe as modernity. At the same time, there were voices of opposition to this process, but this opposition relied on the European construction of the Europe of Christianity, of the "soul", especially the soul of the nation, of deep *Kultur* opposed to superficial and materialistic *civilisation*. "The opposition to the 'import of Western models' was itself essentially an adaptation of a Western import: the advocates of 'organic' development were as much a mouthpiece of European culture as were those who championed

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[14] Ziya Gökalp: *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization*, Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1957, p. 276.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Jovan Skerlić: *Feljtoni, skice i govori*, Belgrade: Prosveta, 1964, p.95.
[17] Ibid., p.285.

unconditional Europeanization", claim Mishkova and Daskalov.[18] Balkan scholars were always well aware of this: what today to an outside observer may come across as Romanian national traditionalism – Junimism – was in fact just a replica of German and English evolutionism, maintained Eugen Lovinescu, the leading theoretician of Romanian liberalism.[19] Slobodan Jovanović, a Serbian liberal and a historian, also noted this in the twenties: the enemies of liberalism in Serbia advocated a concept of strong government and monarchical authority, but this too was a foreign, Western political pattern.[20] The Balkan voices which are sometimes classified as anti-European were particularly loud between the two wars: this is when, for example, a "third way", neither European nor Asian, was contemplated in Bulgaria and Romania, or a "Slavic civilization" dreamed about in Serbia and Bulgaria. However, the interwar period was everywhere a break, a caesura in the development of discourses on Europe. Gerard Delanty claims that this is the period when historians, philosophers and writers – but not politicians – conceived modern European identity out of the sense of crisis which set in across the continent in the aftermath of the Great War.[21] It was not only the previously unseen scale of destruction brought about by a war that demanded a new beginning; the crisis diagnosed by all who took part in the debate about "Europe" was, in fact, the realization that all former ways of constructing Europe could not be sustained any longer. Their disappearance had left a void which was experienced as crisis. If "Europe" was to exist, it had to be constructed on ground firmer than Christianity, eroded by progressive secularization and the disappearance of religion from public life, or "civilization", unsustainable after a war in which those who ruled the world fought each other with previously unseen ferocity, and after the realization that one of its components – which in the inter-war years was to be theorized as modernity or modernization – also had many negative aspects to it. On what exactly it could be built was not quite clear. The title of Oswald Spengler's book *The Decline of the West* accurately sums up the mood in the interwar years, and it was read carefully in the Balkans as much as elsewhere, fuelling the proliferation of negative constructions of Europe. But they proliferated as parts of this larger European discourse of the fall of Europe, not as some putative Balkan specificity.

The cold war froze the debate on Europe in the Balkans, with the sole exception of Greece, and Europe was off the agenda until the late 1980s – when it made a spectacular re-entry. But when it did, it was in the shape of the European Union, which now claimed everything European for itself. The initial reaction to this in all post-communist Balkan societies was confused: instead of insisting on the difference between the two, Balkan intellectuals and politicians wasted enormous energy on trying to prove the obvious – namely, that their societies are just as European, even though they are not in the EU – and on elbowing for the position of sole representative of Europeanness in the Balkans. This later phenomenon became known in scholarship as "nesting orientalisms": trying to prove that one has always been the only guardian of European values and traditions, and that everybody else is a despicable Oriental, Byzantine and Asian.[22] There was neither enough confidence nor wisdom to insist quietly on the position which Roberto M. Dainotto discovered in Michele Amari's work, who demanded that his Sicily be recognized as a part of Europe and universal history "not because it adhered to some putative European standards, but because of its unique history and difference": Sicily

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[18] Diana Miskova and Roumen Daskalov: "'Forms without substance': debates on the transfer of Western models to the Balkans", in Roumen Daskalov and Diana Miskova (eds): *Entangled Histories of the Balkans. Volume two: Transfer of Political Ideologies and Institutions*, Leiden: Brill,2014, p.37

[19] Ibid, pp. 37-38.

[20] Slobodan Jovanović: *Kulturni obrazac*, Belgrade: Stubovi kulture, 2005.

[21] Gerard Delanty: *Inventing Europe*, pp. 110-111.

[22] Milica Bakić-Hayden: "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia", *Slavic Review* 54.4(1995) 917-931.

was for him a part of Europe not because it was reconquered by it, but, simply, because it was.[23] This aside, the direction was the same in all Balkan societies: towards the European Union.

Today, European integration is almost complete: there are very few areas of the continent which are not included in the Union, and these will no doubt sooner or later become full members. Yet it seems that, paradoxically, at the moment which its founders must have envisaged as the triumph of the idea of European unity, many feel that the heroic time of the European idea is behind us. This is painfully obvious from the Balkan perspective as much as from any other. For the sake of illustration, let us take a brisk walk through the landscape created by quite disparate examples, things that first come to mind; the examples will not be systematic, but only indicative of what a person surveyed by *Eurobarometer* could have in mind when replying to the usual types of questions put forward, and in this sense more important than they seem at the first sight.

The discourse the EU has created about itself, or, to put it differently, the original aims of European integration and the chief sources of its attraction, were peace and prosperity in a continent exhausted by two wars, to which from the late 1980s were added – for the benefit of the former communist countries – democracy and the rule of law. Hardly anyone would be able today to assign these four values to Europe and keep a straight face. As for prosperity, Europe does not look like a model to be emulated any longer, something that Greeks and Bulgarians, regardless of the length of their membership in the Union, but also many other Europeans, would be able to go into in great detail.

Peace we do have, but only because European countries are powerful enough to fight their wars elsewhere. It cannot be denied that some European states have been in a permanent or intermittent state of war for many years now, though the streets of their cities are quiet. It is quite distressing that the European political elite remembered international law and the principle of sovereignty only in connection with the crisis in Ukraine, but not on any previous occasion in the last twenty years when European states found themselves in breach of both: Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and very nearly Syria, had it not been for the strong opposition from Russia and Europe's own public opinion. Europe, or at least its most powerful part, is not a force for peace. What Anthony Giddens termed "Euro-hypocrisy, uncomfortably widespread", of which European violations of the international law and the principle of state sovereignty are just the most obvious examples, can be easily recognised everywhere.[24] If one compared readers' comments in the digital editions of major European newspapers, when with regards to Ukraine EU politicians brushed the thick layer of dust off their international law manuals, one could have noticed that the general public, although informed about the crisis from Europe's appalling mainstream media in which comment is sacred but facts are free, can easily see through smoke and mirrors and achieve a remarkable level of unanimity. The intellectual capacity of the "European street", to modify the condescending expression regularly used to denote public opinion in Arab countries, is largely underestimated by the European political elite. And as for upholding international law and the principle of state sovereignty, it is not quite clear if those who have been undermining them for quite a while can be those who can uphold it. The farce with President Morales's airplane held and searched in Vienna – which was also a violation of international law, although on a much smaller scale – was an embarrassing reminder of how quickly Europe can forget the rule of law. The following example is even more telling: on 20 December 2013 *The Guardian* reported that a high court judge dismissed the case of Abdel Hakim Belhaj, who was in 2004 unlawfully abducted in a joint MI6-CIA operation, together with his pregnant wife; he was then renditioned to Tripoli and tortured. Belhaj wanted a British court to declare this operation unlawful, a request

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[23] Roberto M. Dainotto: *Europe (in Theory),* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007, p. 210.

[24] Anthony Giddens: *Europe in the Global Age*, London: Polity, 2007, p. 228.

certainly well-founded, but the judge concluded that to pursue the case might harm Britain's relations with the US and ruled against him. It seems that the rule of law in Europe has its limits there where the national interests of the US begin.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century European democracy has become post-democracy, a historically new phenomenon which fuses together elements from the recent democratic and more distant pre-democratic past. Colin Crouch describes post-democracy in the following manner: "Under this model, while elections exist and can change governments, public electoral debate is a tightly controlled spectacle, managed by rival teams of professional experts in the techniques of persuasion, and considering a small range of issues selected by those teams. The mass of citizens plays a passive, quiescent, even apathetic part, responding only to the signals given to them. Behind this spectacle of the electoral game, politics is really shaped in private by interaction between elected governments and elites that overwhelmingly represent business interests."[25] It is small wonder that under these conditions European electorates in recent years have begun to give credence to political extremists, to anti-democratic political options, or that elected governments of Italy and Greece could have been replaced by technocratic cabinets under diktat from Brussels. It is, however, more puzzling that the highest elected body of the continent, the European Parliament, decided to discuss a resolution which would have barred former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder from publicly voicing his opinion about the crisis in Ukraine.[26] Although this motion failed, that such a resolution could have been discussed in a global bastion of democracy, and even more so that 44.5% of those present supported it, is an alarming reflection of the European Parliament's understanding of freedom of speech and public discussion.

Yet, in spite of all this, what can be heard from the political and media elite only reiterates the message of Europe as a paragon of social and political development to humanity at large – a clear sign of either an extreme lack of information, narcissism, or even disinformation. As Perry Anderson recently summed it up in his response to criticism of his book *The Old New World*: "That the treaty of Lisbon speaks not of the peoples but of the states of Europe; that it was rammed through to circumvent popular will, expressed in three referenda; that the structure it enshrines is widely distrusted by those subject to it; and that far from being a sanctuary of human rights, the Union it codified has colluded with torture and occupation, without a murmur form its ornaments – all of this vanishes in a stupor of self-admiration". [27]

When we add to this the unmistakable rise in national and ethnic sensibilities all over the continent, it is small wonder that some of those who witnessed first-hand the dissolution of Yugoslavia compare the present state of the Union with the initial stages of the former's downfall. If Yugoslavia's end-date was 1991, Joze Mencinger, a Slovene economist, recently claimed that Europe is living through its 1983: eight years to dissolution.[28] Mencinger offered this comparison in 2011; since then one EU state has already announced a referendum on continuing EU membership. Many elements are already here for all to see: for example, the economic crisis, in which those better off complain of having to subsidize those worst off, while the latter complain that they are being exploited by the former. Robert M. Hayden extended the list of similarities: each Yugoslav republican leadership worked only for the benefit of its own constituency; a high level of sovereign debt; a single currency which left the republics very limited scope for manoeuvre and set them on mutually antagonistic political courses,

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[25] Colin Crouch: *Post-Democracy*, London: Polity, 2012, p. 4.
[26]   http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/european-parliament-wants-to-muzzle-ukraine-comments-from-schroeder-a-958497.html#ref=rss, assessed on 15 March 2014.
[27] Perry Anderson: "After the Event", *New Left Review* 73(2012), 51.
[28] "Evropa kao bivša Jugoslavija", *Vreme*, No. 1088, 10 November 2011.

and since decisions could only be taken by consensus, as every republic had a veto power, with deadlock as a result; a group presidency with a rotating chairperson, operating in the same manner as the Council of the EU, which only formally led the country, while real power lay in the republics; the Yugoslav federal government, pretty much as the European Commission, was not accountable to voters, but to republican governments; as in Yugoslavia, in the EU neither the Council nor the Commission are accountable to the entire population, but only to one of the state members.[29] Neither Mencinger nor Hayden suggest that the EU will be dissolved in a war, and it does not have to; but Hayden reminds the reader that in Yugoslavia too no one believed in the possibility of war, even when it became known that several EU states, in addition to the Soviet Union, were secretly supplying arms and ammunition to the constituent republics. In Yugoslavia and its dissolution the Balkans offers Europe a mirror: it may decide to ignore it, but it would be wise to take a good look at it.

As between the world wars, "Europe" once again experiences a crisis: the cornerstones of the construction of "Europe" in the guise of the European Union – peace, prosperity, democracy and the rule of law – do not have the power to convince any longer. This discourse has left a void in its wake, which is experienced everywhere as a crisis, and which political scientists describe as a mere "waning of enthusiasm" soon to be overcome.[30] Europe has already shown a remarkable capacity for re-invention. It re-invented itself after the Second World War, and the EU experienced several brief periods of slowing down; it may – hopefully without a new war – construct a new discourse about itself again. Whoever is about to embark on this project would be well advised to listen to the council of an eminent European, the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer: he did not have much to say about the pragmatic aspects of the EU integration, nor was he much interested in it, but he had something important to say about the conditions under which this integration can be carried out.

Almost at the end of his long life, Gadamer, who had previously rarely voiced his political opinions, published a brief book *Das Erbe Europas* (1989) or *The Heritage of Europe*. It seemed at first sight that Gadamer simply paid tribute to the then fashionable search for European identity, but he actually posed an important, perhaps the most important question: what does "belonging together" actually mean? European nations belong together, we hear all the time; they are in the same boat. And sitting in the same boat, how can they truly be together? Gadamer offered Europeans what he thought was missing the most, and it was *a lesson in humility*. Humility as a way of relating to others is indispensable in hermeneutics, Gadamer's own philosophical discipline, it is the "soul of hermeneutics", in the sense that by hermeneutics Gadamer understood "the ability to listen to the other in the belief that the other could be right".[31] We Europeans "must learn that we could be wrong",[32] wrote Gadamer. This cryptic half-sentence echoes Gadamer's most important book *Truth and Method*, where he elaborated the same idea in the following manner: "Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another. When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person 'understands' the other. Similarly, 'to hear and obey someone' does not mean simply that we do blindly what the other desires. We call such a person slavish. Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces

[29] Robert M. Hayden: *From Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans. Studies of a European Disunion 1991 – 2011*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, pp. 377-387.

[30] Paul Taylor: *The End of European Integration. Anti-Europeanism Examined*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

[31] Gadamer quoted in Jean Grondin: *Hans-Georg Gadamer. A Biography*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, p.250.

[32] Hans-Georg Gadamer: 'The diversity of Europe: inheritance and future', in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry and History. Applied Hermeneutics*, ed. By Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 233.

me to do so".[33] Understanding is not a one-way street, in which only I understand you, in the sense of having knowledge about you, which then I offer to you – better still, demand that you accept it – as your own self-knowledge. And the other way around: understanding does not occur when you listen to me and obey, either because you believe that I know better, or that I have the means to force you into submission. In both these situations, no one understands anything, neither I, with my supposedly superior knowledge and power to impose it, nor you, with your admiration and slavishness. True understanding, openness to the other, without which there is no belonging together, requires that I also allow that my understanding reveals things which are against me, even if there is no one there to voice them, and that I accept them as such not only for the sake of being together, but for my own sake as well. If we were to follow Gadamer's advice, we would be immediately relieved from vanity and narcissism, the "stupor of self-admiration" and the stifling ideological atmosphere which emanates from much of what we hear about Europe these days.

But what does this "belonging together" mean when applied to Europe? How can peoples and states "belong together"? The feeling of belonging together is certainly one aspect of what in other contexts has been called European identity. It has been noted many times that European political identity can be built only if Europeans are allowed to freely debate and reach common decisions about their political future, binding for all, in a single public space – something that does not seem likely to happen any time soon. Quite naturally, the level of identification with the EU is only modest: according to the *Eurobarometer*, the percentage of those feeling fully like EU citizens actually fell by 1% since 2010 from 21% to 20%, and those feeling European "to some extent" by 3%, from 41% to 39%. On the other hand, everybody finds a unified European cultural identity even less achievable, because Europeans do not have a single cultural tradition and do speak many languages. This is exactly what Gadamer understood as the European future way of belonging together: Europe as a community which speaks many languages, not only many natural languages, but many complex second-degree languages – such as religion, historical narratives, poetry and philosophy – which preserve multiple records of our different values and different historical experiences. Being with the other would here mean participating in the other by understanding its otherness. The opposite of it is the drive to master and to control something. The attitude of humility, of knowledge that we could be wrong and that others could be right, of learning "that we may not simply exploit our means of power and effective possibilities, but must learn to stop and respect an other as an other, whether it is nature or grown cultures of peoples and nations"[34] is the only way of belonging and staying together. Realizing this – regardless of the possible outcomes – would at least make a good beginning.

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[33] Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Truth and Method*, London and New York: Continuum, 2004, p.355.
[34] Hans-Georg Gadamer: "The diversity of Europe: inheritance and future", pp.235-236.

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