

**THE GEOPOLITICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS
OF THE TRANSITION PROCESS OF A REGION:
FROM THE BALKANS TOWARDS SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE ***

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Ljubiša Mitrović

Faculty of Philosophy, Niš
E-mail: ljubisa@filfak.ni.ac.yu

Abstract. *The contemporary Balkan region is in the process of transition. The Balkan region has a controversial transition identity, it is at the crossroads torn between retraditionalization and modernization. The future of the Balkans does not lie in retailoring the past and conflicts but in the search for a modern development formula, mutual cooperation and integration with Europe and the world. The Balkan peoples in the 21st century are faced with the necessity to discard the devastating ideological doctrines of blood and land and the blind faith in the omnipotence of weapons and to turn towards the future, to the new strategy based on the fact that only through economic development and democracy they will be able to realize their life interests, their social and cultural progress. The author believes in the possibility and future of the unity of the Balkan peoples on a new development and civilization platform whose very center is the culture of peace, social partnership for development and integration, mutual confidence and the cooperation with the world at large.*

Key words: *Balkan, transition, development, geoculture.*

ETYMOLOGY OF TOPONYMS OF THE BALKANS, SOUTHEAST EUROPE AND WEST BALKANS

The contemporary names of the toponyms are not unfounded. They carry in themselves the connotations of not only a geographic position of the given place and region but also of cultural and geopolitical heritage.

The name for the Balkan region derives from the name of the highest mountain in the Balkans that used to be called Hemos and that covers the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, namely, the part ranging from the eastern borders of Bulgaria to the western borders

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of former Yugoslavia. This is the area from the Black Sea and Bosphorus to the eastern borders of Italy and Austria.

The name of *the Balkans* is of recent date and it denotes a mountain on the pathway. It was used for the first time in its scientific papers of the German geographer August Zenne in 1808. Before the nineteenth century the most prevailing name for this area was the Hellen or Balkan Peninsula while in the early nineteenth century it was European Turkey. In the geographic and communication aspect,¹ the Balkan region represents a transition area, a southeast link between Europe and Asia.

The concept of *Southeast Europe* is a group name for the contemporary societies in transition in the Southeast Europe, that is, the Balkan Peninsula. In 1893 the German geographer Theobald Fischer was the first to insist upon the name Southeast Europe. In the first half of the twentieth century, this name was used in the Nazi geopolitics to denote the strategic direction of the further expansion of the Nazi Germany in the East. The present use of the concept Southeast Europe is to denote those postsocialist states and societies in the Balkans that are in transition and that would like to integrate into the European Union with the purpose of building a new partnership for development and peace, for Europe with no wars. In this context, the Balkan region would, within the European Union as economic and political macrointegration, represent a southeast part of the new Europe.

West Balkan region is a term that came to be used in the nineties of the twentieth century. It is a term used by the European Union to denote the countries that are in the process of approaching and joining the EU. These are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the State Community of Serbia and Montenegro with Kosovo.

The new term of West Balkans aims at defining the area for which the European Union has an elaborate strategy for the integration of the former Yugoslav regions (with the exception of Slovenia which is already a member of the EU and with the addition of Albania). Their strategy towards the West Balkan countries implies four processes, namely, a) *elimination of conflicts and stabilization of this region*, b) *process of joining in*, c) *opening new perspectives of new contractual processes* and d) *development and application of the Pact of Stability for Southeast Europe*.

The political geography of the Balkans has been radically altered many times over the centuries, mostly through the agency of the major world powers trying to accomplish their objectives in the region, whereas at the same time the deeply ingrained matrices of collective psychology of the Balkan nations have proved almost impervious to any change whatsoever. In that sense, many new generations will have to make considerable effort in an attempt to redirect the attention of the Balkan nations from geohistory to geoeconomy, modernization and development, from the past to the future. Any possible new instances of atomization and fragmentation today, no matter how much rhetorically legitimized by the inner and outer forces they may be, will practically lead to further balkanization, and developmental and civilisational blockade of the region. The former Yugoslavia in general, and Kosovo and Metohija in particular, today represent a region characterized by the infiltration of the global powers (especially the United States), and a place where the

¹ For additional information on the genesis of the name of the Balkans and its anthropogeography, the reader is referred to: Jovan Cvijić, *Balkansko poluostrvo*, Sabrana dela, knjiga 2, Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, Beograd, 1987.

geostrategic goals of those powers are pursued, which could have far-reaching consequences for relations between the Balkan nations, their European prospects and regional stability.

ON THE GEOPOLITICAL POSITION OF THE BALKANS AND THE CONCEPT OF BALKANIZATION

The Balkans as a region represents, due to its geopolitical position, in the past as well as today, a specific crossroads between the West and the East, the North and the South. That is why the researchers have written about it as a link as well as a gap between the worlds, as a house built in the middle of the road. Such a geographic position gave the Balkans its *transition function*. It is the territory passed through by numerous armies (from the Crusades or earlier till today); it is on this territory that the two great wars were fought in the 20th century, not to mention it as a pathway of numerous traders and travel writers.²

The Balkan region is a typical area, as S. Huntington would define it, with imperfect political borders in which the ethnic and the political borders do not coincide. It is on this territory that the interests of the great powers collided and their impacts took turns as the prevailing ones in the past. All this has affected the stability, that is, instability and conflicts in the region leading to its political atomization and further to disintegration. As an expression of these processes of constant divisions and conflicts in its history the concept of *balkanization* is introduced into the political science. As Maria Todorova shows in her study on the *Imaginary Balkans*, the concept of balkanization is imported and represents an expression of the colonial discourse. It does not refer to any congenial state of the peoples living in the region; instead, the conflicts among them are most often induced from abroad and instrumentalized for the needs of the great powers. Therefore, this is no pre-destination or some fatal geohistorical doom of the region. Yet, it should be stressed that, both in its history and at present, the Balkan region has more represented an object than a subject of the international relations. Ever since the fall of the Byzantine Empire, the geopolitical map of the Balkan Peninsula has been tailored by the interests of the great powers, first of all, the actors of the Ottoman Empire followed by the Austrian Hungarian Empire, then Russia and, today, Germany and the USA.

The Balkans as a cultural forefront of Europe and *the spiritual fount of wisdom* (V. Durnat) of the emerging Western civilisation has been reduced to a periphery through numerous and unexpected historical twists and turns. In the Balkans, the historical *cunning mind* has drawn on the destiny of the people and has most often found its expression in the form of tragedy. This is the region where the victories won in the wars have turned into defeats when it came to diplomacy. Despite the fact that the historical events taking place here have repeatedly been cruel and blood-soaked, the Balkan elites and the Balkan peoples seem to have difficulty dealing with history and learning from it so as not to keep repeating the same mistakes time and again.

Despite the metamorphoses in the name of the Balkans as a regional toponym, which were predominantly initiated by the global powers struggling to attain their objectives in

² For additional information on the geopolitical aspects of this region, the reader is referred to: *Tajna Balkana*, Studentski kulturni centar, Beograd, 1995.

the region (naming and re-naming it in the process as they pleased), the Balkans, in a considerable number of historical periods, has remained almost unchanged as far as *the collective unconscious* (K. Jung) is concerned. In the contemporary transition period and with its new democratic elites, the Balkans seems to be running round in circles – moving from the point where it was the old periphery (in the time of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Soviet Empires) to a point where it becomes a new European periphery, its geostrategic destiny being that of a *linking point between worlds, a border and a bridge* between different peoples, cultures and civilisations.

If destiny is, to put it in Hegel's words, *the necessity that has not been comprehended*, then the geohistorical destiny of the Balkans is not a mere consequence of its geographical and geopolitical position, but a result of the operation of numerous internal and external factors: the unique geoculture of development, the deeply-ingrained collective psychology of the Balkan peoples, their contemporary cultural orientations and the choice of development strategies, as well as the operation of the social elites in power.

Contemporary Europe, as an expression of globalization, is in the process of becoming a supernational constellation of power of plutocrats and eurocrats. It still has a long way to go before it reaches its ideal of representing a harmonic, common European home of nations. Behind the glittering architecture of its institutional framework, there are divergent processes going on, splitting Europe into several developmental and cultural parts, stratifying it into the Europe of workers and the Europe of bankers, into the countries of the European centre, semiperiphery and the periphery. The ever more aggressive expansion of neoliberal ideology is progressively pushing back the model of Europe as a social welfare state, disintegrating its institutions of solidarity, leaving thereby the various classes, social layers, nations and citizens of Europe nothing to strive for but mere economic interests. Such Europe was never a part of the vision of its great founders: Leibnitz, Kant, De Gaulle, Jean Monnet, Willy Brandt, Robert Schumann and Jean Trijar.³ Such contemporary Europe (as embodied in the *European Union*), driven by the neoliberal development philosophy of its elites, has no heart and soul, no future. It has been tailored to the needs of "the international eurocrat". It represents a unique coalition of financial oligarchy – plutocrats, technocrats and bureaucrats, and not a union of European peoples and citizens and their ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.⁴

THE BALKANS AS A REGION OF MULTIETHNIC AND MULTICULTURAL COCKTAIL

The Balkans as a region is characterized by specific geohistory and socio-cultural dynamics. Therefore, researchers working in various scientific fields write about the specific character of *Balkan civilisation* (T. Stojanović), *the Balkan development paradigm* (B. Babić) and *the Balkan development geoculture* (Lj. Mitrović).⁵

³ For additional information on the visions of modern Europe, the reader is referred to: Wolfgang Šmale, *Istorija evropske ideje*, Clio, Beograd, 2003.

⁴ For information on the contradictory nature of the eurointegration processes and the aspirations of the multinational corporations to spread east and generate profit and extra profit, see H. Hoffbauer, *Proširenje EU na istok – Od Drang nach Osten do integracije periferije u EU*, Filip Višnjić, Beograd, 2004.

⁵ For additional information on these concepts, the reader is referred to:

-Trajan Stojanović, *Balkanska civilizacija*, Centar za geopolitiku, Beograd, 1995;

Regarding its demographic, ethnic and culturological composition, the Balkan region represents, as Z. Brzezinski defined it in his study *The Grand Chessboard* (1977), an area of *multiethnic cocktail*.

Due to such peoples' composition, the Balkan region is today spoken of as a typical multiethnic and multicultural area. This is the region in which the archways of numerous civilizations cross each other (of Islam, Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism) and where its multicultural diversity represented both wealth and a challenge for dialogue and cultural interpenetration as well as, in some historical phases, a cause for conflicts. The latter tendency was more dominant in those historical situations when the cultural, ethnic and religious differences were instrumentalized by the powerful forces, that is, the politics on the Balkans or outside it for the sake of the realization of their particular geostrategic interests. In these historical situations, the cultural diversity, ethnic and religious, was transformed from the bridges of cooperation and richness into the borders and additional causes for conflict generation. That is why it is not accidental that the greatest writer on the Balkans, the Nobel prize winner Ivo Andrić, as a connoisseur of the spiritual life and relations in the region, wrote about the Balkans using the metaphors such as a *dark vilayet*, a *damned yard*, a *bridge on the Drina* as an area where diverse worlds meet and clash. It is also an area where the *narcissism of small differences* is expressed and where love and passion are extreme. Here people passionately love each other but they are even more *passionate*, morbidly passionate in their hatreds.

The empirical research of the interethnic relations and regional identity in the Balkans shows an increase of the ethnic distance in the last decade of the 20th century and in the early new millennium which is the result of the former Yugoslavia's disintegration, especially in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Only in critical situations and radical transformation such as transition do such radical changes take place in the collective consciousness, namely, the societies experience return to the matrix of the traditional consciousness and the values of the *collective unconsciousness*. In such historical circumstances that are marked with considerable social breakdowns and stresses followed by collective frustrations and identity crises of the social groups, there comes a wave of all sorts of fundamentalism, ideological, religious and ethnic particularism as well as further worsening of the interethnic relations, an increase of the ethnic distance, exclusion, intolerance and xenophobia. All this in practice leads to *ethnocentrism* and *ethnopolitics* and it ends most often in interethnic conflicts that grow, here, in the Balkans, into armed conflicts and bloodshed.

The multiethnic cocktail in the Balkans, as shown today and in the past, in the most decisive moments in its history, transformed from richness into its opposition especially when it was used by ethnocrats and great powers for the realization of their particular aims in the nationalist strategy of *blood and land* and imperial expansion. So profoundly disturbed relations among the ethnic group would take a long time to recover and their

-Blagoje Babić, *Prelaz u tranziciji*, Prometej, Beograd, 1996;

-Ljubiša R. Mitrović, *Balkan – granica i most među narodima*, Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, Beograd, 2000;

-Ljubiša R. Mitrović, *Savremeni Balkan u ključu sociologije društvenih promena*, Centar za jugoistočnoevropske studije, Beograd, 2003;

-Ljubiša R. Mitrović, *Balkanska raskršća i alternative*, Centar za balkanske studije, Niš, 2006.

integration into the rising new civil society in the Balkans will be realized through building ethnic tolerance and the culture of peace.

THE CONTEMPORARY BALKANS IN THE TRANSITION ZONE –
BETWEEN RETRADITIONALIZATION AND MODERNIZATION

The contemporary Balkan region is in the zone of transition and choice (S. Huntington). It is also caught in the processes of *the third wave*.

The implosion of socialism in 1989 opened up a way of transition for the Balkan societies to transform themselves from monoparty authoritarian regime into pluralist civil societies. Deep changes took place in economy, social structure (class-stratified), politics and culture.

New political elites in the Balkans, found themselves in the position to choose a model of social development. Most of them opted for a liberal-democratic model in politics and neoliberalism in economy.

A critical questioning of the transition shows that, apart from Slovenia which chose a combination of the liberal-democratic and social-democratic model of social development, the other countries in transition in the Balkans have experienced regression. Namely, according to the numerous indicators, their development is well below the 1989 level of development. This shows contradictions of the transition as well as the fact that any mechanical application of the neoliberal model of dependent (cloned) modernization has led to peripherization of economy and society in the Balkans in addition to the creation of dependent societies of the world semiperiphery capitalism.⁶

The transition of the Balkan societies from authoritarian forms of political organization and the commanding form of economy towards a pluralist political system with market economy is accompanied with numerous contradictions and blockades. The transition balance in the Balkans shows that after the phase of the so-called *blocked transition* and transition recession, these societies, through many reform undertakings, make a crucial step forward, towards modernization, growth and development. This is a painful, long-term and controversial process instead of being a friendly sports match in which, as suggested by I. Wallerstein, there are losers and winners and whose outcome will depend on numerous factors, internal and external, objective and subjective. This outcome will also depend on global processes and actors, their strategies as well as numerous regional, national and local peculiarities. For the time being, the Balkan region is torn between the past and the future, retraditionalization and modernization while all its societies may be said to have *a transitory identity*.

⁶ For additional information on the topic, the reader is referred to: Ljubiša R. Mitrović, *Put u zavisno društvo – bilans tranzicije na Balkanu*, Institut za političke studije, Beograd, 2004.

CONTEMPORARY BALKANS
AND THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION AND EUROINTEGRATION

We are living in the days of globalization. *Globalization* as a process grew out of the scientific-technological revolution, new production forces, division and integration of modern labor; all this led to an intensive interdependence (in technology, economy, politics, culture) and to the formation of a *network society* (M. Castells). This process is spreading all over the globe. Numerous forms of megaintegrations in the world, including the European Union, represent a specific form of regional globalization.

To the challenges of *contemporary megatrends* and especially the processes of globalization and Eurointegration, the Balkan elites, regardless of some hesitation, responded affirmatively in the last decade. Today, unlike the situation in the early years of the 20th century, not only the political elites but the majority of the Balkan peoples, considering the public opinion, are positive towards entering the Eurointegration processes. *The sub-globalization of the Balkans* is today an assumption of its further development and transition into a modern civil society.

As shown by the research projects, the majority of the Balkan countries are today more liable to the strategy of particular, individual joining of the European Union than to the building of an autonomous regional strategy of cooperation, integration and common entering of all the Balkan countries in the European Union.

Dynamics of the Balkan Countries' Entering the EU

	PSI	Membership in the EU	Introduction of euro
Bulgaria		2007	2009
Rumania		2007	2012
Croatia	2004	2008-2009	2010-2012
Macedonia	2004	2013	2015
Albania	2007	after 2013	after 2015
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2007	after 2013	after 2015
Serbia	2007	after 2013	after 2015
Montenegro	2007	after 2013	Since 2002
Kosovo	2007	after 2013	since 2002

Note: SSP = Pact on Stabilization and Integration

Source: Evropski forum, Published in the weekly Vreme, Belgrade, No. 725, 25 November 2004, p. 4

Contemporary Europe as embodied in the European Union, regardless of the rhetoric of its eurocrats, represents, first and foremost, an institutionalized expression of the integration of capital, the coalition of the most powerful transnational corporations, created with the purpose of carrying out their economic and political goals. As such, it still has a long way to go before it becomes a common home of equal nations, citizens and countries. Nevertheless, the Eurointegrations are the key for a faster economic development as well as political stabilization of the region and its integration into Europe and the world. The economic, cultural and political integration of the Balkan countries within and among themselves, and then with Europe and the rest of the world represents the right way for the Balkans to get out of the dark shadow of the past (or, as Andrić metaphorically put it, out of the "damned yard"), and to open up to the new developmental and civilisational challenges of the modern time and the future.

The contemporary Balkans needs to become a part of the modern division of labour through the processes of eurointegration. It also needs to productively face the challenges of globalization and to, through modernization and development, pave the road for the creation of a modern society in this region. It is a process that the protagonists of the new development forces and modern economy, the political and cultural elites can stimulate only on condition they have scientifically defined projects and meticulously worked out development strategies which should create a dialectical unity between the designated objectives and the instruments of achieving individual and common goals and the unity of national, regional and universal spirit and identity – in other words, a social democratic progress as the function of equality and freedom of every nation and every man. Only the Balkans and Europe envisioned in that manner, the ones that integrate the values of progress, humanism and freedom, can represent a challenging vision, a modern development project and the future of modern humankind.

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GEOPOLITIČKI I SOCIOLOŠKI ASPEKTI TRANZICIJE JEDNOG REGIONALNOG PROSTORA: OD BALKANA KA JUGOISTOČNOJ EVROPI

Ljubiša Mitrović

Savremeni Balkan nalazi se u procesu tranzicije. On ima protivrečan tranzitorni identitet; nalazi se na raskršću, razapet između retradiconalizacije i modernizacije. Budućnost Balkana ne leži u prekrajanju prošlosti i sukobima, već u traganju za modernom formulom razvoja, međusobne saradnje i integracije sa Evropom i svetom. Balkanskim narodima u 21. veku predstoji da se odreknu pogubnih ideoloških doktrina krvi i tla, zabludne vere u svemoć oružja, da se okrenu budućnosti: novoj strategiji – da jedino putem ekonomskog razvoja i demokratije mogu da ostvaruju svoje životne interese, socijalni i kulturni napredak. Autor veruje – u mogućnost i budućnost ujedinjavanja balkanskih naroda na novoj razvojnoj i civilizacijskoj platformi, u čijem središtu su: kultura mira, socijalno partnerstvo za razvoj i integraciju, međusobno poverenje i saradnja sa svetom.

Ključne reči: *Balkan, tranzicija, razvoj, geokultura*