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**THE REPORT FOR THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF JUNIR ON THE TOPIC: "ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND
CONFESSIONAL RELATIONS IN THE BALKANS"
SHOPLUK, SHOPLUK AMONG OTHER THINGS¹
(The possibilities of Shopluk as a factor of regional
cooperation and connection in the Balkan peninsula)**

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Abstract.

*"May you live and be healthy and
get old and gray like the Old Mountain..."
(An old Shop toast dedicated to the bride and bridegroom)*

Can Shop (Shopsko), as a pavitly forgotten and neglected name of the central part of the Balkans, become nowadays, in this modern time, a factor of connecting peoples and countries of the Balkan Peninsula? Have the historical, political, social, cultural and other conditions developed, which would finally enable Shopluk to demonstrate its integrative possibilities and turn into "a connecting and linking bridge" out of "the seed of discord"? These, as well as many other questions dealing with Shopluk and Shops are the starting point of our research interest. Thus, in this article we shall strive to follow the trail of answering them.

Namely, Shopluk as an ethnographic area, and Shops, as an ethnographic group, hide, in our opinion, certain possibilities of the regional cooperation and bringing together of Serbs, Bulgarians and Macedonians, as well as the countries in which these peoples live. Reducing their integrative possibilities to a real scope we are aware that their function of connection and cooperation cannot be great and important. However, we are sure that in this for centuries tumultuous area, even the least contribution must not be neglected. Thus, it is our wish to initiate again the discussion on the phenomenon of

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¹ The title is a paraphrase of the well - known work by Hans Magnus Encesberger, "Germany, Germany, among other things".

Shopluk and indicate some basic prerequisites of its Balkan integration. Although it has long been a nationally differentiated territory, its ethnic layers, hides in the possibilities of a bridging character. Shopluk and Shops are patiently waiting for their researchers.

Key words: *Shopluk (Shopsko), Shops, the Balkans, integration, cooperation, ethnographic area, ethnographic group, national identity*

The Balkans - just how many associations does this term arouse?² Being an "eternal enigma" and a "riddle without an answer" it has always attracted attention and occupied human thought. Praised and denied, glorified and cursed - it has always made one search for the answers to the ever present questions. Alongside that, every cognitive generalisation of this part of the Old Continent has stumbled upon the multitude of controversies and problems that the Balkan territories immanently possess. As an extremely complex area it requires a multidisciplinary approach and only through a cross section of many different sciences (geography, geopolitics, geostrategy, history, politology, defendology, ethnography, linguistics, etc.) is it possible to come to the right way of solving the Balkan knot.

The manysidedness of viewing the Balkan reality also reflects itself in different definitions of its geographical position. Mostly it is considered that the Balkans occupies the territory of Southern Europe, the west, south & east border lines of which are outlined by the seas (the Adriatic, Ionian, Aegean, Black and the seas of Crete and Marmara) and the conditional north border presents the Danube - Sava - Trieste line (1200 kilometres in longitude). Today the following countries occupy this area: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, the European part of Turkey and Romania, which can be considered the comprising element of the Balkans due to its historical connections with it. The Balkans has a territory of 1.548.241. square kilometres and a population of over 125.000.000.³

Therefore, with its size, position and geographical characteristics, it represents the natural bridge between Europe and Asia, i.e. between Europe and Africa. However, that was also one of the primary causes of the vulnerability of its geostrategic position and of the appearance of the Balkan antagonisms. The geopolitical problems of the Balkans are extremely complex and deep rooted. The stumbling block of inter - Balkan relations has its roots in historical, cultural, economic, political, religious, ethnic, national and other

² "The Balkans Peninsula" as a geographical term was mentioned for the first time in specialist literature at the beginning of the 19 th century. Among the first to use it was the German geographer, A. Zeune, in 1809, who had taken it over from the French writer, A. Boue, who had named thus one part of Stara Planina ("Old Mountain") in Bulgaria, with an intention "that the southeast territory of the European land should be named after the main mountain range, analogous to the Appenine Peninsula". (Enc. leks. zav. , Volume 1, Zagreb, 1950, p. 361.)

Ethimological meaning of the word 'Balkan' comes from the word 'mountain' in Turkish.

³ All data was taken from : Veliki atlas sveta, Prosveta, Beograd, 1973.

differences, making these areas unstable and socially tumultuous from time immemorial. As the spot where different interests and civilisations met, but also collided, it has history rich in events and too tight for them. But even beside that, many peoples have chosen this relatively small territory to inhabit and live in. Their past is full of examples of agreements and cooperation, but even more of misunderstanding and bloody clashes, and that is the reason why this territory holds an infamous record in the number of wars on the Old Continent. Very often there have appeared territorial aspirations towards "one's own ethnic territory" and "ethnic clean countries", but these intentions have always left behind them historical reminiscences that made any integrative processes even harder, due to the fact that peoples are mixed. That is the reason why "balcanization" has become a synonym for territorial division and permanent clashes.

The Balkans has for centuries been influenced by external factors which did not contribute to the realisation of the interests of its peoples but, on the contrary, has made inter - Balkan relations further more complex. Freeing away from that, the Balkan peoples have been eating a complex interactive net. That enabled them to realise that the perspective does not lie in *autarchic relations* but in mutual cooperation and finding the basis for the long-term cooperation. The fact that they are territorially and historically bound together, then mutual threats and some global political approaches made them realise the need for *cooperation and stabilising the relations in the Balkans*. The idea of integration has taken a very long time to reach the surface, and it has been even harder for it to come into being, for it required the existence of a complex structure of conditions and circumstances. It is the same for the present wishes and aspirations towards the integration of Europe which, lacking respect for the Balkan reality, have acquired the connotation of "running away from this territory": they have also overlooked the priority of reaching good inter-relations in that way. All the analyses confirm that every effort in that direction means the minimum of regional cooperation and the connecting of Balkan peoples and countries. Hence the current interest in the question: how and on what is that process to be found? Searching for an answer to this question confirms the existence of many factors that could be (alongside the wish for harmony and cooperation) at the disposal of the peoples and countries in the Balkans. One of these factors are the numerous *ethnographic groups and ethnographic territories*. Putting their integrative power as *the factor of regional cooperation* into realistic scopes, it must be said that within themselves they hide many latent elements of connecting that in certain conditions should be released and enabled to be expressed in overall tendency for regional cooperation. That is exactly where we are directing our interests - towards the search for both evident and latent elements on the basis of which inter - Balkan connecting can be built.

The Balkan Peninsula, as the crossroads of East and West, has inevitably been the spot where many peoples and conquerors met and mixed, and thus created various ethnic amalgams. Many of them have till this day kept the traces of the heritage of the Balkan tradition. One of them are *Shops* who inhabited the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, once known by now almost forgotten name - Shopluk or Shopsko. Thus *the basic question of our research interest* can be defined as follows: can Shopluk, as the specific ethnographic area, become today the factor of regional cooperation and connecting in the Balkan Peninsula? That is: have the historical, social, cultural, cognitive, political and other conditions been finally fulfilled that would enable Shopluk to become "a connecting

and linking brige" out of "the seed of discord"? These, as well as many other questions dealing with the phenomenon of Shopluk and Shops (Shopa) persistently await scientifically curious people who would search for their answers.

Shopluk (and Shops with it) represents the subject of scientific interest which has, without justification, been neglected and insufficiently explained in science. That is, of course, contrary to the part it has been given by history in this multiethnic territory. It is not easy to supply the justification for such long scientific neglect. Probably the reasons for this were its exceptional vulnerability, research delicacy, frequent changes of state border-lines, and also collisions of national interests and a tumultuous history, all obstacles for this subject to be dealt with objectively, without any national prejudice and cheap politics. All this led to disagreements among scientists upon the basic characteristics of Shopluk - a more precise defining of its territory, ethnic processes, the national identity of its population, the speech zones, the interpretation of historical events, etc.

With regard to the literature it can be seen that there was some research on Shops and Shopluk, but mostly isolated and sporadic in character, and with ethno-political goals in mind. By now, a comprehensive study or a monograph of this area has still not been done. Superficiality in research or just external dealing with the territory inhabited by Shops were not rare. Most studies had a time limit, which brought about the lack of representative data and stereotype presentation of Shops. To all this contributed the geographic position of Shopluk. Itself being in close touch and among Balkan peoples - Serbs, Bulgarians and Macedonians, it has often been disputed from the point of view of "belonging to ethnic territories", and many studies granted it "the exclusive possession right". Out of this came all the negative qualifications of the inhabitants of this area. Unfortunately, such a standpoint in getting to know Shopluk and Shops has not been completely abandoned even today. Even now, many unsolved problems of Shops and Shopluk lie in the very core of the confrontations of national ethnographies of the Balkans, which keeps dimming the whole of Shopluk and *disables its integrative role of the central part of the Balkans Peninsula*. Thus, the complex and contradictory past of the Balkans, bringing this problem out of the reach of the strict scientific circles and its geographical position, was the basic factor of differences in viewing Shopluk and Shops. We believe that the calming down of political zeal of "the protectors of exclusive national interests" and missionaries of "clean nations" would help create the starting conditions for more objective scientific researches and fairer discussions, which would, in itself, mean opening the space for the integrative function of Shopluk. But, just as well, it is important to say that avoiding unsolved problems does not help the long-term interest of those Balkan peoples whose national corpses this ethnic group has melted into.

The basic goal of supporting the modern viewing of this area has to be avoiding unnecessary politicizing, interpretation apriori, and also taking care of theoretically-methodological complexity of researching Shopluk. We are aware that it is neither easy nor simple to give scientifically satisfying solutions for many unsolved problems of complex ethnic processes that have been developing in these territories under extremely specific socially-historical circumstances for centuries. The given historical, political and social conditions have created a complex (but interesting for studying) ethnic composition of the Balkans Peninsula, which demands perseverance, persistence, interdisciplinary knowledge and adherence to strict scientific criteria from its explorer. All this requires

team work, and intertwining of different sciences and scientific disciplines in order to overcome the existing treatment of Shopluk and Shops and to fully uncover their phenomenon.

Aiming to draw the attention to the need of overcoming the stated connotations in order to find the possibilities of connecting the Balkans' central territories, we will now indicate only those dilemmas and differences that had and still have a specific weight. Their span is not small ranging from the disagreements about the ethymological meaning and semantic content of the term "Shop" over the disagreements about the origin of Shop and their ethnogenesis, to the differences in evaluating the territory of Shopluk as the area inhabited mostly by this ethnic group. The greatest differences on this matter were expressed in the positions of the Bulgarian and Yugoslavian ethnologies and ethnographies, where the "national factor" had a strong influence. However, the truth of the matter is that the Bulgarian science has devoted much more attention to Shopluk and Shops than our own scientists, and this is probably so because the greater part of Shopluk remains within the borders of Bulgaria and the lesser one within Yugoslavia and Macedonia. And such as it is, the Bulgarian science has not freed itself from the "national idea"; more-or-less all of the researchers follow the thesis that Shops are the ethnic group of the Bulgarian people solely and that Shopluk is a "Bulgarian ethnic territory". The modern Bulgarian ethnology and ethnography have not advanced far from these claims, but in general follow in the footsteps of their precursors. For instance, A. Isirokov states the following while writing on the problem of establishing the true number of Bulgarians in the Balkans during the 30's of the 20th century: "How many Bulgarians are there in Serbia - no one knows at all. But, from some other sources it is known that there were at least 100.000 Bulgarians in Serbia before 1878, one part of whom had come from the area around the town Tetovo, and *the other part were local Shops who called themselves Bulgarians and* and in whose language there was a great number of Bulgarian words." (A.Isirikov,1921:43-44). Or V. Hadzinikolov who speaking about the importance of studying particular ethnographic areas in Bulgaria, says: "One of the ethnographic areas in our country, *that has got a solid Bulgarian ethnic base* that is characterized by strong Slavic and prebulgarian tradition, but which is expressed through a wealth of a differences and cultural forms, an area *that holds an important position in the overall Bulgarian ethnic space*, but is at the same time characterized by numerous traditional cultural particularities, is the ethnographic area of Shops or Shopluk. In the past, in this area lived the people who mostly belonged to *the Shop ethnographic group of the Bulgarian people*." (Gl.kor.prof.d-r V. Hadzinikolov, 1984:11) (underlined by D.K.) A similar opinion was shared by H. Vakarelski: " One of *the specific groups of the Bulgarian people are Shops*" (H.Vakarelski, 1943:252), as well as A. Strasimirov: "Of all *the Bulgarian groups the most specific one are Shops*". (A. Strasimirov, 1963:242) (underlined by D.K.). Similar theses were stated for some other areas. Thus, for instance, S. Vlgarov claims, speaking of the characteristics of Bulgarian national kolos (kolo - a national dance): "Bulgarian national kolos are grouped into six ethnographic groups on the basis of the differences in their performance coming from the areas of: Trakija, Rodopi, Pirin, *Shopluk*, Dobrudza and from the north of the country. It is impossible to draw a sharp line among them, for they mutually intertwine. It can be most clearly seen in the places where regions meet, in the way the forms and styles are mixed." (S. Vlgarov,1976:43). Or J. Trifunov, who, studying the ethymology of the name "Shop",

states that: "Among various ethnographic names of *our people*, such as 'Brzaci', 'Mijaci', 'Ninjovci', 'Hrcoi', 'Tukunci', 'Torlaci', 'Torbesi', etc. the name 'Shop' is the one most-known." (J. Trifunov, 1912:122) (underlined by D.K.).

The examples of laying national claims can also be found in Serbian literature, but to a much lesser degree. The writer Ivan Ivanovic can be taken as an example of one who defined Shops as "an ethnic group of the Serbian people. He was also among the first to introduce Shops into the literature. In a letter to the American professor of Slavic studies, T. Magner, on the matter of Shops' origin, he writes: "Who are Shops today is hard to define precisely. I am inclined to believe that Shops are *all the Serbs* who lived on the newly liberated territory in south Serbia, at the time of the liberation from the Turks in 1878. Therefore, Shops are the native inhabitants of Southern Serbia, Kosovo and Metohija and Macedonia, who mostly fled to the mountain areas on the right bank of the Juzna Morava river after the battle of Kosovo and the loss of independence of *the Serbian medieval state*." (I. Ivanović, 1988:114) (underlined by D.K.).

Most disagreements (which are still present) were caused by the question of the territory belonging to Shopluk, of defining "ethnic territories" and "ethnic borders", but the most severe ones were brought about by drawing ethnographic maps. Serving, most frequently, national politics with exclusive rights to "one's own ethnic space", these disagreements have several times grown into wars among the peoples in the Balkans. This history lesson warns rather seriously of the importance and delicacy of these problems, and also of the gravity with which they should be studied. All this should be done in order to prevent these disagreements from becoming the cause of or the reason for wars ever again, or that this territory should become the war aim of any people in the Balkan Peninsula.

It is, beyond doubt, very hard and complex, almost impossible, to draw precise ethnic (ethnographic) borders, since there are no sharp ethnic differences. Thus, any settling of borders of this kind is based on finding out as many ethnographic specifics as possible. And that is where the root of the disagreements lies: depending on political needs and "desirable ethnographic characteristics" diametrically opposed views are formed. The objectivity of the approach to solving this problem should overcome any selectiveness in choosing ethnographic characteristics, and should include into its final opinion all the facts that would contribute to forming as complete a "mosaic picture" of Shopluk and Shops as possible. This means that all the studied aspects of this subject should be taken into account, such as:

- the ethno-psychological characteristics of the population,
- outstanding morphological and other natural features,
- the feeling of belonging to a nation of the local population,
- the self-defining of the population and the existence of a certain national consciousness,
- the national costume (especially women's),
- the existence of religious elements,
- folk customs and beliefs,
- the way of living, etc.

Only with the synthetism of these and many other elements is it possible (but, on condition again) to start defining the territory inhabited by a certain ethnic, i.e.

ethnographic group. This methodological condition is specially important in studying the problem of Shopluk and Shops.

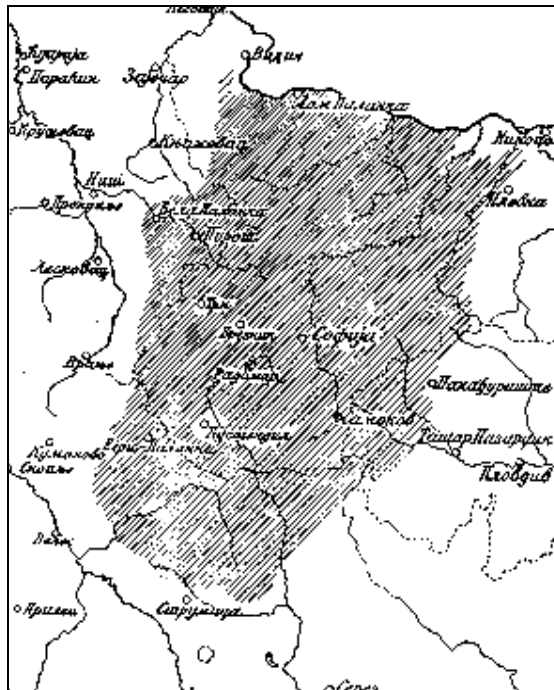
All ethnic maps and borders are relative and go out-of-date very fast. This is especially true for the Balkan Peninsula, where ethnic communities and peoples were caught in powerful ethnic processes, numerous wars over state borders, in mass migration fluxes, assimilation and various other ethnographic changes. Therefore, there could be no permanent, or stable ethnographic border-line, especially for a longer period. Among the first to take into account this fact was Jovan Cvijić, who emphasized the transitional character of these areas: "It is very hard, almost impossible, to draw this line, because the Serbs and the Bulgarians are, in many ways, the same people, besides, *there are great areas of transitional peoples between their national cores.*" (J. Cvijić, 199:208) (underlined by D. K.). His scientific objectivity raised him above, until then, often idealised and onesidedly drawn ethnic (ethnographic) borders of the central part of the Balkans. Cvijić says: "Language kinship and numerous identical ethnographic characteristics gave the intellectuals of both peoples the cause to regard the areas by the border as strictly Serbian or strictly Bulgarian, and thus started the linguistic correspondence, which lasts for decades, concerning two areas: border areas between the river Timok in Serbia and the river Iskra in Bulgaria and Macedonia." (Ibid, p.209). Arguing with his forerunners and devoting himself to correcting wrong notions J.Cvijić says: "The first disputed area, between the Timok and the Iskra, was marked in the oldest linguistic map, made by Safarik, a Bulgarian, although it was both linguistically and ethnographicallz almost unknown at that time. Ami Bue took this over and, according to ethnographic tradition, the wrong border between the Serbs and Bulgarians remained in all ethnographic maps (except in Serbian ones) till the latest ethnographic maps by Niderl and Florinski." (Ibid, p.209.). Complaining about the lack of systematic ethnographic, linguistic and dialectological studies, J. Cvijić emphasizes that the present knowledge is not a reliable enough source for differentiating Bulgarians and Serbs in these areas: "Furthermore, accoring to the present state, we can conclude that many customs, habits and beliefs of the Serbs and Bulgarians are the same or almost the same. There are no studies that would scientifically and precisely determine specific Serbian or Bulgarian characteristics; yet, it seems that there are several such characteristics, which I will list at the end of this chapter." (ibid, p.209.) One such characteristic that could be, according to Cvijic, *diferencia specifica* of one or the other people is Slava (the Serbian family celebration of its patron saint). The difference was made exactly by the diffusion of "the most important Serbian custom - Slava, which comprises both Christian and pagan elements". Introducing this custom - a religious element into ethnographic division, Cvijic says: "None of the other Serbian customs is so warm and deep, and so personal, being related to the family, and handed down to each new generation, it is carried out through the centuries. There is no custom of that kind among the Bulgarians in the East, from the Shop area onwards, and it is used, as a characteristic fosile, to differentiate the Serbian population and the population under the stronger Serbian influence from the Bulgarian one." (Ibid, p.211).

Beside these impediments in defining ethno-space, there are some other characteristics specific to Shopluk which added to this uncertainty. One of these is the lack of affiliation to community, i.e. the non-existence of the consciousness of their own entity. This especially reflects on the transitional and border parts of the Shop area. This is probably,

among other things, the result of the negative connotations given by the neighbouring population of Shopluk to the very name "Shop". As a consequence, the population of Shopluk had problems to accept it or were forced to ethnic mimicry. Giving the pejorative and insulting meaning to the ethnonym "Shop" was specially characteristic of the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, i.e. during the phase of the formation of national states and organised nationalisation of the population within state borders. That exactly is the criterion ("the state of national consciousness") which J. Cvijić chooses as one of the relative factors in defining the ethnic character of the population, when the linguistic or some other ethnic traits are not fully known. "With the state of linguistic and ethnographic studies as it is, and the already mentioned areas between the Serbian and the Bulgarian peoples being transitional, where, it seems, precise and generally applicable scientific results would be hard to obtain even after detailed scientific studies, one must turn to yet another criterion - the state of national consciousness. Furthermore, if in these areas there is a strong Serbian or Bulgarian national consciousness, then that would be, in my opinion, more important than one Serbian or one Bulgarian linguistic or ethnographic trait more. However, these transitional areas can be *without clearly expressed national consciousness*, and since there are no undoubtedly established linguistic and ethnographic traits, we must colour them in neutral colours." (Ibid, p.209). Now we will not delve further into examples of defining borders and attempts to establish the Balkans' ethnic territories, especially of Shopluk. We are joining the group of authors who accept the greatest number of ethnographic elements and who observe this problem strictly scientifically. Therefore, as Shopluk we consider the predominantly mountainous area in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, stretching as a meridian across the present-day Yugoslavian - Bulgarian - Macedonian border (200 km long and 50 - 80 km wide), over 12.000 km² of land, the greater part of which belongs to Bulgaria, and the somewhat lesser one belonging to Yugoslavia and Macedonia. It starts in the North, from Stara Planina ('Old Mountain') to Plackovica and Meleske planine (mountains) in the South. The west part of Shopluk begins with the line of Bela Palanka - Vlasina - Pčinja, and stretches out to Iskra, Dupnica, Strumica and Sophia valley in the East. This ethnographic space is not homogenous, but with numerous local specifics and ethnographic peculiarities, it forms "the wealth of Shop diversity". Many factors have contributed to this ethnographic diversity: geographic territory, migrations, ethnic mingling, historical events, etc. As such areas these stand out: Kraiste (around the towns of Custendil, Bosilgrad and Radomir), Maleševo (southeast of the town of Osogovo), Slaviste and Pijanac (near the river Pčinja), Vlasina (around Vlasina lake and the town of Crna Trava), Grahovo (around the town of Breznik and Pernik), Bure (west of the town Trna), Znepolje (south and east of Trn), Lušnica (around the town of Babusnica and Ljuborada), Torlak (surroundings of the town of Pirot and Dimitrovgrad), Zagorje (Stara Planina's east side), Zaglavak (southeast of the town Knjaževac), Zaplanje (around the town of Gadžin Han), Budžak (around the town of Kalna), Sophia field and Sophia valley, and many more in the east part of Shopluk.

There were also many debates and different views expressed when ethnogenesis and the origin of Shops are concerned. Beyond doubt, one of the greatest ethnological and ethnographic problems is identification of those ethnic groups which took part in the formation of a historically new ethnic group, as well as discovering those ethnic elements which contributed most to the particular ethnic process and creation of a new ethnic

group. *This problem concerns Shops, too.*



Map 1. Diffusion of Shops (1:3000000) by Rista T. Nikolić (1912:97)

There are numerous theses and hypotheses trying to answer the question: Who are Shops? Most of the researchers of Shopluk and Shops support the thesis that this ethnic group is the product of the mingling of newly arrived Slavic tribes and the remains of the Romanised native inhabitants. It will not be easy to explain scientifically how these predominantly cattle-breeding tribes managed to keep their ethnic traits, having gone through many dramatic historical events and rather complex ethnic processes. It is astonishing how these native tribes have kept their Romanic (ethnic) individuality until the 11th century, and comprised the main ethnic mass in these territories, together with the Slavic tribes, in the 12th century. Later historical events prevented Shops from bringing their ethnic individuality and authenticity to a higher socially-integrative level, such as a people or a nation. They remained to exist on the level of an ethnographic community, which has preserved some of the original ethnic identity elements, but which lacks the basic ethnic constant and the basic segment for a higher level of ethnic grouping - a more stable *consciousness of their own ethnic particularity*. Although it could be found even today, it exists more as a rudimentary memory or ethnic reminiscences, similar to not so long ago extinct tribes and peoples (the way that in certain historical moments the Etrurians, Hazars, Tracians, Mesians, Illyrians, etc. disappeared from the ethnic map) Shops do not exist as a solid and stable ethnic community. Their ethnic process was stopped by a concurrence of certain historical, political, military, social and

other circumstances and it is impossible to start again. Shopluk has become *a nationally defined territory* long ago, where, some time ago, there used to live an ethnic-cultural group which had, and to a certain degree, still has its authentic traits. Shops were ethnically complete communities, but, at the same time, *a weak and uncertain ethnic category*. They were different from almost all of their neighbours and recognisable by many authentic characteristics. Their contribution to the creation of the existing ethnic map on the territory where tribes and peoples have mixed for centuries, much more than anywhere else in Europe, cannot be neglected or forgotten. The present ethnic picture and the current national maps are the result of finished ethnic processes, the state of national consciousness and the liberal declaration of ones nationality. Stating one's belonging to a nation has become an integral part of the attained level of human rights and freedoms. Of course, all this has to be understood in terms of the modern definition of the idea of a nation, which is no longer merely ethnic, *but considers the category of will, too*.

Shops' ancestors were ruled by many rulers, regimes and peoples: from the Byzantine reign, Slavic assimilation, Bulgarian khans, princes and tzars, Serbian tzars, kings and dukes, czar Samuilo, to the slavery brought by the Turks. They remained under Turkish reign until the second half of the 19th century, when they gave a considerable contribution to the liberation of the Balkans from the Turks. In 1878 the peace treaty was signed in Vienna, and *that year was of utmost importance in the history of Shopluk and Shops, since it was then that new qualitative ethnic processes started in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula*. Namely, by the Vienna peace treaty were defined, among other things, the state borders between the Kingdom of Serbia and the Principality of Bulgaria. By that act, Shopluk was separated into two unequal parts, the greater part of which was included into the Bulgarian state of the time, and a much lesser one into the Serbian kingdom. As it was also the historical birth of two young national states (Serbia and Bulgaria), the population of Shopluk that entered the composition of these states was to accept either the Serbian or the Bulgarian national identity and make sure to hand it down to posterity. The available historiographic data tell us that numerous administrative measures of the young national states were adjusted to this aim. Thus started the process of assimilation of Shops into Serbs and Bulgarians, and later into Macedonians. It carried on rather intensely during the Second Balkan war, and during the First World War. When it was finished, besides the memory of them, there remained, to bear witness, some ethnographic elements reflected in costumes, speech, customs, language, habits, *music, culture, architecture, etc.*

Is it possible, considering everything mentioned above, for Shopluk to take over the role of the regional factor of cooperation and connecting the Serbs, Bulgarians and Macedonians, as well as the countries where they live? In our opinion, *possibilities do exist, but at this moment they are not great*. But, any contribution to cooperation, even the least one, in these for centuries tumultuous territories, is not to be neglected. In the ethnic depths of these peoples there is a Shop layer which can acquire a much stronger integrative role, if the conditions are met for it to come to the surface and for its linking character to be established. Therefore, all ideas and stereotypes, onesidedness, politicizing and concluding apriori about Shopluk and Shops must be overcome, and their authenticity and particularity cherished as "the wealth of diversity" of the Balkan Peninsula. That would be the first step towards creating the opportunity for Shopluk to become "the bridge of cooperation and connecting" of this part of the Balkans out of "the seed of discord". The starting impulse is in the scientists' domain, while changes in the

Balkan states' national policies would follow. Shopluk and Shops are waiting for their chance to become a true factor of regional cooperation and *connecting in the Balkan Peninsula*.

As no true science aims to the ultimate truth, similarly the views expressed in this paper are yet another attempt to give not ultimate but possible answers to still unanswered questions about Shops and Shopluk. The attained knowledge of them does not offer sufficient foundations for forming a synthetic and consistent scientific theory of Shopluk and Shops. For deeper penetration into the essence of this problem thorough knowledge of many sciences and scientific disciplines is required (as we have already emphasised) - of history, archaeology, ethnology, ethnopsychology, linguistics, ethnography, etc. Only a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach can help create a more concrete picture of the phenomenon of Shops and Shopluk. And this, beyond doubt, calls for the study of a much greater span and for the joint effort of many researchers. However, all the while, the delicacy and susceptibility of this subject must not be forgotten, since they encroach on national identity, ethnic individuality, human integrity, and also on national the policies of the peoples in the central Balkans. To answer the questions of ethnic origin and national roots, requires a researcher to be a real expert and extremely responsible. We believe that this subject is, even though so complex, very provocative and interesting to study; that it represents some sort of a mine to which science will give deserving attention and thus give Shopluk and Shops the opportunity to take the place they deserve according to their importance and the role they have had in the history of the Balkan peoples. Just as Shops have left so much to their posterity, it is the duty of science to save them from oblivion and present them in their true colours to our contemporaries.

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**ŠOPLUK, ŠOPLUK IZMEĐU OSTALOG
(Mogućnosti Šopluka kao faktora regionalne saradnje
i povezivanja na Balkanskom poluostrvu)**

Dragan Kolev

*"Da ste živi i zdravi i da ostareete i
obelete kako Stara planina..."
/Stara šopska zdravica upućena mladencima /*

Da li Šopluk (Šopsko), kao već pomalo zaboravljeni i zapostavljeni naziv centralnog dela Balkana, može u ovom sadašnjem, savremenom vremenu postati faktor koji će povezivati narode i države Balkanskog poluostrva? Da li su se stekli istorijski, politički, društveni, kulturni i drugi uslovi koji bi napokon omogućili Šopluku da ispolji svoje integrativne mogućnosti i da od "sjemena razdora" postane "most spajanja i povezivanja"? Ova , kao i mnoga druga pitanja koja su vezana za Šopluk i Šope jesu polazna tačka našeg istraživačkog interesovanja, pa ćemo stoga i nastojati da u ovom radu budemo na tragu njihovog odgonetanja.

Naime, Šopluk kao etnografska oblast i Šopi kao etnografska grupa, po našem mišljenju, kriju izvjesne mogućnosti regionalne saradnje i zbližavanja Srba, Bugara i Makedonaca ali i država u kojima ovi narodi žive. Svodeći njegove integrativne mogućnosti u realne okvire, svesni smo da njegova funkcija povezivanja i saradnje ne može biti velika i značajna. Međutim, uvereni smo da na ovom, vekovima burnom prostoru, i najmanji doprinos ne sme biti zanemaren. Stoga nam je i želja, da ponovo iniciramo raspravu o fenomenu Šopluka i naznačimo neke osnovne preduslove njegove balkanske integracije. Iako već odavno nacionalno izdiferencirani prostor, on u svojim etničkim slojevima krije skrivene mogućnosti mostovskog karaktera. Šopluk i Šopi strpljivo čekaju svoje istraživače.

Ključne reči: *Šopluk (Šopsko), Šopi, Balkan, integracija, saradnja, etnografski prostor, etnografska grupa, nacionalni identitet*