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The Role of Serbs in the Creation of New Europe

Abstract

In this article the author reflects upon the idea of theoretical and practical creation of new Europe as opposed to the concept and form of the European Union. In this context, the issues of subjectivity and sovereignty of Europe's peoples are addressed in relation to the question of true democracy. The response to neoliberal and postmodern political project - such as the EU - is presented as the rise of post-liberal patriotism in different European states. The role of Serbs is this altering process of the 21st century is exemplified in a three-folded way: through the rise of Euroscepticism, through a remembrance that Russia is a constitutive part of Europe and through emphasis on the specific and representative case of political sovereignty of the Republic of Srpska.

Key words: Europe's peoples, European Union, neoliberalism, subjectivity, sovereignty, Serbs, The Republic of Srpska.

Europe VS. The European Union

The process of creation of *new Europe i.e., of Europe vs. the European Union in its existing form* – in political, economic, social and cultural terms – is entering its second phase. More precisely, this means to say the following: consciousness and awareness that for more than two decades the European Union has been both conceived and built as a *neoliberal and postmodern political project is rapidly growing among citizens and with this tendency subjectivity of Europe's peoples is reborn* (Koljević 2015: 72). Simultaneously, this process of a collective awakening is indi-

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cated by the fact that the project of the European Union has structurally been determined by two intellectual, social and political paradigms that have appeared as dominant in a non-European *topos*, namely, in the United States.² This is how *neoliberalism*³ and *postmodernity* – as fashionable forms of *Weltanschauung* – have been established as discourses of revealing truths *par excellence*. Moreover, they have been expressed as a symbiosis of unquestionable certainty, perceived as pure progress, which, therefore, cannot be critically examined. This crypto-intellectual atmosphere served as the foundation of the *political projects of the West* in last decades of the 20th and in the beginning of the 21st century.

Today, however, the so-called Western paradigm of diverse, but fundamentally interrelated, political, economic and military alliances such as the European Union and NATO – in bond with financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank – is more and more *reaching the stage in which it is disclosing itself as brutal force* in multiple and visible ways across the Old Continent. Moreover, at the same time, as a logical consequence, *the people of Europe* are becoming progressively aware of the fact that both their *national* and *social* interests⁴ are at stake in the current setting and that time has literary „run out of joint“. This is the core of the explanation why *new politics of right and left* are emerging in different European states throughout the continent from South to North, from East to West⁵: it is the process of *the rise of Europe's peoples* (Koljević & Fuzaro 2016: 111). In spite of their specific orientations and particularities these politics of *new left* and *new right* demonstrate common signifiers precisely in opposition to *neoliberalism and post-*

2 Concerning the specific role of postmodernism in the US see Cusset (2005). Regarding the issue of *postmodern foundation of the EU* see Cooper 2003. As for dominance of (neo)liberalism in the US and in the West in general see, for example, Bobbio (2006).

3 From diverse, and often opposed, political-philosophical determinations of neoliberalism, in the 21st century it turns out that the most precise determination has been made by Foucault in the 70s. It goes as follows: *biopolitics is neoliberalism and, as such, it refers to governing and control of entire populations*. The idea of biopolitics i.e., of neoliberalism, by the French philosopher has been expressed as the chosen theoretical and practical paradigm of the Western civilization and today it seems this path has reached the starting point of its end. See: Foucault (2008).

4 See Badiou 2012. Badiou's emphasis is on the social and economic moment while he misses to recognize the relevance of the national question in the struggle of people for freedom.

5 A detailed political-philosophical analysis of the case of Greece and its resistance to hegemony has been provided by Costas Douzinas (2013).

modernism in politics and economy. In other words, these politics reject a *neocolonial* and *neoimperial* stance and severely oppose the concept of Western *political, military, economic and cultural interventionism*. The main appeal here is one for a *return of sovereignty* while the structural call is one for *creation of political subjectivity* in European states. This process is comprehended as *the return of politics as true democracy* i.e., *as the will of the people* and, as such, presents sufficient ground for mutual understanding and cooperation between new authentic politics of right and left. Furthermore, all the stakes are that these articulations can serve as the basis for creation of *new social contracts* between *the people and new political elites – as well as between different European states* - which would, in final instance, produce transformations of the whole system.

In time which has properly been named as the time of *rebirth of history*, the quests for *freedom, justice, equality* and *national dignity*, emerge as structurally interrelated i.e., as a re-opening of the potential and of political relevance of the name of Europe – because Europe exists only in plural, in multiplicity of its preserved differences.⁶

Now, if *the alternative to the European Union is called Europe*, if the alternative to the specific class of *Eurocracy* are *European nations*, the alternative to *totalizing power* the concept of *democratic sovereignty*, then likewise, in real-political terms, it must be perceived that *such new Europe reaffirms its historical, cultural, political and economic ties with Russia* as its integral and *constitutive part*. Moreover, the contemporary situation, in which Russia is defending the principles of *sovereignty and equality of states* as opposed to *hegemony* i.e., the principles of creation of a multipolar world as opposed to forced unipolarity, the notions of communication and open dialogue as opposed to violence etc. make this Federation a true representative – and perhaps currently even an ultimate carrier – of real historic European values *per se*. In this respect, it should also be emphasized that both EU and NATO are more and more losing support among European citizens in different countries and, furthermore, that majority of Europeans does not perceive Russia as a threat but, rather, as a potential or actual political ally. This is even more the case since the crisis in Syria and struggle against ISIL brought into light all the consequences of politics of Western interventionism, as

6 Ultimately, the political and theoretical reality refuted, therefore, Balibar's concept of Europe. See Balibar (2003). This has also been recognized by Balibar himself: see Balibar (2010)

well as Russia's readiness to step forth and demonstrate decisiveness in the struggle against terrorism.

Moreover, the issue of new flow of migrants to Europe – an issue which also properly belongs to biopolitics i.e., to neoliberalism - places into question not only Western politics in Syria, but equally its previous engagements in countries such as Ukraine, Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan. In other words, the flow of both refugees and economic migrants to Europe is perceived as a *clear implication of the contemporary system of control and governing in major Western states – an example of neoliberal and postmodern politics par excellence*. All contemporary migrations to Europe are a consequence of wars i.e., of so-called „humanitarian interventions“, of violent or less violent regime changes in different places, of simulations of civil resistance, in short, of causing crisis or their so-called resolving.

In this respect, *refugees and the produced humanitarian crisis in Europe are one of most notable examples of the functioning of the neoliberal system of the European Union and United States.*⁷ At the same time, it is relevant to note that refugees themselves, as well as migrants, cannot emerge as *political subjects* (Agamben 2000: 47) because what we are dealing here is either 1) struggle for bare existence, and a life condition which is much closer to contemporary slavery than to contemporary subjectivity (and the refugees are, therefore, the announcement of the death of the subject), or 2) we are dealing with a classic example of consumer society and contemporary capitalism, which is the case with the so-called will for „better life“, ergo, with economic migrants. In other words, when there is persecution there is no law, where fear for life is present, the struggle for recognition cannot be achieved.

This is why it is *precisely the phenomenon of contemporary refugees which appears as the real image of contemporary Europe as European Union*, as the mirror of all European misapprehensions and defeats and, above all, as the image of *European escape from its own identity*. This is perhaps the most striking consequence of supporting imperialistic and neocolonial biopolitical projects from across the Atlantic, of which Eu-

7 The term „refugees“ is more adequate because it refers to *depolitization of politics* which happens in neoliberalism i.e., refers to *war* and to those who struggle for „bare life“. The term „migrants“ refers to the economic dimension and to the will for „better life“. In reality, *these two moments* - the tendency towards „bare life“ and tendency towards „better life“ - *appear as constitutive for neoliberal depolitization of politics*. On the concept of „bare life“ see Agamben (1998).

rope's peoples are becoming aware of. When we, therefore, speak about refugees or, more basically, about war, we can perceive that the ground of all contemporary wars is essentially *war against sovereignty, against the concept and practices of sovereignty* – and in this respect the phenomenon of refugees is a lively example of destruction of sovereignty or, more explicitly, of *self-destruction of sovereignty in Europe*. Moreover, both refugees and migrants, in different ways, appear as *metaphors of contemporary Western world*, of a constant struggle for bare life, of a world which, consciously or not, *attempts to destroy the multiplicity of subjects and identities*.

These are the implications of *present lack of sovereignty in European states* and the entire matter is even more complex since it coincides with biopolitical i.e., factual death of European peoples. Moreover, precisely death of different European nations exemplifies that *neoliberal Western system is essentially self-destructive* and that, in final instance, it destroys itself. Because, we are dealing here with internal dialectic in which death of the political (as the core of neoliberalism) in the end implies death *de facto*, and that governing over entire populations always means reference to the following moments: *wars, interventions, refugees, migrations*. Furthermore, all of these elements taken together constitute *the system of contemporary governance which, in final instance, turns against itself*.⁸

The only solution of the current migration crisis in Europe is resolving the crisis in the sense of securing conditions for the return of refugees to their country of origin. Moreover, the metaphor and reality of their return to homeland this way appears as a *metaphor for new politics in Europe* which presents a rebirth of *patria* and, therefore, refers to *the authentic meaning of politics as community, as self-determining community in which decisions are made about its own destiny*. This would be the end of political, military and legal interventionism because such a process would imply a beginning of not only *politics of time* (ergo, of contemporary politics of the 21st century which signifies a transition to a new epoch) but likewise of *politics of place* (politics in which *place* again becomes a relevant matter).

What would this mean for Europe? Above all, this would mean a European regaining of its *topos* through *the meaning of particular European identities instead of neoliberalism*, it would also refer to *reconstruction of*

8 In this light, it becomes clear that a response to such a condition of political, legal, cultural, humanitarian and security crisis, cannot be partial, that is, neither arbitrary nor purely numeric. The response must refer to inversion of the entire system.

*political, economic and cultural sovereignty instead of dominance of the model of domination, of crypto-politics that has produced mass migrations. This is the process of becoming of new subjectivity, a choice not of “bare life” or “better life” but of a political life, a contemporary renewal of the Aristotelian *zoon politikon* as the only chance for a way out for the Western civilization.*⁹

Foucault has articulated that the neoliberal process has also meant a construction of “society of security”, while Baudrillard has explicated that contemporary terrorism appeared precisely as the other of the system itself. This is also the logic of rise of ISIL, as the most radical form of terrorism i.e., of the phenomenon which appears as collateral but immanent product of the same system in the same way in which migrants and refugees appear as a consequence of neoliberal domination.

The last two decades demonstrated how „society of security“ has actually turned out to be one of least safe periods, as a time of growth of terrorism and also – that this is the result of destruction of two most relevant determinations of the political i.e., *sovereignty* and *democracy*. Seemingly paradoxically, precisely the system of “*liberal democracy*”, in most significant theoretical and political frameworks, has abolished *both sovereignty and democracy through transnational structures of capital*. The fact that the concept and practices of political, legal, economic and cultural sovereignty have been destructed simultaneously with the concept and politics of true democracy, testifies of the degree of their interrelatedness and, likewise, that the response to neoliberalism lies in this connection. *The renewal of the political means renewal of concepts and practices of sovereignty and democracy as constitutive and inseparable elements*. Furthermore, this relation is precisely the basis for establishing *new political and social forms of post-liberal patriotism in Europe*.

The Role of Serbia

What is *the role of Serbia in these processes which will, most likely, mark the course of the entire 21 century*? Serbia is not a member of the EU and throughout its history has been recognized as the *topos* in which *East meets West*, i.e., it has been presented as a live example of interweaving of Russia’s influence and that of other different European states.

9 Aristotle’s concept of *zoon politikon* stands in proximity to his concept of *zoon logon echon*. See Aristotle (2013).

The political establishment currently in power places the key emphasis on Serbia's proclaimed political, economic, military and cultural „neutrality“, as a form of non- belonging to any particular block. In reality, however, this stance is becoming more and more a merely rhetorical gesture, emptied of practically any relevant content – *a signifier without the signified*. Or, more precisely, the governing political crypto-elite in Serbia is strongly defending the position that the exclusive aim of the state should be its EU membership at any cost, presenting that such political course does not have an alternative. Logically, it is precisely such an uncritical narrative that enables Western powers such as the US, Germany and Britain to present a practically infinite open list of conditions that need to be fulfilled in order for the travel to “the promised land” to continue. In other words, the consequences of the extreme and radical position concerning the European Union – as the ultimate goal that Serbia needs to reach – are drastic up to the point of jeopardizing state sovereignty and vital national interests. Ruling elites in the West, therefore, have implicitly or explicitly outlined the following conditions:

- 1) Serbia will not only *de facto* but in „foreseeable future“ also *de jure* recognize Kosovo's independence or, more precisely, in the first stage - as in the model of „two Germanys“¹⁰ – it will enable Kosovo's UN membership as „the permanent solution between Belgrade and Pristina“. Moreover, in the second stage this process will be finalized with essential change of Serbia's Constitution (which is scheduled for end of 2017). With this step, the last „obstacle“ to Kosovo's full independence will, therefore, be removed;
- 2) Second, the key Western powers demand that Serbia participates in gradual weakening of *the Republic of Srpska* in Bosnia and Herzegovina. More precisely, the request is that Serbia should support further centralization of Bosnia – even if this centralization stands in full disagreement with key points of the only valid and legal international document for Bosnia i.e., with Dayton Accords, of which Serbia is one of the guarantees. In the name of the so-called “regional stability” Serbia is equally expected to explicitly distance itself from the decisions of the Republic of Srpska. The most notable example of this has been

10 The “two Germanys model suggested for Kosovo” refers to the 1972 treaty between East and West Germany. The *Grundlagenvertrag* established relations between two sovereign states and allowed both to join the UN.

Serbia's distancing itself from RS referendum concerning its Day of the Republic. In foreseeable future, the Republic of Srpska will hold several more referendums (all referring to its political sovereignty enabled by the Dayton Agreement), and Serbia is expected to non-interfere, or, if referendum on independence is scheduled to take place, to explicitly stop it.

- 3) Third – and related to previous two points – the US and its allies in Europe request that Serbia should reduce the influence of *Russia* in the state, practically in all spheres, from politics, economy to science and culture. In this sense, it has to be noted that numerous steps have been taken so that Russia's influence in the sector of energy is also reduced to a minimum and – in reference to military alliances – in 2015 Serbia, for instance, had 26 military drills with NATO, as opposed to 2 with Russia.¹¹ Likewise, a similar situation of dominance of Western influence can be traced in media and culture.

This said, however, it would still be way too arbitrary and superficial to merely conclude that Serbia is entirely and definitely lost to US-German-British dominance, but it has to be perceived that all indicators of its potential liberation are substantially related to the following factors: a) parts of *political opposition* in the country and b) *Russia's role in the Balkans en generale*. In other words, current government and power structures cannot participate in creation of new Europe i.e., in the rise of Europe's peoples because they precisely pursue the course of *neoliberal Western colonization of Serbia*. More accurately, all the elements that are highly relevant for comprehending the complex theoretical and practical situation - as well as comprehending Serbia's political past and future - mostly refer to *the ultimate difference between Serbia's people and its government*. Secondly, a significant issue is also *the external element* i.e., the people's perception of a need for a more active role of Russia in the Balkans.

This conceptualization can be presented through empirical political analysis as well. In other words, in numbers, 81% of citizens of Serbia are against NATO membership and 71,3% are in favor of closer ties with Russia. Simultaneously, more than 65,5% of Serbs do not believe in success of austerity measures and politics of austerity overall, while 34,5%

¹¹ Furthermore, in 2016 Serbia signed a new document for cooperation with NATO which gave the Alliance full diplomatic immunity in Serbia and provides its freedom of movement (NSPO & NSPA). Previously, in 2015 Serbia also signed the IPAP agreement with NATO.

believe that there is a space and need for new political forces on the political scene.¹² Last but not least, perhaps the most relevant phenomenon of Serbia's political and social life at this moment is *the permanent rise of Euroscepticism* i.e., the fall of support for EU membership. The population still in favor of country's EU negotiations is now 44%: the fall of support for the acceleration process is such that in last several months the support has been reduced for 10%. Moreover, this further means that *Europhilia* and *Euroscepticism* are *now practically equalized*, since 42% of the population is against Serbia's EU membership. Keeping in mind that according to all relevant international reports and political actors Serbia will not access the European Union in at least another decade, as well as remembering EU's countless internal economic and structural problems - as well as a new and deep migration crisis - all the stakes are that *the Eurosceptic trend in Serbia will continue to grow and expand even more*. Moreover, it appears that *the Eurosceptic turn has reached the stage of becoming an irreversible process*. What is even more peculiar about this turn is that it has taken place precisely at the same time in which Serbia's power politics is being directed not only towards the EU but towards NATO as well.

This said, however, it also has to be emphasized that this growing horizontal trend among the people – that aspires for a return of sovereignty and subjectivity - carries with itself one immanent danger, namely, that if real political radicalization occurs it can often be accompanied by a forgetfulness of *true European values*. In other words, precisely at this political and historical moment – in Serbia, but equally in majority of other European states across the continent – the difference between *the concept of Europe and concept of the European Union* has to be *underlined in theory and reborn in practice*. Because, it is precisely coming from this distinction that values such as the *rule of law, democracy, patriotism, national dignity, the role of the state* etc. can be reaffirmed and because through this position of advocating for Europe vs. the European Union the spreading of *both „qualitative“ and „quantitative“ Euroscepticism is enabled*. This is to say the following: in order to secure that all relevant political, social, economic, scientific and cultural processes reach the desired outcomes and results *representatives of Euroscepticism need themselves to be representative* i.e., the creation of the alternative has to be performed by credible individuals and organizations which have substantial knowledge and sufficient public credit. In this way, the

¹² These are the results of representative poll of *New Serbian Political Thought* (NSPM) from January 2016.

Euro-realistic discourse can be strengthened both from the inside and the outside, if conceptualized and practiced by those who have the relevant theoretical and practical experience and simultaneously the trust of the people. This is also a question about *the real elite* i.e., about the elite which presents the intellectual, social and political ground for a live synthesis of deep transformation towards preservation of both *national dignity and democracy*.

In Serbia's near future, *the economic, i.e., the social, as well as the national issue will come to the forefront*. This is because, on the one hand, austerity measures, scheduled privatizations – in a situation in which more than 65% of people are against these privatizations – poor life conditions which are progressively getting worse, the growth of unemployment, the reduction of the public sector etc. appear as a line of key reasons for opposition to Serbia's governmental structures. On the other hand – and at the same time – however, Serbia's dance to the „West side story“ i.e., further continuation of state and national humiliation regarding Kosovo, the Republic of Srpska and relations with Russia presents a highly relevant set of reasons in itself. To this we need to add the democratically problematic political, media and social situation i.e., the weakening of the *polis* or the public sphere as the third component on the basis of which the rise of the people is disclosed as most likely outcome. This is to say there is both logic and justice in the fact that when any governmental structure accepts that politics of its own state should be decided by foreign powers, states and actors – externally and not by itself – then the dialectic turn presents precisely the opposite movement, of the future being decided by *the people in ways of their own self-determination*. Or, in other words, *the structural commitment of the people – in this case of the Serbs – is one of patriotism*. But this patriotism *still needs to be transformed into an active struggle for resistance, based on self-respect and freedom*.

In concrete political terms, this means that Serbia's Euroscepticism or, rather – *specific Eurorealism based on remembrance of true Europe* – backed by potential growing influence of Russia and China in the Balkans reappears as the basis for strengthening of alternative political and economic processes, founded on uncompromising opposition to NATO, to independent Kosovo, neoliberal economic politics and, finally, the opposition to the European Union in its present form.

The issue of time and forms of realization of these alternative political movements i.e., the response to the question when and how will

existing but still silent majority, the ground beneath the surface, articulate itself in order to produce significant transformation of the political landscape depends on several different factors. The first one has to do with acknowledgment and acceptance that it is *theoretically and practically impossible to preserve a position of rhetorical “neutrality” in a situation in which two sides – namely, US and Russia, have clearly opposed interests in the Balkans and in which the Russian side acknowledges Serbia’s state sovereignty and key national issues of Serbs while the US led coalition practices neocolonialism.* Moreover, perhaps the most striking example of this impossibility is precisely the gradual movement of Serbia’s governmental structures from a seemingly and - at least officially – proclaimed “neutral” position to one of a *radical pro-Western establishment.* Furthermore, there is no such a political concept as “neutrality” towards both friendship and hostility regarding vital state issues. *The second factor, then, lies in comprehending that the split between Europe and Russia is a false one i.e., that a new Europe, different from the current European Union, is being created and that the Serbs have a relevant role to play in this.* The disclosing of both of these factors, however, has a lot to do with the third one – namely, the issue of Russia’s stance in the Balkans.

The Republic of Srpska as the Example of New Political Beginnings

Contrary to what it might seem at first, the Balkans are a relevant *topos* in the forming of the multipolar world of the 21 century. Moreover, in recent times, the Russian Federation has been a live witness to the fact that it is not sufficient to provide a clear economic perspective for the states of the Balkans, assuming these states will follow their own interests: the fate of the unrealized project South Stream is paradigmatic in this sense. One extraordinary example, however, needs to be analyzed by itself, because it is substantially different in comparison to other states in the region. Such is *the example concerning the Serbs in the Republic of Srpska i.e., concerning the entity which presents a clear perspective for new and authentic political beginnings.*

Or, more precisely, in difference to Serbia’s political crypto-elite, the officials of the Republic of Srpska represent the true interest of their people and have, consequently, unconditionally expressed their political agreement with Russia and all partners in Europe which demonstrate

the practice of mutual respect in politics as opposed to political conditioning. The case of the referendum in Srpska is a clear example of this. Therefore, the strategic *possibility of realization of new Russian and originally European politics in the Balkans* is now open in the issue of future of the Republic of Srpska. Moreover, this could be the first and turning point from which not only Russia's ambitions in the Balkans but, more relevantly, *the liberation of the Serbs from de facto Western colonization by crypto-elites begins*. This is to say all the stakes are that *Russia will in near future return to a more intensive presence in the Balkans – and that this movement is a constitutive one in the second phase of creation of new Europe*. This is also to say neoliberalism in Serbia cannot last very long (there is, of course, great irony in the fact that contemporary Serbia is serving as a paradigmatic example of political and economic neoliberalism). The reason for this is not only the fact that the state is already too close to economic collapse, but also lies in the issue that *the national vitality of both Serbs in Republic of Srpska and Serbs in Serbia is coming to the forefront - and from a potentiality turning into a form of active political participation and organization*.

The road to Belgrade leads from Banjaluka and, in this sense, *the role of Serbs in the process of creation of new autonomous, self-conscious, self-determined Europe becomes more clear and plausible*. Or, on the one hand, this could be one of relevant examples how it is possible at the same time to follow the interests of your own people and to make progress, how independent politics can be built with help of true friends and allies and how *the path for overcoming political crisis and economic crisis is one and the same*. On the other hand, if we keep in mind that it is precisely *NATO aggression on Serbs* i.e., NATO aggression on Republic of Srpska in 1994 and NATO war against Serbia in 1999 – followed by spreading of anti-Serb hysteria in the West - which has served as the first step in the establishment of so-called *political “exceptionalism”* i.e., of *contemporary interventionism* – then *the extraordinariness of the position of the Serbs, together with an irreplaceable responsibility in the discourse of new Europe emerges in new light*.

Finally, in we recall practically any of the most relevant historical events - such as the role of *the Serbs in First World War and their role in the Second World War* - then *the perspective of struggle for freedom, equality, justice and authentic European values becomes one in which past, present and future reaffirm themselves as political subjectivities*. The Serb tradition is a constitutive part of best European traditions which

need to be re-created today. Or, more precisely, *in the gap between EU forms and European realities*, in the gap between a false and unsustainable constructs and original European principles, *a whole new world is being born – one which remembers, knows and builds our century.*

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