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EUROPEAN UNION AND OTHERNESS: THE CASE OF BALKANS

L'enfer, c'est les autres.

Jean-Paul Sartre

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the relation between the EU and the Balkans in the process of othering. The main research question raised here is in what way and to what extent the Balkans as Other was used in the process of the EU identity construction. The EU is perceived as a discursive self-construction establishing its own distinct identity against Others. It is thus argued that the Balkans identity has been discursively constructed in opposition to the EU identity. Through the discursive process, by virtue of asymmetry of power, the EU self-constructed its identity by stigmatizing the difference of the Balkans — Other. The paper starts with the clarification of some conceptual premises concerning Self, Other and the concept of Otherness. It then focuses on the Balkans as Other in the process of EU identity construction. Finally, the Western Balkans as Other is also examined in the process of othering. Due to the asymmetry of power in the EU — Self and Balkans/Western Balkans—Other relation and the ability of the EU to impose the constructed dominant representations, this relation is about inclusion and exclusion, superiority and inferiority.

Key words: Self; Other; otherness; European Union; Balkans; Western Balkan

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Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu przeanalizowanie relacji pomiędzy Unią Europejską a Balkanami w procesie stwarzania inności. Zadając główne pytanie badawcze, autorka docieka, w jaki sposób i jak dalece Balkany jako Inny zostały wykorzystane dla budowania tożsamości Unii Europejskiej. Unia postrzegana jest jako dyskursywna autokonstrukcja ustanawiająca własną odrębną tożsamość w relacji do Innych. Zatem można dowodzić, że tożsamość bałkańska jest konstruowana dyskursywnie w opozycji do tożsamości unijnej. W tym dyskursywnym procesie, wobec asymetrii władzy, UE sama stworzyła swoją tożsamość poprzez stygmatyzowanie różnicy Balkany – Inny. Artykuł najpierw objaśnia niektóre założenia pojęciowe odnoszące się do „Ja” i „Innego” oraz pojęcie „Inności”. Następnie koncentruje się na Balkanach jako Innym w procesie konstruowania tożsamości UE. Wreszcie analiza obejmuje Balkany Zachodnie jako Innego w procesie powstawania inności. W obliczu asymetrii w relacji Unia Europejska jako JA – Balkany/Balkany Zachodnie jako Inny oraz faktu, że UE ma możliwość narzucenia skonstruowanych dominujących wyobrażeń, relacja ta obejmuje włączenie i wykluczenie, nadrzędność i podrzędność. [Transl. by Jacek Serwański]

Słowa kluczowe: JA; Inny; inność; Unia Europejska; Balkany; Balkany Zachodnie

SELF, OTHER AND OTHERNESS

The concept of other is an integral part of identity formation. Identity is a two-faced phenomenon, simultaneously implying similarity and difference. (Jenkins, 2008, p. 17) On the one hand, identity involves the need for belonging, since identities arise as a product of social interaction. On the other, identity appears as an answer in relation to the other, and hence implies the difference vis-à-vis the other. We cannot define ourselves unless we differentiate ourselves from what is not “us” (other) and *vice versa*, we can only define and comprehend what the other is if we place it in relation to “us”. Therefore, self-identity is fundamentally linked to the other. How can othering then be conceptualized? Othering is understood as a process of producing otherness, “as understanding and interacting with the other so as to differentiate and distance oneself from that other, with the other being an individual or a group that the self has ideas about and possibly a relation with”. (Reinke de Buitrago, 2015, pp. 87–88)

What kind of differentiation and distance do we mean in the process of othering? According to some authors, difference does not *a priori* imply something bad, i.e. does not necessarily have a negative connotation like exclusion, aversion, enmity, etc. (Delanty, 1995; Diez, 2005; Hall, 1997; Neumann & Welsh, 1991) As Gerard Delanty claims, “what matters is not the representation of the Other as such but the actual *nature* of the difference that is constructed.” (Delanty, 1995, p. 5) This difference can thus take on a “pathological form”, when the difference is based on the negation of other, i.e. the defining characteristic of the group is not its commonness but separateness from other groups. The concept of other therefore represents a choice between the recognition of otherness which implies diversity, or its negation, which implies division. (Delanty, 1995, p. 5)

Central to the construction of otherness is hierarchy, i.e. asymmetry of power in the self—other relation. Otherness in that sense represents “the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in group (the Self) constructs one or many out groups (Other)

by stigmatizing a difference—real or imagined—presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination”. (Staszak, 2009, p. 43) Otherness is about a “pathological form” of difference, to use Delanty’s wording, i.e. while difference is inherent to identity formation, otherness belongs to the realm of discourse. Discourse, as a “system of representation”, is a particular kind of knowledge about the topic. (Hall, 1992, p. 201) It enables to represent things which are very differentiated as homogeneous. (EU, West, East, Balkans) Discourse is about power, because power and knowledge directly imply one another. (Hall, 1992, p. 203) In this regard, discourse makes it possible to construct the Other in a certain way by the Self and at the same time limits other ways in which the Other can be constructed. The power of discourse depends on its ability to impose its categories, and is related not only to the political and economic power of those delivering it but also to the power to represent someone or something in a certain way, i.e. on the exercise of *symbolic power* through representational practices. (Hall, 1997, p. 259) In the discursive process, the Self imposes the values of its particularity, i.e. its identity as the only valid, “normal”, “real” and, at the same time, devalues the particularity of Other. (Staszak, 2009, p. 43) The Other is constructed in opposition to the superior Self and thus can be easily described in pejorative terms, in simplistic and stigmatizing stereotypes. As a consequence, the Other is symbolically placed on the “periphery”, it is marginalized and stigmatized.

In the field of international relations, the EU is engaged in the process of othering. Thus, the different Others are necessary in order to define/redefine and manifest the EU’s identity. (Neumann, 1999) The EU’s identity construction involves establishing opposites and otherness, especially in the situation when being European “lacks a clearly defined set of markers”. (Delanty & Rumford, 2005, p. 11) In this paper, the EU as an international actor is viewed as a discursive self-construction which establishes a particular identity against Others. (cf. Diez, 2005; Neumann & Welsh, 1991) This particular EU identity is represented as a “normative power” with the ability to shape the conceptions of “normal” in international relations. In this regard, the EU represents a construct which denotes not only the EU as a specific kind of actor in international politics, but also determines the nature of the relationship the EU has with Others. The discourse of the EU as a normative power constructs a particular self of the EU and attempts to change others through the spread of particular norms (Diez, 2005, p. 614). The particular EU identity is achieved through the inscription of boundaries serving to demarcate an “inside” from an “outside”, a “domestic” from a “foreign”, i.e. is based on the inclusion and exclusion. The power of the EU-Self determines the representations and knowledge about the Other, and forces Other into respecting the EU-Self.

The main research question posed in this paper is in what way and to what extent the Balkans was used for the construction of the EU identity in the process of othering. In this paper, the “Balkans” is viewed as a “discursively constructed, controlled, isolated and stigmatizing” Other. (Koprivitsa, 2013, p. 26) The use of the Balkans as the Other exceeds the neutral (geographic) description of the region, transforming it into the category of “symbolic geography” in which “mental mapping” is more important than “physical maps”. (Subotić, 2007, p. 10) In this regard, Balkans ceases to denote a geographical territory and encloses a metaphorical meaning. The terms “inferior” and “existential threat” are in this paper borrowed from the typology of othering presented by Thomas Diez. He distinguishes four types of othering in international politics that are linked to the EU identity: representation of the Other as an existential threat, as inferior, as violating uni-

versal principles and as different. (Diez, 2005, p. 628) The terms “existential threat” and “inferior Other” are used to denote the historically variable modes of domination of the EU Self vis-à-vis the Balkans as well as the Western Balkans.

THE BALKANS AS INFERIOR OTHER AND AS EXISTENTIAL THREAT

Andrew Hammond notes that the Balkans is the expression of one of the most powerful representational traditions in European culture. (Hammond, 2006, p. 8) The region was nameless for centuries.¹ Being divided between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empire it was usually associated with the name “European part of Turkey” or “Turkey in Europe”. (Simić, 2013, p. 115) The Balkans was sporadically referred to by this name until the late 19th century, when it became widely accepted, mostly in relation to the newly created states within the region. The specificity of the region, reflected in the fact that it was a successor of the Byzantine Empire, part of the European continent that had for centuries been under the rule of an oriental power, led to the representation of the Balkans as a region that stood in opposition to the Western European civilization, a place that did not belong to Europe, but rather was some sort of place of “aliens”. How did this dichotomy Europe/Balkans emerge? How do we know all that we know about the Balkans?

Western representations of the Balkans stemmed from the western discourse studies in the late 18th century. (Todorova, 2009) The “discovering” of the Balkans consisted mainly of travelogues, journalist accounts and occasional history books. (Bjelić, 2002; Lazarević-Radak, 2013) In the 19th century, the region was described as a “wild”, “primitive”, “strange”, “backward”, characterized by “diabolical mountains” and inhabited by “inferior nationalities”. (Hammond, 2006, p. 8) This “ugliness” of the Balkans gradually became the conceptual force of the presentation of the region vis-à-vis the “self-beautification” of Western Europe. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century, especially after the Balkan wars (1912-1913) and World War I, the discursively constructed differences between “Europe” and the Balkans become crystallized in the Western European consciousness. The image of the Balkans emerged as an opposition or negative reflection of the “positive” Western Europe. The dominant discourse on the Balkans represented the Balkans as primitive, backward, tribal, barbarian (Todorova, 2009, p. 3), or namely in terms of the hierarchical discourse of superiority and inferiority.

The tendency to define the West as superior relative to different inferior Others was outlined by many scholars. (Bjelić, 2002; Hall, 1992; Jaskulowski, 2010; Said, 1978; Wolff, 1994) Its roots can be traced to the period of Enlightenment in a form of highly idealized image of the West, including positive virtues of rationality, progress, civilization, humanity, etc. (Jaskulowski, 2010, p. 298) Through the process of imagining and representation of the Other as inferior, the identity of the “West” and “Europe” has been constructed as a superior, “civilized” Self. In that sense, the Others have “helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience”. (Said, 1978, pp. 1–2) Edward Said’s *Orientalism* set up the conceptual foundations for the understanding of the Western discourse of Self and Other. The concept of “orientalism” represented a “style of thought” based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between “Occident” and “Orient”, a set of discursive practices through which the “Occident” was able to

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¹ The name Balkan peninsula was first put in official use by the German philosopher Johan Zeune (1808).

dominate, structure and exercise authority over the "Orient". (Said, 1978, p. 3) By virtue of this style of thought, the Occident produced the image of the Orient as inferior, threatening, underdeveloped Other.²

In this regard, the specific rhetoric on the Balkans could be regarded as a "variation on the orientalist theme". (Bakić-Hayden & Hayden, 1992) Jacques Le Rider is explicit in this regard: "European discourses on "the Balkans" belong to a form of Orientalism deprived of any positive features, to a cultural colonialism which expects from Occidental culture that it should restore some order and rationality to fragmented and underdeveloped territories". (Le Rider, 2008, p. 157) In this regard, the Balkans as European Other has been the result of a discursive process by which Western Europe constructed the Balkans by stigmatizing its differences, i.e. by presenting these differences as a negation of Western European identity. Therefore, the Balkans' features, identity and geographic boundaries were "made" as such by the West. In this respect, Balkanism, as a coherent body of knowledge was, like Orientalism, organized around the binaries of superior/inferior, rational/irrational, civilization/barbarism, center/periphery. (Bjelić, 2002, p. 3) Moreover, the negative characteristics of the Balkans were represented as inherent to the region and therefore have had a tendency to be essentialized. (Bakić-Hayden, 1995, p. 918) By power of discourse, even in the absence of a literal colonial presence in the Balkans, the region could be seen as unconventionally colonized with the "imperialism of imagination". (Goldsworthy, 1998, pp. 2–3)

Some authors, however, consider that this role of the Balkans as an object of alterity was not so clear and therefore was more complex than the one of the Orient. Andrew Hammond claims that this region is mostly represented as unstable and unsettling, as an "obscure boundary where categories, oppositions and essentialized groupings are cast into confusion". (Hammond, 2007, p. 204) In a similar vein, Maria Todorova considered the Balkan region as an ambiguous Europe's semi-Other, which is reflected in its "historical and geographical concreteness" in opposition to the "intangible nature of the Orient". (Todorova, 2009, p. 11) She outlined the liminal position of the Balkans as a characteristic of the region that is at the same time part of Europe but also its periphery, the "other" within. By introducing the term Balkanism as a "discourse about an imputed *ambiguity*", she pointed out to the specificity of the Balkans in the process of othering in comparison to Orientalism, which represents a "discourse about an imputed *opposition*". (Todorova, 2009, p. 17) The same trace can be found in Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe*, when he speaks about Eastern Europe as a region not as an absolute opposition to the West but as an ambiguity and contrast to Europe, "as a paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, Europe but not Europe". (Wolff, 1994, p. 7) Due to this specificity, the Balkans remained neither here nor there (Bjelić, 2002), Europe but not Europe, the Europe's internal Other within, the dark side of Europe, where all the unacceptable characteristics of the "civilized" West have to be pushed down. (Lazarević-Radak, 2016, p. 108)

During the Cold War, European integration had become synonym for Western European integration. The end of the Cold War and the creation of the EU as a new political actor warranted a search for the new EU identity which unfolded hand in hand with the

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² Inspired by Said's work, Larry Wolff wrote that the Western perceptions of "Western" and "Eastern" Europe originated as mental constructs, as discursive constructions: "It was Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment. It was also the Enlightenment, with its intellectual centers in Western Europe, that cultivated and appropriated to itself the new notion of "civilization", an eighteenth-century neologism; and civilization discovered its complement, within the same continent, in shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarism (located in so-called "Eastern Europe") (Wolff, 1994, p. 4).

redefinition of the EU's Others. The newly signed EU Maastricht Treaty underscored the goal of "reinforcing European identity and its independence in order to promote security and progress in Europe and in the world" (preamble). In the new circumstances, followed by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Western representations of the Balkans as the inferior Other were revived. In the Western discourse, the Balkans became the "danger evil" (Kaplan, 1993, p. XXI)³, the "horror of ethnic cleansing", the "virus of aggressive nationalism" (Gutman, 1993, p. 175)⁴, the dangerous, violent and even "contentious" area. (Hatzopoulos, 2008) Moreover, civil war in Yugoslavia was equated with the whole region of the Balkans. (Hatzopoulos, 2008; Todorova, 2009) In *The Other Balkan Wars* (1993), the reprint of the Report of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on the Balkan Wars from 1914, the breakup of Yugoslavia was explained by the "ancient hatreds" in the Balkans that were deeply rooted not only in the present but also in the past. (quoted in Simić, 2013, p. 123)⁵ The main feature of this "new Balkan war" was "aggressive nationalism" that "drew on deeper traits of character inherited, presumably, from a distant tribal past". (quoted in Hatzopoulos, 2008, p. 46) In this new representation, the Balkans become an existential threat for the EU and the whole Europe.

How was the new EU identity constructed vis-à-vis these discourses representing the Balkans as a danger, as an existential threat? Not long after the dismantling of the Soviet Union, in a speech before the European Parliament, Jacques Poos, who held presidency of the Council of the EU, declared that "Europe has at last been restored to its *natural* unity". (quoted in Luoma-Aho, 2002, p. 126)⁶ This statement was soon followed by various statements by EC/EU representatives portraying the process of dissolution of Yugoslavia and the civil war which ensued as a threat affecting the stability of Europe as a whole.⁷ The "aggressive nationalism" in the Balkans became an existential threat for the EU and the whole Europe. Being "qualitatively different" from the nationalism in Western Europe, the nationalism emerging in Eastern Europe in general was qualified as "radical and dangerously irrational", with the capability to "transform benign ethnicity to a belligerent political ideology" connected with totalitarianism and xenophobia. (Brzezinski, 1989, p. 16) Thus, the conceptualization of nationalism in Yugoslavia in more or less explicitly pathological terms (malignant, aggressive, ugly hyper-nationalism, extreme, xenophobic, etc.) enabled the construction of the EU identity as a new kind of power in international politics in opposition to the "danger" of the Balkans.

The EU identity was constructed by means of a spatio-temporal narrative—"Europe whole and free": "freedom and democracy took great leaps forward both inside and outside Europe, although history did not quite end as some predicted. The dream of "Euro-

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³ In *Balkan Ghosts* Robert Kaplan writes about "the danger evil" coming from the Balkans. He underlines that "the Balkans produced the century's first terrorists", that the "nazism can claim Balkan origins" and asks himself if there is "a bad smell, a genius loci, something about the landscape that might incriminate" (Kaplan, 1993, p. XXI).

⁴ In *A Witness to Genocide*, Roy Gutman underlined the brutality of the Balkan social life, the "horrors of ethnic cleansing", the "virus of aggressive nationalism" whose "long-suppressed forces have been unleashed once more in the present" (Gutman, 1993, p. 175).

⁵ *The Other Balkan Wars* included a new introduction written by the American diplomat George Kennan.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu pointed out that "every established order tends to produce (...) the *naturalization* of its own arbitrariness" (quoted in Bakić-Hayden & Hayden, 1992, p. 3).

⁷ In August 1991, the Declaration on Yugoslavia stated a strong interest for the peaceful resolution of the Yugoslav conflict, "not only for the sake of Yugoslavia itself and its constituent peoples, but for Europe as a whole"—Declaration on Yugoslavia, European Political Cooperation Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting, Brussels, 27 August 1991. Also, in 1993, during the Danish EU presidency, it was stated that the conflict was "taking place in Europe, and we measure it by the same yardstick as we would a similar development at home in our own countries"—European Council Meeting, Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993.

pe whole and free” suddenly seemed to be a realistic perspective”. (Rehn, 2008, p. 2) On the one hand, the EU was represented as responsible for the future of the entire European continent, and on the other, the EU was portrayed as an actor responsible for the peaceful integration of all countries of the European continent. In this image of the EU as a “rescuer”, with its *mission civilisatrice* and *pacifiste*, the Balkans, as Europe’s “backyard”⁸, occupied a particular position as the EU’s Other. The Balkans was the incarnation of the violent fragmentation of the past *versus* the EC/EU which represented the peaceful integration of the future. The EU was discursively constructed as a “rescuer” that will “heal” the “aggressive nationalism” in the Balkans with the “integration therapy”. From the beginning of the war in Yugoslavia, European leaders repeated that the events in Yugoslavia should and must be managed and solved only by the EC/EU. According to Jacques Poos, it was “the hour of Europe—not the hour of the Americans” to solve “the Yugoslav problem”. EC/EU’s main strategy was to contain the conflict while preventing its cross-border consequences. The failure of the EC/EU to “Europeanize” the Balkans was transformed into a narrative on the “immaturity” of the EU as a political actor. As the then president of the European Commission Jacques Delors declared, “the Community is like an adolescent facing the crisis of adulthood. If the Community were 10 years older there would have been an intervention force”. (quoted in Luoma-Aho, 2002, p. 139) Thus, the failure of the EC/EU in Yugoslavia was transformed into the discourse on the necessity of political maturity of the EU, which will be capable to take a “full” responsibility in its “backyard”, including collective military action if necessary. The materialization of this discourse was reflected in the progressive development of the EU enlargement policy and Common Foreign and Security Policy (including CSDP):

The EU has progressively extended its zone of peace and democracy across the European continent (...) Enlargement is a matter of extending the zone of European values, the most fundamental of which are liberty and solidarity, tolerance and human rights, democracy and the rule of law. (Rehn, 2005, p. 1)

Thus, the EU enlargement policy symbolized EU as a “normal” entity which stands for liberal values, democracy, free trade, “particularism” of European culture and civilization. It enabled to represent its main elements, i.e. promotion of democracy, market economy, good governance, protection of human rights as solely valid. As a powerful Self, the EU set the conditions for membership by imposing its internal principles and values as unquestionable and of universal validity. By the process of integration, the EU gradually became the personification of “Europe” and the framing of the *European identity* became the framing of the *EU identity* through the power of inclusion and exclusion, i.e. by the inscription of boundaries in order to demarcate an “inside” from an “outside”, or “domestic” from “foreign”:

Inside the borders of the European Union we have achieved an era of deep peace, based on law and institutions. In its domestic life, the European Union is a very concrete application of the idea of a peaceful system of international relations outlined in the classic essay of Immanuel Kant on perpetual peace, which imagined a brotherhood of republican democracies which never go to war against one other. But outside the EU’s borders, even in our immediate neighborhood to the South East and East, there is no such perpetual peace. It may not be an outright Hobbesian world where the *law of the jungle* and the survival of the fittest prevail at least if we bypass *the Balkan wars* of the 1990s. (Rehn, 2008, pp. 4–5)

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⁸ In 1992, *The New York Times* wrote that “the blood of the Balkans is seeping under the European door” (quoted in Goldsworthy, 1998, pp. 8–9).

In this process of EU maturity, the “ghettoization” of the Balkans occurred. (Todorova, 2009, p. 191) Instead of failed attempt to “Europeanize” the Balkans, conflicts in the region threatened to “balkanize” EU and brought NATO and USA back on the European stage. (Simić, 2001, p. 22) Thus, two spaces have been discursively constructed, one that was democratic, peaceful and secure and the other that was dangerous, threatened and authoritarian. By constructing the Balkans as a “degraded ghetto”, the EU displaced this region into the periphery, excluding it from the “united Europe”. By the inclusion/exclusion binary, the cohesion within the EU (“inside”) was rendered possible, and at the same time the differentiation to the opposite Balkans (“outside”). The symbolic spatial bordering enabled the constitution of the EU’s normative order (“domestic”) as a place of governance and upholding of the EU values, in opposition to the “threatening stranger” that violated these values (“foreign”):

Borders limit our minds and reduce our influence. Frontiers open new avenues and increase our influence. Frontiers are much more substantive, functional and innovative—even mental—than geographical (...) EU is defined by its values more than by sheer geography, especially in the East and Southeast (Rehn, 2006).

On the other hand, as the stigmatized Other, the Balkans was confronted with a negative image during the civil war in Yugoslavia. The incapacity to conceive itself in other terms than from the point of view of the dominating other led to the internalization of the negative representations in the process of self-identification. While accepting the features of the stigmatized Other, the countries of the region became part of the stigma-delegating process within the region. This process of “nesting orientalisms” (Bakić-Hayden, 1995) therefore emerged at first as the expression of discursively constructed differences among the former Yugoslav countries, but also spread to other countries of the region. In that sense, the Balkans became a “repository” of discursive patterns available to the countries of the region marked with the EU stigma to produce the discourse of otherness through the dichotomy Europeanness/Balkanness. (cf. Petrović, 2013, p. 115)

WESTERN BALKANS AS INFERIOR OTHER

“Any identity is ‘ultimately’ doomed to give up the ghost”. (Neumann, 1999, p. 213) The narratives that uphold a certain identity are not eternal. They must be credible and constantly reformulated to fit new situations affecting the Self. (Neumann, 1999, pp. 218–219) Therefore, the “triumph of integration” enables the EU to categorize the Balkans in a more “benign” manner, by portraying itself as “exceptional” and as example to be followed by others:

Enlargement has been a success story for the European Union and Europe as a whole. It has helped to overcome the division of Europe and contributed to peace and stability throughout the continent. It has inspired reforms and has consolidated common principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law as well as the market economy. (European Council, 2006, p. 2)

In a similar vein, in a speech before European Parliament, the president of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker declared:

If we had not done what we did in the last few decades, if we had not made Europe a peaceful continent, if we had not reconciled European history and geography, if we had not set up the single currency and if we had not established the world's largest internal market in Europe, where would we be now? We would be *nobodies*, we would be weak, we would be defenceless (...) I want a Europe at the heart of the action, a Europe which moves forward, a Europe which exists, protects, *wins* and *serves as a model for others*. (Junker, 2014, p. 8)

Thus, as the Other that violated the universal principles of the EU, and therefore stigmatized and isolated, the Balkans "should be convinced or otherwise brought to accept the principles of the Self", i.e. EU. (cf. Diez, 2005, p. 628) From 1996 onwards, by inclusion of the Balkans in the Regional approach, the EU aimed to transform the Balkans in a "European manner" within the framework of regional cooperation and integration. This process included the reconstruction of the Balkans identity in a "western" manner, no longer as a region with a negative (and occasionally threatening) connotation, an antipode to "European values". The term "Balkans" has been associated with violence, barbarism, chaos and authoritarian regimes. Therefore, the "vampire" needed to be quieted.⁹ Thus, the notion of the "Western Balkans" was introduced for the first time in the EU official documents¹⁰ in order to denote the region that is no longer a synonym for conflict, but a symbol of peace, cooperation, and domination of "European values". (Svilar, 2010, p. 512)

By virtue of symbolic geography, although there is no geographic Northern, Eastern or Southern Balkans, a new region has been "mentally mapped". The EU placed the Western Balkans in the situation "in-between", neither here (EU) nor there (Balkans), not excluded but not included either, as a region with a "European perspective" which has the opportunity to detach itself from the "traditionally barbaric region", but also region that is not yet "European". The prospect of Western Balkans accession to the EU was represented as the only solution for avoiding instability and "retrograde politics of the past". It is the right, if not the "duty" for the EU to make these "troubled" region "European". As European Commissioner Johannes Hahn stated,

If we don't actively export stability, security and opportunities, we are bound to import instability and insecurity (...) That brings me to the Western Balkans, our own "*front-yard*" if you will, or rather an *enclave* in the EU. This is where our policy of "exporting stability" remains particularly relevant. Our job is not done there (...) There is no strategic development alternative for the region" (...) But make no mistake: politics abhors a vacuum. If the EU were to get wobbly in its commitments in the Balkans, someone else could wrestle in more. (Hahn, 2017)

Does this mean that the representations of the Balkans changed at the beginning of the 21st century? At first glance, the label Western Balkans mitigates the balkanistic EU discourse. The "western" characteristics of the Balkans have a new, positive "European" connotation, which is widely accepted by the countries of the region. The region is no longer the EU's "backyard" but becomes the EU's "front-yard". Nevertheless, "Balkanism has not disappeared, but has shifted, for the time being, from the center stage of politics" although it is "still with us, conveniently submerged but ready at hand". (Todorova, 2009, p. 192) In that manner, Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission declared that "this tragic European region needs a European perspective. Otherwise the *old demons of the past* will reawaken". (Junker, 2014, p. 7)

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⁹ Allusion to the title of the book *How to quiet a vampire (Kako upokojiti vampira)* written by Yugoslav (Serbian) writer Borislav Pekić (1930-1992).

¹⁰ The label "Western Balkans" appeared for the first time in the Austrian presidency conclusions of the EU (1998). It comprised Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija.

On the other hand, the Western Balkans found itself in a liminal position. By accepting the idea of inferiority of the Balkans, they deny at the same time that they are part of it. Being “Europeanized” by the EU in the new imaginary region, countries of the region confirmed the “reality” of the balcanistic discourse: the Balkans is “truly” barbaric and non-European. (Svilar, 2010, pp. 516–517) EU membership is perceived as an affirmation of a country’s “Europeanness”, while the “others” are perceived as primordial non-European Balkans. The Western Balkans became a “repository” of discursive patterns available to the countries of the region to produce the discourse of otherness through the dichotomy Europeanness/Balkanness. Therefore, Europeanization produces Balkanization. At the same time, the region is placed “betwixt and between”. It tends to pass from ambiguousness by adapting to the EU values and principles. However, before its exit from liminality, the region must demonstrate “satisfactory conduct”, i.e. “prove” its Europeanness before joining the EU. After all, “European civilization was held responsible for even tiny improvements in Balkans civilization” (Todorova, 2009, p. 133).

CONCLUSION

The Balkans represented the significant Other in the process of discursively constructed identities of Western Europe and the EU. The Balkan identity was discursively constructed as inferior to the EU, i.e. in terms of opposition. In the discursive process, the powerful EU — Self imposed the values of its particularity i.e. its identity as the only valid, “normal”, devaluating at the same time the particularity of Balkan — Other. The power/knowledge that fixed the identities of the two opposite entities was sustained by the stereotypical images of the Balkans as Other. This relation of superiority/inferiority comprises continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of the differences of the Balkans—Other by the EU — Self. In the process of othering, neither Balkans nor Western Balkans succeed to detach themselves from the identity imposed by the EU. Having the ability to impose the constructed dominant representations and to exclude the alternatives, the Balkans and the Western Balkans are what the EU makes of them, i.e. marginalized, the stigmatized inferior Other.

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