Globalization: Fear and hope of small European peoples

A historical perspective

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Looking at globalization and European moves towards unification, Darko Dukovski focuses on how smaller peoples see opportunities in these developments, but also mount counter-processes of preserving such bastions of identity as language.

Often when we “think” Europe, we unjustifiably remember its western or central part alone. We think of a continent that, geographically speaking, is not a continent at all without its Asian part. It is only certain that East and West are complex metaphors describing or explaining the mental structure of the Old Continent, and that these historically instilled ideas represent sometimes positive but more frequently negative influence on the development of civilization. Each of the two “half-Europes” has experienced a full spectrum of historical processes and was eventually defined by these processes over the course of the twentieth century. Yet another fact should be acknowledged at this point: the boundaries of civilization change continually, and it is impossible to know for certain which of the two European subdivisions had more influence on the other in different periods of history. Therefore, it is necessary to restrain from any harsh or final judgments. After all, and regardless of its global division, Europe has a variegated culture; it is interwoven with numerous small, local, regional, and national worlds and cultures, many of which have nothing in common.

In the early part of the twentieth century, Europe took precedence over the rest of the world – there is no question about that. Awareness of this dominance occupied a place in European consciousness. In principle, we Europeans still conceitedly like to believe that our so-called continent continues to govern the world’s international political and cultural movements as it did during the previous four hundred years. However, as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, and especially after World War I, it became obvious that the epoch of Europe’s predominance in the world was about to end.

Regardless of that, Europeans of the twentieth century continued to live the “European” way. In other words, they proceeded with the creation of a system resting on national and
ideological, as well as religious conflicts – all in keeping with familiar historical and cultural traditions. Nevertheless, frustration with the inferiority of Europe’s power lives on, being perhaps the *spiritus movens* of Europe’s unification. It is even more frustrating that Europe still propagates the myth about itself as a unified nursery of a humane, rational, democratic, and, above all, spiritual civilization.

Europe is, in this sense, a magnificent blend of reconcilable coexistence and irreconcilable conflicts, torn apart by opposing religions, cultures, peoples, ideologies, races, and mentalities. Europe lived the twentieth century with the heritage of homogeneous diversity that cannot be regarded as a burden, but which was certainly not providence and light either. The history of Europe in the twentieth century is a history of crises and decadence of a self-destructive civilization. It is the crisis of an identity created over thousands of years only to disappear in one century. Nevertheless, as it often happens in any decadent period, new values emerged, building on the foundation of deep-rooted values and stereotypes of the Christian-Jewish-Islamic culture. By the end of the twentieth century the new values took the distinct form of a future civilization in the third millennium. These values may not be understandable or acceptable to all, but they still point to a course charted by the multiplicity of events that took place over the centuries.

Europe has never had a cultural, political, economic, or any other center, although it has always tried its best to create one. Instead, it consists of various and often opposing centers, which often disagree about the development and future of the Old Continent. It is for this reason that the unity and solidarity of all European peoples has come to represent a utopia of hypocritical humanism, bowing primarily to profit. A strong and ungovernable destructive force, that will eventually turn its annihilating strength against its own cradle, sprung out of a former thought about the superiority of Europe’s civilization, only to become a universally accepted component of Europe’s common historical legacy.

It was racism that conclusively shattered the illusion of European solidarity and peaceful common life. Nevertheless, even without this violent destruction of the civilization’s illusory unity and solidarity, Europe represents an unsolvable mystery in its coexistence of diversity and contrasts, unpredictability, intolerance, superiority of civilizations, cultures, and religions...

Europe’s religious disunity is deeply rooted in history. Contacts between different religions produced beautiful mosaics of cultural architecture and civilization in Europe. Unfortunately, these were mostly historical proofs of unbridgeable differences, as well as tragic examples of intolerance and hatred in the name of God.

A multitude of different languages has been one of the most important elements of the “culture of incomprehension” in the twentieth century, as well as an element of hampered communication in general. These languages are of service to ethnic and national identification, and are closely connected to the development of nation-building strategies of small or unrealized European peoples. In connection with the development of middle-class society and states, illusory concepts of the “holy” land, the “holy” national script, language and culture disappeared by the end of the seventeenth century in western Europe and during the second half of the nineteenth century in central and
southeastern Europe. The fall of privileged educated classes and the rising of the middle class introduced (as opposed to the hitherto “elite” culture) the so-called national culture and national language, the language of the multitude. Dead languages have since been given a completely different semiotic role: they have become a system of signs that connect or disconnect different civilization-based cultural circles. It is most difficult, or even impossible, to present and explain the mentality of a larger group of people in terms of communication and language philosophy and not to leave out particular elements of the mentality itself. Such a presentation is for this reason a most unrewarding task, even more so since everybody can discuss its results, interpret them differently, and still claim to be right.

Europe’s contrary nature emanates from a process in which the larger European peoples strive to impose languages, cultures, and means of communication onto the smaller ones. The Scots, Bretons, Catalanians, Basques, Croats, Slovenians, Macedonians, Estonians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Ukrainians, Fleming, Wallonians – all these peoples had to face the same problem. French and English were generally used as languages of international communication in twentieth-century Europe. In the second half of the twentieth century, the German language was used more widely, while the same happened with Russian in Eastern Europe. How can we corroborate these statements? Over the course of the nineteenth century in western Europe, and in its second half in central and southeastern Europe, according to E. Morin a “philological-lexicographic revolution” took place, alongside the development of national movements resulting from capitalism and megalomania of dynastic states and empires. The “revolution” and the national movements brought complex cultural and political difficulties upon European states and their peoples. Hence the Romanovs ruled over the Tartars, Latvians, Germans, Armenians, Russians, and many other peoples; the Habsburgs ruled over the Hungarians, Croats, Czechs, Slovenes, Slovaks, Italians, and Serbs, while the Hohenzollerns governed in Prussia and Romania. The “lexicographic revolution” in Europe promoted a belief that languages were the private property of certain ruling classes. The best example to describe the complex situation is the case of the multi-national monarchy of Austria-Hungary: the German and the Hungarian languages were imposed on the majority of the non-German and non-Hungarian population, which did not speak the languages at the time. Even though this imposition of a universal language system was at first introduced only to facilitate the general communication, it later became the basic means of Germanization and Hungarization of the rest of the population. In this way the imposition was at first given a universally imperial meaning, but then a local and national one as well. Until the middle of the twentieth century, French was the language of diplomacy. With the creation of the contemporary global information system, the English language has become irreplaceable and therefore easily accepted at schools and other educational systems all over Europe. Yet another Anglo-Saxon victory.

Speaking in general terms of culture and anthropology, Europe has always been divided into East and West, but never into North and South. Such differences exist indeed, conditioned by various historical, cultural, climatic, and other non-historical elements (vegetation, soil, etc). Nobody disputes that there are differences between Mediterranean peoples and Nordic peoples, or between the islanders and those living on the continent. These differences implicitly include different behaviors and reactions to the same social, political, or economic problems and processes. Conflicts between nations and countries have been most apparent in the twentieth century, breaking out between great, as well as
small and (in terms of public law) unrealized nations.

Contrasts between nations, or rather contrasts between different cultures of nationalism have their inharmonious symbols while they artificially sustain the myth about the land and blood. These symbols are usually as fascinating as shrines or Tombs of the Unknown Soldier. The collective memory of myth and martyrdom lives on into the present day. It began in ancient times of the Greeks and Byzantines, with their cenotaphs for the Unknown or the known who could not be buried in the usual way. It almost seems impossible that even in the most civilized of all centuries, the twentieth, the culture of the old Greeks and Byzantines can be compared to the culture of contemporary Europe. It is possible, of course, since the ancient culture has been integrated in the European mindset, but there is more to it than that. The discrepancy seems even more apparent when we remember that no one is buried in the new tombs. Numerous Altars of Homeland are always built in the name of a “higher cause” and at times of national separation, when the nation’s destiny has to be decided. A symbolical sacrifice is always offered to any kind of altar. Could this be anything other than a hypocritical and necrophilic political iconography as a memorial and a lesson to future generations? In the twentieth century, Duty, Honor, and Homeland were written in blood upon such altars by those who were willing to sacrifice the people for the achievement of their own selfish goals. A consequence of too frequently using these “holy words” is endless white crosses on soldiers’ graves.

A new religion is often born out of the spiritual contemplation of a nation: a religion stimulated by the mentality of nationalism, or a new religious community abstracted to the level of national states. In the first half of the twentieth century the nation was still recognized and supported as a community. In other words, it is a “strong horizontal fellowship” despite domineering inequalities or possible exploitation. The idea of fellowship within a nation became reality in southeast European countries and lasted late into the twentieth century. A feeling that abolishes social inequality – the idea of brotherhood and belonging among those of the same nationality – caused the breakout of the two World Wars, where millions of people killed or died voluntarily. It is fascinating to think of mechanisms that “made” the multitudes do things that were originally against their morality and Christian beliefs upon which they were raised, and that resulted from an abstract idea of blood, land, and power.

Europe should be thought of as a space in times of strong feelings of religion, patriotism, and racism, all being important elements of the European mind-set. Social changes and altered conscience, often resting on illusions about a future existence, cannot fully explain the attachment that peoples feel for the figments of their imagination. They also cannot explain why these peoples are willing to sacrifice themselves for their imaginary projects. In this sense, Europe’s crucial failing in the twentieth century was the pathology of its “patriotism” and nationalism that always found their roots in fear and threat from, and finally hatred of the Other, exposing this way the anatomy of destructive racism. The tragedy of European peoples lies in the fact that patriotism often manifests itself not in the love of one’s own but in the hatred of the other. This problem can be viewed from another perspective.

Racial conflicts in Europe in the twentieth century do not stem from biology or genetics, but mainly from social and psychological differences. Contemporary racism feeds on
prejudices created in comprehensive systems of education and social upbringing that most often produce mediocrities and functional illiterates inclined to mass hysteria. Racism is never scientifically based, but scientifically imposed. It is always present in Europe and already seems natural. It is present in historically unjustifiable, self-reproducing myths about peoples without a political system. Economic, as well as political, differences are noticeable in the geographical division of Europe to the poor and underdeveloped East and the developed, rich West. This has often been a cause of political partitions and fierce continental conflicts, so often that such a division has now been implanted in the mind-set of the European man for generations.

What can then be expected from Europe at the turn of the century? In the spirit of humanism, rationalism, and spirituality that sprung up from such a Europe, we should hope that in the twenty-first century, Europe’s coat will be wider and more comfortable to all its peoples. We must, however, be aware that disunion, contrasts, and conflicts will not easily disappear and become history, and remember that the European integration of countries and peoples is still far ahead, much further than we think and are ready to accept.

I have only partially presented here Europe’s cultural and civil legacy as being a vital element in the spiritual being of small European peoples (and those who have not yet turned their community into a state). This legacy is a heavy burden to carry in the new European and world order, and the fears emanating from it are primeval and almost mystical.

To enter Europe means to undergo a civilization-wide initiation into a people’s maturity, but also the maturity of those states in which great or self-fulfilled nations play the role of arbitrators. The truth of the matter is that this means nothing more than accepting certain models of economy, politics, and society. These models are always imposed by more developed and more powerful, in other words more influential, peoples. A formal acceptance is demanded, as if the process of globalization can be stopped or avoided. What does it mean to refuse to attend a feast (in the Greek sense of the word), only because we have just returned from a brief snack trying and enjoying national dishes? Does it mean to be stupid, irresponsible towards one’s friends, proud, asocial? There’s the fear that after the feast we would never be the same, that we may change our views, become someone else...

Processes of globalization cause fear and unease in less powerful and poor peoples, especially when supranational continental European feelings of illusory nature are called for, accompanied by a general euphoria over Europe’s unification as the way out of an individual national entrapment of uneven development. It seems irrelevant that these peoples have already accepted the idea of European identity as a constituent of their national consciousness, politics, systems, cultures, and regimes.

What is it that makes us unite as a continent? Love and trust among European peoples? Most certainly not. Europeans dislike each other. They need each other, but they don’t like each other.

When the Third Cold World War ended in 1990, eastern European countries, together with Russia, fell into a social, political, and economic abyss. It was then that, according to
Samuel Huntington, a Fourth World War began, the war that will drag the world into the state of chaos. Huntington claims that events and processes at the end of the twentieth century only confirm this belief. Militarization and war are presented as a possible civilization: 193 conflicts broke out in the world from 1990 until 1994 only, and in 1997 the number exceeded 250.

The Fourth World War is a concept that denotes a non-military seizing of the world - globalization. In the name of the liberation from national fetters, new forms of oppression appear, closely connected to the process of neocolonization. They emerge at the same time when distraught Europe enters the process of transition. It is true that political bipolarity has disappeared in Europe. On the other hand, multipolarity still appears, leading to the following conclusion: the unipolarity of the US, the only superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union, is developing, and shaping the structure of Europe and the rest of the world. Here again we can notice staging, provocation, blackmail, threats, pressure, and even military interventions.

The problem of globalization as a world-wide process can also be observed as a positive process, since it can help developing and underdeveloped countries in their economic progress. In other words, it can introduce them to the world of global economy, market, and information science. Globalization may lead to a more functional and economical exploitation of natural resources, by creating compatible labor and production markets. Moreover, modern technology would then be far more accessible to all countries falling behind. We are here undoubtedly dealing with an extremely complex process, the unification of Europe and the creation of the global market being only a part of it. Globalization, apart from its political and economic elements, implicitly includes uniformity, or to put it mildly, the compatibility of communication. This raises the question of development and importance of national languages, especially of small European peoples. Apart from that, globalization extends to and alters cultures based on the tradition of faith. Simultaneously with the processes of globalization of small peoples, like the Croats, various counter-processes take place. They are more instinctive than planned, and exist in order to preserve national identity (language, culture, religion) since the problem of identity preservation is – by way of improvisation and unnecessarily – opposed to cultural globalization.

The “protection“ of national culture and language is marked by three differing processes: the development of national cultural institutions, the refusal of new cultural trends, and intolerance towards other national cultural values. Humanity is trying to think of a new order and to represent it as a more just new structure. Humanity hopes to enter the third millennium with such a structure and ensure a new civilizational momentum. However, the trend in the development of world politics opposes such ideas. The same happened in the 1990s, when the world entered the new decade aware of a danger that could without control cause the destruction of social, economic, and political systems still known today. This represents a great imbalance in the world economy. One of the answers to this challenge is most certainly the process of Europe’s uniting or integration, first in the economic and cultural, and then, perhaps, in the political sense of the word. The idea itself is not new. It arose in the Middle Ages and the Modern Age on several occasions and in different forms. Today, Europe unites peacefully, opening its boundaries, removing barbed wires, building a common information and communication system, working on common adaptation and learning tolerance. Smaller, poorer countries have been
particularly in favor of the unification, seeing a chance to approach and reach the more developed countries in the process. Unfortunately, globalization has become a process that causes racism and nationalism. The mechanisms are familiar. Neither small nor large European peoples, like the French, Germans, Czechs, Italians, English, managed to escape these processes. Their “rebellion”, or negative attitude towards globalization can best be seen in their refusal to accept the idea of the united Europe. In terms of religion, it is most interesting that only the Roman Catholic Church offered a wise solution for the perseverance of religious identity in the process of globalization. The Church’s ecumenism has finally reached the point where it could work together with atheistic ideologies and has in this way become one of the globalization processes “with protection factor”.

Europe of the twentieth century? Rapid changes, elusive vicissitudes, a geometrical progression of technological development, global communication, and fast flow of information. Both praiseworthy and reprehensible at once. Twentieth-century Europe also stands for two World Wars with over 70 million victims, the Holocaust, the concentration camps of death. Europe was a theatre for the Cold War and the conflict between its eastern and western parts. Europe of the twentieth century wants its own body, wants to see the unification of its peoples, cultures, civilizations, and customs. It wants to be pluralistic, it wants to retain its richness in the unity of diversity, it wants to be global and still have many faces.

The ghosts of anachronistic and autistic tribal conscience are resurrected in the distorted idea of the civilization’s continuity. The entire history of Europe in the twentieth century raises new questions about the ever-lasting conflict for the domination over the peoples of Europe. The essence of such a policy remains unchanged even after the World Wars, the only difference being the change in methodologies of monopolization. Politics of war and force have been rejected as destructive and simply unprofitable, since they shake up the entire economy of the Continent. However, the events in southeast Europe in the 1990s showed that the ideas of war, violence, genocide, and cultural annihilation still endure.

The constancy of living of the European people is at the same time its biggest problem: the problem of coexistence. It is true that the processes of Europe’s unification carry within them the duality of the question “coexistence or no coexistence?” as distinguishing characteristics of a future order. In the conflict that lasted until the end of the twentieth century between proving the similarities of common historical development, and pointing to its unbridgeable differences, the second option won both politically and culturally. The history of Europe is a history of wars and conflicts, incomprehensible crimes and civil catastrophes, but also of unquestionable cultural, scientific, and economic development. Europe’s fragile salad bowl (of peoples) has one and the same dressing. It cannot be a melting-pot, at least not as it was imagined by Jean Jaures, but a salad bowl can also offer a harmony of various tastes. The only question is - who prepares the food, and to whose liking?

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