

Pande Lazarevski, PhD,

Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research, “Ss. Cyril and Methodius University” - Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

Jadranka Denkova, PhD

Goce Delčev University - Štip, Republic of Macedonia

REINVENTING THE ILLUSION OR GETTING BACK TO THE REALITY: EU MYTH VS. BALKAN IDENTITY

Abstract

Despite prevailing perceptions, the Balkans has been a region with the longest periods of peace and prosperity in recorded history. For centuries, the Balkans has been a crossroad of civilizations paved by empires, commerce, culture and religion, where civilizations did not clash, but communicated, interacted, and merged, producing fertile ground for dialogue and exchange. This great potential was overshadowed by developments in recent history. The first and last armed conflicts in Europe during the short 20th century (1914-1991) took place in the Balkans. The bloodshed gave birth to a new term – Balkanization that became a synonym for a reversion to the tribal, backward, primitive and even barbarian habits and practices. This term echoed some earlier metaphors that tried to capture the innate instability of the region. These metaphors are a part of a Balkanophobe paradigm that consists of oversimplified and shallow interpretations and conceptual frames about the Balkans. At the beginning of the third millennia, marked by geopolitical shifts, migrations, and multiple global and regional crises, we need a fresh, authentic understanding of the Balkans, its role, position, capacity and potentials. We need a shift from a Balkanophobe to a Balkanophile paradigm. In a complex and contradictory world, the Balkan region should not be seen as a buffer zone, but an open, inclusive and connected region, capable of creating conditions that would benefit its countries and peoples, providing them with opportunities to share its positive experiences with one another and the rest of Europe.

Key words: Balkans, paradigm, international relations, clash of civilizations, Balkanization, European Union

INTRODUCTION: PARADIGMS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

According to Thomas S. Kuhn, a paradigm has two basic functions: cognitive and normative.¹ While the cognitive function defines our perception of reality, the normative function enables the paradigm to regulate and influence reality.² Although Kuhn originally had in mind natural and exact sciences, the concept was soon recognized as applicable in social sciences, including international relations.³ According to Kegley and Blanton, the various theories of international relations rest “on different assumptions about the nature of international politics, each advances different claims about causes, and each offers a different set of foreign policy recommendations.”⁴ A paradigm-shift occurs once a dominant paradigm fails to provide a sustainable explanation of international relations. Major historical events, such as the World War I, World War II, the Cold War, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks provided the ground for paradigm shift. Two such paradigms have influenced the perception of and attitude towards the Balkans.

THE BALKANS BETWEEN FUKUYAMA AND HUNTINGTON

Following the unexpected end of the Cold War, many authors were inspired by the liberal momentum. Building upon Alexandre Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel, Francis Fukuyama famously declared the end of history of ideas, arguing that after the Cold War, liberal democracy is the last idea standing.⁵ In other words, liberal democracy is the ultimate form of government for nations. In the Balkans, Fukuyama’s liberal democracy paradigm was somewhat epitomized by the idea of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries. The Copenhagen Criteria (democracy, rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities and a functioning market economy)⁶ would become the new creed of Balkan nations aspiring for membership in the EU and NATO. However, this process was somewhat jeopardized by an equally unexpected influx of nationalism and ethno-religious conflicts in the Balkans during the breakup of former Yugoslavia.

In order to explain the new conflicts in the Balkans and other regions around the world, a different paradigm was needed. In his famous response to Fukuyama, Huntington claimed that following the Cold War, the cultural and religious identities would replace the ideological identities as a primary source of conflict. While the identity of the Cold War was metaphorically summarized in the question “Which side are you on?” the new, post-

1 Rueschemeyer, D. (2006). *Why and How Ideas Matter*. The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Science. Goodin, R. and Tilly C. (eds.). Oxford University Press. 227-252

2 Kuhn, T. S. (1996). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Third edition. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

3 Lijphart, A. (1974). *International relations theory: great debates and lesser debates*. International Social Science Journal. Vol. XXVI. No. 1. pp. 12

4 Kegley, C. W. and Blanton, S. L. (2010). *World Politics: Trend and Transformation*. Cengage Learning.

5 Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. The Free Press. New York.

6 European Union. *Conclusions of the Presidency. Copenhagen European Council - 21-22 June 1993*. Last accessed: 21 May 2017. URL: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/ec/pdf/cop_en.pdf>.

Cold War period would have a new essential question: “Who are you?” In other words, the cultural and religious identity “would define a country’s place in world politics, its friends and its enemies”.⁷ Likewise, Huntington argued that “the fault lines between civilizations are to replace the political and ideological boundaries of the Cold War as the flash points for crisis and bloodshed.”⁸ The concept of civilization was at the center of his theory.⁹ As Tucker notes, Huntington sees the identification with a civilization is the broadest level of identification.¹⁰

In the post-Cold War period, “Who are you?” became a quintessential question for the Balkans. Huntington’s clash of civilizations paradigm sees the Balkans as a region deeply divided by the fault lines of three civilizations – Western, Orthodox and Islamic. These fault lines correspond with previous empires. For instance, the Western civilization in the Balkans spans along the borders of the former Austro-Hungarian Habsburg Empire. Pockets of Islamic civilization are located in Bosnia and Albania. Finally, the rest of the countries fall in the so-called Orthodox civilization, previously part of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. The fault lines that constantly shifted with the imperial borders, have settled with the breakup of the empires following World War I. Frozen during the Cold War era, these fault lines re-emerged with the spring of identities. As Ivanov notes, “the end of the Cold War [...] was followed by a spring of identities. The fall of the Berlin Wall and democratization of societies unfroze pending conflicts.”¹¹

Similarities in the Balkans have often been a pretext for confrontation, on at least two levels. On the level of national identity, similarities have been seen as threats to distinctiveness. “*We dislike our neighbors...because we resemble them,*” says Nikos Dimou.¹² On the level of nation-building, similarities have been used as a basis for confrontation in order to claim monopoly on shared material and non-material values. Conventional history shows that the Balkan nations were successful in recognizing their enemies among their own neighbors. 19 and 20th century interventions of great powers have contributed to these self-fulfilling prophecies by stirring nationalism and great state projects among different nations. This is partly due to the constructed national myths and identities.¹³

7 Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon & Schuster.

8 Huntington, op cit.

9 Bieber, F. (1999). *The Conflict in former Yugoslavia as a “Fault Line War”?* Balkanologie. Vol. III, No.1.

10 Tucker, T (2013). *Huntington and Post-Cold War Paradigms: If Not the Clash of Civilizations, What?* E-International Relations. <<http://www.e-ir.info/2013/09/23/huntington-and-post-cold-war-paradigms-if-not-the-clash-of-civilizations-what/>>.

11 Ivanov, G. (March 2016). *Balkans, Caucasus and Middle East: the Bermuda Triangle of Europe*. Lecture delivered on the occasion of the Doctor Honoris Causa award ceremony at the Academy of Public Administration. Baku. 11th March 2016.

12 Dimou, N. (2013). *On the Unhappiness of Being Greek*. Zero Books. p. 14

13 If, following Benedict Anderson, we accept that the modern nation as a socio-political phenomenon developed since the French Revolution, then, this would mean that imposing this concept of modernity to interpret pre-modern concepts and events is a methodological problem.

THE BALKANOPHOBE PARADIGM

The first and last armed conflicts in Europe during the short 20th century (1914-1991) took place in the Balkans. While the first Balkan conflict was a prelude to the Great War (1914-1918), the last armed conflict in the Balkans coincided with the end of the Cold War (1947-1991). The bloodshed gave birth to a new term – Balkanization that became a synonym for a reversion to the tribal, backward, primitive and even barbarian habits and practices.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines Balkanization as the “division of a multinational state into smaller ethnically homogeneous entities. The term also is used to refer to ethnic conflict within multiethnic states”.¹⁴ According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, to Balkanize means “to break up (as a region or group) into smaller and often hostile units”.¹⁵ As Todorova notes, the term “Balkanization” was first used by American journalist Paul Scott Mowrer in the following sense: “the creation, in a region of hopelessly mixed races, of a medley of small states with more or less backward populations, economically and financially weak, covetous, intriguing, afraid, a continual prey to the machinations of the great powers, and to the violent promptings of their own passions.”¹⁶ Todorova also notes “that “Balkanization” not only had come to denote the parcelization of large and viable political units but also had become a synonym for a reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian.”¹⁷ In this line, Ivanov points out that “Balkanization” has become a “measurement unit for proneness to conflict” that is being used even today for perceiving the politically and security wise unstable regions in the world.¹⁸ In the past two centuries, we became recognizable as an inherently unstable area, where divisions and conflicts are a rule, and relations and peace are an exception to this rule.

This term echoed some earlier metaphors that tried to capture the innate instability of the region. For some, it describes the Balkans as a space where the irrational *Homo Balcanicus*¹⁹ lives.²⁰ For the British, the Balkans were “The Powder Keg of Europe”; for the French “*Balkanique et Volcanique*”; for the Turkish “Bal-Kan” or “Blood and Honey”. These metaphors are a part of a Balkanophobe paradigm that consists of oversimplified and shallow interpretations and conceptual frames about the Balkans. This balkanophobe paradigm has been used to describe other regions.²¹ We have heard of Balkanization of the

14 “Balkanization,” [Britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Balkanization). Last accessed: 21 May 2017. URL: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Balkanization>>.

15 “Balkanize,” [Merriam-Webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/balkanize). Last accessed: 21 May 2017. URL: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/balkanize>>.

16 Mowrer, P. S. (1921). *Balkanized Europe: A Study in Political Analysis and Reconstruction*. E. P. Dutton & Company. New York.

17 Todorova, M. (2009). *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford University Press.

18 Ivanov, G. (January 2013). *The Balkans and the Gulf: The Crossroads of Civilizations*, Lecture delivered at Georgetown University, Center for International and Regional Studies, Doha, January 29th 2013

19 Bechev, D. (2011). *Constructing South East Europe: The Politics of Balkan Regional Cooperation*. Palgrave Macmillan.

20 Bardos, G. N. (Fall 2003), *Davos Man Meets Homo Balcanicus*” *The National Interest* No. 73 (Fall 2003), pp. 128-133 <<http://nationalinterest.org/bookreview/davos-man-meets-homo-balcanicus-1126>>.

21 Hill, F. (May 2001). *The Caucasus and Central Asia: How the United States and Its Allies Can Stave Off a Crisis*. Brookings Policy Brief. No. 8. The Brookings Institution. Last accessed: 21 May 2017. URL: <<https://>

Caucasus²², the Middle East, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Sudan, Nigeria, Congo, etc.

The cure for Balkanization was sought in the Europeization of the Balkans. In other words, there was an attempt to resolve a Huntingtonian dilemma with a Fukuyamian answer. The fault lines between the religions and civilizations would be erased by the European peace project. However, this proved difficult, due to several factors. The European Union was indecisive to open the doors for all countries in the region to join in. Instead, it applied double standards, letting some countries in while leaving other countries out of the club. This resulted with a “Balkanization of EU”, since the Balkan countries that were part of the club started using the consensus mechanism in order to blackmail and block the integration of their neighbors. The Greek blockade of the Republic of Macedonia proves the case. Furthermore, EU faced several diverse challenges, such as the 2008 economic crisis, the ongoing migrant crisis and the rising security crisis, which surpass the abilities of the Union. These growing challenges prompted the Junker Commission to postpone any enlargement before 2019.²³

Some, like R. Craig Nation, criticize Huntington’s paradigm, since it tends to impose “fixed and arbitrary geographical contours onto what are actually complex patterns of cultural interaction.” While agreeing that religion in the Balkans has been conflicting factor, he points out that different religions also provided contexts for promotion of solidarity and mutual understanding.²⁴

When the Balkan peoples start accepting this paradigm and identify themselves with the imposed caricature, then the paradigm becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Not only that this balkanophobe paradigm is not sustainable, but it also mixes the causes with the effects. Commenting on the metaphor of the Balkans as the powder keg of Europe, one Macedonian public intellectual adds that, if that is the case, then the fuse of this powder keg is always outside of the Balkans.²⁵ Namely, whenever the Balkan people and nations waited for others to solve their problems, divisions and enmities were inevitable. So, the following dilemma arises: is there inherent Balkan antagonism, or are antagonisms projected by other interests?

BALKANOPHILE PARADIGM

Despite prevailing perceptions, the Balkans has been a region with the longest periods of peace and prosperity in recorded history. According to Prof. Dr. Gjorge Ivanov, President of the Republic of Macedonia, out of 3.100 years of written world history, 2.700 years are

www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/pb80.pdf>.

22 Dzutsati, V. (March 2013). *Signs of Balkanization Emerge in the North Caucasus*. North Caucasus Weekly. Volume: 14 Issue: 5. Last accessed: 21 April 2017. URL: <<https://jamestown.org/program/signs-of-balkanization-emerge-in-the-north-caucasus/>>.

23 Jean-Claude Juncker. *A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change. Political Guidelines for the next European Commission*. Strasbourg, 15 July 2014 <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/juncker-political-guidelines-speech_en_0.pdf>.

24 Nation, R. C. (2004). *War in the Balkans, 1991-2002*. University Press of the Pacific.

25 BGNES. Георге Иванов: Балканите са буре с барут, но фитилът винаги идва отвън. BGNES.com. 14 April 2016. Last accessed: 21 April 2017. URL: <<http://www.bgn.es.com/sviat/balkani/4423588/>>.

marked with wars, and only 300 years with peace. Paradoxically, he points out that the longest periods of peace were in the Balkans - namely *Pax Romana* and *Pax Ottomana*.²⁶ For centuries, the Balkans has been a crossroad of civilizations paved by empires, commerce, culture and religion. The Balkans is a place where civilizations did not clash, but communicated, interacted, and merged, producing fertile ground for dialogue and exchange. In such contexts, the Balkans gave birth to over 20 Roman Emperors including Constantine the Great and Justinian I. It was the birthplace of church fathers such as St. John Chrysostom, Ss. Cyril and Methodius, St. Clement of Ohrid, humanists that changed people's hearts like Mother Teresa, philosophers and scientist who changed the world, composers, writers, cineastes, painters and sculptors. The common denominator for these contexts is the presence of a neutral power (empire), a common language (*lingua franca*) and a common market of currency and ideas. The Millet System, understood as religious autonomy of the Ottoman Empire and the cultural autonomies of the Austro-Hungarian Habsburg empires provided the right balance between unity and diversity, with respecting the differences, while pursuing shared interests of the neighborhood, community, nation, or region.²⁷ This philosophy was metaphorically summarized in a Macedonian Jewish proverb attributed to General Beno Isak Ruso (1920-2006): "Separated ("bashka") lives (of different religious, ethnic and linguistic communities) leads to ghettoization. United ("barabar") lives (of different religious, ethnic and linguistic communities) leads to assimilation. The answer lies in separated yet united lives ("*em bashka em barabar*")." This model enables balancing the animosities by satisfying the needs for distinctiveness.

Applied to the Balkans as a whole, this approach would allow the countries to pursue common security, economic and political interests, while respecting their uniqueness. At the beginning of the third millennium, marked by geopolitical shifts, migrations, and multiple global and regional crises, we need a fresh, authentic understanding of the Balkans, its role, position, capacity and potentials. We need a shift from a Balkanophobe to a Balkanophile paradigm. But, in order to achieve this, the Balkan region should not be seen as a buffer zone, but an open, inclusive and connected region, capable of creating conditions that would benefit its countries and peoples, providing them with opportunities to share its positive experiences with one another and the rest of Europe.

CONCLUSION

A paradigm-shift in international relations occurs once a dominant paradigm fails to provide a sustainable explanation of events, processes and trends. Major historical events provide the ground for paradigm shift, both defining perception and influencing the reality.

As it was pointed at the very beginning, despite prevailing perceptions, the Balkans, a crossroad of civilizations, has been a region with the longest periods of peace and prosperity in recorded history. In order to explain the new conflicts in the Balkans (and other regions

26 Ivanov, G. (August 2014). *Address at the 6th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations*. Bali.

27 Ivanov, G. (September 2014), *Macedonian Model of Coexistence: Tradition of Respect for Diversity*. Lecture delivered at the Yale Divinity School, New Haven, 22 September 2014.

around the world), a different paradigm was needed, explaining that the cultural and religious identities are replacing the ideological identities as a primary source of conflict (Huntington's response to Fukuyama), or, "the end of the Cold War [...] was followed by a spring of identities" unfreezing the pending conflicts.

Similarities in the Balkans have often been a pretext for confrontation in order to claim monopoly on shared material and non-material values, recognizing the enemies among the neighbors, due to "support" of great powers and constructed national myths and identities. Balkanization became a synonym for a reversion to the tribal, backward, primitive and even barbarian habits and practices, a "measurement unit for proneness to conflict" and the Balkans became recognizable as an inherently unstable area, where divisions and conflicts are a rule, and good relations and peace are an exception to this rule.

The cure for "Balkanization" was an attempt to resolve a Huntingtonian dilemma with a Fukuyamian answer, erasing the fault lines between the religions and civilizations by European integration as a peace project. Instead, this resulted with a "Balkanization of EU", since the Balkan countries that were part of the club started using the consensus mechanism in order to blackmail and block the integration of their neighbors.

When the Balkan peoples start accepting "balkanophobe" paradigm, mixing the causes with the outcomes, and identify themselves with the imposed caricature, then the paradigm becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If it is true that divisions and enmities were inevitable whenever the Balkan people and nations waited for others to solve their problems, the following dilemma arises: is there inherent Balkan antagonism, or are antagonisms projected by other interests?

At the beginning of the third millennia, we need a shift from a "Balkanophobe" to a "Balkanophile" paradigm. Paradigm that is based on pursuing of common (regional) security, economic and political interests, while respecting uniqueness of all Balkan nations. Paradigm that avoids the perception of the Balkans as a buffer zone, but an prosperous and resourceful region, open, inclusive and connected, capable of sharing its positive experiences with the rest of the world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bardos, G. N. (Fall 2003). *Davos Man Meets Homo Balcanicus*" The National Interest No. 73 (Fall 2003). pp. 128-133 <<http://nationalinterest.org/bookreview/davos-man-meets-homo-balcanicus-1126>>.

Bechev, D. (2011). *Constructing South East Europe: The Politics of Balkan Regional Cooperation*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bieber, F. (1999). *The Conflict in former Yugoslavia as a "Fault Line War"?* Balkanologie. Vol. III, No.1.

Dimou, N. (2013). *On the Unhappiness of Being Greek*. Zero Books.

Dzutsati, V. (March 2013). "Signs of Balkanization Emerge in the North Caucasus." North Caucasus Weekly. Volume: 14 Issue: 5. Last accessed: 21 April 2017. URL: <<https://jamestown.org/program/signs-of-balkanization-emerge-in-the-north-caucasus/>>.

Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. The Free Press. New York.

Jean-Claude Juncker. *A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change. Political Guidelines for the next European Commission*. Strasbourg, 15 July 2014

Hill, F. (May 2001). "The Caucasus and Central Asia: How the United States and Its Allies Can Stave Off a Crisis." Brookings Policy Brief. No. 8. The Brookings Institution. Last accessed: 21 May 2017. URL: <<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/pb80.pdf>>.

Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon & Schuster.

Ivanov, G. (January 2013). *The Balkans and the Gulf: The Crossroads of Civilizations*. Lecture delivered at Georgetown University, Center for International and Regional Studies, January 29th 2013

Ivanov, G. (September 2014). *Macedonian Model of Coexistence: Tradition of Respect for Diversity*. Lecture delivered at the Yale Divinity School, New Haven, 22 September 2014.

Ivanov, G. (August 2014). *Address at the 6th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations*. Bali.

Ivanov, G. (March 2016). *Balkans, Caucasus and Middle East: the Bermuda Triangle of Europe*. Lecture delivered on the occasion of the Doctor Honoris Causa award ceremony at the Academy of Public Administration. Baku. 11th March 2016.

Kegley, C. W. and Blanton, S. L. (2010). *World Politics: Trend and Transformation*. Cengage Learning.

Kuhn, T. S. (1996). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Third edition. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Lijphart, A. (1974). *International relations theory: great debates and lesser debates*. International Social Science Journal. Vol. XXVI. No. 1.

Mowrer, P. S (1921). *Balkanized Europe: A Study in Political Analysis and Reconstruction*. E. P. Dutton & Company. New York.

Nation, R. C. (2004). *War in the Balkans, 1991-2002*. University Press of the Pacific.

Todorova, M. (2009). *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford University Press.

Tucker, T (2013). *Huntington and Post-Cold War Paradigms: If Not the Clash of Civilizations, What?* E-International Relations. Last accessed: 21 May 2017. URL: <<http://www.e-ir.info/2013/09/23/huntington-and-post-cold-war-paradigms-if-not-the-clash-of-civilizations-what/>>.

Rueschemeyer, D. (2006). *Why and How Ideas Matter*. The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Science. Goodin, R. and Tilly C. (eds.). Oxford University Press. 227-252

BGNES. Георге Иванов: Балканите са буре с барут, но фитилът винаги идва отвън. BGNES.com. 14 April 2016. Last accessed: 21 April 2017. URL: <<http://www.bgn.es.com/sviat/balkani/4423588/>>.

European Union. Conclusions of the Presidency. Copenhagen European Council - 21-22 June 1993 Last accessed: 21 May 2017. URL: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/ec/pdf/cop_en.pdf>.

“Balkanization,” [Britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Balkanization). Last accessed: 21 May 2017. URL: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Balkanization>>.

“Balkanize,” [Merriam-Webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/balkanize). Last accessed: 21 May 2017. URL: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/balkanize>>.

