



UDC 323.1+327(4)
Manuscript received: 01.04.2011.
Accepted for publishing: 10.05.2011.
Original scientific paper

Serbian Political Thought
No. 1/2011, Year III,
Vol. 3
pp. 7-19

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Europe and the Others

Abstract

Understood as a social and political entity, Europe is constituted by its outside. It is, as anthropologists beginning with Fredrik Barth have elaborated for more than forty years now, at the boundaries to others that identities are being maintained. The article looks at the consequences of this for European identity, makes a tour d'horizon of Europe's constitutive outsides, and draws particular attention to the key role played by the Eurasian steppe in European state building. Steppe polities were part of a tradition, with patterns of leadership, succession and also foreign relations that differ from what was found amongst sedentary polities, but they nonetheless put their distinct marks on state building projects. Europe's Eastern neighbours must be thought of as intimate strangers through a more than thousand year long period.

Keywords: Europe, identity, European identity, the steppe, constitutive others.

Analyses of European identity often have starting point in nation states. The nation state is an interesting and also dominant form of political control unit, but it's not and it has never been the only one. In a longer historical perspective, it is a newcomer. One of the features of political life in Europe today concerns the relationship between the EU emerging political governing bodies on the one hand, and its member states on the other. An intense dialogue between the two of them is in progress. A key concern in this dialogue is "the East", whether it concerns the easternmost members of the current EU, such as Bulgaria, or Russia, or for that matter Iran or China. The point I will elaborate here is very simple. Europe has its origins in the Eurasian steppes - the area stretching from the Bering Strait in the east to the forest area surrounding the Volga in the west. With the possible exception of the Basques, whose origins we know little about, so-called indigenous people came to Europe from the East. Historically, this is obvious. Politically speaking, it is definitely gone into oblivion. That's why there may be a reason to point out that

this is not just a phenomenon belonging to prehistory. In fact, steppes, or more specifically, people who come from the steppes, has always been called Europe's constitutive other by the poststructuralists. I will briefly evaluate how this manifested from about the year 800 to about the year 1500, and draw the line to the current form of nomadism. The term "constitutive other" simply emphasizes that identities are a question of separating "us" from "them". Since the objective of creating and maintaining a specific identity always involves delimitation of "us" from the phenomena that are outside, the outside will necessarily play a role in shaping or constituting the term "us". As with all identities, Europe has been created through its ongoing delimitation of the phenomena that are considered non-Europe (Neumann 1999).

Us and Them

It may be necessary to set right the concept of identity's "constitutive outside." Let us take a detour on Plato's dialogue *The State*. Plato is interested in what distinguishes a statesman's work, and thus also the politics. His answer is that the politics is overarching, or perhaps better developed art of regulating the relationship between one person and a lot of people. *Polis*, Plato suggests, is a textile. Statesman's task is to finalize that textile. The finished textile should be an inclusive and perfectly tuned blend of the brave and the cautious. Such textile, such political society would be the most beautiful of them all, concludes Plato (2003: 261b-263a).

For Plato, politics should also affiliate individual threads of destiny to a textile where all mutually complement each other, bound together in a community of practice and destiny. This is a collective identity formation that you can see above in the text. As we will discuss later in the text, it is about belonging and acting in accordance with already existing script. This theme is a recurring element in the political theory's canon. For contract theorist, that is an example that people come out of their natural state to form a community. The basis of all questions about everyday politics, about what kind of constitution a society should have, how resources should be distributed, etc., is the basis of the question of who we are. Belonging to a group is the key to human life. The larger the groups are, the more crucial is that there's a kind of glue that holds them together, some markers of community, integrating powers.

Why is this so? Because it is dangerous, perhaps impossible to act collectively without having an already existing scheme of who should act? Methodological individualists claim the opposite - that each individual

can only act gradually, and so, we are absolutely preparing ourselves for a collective action - but then, they seem so far away from the idea of individualism –that the individual is the one who should act- that idea is by itself a group forming phenomenon: whether individuals are being formed from the collective ideas that they should be individuals who will act in a certain way, and they do that, yes that's how collective idea of the individual is being realized as a series of "individual" actions that reflect a collective form; they are the same.

Collective action problem grows with group size. Any workplace is full of occasions where the community idea and practices repeat, again and again. Why? So that the employees should feel good? Also, it is because it's widely accepted that community feeling is something that causes most people to feel good. But the main idea is that community feeling is based on a knowledge repertoire of how and when we should act together. The idea of who will act together becomes substantial through the practice. Such knowledge is vital for every collective action power. A group that feels like "we" is simply more productive; it has more action capacity than it would have if we-feeling was weaker. Thus, we-feeling, as it has been argued since Plato's time, is a key resource.

People are neither bees nor ants. A group made of human species will necessarily be more or less heterogeneous. This means that an important part of community feeling will be fictional, not actually lived– when we form "we", we imagine that we are equal, that we have more in common than we actually have. Collective identities are also complex. They have no clearly defined boundaries, but they are built on what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls family similarities. It isn't physical or cultural trait that guarantees absolute equality. To be a member of a group is a case of "know it when you see it", as social anthropologists say when they are pushed into a corner. Collective identities are also relational. For a single concerned group to be a member of that group is like to be a part of something without further learning to unite with the feeling of being a member of another group. As a Norwegian, I live each day with a possible combination of national identity and European identity (as discussed in Neumann 2001).

The relationship between just Norwegian and European identity is very controversial sometimes. For a number of Norwegians to be a Norwegian means to stay out of the EU. The EU is what we can call a constitutive outside for Norwegian identity. All identities have their constitutive other. In the border areas of any collective identity, whether in terms of gender community or territorial political community, there is a continuing need to support and maintain this identity. Collective

identities can be fictional and complex, but since they are relational, there are always other identities that support them to be different. The question of who the others are, vary within the group and also historically. Today, a German nationalist who lives in Hesse and a French-Algerian liberal who lives in Paris, presumably will not agree on who represents the constitutive other for their European identity (Bang City & Bunzl, forthcoming). But the constitutive other will necessarily be there in one form or another. No inside without an outside, no in-group without out-groups.

It is not a new insight that a collective identity is a relational condition, that the group relationship to the other groups is what maintains the group itself. But decades after World War II, this insight has been deepened in the ways that made it become springboard for the social analysis of collective identity. Philosophers like Emmanuel Lévinas did the theoretical groundwork (cf. Neumann 1999:1-38). Whatever method is concerned, breakthrough however happened within the social sciences that have specialized in identity from the subject's own birth, namely social anthropology. In Bergen in 1969 published Fredrik Barth and the others book *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, whose main point was that the maintenance of ethnic groups could and should be studied from the group boundaries and inwards, and not, as before, inside and out. Collective identities are not maintained simply by the fact that people are dressed in the same type of clothes, that they eat the same type of food, etc., but people do this in competition with the other ways to dress up and eat. Such competition becomes most clearly visible in the (social and political) border areas, where it is the most intense, yes, social boundaries can actually be defined by such competition formation. Social anthropologists never looked back, and over the last thirty years, other social scientists have followed in their footsteps.

Identity should be studied along its borders. This has significant impact on the way we think about European identity. In the first place, it means that attempts to create a list of historical and social features that will define a given political entity (for example Norway = meatballs, 17th of May, folk costumes and settlement on the edge, or Europe = Christianity, Ode to Joy and democracy) have limited value. It is impossible to find any cultural trait shared by all Europeans, and that at the same time is missing with non-Europeans. For example, is it true that most Europeans have some traditional behavioral manners in common — but you can also find similar manners in other places. It is true that there is a European cuisine tradition, but it is not consistent, you can

find it in other places and in Europe itself, it lives side by side with, for example, Turkish and Chinese cuisine traditions. Similar points can be used for all cultural features.

A second implication of the fact that identity is relational condition, concerns the compatibility between European and national identities. The more similar two types of identity are, the less they will be compatible. The more different they are, the less is the chance that they will be activated simultaneously, and the less is the chance that they will come in conflict with each other. Here we have the reason why the European Commission's efforts in the 1970s to build a European identity on the basis of one European flag, one European anthem, etc. were so obviously unsuccessful, and probably seemed counterproductive. This way of building identity was already adopted by nation states, and hence to build a European identity by using the same type of symbols was a risky undertaking that soon went under.

A third consequence of this type of relation between identities is that the size of cultural differences does not depend on inherent characteristics, but on how different they are perceived to be. Finnish and Swedish belong to the two different language families, while Swedish linguistic is very similar to Norwegian linguistic. As identity markers, they are however equally good. For an outsider, the difference between Serbian and Croatian folk music is minimal. However, for Serbian and Croatian people, they belong to the literally different worlds - no matter how related they can be musically, they are constituted of an identity-related difference. This point - that a difference perceived by the group itself is the key to cultural difference - has important consequences for European identity. This means, for example, that all the things that Europe has in common with its neighbors, can be considered for nothing because everyone who's involved insists on the differences, not similarities. Religion is an example. What it helps to point out that Islam and Christianity come in many varieties, that they have a common origin ("we are all sons of Abraham"), that they have a number of structural similarities (monotheism and patriarchy, to name just two), if the most people involved look at religion as a razor sharp difference marker (Rumelili 2007)? This is why people like Samuel Huntington, Osama bin Laden and Jean-Marie Le Pen are so dangerous - not because they point out "real" differences, but because they insist that these differences would be constitutive of who we are, and thus essential for social and political life. Every identity has its constitutive other. Many things stand and fall on how we think about the outside, and in what ways and to what extent we undo a difference towards another.

Time

History is chronological aspect of identity. Chapter one of European etymology is mythic, it comes from Greece, and it's about how a Phoenician princess named Europe was seduced by Zeus, who had assumed the form of white bull, and that happened from mainland to Crete. Term Europe was used as a geographical term for the upper, western half of the Greek map, where Asia and Africa were the two parts of the map below the crossbar. The border between Europe and Asia should have been the River Tanais, i.e. The Danube River. Europe's constitutive other was Asia. More specifically, it was Persia. Note that in the 5th and the 6th century came waves of steppe people who invaded the residents west of them – among others Scythians and Sarmatians-Iranian-speaking people.

Chapter two in European etymology seems to be the worst known. The term shows up around the time of reign of Charlemagne (742-814) to signify the Carolingian Empire in a narrow sense, and Christendom in a broader sense. We are talking about spread use of term, not enough to attach it to a specific territorial reference. Charlemagne was King of the Franks, and he became, as we remember, crowned emperor of the Romans early in the year 800. Note that this was just one of the various transfers of rule (Lat. *translatii imperii*) in circulation. A main reason why the coronation took place when it did was to celebrate the victory over the Avars. Let us say a bit more about these Avars.

Avars were one of the many predominantly Turkish-speaking people who invaded and settled in the populated areas west of the steppes (Curta 2006). They arrived in the mid 500's, after Sarmatians. Avars invaded westwards from Central Asia to escape the pressure of another Turkish group, the Altaic Turks. They defeated the Bulgarians, another Turkish-speaking people who lived out on the Caucasian steppe at the time, and gathered around the place that's now known as The Great Hungarian Plain (*Alföld*). Avars were organized in a *qaghanate*, the political electoral system for the nomads from the steppes kingdom in inner Asia (a khagan is Khan of Khans). Charlemagne defeated Avars khaganate, and his coronation was among other things celebration of this victory. In other words, Charlemagne placed himself up as the crowned head of a unit that was called Europe few times, and a constitutive unit outside this one was the Avars khaganate, that originated from the steppes.

There is a direct relationship not only between the Avars and the European identity structure, but also between the Avars and the specific

national states' identity in contemporary Europe. One is French. The other is Bulgarian. The Bulgarian state emerged as a result of mixture between the conquerors from the steppes who came to collect tribute - Bulgarians - and the local tribes, mostly Slavic. Bulgarians hold on this territory became stronger as the largest of the Bulgarian khans, Krum (803-814), ended the Avars.¹ It is not difficult to find examples of how it is impossible to think about Europe and its current political entities and not to include the steppes. Today's Bulgaria is really a result of a confrontation, like Hungary and Russia. Let us not forget that the Vikings a thousand years ago played a crucial role in early formation of Russian state (Noonan 2001). Note that they did this in competition and finally, in cooperation with the steppe people such as Bulgarians, Khazars and Magyars (a branch of today's Hungarians). The second chapter in European etymology is still very alive.

The third time term Europe emerges is evidently in the 15th century, this time as a replacement for the term Christendom (Neumann 1999). My interpretation of this is that religious disputes, first between Orthodox and Catholics, then between Catholics and Protestants, requested a concept that could unite without referring directly to the conflict theme. "Europe" was such a term. We can further note that the term Europe was also related to Christian defense forces that in the 15th century gathered against the Ottoman attack that finally brought Constantinople to fall in 1453. Enea Piccolomini, who later became Pope Pius II, was the first to employ this term in a book title. Conceptually as well as politically, Europe is Christendom's successor, and its constitutive outside this time was the Ottoman Empire which had conquered Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire. The Ottoman Empire emerged from the Turkish-speaking people who pulled in from the steppes to settle. Again, we can see that the steppes and the people there make Europe's constitutive outside.

Space

I have focused on these three occurrences of the term Europe and emphasized how they all have their constitutive outside because it has a direct impact on the current situation. Constitutive outsides must be maintained. The old Habsburgs used to insist that Asia began east

1 But Quidditch player Krum and his key role as a menacing figure from the East in the Harry Potter universe is an interesting example of how Europe's steppe-connection is still present as an undercurrent in European culture.

of the Ringstrasse - a circular road that surrounds the city. Balts and Romanians will say that the East begins over the river, in Ukraine. Most Poles will say the same, if they are not the expansive historical type who considers themselves for Jagiellonian Poles, related to the Ukrainians. If that's the case, they will tell you that Asia begins in Russia, as the majority of Ukrainians will say (Mälksoo 2009). Most Russians will however insist that Asia begins in a place that's southeast of them. In the southeastern corner of Europe we can probably identify a chain that's been identified. Austrians would say that Asia begins in Slovenia, Slovenes will point to Croatia, Croats will point to Serbia, Serbs will point to Bosnia and Bosnians will point to Turkey. Most Greeks will be keen on supporting the idea that Europe stops at their threshold.

In the south we can identify a diluted version of the same tendency. Moroccans want EU membership, and since being European is an explicit requirement for membership, they have to play up their European side. Moroccans do not seem to be in doubt about the non-European status of their neighbors further in south (Pace 2006).

We can make two points out of this tendency to always make Europe boundaries merge with the boundaries of "someone's own" state, and they point in different directions. The first point is that these arguments are very difficult to substantiate. I have not seen yet, say, a Romanian argument for Romanian Europeanization and Ukrainian non-Europeanization, or any Slovenian argument for Slovenian Europeanization and Croatian non-Europeanization that could be formed beyond the national state framework where the argument was launched. Any outsider who has been in a Romanian Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholic Church, or who has eaten a Slovenian and Croatian meal will still wonder why one out of two of them should be more European than the other. But the second point is the exact opposite: If enough people adopt these differences as constitutive for Europe, then this becomes a social fact, and thus self-fulfilling. The formation of "we" is the essence of all identity politics. It is absolutely crucial *who* will win the semantic identity battle, because it also defines who will be excluded and how "normal" we-group seems.

If Europe's relationship with its geographical neighbors is constitutive for European identity, then a single view on all of them should tell us something about the current condition of European identity. However, that isn't so simple. Since identities are social, not geographical, Europe's identity is not only related to the Europe's relationship with its neighbors, territorial proximity, but also to more distant powers. Furthermore, there are other types of relationship than geographical one that also play a significant role. Europe's relationship with its own past could be a significant example (Wæver 1996). For some, European

identity only deals with Christianity, and the Middle Ages stands out as a particularly prosperous period. For others, the European heritage deals with secularization's triumph of faith and for them, the cornerstone of enlightenment thought and the intellectual life during the Age of Enlightenment are ideal.

Russia is located on the east. Russia and Europe have a consistent history of about three hundred and fifty years in which both parties have discussed the extent to which they are related to each other (Neumann 2008a, Neumann 2008b). This conversation continues, and I will argue that its key issue reaches the state's role. In Europe we see a concentration of political power in the EU, and universal standards of various kinds intervene increasingly into politics. Human rights are obvious example. But I think first of all on the relationship between the state and society. In Europe the state backs off, not in the sense that it necessarily becomes less important, but in the sense that it delegates more and more to the other entities and to the citizens. We see a turn towards indirect control orchestrated by the state. The State pulls non-governmental organizations, transnational organizations, international organizations and different social actors to bring programs into life (Neumann & Sending 2010). That's not the situation in Russia, where the state is growing, and it has tendency to control several relationships more directly. If a social project is successful, it will be shut down. We can recall Yukos-affair, in which the owner of a multi-million dollar company was sent to prison and the basis for that was not strong, after the state out of nowhere had promoted enormous tax requirements; we have the NGO law that prevents foreigners to establish themselves and contribute with money to the Russian NGO partners; we have the state's attack on non-Orthodox religious groups. What we see here is a situation where pluralism and a form of generalized liberalism become more and more central in European identity politics, while Russia chooses something that for Europeans seems like an antique state construction. The result is that Russia is not synchronized with the development of European identity.

If we turn ourselves southward, we see that countries from Estonia in the north to Slovenia in the south made big efforts to achieve EU membership during the 1990s. There are two things that other countries in this region can learn from this. In the first place, these states were integrated in the union because they met the Copenhagen criteria.² It is possible to succeed, and that can happen quickly. In the second place,

2 EU's Copenhagen-criteria from 1993 are requirements for membership: institutionalization of democracy and human rights, market economy that works, respect for the EU legislation, institutional capacity to manage the membership.

a state may postpone the implementation of certain legislation and get the European Commission to close their eyes for a single deviation from the Union's political line, but there isn't any alternative to actually avoid to carry out the social and political work that was formally required in order to take part in the union. Experiences with European protrusions such as Norway and Switzerland point in the same direction - their foreign policy is oriented towards making amends in accordance with the EU actions. European identity can be socially decentralized, but the politics is concerned with something that definitely has a center. Furthermore, the Brussels-centered European integration politics provides directions for increasingly larger parts of European politics in general. In each European country, whether it's a member of the EU or not, it seems that division line, in increasingly large degree, is concerned with to what extent the country is willing to commit itself and to be active in the whole fan of arenas and networks that are in the game when European decisions are being made. As far as I can see, this willingness to commit is considerably more important than vote support on questions such as whether the country should go over to euro or to agree to the Lisbon Treaty or not. Any political agenda has become a European agenda. This, I will claim, is more important than the question of integration speed. One relationship that can reverse this tendency is not opposition to further integration. It can certainly reduce integration speed and stop its expansion into new areas of social life. But alone, it wouldn't be able to undermine the Brussels-based politics central role. One relationship that can have such effect is whether the political life in European countries should develop its own agendas, which not only stands in opposition to, but simply is a different kind than hegemonic one, Brussels-based politics. The only place in Europe where I can see the possibilities for such development is in Serbia. Serbia's recent political history is also a sober reminder of what such non-Brussels-oriented politics can lead to. But in Serbia itself, we are only chatting about a modest protest and minority position. Generally, the political life in the Eastern Europe and the Balkans strengthens the European identity; thereby they want to participate so strongly, that they sign the validity of the European political project.

In my view, the formative forces that concern European identity today can not relate to Russia, that currently has decided to keep its distance, or to the Eastern European countries and the Balkans, that to the contrary want to reduce the distance to a greater or lesser extent. Rather, they have to deal with the allied issues of the USA and Turkey.

Importance of the USA for the global politics today can not be overestimated. There is hardly any political problem area or political

conflict that can be adequately understood without the United States inclusion in the equation. Relationships with the United States play an important role in the formation of any political community in any order, anywhere in the world. It's black and white in the official American documents such as the *Quadrennial Defense Review*, an official military strategy which gets updated every four years, and presents America's long-term goals (25-30 years) to block the emergence of possible potential rivals. I will argue that there are two reasons why the relationship with the United States is going to be crucial for European identity in the coming years. The first reason is the indisputable and overwhelming importance of American military and political power in the years ahead for the rest of the world, including Europe. The second is that America is a model for a lifestyle that in many important areas presents an alternative to the European way of life. It takes no interplanetary explanation for this, as some have tried (Europeans are from Venus, Americans are from Mars, see Kagan 2003). It is enough to point out that the United States, because of its experience as an immigrant nation, has developed a way to look at the rest of the world in line with how mature they are to adopt a particular political and economic order (democracy and capitalism) as well as particular social order ("the American way of life") (Forsberg 2009). The debate about how "the West" will drive state construction to the "rest" is among other things a debate about identity politics role in this confrontation between liberal imperialistic American program and other different political projects, among them European (Leira 2008; Nexon and Wright 2006). European identity will be put to the test in the coming years, not least because of the pressure from the American liberal imperialistic project.

In the aftermath of 9/11, Islam and Muslims have become an increasingly important factor for the Western, American and European identities. There is a particularly important and historically charged relationship between Islam and Europe that can serve as a barometer of European benevolence towards the Muslim world and Europe's willingness to leave behind a historical heritage of hate and the ability to show closure to pluralism. This is the question of Turkish EU membership. Turkey has been waiting for a chance for almost 40 years. Already, millions of Turks live and work in Europe. Most important of all, Turkey has carried out fundamental political and social adjustments in order to become a member. Important twists remain. It was also the case with the eastern enlargement. Turkey would for example get a lot closer to the membership if the country admits attacks on Armenians around 1915. Even if the arguments can vary and have religious or other nature, no one should make that type of arguments against membership

like in the previous case. Turkish membership would send a much needed signal to the rest of Europe's neighbors - and among them we can find countries with young, large and growing populations such as Egypt - it would mean that they engage themselves in thinking about relations to Europe in their own home.

Tangled in the European identity, we find a number of other identities, each with its constitutive other, each with its own dynamics, and each with its potential to affect European identity. Who we are depends on what is on the outer side of us, and it is not easy to draw the boundary between inside and outside. Identity is an open project. When we, and particularly the politicians among us, weave Europe's textile, it is crucial that we let the thread pieces hang freely. Collective identities do not stand still in front of the camera. They are always unfinished, in terms of contents as well as the social and geographic range. Therefore, Europeans should be open to those who seek our companionship, and compensate for the broader challenges that are being created by a larger and more multifaceted union, by continuing to strengthen Europe's common institutions as the enterprise grows, just as we have done at each enlargement of the Union so far. Since the concept's birth, steppes have been Europe's most important constitutive outside. However, steppes have also been our own place of origin. Literally speaking, people who lived in what we now call Europe interacted with people that came from the steppes for thousands of years. Our eastern neighbors may seem like strangers, but they are close strangers.

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