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Balkan Multiculturism: Example to Itself & to the EU

Track

Balkan countries have the potential core for economic and political development: Living by cohabitation in peace with tolerance and mutual respect. If the Balkan people relearn to live together, they could catch the wind of achieving for political and economical escalation. And again if Balkan countries can achieve it, as they succeeded it in their own history, this Balkan multiculturism can be also a sample for the EU's multicultural aim.

Abstract

Almost all countries in the Balkan area are the multicultural samples with their heterogenic mosaic. This heterogeneity has become the reason of social togetherness and economical development in its history. According to old-fashion scholars economic development is the reason of socio-cultural togetherness; but the fact is, socio-cultural and political integrity is the reason of economic development. Then the economic development with the socio-cultural integrity brings welfare and regional peace. If this hypothesis is right, Balkans has the core value for the economic development, welfare and social togetherness and also EU's multicultural purpose.

Key Words: Multiculturism, Balkan &EU, tolerance, cohabitation.

Introduction

Balkan multicultural mentality is one of the best samples for the world and also it could be a richness and positive contribution for the realization of the EU's multiculturistic claims and being a global actor in the world arena. Almost all countries in the Balkan area are the multicultural examples with their heterogenic mosaic. This heterogeneity has become the reason of social togetherness and economical development when it was used on the right path in its history. According to old-fashion scholars economic development is the reason of socio-cultural togetherness; but the fact is, socio-cultural and political integrity is the reason of economic

development. Then the economic development with the socio-cultural integrity brings welfare and regional peace. If this hypothesis is right, Balkans has the core value for the economic development, welfare and social togetherness. Balkan history has the full of this kind of experiences and special individuals such as Sokollu, the Prime Minister of Ottomans, built a lot of bridges, fountains and caravanserais in several Balkan countries. The architecture of a city or a region is the coat of richness, culture and mentality of that region. At a glance it is said that Balkan area had very rich tolerance, togetherness and economic development in its history.

Today, although there are a lot of cities which were established according to the ethnic and religionic differences, there are tens of cities with the full of heterogeneity in the same time. It is the reality even today that Bosnians, Macedonians, Turks, Albanians, Roms, Catholics, Orthodoxies and Muslims live as neighbors in the same city, even in the same street in Skopje, Ohri, Varna, Burgas, Prizren and so on. In general, if this mentioned heterogeneity is used as yeast for a mutual understanding, respect and tolerance, it is going to be a positive economic, social and political accelerator. However if modern separatist ideologies, such as nationalism, micro-nationalism, tribalism and ethno-religionism enter to the region, suddenly the region transforms (and will be transformed) to the habitat of negative social escalations and conflicts. This reality has the same potential danger for the other regions of the EU and the world.

Ethnic and religionic separatism had been pressed by rigid ideology of communism in region, like Enver Hoca and Tito did. But the pressure is an artificial path and the temporary solution for the limited time. Normal and long-lasting (permanent) steps of the multiculturism are establishing mutual recognizing, acceptance, respect and natural habitat and then building a consensus on the strong main basement among the people. Yugoslavia, Albania and Bulgaria had not given even the right of religion, which is the need for the human being, to the people of the region in their recent communist histories. This rigidity of communism and nationalism and also intolerance brought the end of these regimes. Jivkov's Bulgarian regime which had not given the right of being Muslim or Turk, collapsed down in 1989. Again Milosevic's speech which was full of ethno-religionic unilateralism in Kosovo Square in 1989 became the reason of dismantling of Yugoslavia into seven countries of today.

This recent historical background and bad experiences should become a guider and a teaching course for the new governments and states in the region and also for the EU. Bulgaria has succeeded it and adopted its own heterogeneity within its own structure after 1991. Right and Freedom Movement was established as an ethnic party at the beginning, but today it has transformed to a national party by taking 3% non-Turkish votes in the last general elections. Macedonia had ignored

Albanian minority in 1991 Constitution and the country has transformed to the bloody ethnic region suddenly. After recognizing ethnic minorities representing in Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001, tension could be gotten down by the mediation of the US, EU and secretly Turkey. Bosnia Herzegovina has still been going on the flue path because of shortness of Dayton Peace Agreement about establishing a normal state and ignoring Bosnians' systemic rights within the new system.

Balkan countries have the potential core for economic and political development: Living by cohabitation in peace with mutual tolerance and respect. If the Balkan people live together, they could catch the wind of achieving for political and economical escalation. If Balkan countries can achieve it again, as they succeeded it in their history[1], Balkan multiculturism can be a sample for the EU's multicultural aim.

Balkan's multiculturism, tolerance and cohabitation: history & today

In the Balkans, different religions, sects, ethnicities and cultures lived together, not side by side but one inside the other and nested, for several centuries. These differences were seen as a richness and cultural mosaic for a long time during the Rome and Ottomans sovereignties. During the nationalism and declining times, the whole Balkan area drastically transformed to a bloody region. Even Tito had established autonomy in respect of ethnicities and then a stable political system could be ensured during the communism. During the Balkan history, Bogomolism and Islam became the core of cohabitation and tolerance; church, synagogue and mosque were built side by side and used the joint walls for 500 years.

Ottoman Empire system enabled the regulations of various interethnic, religious, and linguistic issues, promoting the concept of interethnic tolerance and patience. Ottoman case is a kind of proto- multiculturism which bases cultural rights upon collectivity, a group, a community, rather than upon an individual as has been the case in the contemporary society and in the authentic concept of multiculturism.[2] Even today, in the modern Greek political system, the notion of "being Greek" springs forth as a true heir of the Ottoman "millet" system. The claim that the "millet" system is alive today in Greece should not be surprising because the millet system is a wider

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[1] Cüneyt Yenigün (2008), "Autochthon Turkish Existence in the Balkans", First International Balkan Congress Proceedings, 24-25 April 2008, Tekirdağ, 517-518.

[2] Misho Doknanovich (2007), "The Origins of Multiculturism in Macedonia", Hikmet, 9, June 2007/1, 9-10.

concept with the evident of ideological and legal results in the manner in which immigrants or even Greek citizens are presently classified.[3]

Balkan history presents a very important regional specific fact: If a power struggles to erase the "others", it loses; if a power struggles to establish a greater ethnic state by ignoring the others it gets smaller. "Big Croatia" Greater Macedonia and Greater Serbia aims resulted in accordance with this fact. Assimilation or ethnic cleansing strivings make a "boomerang impact" in this heterogenic region. Integration, cohabitation and mutual respect strivings of the states awards the sovereign powers with the legitimacy.

Assimilation struggle → getting smaller
Integration struggle   → legitimacy

Czech and Slovak people and states could separate easily, because there was no heterogeneity in the region; they were living in de facto divided regions. But almost all Balkan regions were and are exactly heterogenic and it is impossible to separate the cities and regions one by one. That's way there is no way for division for the region, otherwise region transforms to city and tribal states; but unique way is multiculturism and tolerance like its history.

Even today Balkan peoples have the cores values of multiculturism and mutual respect. "If a person speaks one language he is a one person; if a person speaks two languages he is accounted as two persons" according to a Middle East culture. Balkan individuals generally speak three languages because of multiculturistic feature of the region. This is valuable richness for the Balkans. Again individual respect to the others still continues on the streets in heterogenic Balkans. According to a public survey, this was taken in Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo in 2005, "backbiting" is seen one of the four worst things among the Balkan Muslims. Again according to the conclusion of this survey, the most important thing is the freedom of religion (41 %) in the region. (Second important thing is the solving economical issues. [17,2 %]).[4]

Today there is a kind of "Balkan culture and folklore"[5] and especially "Balkan identity" which differs the region from the rest of Europe in the region. It is normal

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[3] Lambros Baltsiotis (2007), "Minorities in Greece: State Policies and Administrative Practices", Minority Issues in Balkans and the EU Conference Proceedings, May 16th 2007, Istanbul, 120-121.

[4] Musa Musai (2005), "Balkan Müslümanlarında Din, Kimlik Bütünleşmesi" Hikmet (6), 2005/2, 34, 44.

[5] Nikolai Vukov (2008), "Deciphering Shared Heritage", First Balkan Congress Proceedings, Tekirdağ, 78.

and acceptable specific feature of the region in according to geopolitics. For example Sweden, Norway and Denmark claim today "they are not European but "Nordics" or "Nordic European". In the region for example, "Bosnian" terminology was not recognized officially until 1993[6] (during the war), because Bosnians and especially Aliya Izzetbegovic has struggled to establish a kind of upper-identity in Bosnia-Herzegovina to solve the ethnic issue. This was very perfect formulation for whole Balkan region too. Upper identity: Balkan culture, "Balkanic". Lower identity: ethnic or religionic differences.

Eu's Dilemma on Multiculturism & Multi-Religionism

EU presents "hope of the peace" to the region, but this hope is already existed in Balkan's own history. In addition to EU's assistance, Balkan states and peoples especially should turn back their own spirit of civilization of multiculturism. Because as Fukuyama claims, democracy could be consolidated ideologically, institutionally and at the level of civil society, but the culture of a country can be the most resistant factor for democratic consolidation.[7] People should find their own richness and develop their own democracy, in addition to EU's help to the region.

EU has been striving to become global/universal actor in the last two decades. To do this purpose, it is struggling to increase power by all means and to establish a permanent consensus among the people of its members. Sovereignty has two components: Rude power and legitimacy. Legitimacy is the most important factor for the EU's incredibility nowadays. EU has to show more effort to increase respect and tolerance to the other cultures and religions, to ensure the credibility and trust in the EU-27 area and also in the Balkans. Micro-nationalism and anti-Islamism has been increasing especially in the eastern members of the EU. This is the one of the most important handicaps of being a global actor of the EU. Ethnic or ethno-religionic issues, such as Bask and Catalan issues in Spain, Northern Ireland issue in the United Kingdom, Sicily issue in Italy, Corsica issue in France, are on the way of the resolving by the assistance of the EU's supranationalism within the EU-27 area, but it cannot be said that the EU is ready for the multi-religionic tolerance for the outsiders. The problem of accession of the countries of Muslim population majority is the flue point for the EU. On the process of enlargement, EU has long lasting pains to open its

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[6] Aydın Babuna, (2008), "Boşnaklar ve Kimlikler. Değişiklik ve Süreklilik", First International Balkan Congress Proceedings, 24-25 April 2008, Tekirdağ, 44.

[7] Şaban Tanıyıcı (2008), "EU's Copenhagen Political Criteria and Political Culture of tyhe Western Balkan Countries: Are They Compatibale?" International Conference on Balkan Studies Proceedings, Tiran, 89.

borders to the Muslim countries. This indecisiveness yield some allegations of "12 stars of the EU represent the Jesus' apostles"; or "EU is a kind of religionic union".

Today around 12-16 million muslim live in EU-27 area. But still according to some European scholars "differences and plurality, especially of a religious kind, have historically been more destructive than constructive. Differences have to find a place within an overall political, social and legal consensus."[8] Again for the plural constructive contribution for Europe, experts wish to point to Ottoman Empire and Islamic Spain at certain periods.[9] Although United Kingdom and Austria have accepted Islam as official religion, EU is very reluctant (or EU moves very slowly) to accept muslim populated countries such as Turkey, Bosnia- Herzegovina, Albania to the union. Europe has just started to get acquainted with tolerance multiculturism and multi-religionism terms in the last 20 years, because history of Europe is full of nation-state and religionic wars. "National identity", "national interest" and "nation-state" terms were born in Europe. Today's Belgium is on the way of Valon and Flamenc separatism and the EU has been struggling to find a unifying point for supranationalist phase, like Ottomans and Habsburgs. If the EU wants to be a global and powerful actor in the world arena, it has to produce effective projects against xenophobia, anti-islamism and tribalism issues and has to solve them by tolerance, mutual respect, and multi-religionic approaches.

In addition to EU's flounders to solve its internal issues, it has been assisting the Balkan area's consolidation of democracy, minority and human rights and development of multiculturism. For this purpose, EU Commission insists on EU candidate countries in the region to establish and develop:

- Human and minority rights,
- Stabilized democratic institutions,
- Political movement standards and
- Independent media[10]

These are the some liabilities for the candidate countries to consolidate the democracy in accordance with Stability and Association Agreements (SAA)[11]. On the one hand the SAA give a carrot of membership in the future to the candidates; on the

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[8] Jorgen Nielsen (2001) Muslims in Western Europe, 2nd edition, Edinburg, Edinburg University Press, 169.

[9] Jorgen, ibid, 168.

[10] EU Commission (2007), "The Stabilization and Association Process and CARDS Assistance" 2000-2006, 3.

[11] Cüneyt Yenigün, (2008), "EU's Role on the Western Balkan Democratization", International Conference on the Balkan Studies Proceedings, 7-8 November 2008, Tiran, 106.

other hand establish a kind of hierarchical relations[12] between the candidates and the EU. This should be perceived by the candidates, not a negative pressure, but a positive guiding.

Actually Balkan people perceive that the EU's guider and the membership of the EU is positive development. According to Gallup Balkan Monitor survey in 2008, Balkan people were asked whether membership of the EU would be a good or a bad thing, nine out of 10 respondents from Kosovo answered positively (89 %). In Albania, more than eight in 10 respondents were upbeat about their country's membership of the EU (83%), and less than one in 10 interviewees gave a neutral response. 66% of Macedonians, 58 % of Serbians, 57 of Montenegrins, 48 % of Bosnians highly support the EU membership.[13]

Conclusion and key elements: mutual respect and trust

Emerging multiculturism must give deep attention also phenomenon of communities' loyalty to the state, the respect of the laws and duties that the state imposes generally for all citizens, regardless of their religious, political or ethnic affiliations. The Balkan model must clearly define the elements for linking the minority groups with the Balkan societies which undoubtedly, should originate from the history of cohabitation, common traditions, common citizenship and finally common future.[14]

Turks and Balkan peoples have learned multiculturism together in their history. During the 14 - 18. centuries while Europe was shaking with the religionic and ethnic wars, Balkans was living in multicultural and multi-religionic peace. It could be explicitly said that Balkans was the origin and the center of multiculturism and tolerance in Europe. Again it became a sample of cohabitation to the East and the West. This culture overshadowed in the Balkans during the 1990's nationalistic winds, and now the region is looking for a permanent peace among its nations again. It is pay-back time of Turkey and the EU to assist Balkans' regaining of multiculturistic spirit.

EU struggles to be a multicultural and multi-religionic union by pursuing and updating Ottoman's multicultural administration. Balkan countries had come and lived together under the Ottoman's supranational administration in history and today they are struggling to come together under the EU's administration on the way of

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[12] David Chandlar, (2008), "EU State Building: Securing the Liberal Peace Through EU Enlargement", Stratejik Öngörü (12), 10-11.

[13] Gallup Balkan Monitor (2008), Insights and Perceptions: Voices of the Balkans, 2008 Summary of Findings, 14-15.

[14] Doknanovich, ibid, 16-17.

supranationalism. EU should assist Balkans, but it is not enough for the region. Balkans should strive to establish democracy in accordance with its multi-culture and historical background; because democracy cannot be exported, but can consolidate by the effort of own people. Balkans have a lot of bridges which connect and tie two cultures, religions and languages like Drina Bridge in Visegrad, Mostar Bridge in Mostar, Stonebridge in Skopje. Like these bridges, Balkans again has to struggle to establish bridges between the different cultures. Balkans has necessary components, richness and historical background to do it. Formulation is:

Tolerance → Common Trust / Moral → Socio-Political Peace → Economic development & EU membership

Regional governments and people are responsible actors to achieve the democratization. Governments should desire it and put into force some courageous steps on bureaucratic and institutional developments. Ohrid Framework Agreement in Macedonia, Bulgaria and Rights and Freedom Movement are good samples of cohabitation and peace. For the minority issues, kin-states should also suggest minorities to integrate their host states in the region. In the same time governments should work on decentralization steps which are the most important component of a democracy.

Governmental and non-governmental organizations should be increased and they should be active. Today's the biggest and the most active governmental society group is TİKA in the region. It is orchestrating tens of projects today, from the historical constructions to music festivals, from surveys to social initiatives, to develop common culture and good relations between minorities and the Balkan states.

The number of civil society groups (CSGs) should be increased, developed and activated. Today the CSGs are counted as a new power or component of a democracy. There was no CSGs in communist era in the region, that's why the old generation is very cold to them; but new generation has started to establish this kind of foundations as a good sign. For example in Turkey there are more than 300 foundations and associations only related with the Balkans.[15]

Think-tanks should be increased and they should work and study on erasing xenophobia, tribalism and separatist nationalism and misinformation about the "others". Still in some countries there is misinformation in primary school books and history books about the history and the "others" identification.

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[15] Özcan Pehlivanoğlu, (2008) "Rumeli, Balkan ve Trakya Sivil Toplum Örgütleri", First International Balkan Congress Proceedings, Tekirdağ, 404.

Media is the fifth power in democracies right now. Media should play positive and constructive role for the multiculturism in the region.

Political parties and pressure groups are also responsible for construct of friendship with the "others" among the people. It should not be forgotten that rigid nationalist and hegemonic approaches and entities have lost every time in this region. But peaceful policies both become the reason of the getting power of that party, and also establish socio-politic and economic development.

EU project has started after millions of people killing in World War II. Balkans has also live very bad and sinful wars in the recent history, but in compare with the World Wars these are seen as regional wars. Balkan states and peoples should not grudge against each other. They have to enter EU's peaceful umbrella, but before that, they have to solve antagonistic issues psychologically. When Balkans and Turkey becomes the member of the EU, this will enrich also EU in terms of multiculturism and multi-religionism.

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