

United or Divided We Stand? Perspectives on the EU's Challenges

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Paper Title: “United in Diversity”. A mechanism of “othering”?

Abstract

The need of rethinking anew the boundaries of European identity emerges as a priority in the European scene. The ongoing economic crisis together along with the ongoing refugee crisis and the secession tendencies within it, raise the question of whether a European collective identity can accommodate multiple national identities and essentially achieve the goal set by the EU motto “united in diversity”. The EU rhetoric “united in diversity” has manifested itself in the contemporary conceptions of Europe and dominates the institutional representation impacting on the identity formation processes and societal transformation. Consequently, this should lead us to a holistic approach of this motto according to which diversity is to be acknowledged and unity will be succeeded by giving priority to the plurality of national cultures. Therefore, we propose a paper on the case study of the Balkan Peninsula through the prism of the EU enlargement process toward its eastern neighborhood. We aim at providing arguments supporting the thesis that the EU motto “united in diversity” could result culturally in the exclusion of the Balkan countries from the construction of a cosmopolitanism Europe and consequently it might function as a mechanism of “othering”.

1. Introduction

The concept of identity is a contested notion that tends to create dilemmas and represent various multiple narratives. Above and beyond its various definitions, identity should be understood as a contentious and dynamic notion which encompasses various categories, characteristics and meanings. Its various defining criteria prove that it is built on a multiple repertoire of options, where people construct their own identities based in accumulated marks of the past experience and simultaneously determine the outcome of their future collective social practices. Cultural, political features or indeed both can become the main characteristics of a collective identity. Scholarship on the EU identity explains that identities are not identical to each other and need to exist in a relational framework of opposites. Therefore, the grand narrative of the EU collective

identity, having its origins in the Judeo-Christian legacy, the Greco-Roman civilisation as well as in the norms of the European Enlightenment, is constructed in opposition to the East. In other words, the concept of “othering” serves the need of self-portraying. In the forefront of the European enlargement process, the borders of identity seem to be defined by the notion of culture and consequently challenge the very process of the cultural aspect of Europeanisation. Also, given the re-affirmations by EU representatives that the EU enlargement policy has been one of its seminal and lasting achievements¹, yet the EU is facing the current economic crisis as well as the secession tendencies within it, the debate that comes up is whether a European collective identity can accommodate multiple national identities and essentially fulfil the EU motto of “united in diversity”.

This rhetoric, after being echoed in the Treaty of Maastricht, dominates nowadays the institutional representation and has become one of the most influential attitudes of the EU towards its process of Europeanisation. These two notions, “unity” and “diversity” are coming to the forefront of the discussion and can lead us to the question of how the EU configuration of this motto within culture is affecting the relationship between culture, identity and governance. For the purposes of this paper, the Balkan Peninsula will be taken as a study case and its collective identity formation process will be analyzed vis-à-vis the European one. We consider the Balkan Peninsula as a very special region which has suffered several ethno-national tensions that affected the creation of one identity and until recently, because of it, it has been considered as “non-European”. Thus, we believe that such a study could allow us to open up the discussion of whether the EU rhetoric “united in diversity” can eventually function as a mechanism of “othering” in the identity formation process.

2. Theorizing the notion of identity

In order to answer the above mentioned research question, it will be helpful first to go into a short review of how identities are defined, how they are constructed and which types of them could be linked with the European project, both political and cultural.

¹ Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (2006), Speech in The Sound of Europe Conference, Salzburg, 27 January 2006, accessed 6/7/2015 at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/discours/88179.pdf

Before outlining any theoretical perspectives of the notion of identity, it is of great significance to remark that when we refer to identity we need to keep in mind the plurality of its meaning. Identity, above and beyond its various definitions, should be understood as a contentious and dynamic notion which encompasses various categories, characteristics and meanings. Thus, the defining criteria of identity can be various.

Montserrat Guibernaut refers to the “continuity over time” and “differentiation from others”². By continuity over time we refer to the common elements that unite the people and follow a continuity of common practices and experiences, while by differentiation we refer to the main elements through which people grasp and establish their own distinctiveness of a particular feature in comparison to the significant other. Similarity and difference as defining criteria of identity are also prevailing in the discussion by the sociologist Richard Jenkins. According to him identity is produced and reproduced not only in narrative, rhetoric or representation discourse but also in practice by putting emphasis into the time and space which determine the integration of either the individuals or the collectivities within the society³. According to this we could say that the notion of identity is directly connected with the social theory.

To further elaborate on this argument and the social meaning of the identity we can point out Castells main definition of the notion of identity. For Castells to search for identity, either collective or not, constructed or ascribed, becomes the fundamental source of meaning. Indeed according to him, “identity, as it refers to social actors, is the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning”⁴. Thus, this explains why the identity is considered a dynamic and always changing notion which can be understood only reciprocally in our relations with the others. Moreover, some other important defining criteria of identification are the reasoning and emotion. These could be two contrasting realities that can lead someone to define his identity, either by promoting common values rooted in the history or the geography or by building a new one through the stereotypes that are created by politics or social interactions. Castells argues about the existence of three different categories of identity:

² Montserrat Guibernaut, *The Identity of Nations*, 10

³ Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 37-48

⁴ Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*, 6

the one imposed by the dominant group and have been followed by reason, the identity that resist any kind of oppression and build its own boundaries around the basis of this identity and lastly the so-called project identities which are built on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available and seek the transformation of overall social structure⁵.

Last but not least, it is important to mention also the definition given by Delanty according to whom the identity “is not an idea or a cultural given, but a mode of self-understanding that is expressed by people in ongoing narratives and situations”⁶ with fluid and contested boundaries. What it is important for this literature review is to point out the four salient aspects of identities, as pointed out by Delanty, which are in perfect match with the discussion around the process of Europeanisation and the debate concerning whether a European collective identity can accommodate multiple national identities and essentially fulfil the EU motto of “united in diversity”. The four significant features of identities we refer to are related with: a) the expression of the self-understanding and self-recognition of the social actor, b) the stories that people tell about themselves in order to give continuity to their existence, c) the constitution of the identity of the self based upon symbolic markers and d) the various interrelations between collective identities, such as overlapping, nested, cross-cutting, mixed and co-existing⁷.

What arises from the above analysis is that identity has become multidimensional, multi-layered and differentiated. Its various defining criteria prove that it is built on a multiple repertoire of options, where people construct their own identities based in accumulated marks of the past experience and simultaneously determine the outcome of their future collective social practices⁸.

⁵ Ibid. 6-12

⁶ Delanty and Rumford, *Rethinking Europe. Socially Theory and the Implications of Europeanisation*, 52

⁷ Ibid. 50-54

⁸ Piotr Sztompka, *From East Europeans to Europeans: shifting collective identities and symbolic boundaries in the New Europe*, *European Review*, 12, 4 (2004), 481-496

3. European identity vis-à-vis Balkan identity

According to the previous theoretical analysis of the notion of identity, it is now becoming concrete that the European Project should be based in the construction of a collective identity if it aspires to be strong, efficient and fulfill its initial goals. A collective identity in order to exist needs a social group which will carry a collective project. The simple aggregation of individual identities is not enough in order to be created a strong economic, political and cultural union. Language, historical memories, myths of ethnic descent are factors which can unite the people of Europe.

However, the European Project initiated as a political one and it was the outcome of the II World War. With the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950 the main aim of the six involved countries⁹ was to “substitute for historic rivalries a fusion of their essential interests: to establish, by creating an economic community, the foundation of a broad and independent community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts; and to lay the bases of institutions capable of giving direction to their future common destiny”¹⁰. Consequently, the European project and the idea of enhancing and facilitating the European integration process initiated due to the cold war between East and West.

Nevertheless, based in the idea that a collective identity to exist, a social group with a collective project must exist, the political elites tried to unite the people through the creation of an overarching institutions. In this way it could be said that what it was constructed was an EU civic identity based mainly in the integration model of civic assimilation where the state ensures the rights of people in the public sphere through the laws and institutions. So a shared political culture has been empowered by the EU as this is the most meaningful tool for the citizens in order to enhance a meaningful

⁹ The first six founders of the European Coal and Steel Community: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

¹⁰ Council of the European union, *Paris Treaty of 1951*, European Steel and Coal Community, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/Treaty%20constituting%20the%20European%20Coal%20and%20Steel%20Community.pdf>, accessed: 9/2/2015

dialogue between them and resolve their differences¹¹. However, this proved not to be enough for constructing a collective European identity. Despite the fact that there are several critiques for this theory as such, we choose to focus, in particular, on the backlash concerning the existence of a shared political culture, which we tend to consider it most appropriate for the discussion of the construction of a European collective identity. The political culture is a dynamic process which changes each time according to the various historical and social context and values, ideas or movements that used to be dominant can become non-dominant according to the dynamics of the history¹². Consequently, this drives us to think of an argument that comes from Anthony Smith in his book “*A Europe of Nations – or the Nation of Europe*” who makes a comparison between the EU and the “Germany of Bismarck”. A Smith puts it:

“of course, one can forge supra-national institutions and create economic and political unions, as Bismarck did for the German states. But (...) language and historical memories, as well as myths of ethnic descent, united the population of the German states; the same factors divided the peoples of Europe.”¹³

Utilizing the social constructivist approach where socio-cognitive structures and social models determine it¹⁴, this paper theorizes the notion of Europeanisation according to elements of social theory. We especially adhere to the theoretical approach of Gerard Delanty as a reflexive project of identity¹⁵ and Monica Sassatelli’s line of addressing Europeanisation processes of societal transformation and reconfiguration of cultures¹⁶. According to Delanty and Sassatelli, the interpretation of the cultural identity is treated as a project of subjectivity and active resistance by the individuals¹⁷. In particular, Delanty argues that the process of Europeanisation should be perceived as an embarkation on a programme where “cultures of contention will be institutionalized

¹¹ Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, 200

¹² *Ibid.*, 200-204

¹³ Anthony Smith, "A Europe of Nations. Or the Nation of Europe?", *Journal of Peace Research* 30 no. 2, (1993), 134, accessed 25/11/2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/425194>

¹⁴ Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, *Rethinking Europe. Socially Theory and the Implications of Europeanisation* (London: Routledge, 2005), 4

¹⁵ Gerard Delanty, “Social Integration and Europeanisation: The Myth of Cultural Cohesion1”, *Yearbook of European Studies* 14 (2000), 221-238

¹⁶ Monica Sassatelli, *Becoming Europeans. Cultural Identities and Cultural Policies* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 1

¹⁷ Monica Sassatelli, *Becoming Europeans. Cultural Identities and Cultural Policies* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 5

and built around new norms of public commitment, social integration and Europeanisation and will promote a self-critical European identity”¹⁸. While the EU accession policies tend to have a domestic impact on the integrated countries and the whole process of Europeanisation is bounded by specific EU policies, the discussed dimension of Europeanisation tends to challenge the traditional elements of nationality, territory or cultural heritage, and recognize the multi-identification through constant re-interpretation of the collective identities¹⁹. This new perspective could be of great significance to the integration of the Balkans and their self-designation, given the fact that it is not rare that “the outside perception of the Balkans is being internalized in the region itself”²⁰.

We argue that a European collective identity is to be constructed through the process of Europeanisation and this tends to be interrelated with the perception that the Balkan countries will also benefit. The detailed work of the historian Todorova in “*Imagining the Balkans*” gives a meticulous explanation of why the Balkans have been “an exercise to polysemy”²¹ and elucidates all the stereotypes that tend to rule Balkans’ description until nowadays and even during their integration process to the EU²². There is a negative stigma of the Balkans which is expected to be eliminated through the process of Europeanisation. The Balkans have suffered from several over-inflating ethno-national tensions that caused instability in the region. Consequently, their affinity to the European system of values is considered to be their solution of eventually throwing off all the endemic elements that tend to create feelings of distrust and instability in the region. However, it is worth mentioning that even in front of the recent EU enlargement towards the Balkan countries of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 and Croatia in 2013 as well as the EU’s 2012 enlargement campaign strategy towards the Western Balkans, still the Balkans are considered as “non-European” and they are stigmatized by their past blurred reality.

¹⁸ Gerard Delanty, “Social Integration and Europeanisation: The Myth of Cultural Cohesion1”, *Yearbook of European Studies* 14 (2000), 235

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 233-235

²⁰ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2004), 39

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22

²² *Ibid.*, 119

More concretely, concerning the European – Balkan dichotomy creation, the constructed European superiority has its origins in the Graeco-Roman civilisation. The religion of Christianity and the Latin language gave the status of exclusivity to Europe and empowered the feeling of uniqueness towards the others²³. Also, the Greek geographer Strabo tried to explain where the superiority of Europe comes by pointing out that Europe started representing itself uniquely as the continent of liberty and true government²⁴. Respectively, the Balkans inferiority, often being characterized as primitive or uncivilized in comparison to the West, is embroiled with the Balkan wars, their Ottoman legacy and their nationalistic history. The violence they have been exposed to, eventually determines their representation as a collectivity and transforms them into the European “other”. Despite the various racial and religious differences between the Balkan countries, their geopolitical configurations or their different languages, still the collective identity of the Balkans towards the European one has been stigmatized by their turbulent historical past. The metaphor of the Balkans as “an opera bouffe written by blood”²⁵ is the first connotation that comes to someone’s mind and automatically creates their opposition to progressive, civilized and rational western European values.

Consequently, while for the Balkans the Europeanisation seems to be the solution to their turbulent past and traumatic memories, for the EU it is becoming the urgent need to forge the EU people’s consciousness of sharing a common heritage of ideas and values. During this process of Europeanisation, both the Balkans and the EU promoted their grand narratives and constructed their collective identities through their interrelationship as this was formed and transformed during the years by the respective political leaders. In fact, Europe has coined to the Yugoslav disintegration the term “Balkan wars” which demonstrates how the term “Balkan” kept being intertwined with violence in the European imaginary and enhancing the dichotomy between the Balkans and Europe. Opposing to this violence, the European ideals of liberty, true government and law were constructed in European discourses as a grand narrative that would determine the designation of the European civilisation and would have a significant

²³ Anthony Pagden, “Europe: Conceptualising a continent” in *The Idea of Europe From Antiquity to the European Union* (Woodrow Wilson Centre Press and Cambridge University Press), 39-43

²⁴ Quoted in Anthony Pagden, *The Idea of Europe From Antiquity to the European Union* (Woodrow Wilson Centre Press and Cambridge University Press, 2002), 37

²⁵ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15

impact to the process of constructing the European identity. While the EU enhanced the motto of “united in diversity” in order to forge the construction of a strong European collective identity, the Balkans were in need to define and redefine their identities according to the historical and socio-political developments, each time, in their region.

Indeed, we have already discussed that the criteria of time and the differentiation are crucial elements for the definition of identity. We mentioned that Richard Jenkins in “Social Identity”, points out time and place as two characteristics that determine the integration of either the individuals or the collectivities within the society. In the case of the Balkans it is worthwhile to observe how their designation was changing during the time and the space. As violence had been the leitmotiv of the Balkans and the ethnic and religious heterogeneity of the region had burdened them with the characteristic of “strange nationalities”, the concept of the “Balkans” was changing. The various changing terms was a tactic from the EU perspective for an easier integration of the Balkans and a more politically correct approach towards the EU enlargement process. Therefore, the Balkan identity eventually was being re-invented during the times within the enlargement discourse. For instance, after the World War II where some parts of the Balkans were classified as part of the Eastern Europe and others as of the Western Europe, the term “Balkans” was no longer central to the discourse. Instead, the neutral term of “Southeast Europe” became salient and even used as a means of euphemism. It was those historical and political developments particularly in the time and space that made the Balkans to redefine their identity and even opposed to their historical legacy of Ottoman conquest. In addition, another pertinent example could be the notion of “Western Balkans”. While it is a term that had become salient as a denotative term for all those countries that suffered and still do from the ethnic conflicts of the past, yet any Balkan country which accedes to the EU ceases to be part of the Western Balkans. This is to be connected with what Montserrat Guibernau refers to when she talks about the “continuity over time” and “differentiation from others”. However, the Europeanisation process for the Balkans should not signify just their advancement according to the western European models but encompass all the cultural boundaries that might arise and seem to be a challenge for the EU.

Consequently, the abovementioned discussion leads to a basic question regarding the way collective identities are shaped during the times. In particular, focusing on the

Balkan case we will borrow the definition of identities from Stuart Hall and formulate it respectively: “what the Balkans might become, how they have been represented and how that bears on how they might represent themselves”²⁶. According to the social constructivist approach of Europeanisation, the Balkans should not be designated as the imaginary representation of the westernized hegemonic discourse, but in accordance with the dynamics that derive from the societal ideologies and self-narrations²⁷. As such, social constructivism places the emphasis in social theory and identity, in particular, is framed through its social meaning. According to social theory, identity is built on a multiple repertoire of options, where people construct their own identities based in accumulated marks of the past experience and simultaneously determine the outcome of their future collective social practices. In particular, Manuel Castells explains that to search for identity, either collective or not, constructed or ascribed, becomes the fundamental source of meaning:

(...) identity, as it refers to social actors, is the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning.²⁸

This analysis reflects the multidimensional, multi-layered and differentiated nature of the notion of identity which, in turn, constitutes the central axis of the discussion about the identification process of the Balkans and the constructed dichotomy between the Balkan identity and the European one. Sassatelli highlights the dynamic notion of identity and explains that the competing status between a national and a European identity should be re-interpreted by reflecting multiple layers of loyalty of the subject²⁹. This in reality could provide the answer to the aforementioned discussion of how the Balkans have been represented and how that bears on how they might represent themselves. All the while, it highlights the fact that identities can be understood only reciprocally in our relations with the others; and the Balkans used to be the “other” of Europe.

²⁶ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who needs Identity?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 4

²⁷ Tanja Petrovic, “Introduction: Europeanisation and the Balkans” in *Mirroring Europe. Ideas of Europe and Europeanisation in Balkan Societies* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2014), 4-19

²⁸ Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2010), 6

²⁹ Monica Sassatelli, “Imagined Europe: Narratives of European Cultural Identity” in *Becoming Europeans Cultural Identity and Cultural Policies* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 19-45

4. United in diversity as a mechanism of othering?

Shortly reviewing the aforementioned discussion it can be argued that the process of constructing an identity is a contentious ongoing project taking different forms and meanings according to the grand narratives that are constructed through time and space. Both the construction of a collective identity and the conception of "otherness" include salient symbolic and cultural boundaries that become the markers of one's identity. People need those markers in order to be able to belong in a collectivity. They associate themselves with these cultural boundaries which automatically enhance the separation between the self and the other and consequently contrasting ideologies become significant markers in the discourse of "othering".

The above described distinctions, regarding the identity formation process and in particular the construction of the Balkan identity vis-à-vis the European one, illustrate how much contentious and ambiguous is the identity construction project; and both Europe and the Balkans had to deal with issues that played a significant role in the rediscovery of the Balkan identity and determined their status of "otherness" towards Europe. The Balkans have experienced various boundaries of exclusion and their position in Europe has been affected from various identity-building projects³⁰. The contesting representation of the civilization constellations in Europe had a direct impact on the competing narratives of the Balkan and European identity. For instance, according to some typifications of the Balkans, they were considered as "the Europe's unconscious source of carnage and violence"³¹, whereas, at the same time, the EU was characterized as "technically ingenious"³².

Recounting the identity formation process of the Balkans in relation to Europe, we can argue that they were considered the crossroad between West and East all the while they had to face "a threshing floor of different peoples"³³. The EU today has to face a similar issue, the integration of diverse cultures under one umbrella defined through the

³⁰ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21-30

³¹ Julia Kristeva, quoted in Dusan I. Bjelic, "Julia Kristeva: Exile and Geopolitics of the Balkans", *Slavic Review* 67, 2 (Summer 2008), 364

³² Ernest Gellner, quoted in Trine Flokhardt, "Europeanisation or EU-ization? The Transfer of European Norms across Time and Space*", *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, 4 (2010), 790

³³ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2004), 59

construction of a European collective identity based in the values of respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights³⁴. Consequently, studying the European rhetoric of “united in diversity”³⁵ under the prism of functioning as a mechanism of “othering” is of special merit. Indeed, this motto has become one of the most dominant and influential motto of the European Union, nevertheless it has also raised a lot of sharp critic. Namely being characterized as a “saccharin concept” by Borneman and Fowler, an “empty rhetoric” by Wintle, a “centralising hegemonic project” by Passerini and a “thinly veiled renewed Eurocentric triumphalism” by Shore³⁶, we argue that it provides some space to discuss in what ideological approach is based on and how this is portrayed in the EU and domestic level.

The “united in diversity” rhetoric nowadays dominates the institutional representation impacting on the identity formation processes and societal transformation. This EU rhetoric has manifested itself in the contemporary conceptions of Europe, in the EU enlargement process and in designations of the EU cultural policies³⁷. Inevitably it has fused itself with the cultural aspect of Europeanisation and the EU attitude towards its member-states and the applicant ones as well. Taking up the position of Europeanisation by the sociologist Monica Sassatelli, as a project of identity construction “assembled in the polysemy and ambiguity of symbols”³⁸, the notion of “ethos of pluralization”³⁹ towards the Europeanisation process by Gerard Delanty and the idea of “cultural pluralism”⁴⁰ as developed by the political theorist Bikhu Parekhi, this chapter aims to discuss this motto as a holistic approach of becoming aware of and appreciating the various and distinct cultural identities of an international or European

³⁴ European Union, *Treaty of Lisbon. Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community*, Article 1a (EU, 2007), accessed 4/5/15 at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12007L/TXT>

³⁵ Gerard Delanty, *The European Heritage from a Critical Cosmopolitan Perspective*, *LEQS Paper* No. 19/2010 (February 2010), accessed at 25th March 2015 at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/LEQS/LEQSPapers.aspx>

³⁶ Quoted in Monica Sassatelli, “European Cultural Space in The European Cities of Culture. Europeanisation and cultural policy”, *European Societies* 10, 2 (2008), 231

³⁷ Monica Sassatelli, “Imagined Europe. The Shaping of a European Cultural Identity through EU Cultural Policy”, *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, 4 (2002): 435–451

³⁸ Monica Sassatelli, *Becoming Europeans. Cultural Identities and Cultural Policies* (2009, Palgrave MacMillan), 5

³⁹ Gerard Delanty, “Social Integration and Europeanisation: The Myth of Cultural Cohesion1”, *Yearbook of European Studies* 14 (2000)

⁴⁰ Bikhu Parekhi, “A Commitment to Cultural Pluralism” (paper presented at the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development, Stockholm, Sweden, 30 March-2 April 1998)

community where at the same time common values are shared in it⁴¹. Given the fact that this motto is a conscious construction by the EU institutions in order to create an “imagined community”⁴² with a common sense of belonging and a strong European identity which will embrace the different cultures and allow smooth and deeper integration, this thesis intends to argue that eventually it can function as a mechanism of “othering”.

Besides, as already mentioned above, there is some scholarship that negatively characterizes this motto as a vague and empty label. This is justified if we take into consideration the EU approach to build its policies of accommodating national diversities on a symbolic level. This approach dates back in 1984 when it was agreed to be established an ad hoc Committee for a People’s Europe aiming to strengthen and promote the Community’s identity as the “symbols play a key role in consciousness-raising but there is also a need to make the European citizen aware of the different elements that go to make up his European identity, of our cultural unity with all its diversity of expression, and of the historic ties which link the nations of Europe”⁴³. Towards this direction and trying to implement policies that would forge what the EU people were lacking, a shared cultural heritage and a common past of experiences they tried to establish and promote symbols for the EU around which the common European identity would be woven. Some examples of this approach could be the creation of an

⁴¹ The motto “united in diversity” was clearly stated and explained in the Constitutional Treaty as follows: “while remaining proud of their own national identities and history, the peoples of Europe are determined to transcend their former divisions and, united ever more closely, to forge a common destiny” in European Union, *Treaty Establishing A Constitution of Europe*, European Communities, 2005, accessed 31/7/2015 at http://europa.eu/eu-law/decision-making/treaties/pdf/treaty_establishing_a_constitution_for_europe/treaty_establishing_a_constitution_for_europe_en.pdf. In addition, Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford have outlined four ways in order to discuss the relationship between “unity” and “diversity”: diversity as derivative of unity where the unity lies in the Graeco-Roman and Christian culture, thus diversity is implemented thanks to the core principle of unity which is tolerance; unity as derivative of diversity according to which “European identity is a project to be achieved rather than simply an identity that exists in some form” ; unity as diversity according to which diversity is to be acknowledged and unity will be succeeded by giving priority to the plurality of national cultures; and lastly a self-limiting unity according to which “the diversity of Europe makes a strong unity impossible but does not preclude the possibility of a reflective kind of unity emerging”, in Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, *Rethinking Europe. Socially Theory and the Implications of Europeanisation* (London: Routledge, 2005), 61-63

⁴² Benedict Anderson has introduced the main idea that the communities do not lie in the tangible relations between its people rather a sense of “communion” is created in their imaginary, thus exist as cultural artefacts. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991, Verso), 6-7

⁴³ Bulletin of the European Communities, Supplement 2/88, “A people's Europe”, Commission communication Voting rights for Community nationals in local elections. Proposal for a Directive, accessed 31/7/2015 at <http://aei.pitt.edu/56107/1/B1144.pdf>

EU day the 9th of May, the adoption of the EU flag, the EU anthem etc. In addition, various cultural programmes such as the European City of Cultures or the EC Youth Orchestra, the European Literature Prize etc, aimed at enhancing the need of a cultural unity.

While, this motto could constitute a multiple identity affiliated with the cultural process of Europeanisation, significant divisions between the EU member-states and the applicants ones in terms of economic integration and in general in the level of political ideology raise the question of how is “unity” delimited and how “diversity” is perceived. According to a commentary text around this issue, published by the European Navigator, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing has pointed out that

the dominant culture within the institutions in Brussels systematically underestimates diversity, viewing it as an obstacle to the further standardisation of Europe. Standardisation is, moreover, one of the objectives that this culture has set itself the task of achieving in practice by trying to impose it from above through standardising rules and pressures on mechanisms of identity.⁴⁴

Therefore, this discussion of how “united in diversity” can function as a mechanism of “othering” becomes even more interesting and essential in the case of the Balkans as it has to deal with tangible issues of societies with multi-ethnic inconsistencies.

In particular, after a short reviewing of what we have already discussed we could argue that this motto corresponds to tangible elements that enhance the process of “othering” and it is not an innocent one suggesting intercultural communication. Therefore, we argue that if the standardization of Europe is based in the principles of solidarity and non-discrimination, it enhances policies of pluralism and multiculturalism, it promotes values of human rights’ respect, human dignity, democracy, rule of law, equality or an “hegemonic discourse”⁴⁵ of a westernized lifestyle where the European identity is to be built up on “Europeanizing” images, then anything beyond these “standards” could constitute the “other”. Under this perspective and given the previous analysis on the relationship between Europe and the Balkans, we could say that if the Balkans are represented as nationalistic and with unitary politics, thus different from the inclusive

⁴⁴ European Navigator, “The European Union motto” in *The Symbols of the European Union* (CVCE, 2011), accessed 31/7/2015 at <http://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/eeacde09-add1-4ba1-ba5b-dcd2597a81d0/fefea7bf-b49d-49db-b06e-a32a06ff1538>

⁴⁵ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2004), 40

European characteristics of multilateralism, pluralism and multiculturalism, “united in diversity” can automatically function as a mechanism of othering. In addition, we could say that if Europe as “us” aims at expressing the motto of “united in diversity” through the ideals of a common heritage, common values and common interests, the Balkans are to be excluded as the “other” due to their national wars and conflicting interests. Moreover, taking into consideration the past of Nazism that Europe has suffered, the communist threat and the expansion of the Ottoman Empire we can understand how its own “other” is constructed and how the values of democracy, rule of law and principle of solidarity are crucial for the essential realization of “united in diversity” motto. However, this perspective again can become exclusive of anything that differs and/or is hard to be assimilated. In other words, if the motto “united in diversity” reflects the grand narratives of the past and forms specific norms and behavioral practices, then it might function as a mechanism of “othering” for anything that is not “Europeanized” and it might also perpetuate the development of both nation-centric and Eurocentric attitudes.

In other words, we would align with Edward Shils’ argument that people need symbols and values to incorporate into their way of thinking and living so as to develop a sense of accumulation in one collectivity⁴⁶, nevertheless, through “demanding the treatment of culture as an autonomous phenomenon within a universal human context”⁴⁷. Within this theoretical framework the discourse around the “united in diversity” motto becomes useful in front of the EU enlargement process and the designing of the EU accession policies. This is why it stresses the need of understanding that the EU unity should emanate from the accommodation of differences, without targeting uniformity. Under this perspective the construction of a European identity will have to be based in the culture which will function as a “perpetually self-transformative process”⁴⁸ detached from any specific cultural content, while the community will benefit from the existing diversity and wish to foster further their sense of common belonging. Unless the EU accepts the conflictual nature of culture, inescapably existing in each member-state as well as the candidate countries, and moves towards an innovative articulation of its

⁴⁶ Edward Shils, *Centre and Periphery: Essays in MicroSociology* (1975, Chicago Press), 7 quoted in Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2004), 40-41

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 41

⁴⁸ Gerard Delanty, “Social Integration and Europeanisation: The Myth of Cultural Cohesion”, *Yearbook of European Studies* 14 (2000): 231

social integration, a weak kind of cultural pluralism will be formed which will differ little from enhancing the idea of an ingenious, exemplary, “new mega – region with an identity which excludes as much it includes”⁴⁹.

5. Conclusion

This paper analyzed the notion of identity as a process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute. Identity was understood as a process of construction based in a multiple repertoire of options and accumulated in markers of the past experience; all the while determine the outcome of a future collective identity. Under this perspective, it was questioned whether a European cultural identity can accommodate multiple national identities and essentially fulfill the EU motto of “united in diversity”. Having discussed how this motto can eventually function as a mechanism of “othering”, it was suggested that the process of Europeanisation should not justify just the advancement of the Balkans according to Western European models but encompass all the cultural boundaries that might arise in the process of defining their identity.

Indeed, the Balkans are mobilized in search of identity, nevertheless this paper argued that any attempt to homogenize or even westernize this particular region which used to have its own symbolic and cultural boundaries, even in-between its different ethnicities, does not promote from one side European integration neither facilitates the formation of a solid Balkan identity. As such, it was argued that Europeanisation needs to be read as a project of collective identification based in “form rather than content as precise meanings remain implicit and assembled in the polysemy and ambiguity of symbols”⁵⁰. This was translated into a disengagement from tangible elements such as the European heritage, the European people, the idea of a European supra - state or even the cliché concepts of each civilization which rather tend to enhance the dichotomy between Europe and the Balkans than re-conceptualize this relationship in terms of cultural pluralism.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 227

⁵⁰ Cohen, 1985, quoted in Monica Sassatelli, *Becoming Europeans. Cultural Identities and Cultural Policies* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 5

To sum up, this paper aimed at discussing the peril of the EU motto to function as a mechanism of “othering” and it placed emphasis on a more encompassing meaning of culture which balances the dual dimension of the “united in diversity” motto (plurality and division). In this way, it allowed for the transformation of this motto into “the phrase that perfectly captures the cultural logic of Europeanisation”⁵¹. In other words, what we argue here is that it is not the attempt to construct a European cultural identity based on the motto of “united in diversity” that is objectionable, but rather on what ideological approach it is based and how this is portrayed in the European and the domestic levels respectively.

⁵¹ Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, *Rethinking Europe. Socially Theory and the Implications of Europeanisation* (London: Routledge, 2005), 60