

HISTORY AGAINST GEOGRAPHY: Should We Always Think of the Balkans as Part of Europe?

by Alexander Vezenkov (Sofia)

published in: MacLachlan, A./Torsen, I. (Eds.): IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conferences, Vol. 21 (2006), http://www.iwm.at/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=488&Itemid=276.

1 Cf., among others: Bakic-Hayden, Milica/Hayden, Robert M.: *Orientalist Variations on the Theme »Balkans«: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics*. In: *Slavic Review* 51/1 (1992), pp. 1-15; Todorova, Maria: *Imagining the Balkans*. New York: Oxford UP 1997; Goldsworthy, Vesna: *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*. New Haven, London: Yale UP 1998; Fleming, Kathryn E.: *Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography*. In: *The American Historical Review* 105/4 (2000), pp. 1218-1233; Bjelic, Dušan/Savic, Obrad (Eds.): *Balkans as Metaphor*. Cambridge Mass.: MIT 2002.

2 *Balkanologie* 3/2 (1999), pp. 47-127: »Europe du Sud-Est: histoire, concepts, frontières«; Sundhaussen, Holm: *Europa Balcanica. Der Balkan als historisches Raum Europas*. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 25/4 (1999), pp. 626-653; Sundhaussen, H.: *Die Dekonstruktion des Balkanraums (1870-1913)*. In: Lienau, Cay (Ed.): *Raumstrukturen und Grenzen in Südosteuropa*. München: Südosteuropa-Ges. 2001, pp. 19-41; Sundhaussen, H.: *Was ist Südosteuropa und warum beschäftigen wir uns (nicht) damit?* In: *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 42/5-6 (2002), pp. 93-105; Todorova, M.: *Der Balkan als Analysekategorie: Grenzen, Raum, Zeit*. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28/3 (2002), pp. 469-492.

3 Duroselle, Jean-Baptiste: *L'idée d'Europe dans l'histoire*. Paris: Denoël 1965, p. 74.

For the last fifteen years a whole wave of publications has been examining the way in which the West »misunderstood«, »constructed« and »stigmatized« the Balkans. These publications follow the path of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and the more recent work of Larry Wolff on the »inventing« of Eastern Europe (1994). The book of Maria Todorova *Imagining the Balkans* is probably the most widely known of this type of publications concerning the Balkans.¹ Many scholars and intellectuals in the region, or originating from the region, have vividly and enthusiastically joined the cause of deconstructing the »Western myths«.

A parallel discussion about »what the Balkans actually are« has also been taking place.² This discussion has a solid background and is to a large extent based on the achievements of an already institutionally established scientific discipline. More than a dozen institutes and university chairs, and at least twice as many scientific journals and book series, both in the region and in the West, are focused on studying the Balkans or Southeastern Europe. These two interrelated debates have led to the consolidation and even to the flourishing of this scientific field – in the 1990s, a number of conferences took place, collective projects were launched and new centers of study and journals were created.

My main thesis is that the recent debates about the Balkans missed or rather avoided to deconstruct the very fundament of the whole construction: the assertion that the region is part of a European continent. The publications in question vehemently opposed the »constructs« »Eastern Europe« and »Balkans«, but not the construct »Europe from the Atlantic to the Ural«. Still these constructs are interrelated and it is simply impossible to construct »Eastern Europe«, »European Turkey« (the later »Balkans«) or »Southeastern Europe« without having the construct »European continent«. Also because without seeing Europe at first place as a continent, most of these territories are not considered European.

This paper will try to challenge the established tradition to study the Balkans as a region of Europe, but not by insisting on its differences with Central and Western Europe. These differences are well known and widely recognized and given the fact that Europe is diverse by definition simply to examine and underline them would not change much. Here I will instead insist on the similarities with Anatolia – and precisely Anatolia, not so much the »Orient« and certainly not »Asia«. This is a way to demonstrate how arbitrary it is to think of Europe as one indivisible whole with clearly defined borders and how misleading is always to »contextualize« the history of the Balkans in an »all-European history«. I would argue that in many cases this is done intentionally and purposefully in (self-)presenting some Balkan nations as European. »The border between Europe and Asia« on the Bosphorus is not only a geographical convention, but also a politically motivated construct.

The Idea of Europe as a Separate Continent and Its Consequences

The use of the name »Europe« has a long history starting in Ancient Greece and obviously not everything is equally relevant for understanding its present use. First of all, one needs to differentiate between the idea of Europe as a supranational community and as a separate continent »from the Atlantic to the Ural«. These two concepts have different roots and with very few exceptions were used separately till the 17th-18th century,³ but even after that more careful observers always differentiate between them.

The present day idea of Europe as a supranational community has its roots in the Middle Ages and is based on the idea of belonging to Christendom/*christianitas*, already understood as including only Western Christianity. The concurrently used term »Occident/*occidens*« is revealing in this regard. The term »Europe«, seldom used in the previous centuries, started to appear parallel to the notion of Christendom in the 14th-16th centuries, although it was still used very rarely. At that time not only religious criteria, but also political characteristics (mild governments, small states with various types of governments including republics) or ideas (the balance of power) started to be emphasized in order to define this supranational community.⁴ Since the late 17th until the early 18th century the name »Europe« in its present day meaning became widely used.⁵ The concept of Europe as a part of the world culturally

4 Chabod, Federico: *Storia dell'idea d'Europa*. Bari: Editori Laterza 1961, p. 48ff.; Duroselle 1965, p. 75ff.

5 Duroselle 1965, p. 105ff.; Schmale, Wolfgang: *Geschichte Europas*. Wien: Böhlau 2000, p. 11ff.

6 Chabod 1961.

7 Schmale 2000, p. 46ff.

8 Lewis, Martin W./Wigen, Karen: *The Myth of Continents: a Critique of Metageography*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: Univ. of California Pr. 1997, pp. 21-31.

9 Wolff, Larry: *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford UP 1994, p. 7.

10 Todorova, 1997, p. 11.

11 Chabod, 1961, p. 193.

12 Bassin, Mark: *Russia between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of Geographical Space*. In: *Slavic Review* 50/1 (1991), pp. 1-17.

13 Osterhammel, Jürgen: *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert*. München: Beck 1998, pp. 47-51.

different from the rest of it obtained a coherent form during the Enlightenment, although later modifications should not be underestimated.⁶

The idea of a European continent has a longer but less illustrious history. The term comes from Ancient Greece where it was first used to name a region in continental Greece, and later to refer to the whole territory northwest of the Straits. This denomination was occasionally used by geographers in the later centuries, and received a clearer expression in Early Modern Times: 16th century maps already present Europe as a part of the world different from Asia.⁷ Still, it was only with the rise of the idea of Europe as a supranational community during the Enlightenment that the geographical concept gained political importance, overshadowing Christendom as point of reference. Europe started to be identified with the continent, and this use was widely accepted. It was the self-perception of the Western-European elites during the Enlightenment that led to the »recycling« of the idea of Europe as a geographical unit distinct from Asia – otherwise this Ancient Greek speculation turned out to be wrong. Finally, it was 19th century geography that formulated the concept of continent as a large landmass referring not only to a physical, but also to an anthropogeographic unit.⁸

The European continent is much larger than Europe identified with Christendom and Occident, and some vast territories are part only of the former. It is only natural that these territories, which were supplementary added to what was already seen as an existing core, could not be anything but »periphery«. This explains the »construction« afterwards both of Eastern Europe and of the Balkans as »incomplete European« spaces. Critics of these »constructs« are inconsistent in analyzing the process of these constructs' elaboration. At the beginning of his book, Larry Wolff writes that »interestingly, the idea of Europe as a whole came into cultural focus at the same time that the continent was conceived in halves«. ⁹ But later he discusses the invention only of Eastern Europe, even if the first step was to see the continent as a »whole«, and only after that was it possible to »divide it into halves«. Following him, Maria Todorova prefers to see only part of the invention, without even mentioning the rest: »As Larry Wolff had convincingly shown, the conventional division of Europe into East and West is a comparatively later invention of eighteenth-century philosophers[.]« ¹⁰ But exactly the same formulation is valid also for the idea of Europe itself: »tipica elaborazione settecentesca.« ¹¹

This perception of Europe as a separate continent did not coincide with political realities on its eastern »border« with Asia. The line was crossing through the possessions of two big empires – the Russian and the Ottoman. As a consequence, part of the Russian and Ottoman Empires were named »European Russia« and »European Turkey« respectively. In the first case, this division was accepted by the Russian political and intellectual elites with the reforms of Peter I and was used during the 18th century to present the newly Europeanized empire as structurally identical with the other most developed states; Russia had a main core in Europe and colonies outside (Siberia), with the Ural Mountains serving as boundary between the two. Despite later critiques and competing interpretations, this formula remained dominant.¹²

The second byproduct of the concept of the European continent, European Turkey, later renamed »Balkan Peninsula«, is the subject of this study. Gradually during the 18th and mostly 19th century, more and more Europeans started to think of these provinces of the Ottoman Empire as part of Europe under »foreign« Ottoman domination. Still most people continued to see the Ottoman territories as »Oriental«, independently of their formal geographical location; for them the Orient started at the Ottoman border, not at the Bosphorus.¹³

Mostly in the 19th century, through maps and translated manuals, the elites in the Ottoman Empire also adopted this division between Europe and Asia on the Bosphorus and accepted the western denominations of »European« and »Asian« parts of the empire. This division was superimposed on a traditional perception of Roumelia (i.e. the Balkans) and Anatolia as two separate and distinct units, which was reflected in the military and judicial system (thus in the state administration) of the empire starting from the 14th century. The difference is not only in the change of the names – Roumelia and Anatolia were not seen as part of two different and opposed worlds – but rather as twins within the imperial structure. In this case, the most enthusiastic about the concept of Europe and its border with Asia on the Bosphorus were the new Balkan political and intellectual elites. It gave them the

possibility to present themselves at the same time as part of the civilized world and as fundamentally different from and even superior to their former masters.

The perception of the »European« provinces of the Ottoman Empire as something different from the »Asian« ones received political expression. There were different projects to »liberate« the European territories from the Turks in an Iberian style *Reconquista*, or at least to transform them according to European standards. For example, article 23 of the Berlin Treaty (July 13, 1878) explicitly envisaged reforms in the European provinces of the empire. In contrast, the »liberation« of »non-European territories« like Jerusalem was abandoned as political goal, and many of these territories were later »colonized«, not »liberated«. The gradual expulsion of Muslims/Turks from the newly established Balkan states was tolerated by the Great Powers, while on the other side, in Anatolia, in a similar way non-Muslims were forced to leave (the Greek exodus of 1922–1924) or even massacred in large numbers (the Armenians in 1915). During the 19th–20th centuries the Balkans became much more (if not completely) »Christian«, and Anatolia almost exclusively »Muslim«.

Constructing the Balkans as Part of Europe

Politically, the present-day Balkans were gradually transformed into part of Europe, obviously »peripheral« and »incompletely European«, during the 19th–20th (should we add 21st?) centuries. This is a process that deserves attention in itself, but here I will examine the attempts to study the region as part of an »all-European history« (*gesamteuropäische Geschichte*) independently of problem or period of research. This is the case in the field of Balkan/SEE Studies, which avoid discussing the difference between Europe as a supranational community and as a separate continent and insist on the borders of the latter.

The presentation of Balkan history as an integral part of the general European history contains several operations. The first step is to insist on Greek Antiquity instead on the history of the Western European Middle Ages as the foundations of today's Europe. For this purpose, the location of Greece was particularly convenient compared to Christianity's origin in Jerusalem. The Greek origin of the *name* Europe, of the geographical boundary between Europe and Asia and the fact that a region in Thrace was called »Europe« by the Ancient Greeks and later in Byzantium are also used as evidences for the intrinsic Europeanness of the region.¹⁴ Second, to present Byzantium as European, as »the other Europe« during the Middle Ages, despite of the fact that the rare uses of the term in western context at that time did not include Byzantium, and even explicitly opposed it, while the Byzantines never identified themselves with »Europe«. ¹⁵ Anti-Byzantine attitudes, so typical for non-Greek Balkan nationalisms, are now rejected as one of the »Western« stereotypes about the region.¹⁶ Third, to present the Ottoman domination as a foreign rule, as a superstructure that did not change the essential characteristics of the region, forged under an illustrious Byzantino-Slavic medieval civilization.¹⁷ Finally, to present the modernization and the Europeanization from the 19th–20th centuries up to the present integration into the EU as »return to Europe« and to ignore any possible parallels with the modernization and the Europeanization in non-European territories in the same period.

The Ottoman period (roughly late 14th–19th centuries) is by far the most problematic for the retroactive »Europeanization« of the region. It is because, on the one hand, scholars from Balkan countries reject everything Turkish and Islamic, portray the Ottoman Empire in a negative way, present it as foreign »Asiatic« domination and blame it for the underdevelopment of the region, but at the same time they insist on studying the region even during these centuries in an »all-European context«. As a remedy, Balkan historians as well as many Western scholars tend to exaggerate the role of the Byzantine heritage and view everything as »post-Byzantine«, while undermining the changes due to the Ottomans. Iorga's famous expression »Byzantium after Byzantium« became a model for describing and explaining almost everything valuable during in the Ottoman period. Byzantine legacy is presented as the most important constitutive element of Balkan civilization, »although modified by Turco-Oriental influences«. ¹⁸ It is claimed that the Ottoman Empire even contributed to the spread of Byzantine civilization,¹⁹ – an argument that could be valid for Wallachia and Moldova under the Phanariotes (1711–1821), but not for the region as a whole during the four or five centuries of Ottoman domination. By the way, it should be noted that this

14 Stoianovich, Traian: *Balkan Worlds: the First and last Europe*. Armonk/NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994.

15 Tzermias, Pavlos: *Das andere Byzanz. Konstantinopels Beitrag zu Europa*. Freiburg: Univverl. 1991.

16 Angelov, Dimiter G.: *Byzantism: The Imaginary and Real Heritage of Byzantium in Southeastern Europe*. In: Keridis, Dimitris/Ellis-Bursac, Ellen/Ytromanolakis, Nicholas (Eds.): *New Approaches to Balkan Studies*. Dulles/VA: Brassey's 2003, p. 3-21; Todorova 2002, p. 484.

17 Sundhussen 2001, p. 23: »Die ›Europäische Türkei‹ (Rumelien) war zwar Teil des Osmanischen Reiches, ging aber nicht in diesem auf. Unterhalb der staatlichen, ›Sultanischen‹ Strukturen lebte das vorosmanische, byzantinisch geprägte Erbe fort [...]«

18 Cvijić, Jovan: *The Zones of Civilization of the Balkan Peninsula*. In: *Geographical Review* 5/6 (1918), p. 472: »Byzantine civilization has thus become Balkan civilization par excellence, Balkanism in the true sense of the word.«

19 *Ibid.*, p. 473; Todorova 1997, p. 179: »looked at from another angle, however, the Ottoman period provided a framework for a veritable flourishing of post-Byzantine Balkan culture.[...]«

20 Iorga, Nicolae: Byzance après Byzance. Bucarest: Inst. d'Etudes Byzantines 1935, p. 13, p. 242.

21 Kaser, Karl: Südosteuropäische Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft: eine Einführung. Wien: Böhlau 1990, p. 112, p. 114. Not in the second, 2002 ed.

22 Cvijić 1918, p. 471.

23 Hösch, Edgar: Kulturgrenzen in Südosteuropa. In: Südosteuropa 47/12 (1998), p. 612, referring to J. Cvijić.

24 Todorova 1997, p. 162.

25 Sundhaussen 1999, pp. 632-633.

so »vital« Byzantine heritage is needed only till the Balkan peoples are under the Ottomans – according to Iorga Byzantinism »died« at the beginning of the 19th century.²⁰

The use of several metaphors is particularly helpful for undermining the central role played by the Ottoman Empire, Islam and the Turks in shaping the Balkan-Anatolian culture. The Balkans are a »bridge« and also a »crossroad« and that makes everything undesired (Islamic, Turkish, Oriental) look as foreign influence, as coming »from outside«. Obviously this is done selectively: it is true that Islam came from »Asia«, but the same is valid also for Christianity; the Turks were »invaders«, but so were the Slavs before. It has been claimed that the Balkans could be described as »unity in diversity« (*Einheit in der Vielfalt*).²¹ But if diversity is a basic characteristic, it is easy to present the Islamic, Turkish and Oriental elements as some among many others, and in this way to undermine their importance. The lack of continuity is another »characteristic« of the Balkans.²² This is not only a profound difference from an Orient »frozen in time«, but also gives the possibility to choose what to discard as »temporary«.

Thus the Ottoman domination on the peninsula, in the end, looks like an incident, covered by a suspiciously long *longue durée*. This imagined continuity allows at the same time to underline the »Asiatic« characteristics of the Ottoman domination and still to think about some of its territories in the context of the »all-European history«. It is presented as something external to the Balkans (although it left »profound traces«) even if it was the longest uninterrupted rule in the region as a whole and in fact holds the history of the peninsula together.

But what is far more important is that because Byzantium was »European« while the Ottoman Empire was »Asian«, these interpretations tend to limit the discussion about the Byzantine heritage to the Balkan Peninsula perceived as »European« opposed to the other provinces. Contrary to this perception, the Balkans were far more important for the Ottoman Empire than for Byzantium. The Ottomans controlled much larger territories in this area and the revenues and the military recruits from the European provinces were vital for the might of the empire, which was not the case for Byzantium. There was a non-interrupted Ottoman domination for four and in some parts more than five centuries, reaching further than the Byzantine one. The attempts to delimit the spheres of direct influence of the Byzantine civilization present an area clearly smaller than the Ottoman possessions in Europe.²³

Despite these overestimations of the impact of the Byzantine heritage and despite the attempts to undermine the role of the Ottomans, many scholars are inclined to define the Balkans as the post-Ottoman space in Europe.²⁴ This is exact as description of the present situation, but not as chronology and order. The Balkans are not the imprint of the Ottoman presence in Europe, but the concept of the Balkans results from imposing the idea of an European continent over the Ottoman Empire and thus defining part of it as »European Turkey«. The Balkan Peninsula coincides with the European possessions of the Ottoman Empire at the time when Johann August Zeune for the first time proposed this name (*Balkanhalbeiland*) in 1808,²⁵ so later it easily replaced the notion »European Turkey«. Thus the term »Balkans« corresponds to the »European« provinces of the empire in the late 18th to the early 19th century, while territories that were part of it in the 16th-17th centuries as Hungary are not considered »Balkan«; occasionally they qualify only for »Southeast European«.

The Balkans: the Spatial Limits of the Studied Area

Studies on the Balkans take the Balkan Peninsula as the limit of the examined area, and all the publications discussing »what the Balkans are« accept the same view. Most of its borders seem undisputable, because as every other peninsula it is »surrounded by water from three sides«. The single debated question is the delimitation between Balkans/Southeastern and Central Europe. Some authors tend to present only a history of the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire (plus the successor states) in its limits of the early 19th century. In other cases part of the territories of the Habsburg Empire are also included, namely Croatia and Slovenia. Obviously in this case 20th century Yugoslavia was the reason for moving the northwestern border of the region. Most historical studies include also Romania (resp. the principalities of Wallachia and Moldova), but studies in geography and economic history do not.

26 Kaser 1990, p. 20, referring to J. Roglić.

27 Schultz, Hans-Dietrich: Raumkonstrukte der klassischen deutschsprachigen Geographie des 19./20. Jahrhunderts im Kontext ihrer Zeit. Ein Überblick. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28/3 (2002), pp. 555-557.

28 Maull, Otto: Einheit und Gliederung Südosteuropas. In: *Leipziger Vierteljahrsschrift für Südosteuropä 1/4* (1938), pp. 3-20; Gavazzi, Milovan: Die Kulturgeographische Gliederung Südosteuropas. In: *Südost-Forschungen* 15 (1956), pp. 5-21; Hösch, E.: Kulturgrenzen, gesellschaftliche Entwicklung und Raumstrukturen. In: Sundhussen 2001, pp. 43-57.

29 Sundhussen 2002, p. 100.

30 Copeaux, Étienne: *Espaces et Temps de la nation turque. Analyse d'une historiographie nationaliste (1931-1993)*. Paris: CNRS 1998; Copeaux, É.: *Une vision turque du monde: à travers les cartes de 1931 à nos jours*. Paris: CNRS Éd. 2000.

31 Stavrianos, Leften Stavros: *The Balkans since 1453*. New York: Rinehart&Co 1958; Yelavich, Charles/Jelavich, Barbara: *The Balkans*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall 1965; Hösch, E.: *Geschichte der Balkanländer. Von der Frühzeit bis zur Gegenwart*. München: Beck 1988; Castellan, Georges: *Histoire des Balkans, XI^e-XX^e siècles*. Paris: Fayard 1991; Pavlowitch, Stevan K.: *A History of the Balkans, 1804-1945*. London, New York: Longman 1999; Mazower, Mark: *The Balkans. From the End of Byzantium to the Present Day*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2000.

32 Karatay, Osman/Gökdağ, Bilgehan A. (Eds.): *Balkanlar El Kitabı. v. I Tarih*. Çorum: KaraM 2006.

33 Todorova 1997, pp. 141-160.

34 Carter, Francis W. (Ed.): *An Historical Geography of the Balkans*. New York: Academic Pr. 1977, p. 1; Kaser 1990, p. 18, p. 85, p. 103; Todorova 2002, p. 477, footnote 14.

35 Kaser, 2002, pp. 36-39.

In this connection, the question of the difference between the Balkans and Southeastern Europe as notions and as territory also arises. In many cases, the two terms are used as synonyms, but mostly in German speaking milieus Southeastern Europe is considered territorially larger than the Balkans and include not only Romania and the whole of former Yugoslavia, but also Hungary and even Slovakia. A number of authors consider the term ›Balkan‹ stigmatizing and present ›Southeastern Europe‹ as a »neutral« one. From the perspective of this study, ›Southeastern Europe‹ even more clearly bears the pretension of being European, in the sense of being part of the continent. Not only because of the name; by including territories that otherwise are often perceived as Central European, it becomes even more »natural« to study the region as a whole in the European context and to ignore everything considered »Orient«. The institutional framework of East and Southeast European Studies has the same impact.

That the region as a unity belongs to Europe seems so evident that some studies even speculate about the location of the Balkans/SEE vis-à-vis the continent in schemes with lines, fleches and triangles.²⁶ In fact, all attempts to propose internal divisions of Europe start by taking the existence of the continent and its borders for granted and looking for the best way to subdivide it.²⁷ Obviously, such an approach is extremely problematic for the Eastern and Southeastern parts of the »continent«. Also in the attempts to examine the internal subdivisions of the Balkans, the delimitation from Anatolia is taken for granted and any possible overlapping between the Balkans and Northwest Anatolia is not even discussed.²⁸

Besides the continental division, what is also important is that all the territories on the other side of the Straits were included in one single national state, the Turkish Republic. This had two main consequences. First, there was no political »diversity« in Anatolia, while one of the main stereotypes about the Balkans was the disintegration into small states (the so-called *balkanization*). The success of the Turkish War of Independence prevented similar, if not identical development in Anatolia after the Sevres Treaty (1920). Second, the fact that the territory became completely Muslim (or »Turkish« as suggested by some historians) was the single argument to exclude it from the »post-Byzantine« Balkan space.²⁹

In addition, after loosing all other territories, the Turkish national past and heritage started to be identified more and more with the history of Anatolia. And this is valid both for the Ottoman period, where studies on Anatolia by far outnumber all the others, and for the pre-Ottoman times, Antiquity included.³⁰ Because this situation almost coincided with the »border between Europe and Asia«, this led to a stable division: Anatolia became an object of study for the Turkish historiography whereas the Balkan Peninsula for the historiographies of the respective successor states, on a country-by-country basis (national historiographies) or as »common Balkan heritage« (Balkan studies).

Most studies include the Ottoman Empire, resp. Turkey among the Balkan/SEE states, and centers, university chairs and departments or academic journals in the field of Balkan/SEE Studies always cover Turkey. Still, even when the Ottoman Empire/Turkey is considered, it is considered as *state* (the central state institutions and their policies are presented), but usually not as *territory*. This is very clear in all the books called *History of the Balkans*,³¹ even in those published in Turkey.³² The debates about »the Balkans« mention Turkey, but completely ignore Anatolia. In her book Maria Todorova does not discuss it at all, while one whole chapter is devoted to *the Balkans and the Myth of Central Europe*.³³ In cases where a clear definition is given it is openly stated that the Balkans/SEE include only »the European part« of the Ottoman Empire/Turkey.³⁴

The problem is that the geographical boundary between Europe and Asia has never been a political or cultural border in the history of the region – it hardly had more importance than the Greenwich Meridian. The Ancient Greeks who invented it lived on both sides. For them the »others« were the »barbarians«, independently of where they lived. The Romans did not see it as a border either, and the division of the empire into Eastern and Western parts had nothing to do with it. During the Middle Ages and in Early Modernity, while today's Europe was taking shape, the Balkans and the neighboring »Asian« region Anatolia had a very similar fate under Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire and remained like twins till the 19th – beginning of the 20th century. Today, Balkan/SEE Studies are interested only in one of these two regions due to the perception that there is a separate European continent, which is delimited from Asia by the Black, Marmora and Aegean sees and by the

36 Hösch 1998, p. 601: »Das Bewußtsein, an einem gefährdeten Grenzbereich zu leben und eine für die europäische Völkergemeinschaft lebenswichtige Aufgabe zu erfüllen, hat von den Persen ab bis hin zu den Frontstellungen des Kalten Krieges unter den Bewohnern der Balkanhalbinsel tiefe Wurzeln geschlagen.«

37 E.g. Todorova, M.: The Ottoman legacy in the Balkans. In: Brown, Carl (Ed.): The Imperial Legacy. The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East. New York: Columbia UP 1996, p. 51. It is stated that Rhigas Velestinlis »provided an all-Balkan vision for the future of the peninsula«. In fact, Rhigas could not limit his project to the peninsula because the Anatolian provinces were part of the Greek aspirations. The same fallacy in: Villalba, María L.: Balkanizing the French Revolution: Rhigas's New Political Constitution. In: Tziobas, Dēmétrēs (Ed.): Greece and the Balkans: identities, perceptions and cultural encounters since the Enlightenment. Aldershot: Ashgate 2003, pp. 141-154.

Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles between them. Consequently, the Balkans are regarded as part of Europe, whereas Anatolia as part of Asia.

The question is to what extent one could perceive Anatolia and the Balkans as two regions »separated by water«? In physical geography water »separates« continents and islands, but this is not necessarily valid for human geography. In sharp contrast to the »Mediterranean world« of Fernand Braudel, specialists in Balkan/SEE Studies pay attention mainly to the communications by land, usually underlining that they were »very difficult«, mention the Danube, but very often omit the communications by sea.³⁵ To ignore the sea means to disregard the most important connections for the Balkans both with Western Europe and with the Middle East.

Following the formal continental boundary, national historiographies in the region created the myth of the Balkans as »border region« of Europe that is reproduced even by western scholars.³⁶ The whole history of the region was rewritten according to this »border«, leaving aside everything »non-European«. Not only the Ottoman, but also the Byzantine and Greek history is often presented in the procrustean boundaries of the Balkan Peninsula.³⁷

Proposing to consider the Balkans and Anatolia together, I would not claim however that they are or were identical. Although included in the same empires, the two regions were subject to different invasions and different new settlers established themselves on these territories – mostly Slavs in the Balkans in the 7th century (and much less numerous Turkic tribes); mostly Turks in Anatolia since the 11th century. The Byzantines managed to convert the Slavs, but the Turks opted for Islam. In Anatolia the Sultanate of Rum laid stronger basis for the establishment of an Islamic and Turkish civilization under the Ottomans. These differences deserve to be studied and analyzed, instead of taking the fundamental difference between the two regions as something given, only because they belong to »two different continents«.

The argument »Anatolia is different from the Balkans« is once again related to the general stereotypes about Europe and the Orient. Big differences within the Balkans are not a problem for studying these territories together – the region is diverse by definition. At their turn, the profound differences between the Balkans and the rest of Europe are not a reason against thinking of the region in the »larger European context« – Europe is also diverse by definition. In what concerns Anatolia, this type of argumentation is not valid any longer; here »different« is understood not as part of a »diversity« of higher order, but as part of the fundamental difference between Europe and Asia, because »the Orient is different«.

The Other Face of the Construct »Balkans«

If there is a negative construct »Balkans«, there is also a positive one and its starting point is that geographically the Balkans are considered part of the European continent. This enables some Balkan scholars and intellectuals without any argument to disqualify the rest of the »Orient« and only then to start (re)negotiating the Balkans' place in the »European Club«. Maria Todorova severely criticized the concept of Central Europe of the 1980s (as presented by Jenő Szűcs, Czesław Miłosz, Milan Kundera) as part of an attempt to be on the safe side in a discriminative rejection of the East. This concept also found numerous Western critiques.³⁸ However, most of the scholars writing about »the Balkans« do exactly the same in turn by discussing the region as part of Europe and not as Oriental. Earlier generations claimed that »the Balkans are not Orient«, now it is added that »Balkanism« is not »Orientalism« (in Edward Said's terms).³⁹ In some cases denominations like »semi-Asiatic« or »semi-Oriental« are considered as part of the negative stereotypes about the Balkans.⁴⁰

Differences between the Balkans and the rest of Europe are always discussed as subdivisions of one and the same whole. At the end of her book Todorova concludes that the Balkans are »geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed as ›the other‹ within«. ⁴¹ In fact, Balkan nationalists are rather happy with this situation. On the one hand, the region is »geographically inextricable from Europe« and they are »within«. On the other hand, to be »the other within« introduces the idea of diversity and could be a good excuse for not being exactly as other Europeans (»we are different, but we are not less European«). From this point of view, European is not about becoming, but about being; it is a result of living in the continent. Therefore the most urgent need is not to change, to

38 Schenk, Frithjof B.: Mental Maps. Die Konstruktion von geographischen Räumen in Europa seit der Aufklärung. In: Geschichte und Gesellschaft 28/3 (2002), p. 511ff. and quoted studies.

39 Cvijić 1918, p. 472; Todorova 1997, p. 11.

40 Hösch 1998, p. 603; Todorova 2002, p. 471.

41 Todorova 1997, p. 188.

42 Kitromilides, Paschalis M.: Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy. Studies in the Culture and Political Thought of South-eastern Europe. In: Variorum (1994), pp. XIII-XIV.

43 Tzermias, Pavlos: Die historische Stellung des Balkan innerhalb Europas. In: Südosteuropa 49/1-2 (2000), p. 89: »Unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Geistesgeschichte wäre es verfehlt, die Unterschiede zwischen West-, Zentral- und Osteuropa zu überbetonen und somit eine Mauer zwischen dem Osten und dem Westen zu erreichen. Die Geschichte Europas war trotz der historischen Kluft zwischen Ost und West in vielfacher Hinsicht einheitlich.«

44 Kaser 2002, pp. 22-24.

45 Kiossev, Alexander: The Dark Intimacy: Maps, Identities, Acts of Identifications. In: Bjelic/Savic 2002, pp. 165-190. Although aware of the Oriental/Turkish/Persian etc. origins of food or music and even of the interconnections between Trace and Anatolia (p. 173) the author describes and examines them as »Balkan«. They are not »typically Romanian, Serbian, Greek... Turkish« but »common Balkan«.

46 Todorov, Nikolai: The Balkan city 1400–1900. Seattle, London: Univ. of Washington Pr. 1983.

47 Todorova 1997, p. 57.

48 Pippidi, Andrei: Changes of Emphasis: Greek Christendom, Westernization, South-East Europe, and Neo-Mittleuropa. In: Balkanologie 3/2 (1999) p. 104.

»Europeanize« the Balkans, but to improve their image, to refute the »wrong stereotypes« about them.

In many cases, the discourse on how the Balkans are victims of negative stereotypes is appropriated by Balkan nationalists because it provides them with a more legitimate cause than openly defending Albanian, Bulgarian or Serbian interests and pride against the West, which might seem as a manifestation of national inferiority complex. It would seem ridiculous to claim that the West misunderstands Albania or Bulgaria, or that people in the West have anti-Albanian or anti-Bulgarian prejudices (as was done during the Cold War, for example), but to say that that the victim of such attitudes are »the Balkans« or »South-eastern Europe« is acceptable in political and scientific circles in the West.

Seeing the Balkans simultaneously as part of Europe and as different from the Orient is a view used largely for political purposes. Balkan nationalists could easily present their anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim attitudes as part of a pro-European discourse, as »European values«. They do not object to diversity within Europe, but see this Europe as a unity opposed to »Asia« and the »Muslims«. Academic publications also oppose the internal divisions of Europe, warning that there were no »impenetrable cultural frontiers«,⁴² that »there is no wall« dividing the different regions of Europe,⁴³ but selectively forgetting that the same is much more true for the Balkans and Anatolia (and at macro level for Europe and Asia). In the new version of his manual, Karl Kaser questions the very notions of Southeast European history and Southeastern Europe as a region, primarily because it has no clearly defined borders from the rest of Europe, but he does not question the delimitation from Asia and he keeps including in Southeastern Europe »European Turkey« only.⁴⁴

The positive discourse on »the Balkans« is not only about underestimating or denying the Ottoman heritage – it is also about appropriating it, about »converting« it to »Balkan heritage«. A lot has been written about the use of the characterization ›Balkan‹ as a stigma, but the very same name ›Balkan‹ is also used as a euphemism to avoid terms such as ›Turkish‹, ›Islamic‹, ›Ottoman‹ or ›Oriental‹, that are reserved to describe the negative phenomena in the region. In case these »Oriental« features are seen or presented in a positive manner, scholars and intellectuals from the region prefer to speak about »Balkan« traditions even when the Islamic or Turkish origin is well known and widely recognized. ›Balkan cuisine‹ is a widely used denomination for traditional Turkish and Oriental dishes and in many cases the same is valid also for ›Balkan music‹ and more generally for traditional ›Balkan culture‹.⁴⁵ During the last decades more and more publications present ›Balkan cities‹ instead of ›Oriental/Turkish/Ottoman/Islamic cities in the Balkans‹.⁴⁶ The ultimate irony is that the euphemism used for Turkish, Ottoman, etc. is ›Balkan‹ – a Turkish word that means »thickly wooded mountain range«, which initially was used as a proper name for the Haemus Mountains, and later for the whole peninsula.

Written mostly in the region or by people originating from the region, the Balkan studies themselves are a major »producer« of positive constructs about the region. It is in some regards erroneous, when this field is considered as fundamentally different and »superior« to national historiographies in the region. In such a way Todorova claimed that Balkan studies in Bulgaria serve »to overcome the usual parochialism of the nation-state approach so typical for all Balkan countries«.⁴⁷ Not always and not completely. Studies concerning the Balkans were developed in Bulgaria in the last decades of the communist regime, when it was becoming more and more nationalistic, and this new field appeared rather as an ally than as an alternative to the national historiography. The fact that Balkan countries were also neighboring countries made possible the confusion between Balkan studies and national history. Large part of the research and the publications in Balkan studies were and still are related to national history and deal with Bulgarian minorities abroad and the international relations with the other countries of the region.

Similar coincidences between national agendas and the Balkan studies could be seen in other cases. Insightful in this regard are the reasons for Nicolae Iorga to create the Institute of South-East European Studies in Bucharest in 1913 and for the communist leadership to revive it in 1963. In both cases the »broader context« of the Balkans/SEE had to serve the Romanian cause for emancipation from powerful neighbors.⁴⁸ The majority of Romanian publications on the Balkans is in fact devoted to the Romanian, Aromanian or Vlach populations south of the Danube. In the Greek case, the Institute for Balkan Studies in Thessalonica (IMXA) came into being in March 1953 as a branch of the Society for Macedo-

49 <http://www.hyper.gr/imxa/>; <http://www.hyper.gr/ems/>

50 Grothusen, Klaus-Detlev: Südosteuropa – Städtewesen und nationale Emanzipation. In: Stob, Heinz (Ed.): Die mittelalterliche Städtebildung im südöstlichen Europa. Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau 1977, p. 1: Southeast European Studies should be »komparatistisch[] im Sinne nicht nur des Versuchs einer Zusammenschau der südosteuropäischen Geschichte, sondern darüber hinaus auch ihrer Einordnung in die Gesamtgeschichte Europas.«; Kaser 1990, p. 12: »Das Fach Südosteuropäische Geschichte muss methodologisch und theoriebezogen gestärkt und auf eine feste Grundlage gestellt werden, nicht um die Geschichte Südosteuropas von der gesamteuropäischen zu isolieren, sondern um sie verstärkt in die gesamteuropäische Geschichte einzubringen.«

nian Studies. The latter had existed since 1939 and was interested in Macedonia as a Greek region.⁴⁹

Thus in some cases »Balkan studies« serve simply as an umbrella for writing and publishing national historiography, esp. when it is addressed to a foreign public. With the excuse that the region is so diverse politically, ethnically and linguistically that »no one could master it as a whole«, scholars sell their national historiography as »Balkan studies«, obviously presenting mostly their respective national history as »a case study«. But even in the cases where a broader perspective is provided, Balkan studies only to some extent go beyond the narrowness of the national historiographies. In most cases the product is an »upgraded version« of the national one, preserving its negative attitudes toward the neighboring empires (anti-Ottoman in all cases, anti-Habsburg in the Serbian and Romanian case, and in the last one also anti-Russian) and the pretension to be European, different from the Orient. This »broadening« is going further with the ambition to study the Balkans/SEE as an integral part of the »all-European history«, supported also by western scholars.⁵⁰ Obviously this is done at the expense of the possible parallels with the history of Anatolia and the Middle East, so important both for the Byzantine and Ottoman period.

It is only after the Enlightenment that the conventional line on the Bosphorus started to be presented as the real border between two worlds, between »Europe« and »Asia«. This perception was further developed, strengthened and exploited for political reasons. Recent studies criticizing and aiming to deconstruct different prejudices about the Balkans never questioned the construct »European continent«. On the contrary, they reinforce the myth of Europe as one indivisible whole, part of which are the Balkans. The Balkans and everything Balkan are »constructed« as European, even if it is as part of »the other Europe«. Everything Oriental, Turkish, Ottoman and Islamic is reduced to one of the components of the Balkans, one among many, that came from »outside« and at a very »late« stage in the history of the region.

Although widely used in Balkan/SEE Studies, the Balkan Peninsula is unacceptable as spatial framework for historical analysis, because the arbitrary delimitation of the studied space, even if it is done »for practical reasons«, even if it is »purely conventional«, influences the conclusions of the research. Of course, it is better to overcome the nation-state approach, but if the Balkan/SEE context is understood as the peninsula, the benefits are limited, because there is no reason to set apart Anatolia and the Middle East. Everything that makes the Balkans a region and holds them together despite their »diversity«, would it be Byzantine heritage or Ottoman presence, is valid also for Anatolia and in many cases for a larger area. The appeals to integrate further the study of the Balkans in the larger context of the European history are in most cases misleading.

The Balkan-Anatolian perspective this article is pleading for would change at least two things. First, to start taking into account Anatolia would change dramatically the proportions between the different elements of the »diversity« of the Balkan world. The central role played not only by Byzantium and the Orthodoxy, but mainly by the Ottoman Empire, the Turks and Islam would become clearly visible. That would be a clear difference from the present-day discourse about »the Balkans«, whose charm for Balkan nationalists is that there is no big center outside their own national culture. The second major difference is that a Balkan-Anatolian world should not be necessarily studied as an integral part of Europe. Otherwise, to keep asking »what are the Balkans« and writing »history of the Balkans« by looking at the Balkan Peninsula as part of the »larger European context« would mean to give more and more elaborate answers to a wrong question.

Dr. Alexander Vezenkov: Studies in history at the University of Sofia (MA, 1995), at the Central European University, Budapest (MA, 1998) and at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris (DEA, 2000). PhD in history from the University of Sofia in 2001. Freelance scholar based in Sofia, currently working on a research project of the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past, Sofia. Publications on XIX-XX c. urban history, XIX century Ottoman history and institutional history of the communist regimes. Contact: avezenkov@hotmail.com