

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

# VALUES AT STAKE

Southeast Europe: A Normative Marketplace?

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EU-ropes has not yet achieved creating a common European sense of »who we are«. The question is whether EU normative influence ever truly existed and whether substantial normative transfers to Southeast Europe (SEE) have ever been achieved.



The prevailing top-down »one size fits all« approach to democratization in Southeast Europe must be contested in favour of a more nuanced methodology that considers the interests, grievances, and demands of each society.



We cannot have societies with true European values without creating high-quality discursive spaces where SEE citizens can socialize as active citizens. We need to build a democracy of informed and engaged citizens that do not exclude each other.



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# SOUTHEAST EUROPE BETWEEN NORMATIVE EMPIRE AND NORMATIVE MARKETPLACE

GAZELA PUDAR DRAŠKO AND VEDRAN DŽIHIĆ

The region of Southeast Europe has been expected to progress almost linearly on the European and democratic path, accepting, implementing, and internalizing the democratic and liberal values that the European Union stands for. The EU was founded as the ›greatest peace project of all time«. Its steady political and economic progress before the Great Recession of 2008 had attracted neighboring countries, especially those coming from post-communist and post-conflict zones, promising a realistically ›utopian« horizon and the promise of a better, normal life.

Transformed from an economic community to a political community by the Maastricht Treaty, the European Union became a community of Europeans, sharing the values

*»... of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.«*

Treaty on European Union

Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, cited above, is the foundation on which the EU ›normative power« is based. The EU has been perceived as a *community of values*, and ›by continuously adding new members to its ranks, European integration has been crucial in expanding a community of values and sharing a blend of free-market economics, rule of law, human rights and democracy coupled with tolerance and individualism, captured in the EU motto ›Unity in Diversity« (Toje 2010: 40).

In Southeast Europe, this normative power was – at least in the first phase of ›Europeanisation« since 2000 – largely uncontested, both among political elites as well as in the public discourse. The assumption was that there is and will be no ›turning back« from the path towards shared values, democracy, and the rule of law. Added to this notion of EU as ›normative empire« was the assumption that liberal democracy is the supreme political system, one that is able to ›export« its norms to the neighborhood and the enlargement candidate countries and act as a ›normative hegemon« (Whitman 2011). This is widely accepted idea, but still not completely accurate. While many candidate (and now mem-

ber states) did accept so called *acquis communautaire* in order to satisfy criteria for membership, the transfer of European ideas and values was never so straightforward. The values and norms that do not resonate with the domestic political culture did not find fertile soil in Southeast Europe. However, we can also discuss on their acceptance in other countries that have joined the EU, as cases of Hungary and Poland show recently (Magen and Morlino 2008).

With shifting normative horizons globally and in Europe, the ›normative empire« is currently being challenged by illiberal democracies from within, or by competitive (neoliberal) authoritarian regimes (Solska, Bieber, Taleski 2018) from outside. They all exhibit various forms of populist nationalism, tribalism, and xenophobia. It is not only European values that are challenged, as EU values are not really distinctively European ideas, but more generally belong to the normative base of the wider international order of the ›first world« (Epstein 2008). In addition, it became quite clear that two competing visions of Europe have emerged from the perpetual crisis cycle that caught the European Union ever since the global financial crisis in 2008: a modern political Europe based on the values of secularism and enlightenment, and a more traditional and culturally bound Europe underlining Christianity as its core distinctiveness of Europe (Börzel and Risse 2009).

It was the aftermath of the global financial crisis but even more the events and reactions surrounding the so-called ›refugee and migration crisis« from 2015 onwards that revealed the porosity of the European values at the base of the European Union. The debate about the self-understanding and identity of EU-ropo and its member states intensified and has become more confrontational since 2015. It partly divided EU-ropo between those arguing for the necessity of open, liberal, human-rights-based societies and those engaged in ›protecting« their culture, national identity and ›pride« from the ›others« while standing ready to undermine rule of law and democratic values for the sake of this ›protection«. Overall, the perception of the Union as a unified actor suffered, opening up space for talk of a divided and weak Union. As a result, the liberal and democratic ›normative power« of the Union was weakened. Moreover, it also revealed that the notion of European democracy as lived, promoted, and ›exported« to Europe's semi-periphery simply has its limits.

In Southeast Europe, we see a new »normative marketplace« emerging, where the universality of EU norms and values such as democracy, human rights and freedoms, and the rule of law are at stake and very openly challenged. The challenge comes from new strong geopolitical and authoritarian actors (Russia, China, Saudi Arabia etc) as well as in form of public discourse, where the narrative of strong hand and the necessity of protecting of »our« nation has partly replaced the EU-narrative of values and democracy. Anti-EU and anti-liberal visions are on rise in public discourse. Rather than having the EU an »exporter« of only liberal values, there is an observable import of »anti-liberal« standards from the EU. Some scholars and authors use even the term authoritarian or illiberal convergence or learning, meaning that some regimes in Southeast Europe simply learn from countries and regimes that have established themselves as strongholds of illiberalism or competitive authoritarianisms, such as Hungary, Russia or Turkey. Since 2010, Hungary under Victor Orbán has been viewed as a role model for changing the political system from within and making it illiberal and semi-authoritarian. Orbán has managed Hungarian de-democratization since 2010 and has established himself and his clique as the single most decisive power block in the country. It is not a coincidence that the former Prime Minister of North Macedonia, Nikola Gruevski, after being ousted from the power in Macedonia, was granted asylum precisely in Hungary.

However, some several scholars and authors have recently begun to criticize the oft-repeated argument about failing or declining democracy. While the discourse of announcing the death of democracy in the West most certainly provides a very simplistic and alarmistic picture of the fate of liberal democracy in general, we do not see much space for relativism in Southeast Europe. Here, freedom, democracy, and rule of law are simply under attack. Obviously, the contexts, circumstances, and reasons why such attacks are not only possible but seem plausible and justified for so many are found in »thick descriptions« of each individual case. What unites illiberal and semi-authoritarian regimes or strongmen are open attacks on fundamental rights, freedoms and democratic values, obstruction and dominance of formal state institutions, and clientelism combined with strong nationalist rhetoric.

The philosopher Ágnes Heller, one of the brightest minds of European 20th century thought, died in 2019. Heller reminded us about dystopian moments of European history and the imminent danger that history might repeat itself. By telling the story of the rise of Orbán in her home country Hungary, Heller issued a universal warning against authoritarians and the tyrannical rule of strongmen and opponents of open and free democratic societies. She underlined structural similarities between »Orbanization« and similar authoritarian tendencies of complete control of societies like in Russia or Turkey. The message that Heller repeated in the last years of her life was that freedom, human rights, and liberal values are endangered in some parts of the world, and that we need to protect the only system that can guarantee them: liberal democracy. »Liberal democracy,« she

said, »is imperfect, in some places more imperfect than in others. But we do not have anything else to protect. This is the only thing we can protect« (Heller, 2018).

Democratic engagement beyond institutions is necessary for protecting and advancing democracy beyond what we know as *liberal* democracy. We claim that social or protest movements and the actions of engaged citizens on the local level of governance or in parts of civil society, are fundamental for a democracy of equal citizens. In Southeast Europe, there are also strong progressive democratic forms of social engagement with the potential to change the political and rejuvenate the »normative marketplace« and the notion of democracy (Džihić et al, 2019).

The primary aim of this publication is to briefly discuss the current »normative marketplace« in the region. We want to draw contours of the current state of this marketplace and of those powers and actors that are challenging and endangering it. It is also our intention to engage in thinking about possible utopian horizons able to reclaim democracy, freedom, and emancipatory societal values. Of course, the »realist utopian horizon« deserved a sober acknowledgment of challenges faced by the European Union and its internal disputes, as well as the profound lack of strong socio-political forces in Southeast Europe that could be able to push for Europeanization as long desired, but never actually realized process.

Bojan Baća engages in the discussion on the role of the civil society in transferring European values to the region. Emphasizing the key roles of externally funded non-governmental organizations in the democratization of Montenegro, he critically reviews their impact as they have slowly become donor-driven, clientelist, and professionalized, with little interest in mobilizing society or creating a genuine democratic culture. His insights resonate strongly with the experience in other countries of the region, where occasionally social movements reach out to a broader layer of citizens and push for their demands in public spaces.

Nilay Kiliç points to the case of Turkey as a paradigmatic case for understanding Europeanisation. Kiliç suggests the differentiation between »EU-isation« and »Europeanisation« in order to understand the challenges of the value transfer. She argues that Turkey, a large country with a predominantly Muslim population, incentivized *othering* in European Union and served as a litmus test for the lack of a common European sense of »who we are«.

Finally, Senada Šelo Šabić challenges the usual notion that normative transfer from European Union to Southeast Europe has ever truly occurred. Even if European Union is the strongest partner of the region in all aspects, other strong geopolitical actors – Russia, Turkey, China, the Gulf States, and the USA – influence the internal affairs of the region and act as competitors to the EU in this region, diminishing the EU's normative power. Senada Šelo Šabić explores the agency that might lead to change, finding the notion of civic duty to be responsible for the situation in our societies and key to mobilizing to start changing these circumstances.

In these times of obvious crisis for the European model in Southeast Europe, it is our message that a true transfer of European norms and values is possible only with a strong participatory democratic process that allows citizens to exchange opinions and construct shared definitions of the public good (Dryzek 2000; Habermas 1996). We cannot have this process without creating society engaged in critical public debate where SEE citizens can socialize as active citizens, and are treated as equal, responsible, and responsive towards their communities. This is the only path towards living as European citizens, no matter whether we live in European Union or not. However, the first and the most important struggle in the region is for a democracy of active citizens – a *condicio sine qua non* before we can talk at all about European values and any meaningful future of Southeast Europeans.

# RETHINKING THE »CHAMPION OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS«

BOJAN BAĆA

To date, Montenegro is the only European country that has not seen a change of government through the ballot box. The ruling party, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), is a direct successor of the League of Communists of Montenegro, and has been continuously in power since 1945, albeit undergoing internal reshuffling of party elites in 1989 and 1997. While formal democratization did occur under its reign, Montenegro remains a façade democracy, if not a competitive authoritarian regime (Bieber 2020). The DPS builds its reign on a patronage system and ethno-political populism through which it presents itself as the *condicio sine qua non* of Montenegrin sovereignty, independence, and its »European path«. Despite having been perceived by the European Union (EU) officials as the »champion of European integration in the Western Balkans« since its independence in 2006, contemporary Montenegro is anything but. In this complex merger of the ruling party and state structures, a substantive transfer of so-called »European values« from the EU to Montenegro is rendered impossible. The impulse for this substantive change has to come »from below« – from *within* the civil society. But first, civil society must in its own right transform from an impediment to an impetus of radical democratic politics.

If we look back, one of the key roles in the democratization of Montenegro was played by externally funded non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which first emerged in the late 1990s. On the positive side, international financial and logistical support fostered organizational capacity-building, increased the political capital of civil society, and promoted liberal values of tolerance, human rights, and the rule of law. On the negative side, however, it effectively narrowed the scope of civil society activity to that of a professionalized *civil sector*. As observed in other Central and Eastern European post-socialist, (post-)transition societies, the advent of foreign donor assistance in civil-society-building pushed NGOs towards practical activities aimed at decision- and policy-makers (e.g., advocacy, lobbying, expertise) rather than reaching out to a broader layer of citizens and pushing for their demands in public spaces (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013). Therefore, foreign assistance has resulted in producing well-developed structures within a non-profit »third sector«, populated mainly by advocacy organizations that are professionally managed and, as such, accountable primarily to their donors, instead of being responsive to the needs of the local population. Eventually, this shrinking of civil society

lead to depoliticization of civil sector activities: the focus on educational, advocacy, and self-help activities, deeply embedded in the liberal agenda, pushed NGOs away from more radical demands and subversive actions.

The NGOs in Montenegro, therefore, were not organizational platforms based on individual participation and mobilization, but were instead professional and clientelist in function, with little interest in mobilizing society or challenging dominant power relations and, in the process, creating a genuine democratic counter-culture. The process of NGO-ization of civil society prescribed and legitimized only certain issues as those that should be of interest for civil society actors, as well as the ways in which these should be addressed – in non-radical, non-disruptive ways, only through institutional channels. As such, the civil sector was there to ensure a smooth political and socio-economic transition to liberal democracy and market economy – no questions asked. The conceptual narrowing of civil society to the »civil sector« had, for instance, left wildcat working-class strikes by rank-and-file workers – which at the time challenged corrupt privatization and the frequent violations of Montenegrin labor law through militant grassroots action – outside of the symbolic boundaries of civil society established by the post-socialist liberal consensus.

However, once the Montenegro' statehood status was resolved in 2006, civil society actors – who hitherto defended their strategic alliance with the DPS with the now infamous slogan »independence first, democracy second« (or »first the state, then democracy«) – shifted their discourse from ethnonational politics towards issues of democratization, social justice, corruption, organized crime, independence of the judiciary, development, social welfare issues, and European integration, among others, seeing the partitocratic grip over the state apparatus as the main obstacle to further reform (Morrison 2018). 2010 marked the beginning of the rise of dissent through non-institutional actions, which over time became more political, especially among previously apolitical social groups. As such, their »political becoming« was articulated loud and clear in both the public sphere through written word and public spaces through collective actions. Contrary to the middle-class urbanity and civility that had defined »civicness« in simplistic terms such as ethnonational tolerance since the late 1990s, new civic actors began to redefine the terms of »civil discourse« and »civic

participation« on more activist grounds, emphasizing solidarity with the so-called »losers of the transition« and calling for both environmental and social justice. Unlike activism before the historical turning-point of 2006, mass, contentious, anti-government mobilizations began to appear in the streets of the capital during the post-2006 period, challenging the regime directly, most notably in 2012, 2015, and 2019.

This has reinvigorated Montenegro's civil society: instead of being limited to a non-profit civil sector populated by NGOs, its scope has been broadened as it has become (re)politicized »from below«. Thanks to new media technologies, a novel space is emerging for more democratic civic actions, producing new political subjectivities in the process. These actors are beginning to articulate political messages that are radically different from mainstream politics, which tend to be oversaturated with an apolitical – or, better yet, depoliticized – liberal consensus among existing political and civil society elites. In their place, these new actors are introducing to Montenegro genuine concerns about social justice, labor rights, gender equality, environmental and cultural heritage protection, military neutrality, left-wing Euroscepticism, alternative globalization, and quality of living in urban space, along with more reactionary right-wing populism and romanticized traditionalism.

Many of these activist groups, civic initiatives, informal networks, and grassroots movements have emerged in real and virtual public spaces of deliberation and, most importantly, are beginning to formulate new political identities that cannot be reduced to existing ethno-political categories and associated antagonisms (Mujanović 2017). The injustices against which they have struggled are issues that cut across ethnonational communities: systemic corruption, corrupt privatization, austerity measures, environmental degradation, protection of the commons (e.g., natural resources, public spaces, and historic-cultural monuments), unequal access to public services, inequalities in social status and poverty, and the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of the DPS regime. They also address other »real life issues« resulting from socio-economic transformation, bad policies, authoritarianism, which have impacted them and their communities directly, such as: the (non-)provision of public utilities, nepotism and clientelism, privatization of public spaces, unequal access to public services, bureaucratic inefficiency, and institutional failure. These struggles, in effect, have spurred the creation of new political bonds among multitudes of individuals and collectives that demand proactive involvement in decision-making by renouncing the elites' definition of politics, in which the political system strictly serves the (economic) interests of the few (Fagan and Sircar 2018). The emergence of grassroots activism, coupled with stark criticism of the oligarchic core of electoral democracy also brings to the fore the question of the quality of externally sponsored, top-down democratization and associated processes (e.g., privatization, NGO-ization, state-building, and Europeanization) that have molded contemporary Montenegro. The overwhelming sentiment among progressive activists is that three decades of democratization of the Montenegrin polity have been purely

cosmetic in nature, since their outcome has been a total merger of the state apparatus with the ruling party structure (and, more broadly, its clientelistic networks).

Despite these changes, the advent of external funding in the past two decades has created a path dependent development within civil society, so that the non-profit »third sector« – steered by (young) urban, liberal, and middle-class professionals and dominated by a small number of advocacy and service-providing organizations, who are disinterested in participation and mobilization – remains the dominant model of associational life and, in essence, hostile to those interested in radical change of existing power relations, structural injustices, and patterns of exclusion. On its fringes, unfortunately, »uncivil society« gradually emerges, comprised mostly of the aforementioned »losers of transition«, whose feelings of betrayal by the elites, disillusionment with the local reality of »European integration«, and overall sense of powerlessness in changing the *status quo* through the ballot-box makes their resentment easily manipulated and exploitable by right-wing populism(s) (Kopecký and Mudde 2003). In short, instead of peoples' desire for radical socio-political change being articulated through progressive left politics, the worsening of their material predicaments in the context of the DPS-induced ethnonational antagonism frequently forces them to the regressive and reactionary right. This process is further being strengthened by Brussels' insistence on *stabilitocracy* (Bieber 2020), which is unintentionally accelerating overall democratic backsliding, not only in Montenegro, but in the region as a whole.

The DPS has proven to be exceptionally skilled in capitalizing on the interests of the Western powers and ensuring their support simply by being obedient to their demands – at the expense of the public interest and common good. As such, the DPS managed to falsely present itself to the international community, regional partners, and the majority of Montenegrin citizens as a *condicio sine qua non* of multi-ethnic cohabitation and political stability, while simultaneously framing (and vilifying) any opposition to its »illiberal« reign as the work of anti-state, anti-democratic, anti-European elements. At the same time, neopatrimonial-neoliberal privatization and clientelistic mechanisms introduced by the DPS have created socio-economic conditions favorable to the rise of right-wing diagnostics of socio-economic predicaments shared by many and, therefore, opened up a space for ethnonational antagonism. In other words, while the DPS represents itself as a »guarantor of stability«, its policies actively deepen ethno-political cleavages and socio-economic inequalities and, effectively, increasing popular resentment toward the Europeanization process.

Until democracy promoters start acknowledging and analyzing the actually existing civil society in Montenegro and the broader region, and the varied reasons assorted civil society actors – such as trade unions, social movements, citizens' initiatives, informal civic organizations, political groups, and community associations – have for engaging in extra-institutional, contentious political actions, they will neglect

progressive impulses that come »from below« and, in turn, unintentionally foster conditions conducive to further »un-civil-society«-building. Therefore, the prevailing top-down »one size fits all« approach to democratization in Montenegro, and the region more generally, ought to be contested in favor of a more nuanced methodology that takes into account the specifics of a country, as well as the interests, grievances, and demands articulated within the society itself. This change in approach would not only politically empower already expanded civil society (and all democratic actors within it), but would also create conditions for a substantive transfer of the so-called »European values« from the EU to Montenegro. Otherwise, just like Montenegrin elites that placed independence before democracy, the Brussels' bureaucrats are making the same mistake by putting stability before democracy in Southeast Europe.

# TURKEY AND THE EU – FAILING THE NORMATIVE TEST?

NILAY KILINÇ

There has been an increasing debate about the nature of the EU's exertion of power and its legitimacy since Manner's seminal article, »Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?« (2002). Discussing EU's normative power within the context of the EU-Turkey relations requires us to understand such »normative power« needs to be qualified by specific local contexts which encompass socio-cultural factors and government/opposition dynamics (Aydin-Düzgit, 2018). I will mainly focus on the political dynamics in Turkey which, in recent years, have caused the EU to have serious concerns over continued negative developments in rule of law, democracy, fundamental rights and the Judiciary (European Commission, 2019). Subsequently, accession negotiations with Turkey are effectively frozen; nevertheless, Turkey remains a key strategic partner of the EU in the areas of migration, security, counter-terrorism, energy, transport, economy and trade. The current developments in the EU-Turkey relations illustrate that the process of »European integration« – characterised by heightened cooperation between authorities – had begun to face difficulties within its acquired reforms which aimed at making Turkey resemble a member state of the EU.

At the core of these drawbacks lies a mismatch of expectations from both sides: In a nutshell, whilst Turkey has been pro »EU-isation« especially since the Helsinki Summit (1999), it hardly satisfied the EU in terms of »Europeanisation«. Here, it is crucial to elaborate that »EU-isation« does not equate »Europeanisation«. The former is »a formal process of alignment with the EU's institutions, policies and legal structure«, and the latter is »rather a normative-political context, a context experienced and mobilised by different social groups in varying degrees and modalities in different historical periods of time« (Kaliber, 2013: 54). Hence, the problem has been less about Turkey's »EU-isation« process and progress – at least until 2006 – when Turkey used to assert a more Western European orientation in its foreign policy. But the »normative question« has become more problematic than ever, regarding whether these mutually dependent partners will be able to reframe their relations to develop and implement resilient solutions for key challenges (e.g. economic globalisation, migration, integration, international security) at a time when Turkey's EU accession offer no longer accelerates effective political reform, nor does it promote honest and constructive dialogue (Hoffman & Werz, 2019).

Turkey-EU relations have been on a very long and arduous journey. Joining in OECD in 1948, the Council of Europe in 1949 and NATO in 1952, Turkey has been a significant ally for the EU. Turkey has been associated with EEC (then the EU) since 1963 and a candidate country for longer than any other nation state. After finally gaining an official candidate status to the EU membership in 1999, the EU had begun the negotiations with Ankara in October 2005. However, Turkey-EU relations has been in the period of backsliding since 2013, mainly characterised by a degradation of the political situation in Turkey which became evident in the aftermath of the Gezi protests in 2013 and Erdoğan's victory in the first presidential election in 2014 (Soler i Lecha, 2019). As the Negotiating Framework put it, negotiations remain »an open process, the outcome of which cannot be guaranteed beforehand« (Turkey Negotiating Framework, 2005) and recently, the European Parliament-approved resolution of 13 March 2019 declared that accession negotiations with Turkey are formally suspended.

There are several economic and political arguments against Turkey's accession to the EU. Turkey is sailing in the turbulent waters in terms of economic growth; trade investors are overwhelmed as the Turkish lira decreased by 40 per cent against major currencies in 2018 (Pierini, 2019). There are also worries related to the political tendencies of the AKP-ruled government with regards to the *domestic political backdrop*, wherein Turkey has transitioned from a parliamentary to presidential system in 2015, Erdoğan being elected as the country's first executive president. From 2011 onwards, AKP shifted its ideology from »Muslim democracy« to »political Islam« and supported »Muslim-brotherhood« movements in the Middle East after the Arab Spring; a self-acclaimed leadership position which later resulted in the intervention of the Turkish Armed Forces to seize control in Aleppo in 2016 and Afrin in 2018 (Mankoff, 2016). Turkey failed to convince its Western partners to advance its interests in Syria, including establishing mechanisms to respond to the growing ISIS threat and creating security zones in Northern Syria (Rüma & Çelikpala, 2019).

The Turkish *foreign policy* has become increasingly anti-Western – firstly towards the US and then the EU – cooperating with the Eurasianists and Turkish nationalists in the domestic politics, at the same time getting closer with Russia, China and Iran which has been increasingly weakening the cohe-

sion of Turkey's Western alliance with NATO and the EU (MacDonald, 2019). In terms of *human rights*, the Turkish government has been strengthening the counterterrorism narrative, fighting against the Gülen movement and PKK, which then turned into a systemic blacklisting and imprisonment of academics, journalists, politicians, artists, students – anyone who is judged to be a potential threat to the government (Weise, 2017). The pros and cons of Turkey's strategic partnerships to navigate in a politically instable Middle East may be open for debate, however for the EU it was clear that »Turkey has been moving away from the EU« (European Commission, 2018).

With AKP's third election victory in 2011, Turkey has entered into a »de-Europeanization« phase, wherein AKP government used extending membership process as a policy tool to stay in power, gradually slowing down the reform process by cherry-picking certain reforms which are in line with the party's political vision (Sipahioğlu, 2017: 52). At the time, the domestic actors instrumentalised »EU-isation« in various ways such extending religious rights, enabling more pluralism and weakening the military's influence over politics, and although AKP's secularist stance was questionable, these implementations were found progressive by the majority of the Turkish society and the EU. Nevertheless, the events followed illuminated the real interests of the domestic actors: the repression of the Gezi protests in 2013, the collapse of the peace process towards the Kurds in 2015, the purges and detention following the 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016 coup attempt, and the erosion of the separation of powers with the entry into force of the super-presidential system in 2017 were among the many elements that raised concerns among large segments of the population in Turkey and in the EU (Solar i Lecha, 2019). The EU also followed attentively the local elections in 2019 and questioned the reasons behind the repetition of the vote in Istanbul (Ülgen, 2019; Esen & Gumuscu, 2019).

In the light of all these shortcomings, what really stands in the way between Turkey and the EU is Turkey's stumbling process of »Europeanisation«. However, this goes for both partners: A possible EU membership candidacy of Turkey has been raising questions about not only Turkey's »Europeanness«, but also about »what is« – or rather »what is *not*« »European«. As Žižek and Horvat put it, »The problem of Turkey, the perplexity of the EU with regards to what to do with Turkey – is not about Turkey as such, but the confusion is about what Europe is itself« (2014: 74).

The EU's normative power entails »ideological power over ideas« (Manners 2002), enforcing common norms of democracy, rule of law, social justice, and human rights, but at the same time not being able to translate Europe's reflexive humility for historical failures and crimes (e.g. colonialism, world wars, holocaust, nationalism) into a normative project within and beyond the Union. In Balibar's terms, Europe stands out as a »vanishing mediator«, a »*EUtopia*«, »a transitory institution, force, community ... that creates the conditions for a new society by rearranging the elements inherited from the very institution that has to be overcome«

(2003: 312). Hence, there also needs to be an evaluation about the EU's fate, considering the rise of right-wing populism and Euroscepticism, trade disputes, budget deficits, and the migration/refugee crisis within the member states.

Despite the European elites see the EU as a political project and the solution to many problems that Europe foresaw, it is also clear that the EU has not yet achieved creating a common European sense of »who we are«. Therefore, the projects designed by the EU, or the EU itself as a project, have generated backlash based on such lack of »belonging« among the member states. This calls attention to the current phenomenon that there is no project like the national one that all the members of the EU agree to, or have ever agreed to. This was explicit when the Greek debt crisis haunted the EU and it is now more perspicuous than ever as 51.9 per cent of the UK citizens voted for leaving the Union. Brexit has shown that the tangible advantages of being an EU member, such as the free movement of people, labor, and goods were not adequate for people to embrace a European identity. Why did people feel so threatened by the invisible and indirect implications of the EU, and what feeds this paranoia of being dominated by a supranational chief?

Borneman and Fowler suggest, »the EU's appeal rests firmly on individualism and freedom, values that unsettle many national plots but upon which the process of Europeanization also depends« (1997: 492). The current situation also shows that humanity is still far from embracing a global identity beyond their national borders, regardless of how much they experience super-diversity in their locale. And this is also why fear of migration and the discourse around terrorism has at times won over the idea of a connected Europe.

Similarly, current EU politics and relations with Turkey have become more confusing for the Turkish public. Turkey, as the buffer zone between the EU and the Middle East, was identified as the most significant cooperation partner since the influx of Syrian refugees to the EU states began. After difficult negotiations, Turkey and the EU signed a migration agreement on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2016, which resulted in approximately 3.6 million Syrians living in Turkey under temporary protection, a number larger than the entire population of some EU countries (Paçacı Elitok, 2019). However, convincing Turkey to be a »gatekeeper« required the EU to turn a blind eye to the dubious Turkish election results in 2015, and the EU postponed the publishing of the Commission's progress report after the elections. Additionally, through the fulfilment of Visa Liberalisation Roadmap to Turkey agreement, visa requirements for Turkish citizens to the Schengen Area were to be lifted the end of June 2016 at the latest (which never came into force), 6 billion Euros in total was to be granted to Turkey in support of refugees' needs (some 3.4 billion has been contacted in a 2-year period, financing 72 projects and facilitating direct cash transfers to 1.2 million of the most vulnerable refugees) and the EU-Turkey Custom Union was to be updated (negotiation meetings continue) (European Commission, 2016).

Postponing the report as well as intensifying accession talks are interpreted as examples of the normative concessions the EU was willing to make to obtain Turkey's cooperation. Furthermore, constantly rising numbers of refugees have been one of the biggest challenges the EU has faced since the end of the Cold War. The related rise of right-wing populists, the appearance of security concerns, and the EU's inability to find common solutions are a threat to the core principles of the EU, such as tolerance, unity, and solidarity (Adam, 2016). The EU's approach to counterterrorism and renditions during the Iraq War and the treatment of minorities within member states also undermine commitments to human rights (Dennison & Dowkin, 2010). By the same token, the EU's politics towards Turkey enforces double standards at times and puts its normative values at risk. In that sense, any possible privileged status given to Turkey by the EU, or a miraculous EU membership, would really test the EU's normative power. However, as Manners (2008) argues normative principles should be legitimate, coherent and consistent, so that the EU is »living by example«.

# FROM A VALUE TO A NORM: NORMATIVE TRANSFER THAT NEVER HAPPENED

SENADA ŠELO ŠABIĆ

There is no shortcut to a value-based society. Values are established, shared and sustained by individuals in any given society. We, each one of us, carry them within. And we build our norms in a way to reflect our values. As popular literature states: Social norms are standards, rules, guides and expectations for actual behavior, whereas values are abstract conceptions of what is important and worthwhile. Honesty is a general value; the expectation that students will not cheat or use such material forbidden by the codes in the examinations is a norm. (Mondal, ny)

How to assess the current state of norms and normative horizons in Southeast Europe? In order to reconsider the power of the European Union as a »normative empire« and discuss the current »normative marketplace« in the region, let us imagine and sketch almost a utopian horizon able to reclaim democracy, freedom and emancipatory social values.

To do so, I feel the need to underline the difference between *values and norms*. Values are abstract and intrinsic characteristics that we use to define who we are: In brief, values are ends while norms are means to achieve these ends. Many different norms can lead to the same values. For example, if our value is honesty, we will establish norms such as that it is not acceptable to cheat at exams, it is not acceptable to give a false testimony, and it is not acceptable to appropriate somebody's property (material or intellectual).

Why is this important? Because in general political discourse, we speak about the transfer, export, or distribution of norms as if they are *tradeable goods*. Yet they are not. Let us take as an example a topic of gender equality. Civil society and governments in Southeast Europe receive grants from international donors to implement projects whose goal is to advance the position of women in a society. While there are stakeholders in the implementation of such projects who genuinely support the equality of women and men, too often such projects end without making a lasting change, and patriarchal and conservative values continue to prevail. Why is this so? Because changing values is never easy. Replacing old values and beliefs with new ones can take generations. Old patterns and beliefs persist, and traditional and conservative power structures tend to change everything so that nothing can be changed. Yet, a substantial change has to happen and to be sustained on a level of an individual person first.

External influence might be helpful, can support certain developments, but certainly not if external powers see themselves as the one and only driving force of societal changes. Doing something for the sake of others is never sustainable. Using the previous example, a project on gender equality may be successfully implemented as long as there is monitoring. Once funds or other form of motivation are gone, old patterns usually prevail. To be fair, some changes do take place, but incrementally, slowly. Why? The process of project implementation has created situations in which the socialization of men and women was on a more equal footing, probably panel discussions, focus groups, and other forms of public debates were organized to raise a level of awareness. The project may have created new regulations and laws. Yet, without internalizing the value of equality among women and men, a society ends with little change and with laws that are just ink on paper. Internalizing values, changing old beliefs and patterns of behavior takes time, and needs an uncontested normative environment to flourish.

Therefore, it is questionable to discuss disappointment in the dwindling normative influence of the EU in Southeast Europe. The real question is whether normative influence ever truly existed and whether substantial normative transfers have ever been made.

To be fair, the same question goes for a number of other countries that are now members of the EU. Faking the appropriation of norms and pretending to hold certain values to receive benefits has long been our reality, but faking democracy never results in fundamental democratic changes. The crisis in the EU shows not only that has normative transfer not been made in a sustainable way, but also that the normative horizon of European Union has lost its momentum.

## EXTERNAL ACTORS AS NORMATIVE COMPETITORS

In the last few years there have been numerous articles written on the topic of the EU being challenged in Southeast Europe by actors such as Russia, Turkey, China, the Gulf States, and as of very recently, the United States, whom some authors see as a competitor to the EU in this

region. The crux of these articles lies in the notion of disappointment. Disappointment that the EU is not as strong as one would like it to be; disappointment that the EU's legacy of over two decades of engagement in this region is thin; disappointment that governments in this region are not trustworthy in claiming that they are willing to reform and adopt European values; disillusionment stemming from a belief that the countries in this region seem eternally corrupt and that they will switch their allegiance to whomever offers more rewards.

Let us quickly reflect on these arguments. Measured against what was promised at the beginning of the Europeanization processes, both implicitly and explicitly by the EU and local political elites, we might argue that the expectations have not been properly and sufficiently managed. High expectations in processes that unfold step by step and over a long period of time almost always end up in disappointment. But we can also ask whether the disappointment that we see when we compare public opinion results from the beginning of 2000s and today is entirely conceptually misleading. A true commitment to Europeanization – we could argue today – was not there in the first place, having in mind the argument that governments that pledged the desire to adopt the norms of liberal democracies and genuinely reform their countries to make them democratic, progressive, and prosperous instead engaged in faking reforms rather than truly and wholeheartedly changing their societies. In return, the EU pledged its desire to offer membership, a pledge that has been repeated repeatedly until today, only to receive the cold shoulder when France rejected the opening of the negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania in late 2019 and the whole debate about Enlargement started again.

In any case, at the heart of EU enlargement in a number of cases was a transactional approach – a prospective member will reform in exchange for assistance and eventual membership. But, again, what does it mean to reform and when is the reform successfully completed? Formal EU membership is an end goal, as the European Union is an organization that reflects its members' interests, but in terms of values and norms even full membership – as we see in the cases of Hungary and Poland – doesn't guarantee democracy, rule of law, and an open society.

The attraction of the EU faded with consecutive crises, and the governments of Southeast Europe started to look for partners elsewhere. Yet, the EU will experience crisis like any other organization, as crises are necessary for growth. The 2015 refugee crisis was a tipping point for a major crisis in the EU, which led to the EU with limited capacity for coherent transformative action in the Southeastern Europe. However, it is wrong to claim that the ›normative marketplace‹ was challenged, addressing the possible shifts of allegiance in Southeast Europe. There is nothing to be challenged, as there never was a true normative marketplace. There was just a marketplace. And this is the lesson which all sides could learn. The European Union should fairly take its share of responsibility in building a transactional rela-

tionship with would-be EU members. Enlargement policy will have to change if it is to survive.

The EU needs time in this crisis to go deep, diagnose, and if possible repair the faults that threaten its existence. If this means that there will be further shrinking into a core Europe, let it be. As someone who is inspired by words of Schuman, Monnet, Adenauer and other visionaries, I prefer that the idea survives: the idea that nations which fought each other for centuries can overcome animosity and discover common interests, the idea that the history of conflict can be replaced by the future of cooperation. I, as a European citizen, prefer to see this idea survive in a small number of countries and have it as an inspiration for years to come than to let it die out in mutual accusations, cheap politicization, and disregard of reality that in the past led to the collapse of empires. For the EU to grow out from this crisis as a more coherent, free, and progressive organization, there is a need for committed, capable, and courageous leadership. Whether the EU has this remains to be seen.

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Acknowledging the lack of platforms allowing for quality debate among progressive young scholars, research institutes and think tanks across Southeast Europe, in cooperation with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, have launched the joint initiative »Think Engaged: SEE Academia in Dialogue Series«. Since autumn 2017, an

ongoing series of events has aimed to provide a framework for critical reflection on the societal challenges connected to the crisis of democracy in Southeast Europe. In order to make these exchanges available to a wider audience, some selected contributions are being published in this curated format.

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## VALUES AT STAKE

### Southeast Europe: A Normative Marketplace?



EU-rope has not yet achieved creating a common European sense of »who we are«. The question is whether EU normative influence ever truly existed and whether substantial normative transfers to Southeast Europe (SEE) have ever been achieved.



The prevailing top-down »one size fits all« approach to democratization in Southeast Europe must be contested in favour of a more nuanced methodology that considers the interests, grievances, and demands of each society. This change in approach is necessary to support the revival of civil society and the democratic actors within it.



We cannot have societies with true European values without creating high-quality discursive spaces where SEE citizens can socialize as active citizens. We need to build a democracy of informed and engaged citizens that do not exclude each other – a sine qua non for any discussion about European values and any meaningful future of the region, no matter whether we live in the European Union or not.

Further information on the topic can be found here:  
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