

STAMOV Valentin: The Balkans and the Europe on the verge of transversal culture.

Looking historically, even in ancient times the Balkans have always been a cross-road and a place of exchange of all kinds of cultural traditions. Let us not for a moment forget, that this was the place where Hellenic and Thracian culture was born and developed. And it was those cultures, which to a great extent determined the main character of the contemporary European civilization. On very interesting fact: according to ancient Greek mythology the mighty Zeus, disguised as a bull, abducted princess Europe to the lands of Thracia, these same lands, which now form the main territory of Bulgaria. On the basis of this legend the notion of Europe for the ancient Greeks has always been connected precisely with the Balkans and only later it became the designation of the whole continent.

We mention here this fact, not because we want to put some special accent on some kind of Balkan centrist position, but because today we feel that all discussion about United Europe should not leave out the Balkans as an integral part of Europe. On the Balkans today there can be observed a much larger, if compared to Europe, concentration of different religious and national cultural formations, situated on not so large a territory. Such are the Slavic, Orthodox cultures in the northern parts of Yugoslavia, the Slavic Catholic cultures in the northern parts of Yugoslavia, the Greek Orthodox culture, the Turkish Islamic culture, Roumania's culture, which was influenced by the Roman tradition as well as the Albanian culture - which is in a sense a strange phenomenon of ethnical uniqueness.

In the contemporary transition period towards the global technocratic culture of the future, the above mentioned notions only barely characterise the specific features of the different national cultures on the Balkans. The mass media and the Western popular music during the last decades, and particularly today, when the ideological barriers have fallen, brought about a transformation of traditional cultural foundations in each separate country and created new, stronger bridges for their contacts and interrelations. But what after all differentiates the Balkans from Western Europe in this process of cultural metamorphosis?

Mainly the fact, that together with the incredible variety of cultural and religious traditions, with regard to the new media-culture we can witness in the different Balkan states enormous distinctions in the level and pace of its assimilations. As an example of the two extreme points of this assimilation we can state here the highly developed media-culture in Greece on the one hand, and the almost incredible from the European point of view backwardness in this terms of Albania - a country which was in great isolation in the past decades. It goes

without saying, that these disproportions will inevitably turn into a barrier on the way towards a cultural integration of the Balkans.

No matter how strange it may seem, the cultural contacts among the different Balkan nations and the influence they have on each other, most often are based on traditional forms. In Bulgaria for instance is very popular Serbian and Greek folk-music. The new audio-visual means of communication aid this integration of the Balkan cultures namely on the basis of these traditional forms. The market of video products in Bulgaria is filled to a greater extend together with the popular american genre-films, with video recordings of popular Serbian and Greek singers and groups.

Having in mind this general idea of United Europe, wich together with everything is based on the mutual traditions of Christian values of the european nations, the Balkans are important from another point of view. They have a very special functions as an outpost of the European Civilization at the edge of the Islamic World, and as a binding link between the Orient and the Occident. But this state of affairs is not that simple. In wath sence? If Islamic Fundamentalism and agressivness suddently gain great power and large proportions, it is namely here that restrictive barriers will be set for United Europe, with all the consequences - economic, political and cultural to follow. If, on the contrary, the process of europeanization, including in culture, for instance in let say Turkey, takes a dominant form, then here there will be a need il the building of connecting bridges.

Due to the political and social changes, that have started on the Balkans since 1989 they are on theh verge of a new situation in their search of better mutual relations between the nations, of the incredible broadening of their mutual contacts. But here again the situation is not that simple. On one hand we have the fall of the totalitarian socialist system in countries like Bulgaria, Roumania, Yougoslavia and Albania wich removed the barriers not only in political but in cultural and purely human internal contacts. Now we are wittneses of active circulation of people between the different Balkan states. The mass-medias and in partuculer radio and television have created a peculiar district in Marshall McLuhan's "Global Village". But on the other, together with this positive trend, we can observe a destructive boom of nationalism, suppressed artificially by the communist regimes for many years. These regimes have tried on the basis of common ideology to buld forsefully artificial communities between different nations as for example in Yugoslavia. But this formulae of national integration on the basis of common ideology suffered a fiasco and this best illustrated by the situation in the URSS.

We state this this facts in order to explane the specific situation on the Balkan today, where the process of integration with the halp of the developing media-culture at the given moment, very regretfully coinside with exactly the opposite



processes of hyper-reaction after the period of forceful suppression of the national consciousness. But let us be optimistic in our hope, that the European consciousness and view of life will overcome the negative nationalistic trends.

But no matter how strange this may sound, today when the Balkans are torn apart because of national conflicts, here again on the basis of the new media and technological culture has begun the growth of a Balkan INTERNATIONAL. What we mean by INTERNATIONAL is a new type of community between the different nations, which is born in the post-industrial and post-modern society in the age of the global mediatisation and computerization. On the Balkans this process of consolidation of the INTERNATIONAL is only in the beginning and it will inevitably be very difficult and full of problems. And of course this process will take much longer than in the West. But even today in Europe we can already speak of differentiated INTERNATIONALS - such are the Scandinavian nations, the Baltic republics, the countries of the Benelux. Europe itself as a whole has definitively taken the road to an united INTERNATIONAL.

We would like here to introduce for the second time a new term. That is TRANSITORY CULTURE. We think that this is the first stage in the development of transversal culture. The birth and development of INTERNATIONAL is connected organically with the development of the transitory and later the transversal culture.

TRANSITORY phenomenon in time and space can be observed on the Balkans. This is the short period of transition towards the culture of the future with its new superior characteristics; this short period of time when we shall part with the old Balkan traditions on the threshold of the future technocratic culture! As key accelerator of this process we stress here namely the media-culture of the United States and Western Europe. The young people in the different Balkan states are much more devoted to the American TV shows and West European disco-music, they are more attached to their VCR or tape-recorder than to the traditional forms of cultural exchange as the folk-festivals of everyday life festivities. Through officially by the state radio we observe the formation of a new type of social needs, which means new kinds of cultural identities - that are universal and above the narrow boundaries of the state.

This process does not alarm us in the sense of some kind of subjugating universalization, because at the same time we are witnesses, as was stated earlier in Bulgaria of a boom in the distribution of Yugoslav and Greek video and audio production. While at the same time for instance Bulgarian folk-music has not lost its place in the new media situation.

The Europeanization of the Balkans is a two-way process. It depends not only on the good will and eagerness of the Balkan states and nations to gain an European identity and consciousness but also on the will and initiative, which Western Europe will undertake in bringing them closer to those ideals, including the

field of cultural relations. Naturally of great importance here are not only the collective European initiatives, but also the steps which different European countries will undertake in bringing them closer to the Balkans and their cultural presence there. And here again the main part will go to the young people, they will have to play the leading role. Excellent for instance is the French initiative of broadening and modification of the radioprograms of France Internationale for the Balkan states. Very active in their cultural relations with the different Balkan states are other countries like Austria for example. Vienna has always been one of the main links of Europe with the Balkan states. Many symposiums, conferences and other initiatives with the presence of different concerned parties from all over the Balkans are held here at the recent moment, like for instance the conference on the problems of the audio-visual medias "Open Frontiers".

So far as the collective European initiatives are concerned, here on the Balkans we are expecting with great interest the so called program "Canal E" of the European Institute for the Mass-medias in Manchester, which will be transmitted through the Satellite ASTRA. This will be the first All-European satellite program which will specialize in cultural, educational and business broadcasts. Already Turkey has stated its will to participate in these broadcasts and it is expected that other Balkan states will also take part in this initiative.

We believe strongly in the constructive potential of the universal, transversal culture and in the good will of the great European Family towards the Balkan Region.

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