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The EU project of Europe: the 'inclusion – exclusion' game?

Valeria Korablyova

Abstract

The paper tackles the EU as a version of Europe's geopolitical configuration and the concept of Europe as it has been implied or articulated at different stages of its development. The demarcation line is drawn between the "Old" EU in the shadow of the bipolar world structure and the "New" EU after its expansion eastwards. The theoretical framework of the research involves symbolic geography and ideology studies.¹ The focal point would be the gap between Western and Central-European Europe in their imaginaries concerning themselves, 'Europe' as a symbolic entity, and strategic positioning of themselves within this entity. The range of questions to be posed in the context contains the following: What does the geocultural notion of 'Europe' imply? Is the EU as 'Europe' functioning as an inclusive project as it ultimately declares, or has exclusion always been its flip side? And how do different parts of 'Europe' correspond to each other within the EU project?

"Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty."

William Connolly (1991, 64)

"Central Europe no longer exists, only East and West, as it used to be. [...] What is happening in Warsaw is big trouble. And as we see, it's affecting the Czechs too, because almost overnight we found ourselves again listed in the "Eastern Europe" column."

Erik Tabery (2016)

Introduction: the EU crisis and the rise of Euroscepticism

It's widely recognized nowadays that the EU has been facing multiple challenges that might put it on the verge of existence. On the one hand, any crisis is an opportunity, and by overcoming the present problems and tensions, the EU can reconfigure itself to become a more coherent and influential polity. Yet, on the other hand, as Ivan Krastev rightly mentions: "Disintegration always comes unintended... The more people believe something is unthinkable, the higher the risk it's going to happen" (Krastev, 2016).

Therefore the prospects of European disintegration nowadays are probable enough to be considered seriously. If there is something that still unites Europe under current conditions, it is a doubt in the EU project, existing in all its parts, although with different arguments. What are the reasons behind it?

On the everyday level the Europeans perceive the EU through three major patterns: first, as a trade and monetary union, a *common market*; second, as a space of *borderless communication*, facilitated travel, education and work mobility²; and thirdly, through the lens of *shared values*, common history and cultural legacy. Notwithstanding that the latter is usually put forward in official treaties, it is the most dubious point, as the detailed content of this very heritage is rather problematic: thus, the role of religion and traditions is one of the most sensitive issues nowadays, which stands as a stumbling block within the EU. Furthermore, it is often treated as a folding screen for realpolitik, a rhetorical figure to achieve some pragmatic ends, to force one to do something s/he does not want to (pushing for refugees' quotas would be a telling example in the context). Where do this suspicion of hypocrisy and disillusionment come from, and why are they so persistent?

The present cycle of the EU crisis started in 2009 with the Greek case, which revealed internal discrepancies of the Eurozone but also reinforced asymmetrical power balances between the member states. It shattered the first - *economic* - framework of the EU and put under question its viability and credibility. As George Soros formulates it:

"The European Union was meant to be a voluntary association of equals but the euro crisis turned it into a relationship between debtors and creditors where the debtors have difficulties in meeting their obligations and the

creditors set the conditions that the debtors have to meet. That relationship is neither voluntary nor equal” (Soros, 2016).

The second framework, namely the *Schengen* zone concept, fell as a victim of the recent refugee crisis. Poorly controlled flows of people coming in large numbers from Syria and the Middle East not only questioned the efficiency of European institutions, but also revived multiple fears, pushing for the “Fortress Europe” model, that is Europe being closed in all its senses. Eventually it produced *fissures* in the European space – physical with barbed-wire fences and symbolic with the lack of trust between the member states.³ Ivan Krastev notices: “The compassion deficit highlights the much deeper crisis at the heart of the European project” (Krastev 2015).

And this deeper crisis endangers the third pattern of the EU, namely the shared *European values* and policies. The Visegrad 4 countries stand as the most explicit case here. However, the rise of an anti-EU mood is easy to observe throughout Europe. Iver Neumann described its preconditions back in 1999 in a structural and context-traversing way:

“In Europe friction between leaders and polities on issues of migration and EU integration may be seen to reveal contending conceptions of security, in which the *states’* insistence on the pooling of sovereignty clashes with the *societies’* insistence on maintaining the borders between ethnically divided nations” (Neumann, 1999, 30).

All the aforementioned leads to the most crucial point concerning the *legitimacy* and the *(geo)political agency* of the EU: has the Union succeeded in re-establishing itself as a polity? This task came to the fore in 1980s, and its present-day challenges are embodied in the Ukraine crisis, the refugee crisis, and, finally, in the Brexit case. All the three exposed the lack of comprehensive internal and foreign policies, the absence of common positions on the issues, but also, probably for the first time, a situation of *supposed controversy between national and supranational (i.e. European) interests*, which in turn questions the credibility of the EU project as such.

The underlying ultimate question concerns the political architecture of the ‘EU version of Europe’: is it a quasi-empire oppressing the member-states or a brand new political constellation promoting co-sovereignty of the latter? Proponents of the former position usually stress the opaqueness of the decision-making processes,

bureaucratic institutions in Brussels being puppets of world capital. Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French *Front Nationale*, uses a catchy notion of the 'European Soviet Union' for introducing sundry negative connotations:

"The French have understood that the EU does not live up to the utopia they were sold. It has distanced itself significantly from a democratic mode of operation. [...] I want to destroy the EU, not Europe! I believe in a Europe of nation-states. I believe in Airbus and Ariane, in a Europe based on cooperation. But I don't want this European Soviet Union. [...] Europe is war. Economic war. It is the increase of hostilities between the countries. [...] The EU is deeply harmful, it is an anti-democratic monster" (Le Pen, 2014).

Counter to this point, Timothy Snyder argues that the *European Union is the only viable option for preserving nation-states*. Thus, he stresses that after World War I when the main European empires were dismantled, emerging nation-states quickly became easy targets for new imperial projects. One of them failed – namely the Nazi one – however another one – the Soviet – not only won the competition but also defined the geopolitical world structure for the next half a century. This structure recognized only 'superpowers', while nation-states experienced little sovereignty, being inscribed into 'spheres of influence.' Even former maritime empires upon their war and colonial losses felt geopolitically insecure, so to speak, and that pushed them into a union. Professor Snyder draws the following conclusion:

"What the EU actually allowed was a *safe landing from colonization, girded by an irenic myth*. [...] Although the EU worked as a substitute for colonization, it followed different principles. Despite differences in economic and political weight, its members *recognized one another as formal equals*, with smaller states enjoying exaggerated power within the larger entity" (Snyder, 2015, 700-1).

The turning point for this arching European constellation was 1989, when states in Central and Eastern Europe got emancipated from the Soviet dominance and claimed the urge to get back to the "stolen West" (Kundera, 1984). The strategy of Eastern Enlargement of the EU not only implied the reestablishment of the Union in political terms but also contained the less obvious challenge to unite former colonies⁴ and metropolises on arguably equal grounds. The *objective* of this paper is to reveal how this transformation was imagined and conducted in political discursive practices and whether it led to the political equality of the member-states.

To sum up, the EU is nowadays at a next turning point that obviously challenges the effectiveness of its institutional structure in terms of numerous

member-states not sharing some visions and priorities, which stands as a threat to the project in general. Probably for the first time in the modern history, the so-called “West”, or the “Euroatlantic civilization”, loses its ideological superiority. And what is thorny about the situation is that “the West” cannot overtly impose and forcibly support its values and concepts, as it would undermine its own cornerstones. The EU will most likely survive albeit the cost is uncertain so far. And the vision of Europe it will deliver has not yet been exposed. The Europe of the past can be described with the metaphor of a *museum*. The present Europe looks like a *shopping mall*. And the image of the future Europe is yet to be discovered. Hopefully it will not be a barbed-wired fence.

The *rationale* for the paper is to investigate the EU project of Europe through the lens of its ideological grounds. In other words, what does the concept of the united Europe imply in terms of its symbolic landscape? What are the implications of the declared formula ‘United in diversity’? How much diversity might be accepted not to put the project on the verge of its existence? The core tension I am about to examine is between the European ‘self’ and ‘other’, traced on the example of Central and Eastern Europe. The methodological framework of the research is symbolic geography, which reveals a gap between ‘Europe’ as a geographical term and as an ideological concept, focusing on the ‘excluded Europe’ staying ‘in Europe yet outside of it.’ The core question I am attempting to answer is whether the EU ideological framework might be reconfigured to face the current multiple crises.

‘Europe’ as a project of modernity: othering and exclusion as its flip side

There is a famous quote of Jean Monnet who supposedly, and most likely erroneously, said: “If I were to start anew, I would start from culture.” My claim here would be that culture has always-already been there. Yet it was there in a form of prejudice and othering, not only as a unifying factor of common history and shared achievements. It represents a *geocultural assessment of Europe*, which implies that cultural claims and descriptions are always loaded with political meanings, herewith providing with mental mapping of some territory. For taking this standpoint, one must adopt a *constitutivist* approach, according to which entities are

constructed, dismantled, and reconfigured, and we perceive them as 'natural' due to the inertia of thinking and also, involving Lacan's vocabulary, because of the trick of 'instant historicization' (people tend to recognize deep historical roots in current processes and phenomena).

I am starting with a hypothesis that 'Europe' as a geocultural project was launched within modernity and the Enlightenment as a new arching identity counter to the previous, religion-based one. Functionally it substituted for the 'Christendom' concept, being more relevant to the secularized society. Therefore its core implications are linked to the Enlightenment, on one side, and the French Revolution, on another. The 'cultural' component can be grasped through the concept of 'civilization', which connotes a belief in science and education (not religion) as the main vehicles of the humankind's progress. Whereas the 'political' component contains the values of individual freedom (assessed diversely), human dignity, rule of law, rights of man, and political participation. However pastoral it might look at first glance, this ideological framework was clearly Eurocentric and based on the assumption of Europe's cultural superiority as being opposed to underdeveloped 'barbarians'. As Iver Neumann persuasively shows, the self/other nexus has always played a crucial role in forging the European identity. At the same time, he claims that: "the dominant other in the history of the European state system remains "the Turk" (Neumann, 1999, 39).

Yet, it seems that "the Turk" represents *a religious other* as central for the pre-modern concept of 'Europe as Christendom,' in which "Christians" are juxtaposed to "infidels". This structure of othering indeed has been always present in the European identity-building process, while this signifier has been filled with different content: "the Saracen", "the Ottoman Turk", or, more recently, "the Muslims." Moreover, the religious other is most commonly perceived as a "*threat*" that incites internal cohesion. It is worth mentioning that "the Muslims" as the main contemporary 'religious other' stands as a symbolic antagonist rather to a 'secular Europe', which is underpinned with a belief that public sphere in Europe must be free of religion.⁵

However, for the secular European identity in the period of early modernity the niche of 'non-European Europeans' played a more important role, because it was

centered with the idea of 'civilization.' It was imperative to draw a clear distinction from the closest neighbors that were geographically located in Europe yet did not fit in the affirmed 'canon' of 'Europeanness.' As Larry Wolff reveals in his landmark book, the dichotomy "civilization - barbarism" was first applied to so-called 'Eastern Europe' and eventually expanded on other objects:

"It was Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its *complementary other half* in the eighteenth century, the age of the Enlightenment. It was also the Enlightenment, with its intellectual centers in Western Europe, that cultivated and appropriated to itself the new notion of "civilization," an eighteenth-century neologism, and civilization discovered its complement, within the same continent, in *shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarism*. Such was the invention of Eastern Europe. [...]

In fact, Eastern Europe in the 18th century provided Western Europe with its *first model of underdevelopment*, a concept that we now apply all over the globe" (Wolff, 1994, 4, 9).

Counter to the previous model, otherness herewith is perceived not through an *alternative* set of traits or values (another religion, for instance) but through the *lack* or *absence* of the same trait (not European enough, non-civilized). If a 'religious other' is exposed through the metaphor of '*mystery*', an impermeable cultural domain,⁶ a 'European other' ontologically stands as '*emptiness*', lack of essence, whereas functionally it is perceived as a 'gate', or a 'bridge'.

It would be misleading to assess this process as evaluating the level of cultural development of different parts of the continent. The main dramaturgy happened in the realm of imaginaries: symbolic 'Europe' was coupled with an *asymmetric counter-concept with a negative content* (Koselleck, 1985), which was just a mirror or a backdrop with no own content. Thus, a new model of a 'European other' was instantiated, namely *an underdeveloped other*, an *excluded periphery*. The main strategy of dealing with it would be either *distancing/closure* (i.e. exclusion) or *teaching/cultivating* (i.e. inclusion on unequal grounds). Its link to the symbolic 'East' is to a large extent accidental, whereas its projections on the geographical realm are highly arbitrary. To exemplify the first point, it's worth mentioning that the pejorative notion of "East" was preceded by the same of barbarian "North" in the times of Ancient Rome and the Renaissance, when cultured inhabitants of Italy were opposed to the German warriors. Tacitus described the latter in the following manner: "When not engaged in

warfare they spend a certain amount of time in hunting, but much more in idleness, thinking of nothing else but sleeping and eating” (Tacitus, 1970, 114).

Interestingly enough, this symbolic dichotomy of the South vs. the North has been recently re-actualized with the opposite evaluations: in the context of European sovereign debt crisis since 2009, the European “South” (Greece, Spain, Portugal) were stigmatized as ‘economically underdeveloped’, whereas the former “East” (Poland, first and foremost) showed sustainable economical growth, thus affirming its “Central” European identity. Among the rest, it exposes that the markers can be easily switched but the very structure of superiority, assessed in geographical terms, is highly inertial and resilient. All the mentioned, however, is not aimed to disclaim the point, made by a number of researchers, that the “East” has been the most widely disseminated stigmatizing concept which tends to remain in the discursive domain. As Larry Wolff aptly notices:

The iron curtain is gone, and yet *the shadow persists*. The shadow persists, because the idea of Eastern Europe remains... This is not only because the intellectual structures of half a century are slow to efface themselves, but above all because the idea of Eastern Europe is much older than the Cold War” (Wolff, 1994, 3)

As for the second point, the application of symbolic geographical notions to the ‘real’ landscape is voluntary enough. Iver Neumann suggests a case of contemporary Bashkortostan, a region in Russian Federation, which borders with Tatarstan and marks the latter as “the East” (“Muslim” and “fundamentalist”) though it is located to the west of it (Neumann, 1999, 206). Another telling example, provided by Larry Wolff, would be of Mozart travelling from Vienna to Prague and describing it as a “voyage into Eastern Europe”, into Slavic Bohemia, disregarding the fact that Prague is located to the north of Vienna and slightly to the west (Wolff, 1994, 8). These examples show that “the East” as a social signifier might be “cut loose from its geographical moorings” (Neumann, 1999, 206).

Finally, the third model of othering, crucial for the European identity, emerged in the 20th century and gained a special significance after World War II. It is a pattern of a ‘*rival other*’, which implies the USA, yet potentially might be applied to other objects.⁷ Within this framework, the USA is perceived as an “Atlantic rival” carrying out an alternative project of modernity. It stands as an offspring of the

symbolic 'Europe' that seized the global dominance and claimed cultural/political superiority. Here the basic strategy of *competition* involves discursive means aimed at discrediting the rival's superiority by highlighting its weak sides and diminishing its achievements. Compared to the first model of othering, where the "Europe vs. barbarians" opposition is interpreted as "*civilization/culture vs. nature*"; here "Europe" is juxtaposed to "America" on the axis "*culture vs. civilization*".⁸ The following quote from George Steiner is quite symptomatic and representative in the context:

"Nothing threatens Europe more radically - 'at the roots' - than the detergent, exponential rise of Anglo-American, and of the uniform values and world-image... The computer, the culture of populism and the mass-market, speak Anglo-American... This [European - V.K.] assignment is one of the *spirit* and of the *intellect*. It is nonsense to suppose that Europe will rival the economy, military and technological might of the United States. Already Asia, China in particular, are set to surpass Europe in demographic, industrial and, ultimately, geopolitical significance. The days of European imperialism and diplomatic hegemony are as far gone... It is vital that Europe re-affirm certain convictions and audacities of soul which the Americanization of the planet - with all its benefits and generosities - has obscured" (Steiner, 2015, 34).

Notwithstanding the importance of 'foes' and 'rivals' for defining the symbolic 'Europe' and for positioning it on the geopolitical world map, I will focus going forward on the second pattern for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it is this pattern that influences the European identity and the project of Europe in the most direct way: whereas 'other as an adversary' and 'other as a rival' are clearly distinguished, they only enforce the internal cohesion and identity; yet, 'internal other' is prone to transform the whole project from within. Secondly, since the essence of a 'European other' is not fixed, it has been standing as the most dynamic and fluid imaginary, and every attempt of fixing its content and position had an immediate reverse impact on the 'core' identity. The French anthropologist Louis Dumont (1994) labeled this process as 'acculturation to modernity', which implies that upon joining the project of modernity, every country not only accepts the cornerstone cultural set but also *transforms it thus changing the whole project*. To put it differently, 'Europe' has always stood as an open project constantly running through internal changes and re-shaping its essence by accepting new participants, what Ivan Krastev calls the 'reverse engineering'. The breaking point for the modern project of

'Europe' was 1989, when new countries were about to join the project and faced the challenge of the 'East-as-the-other.'

The EU Enlargement: the excitement of inclusion

The year 1989 stands as a landmark event in the story of the symbolic 'Europe', first and foremost, because it suddenly became the main geopolitical notion in the region that factually *replaced the dichotomy of "West vs. East"*, dismantled by the historical loss of the "East". However, both parts changed drastically: while the "East" was gone, the "West" got split (hence also disappeared as a supposedly coherent entity). Therefore not only Eastern Europe got emancipated from the Soviet dominance, but also Western Europe acquired a chance to get out of the shadow of the bipolar world structure and to reinforce its geopolitical agency. It coincided with the rise of anti-American moods: similar to the Easterners' emancipation, the Westerners also strived to decrease the influence of the USA, frequently perceived as a cultural colonizer. Tony Judt expresses it in the following way:

"For most of the period 1948-1973, the cultural identity of Western Europe was heavily colored by anti-Americanism. Beginning in Britain during the war itself, resentment at the privileged American ("overpaid, oversexed, and over here") took off during the 1950s, a combination of *economic jealousy and political opposition* fueled the frustration born of that same European decline that had propelled the United States into its position of privilege. In France and Italy matters were exacerbated by the presence of an aggressively anti-American Communist party and by memories (especially strong in France) of the ambivalent mood during the Liberation, when *resentment toward U.S. presence and policies* came to outweigh appreciation of the American role in the freeing of these countries" (Judt, 1990, 37).

Therefore, de Gaulle's vision of a 'Europe stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals' had little to do with re-gaining the lost "East" but was more about a desired reemergence of Europe as a world power (Ibidem). Accordingly, the concept of this 'extended Europe' as imagined by the Western European intellectuals kept "old" Europe as the core and the lands to the East as *its cultural extension*. Arguably, the Eastern Enlargement of the EU, ideologically rooted in the debates of 1970-80s, was imagined as cultural colonization with close to zero focus on local peculiarities. As Attila Melegy reveals in his seminal book, the EU Enlargement was perceived as a "*mission civilisatrice*", herewith quoting a British commentator:

“if redrawing the map of Europe is effectively about extending the territorial coverage of the rules of law and norms of civil society, this is equivalent to the projection through much of central and eastern Europe of the code Napoleon, this time without the blood-shed and with legitimacy” (Melegh, 2006, 18).

A dramatic disregard to the voices and actions from “the East” is easy to notice if moving beyond the clichés of ‘annus mirabilis’ and the discourse of re-union. Thus, Tony Judt argues that the Western reception of Kundera’s ideas of the ‘stolen West’ happened mostly due to the changes in the West itself rather than to the increased attention to the East. Moreover, similar ideas were expressed several decades before by the Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade,⁹ yet they were largely ignored, as no political demand for the united Europe had been formulated in “the West” by that time. And the initial reception of the Polish Solidarity movement in Western Europe is an even more striking case. Timothy Garton Ash persuasively shows in his book on the issue (1983) that no major political forces in Europe or the USA *initially* supported the movement, before it turned out to be victorious. Any party had its own reasons for doing so. Thus, the Right wing was embarrassed by the socialist values implied in the Solidarity movement: beside it was a *workers’* movement, it contained an egalitarian thrust, a plea for the welfare state, and also opposed the privatization of heavy industry. Less obviously, the left-wingers were distressed by “the bewildering attachment of Polish workers to that bastion of Reaction and staunch ally of the ruling bourgeoisie, the Roman Catholic Church” (Ibidem, 308). Moreover, the Leftists throughout the world carried ‘the fear of anti-Communism’, linking the Communist idea to the USSR and its viceroys in the states of the Warsaw bloc. Garton Ash notices bitterly:

“Rather than stand up and say ‘Yes, I am an anti-communist socialist’, and risk being embraced by the Right, they fled either into criticism of Solidarity, which was easier than self-criticism, or into criticism of the Right’s support for Solidarity... This kind of escape was easiest of all” (Ibidem, 312).

The political Center in those times was driven with *Ostpolitik* with the core policy of reducing tensions (Entspannungspolitik), which led to the support of the Polish authorities not the Polish people. The main dream of the “theology of détente”, as Professor Ash labels it, was “gradual peaceful change inside the Soviet bloc.” Finally, the so-called Peace movement was also dissatisfied with the Solidarity Movement as, first, it was a competing movement occupying the political stage, and secondly it was

perceived as a *threat* to the European peace and to the prospects of creating a 'nuclear-free zone.' To sum up the description of the power disposition at the moment, no significant actors were interested in a conflict with the Kremlin, choosing instead not to look too closely but to label the movement as vicious and alien to the aims and goals of any party. Timothy Garton Ash resumes it in the following way: "Bonn was not prepared for the Polish revolution any more than Washington was" (Ibidem, 323).

What is even more important, however, that even the successes of 1989 did not lead to the proper evaluation of the preceding events and of the political agency of Central Europe. As I argue elsewhere (Korablyova, 2017), 1989 was a 'misinterpreted revolution', and its misreading had far-going consequences both for normative political theory and political practices. Strikingly enough, what stood as the declaration of popular subjectivity and the embodiment of 'civil democracy,' was widely perceived as the victory of the USA in the Cold war and as a proof of the unsurpassed superiority of Western liberal democracy, along the lines of the 'end of history' claim. "The West" failed to move beyond the underdevelopment theory in its attitudes to "the East" after the 1989, and also could not recognize the critique of the current Western political and economic system within the Solidarity movement, which was there alongside the critique of the Soviet system.

As a result, a social contract behind the Eastern Enlargement was the following: the new EU member-states had to adopt a role of '*learners*' for themselves and to emulate the Western model of development, while in turn receiving funding and some political sovereignty. Here the Eastern Europeans receive a *double-binding gift of Europe*: "Universalism is a "gift" of the powerful to the weak which confronts the latter with a double bind: to refuse the gift is to lose; to accept the gift is to lose" (Wallerstein, 1991, 217).

Michal Kořan describes the consequences of this move:

"For more than a decade, Central Europe has lived a blasé life, wrapped in the cozy blanket of illusion that it had successfully managed its difficult transformation to become a fully European democratic region with well-functioning market economies and responsible societies. It was the hope that these societies would eventually lead to improving the still murky world of everyday politics.

This illusion was further augmented by both the European Union and the United States as they – and rightly so – *needed success stories of democratic transition*. Not to mention that the world has had other and more pressing tasks to do than to pay attention to a once problematic region. Naturally, it was far more effective to see Central Europe as fixed once and for all than to confuse the world by asking unpleasant questions” (Koran, 2015).

However, a flip side of this ‘blasé life’ was eventual frustration of ‘new’ Europeans, as Europeanization of their countries turned into neoliberalization, with all its flaws and shortcomings. The strategy of “*catching up*”, imposed on them, added to the picture: a list of requirements, both economical and political, strengthened the feeling of being ‘outsiders.’ Within the context, the former “East” strived to re-interpret and re-brand itself, searching for new labels free of negative connotations. Unfortunately, rather than attempting to dismantle the whole pattern of discrimination against “the East”, new ‘Europeans’ tried to shift its focus elsewhere. Here the symbolic label of “*Central Europe*” arises, yet the scope of included states remains questionable. Grzegory Gornicki notices:

“The concept of *Mitteleuropa* is German... devised for specifically German interests and purposes. The Central Europe discussed in Warsaw, Prague, Budapest and Vienna is, nevertheless, something different. Its measuring rod is geopolitical and it embraces the countries “between Russia and Germany” (Gornicki 1991, 57).

This concept stands as a clear case of identity politics, detached both from geography and history. Iver Neumann reasonably claims that as a political project it was “a moral appeal to Western Europe on behalf of an imagined community born of frustration with the Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe” (Neumann, 1999, 158). However, it contained a procedure of exclusion as well. Besides implying some central position (instead of the peripheral one), it also hints at some more backward lands eastwards and southwards, herewith excluding from the ‘civilized’ area the Balkans and the former Soviet republics. It leads to a significant shift in the symbolic geography of Europe, namely from *clear-cut zones* of ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarians’ to the so-called ‘*East - West slope model*’ (Melegh, 2006) that implies a scaling of merits: the farther from the center the more barbarian the area is. I believe that this very model was initiated by Central Europe no less than by “the West”, as it provides the former with some civilizational privileges as compared to the rest (the Balkans, for instance). As early as in 1991 the regional concept-building was

reinforced by double labeling: the countries usually referred to as Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czech republic and Slovakia) received another common signifier – the “Visegrad Group”.

Another symbolic marker is worth mentioning within this ‘*battle of signifiers*’: being imposed from the outside, it does not fit into the common hierarchy of ‘Europeanness.’ I am talking about the ‘*New Europe*’ label that codified the superiority of new EU member-states as opposed to the ‘old’ Europe that lost its appeal. It was introduced by then-U.S. secretary of Defense Donald Ramsfeld in January 2003 to stress that new members of the EU and of NATO supported the US intervention in Iraq. This claim implied some rigidity and backwardness of the ‘old’ Europe. Interestingly enough, this ‘sudden’ marker made a discursive career, as it appealed in a pat way both to the claims of the decline of Europe (going back to Nietzsche and Spengler) and to the positive connoting of everything “new”, inherent in the culture of progress and innovation. Later this marker got used diversely: for distinguishing European states by the criterion of their attitude to the USA, as was implied initially, but also for putting an emphasis on brand new and future oriented policies in the EU. However, in Western Europe this label received negative connotations (‘New Europe’ as pro-American, *i.e. anti-European*, Europe), so nowadays it stands as a rather ambiguous signifier.

So, 1989 was a turning point for the EU project of Europe: on the surface it looked like a historical chance for the continent’s re-union on common ideological grounds. However, this re-union was designed and conducted on the ‘East – West slope’ model, rooted in the Enlightenment concept of the underdeveloped ‘East.’ Two competing narratives were dominant on different sides of the Berlin Wall: one of Western Europe gaining its autonomy from the US influence by expanding eastwards; and another – of “a Central European fantasy of a never-never Europe of tolerance, freedom, and cultural pluralism” (Judt, 1990, 48). “The West” failed to recognize “the East” as an equal partner, introducing the ‘teacher – learner’ pattern of relations instead. Not only it fixed the discriminative framework of the backward “East” that led to further disillusionment in the idea of Europe from the side of the “Easterners”, but also caused dramatic consequences for the project in general. Instead of re-establishing the EU as a polity, the decision-makers instantiated it as a

quasi-empire, in which political declarations of the equality of the member-states clashed with de facto cultural colonization of the 'East.' Thus the mechanism of 'modernity in progress' was suspended, which in a long run has been harmful for all the parties involved.

Conclusion, or What Europe will survive?

History knows many examples of a bygone glory in ruins. Probably, Greece might stand here as a telling example: while Europeans recognize the cornerstone role of the legacies of ancient Greece (be it democracy, art or philosophy), they simultaneously stigmatize the present-day Greece as barely worthy of EU membership. Likewise, the unquestioned privileged position of Europe may soon turn into dust. Nowadays, more than ever before, "Europe itself, is not a "fact": *it is a task and a process*" (Biedenkopf and oth., 2006, 97).

As Kurt Biedenkopf rightly notices, the initial EU was unified due to several driving forces, namely "a longing for peace, a striving for freedom, defense against a common threat, a determination to rebuild and a promise of prosperity" (Biedenkopf, 2006, 16). However, the initial set of goals is either accomplished or discarded as irrelevant. And the contemporary EU contains three failed promises – of prosperity, of social welfare, and of solidarity. Therefore, a new task the European community faces at the moment is to "set out the basis of an answer to the question as to what will hold Europe together even *when economic and social promises fail to do so*" (Ibidem, 27).

In other words, economy has ceased to be the driving force of a further EU development. Against the multiple present-day crises and challenges, a search for new driving forces and a new configuration of the EU project becomes crucial. The core problem to be solved nowadays concerns the political architecture of Europe and managing the internal diversity of the EU. There are two options here: *the path of power* and the *path of consensus*. The first model implies exposing the centers of power (Germany being one of them) and building more explicit hierarchy of dominance and subordination between the member-states. It will enforce and facilitate the decision-making process, yet it will move the Union towards a quasi-

empire formation, where Eastern member-states will experience internal colonization.

Yet, another option seems also conceivable. It entails turning the declared equality of the member-states into a real one, as implied by Timothy Snyder and George Soros. Its ultimate goal is re-establishing the EU as an umbrella constellation for co-sovereign states. Then internal relations must be built on the basis of *dialogue* not dialectics, as Iver Neumann labels it: in such constellation otherness should not be assimilated or annihilated, but recognized and cherished. In the practical realm it implies not only delivering more sovereignty to 'other' (Eastern) states but also enabling them to contribute to the project in general, thus necessarily transforming it. As a possible genuine contribution from "the East" might stand the 'solidarity proposal', embodied in the Polish Solidarity movement and also - more recently - in the Ukrainian Maidan. In turn, this might make the role of civil society, or pan-European demos, more central. I believe that was the underlying idea behind the recent claim by George Soros that

"the new Ukraine is *one of the most valuable assets that Europe has*, both for resisting Russian aggression and for recapturing the spirit of solidarity that characterized the European Union in its early days" (Soros, 2016).

This solution implies deconstruction of the "East - West slope" model: Western Europe has to treat the 'Central' or 'Eastern' one seriously, while giving up on its civilizational arrogance and omitting the temptation of othering and stigmatizing.

Notes:

1 Since both methodologies have been developed in many diverse ways, I would roughly define symbolic geography as revealing cultural and political meanings in seemingly geographical notions, whereas ideology studies imply revealing underlying assumptions setting the cognitive order of differentiation.

2 The Erasmus program and the Schengen zone stand as good examples here.

3 More details concerning the outcomes and political implications of the refugee crisis for the architecture of the EU are in my recent paper (Korablyova, 2015).

4 However, these were the colonies of another metropolis (the USSR), which certainly makes a difference.

5 This is a highly sensitive and controversial issue, as one may argue that several European countries with the strong Catholic church still perceive this opposition in literally religious terms, namely as "the Christians" vs. "the Muslims." I would object that in this case the nationalist - rather than 'European' - ideology is involved.

6 One should compare it with the famous Churchill's quote on Russia that was once described by the British statesman as "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."

7 Contemporary Russia seems to fight for this niche, in order to make a shift from an 'underdeveloped other' to a 'rival other.' Whether these attempts are (and potentially may be) successful, is a subject for a separate study.

8 The juxtaposition of "civilization vs. nature" implies that "barbarians" are savages, who are similar to animals, close to nature and non-civilized. Whereas the dichotomy of "culture vs. civilization" dwells on the pejorative notion of "civilization" as a "heartless", "technicized" culture, along the lines of Oswald Spengler's conception (Spengler, 1991).

9 Mircea Eliade published in 1952 in *Preuves* in Paris: "These cultures [of Central Europe]... are on the eve of their disappearance. ...Does not Europe feel the amputation of a very part of its flesh? Because, in the end, all these countries are in Europe, all these peoples belong to the European community" (Eliade, 1952, 29).

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