

MULTI-ETHNIC STATE BUILDING
AND THE INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to introduce the present situation of the member states of the former Yugoslavia in connection with the multi-ethnic state building, and the EU integration. For this, the following questions are going to serve as a basis: What progresses have been made already, and what are the obstacles which are blocking the further progress? What is the role and what is the attitude of the EU and other international organizations in regard of the EU integration? What perspectives do these countries have in the future?

Keywords: multi-ethnic state building, EU integration process, accession of the West Balkan countries, implementation of the peace accords, security building, peace building, democratisation, cohesion.

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Introduction

The theme of the paper is given by the interactive lecture of Veton Latifi¹ (professor of national relations and political science in SEE university, Tetovo), held in the Central European University (CEU), in Budapest, on 21st of November, 2011, titled as *Supplementary approaches of multi-ethnic state building and institutional reforms for EU integration*, what was discussing the present situation of the former Yugoslav members – especially Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo – in the aspect of the multi-ethnic state building, and EU integration.

The region and Europe

The Western Balkans is the only region in Europe where the question of the *multi-ethnic state building* refers on the *EU integration* process, and the only area, where serious multicultural questions come up. Most of the European countries are already the members of the EU, while the area of the Western Balkans – which is geographically one of the most important parts of Europe at the same time, as it is the border of the continent - is still struggling with implementing the institutionalizing reforms, and in its case, it is still a question how to and when to join the European Union. The conference was focusing on the three countries of *Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo*.

Professor Latifi separated four main areas of the lecture:

1. Challenges of the multi-ethnic state building.
2. Institutional and political *information process* for EU integration, in other words the reconstruction of the institutional aspects and the multi-ethnic state-building, what is asked from the countries by the EU. (The role of the EU in the region)
3. Supplementary approaches of the EU membership of the Western Balkans, from the beginning of the multi-ethnic state building.
4. What are the perspectives of the EU for the future: How will the EU reflect the accession process?

The first three areas cover well known questions, which have been discussed several times, but the lecture had had a novelty: it had summarized them in the fourth, main point. This crucial point – by looking on the mentioned three problems in the aspect of the challenges and difficulties of the internal and external systematic operation - was examining what is happening in the EU now, and what kind of orientations, what perspectives does it have, and how will it reflect on the *EU accession process* operation. It also presented the operation problems of the EU and its economic problems caused by the recession.

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Historical background

To understand the present problems, it is important to be informed about the historical-political background of the discussed countries, which are related to the European integration.

In these three countries there were made three peace accords to stop and to manage the conflicts. These peace accords still can be regarded as the guiders of the multi-ethnic state building. It is a good sign that they are the symbols of the end of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and in Kosovo as well. The accords have drawn up purposes such as: developing the human rights, more efficient political structure and function, the modern operation of the public organizations, or the decentralization of power.

The Dayton Agreement - peace accord of Bosnia-Herzegovina - had closed down a three and a half-year war, in 1995. It contains the political division and the definition of the governmental structure of the country (changing state presidency, central bank, constitutional court), furthermore it draws up the outline of the internal ethnic borderlines. It defines the country as an independent state, from which no entity can be separated. The peace accord have also called external, international organizations to monitor the implementation process, such as the *Implementation Force* (IFOR, implementing the military aspects of the accord), the *Office of the High Representative* (civil implementation), and the *Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (it organised the first free election in 1996. (Summary of the Dayton agreement)

The Ohrid Framework Agreement is the peace accord of Macedonia, which was signed in 2001, by the Albanian representatives, and the government of the republic of Macedonia. It put an end of the military conflict of the *National Liberation Army*, and the Macedonian security power, and also provided ground for the development of the Albanian ethnicity. However, for the implementation of the agreement it is needed a further revision: there are essential laws which have to be accepted and ordered, especially those ones related to the use of the Albanian language. Another unsolved problem is that the proportion of the Albanians has to be defined in the public administration. So far, the implementation of the accord could have not been achieved without the mediating and ordering of the national associations. Its implementation - on both institutional and political level – is essential for Macedonia to become a *multi-ethnic state*, and not to remain a *multi-ethnic society*.

The *Ahtisaari-plan* is a proposal for the regularization of the status of Kosovo. Kosovo has never been said to be independent, but EU has accepted its *independence* in 2008 (it accepted its declaration of independence), but did not declare it, so the status of it is still not clear. The opinion of the countries of the world about the independence of Kosovo is divided.

All of the accords involve the *International Community* in the implementation. The IC's tool to support the EU integration process is to develop this three peace accords.

Although there is a significant development since the signature of these documents, the operation of the three countries is still not appropriate, and the distance between the ethnic groups is keep on growing. The reason for that can be found in the delays and neglecting of the peace accords. There is no doubt about the possibility of the implementation of the multi-ethnic state building in the countries, as they have all the required conditions, and if it would be achieved to orient the attention on the spirit of the peace accords, the demands could be implemented without any obstacle. As it seems, the only way to the EU accession is the implementation of the peace accords. Despite the obstacles, the implementation has progressed visibly, and that had made the countries to proceed in developing. In the fallowing, the paper is going to draw up what changes have happened already, and what changes has to be made for the further progress of the process of developing the region.

The situation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo

The situation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo can be examined along the process of the EU integration, the process of *democratization* and the process of the *reconciliation*, from which the first one is only at the beginning, the second one seems to be a „never ending story”, struggling with the essential problems of democratization, and the third one is already successfully completed. These three processes are in mutual relation with the process of multi-ethnic state building. Presently, the region is under a social transformation which – as other integration processes – is progressing only because of the push of the EU, the *NATO*, and other international organizations.

In the region there are serious contrasts between the groups of the different ethnicities, and this is not provoked by daily politics. It is much more a somehow natural, default phenomenon. The majority-minority relations still not have been *stabilized*, and as there is no other region in Europe, where the ethnicity problems exist as significantly, there is no known way to solve this kind of problems. However, there are certain mechanisms which can be used to stop the conflicts such as the division of power.

The process of the implementation of the peace accords – even if it is in delays and obstructed – progresses. But this does not mean that the established democracy is organised to be appropriate for the European institutional requirements. The reform processes of politics and democratization has contents which reflect on the *slow dynamics* of the multi-ethnic state building. The ethnic politics for example is still one of the main principles of political life. The main parties of the countries are built along ethnicities, they are often fragile and they usually show the values of the winner political line. In their strategy there is nothing to refer on the multi-ethnic state building, but the anticipation, and the co-operating with the governments.

The basic problem of multi-ethnic state building is that it is not enough promoted neither on national, nor on regional level, and it does not gets its support from the national political elites – which itself obviously do not see its importance -, but the International Community.

To stop the difficulties it is needed to aim the removal of problems such as the question of the parliamentary majority (as in these countries there is no constant majority). It is also missing a multi-ethnic party, which is essential if they want to find a solution for the racial and minority groups to have not a false, but meaningful representation. This problem was reduced by the Ohrid Framework Agreement in Macedonia, and the representation has improved a lot in Kosovo as well in the aspect of ministers and parliament.

As it seems, the European Union is the integral part of the improvement process of the region, but to understand what role does the region play in the future of the EU, we have to know what is the role of the EU in the region exactly. This is what the following chapter discusses.

The role of the EU in the region

The process of the European integration has to be an important factor that helps these multi-ethnic societies in the process of multi-ethnic state building, to make them to be appropriate for the EU standards. Therefore, the integration of the countries has to be a transition state, which supports several essential improvement processes. One of these processes is a sustainable internal and external cohesion, as well as a multicultural cohesion. Latter have always caused serious problems of the region, whose solution still seems impossible, although the internal cohesion is the part of the agenda of the EU nowadays. The integration also helps in stabilizing, and in the process of building a modern, well functioning state. So the process of the integration contributes to achieve the internal cohesion, in other words in the process of creating democracy in the region.

It can be stated, that the main role of the EU in the region is to establish democracy, and to help the reconstruction processes. According to Florian Bieber there is a conflict between the EU's minimalist state building and the state building for the EU membership, as the minimalist state model does not fulfil all the functions what the EU members fulfil, so to make the countries to for the countries of the region to reach the standard of the European Union, the minimalist operation has to be expanded. However, this is obstructed by the deficit of the democratic co-operation. (Bieber, 2011)

The EU has expended a lot on the multi-ethnic state building of the countries. For the question, why the progress of the process is important for the European Union the answer will be found in the concept of the multi-ethnic state-model. If multi-ethnic state model would come to being in countries presently struggling with multi-ethnic conflicts, it would prove the possibility of the creation of a balanced and functioning relationship between the different ethnicities. However, the process of state building has used up all the energies, so the straightening of democracy has relegated to the background. Europe has to work on the stabilization of the Western Balkans as much as the region has to work on its ethnic conception though.

For the concept of democracy we can connect three theoretical problems, which source is what most of the countries is not ready to achieve yet: the institutionalizing of the ethnicities.

1. The divided societies have challenges: it is more difficult to ground democracy, in the case of a multi-ethnic society than in the case of a multi-ethnic state. At least there is less contribution for the building of the process. In the case of a divided society the first step is to reach the internal cohesion, what can be followed by the democratization. If it would be possible to considerate the line of the ethnic cultures at the same time, the result would be a divided democracy.

2. The low level of interest for democratization.
3. It is important to not reconstruct the multi-ethnic state, but to build it.

The EU demands do not contain the adaptation of the western liberal ideologies, but for the progress in the process of progressing of the multi-ethnic societies, these ideologies have to be taken into consideration, and both in the theoretical and practical processes they have to be used.

The European Union visibly has deficit in its method. Namely: even if it has a developed strategy for reaching the EU membership, it has no mechanism for the multi-ethnic societies, what is exactly the main need of the Western Balkan region to achieve EU membership. EU tries to manage the problem by using the EU membership strategy to the process of multi-ethnic state building, but it is important to see that even if these two complete each other, they have to be separated to be attained. In the following, the paper is going to discuss, what is expected from these processes.

The processes in the future

Many little of the politicians of the Western Balkan think that the multi-ethnic state building is the future of their countries, but this seem to be the only choice if they want to peacefully attain the state model drawn up by the EU standard. Naturally, there are other opportunities, as the struggle for the change of the borders, but according to professor Latifi, their rationality is excludable.

Nowadays, the geo-strategy is the leader power for regarding the Western Balkans to be members, and this is one of the reasons that these countries are the part or the EU agenda. However, more is needed for the progress: higher criteria in the next term, mainly in the aspect of multi-ethnic societies. Change is not going to happen yet though, as the EU itself is having hard times right now. It is not ready to open its gates as it is already complicated inside, and next to its present problems, the geo-politics and geo-strategy – on which the accession of the Western-Balkan states could depend – is relegated to the background.

Even if its situation was much more different, the example of Croatia can give a positive model in the aspect of the European integration of the former Yugoslav members, and its experiences can be a great edification.

“1. EU implements its commitments as the factors are completed.

2. The accession criteria and factors are strict, and their implementation is monitored more and more. This [...] makes the members to have higher efficiency, what is advantageous both for the states and the EU.

3. The debates with the neighbouring countries should be solved by negotiations and compromises, along the principles of the EU. (European Committee: 4)

Success does not depend only on the countries which wish to join. EU has to offer more for the countries of the region, than the ethnic parties offer, to give a real, internal support for the multi-ethnic state building, not only from the international organization. The economic crisis is not an acceptable excuse for not offering as much. The slow dynamics of the process of progressing cannot be deduced to the economic crisis anyway.

Conclusion

The main aim of the paper was to draw up the present situation of the EU integration process and the multi-ethnic state building process of the former Yugoslav members – especially Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo by giving information about the historical background, along the lecture of Veton Latifi (21th November 2011), using the questions of the abstract. As the result of my research it can be stated, that the chance for the accession in the case of the introduced states is low, in the aspects of the near future. This is caused by both the EU's present situation and the internal conflicts of the countries.

In the process of the integration and the essential reforms significant progress has been made since the period of the division of Yugoslavia, and even if it is because of the external push of the international communities, it proves the improvement of the region. A big part of the political elites though still have not recognized that for the advancement the only way is the stabilization of a well functioning state, and the cease of the multi-ethnic conflicts.

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