

SPECIFICS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE BALKAN STATES

Abstract

The author proves that 12 states located in the Balkans have quite different, specific development of political culture and political processes. Basically, these processes are historically preconditioned. Among them, Bulgaria, which has a stable democratic regime (except for problems) and peaceful coexistence of minorities and ethnic communities, can be an attractive model of political status. The political tool of this process can be the focus on common initiatives of the region, on deepening the political cooperation and accelerating the action of integration mechanisms.

Keywords: the Balkan States, political culture, Bulgaria, integration.

СПЕЦИФІКА РОЗВИТКУ ПОЛІТИЧНОЇ КУЛЬТУРИ В БАЛКАНСЬКИХ ДЕРЖАВАХ

Анотація

Автор доводить, що розміщені на Балканах 12 держав, мають цілком відмінний, специфічний розвиток політичної культури та політичних процесів. Здебільшого ці процеси історично зумовлені. Серед них привабливим зразком політичного статусу може бути Болгарія, яка має стабільний демократичний режим (крім проблем) та мирне співіснування меншин і етнічних спільнот. Політичним інструментом цього процесу може стати концентрація уваги на спільних ініціативах регіону, на поглибленні політичної співпраці та прискоренні дії інтеграційних механізмів.

Ключові слова: Держави Балкан, політична культура, Болгарія, інтеграція.

Social relations and, in particular, political relations have become very complicated under the influence of globalization and specific factors that are developing in different regions of Europe. It can be assumed, by analyzing the course of the political process, that up to a certain stage of development of the global world in international relations the elements that served as a certain benchmark for the states (bloc confrontation, balance of

power, etc.) were dominant, and today, obviously, it is necessary to consider new elements that have extremely diversified these relations. In support of this thesis about the complexity of public relations and how they affect political relations, we can cite an argument related to two seemingly different processes, but those that are intensively developing in the Euro-Atlantic region. We are talking about the trend of returning to a strong national state within the EU, with the development of the attributes of such a policy, and the strengthening of communitarianism¹ in the postmodern states of the West, as a reaction to globalization and as an attempt of finding the identity within the community.

The first process, in our opinion, was clearly demonstrated by the refusal of a number of states to support the draft Constitution of the European Union (later, under the aegis of Germany, this initiative was replaced by the Lisbon strategy), which clearly indicates the desire to distinguish, divide, preserve the national factor in the corporate policy. At the same time, different data show that in Western and Central Europe and in the United States, there has been an increase in the process of uniting citizens, who have registered as different legal entities, for example, in interest clubs. Their actions clearly show the desire of society for more intensive social cooperation, unification and personal identification as a part of the community. However, the picture is becoming more complicated if we look at the developments in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) and the Balkans.

The development of political culture and political processes in the SEE and the Balkans is quite different. Basically, these processes are historically preconditioned. Even within the Ottoman Empire, the policy of these regions was aimed at “separation” from the Ottoman political culture, reducing its influence on the subjects that were a part of the Empire. Later, in the process of building a nation state, this style of policy was repeated cyclically. Although the Balkans are seen as a whole, time has had a different impact on different actors in the political process. Thus, some modern states are experiencing a crisis characteristic of the period of development of national states (Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina), others are in the process of creating a modern democratic state, and the others are trying to “understand” the integration processes.

One of the most characteristic features of the Balkan political culture is the desire to form a positive “image” among the Western States. This has an explanation, because for a long time political elite of the EU-15 considered the Balkans as a subject inhabited by “bad Europeans” between the best countries in the world, and the imaginary border with South-Eastern Europe served as a division. However, the analysis of the Balkans can only be adequate if we consider the concept of Europe in discourse. Recently, “old” Europeans have come together to agree on a statement that the Balkans are a micro-model of a particularized

¹ Манчев Кр. (2007), История на националния въпрос на Балканите, Трето преработено и допълнено издание. София: Парадигма, С. 112-113.

Europe² that emerged from a political vacuum after the Second world war, and this has affected the Western European countries' foreign policy combination on the integration of the Balkans. With the enlargement of the European Union to 28 member-states and with the political problems of administrative reform within the EU itself, the idea of the Balkans as a politically stable whole is becoming increasingly more relevant and should be on the agenda of the parties concerned.

There are now two lines of development in the evolution of the Balkan States: the politically formal and the informal levels of communication. And if the Western part of the European continent has achieved the synchronization of the two lines, the Balkans are still far from it. It also explains the concept which sees Balkan political elite as something that is far from the masses³. The actions of the participants in the decision-making process do not seem to have anything to do with the voters, and therefore comes the understanding of Balkan politics as something "bad", "dirty", accessible only to the chosen ones. This understanding of political processes further complicates the thesis of integration in the region, because the implementation of political will usually occurs in two ways: when there is public support for a certain policy, or, in case of its absence, the will of the political elite is proclaimed as mutual. The current problem for the Balkan States is that there are no indicators for both of the ways⁴.

It should be noted that the political identification of the Balkan national states is dominated by the emphasis on competition and confrontation. With a strong and traditional political culture, individual ethnic groups have long sought to articulate their differences in order to preserve their identity and survive. In this case, the emphasis on diversity was vital. Continuation of the usual policy is present in the offensive nationalism in Macedonia, both at the level of political elites and at the level of mass culture. This combination of cultural differences, activated by the process of islamization, is cultivated in the Western Balkans, significantly reducing the opportunity for self-identification of residents of the region (which comes from the within and is not "brought" from the outside). Indeed, contradictions and problems with the islamization exist, which is explained by the backwardness of evolutionary development, the revival of the antagonisms that have already been overcome. Thus, although in Europe painful discussions about the "occupied" territories had stopped over two decades ago, this issue is still not resolved in the Balkans and the territory (in the geographical sense), as the essence of the phenomenon, is associated with the political identification of various Balkan communities and entire societies.

The political awareness of the Balkans is perceiving them as an object, not a subject, as "victims" and sufferers, which causes the formation of reverse complexes, supranational

² Delhey J. (2012), Generalizing Trust: How Outgroup-Trust Grows Beyond Ingroup-Trust, *World Values Research*. Vol.5. №3. P. 49.

³ Славев Т. (2009), Политическа култура на Балканите и политически перспективи // България в Европа и света. София: Център за европейски и международни изследвания Фондация «Фридрих Еберт», С.121.

⁴ Конфликты на пространстве бывшей Югославии. Справка. URL: <https://ria.ru/spravka/20110720/404635550.html> (дата зърнення 20 жовтня 2017).

ambitions and a distorted interpretation of historical objectivity (as far as it is possible at all). Hence the main difference between European and Balkan traditions: if the former are characterized by continuity, the Balkan political culture has always followed the lines of fractures. The custom of interrupting the traditions laid down by the previous rulers is extremely dynamic, revolutionary, and not evolutionary (like the rapid liberation from the Ottoman Empire and the rapid replacement of the Communist political system with new democratic institutions). This causes difficulty and complexity of perception of the Balkans by the people themselves – the balkanians and identification of political subjectivity.

However, this is a rather controversial thesis, but the conclusions are in fact that the Balkan political culture is extremely complex, heterogeneous, expressed in the coexistence of many “others” in one region. In addition, the Balkans have indeed been perceived as an atomized reality for a long time, as evidenced by the presence of the Balkan Orthodox and Balkan Romano-Germanic types of religious and legal systems etc⁵.

American sociologist, representative of the structural functional school T. Parsons considered society as a system consisting of separate, integrated elements in his work “Social System”. As such elements in the structure of each society he defined: social goals, norms, values, roles. Society consists of institutions, which are subsystems of a large social system. Each social system (subsystem) has four main functions that ensure its preservation and survival: adaptation, that is, a specific type of interaction of social actors with the environment, as a result of which there is an adjustment of its requirements to the environment; achievement of goals (provided by political subsystem, policy); integration, achievement of the state of connectivity of differentiated elements, the presence of order, conflict-free relations between social actors-individuals, communities, organizations (legal institutions, power structures, rules of law, customs); the maintenance of the systems (of beliefs, morals, agencies of socialization – family, school, arts, etc.)⁶.

These cultural layers are also reflected in the structural complexity of the Balkans, which are quite clearly manifested through the conflicts existing in the region: first, internal conflicts in countries; second, conflicts between countries; third, conflicts at the cultural and geopolitical, global level (in the context of globalization)⁷. The weakness of the political structure lies in the lack of unity for cooperation and mutual search for progress in policy at the state level and locally. There is a characteristic tendency, the nature of which is that all the political successes of states are quite similar, because everyone tries to win “at the expense of the other”. This creates the feeling that every political action of one of the Balkan States forces others to act the same.

Structural complexity is also evident at the cultural level. Problems in the development of national states in the Balkans have created certain conditions for the perception of their societies as a whole, because the emphasis is on common national and internal similarities

⁵ Интереси и възможности за сътрудничество между държавите от Югоизточна Европа, (2012), т. 1, София, Издателски комплекс – УНСС, С. 29.

⁶ Parsons T. (1991), *The Social System*, New York : Routledge, P.24-35.

⁷ Чавдарова М. (2008), Пет причини за дезинтеграция на балканския етнодържавен ред, *Международни отношения*, №2, С. 37.

opposed to the other countries. The main problem is that the Balkan political model lacks the pure anthropocentrism, which is characteristic for the Western European unification. It is in the essence of common, classical and recognized cultural and political models that the answers to the integration of the Balkans can be found, and the prerequisites for this exist. If we follow the opinions of J.J. Rousseau, who argued that in order to build a modern state it is necessary to destroy all the traditional communities⁸, the Balkan States are trying to restrain the development of political culture as a characteristic element of nationality. However, when it comes to the crisis of national identity, these attempts (including political elites) are doomed to failure, which can lead to underdevelopment.

The attempts of the Balkan States to “close themselves up” and dissociate themselves, to a certain extent, are modern⁹. Globalization has once again sparked a debate on the search for identification. At the structural level, the Balkans have advantages, but being an object of observation and wishing to be “included” in the criteria of democracy, they seem to be torn between the two tests of the same course. At a time when all national political cultures are returning to ethnic origins and so trying to find their place, the region is expected to look more global. This complicates greatly the problems of identification, and perhaps the best solution is to use all the common Balkan elements of political culture, following the example of the EU – 15, which will contribute to the deepening of integration, cooperation, and will also strengthen the national factor.

The risk factor for this type of political development is the transformation of the political course to explicit or disguised nationalism. Nationalism as a policy is present in all Balkan States without exception, but in different forms. Balkan nationalism is so strong that for five centuries the Ottoman Empire had been failing to unify or assimilate individual national communities. In modern conditions, it is in a latent state, but in moments of concern in the political environment, it creates significant tension.

Nationalism can also be defined as a “convenient” form of collective identity. It shows the most clearly when political change is needed. It is no accident that in a situation where a stable future development of the Balkans is associated with membership in the European Union, nationalist challenges are sounding more and more strongly. This process is also characteristic of the EU itself. The Balkanians traditionally prefer to define themselves through collective identity, because for a long time there were no conditions for this. Now identity is connected with choice. Existing identities in the world are accessible to all, but at the level of the citizens of the Balkans, it is again difficult, because political elites have not assimilated enough the difference between political identity and natural, cultural identity. History shows that political identity is not that stable and is difficult to maintain, which provokes

⁸ Руссо Ж.-Ж. (2001), Про суспільну угоду, або принципи політичного права, Пер. з фр. та ком. О. Хома. Київ: Port-Royal. С. 53-54.

⁹ Чавдарова М. (2008), Политически системи и външна политика на балканските държави, София: УИ Стопанство, С. 235.

attempts to combine traditional political culture with a new form of political development. The paradox in the Balkans is that identity is perceived as political (but this understanding is complex, even impossible), or as ordinary, natural (but such a regional type can be dangerous).

The key point in the political orientation of the Balkans happened in the early 1990s¹⁰, South-Eastern Europe, as a part of the former socialist bloc, was a rather interrelated political integrity. Western Europe has long been afraid to view this part of the world as such a subject that has already reached a degree of cultural and political identity. An approach to the hierarchy of the states according to the degree of readiness to meet the EU criteria was developed. This created internal tension and set the states against one another. Now another approach is being practiced – the region, which is consciously perceived as renewed, is ready to create a homogeneous structure. In this case, the Bulgarian model can be considered successful.

The ability of Bulgarian society to turn over the page of ethnic confrontation, despite the historical moments of excessive escalation, can be realized at the regional level. The political elite of Bulgaria at some point realized that the integration of ethnic groups occurs by providing channels for communication, both between communities and between communities and the political elite. However, the lack of political will and the ability to sacrifice someone from the political leadership among the parts of the Balkan subjects (states) for the common Balkan fate, makes the regional cooperation and stability of the region impossible.

The main feature of the Balkan political subculture is multiculturalism, which is understood as the presence of many cultures. There are some features that distinguish Balkan multiculturalism from the American one. Thus, on the one hand, the understanding of the culture of individual communities mainly as ethnic, and not as those based on global or other initial positions (the Balkanians will be determined in culture according to their ethnicity, and not in connection with their belonging to a certain political force or environmental movement). In addition, if the American communities have a clear time of occurrence, then in the Balkans all cultural communities claim to be primordial and primacy, because their main goal is not a policy of compromise and understanding, but their own positioning as a dominant entity. Here the difficulties arise when it is argued that multiculturalism, understood as the mutual penetration of cultures, as cultural exchange and the like, could become an adequate recipe for relieving political tension.

Purely political obstacles for mutual respect create many physical constraints in the Balkans. If we talk about multiculturalism, then, of course, it is necessary that the free movement of goods, people and capital could operate, that is, that there is complete freedom of movement. In the context of political culture, this is impossible. Circulation in this sense will mean a dynamic, a process that is highly respected in the EU. But in the first period, when various ethnic, religious or other defining elements of political culture begin to emerge, tensions will arise in the Balkans, because the political space is not ready for this. The vacuum

¹⁰ Чавдарова М. (2008), Политически системи и външна политика на балканските държави, София: УИ Стопанство, С. 193.

that will appear in the political space will easily be occupied by populism or nationalism of the Balkan model, and these are undesirable phenomena.

How these cultural and political layers will emerge in the current political process of the Balkan States is a matter of utmost importance, as it outlines the possibilities for political cooperation. All examples of common Balkan initiatives do not indicate the existence of political will or the desire for political cooperation and integration, but are rather caused by the objective needs of interests of forces outside the Balkans. Thus, multilateral military cooperation in the black sea region is represented by the regional organization BLACKSEAFOR¹¹, which includes six black Sea coastal states – Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Greece and Turkey. In 2000, they established a working group on black sea military cooperation, which activities include rescue operations in case of a disaster, mine clearance; humanitarian assistance, environmental protection and operations to support peacekeeping operations under the aegis of the UN or OSCE.

Despite the existence of this organization, it had no real mechanisms (the Russia – Georgia conflict over South Ossetia) for security, although it relied on military cooperation. A specific example of “building a model of cooperation” is the multinational model SEEBRIG (South-Eastern European brigade), founded in 1988, according to one of the variants of the NATO multinational force – “NATO-Plus”, which is a coalition of member-states and states with partner status¹². The purpose of the brigade is the joint operations of NATO and member-states of the “Partnership for peace” initiative. Although the brigade has several peacekeeping missions (including in Afghanistan), there is no such mission in the Balkans. There arises and understandable question: if this type of institution is established why does not it participate in monitoring and missions in Kosovo? It is difficult to answer this question, given the lack of available information.

Thus, the examples given are only some of the complex problems that should be noted in the political communication in the region. The fact is that when a Balkan state has a partnership priority in its relations with one of the major actors in international relations, its relations with the other states of the Peninsula acquire a rather chaotic character or, at best, become ineffective. The only possible solution is the emergence of an attractive center that would be able to streamline relations through mutual cooperation and the introduction of common models and tasks.

The role of Bulgaria in the Balkans is often defined as a stabilizing factor, but apparently this is not enough. Of course, the position of Bulgaria, analyzing which we can draw positive conclusions (in addition to political and economic), and it is an active, regional factor. However, there are several problems, despite the existing objective conditions for the state to

¹¹ Aydin M. Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea and the Role of Institutions // Perceptions. 2005. Autumn. P. 82

¹² South-Eastern Europe Brigade 'SEEBRIG'. URL: <http://www.scebrig.org/mpfsee/south-eastern-europe-brigade-scebrig-2.html> (дата звернення 20 жовтня 2017).

become the voice and an exponent of all Balkan interests. Bulgaria could become an attractive model of political status for other Balkan States, in terms of having a stable democratic regime (despite problems) and peaceful coexistence of minorities and ethnic communities. In addition, the Bulgarian society, though hard to accept the policy of reforms, managed to adequately pass this difficult period of development of society, when the other Balkan states have yet to do it. In such a difficult situation, the Bulgarian political elite (in the broad sense of the term) should not only be ready to help, but also seek to determine the priorities of the agenda. The lever for this should be the focus on common initiatives in the region, on deepening political cooperation and accelerating the action of integration mechanisms.

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