Citizenship and Transnational History:
Comparative Perspectives on the Balkans

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1. Introduction: Post-Communist National Revival, European Integration and the Writing of History in the Balkans

The collapse of communism in East-Central and Southeastern Europe has inaugurated sweeping economic and socio-political changes, marked by the conversion of state-economies into market economies, political liberalization and democratization, and integration into European and Euro-Atlantic security and political organizations. An important part of the process of political transformation has been the recuperation of the historical memory, especially of those aspects censored under the communist regimes. This recuperation has taken place in the name of the "national identity" that had been suppressed for decades by the military and political hegemony of the Soviet Union. The upsurge of 1989 was seen by many scholars "as the victory of national identity against Marxism, "the finest hour of East European nationalism," or the "Springtime of Nations."[1] At official level, the tendency of returning to the "national history" has been expressed by the restoration of traditional state symbols and monuments of national heroes, the establishment of new national holidays, rituals of remembrance and commemoration, and the re-writing of history textbooks. Sweeping political changes have also affected the pattern of inter-state relations in these regions. Due to an unprecedented intensification of their political collaboration and their integration into Euro-Atlantic and European political and security institutions, countries in Southeastern Europe are linked today by a dense network of inter-governmental agreements, which have worked for changing the nature of inter-state relations, by fostering co-operation rather than conflict.

As a result of this twofold development, one can identify an underlying tension between the "re-nationalization" of history in Central and Southeast Europe and the process of regional and European integration. As Mary Fulbrook pertinently points out, the process of European integration calls for "the development of more adequate historical perspectives."[2] At the same time, the nation-state perspective continues to frame historical studies. This contradiction raises the challenging methodological question: Does "European history, far from being the sum of individual national histories, in fact constitute an alternative framework within which different kind of constituent parts may be identified and interpreted?"[3]

This paper argues for the need to re-conceptualize the history of Southeastern Europe by employing a relational and transnational approach, as part of a more general effort to re-write continental and global history from an integrated perspective. Southeastern European countries share a common historical past that goes far back in time to enduring medieval and early modern imperial legacies, such as the Byzantine, the Hungarian, the Habsburg, and the

Ottoman. After 1945, they experienced similar strategies of communist modernization, and a forceful integration into a common military and economic block. Post-communist countries in this region are now facing similar socio-political challenges. Despite these similarities, historians continue to focus on their own national histories, and have relatively limited openness toward the historical experience of their neighbors. National historiographies in Southeastern Europe have been generally characterized by low regional scholarly interaction. Surely, there have occurred during the time numerous and passionate polemics among historians in the region, but they have been too often politically driven and have concentrated on the question of historical rights of their respective nation. As a result, the inter-regional dialogue on historical studies has been rather limited, often lacking a genuine openness to cultural differences.

The process of regional integration and the European Union's recent enlargement to Romania and Bulgaria, calls for an incorporation of Southeast European Studies into the framework of European studies (thus breaking with the tradition of *Russian and East European Studies*, which is a legacy of the bipolar Cold War division of Europe). Historians in the Balkans are now challenged to place a greater emphasis on the "shared" and "entangled" history of the peoples in these regions, to assess international influences and transfers, and to account for the process of European integration and its impact on the development of their regions. They need to transcend the prevailing narrow national-based historiographic perspective and to shift their research focus toward new areas of inquiry, such as physical and geographical mobility, transnational circulation of ideas, migration and the environment.

In order to fill this gap, my paper pleads for a redirection of the scholarly research on the Balkans towards a comparative analysis of the making of nation-state citizenship in the region. I argue that the study of citizenship would contribute to a better understanding of the roots of ethnic conflicts in the region, would expose illiberal citizenship practices such as ethnic cleansing and the denaturalization of ethnic minorities, and would sustain processes of historical reconciliation. This analytical endeavor is of a crucial importance nowadays, when post-Communist states in the Balkans are engaged in a deep political reorganization involving processes of democratization, citizenship liberalization, and integration into European political and security institutions. In addition, the analysis of the Ottoman legacy and of the transition to the modern Turkish secular state is also a timely endeavor. Although Turkey has started negotiations for integration into the European Union, its history continues to be artificially separated from mainstream European history and often stigmatized as an Oriental "other."

In the following, I provide a broad comparative overview of the main features of the institution of nation-state citizenship in the Balkans, underscoring the need for employing a trans-national and relational approach to the history of the region, by highlights the interdependence among national case studies and by placing them within the socio-political context on the late Ottoman Empire. On the basis of this overview, I suggest new ways in which the issue of citizenship can be theoretically and methodologically addressed for conducted elaborated comparative research on the Balkans and for disseminating it in

innovative history textbooks, without either sacrificing local specificity or falling into the trap of essentializing the historical experience of the region.

II. Citizenship Studies in East and West: The State of the Art.

There has recently been renewed scholarly interest in citizenship studies in an interdisciplinary effort of political scientists, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists. Challenged by socio-political developments of the post-Communist era, numerous scholars have re-examined established notions of citizenship, trying to adapt them to new historical circumstances. These studies have enriched our understanding of the conceptual definition and theoretical underpinnings of citizenship, by connecting it with central concepts of academic inquiry such as identity, nation-building, class, ethnicity, national identity, immigration, gender, and the European Union. Nevertheless, while the growing body of scholarly works on citizenship has concentrated overwhelmingly on theoretical aspects, the history of the institution of citizenship in Eastern Europe in general – and in the Balkans in special – have remained largely under-researched.

To date, scholarly works on the Balkans have mainly concentrated on the history of nationalism and national ideologies. One can identify four main approaches to the process of nation- and state-building in the region. A first one, promoted primarily by Ottomanist scholars, regards the Ottoman Empire as a "golden age" of religious tolerance and multi-ethnic coexistence. They contrast the Ottoman inclusive and pluralistic societal order with the inter-ethnic violence, exclusion and forced migrations that accompanied the establishment and consolidation of nation-states in the region in the modern period. They also credit external factors with a decisive role in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and emphasize the responsibility of narrow circles of intellectuals in instigating national movements of secession in the Ottoman Balkans. Such an argument is developed by Kemal H. Karpat, who states that the Balkan nation-states carved out of the Ottoman territory were legitimized exclusively by "historical nationalism," "built on false premises and nourished by myth."[4] In his view, the new states were *ad-hoc* and illegitimate constructions, "created by Britain, France, Russia, and Austria through the mechanism of the Berlin Treaty of 1878."[5] Therefore, "none of these states was a true 'nation' at the time when official sanction was made; but the small group of intellectuals in each of them took possession of the state apparatus and sought to build a nation in fact out of the patchwork of ethnic religious groups within its assigned territory."[6]

Second, in opposition to this approach, which stems in fact from the official discourse put forward by the Ottoman ruling elite during its last phase of existence, national historiographies in the Balkans have traditionally focused on the historical rights of their respective countries to territorial statehood, commonly traced back to pre-Ottoman principalities, claiming legitimate rights to national self-determination. Their different perspective has also theoretical and methodological implications. While Ottomanist scholars

generally adhere to the "modernist" school of thoughts in the study of nationalism in order to emphasize the "instrumentalist" or "invented" nature of nationalist movements in the Balkans, local scholars employ a "primordialist" perspective, underscoring the "ethnic bases" of modern nations and the pre-modern historical roots of national statehood. Moreover, in order to legitimize strategies of modernization and catching up with "the West" employed by political elites in the newly-born Balkan states, local historians portray the Ottoman Empire as an illegitimate occupier of the Balkans and a ruthless oppressor of Christian populations, unilaterally blaming it for the economic backwardness of the region, and arguing for the removal of the material or demographic "traces" of the Ottoman legacy.

A third discourse on the Balkans is external. A majority of foreign (mainly Western) works on the Balkans have argued that the region is the primary site of "ethnic" forms of nationalism, in view of the secessionist nationalist movements that developed in the region under the late Ottoman rule and the recurrent patterns of *irredenta* wars that followed the collapse of the empire, culminating with the Balkan wars (1912–1913). The ethnic violence that accompanied state-building in the region has been often almost exclusively explained in terms of the "primitive mentality" of the Balkan inhabitants and the "backward" Ottoman imperial state-structure and "incomplete modernization," while Balkan nationalism has been stigmatized as a form of "tribalism" and contrasted with a tolerant Western version of "civic nationalism."

The most comprehensive typology contrasting Eastern and Western forms of nationalism was put forward by Hans Kohn. Employing Frederich Meinecke's distinction between *Staatnation* and *Kulturnation*, Kohn argued that in Western Europe and USA nationalism developed either before or concomitant with the formation of homogeneous nation-states, while "in Central and Eastern Europe and in Asia, nationalism arose not only later, but also generally at a more backward stage of political and social development."[7] For exemplifying this distinction, Kohn contrasted the case studies of France, regarded as representative for the Western type of civic nationalism, with that of Germany, which in his view best epitomized the Eastern type of ethnic nationalism.[8]

Building on Kohn's perspective, Peter F. Sugar further explored the main features of the Eastern European type of nationalism. He argued that – similarly to nationalism in Western Europe – Eastern European nationalism was "a revolutionary force," sharing with it an "anticlerical, constitutional, and egalitarian orientation." At the same time, it differed in important respects from its Western counterpart. In Western Europe nationalism developed organically and "corresponded to changing social, economic, and political realities", while in Eastern Europe nationalism spread "long before a corresponding social and economic transformation" could develop.[9] Therefore, "Western nationalism was based on reality, Eastern nationalism on myths and dreams."[10] Western nationalism was inclusive, Eastern nationalism "tending toward exclusiveness."

Sugar also argued that, although sharing common main features, Eastern European nationalisms differed from one another in important respects.[11] Rejecting the differentiation

between "historic" and "non-historic" Eastern European nations as too simplistic, he classified Eastern European nationalisms "into four main groups," namely bourgeois, aristocratic, popular and bureaucratic. The bourgeois nationalism resembled most closely Western nationalism, and was developed by Czechs. The aristocratic version of nationalism was developed by Poles and Hungarians and "produced the least constructive results." Popular nationalism (also called "egalitarian nationalism") was developed by Serbs and Bulgarians. Bureaucratic nationalism developed in Romania, Greece, and Turkey, and had "much in common" with that developed in emerging countries in contemporary Africa and Asia

The comparison between Eastern European nationalism and Asian and African nationalisms was also employed by John Plamenatz, although he did not elaborate on it, but focused on the case study of nationalism of the Slavs living within the Habsburg Empire.[12] Plamenatz defined nationalism as "a reaction of people who feel culturally at a disadvantage," especially during the social revolution brought by modernity. He contrasted Western nationalism, exemplified this time by the case study of Italy and Germany, with the Eastern one, best represented by the Habsburg Empire. In his view, Italians and Germans were well equipped culturally to deal with the modern social revolution. Therefore, "Nationalism in the West, though it was not entirely liberal, was so more often then not." In contrast, nationalism in the East originated "in a world where social mobility and trade and a cosmopolitan culture are growing fast, where much the same standards, much the same ambitions are taking root everywhere, or at least over large areas, and yet some people are culturally better equipped than others are to live well by those standards and to achieve those ambitions." It was therefore "disturbed and ambivalent," "imitative and competitive," "hostile to the models it imitated," and "illiberal, not invariably but often." Eastern nationalism was based on a double rejection: "rejection of the alien intruder and dominator who is nevertheless to be imitated and surpassed by his own standards, and rejection of ancestral ways which are seen as obstacles to progress and yet also cherished as marks of identity."[13]

Although these typologies of nationalism are very diverse and often divergent in their definition of "East" and "West," in their evaluation of the position of German nationalism and in the main features they attribute to "civic" as opposed to "ethnic" nationalism, they all converge in contrasting "Western" nationalism to a unified "Eastern" nationalism (specific to Central, Southeastern and Eastern Europe), the former being portrayed mainly in positive terms, while the latter in negative ones. True, most of these typologies were produced during the Cold War, when – under the strong impression of the political cleavage between the "First" and the "Second" worlds – Western historians broke away with the tradition of approaching the history of the Balkans through the diplomatic lenses of the "Eastern Question," advocating the idea of a complete divergence in the historical development of the two halves of the continent. Moreover, their perception was to a great extent shaped by disillusioned local or émigré Eastern historians who advocated the idea of a "deviationist" or "mutant" historical development of Eastern Europe. It is nevertheless important to note that these academic clichés have in fact not only pre-dated, but also survived, the political division of Europe in

two rival blocks, being often employed in the post-communist scholarly works, as well.[14]

Fourth, as part of a new wave of historiographical interest in the region, local and foreign historians have more recently reacted against the essentialization of the historical experience of the Balkans. Instead, they propose a "realistic" approach to the history of the region, regarding nation-states in the Balkans not as "mutant" phenomena, but as viable, legitimate and relatively successful political structures, modelled on Western patterns.

III. The Making of Citizenship in the Balkans. Main Features and Research Directions:

My paper builds on the latter historiograhical discourse, but approaches the process of nation- and state-building from a novel perspective. I argue that the making of nation-states in the Balkans cannot be understood without focusing on the emergence and evolution of the institution of state-citizenship as a new type of legal frontier demarcating membership in national collectivizes. As compared to other historic regions, the making of citizenship in the Balkans exhibited several particularities:

(1) First, it was framed by the Ottoman demographic legacy. To be sure, the Balkans had been an area of intense migration prior to the Ottoman occupation. Demographic changes intensified under Ottoman rule, military colonization and recurrent immigrations transforming the Balkans into a highly inter-mixed ethnic area. Ethnic diversity was aggravated by the Ottoman economic system, favoring the economic specialization of certain ethnic groups, most notably Jews, Armenians, and Greeks; and by the recurrent series of Austrian-Russian-Ottoman wars during the period 1768–1878, which provoked anarchy in administration and great fluctuations in population, most importantly on the frontier belt between the empires that served as a battleground, ranging from the Caucasus to Southern Bessarabia, the Dobrudja, and the Croatian military border. The Ottoman rule in the Balkans thus resulted in the de-territorialization of certain ethnic groups, which gradually lost their compact territorial distribution, dispersing according to the role they performed in the imperial system;

(2) The socio-political organization of the empire was largely indifferent to nationality. Communities were organized along religious lines, within the vertical pillars of the *millets*, rather than in horizontal class institutions or ethnic blocks. This accounts for the paramount role played by the Orthodox church in the national awakening of Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, and Romanians, as well as for the symbolic value attached to religion in defining national identity;

(3) Political elites in the Balkans claimed that the achievement of their countries' independence was a restoration of their statehood and historical rights that had existed prior to the Ottoman occupation. Despite this claim, the making of nation-states in the Balkans was shaped by an underlying conflict between political visions of national "imagined communities," and the complex ethnic reality on the field. In order to carve out their national space out of the