

## *No Race to the Swift*

### **Negotiating Racial Identity in Past and Present Eastern Europe**

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**Abstract:** Portrayals of Eastern European countries as “bridges” between East and West are commonplace both in the media and in the political discourse. While the question of the historical origin of Europe’s East-West divide is still under heavy dispute among social scientists, it can be argued that it was the Orientalist discourse of the 19th century that decisively shaped the content of the present categories of Western and Eastern Europe and made policies of demarcation from “the Orient” an important strategy of geopolitical and cultural identification with Europe. The enduring quality of Orientalism’s effects on both national self-definitions and social and cultural policy in Eastern Europe is examined in the present paper in two successive steps: first, by looking at the intellectual discourse in 19th century Romania against the background of the country’s political independence from the Ottoman Empire and increasing economic, cultural and political orientation toward Western Europe; second, by discussing the resurgence of systems of representation based on this type of discourse in the context of the European Union’s “Eastern enlargement”. In the first case, the terms of the Western European discourse were appropriated such as to make the “Oriental barbarism” in which Romanian society had been “steeped” until acquiring independence from the Ottoman Empire the point of departure for the development of a European (civilized, Christian, modern) identity. In the second case, the degree of connection to the Ottoman, and therefore Islamic legacy of Eastern European candidates to the European Union has been reinstrumentalized as a legitimating strategy for discursive practices of inferiorization, exoticization, and racial othering that parallel the region’s economic peripheralization.

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#### **1. MENTAL MAPS OF EUROPE: HISTORY AND TERMS OF TRADE**

Portrayals of Eastern European countries as “bridges” between East and West are

commonplace both in the media and in the political discourse. In particular, the popular label “gateway to the East” is used in history textbooks, tourist guides, and economic reports to equally describe Warsaw, Budapest,

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Bucharest, Sofia, and Istanbul (Hann 1995: 2). Thus, in the European imaginary, Easternness, in its European variant, is being continually passed on—and, as such, consistently refuted—all the way to Europe's geographical borders as they are defined today.

As definitions of the border between Western and Eastern Europe have historically shifted to highlight ethnic, economic, imperial, or religious divides within the continent, so have attitudes toward the proximity of the Orient and the threat it was perceived to represent at different moments in time. Rather than a twenty-first century phenomenon, efforts to reject an Eastern identity constitute a historically recurring pattern in the construction of Eastern European national self-definitions that has been inextricably tied to (1) the military, economic and cultural impact of the Ottoman Empire in the region on the one hand and (2) the representations of Islam and the Orient in the geopolitical imaginary of the Euro-American core on the other.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the ongoing process of negotiating geographical borders while reasserting historical claims to territory and power resulted in further subdivisions such as Central, Northern, Southern and Southeastern Europe. Whereas Central Europe was conceived as a third zone between Eastern and Western Europe, but was coterminous with the nineteenth century geopolitical project of *Mitteleuropa*, Southeastern Europe was coined as a politically correct term for designating the Balkans, the easternmost region within the East itself (Gallagher 2001: 113). Due to its proximity to Asia and its legacy of Ottoman dominance, it was this last subcategory in particular which has conjured up the image of a bridge between Orient and Occident, and which as a result has periodically acquired the scent of temporal in-betweenness as well—of the semideveloped, semicolonial, semicivilized, semi-Oriental (Todorova 2002) always in the process of “catching up with the West.” The resurgence of the

stigma thus attached to the concept becomes increasingly clear today, when the same stereotypes attached to the alleged “Balkan identity” are being used in the political, social scientific, and media discourse of the very Europe the ex-Communist countries are trying to (re)join.

The question of the historical origin of Europe's East-West divide is still under heavy dispute among social scientists, and—in view of its economic, political, and religious dimensions—probably evinces more than one answer. For the purposes of the present analysis, however, it can reasonably be argued that it was the Orientalist discourse of the 19<sup>th</sup> century—in the understanding Edward Said (1979) attributed to the term—that decisively shaped the content of the present categories of Western and Eastern Europe and made policies of demarcation from “the Orient” an important strategy of geopolitical and cultural identification with Europe for the latter region. As a discourse dominating Western representations of the Other and allowing Western European culture to gain “in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (Said 1979:3), Orientalism first emerged in the period following the Enlightenment. Scholarly, literary and scientific depictions of the Orient as backward, irrational, in need of civilization, and racially inferior produced during the next centuries served as background for representations of the Occident as progressive, rational, civilized, even biologically superior, thus justifying European colonization and control.

In order to examine the applicability of this system of representation to inner-European processes of inferiorization and racial othering in historical perspective, it is necessary to address two interrelated questions: first, what kinds of mental maps<sup>1</sup> of the Occident, the Orient, and the boundaries separating them were being negotiated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, second, how do they relate to the remapping of European order in



Map 1. Europe after the Congress of Berlin 1878

Source: Philip Lee Ralph, *World Civilizations*

the process of Eastern enlargement? To this end, the impact of the so-called “Eastern question”—the growing decline of the Ottoman Empire—on the cultural self-definitions and the geopolitical agenda of its Euro-

pean possessions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—is discussed using the example of Romania; subsequently, the present-day resurgence of systems of representation based on an Orientalist type of discourse—of which Islamophobia is an instance—are examined in the context of the European Union’s “Eastern enlargement.”

## 2. THE EASTERN QUESTION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

According to Edward Said, Islam had been Europe’s lasting trauma ever since its emergence in the seventh century. In time, it had come to stand for “terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians” (1979: 59)—an image that, until the end of the seventeenth century, was constantly re-

<sup>1</sup> Edward Said uses the term “imaginative geographies” to refer to the end results of the “universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space which is ‘theirs’” (1979: 54). However, while imaginative geographies can be found on both ends of the power differential between Orient and Occident, it is the process by which they acquire one-sided definition power and are consequently linked to projects of territorial expansion that grants them the explanatory force characterizing the Orientalism of the nineteenth century, the Balkanism of the twentieth and the Islamophobia of the twenty-first. I therefore use the term “mental maps” in order to differentiate it from the power-laden “imperial maps” (Coronil 1997; see also Boatcă 2006) of which such discourses are a result.

inforced by the geographical proximity to Europe and to Christian civilization of “the Ottoman peril.” European representations of “the Muslim, Ottoman, or Arab” therefore tended to be ways of controlling the Orient as a place culturally, intellectually and spiritually outside Europe and European civilization and at the same time as the Other against which the latter had been constructed (Said 1979: 71; Connolly 1996: 13).

By mid-nineteenth century, however, the gradually decaying Ottoman Empire had irretrievably become the “sick man” of an economically and politically rising Europe. Meanwhile, its possessions remained at least as interesting for the Tsarist Empire as they were for the expansion of Western capital, always in search of new markets. Situated between the Habsburg, the Ottoman and the Tsarist Empires, the three Romanian Principalities Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia had long occupied a strategic position, especially because of the access to the Black Sea and the mouth of Danube of the latter two.

As of 1711, Wallachia’s and Moldavia’s boundaries had therefore been periodically redrawn to the territorial benefit of Austria and Russia, at the same time as Turkish suzerainty exposed them to constant political intervention and fiscal exploitation. The end of Ottoman domination and the right to free export they had regained in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century equaled an economic and cultural opening toward the West as well as a shift into the Western sphere of influence, whose agrarian supplier and market for industrial goods the Romanian provinces became. Given that the Ottoman Empire had behaved more like a traditional world empire—using control of its provinces in order to finance military campaigns and luxury spending—the “shift of peripheral axis” (Bădescu 2004: 82) from the periphery of the Empire to that of the Western capitalist core that the Romanian Principalities underwent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century amounted to a transition from a “protocolonial system” (Chirot 1976:

10) under Ottoman rule to a “neocolonial” one as an agricultural periphery of the capitalist world-economy controlled from Western Europe.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1. *The Westernizing Project*

Along with the shift of geopolitical axis went a shift in the intellectual and political discourse, taking place in united Romania as of 1859 (see Boatcă 2003). Caught between the need of uniting their territories the better to protect them, the proximate powers’ attempts to incorporate them, and their position as “buffer state” (Stahl 1993: 87) absorbing the military tensions among the three empires surrounding them, Wallachia and Moldavia enjoyed a love-hate relationship with Western Europe. Conversely, the European powers’ decision to grant the Principalities relative autonomy at the end of the Crimean War reflected the many political and economic interests linked to the fate of the two Romanian provinces: By removing them from under the Russian protectorate and declaring them autonomous, the Great Powers—Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Austria, and Prussia—created a “buffer state” that warranted Austria and Russia the security of their frontiers against Turkey’s claims and that, as a result, had to be modernized in order to fulfill its new role as bridgehead of Western capitalism. Accordingly, modernization on Western European terms went along with increasing distancing from the Ottoman Empire.

In accordance with the program of liberal reform in effect since 1848, Prince Cuza, the first ruler of the united Romanian provinces, undertook a tremendous effort of rapidly modernizing the country and facilitating the penetration of foreign capital. This entailed adopting a series of legal codes on

<sup>2</sup> This situation has been documented for the same period of time for both Hungary and Poland with the help of the similar concept of “semi-colony” (see Böröcz 2001: 31, Adamczyk 2001)

the model of French and Prussian legislation (Code of Trade, the Penal and the Civil Napoleonic Code), promulgating a new Constitution drawn up on Belgium's model, creating economic and financial institutions (the Chambers of Commerce, a national bank, a Court of Accounts), institutions of higher education (the Universities of Bucharest and Jassy, Schools of Fine Arts and art galleries, Conservatories, cultural societies, the Romanian Academy, the Romanian Athenaeum), and introducing the metric system for measures and weights as well as a postal and telegraphic system. Westernization, civilization, and economic progress started being viewed as closely related and mutually reinforcing processes (Love 1996: 26), while the Romance origin of the national language, alongside the Christian nature of Romanian Orthodoxy, became crucial arguments in the effort to escape the connotations of "backwardness," "irrationality," and "savagery" that "the Orient" had acquired in the dominant Western imaginary.

## *2.2. Internal Orientalism*

The first work by a Romanian traveler to Western Europe stating Romania's imperative need to catch up with the West by adopting similar institutions and ideas, Dinicu Golescu's "Notes from My Journey" (1826) invited a verdict on the frame of mind of an entire generation of scholars. Coined by cultural historians, the resulting label "the Dinicu Golescu complex" was supposed to convey what they considered to be an inferiority complex characterizing the Romanian intellectuals' realization of the profound lag between Romania and Western Europe (Georgiu 2000: 116). Although the nineteenth-century intellectuals' awareness of their country's peripherality prompted a sophisticated cultural reaction (see Boatcă 2003) that far exceeded a passive inferiority complex, their tenacious attempt to negotiate a Western cultural and racial identity alongside a common national senti-

ment involved embarking on the "Occidental mission to the Orient" (Said 1979: 87) on Western Europe's side.

In a faithful replication of the binary oppositions inherent in the cognitive map of Orientalism, pitting the period of Ottoman domination against the recent cultural and economic opening toward Western Europe thus became commonplace in the Romanian intellectual and political discourse of the time. While the former was viewed as characterized by "Turkey's darkness," with which the entire Orient was associated, the latter was tellingly epitomized by references to the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and Occidental—especially French and German—civilization (Măiorescu 1973: 239). Interestingly, the terms of this Orientalist discourse were not only appropriated within Romanian liberal thought, which naturally favored both the economic and the cultural-political orientation toward the West, but within conservatism as well. As such, it was embedded in the very criticism conservatives directed at the liberal policy of rapid institutional and economic modernization in the absence of the necessary historical and social prerequisites for such a process:

"Steeped in Oriental barbarianism until the beginning of the nineteenth century, Romanian society started to awake from its lethargy around 1820, perhaps seized only then by the contagious movement by which the ideas of the French Revolution had reached even the outer geographic extremities of Europe. Attracted to the light, the Romanian youth undertook this extraordinary emigration towards the fountains of French and German science, which has kept growing to this very day and which has brought part of the luster of foreign societies to free Romania. [...] And thus, limited by a fatal superficiality, their hearts and minds inflamed by too light a fire, the young Romanians did and do come back to their homeland with the decision to emulate and reproduce the appearances of Western culture, in

the belief that they would thereby also at once attain the literature, the culture, the arts, and above all, liberty in a modern state" (Măiorescu 1973: 163).

In the conservatives' view, therefore, the pernicious effects of Western Europe's monopoly on the direction of Romania's cultural and economic development stood in close relationship with the latter's Oriental—and hence uncivilized—heritage. For a country situated geographically and culturally "at the border between barbarianism and civilization" (Măiorescu 1973: 241), conservatives argued, thorough social change became a matter of national survival. Having deprived Romanians of the "advantage" of uncritical cultural borrowing warranted by a "barbarian condition" (Măiorescu 1973: 241), the shift of axis from the periphery of the Ottoman Empire to that of Western Europe simultaneously mandated a critical view of the modernizing process, in order to ensure that the benefits of Western culture could be appropriated.

While the notion of "barbarism" was a clear reference to the dichotomization practiced in the exportation of the global design of civilization as a legitimating strategy for an economic and ideological "civilizing mission," the conservatives' account was not equivalent to reproducing this developmentalist ideology by acknowledging its terms. On the contrary, they unveiled the close connection between the economic prerequisites for peripheralization and the epistemological divides enforced thereby, thus viewing dichotomization and processes of peripheralization as ideological constructs at the service of particular economic interests:

...when a race degrades itself by way of economic ineptness, it is credited with being lazy, fatalistic, ignorant. Indians are lazy. Turks are Mohammedan and fatalistic, incapable of competing with the English, and these circumstances are presented to us as causes of

their increasing weakness. Nevertheless, one hundred years ago Turks had the same religion, and trade with them was among the most sought after. The Moors in Spain were Mohammedan and their religion was no obstacle to a relatively high degree of civilization. Of different religions and of different origins, under other climates and other geographical latitudes, human states resemble each other as soon as they are declined the possibility of diversifying and multiplying their citizens' occupations, of allowing them to develop any kind of individuality. Subsequently limited to agriculture, they had to export their products in the crudest form, whereby the land is exhausted, productivity decreases, and the work's income keeps getting smaller. (Eminescu 1881: 387f.)

While at the same time correctly identifying the Western, especially Austrian, economic policies in Romania as a colonial endeavor meant to "open the gates of the Orient" (Eminescu 1876: 47) for Western capital, the Romanian conservatives' recourse to a polarized imagery contrasting a civilized Occident to a barbaric Orient nevertheless reproduced the very mental map which served to legitimize this endeavor. From the epistemological position of the semi-Oriental at which the Western discourse had placed them, they thus in turn engaged in a policy of "internal Orientalism"—not unlike the phenomenon of "internal colonialism" (González Casanova 1965, Stavenhagen 1965) discussed in the Latin American context—that has been independently diagnosed throughout Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Wolff 1994, Todorova 1997, Adamczyk 2001, Lindstrom 2003, Böröcz 2005). Its proliferation within the eastern parts of Europe in the end resulted in a "gradation of Orients," defined as "a pattern of reproduc-

tion of the original dichotomy upon which Orientalism was premised" (Bakic-Hayden 1995: 918), which deemed Asia as more Oriental—and, on that account, "more other" with respect to the unmodified category of Europe—than the Balkans, and the latter in turn as more Oriental and other, and consequently less European, than Eastern Europe. The same logic of "nesting Orientalisms" (Bakic-Hayden 1995) was to resurge in the region in view of the prospect of political and economical European integration at stake for Eastern Europeans after 1989.

### 3. THE EASTERN QUESTION OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

With the proclamation of Communist states throughout the non-Western world after World War II, the century-old cultural and religious dimension of the Occident-Orient dichotomy was gradually eclipsed by the primarily political bipolarity of the Cold War opponents. It however resurfaced all the more forcefully soon after the collapse of the Eastern European Communist regimes and the resulting geopolitical reshuffling, globally marketed as "the end of history" (Fukuyama 1992) and of the search for political alternatives to neoliberalism

and globalization. For Eastern European countries, this has not only meant being once again defined as "catching up" with the West politically, economically, and juridically, but also being recast into the geographic mold of the old European subdivisions of Central, Northern, Southern Europe, and the Balkans, along with the historical claims to power as well as cultural and racial identity underlying them.

#### 3.1. *The Europeanizing Project*

In 1993, Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington argued that the 500-year-old eastern boundary of Western Christianity had recently served to replace the relatively short-lived Iron Curtain as the most significant dividing line in Europe by a more pervasive divide that he called the "Velvet Curtain of culture," thus restoring the civilizational map of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

In this view, not only are cultural differences arising from the distinct confessional denominations of Protestantism/Catholicism on the one hand and Orthodoxy/Islam on the other associated with significantly different degrees of economic advancement in West and East, respectively, but their impact on the trajectory of European moder-

Fault lines	North/West	South/East
Religion	Protestant/Catholic	Orthodox/Muslim
Economic progress	High	Low
Role in history of European modernity	Central	Peripheral
(Future) political system	Stable democracy	? (Democracy unlikely)

Table 1. Huntington's "Velvet Curtain of Culture"  
*Compiled from: Huntington 1993*

nity is taken to have been essential as well: According to Huntington, whereas Western Christianity was both actively involved in, as well as shaped, by feudalism, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and industrialization, both Orthodox Christians and European Muslims have only been “lightly touched” (Huntington 1993: 30) by them. Along the same line, stable democracies are considered a likely prospect for countries of the West, not, however, for those on what obviously represents the “wrong” side of the curtain.



Map 2. The Transformation of Western Europe  
Source: Huntington 1993, p. 30

While graphic representations of patterns of social conflict tend to take on the character of self-fulfilling prophecies, in this case it seems more reasonable to assume that Huntington’s map is symptomatic of—rather than responsible for—the resurgence

of the rhetoric enabling Western Europe to portray itself as essentially benign, liberatory, and civilizing against the background of a perpetually backward and repeatedly oppressed “East” into which Orthodoxy and Islam become culturally convoluted. In the context of the self-proclaimed civilizing project of the European Union, this however amounts to a renewed race for identity among those Eastern European countries situated on the hem of the “Velvet Curtain” that supposedly separates “proper” Christianity from Islam. For them, the race’s enduring stake—access to Western markets, employment opportunities, and financial aid—amounts to an exercise in “moral geopolitics” (Böröcz 2005: 115) that involves discarding—or at least downplaying—their “Easternness” while professing a will to Westernization.

Thus, negotiations of cultural and racial identities framed in terms of repudiating an Oriental past, stressing one’s contribution to European civilization, and mapping one’s integration into the European Union as a “return to Europe”—and therefore as an act of historical reparation—once again dominate the identity rhetoric across Eastern Europe. The recurrent tropes used in the process are highly reminiscent of the ones discussed above in the context of nineteenth-century Romania: On the one hand, national elites have referred to the political and economic transition of both Croatia and Slovenia in the 1990’s as liberation from “Balkan darkness” (Lindstrom 2003: 319). At the same time, the electoral promise of rejoining Europe both institutionally and economically has been grounded on the emphasis placed on the country’s century-old role as “bulwark of Christianity”<sup>3</sup> against the Ottoman threat in both Croatia and Poland

<sup>3</sup> “antemurale Christianitatis,” a title equally claimed first and foremost by Austria, further by Poland and Romania, but explicitly used by Pope Leo X in 1519 in reference to Croatia, in acknowledgment of the role of the Croatian army in fighting back the Ottomans.

(Bakic-Hayden 1995: 922) and has reinforced claims of historical belonging to Central Europe (rather than Eastern Europe or the Balkans) throughout former Yugoslavia (Bakic-Hayden 1995: 924, Lindstrom 2003: 324).

Although never explicitly addressed as such, one of the main objectives of such negotiations is “whiteness” (see Böröcz 2001: 32), the accomplishment of which is seen as depending on a thorough break with and disavowal of Islam/the Orient/the Ottoman legacy. Accordingly, individual strategies of delimitation are contingent upon handing over Easternness, Orientality, and ultimately non-whiteness to newly constructed “others” within the region, thus internally reproducing Orientalism in kaleidoscopic fashion:

“...while Europe as a whole has disparaged not only the orient ‘proper’, but also the parts of Europe that were under oriental Ottoman rule, Yugoslavs who reside in areas that were formerly the Habsburg monarchy distinguish themselves from those in areas formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire and hence ‘improper’. Within the latter area, eastern Orthodox peoples perceive themselves as more European than those who assumed identity of European Muslims and who further distinguish themselves from the ultimate orientals, non-Europeans” (Bakic-Hayden 1995: 922).

Especially in the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the framing of the terrorist threat as “Islamic challenge” to the entire Western world, Westernization has increasingly become a matter of taking sides in the “clash of civilizations” Huntington deemed characteristic of future conflicts. In this context, the fact that the European Union’s current expansion occurs under the heading of “Eastern enlargement” and that incorporation of the Central and South Eastern European countries into the European Union is commonly referred to as a process of “Europeanization” once again points to the bridging character devolving upon the European

East in the Western cognitive map. Thus, the general notion of “Europe” used to denote Western, Northern and (parts of) Southern Europe throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries has now become synonymous with the European Union, whereas the Eastern parts of the continent have been recast as a region whose political, socio-cultural, or religious of questionable European-ness and wanting economic and juridical standards.

Counting the tasks of *overseeing*, *dominating* and *civilizing* the controlled territories and their populations as the defining features of colonial control, Böröcz (2001: 23) has put forth the notion of “contiguous empire” in order to characterize the European Union’s colonial relationship with the Eastern European applicants. Unlike the modern world’s more commonplace “detached empires,” in which the métropole and its colonies were territorially disconnected, contiguous empires have more difficulty in categorically excluding their inferiorized others. Hence, spatially detached colonial rule will tend to produce “qualitative hierarchies of difference, leading to essentialized othering through exoticization, feminization, puerilization and racialization” (i.e., Orientalism), whereas in a situation of spatial contiguity between colonizer and colonized, the mechanism of othering will rely on a “quantitative pattern of inferiorization: this type of other is seen as being perhaps of the same substance but offering an inexcusably inferior level of performance” (i.e., Balkanism). The latter will accordingly be traced to its location in the métropole’s own, less developed past (2001: 25).

Against this background, the discourse of “Europeanization” applied to countries with a century-old European cultural and social tradition (from Poland and the Czech Republic to Hungary and Romania) conforms to this very logic. On the one hand, it reinstrumentalizes the Orientalist imagery to imply that distance from the Orient represents the underlying yardstick by which



Map 3. EU Enlargement 2004 (dark grey), 2007 (light grey) and pending (lighter grey)

Source: CIA World Factbook

standards of modernity and civilization are measured. On the other hand, it employs the mechanism of quantitative inferiorization in order to mobilize the inferiority complexes thus incurred for its own geopolitical projects: As the Islamic threat replaced the Communist one in the hegemonic Occidental imaginary, Eastern Europe exchanged its political and economic Second World status for that of a culturally and racially Second World. By being (reasonably) white, Christian, and European, but at the same time backward, traditional, and still largely agrarian, it thus represents Western Europe's incomplete Self rather than, as in the case of Islam and the Orient, its Other (Todorova 1997: 18). What Immanuel Wallerstein has called "the family feud tonality" (2003) of processes of racial othering within kindred cultural spaces thus allows Eastern Europe to be simultaneously ex-

cluded and included in the identity of the expanding contiguous empire of the E.U. according to the quantitative pattern of inferiorization described above.

### 3.2. Orientalism: Comeback with a Vengeance

The fact that the theory and practice of the European Union's "eastern enlargement" act as an "orientalising tool" (Böröcz 2001: 6) becomes apparent in the fact that, for now, the last countries to be negotiating admission into the European Union should be Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and (possibly) Turkey, in an almost exact replication of the degree of their connection to or overlap with the Ottoman, and therefore Oriental, legacy. While the first two were initially considered for the fifth enlargement round of

2004, at least the political grounds on which they have been denied membership until 2007 are clearly reminiscent of the mental map of 19<sup>th</sup> century Orientalism. Explicitly designated by the European Commission as the “critical yardsticks for EU accession” (Rehn 2006: 5), the fight against corruption and crime, trafficking in human beings, and the reform of the judiciary system have become the lines along which increasingly divergent levels of the “progress” required of both countries are being assessed.

These criteria poignantly reflect the Orientalist prism through which the performance of the two countries—and, by extrapolation, that of all future candidates—is evaluated: corruption, human trafficking (especially in the form of forced prostitution) and the missing rule of law clearly belong to the repertoire of Oriental despotism that prominently featured among the images of the Orient constructed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that are now being reproduced in relation to the European East. Singling them out as critical issues in the countries under scrutiny not only renders the applicant states exotic and inferior (Kovács 2001: 205), but, more importantly, traces their problems back to a past which the member states have supposedly overcome. This obscures both the continued existence of similar problems (such as corruption) in core states (Kovács 2001) and the West’s active contribution to their very emergence in Eastern Europe and parts of Asia, as in the amply documented case of sex trafficking in women and children (Bales 1999, Laczko et al. 2002), that, since the 1990s, predominantly targeted the European East, as opposed to its focus on Thailand, the Philippines, and Latin America in the 1980s.

Nevertheless, the Commission’s latest evaluation commended Romania on preliminary progress in all these aspects and stated that the rule of law now prevailed “for the first time in the history of the country” (Rehn 2006: 3), and at the same time judged

Bulgaria’s corresponding efforts as “limited” and “not yet satisfactory” (Rehn 2006: 3; 4). It thus relegated the latter country to an earlier point in the reform process—one characterized by an inefficient and partisan judiciary and a crime-ridden civil society—and further tightened the monitoring process by assigning the two candidates to-do lists—a longer one for Bulgaria, a shorter one for Romania—on the fulfillment of which depend both the date of entry and the amount of EU funds to be received after accession. Given that no such restrictions were applied for previous EU enlargements, one can contend that, in terms of Europeaness, the above-mentioned cultural and racial Second World status of South-Eastern European countries translates as second-class EU membership.

On the other hand, Turkey’s admission, postponed on similar charges as Romania’s and Bulgaria’s, but with a different degree of gravity, still lies in the distant future. Apart from the lasting uncertainty of the undertaking, the gap separating Turkey from the (predominantly) Christian candidates stands out especially when taking into account that, despite the fact that Turkey’s application for full membership dates back to 1987, it was granted the status of a candidate country in October 2005 and her accession negotiations will be carried out along with those of Croatia and the FY Republic of Macedonia, who had first applied in 2003 and 2004, respectively. The grounds for denying membership to the one candidate whose official state religion is Islam were additionally reinforced in the post-9/11 geopolitical context, when the European Union’s professions of solidarity with the United States in the fight against “Islamic terrorism” paralleled debates about whether the Common European Constitution should contain provisions about the “Christian roots of Europe” and thus exclude references to an Islamic legacy—an initiative led by eight Catholic European countries.<sup>4</sup> Although the proposal was

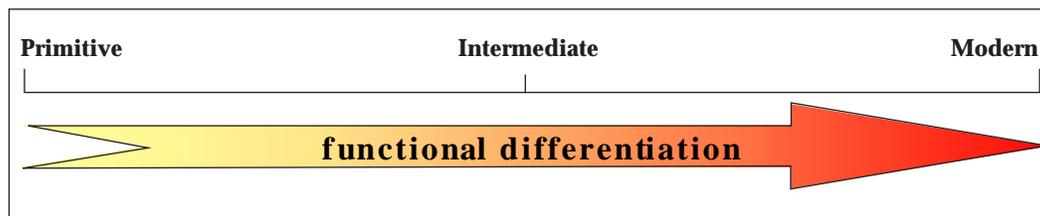


Figure 1. Modernization Model

*Compiled from: Parsons 1966*

eventually rejected, the mental map underlying it reveals a sharpening of the Muslim-Christian divide that is reflected as much in EU immigration policies and school curricula as it is in its accession negotiations with new candidates. Tellingly, Albania, a country with a large Muslim majority and a long history of Ottoman rule, still does enjoy the status of a candidate to the European Union, a prerequisite to which is considered to be “a rapprochement between Albania and European values and standards” (European Commission 2006).

#### 4. HISTORY REPEATING

Much like the functionalist notion of universal stages of development, which situated North America and Western Europe at the peak of social evolution, the postulated continuum of Europeanness ranging from Catholicism and Protestantism through Orthodoxy up to Islam translates as a scale of degrees of the ontological inability to fully Europeanize. By tracing this deficiency to the cultural and religious background of the remaining candidates to the European Union, both mental and physical maps based on this notion replicate the logic according to which the “feudal remnants” of Third World economies and societies were diagnosed as obstacles to their attempted “modernization” and the achievement of “capitalism.” In so doing, they not only per-

<sup>4</sup>Spain, Poland, Ireland, Portugal, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Malta, Italy.

petuate the dominant evolutionist view according to which human civilization proceeds in a linear way from an initial state of nature through successive stages leading to Western civilization (Quijano 2000: 543), but, more importantly, they obscure the military, economic and epistemic power relations which uphold the current core-periphery structure of the modern world-system.

Rather than a new world order, the geopolitical reshuffling following the end of the Cold War seems to have brought about a mere shift of focus in the choice of measuring sticks for barriers to socio-economic achievement and political advancement, the paradigmatic model of which remains the Western European one. Accordingly, as culturalist explanations for Eastern Europe’s low economic performance and political stability regain prominence, increased dependence on Western European trade and investment, technology, and overall regulations ensure the region’s economic Third-Worldization. In this context, Andre Gunder Frank has suggested that the Second World status of Communist countries was an “ideological illusion” which obscured the assignment of both the East and the South to a Second world to which the First has repeatedly blocked access (Frank 1992: 36). While at least the economic disparities between the Communist semiperiphery and the formerly colonized periphery during the Cold War era make such a conflation of South and East empirically problematic, today both the deteriorating cultural and epistemic terms of trade discussed above

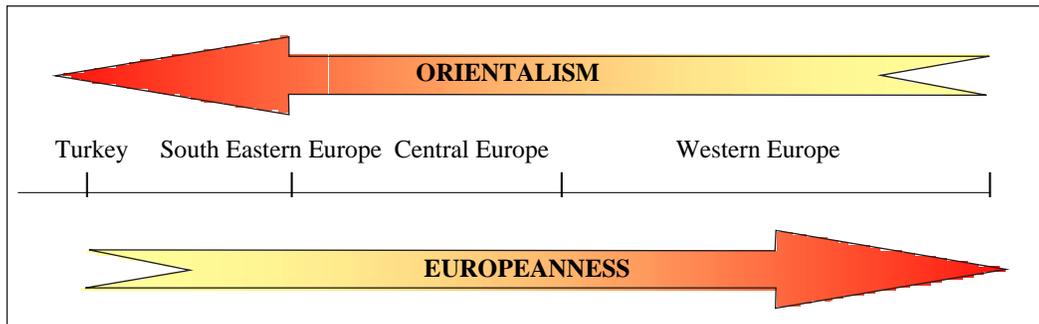


Figure 2. Continuum of Europeanness in the Hegemonic Mental Map

and the political-economic trends characterizing Eastern Europe with respect to Western Europe increasingly point toward the region's peripheralization:

“the industrial economies of the West, in Europe and elsewhere, are increasingly capable of transferring a major part of the adjustment cost of the world economic crisis to the “second world” East as they have already done to the “third world” South. In so doing, the “second” world is also being “Third Worldized” [...] The interminable missions of “expert advice” and International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies that had already depressed the economies of the South and East in the 1980s are today even more legion in the East where they further promote this bankruptcy.” (Frank 1992: 42f.)

In the end, prolonging the interim status of “applicant states” amounts to a renewed quasi-colonial situation, this time characterized by legal and economic dependence on a foreign authority, and ideologically supported by means of a continued reconstruction of “modern” identities in which an Orientalist imaginary plays a central part. In this case, *the race* for a “more European” identity won't be to the swift, yet both the swift and the slow will go on bearing *the race*

*marker* of “lesser whiteness” whose legitimacy they acknowledged when entering negotiations.

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