Different political trajectories in Southeastern Europe under asymmetrical relations with EU: The Cases of Bulgaria and of Macedonia

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This paper is about some counterintuitive effects on the political culture that become possible as a result of an external, for the political system, impact following asymmetrical power relations. The dominant side does not impose directly its will, but change the way the subordinated side sees itself; this change in identity in the latter brings the possibility of behavioral changes that affect the functioning of the subordinated side's political system. This process is different either from the institutional learning or from the strategic-based interests of both parties. This paper, part of a doctoral research, using original data, traces the different cultural trajectories that become possible as a result of such asymmetrical power relations. They either confirm or reject different elements within the main existing models of political culture change, institutional and strategic. It also draws the borderlines of such internationally based change.

The case study, or the real life context, which I use to project the theoretical framework of this research question, is the post-communist world of Southeastern Europe. The countries that left the communism in 1989 will represent the subordinated side in the model; the dominant side is the European Union (EU); the asymmetrical power relation is the process of the EU integration, in which the candidate countries must apply the EU political and other conditionality in order to meet certain criteria for membership.

Literature review

The existing literature on the EU integration and enlargement is still searching for a common denominator as far as the political regime outcomes of this integration process are concerned. Some answers are extremely optimistic: Vachudova (2005), Pridham (2001; 2005; 2007), Levitsky and Way (2005a; 2005b; 2007), Mansfield and Pevehouse (2006), Coricelli (2007) and Schimmelfennig (2007); for them the EU integration is always beneficial for the creation and improvement of the democratic political regimes. Others are extremely pessimistic: Bideleux (2001), Raik (2004), Gallagher (2005a; 2005b); for them the EU integration is always detrimental for the good functioning of the political democracy. Between these two extremes, there are some nuances: Kolarska-Bobinska (2003), Grzymala-Busse and Innes (2003), Dimitrova (2002); these authors look at the different periods of the EU integration impact to point out at the different possible short- and long-term outcomes.

In the literature, ontologically, the preferred units of analysis are the presence of formal institutions and procedures, and the key local politicians' decisions as far as the

institutional transfer is concerned. The preferred theoretical mechanisms of integration are the institutional or learning process, and the strategic or instrumental action; the new EU states may change because they either learn how to do it or because they make calculations over the costs and the benefits of changing. Therefore the major difference between the two models is that the first eliminates the specific role of the key domestic actors; they are just pupils who must learn their new roles. The second model, on the contrary, puts an emphasis on the strategic choice of the domestic actors; they are power maximizers that pursue the EU integration in order to keep, if not to increase, their political positions. These two main models of integration are found in each polar group that makes either pro- or anti-democratic predictions as far as the EU influence is concerned.

Epistemologically, most authors work within the realm of positivism; methodologically they use either quantitative data or non-interpretative qualitative methods. Among them there is none to look at the EU integration as a process of cultural interaction. The learning process implies passivity and gradual adaptation on the recipient end of the relation. The local cultural legacy may influence only the speed of learning but it does not change its initial direction or the asymmetric relations per se. Unless it is rooted in instrumental rationality, the local cultural legacy has to give way to new imported institutions. A missing common denominator in the literature is therefore analyzing the EU integration as cultural and emotionally charged interaction that does not predetermine the final endpoint of the integration. Such alternative analysis could neither start from the formal ends of integration nor from the strategic rationality of the local elite because they must still to be confirmed and put into proper context. Instead of using the logic of deductive and normative research, this new logic will use inductive and descriptive demonstration. Instead of measuring the democratization by what should have been achieved, it will evaluate what had been achieved. Instead of interpreting the data from supposedly objective and impartial criteria, this research will use the inter-subjective interpretations that the local society creates in order to grasp with the new reality.

An alternative model of understanding

I start from the premise that the good functioning of political regimes, including the democratic, requires not only the presence of objective social facts, such as institutions, procedures, behavior, "objective" social facts in positivist sense, but also another entirely different, and relatively independent, inter-subjective or interpretative dimension. The institutions, either international or domestic, do not mechanically impose particular behavior, they can do so only as a result of an interactive interpretative process. This opens the gate for multiplicity of behavioral answers to seemingly identical institutional incentives; this opens also the gate for possibility of identical behavioral answers to seemingly different institutional incentives. I also share the Weberian assumption that the inter-subjective interpretative dimension is relatively autonomous from the formal institutional framework; the culture may or may not align itself to the other social facts. When it aligns itself, it improves the functioning of these formal institutions; when it does not, their mechanical side, also autonomous, may still function, but its prospects for survival and thriving are getting worse.

The new glasses I am putting on stare at the culture as constitutive to the social reality, not purely reflective. Following the research of McFalls (2002) I look for alternatives to both the rational choice and the structural-functionalism as only two possible paradigmatic explanatory models; such alternative that has never been completely eliminated from the discipline although has never been attributed central stage, is associated with the influence of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who is in turn inspired by Max Weber's comprehensive sociology. For the latter, the interpretation is not a method of understanding in a process of looking for the "true" or the "absolute" nature of an act, not a fancy addition to essentialism; the interpretation is mainly the way every human being behaves in order to be in this world, at the same time physical *and* symbolic. McFalls (2002, 84) claims that we can reconstruct the cultural dynamic of any given society and any given time by observing social structure, on the one hand, and the individual expressions of subjectivity, on the other. He points out at the Gramsci's model of cultural hegemony as a good starting point in explaining the cultural shift under the influence of structurally dominant class. This class directs or guides but does not command subordinate classes by proposing but not imposing a new interpretation of the social reality. By articulating its opposition in terms of the dominant class's proposition, the subordinate class subjectively (re)produces its subordination even if and even as it contests its subordination. Indeed, as McFalls points out, the ruse of cultural hegemony is that it simultaneously creates the subjective conditions for both objective social domination and resistance and thereby allows for both social status quo and change.

The alternative model upon which this paper is built upon takes the European integration as a form of asymmetrical power relations; the relation between an international organization, the European Union, and the candidate country is conceptually identical to the Gramsci's model of intrastate class-based cultural hegemony. The European Union, as objectively representing the dominant side, makes proposals as to the expected change the prospective member must take in order to satisfy the political and other conditionality. The prospective member state enters this objectively unequal dialogue that is both material and symbolic; the apparent free will of entering such asymmetrical relation does not make its nature qualitatively different from the nature of intrastate class-based hegemony relation. Following automatically the EU conditionality or the structural-functional approach, or following the alternative model of strategic accommodation to the foreign domination, these are only two among the possible outcomes. The asymmetric dialogue is open-ended, free to take different shapes and directions that escape these two main logics, socialization and rational choice, or any possible combination in between. This dialogue, as may happen with any social conversation, following the configurationalist theory of Norbert Elias (1939), may create another social reality that is not anticipated in advance by either of the main actors in the asymmetrical power relation.

Another major premise is that people are using different symbolic avenues in order to adapt to the presence of new social and political institutions; they do not do this only automatically, as the theory of the socialization argues, or only strategically, as the rational choice theory predicts. If that were that simple, then the successful democracy would be either a matter of time or a matter of mathematic calculations. My alternative premise is that the symbolic world of the social actors, a world that also includes political ethic, enjoys a relative autonomy in relation to the formal institutions. These formal

institutions and symbolic representations can find themselves in different phases of alignment. Their complete convergence into a stable democratic regime therefore becomes only an ideal-type; a theoretical possibility that does not need to be exactly replicated in the real world, but is useful in order to understand it.

This research emphasizes the possibility of using qualitative methods in order to observe the construction of democratic ethic in the context of the post-communist democratization under the influence of one particular factor, the European integration. My assumption here is that this democratic ethic, as part of the larger political culture, may not be very present at the beginning of the democratic transition throughout society; when the old communist regime collapses, the procedural democracy is far from being the only game in town. If it has been otherwise, if it would have been the only game in town, deeply interiorized by everybody, there would be no need of discussing the possible pro-democratic role of the European integration outside the context of formal institutional transfer; there would be no such symbolic pro-democratic role.

This symbolic representation of the EU integration process is an intentional construct of a new common social space, of a new "we" for the people that live in the post-communist countries that join or tend to join the EU. This new collective identity construct becomes possible within the framework of the asymmetrical power relations between the EU and the post-communist countries; this asymmetrical relation, however, does not automatically predetermine its features. It becomes possible at the junction of different factors; on the one hand, there are formal institutional transfers and norms of different kinds from the EU toward the accession countries; on the other hand, there is a reaction, not mechanical but creative, from the elites and ordinary citizens in the post-communist countries vis-à-vis this transfer. On certain levels, especially symbolic, the influence could potentially become mutual. The change could apply not only to the way a candidate country adopts the common identity, but also to the way this common identity backfires its original source, thus changing the dominant factor himself.

Methodology

Regarding the choice of cases in the post-communist world under the influence of the EU, the literature (Vachudova 2005; Levitsky and Way 2005a; Bideleux 2001) shows a certain trend to use predominantly illustrations based on the development of Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, the Czech republic, and Slovakia). These illustrations, with the only exception of Slovakia, were mainly countries considered democratic before the start of the European integration; therefore it would be much more difficult to discern the exact role of the EU among the other factors that influenced this political trend. This is a reason why I will be focusing on the Balkan region, a region in which democratization, especially in its enlarged definition, both institutional and interpretative, has been and still is slower and more painful.

Bulgaria is an interesting case for making main field study; this country has gone through the entire process of European integration; it is a EU member since 1st January 2007. In addition, this country defies the simplistic logic of institutional transfer from West to East. Even after the formal EU membership, Bulgaria continues to pose serious questions regarding its democratic quality. The Former Yugoslav Republic (F.Y.R.) of Macedonia, which is a candidate for EU membership, is still in the waiting room, pending official start of accession negotiations.

The research techniques vary according to the level of analysis: political personalities, civil servants, and ordinary citizens. As far as the political leaders are concerned, I put the accent on the qualitative political discourse analysis triangulated with their political behavior and some media-based interviews that contain biographical elements. Given that the sources ready to reveal the significance of the European integration are always in train to change in any country and are virtually unlimited in number, I will focus mostly on events and discourses of recent years that I consider particularly revealing regarding the evolution of the democratic ethic. As far as the civil servants and the ordinary citizens are concerned, the biographical interviews represent the main research technique. The goal is to follow the life narratives with the European integration being always at the background as a constant point of individual reference. Within semi-structured interviews people narrate freely as much as possible but also in response to the orientation questions, their personal lives and professional evolution. Following their life narratives I extract the main infrastructure of their political culture and the possible presence of democratic ethic before and after the beginning of the European integration; these two periods are divided by the subjective perception of the persons interviewed. I try to understand the way people understand this integration. In the Bulgarian case this subjective evaluation of the European integration and its effects is done retrospectively; this particularity requires another case, which for this study is the F.Y.R. of Macedonia, in order to compare diachronically the same process, this time prospectively.

Being part of an ethnographic study, I am using also techniques that add information to the one extracted from the interviews. The goal is to put in broader context or to triangulate, the statements made in the interviews. Among such contexts, I choose the visual representations that show the beginning and the development of the feeling of the European integration as new identity-shaping factor. Last but not least, a non-participant observation will help immerse in the particular cultural environment. This observation will help asking additional questions that are specific for each country and will be a necessary, although not only, way of triangulating the information accumulated through other techniques.

Findings

The following section summarizes the findings that came out from two field trips to Bulgaria in June-July 2009 and in June-August 2010, and one field trip to the F.Y.R. of Macedonia in June-July 2010. They consecutively present the findings gathered using four different techniques: interviews, observations, text and text-analogue analyses; the texts are focusing mainly on local political leaders' statements, the text-analogues are focusing on visual representations, most notably on political cartoons.

The EU influence begins to affect both countries on the basis of already existing material and cultural prerequisites; these prerequisites include, among others, the individual attitudes toward the social and political roles. For many subjects, the EU does not change significantly overtime these prerequisites; the integration is a no event, or to be more precise, a no process. These subjects, however, may be situated on different levels of previous political activity; the EU may not affect people that are equally politically active or inactive. Several, equally powerful mechanisms, acting either on material or symbolic level, or on both, are contributing to this no event, to this stable

overtime trajectory, regardless of the initial level of political participation. Ironically, the EU, through different mechanisms, is contributing toward some of these mechanisms not to make fundamental shifts within particular state of political culture. Therefore, ironically, some stable trajectories are, in fact, due to the EU integration despite the lack of overtime change in parallel with the EU integration process.

Economic independence. Economic independence is the capacity of individuals to live and thrive in society based on private source of income that is independent from governmental sources of income or salary in private companies. In fact it is tantamount of an act of de-ploletarization. This mechanism explaining being and staying constantly out of the politics under all or under most of its forms, may act on both material and symbolic level; it may be objective, such as private ownership of means of production that have small but guaranteed market which is not subject to market fluctuations; or subjective, the feeling that "only sky is the limit", that there is no boss to be held accountable to, that no matter what happens in society the material survival is assured. The feeling of economic independence remains largely a matter of belief that is rarely, if any, put into question. On intellectual level, the subjects that express such belief agree that in the modern world nobody is really independent and that if somebody is not interested in politics, the politics is for sure interested in him, under the form of regulations and taxes. Yet, they trust their feelings that they could cope with all unexpected circumstances, if such circumstances arise, without the need of collective action under any form. Therefore, they do not consider changing their political habits. This feeling of economic independence, for those who stay out of the politics, is a sign of parochial behavior and appropriate understanding of the role of individuals in society. Feeling incapable of influencing the public affairs under any form, these subjects find in the small private sector the place to survive and the reason to be. The EU integration is only partly responsible for this type of behavior. It legitimizes the private property as basic pillar of the national economy; therefore, it legitimizes the small business as well, making culturally difficult if not impossible any return toward more planned economy. On this level, there are some important differences between Bulgaria and Macedonia; it is in Bulgaria that the EU culturally affects the feeling of security for those that profess economic interdependence; in Macedonia, where the small private ownership was legal and thriving since the 1960s, the EU does not act in the role of its institutional insurer. In the latter, it however promotes economic independence by enlarging the horizons for businesspersons. This promotion, however, in Macedonia, unlike Bulgaria, is also linked to rather high level of political participation, feeling of competence and readiness to contemplate collective action. So, this mechanism of economic independence may be part of two very different trajectories within the type of stable overtime political culture. It may lead to remaining within the realm of political parochialism, or, on the contrary, it may contribute toward remaining within high level of political participation; both look equally rational in terms of finding appropriate means toward desired goals; the former takes the economic independence as a way of detaching from the social tissue, the latter finds in it the better way of gaining more within the social and political tissue. The EU in all this plays secondary, but not negligible role of providing material and/or cultural incentives that keep the actors within these prefabricated paradigms. This mechanism that supports the stable overtime political behavior is a complex phenomenon, it includes elements from several models of

interpretation: institutional, strategic, and deep beliefs. It is both material and cultural as far as the material basis does not automatically imposes particular interpretation of social reality. In Bulgaria, this model reflects the deep held mistrust between people and the expressed desire to increase the level of individual protectiveness not by collective action, that would certainly imply more political participation, but though material separation that exists more in the minds of people only than in reality. This explains why Bulgarians who feel disillusioned from this mechanism of protection, instead of reconsidering more social ways of acting, prefer to withdraw even more from social affairs, either by social marginalization, or by spatial detachment from society. In Macedonia, where such economic independence requires substantial self-investment in politics, this mechanism, on the contrary, requires substantial level of social trust; being disillusioned therefore from this way of economic protection would rather lead people toward alternative social arrangements.

Spatial detachment from society. This result is not completely overlapping with economic or political migration, although it has all positive attributes that make it look like simple relocation to a country different from the country of origin. In Bulgaria, and in Macedonia to a lesser extent, this is a quite natural way of feeling in more security, and economic independence from the state or from large private interests, if more traditional way of reaching economic independence through small business has not achieved its desired goals. The level of social mistrust for these subjects, either Bulgarian or Macedonian, remains very high. Their social practices represent painful narratives of broken promises and friends' unreliability. Even the small increase of personal and family protection through less emotionally charged and materially easier ways seems at some point a dead-ended effort. One possible way of solving this dilemma would be to embrace again more collective, based on more trust, action, including political action. Another option, presented here, tries to reach the desired level of personal protection through physical, but not emotional, detachment from the country of origin. The level of anxiety of those moving abroad remains very high, making less likely the strategic explanation for this radical move. It is more the feeling of pain back home rather than intellectual pursuit of happiness abroad that stimulates this move. These people are escaping from, not going to. The final destination does not matter so much as the fact of being somewhere else. The EU integration plays certain, and sometimes very significant, role in this process. The opening borders and the freedom of movement represent one of the main pillars of the European idea and European Union. The process of spatial detachment is therefore also a complex phenomenon, institutional, strategic, and emotional, where each element boosts the forces of the others. The EU integration makes the choice of moving to Europe more rational; at the same time the ability to move abroad makes the pain of staying, for those who really feel the pain, more acute and impossible to sustain.

Social marginalization. On the top of political apathy, certain subjects, especially in Bulgaria, show signs of distress that are not accompanied with tangible plans either of reconnecting with larger social forces or of spatial detaching from society in order to alleviate the suffering. These subjects easily fall into substance abuse, which is sustained by recently developed culture of very high tolerance toward alcoholism. People stop feeling ashamed from the fact that they abuse with the consumption of alcohol. Some make their abuse public in an ironic local version of the western "coming out" gay

practices. They accept themselves with all their imperfections, old and new, turning the shame into some sort of personal pride. The role of the EU integration in this process is not paramount, although it is far from negligible. In a similar vein as it moves society culturally more toward accepting the private business as normal way of managing economy; it also increases the level of social tolerance toward all kind of new practices or old practices on higher level. Unlike those who move abroad in order to ease the pain of being home without personal protection, those who are marginalized stay in the homeland despite the pain, which is melted in substances. They fear being emotionally cut from home, but at the same time they fear the presence of other people that surround them. Only the alcohol appears to give them temporary relieve; where they feel capable of making logical statements, they prefer abstract topics, like art or philosophy; discussing current social topics make them easily very angry. Being sober is very frequently equal of being depressed by the lack of vision and feeling of being unable to be in control of own life.

      <u>Some social identifications</u>. Here I present a mechanism of social identification, of irrevocably linking some subjects' destinies with large groups that determine their stable political orientation, regardless of initially different levels of political participation. These groups may be organic, such as the first family, or artificial, such as a political party, or a combination of both, such as an ethnic community, especially a minority ethnic community. People are transferring to these groups the responsibility of their political choices as well as the level of political involvement. These groups provide the understanding of the place of the individuals in society and, if any, within the political process. As a matter of fact, the EU has very little say in anyone of these different groups of identification and as far as their stable overtime political trajectories are concerned; regardless of their initial level of intensity. Ironically, people with such strong referential attitudes toward certain groups, organic or artificial, are outside the real politics despite the deep conviction of some subjects to the contrary. Any act that may potentially be political, they see it only through the prism of larger group-based interests or values; the first among them being to be conformed and not to disturb the group status quo. They react with deep sadness of any real or potential split within the group; they fear it most of all, because it puts in jeopardy their proper identity. These groups act as emotional safe nets for these subjects; they increase the level of feeling of being protected and cared of to bearable levels; people with such strong attitudes toward groups would hardly seriously consider being detached geographically from their homeland; in Bulgarian case, they would also not cross the line between social drinking and substance abuse in order to ease the pain created by high levels of social mistrust. The family as a source of material and emotional comfort acts much better in Macedonia than Bulgaria; this at least partially explains the difference in the level of substance abuse in public between the two countries. The role of the family in both countries has another noticeable effect on the political participation; it opens the door to the cultural influence of Christian orthodox and Muslim religions and makes the active role in political life less likely. As far as the minority ethnic community or preferred political party are concerned, the two countries share very similar levels of identification. The creation of a group of identification, for the artificial groups such as political parties, is a complex phenomenon that only partly stays within institutional or strategic paradigms. It is conditioned upon other factors, such as attitudes toward state, nation, freedom, equality, historical facts, and neighboring

countries, among the others. Some of those are deeply symbolically embedded; the choice between freedom and equality and the choice to be able to make a choice between these concepts in first place as well as the attitudes toward minorities does not follow automatically any social prerequisite. They are also emotionally embedded; the feeling of joy or pain while cooperating is hardly a product of pure logic based on the benefits and costs of such cooperation.

Unlike the previous section, this one narrates two independent trajectories of those Bulgarian-only subjects that report increased sense of civic competence to understand the political process, and increased willingness for collective action that may transcend the narrow-defined ethnic boundaries that constitute the nationhood in this particular Balkan country. The EU integration plays a major role in both trajectories. There are no such trajectories in Macedonia, a phenomenon that is only partly due to the fact that this country is on different, earlier, institutional stage of the EU integration. The reason why these subjects evolve, unlike those who remain stable overtime, and why they evolve differently, can neither come out of the EU integration itself, nor of the specific position of each subject, material and cultural, on the onset of integration. It is the specific response on sub-cultural level, including specific social practices, to the EU integration as external stimuli, which creates the possibility of different trajectories of political culture development. The different mechanisms, acting on both material and symbolic levels, are partially overlapping.

Acquiring better sense of vision. The word "vision" associated with the individual impact of the EU integration has been ubiquitous in the interviews with subjects that report increased sense of political competence and more willingness for collective action. The EU gives them a better roadmap that makes future less fearful. The EU creates the impression that it represents the future; therefore Bulgaria has only to imitate it in order to move forward. The differences between more advanced European countries and Bulgaria is therefore not a source of anxiety; the new clearer roadmap links these different dots and shows the means of joining the more advanced nations. The wheel needs not to be reinvented; Bulgaria must just follow literally in order to move forward. The EU regulations are not burdensome; they are the means to make Bulgarians familiarize with the new roadmap.

Acquiring better sense of security. Another element that seems important to most subjects that report increased level of democratic political culture is the sense of better security directly linked to the fact of EU integration. "Security" here should be defined well outside the traditional concept of physical or material safety. It is also, and above all, feeling of more comfort associated with the inevitable stress of the unknown. The post-communist transition in Bulgaria has been largely associated with high level of stress coming from the unknown end- and mid- points of transition. After 45 years of society based on non-capitalist economy, non-democratic political regime, non-liberal values, and without liberal migration police in either direction, it should be of no surprise that there were hardly anyone in the country that could practically know where the country would head to and how a stable capitalist, democratic and liberal society should look like, outside the media-imported, meaning also media distorted, western models. The first years of post-communism were years of trials and errors, leaving many people with the bad impression that the situation in the country becomes worse and even less clear than

before. Some of these same people, once the EU integration takes off, are moving again toward more optimist interpretation of the situation. Moving along the new roadmap, these people report that they feel more secure.

  <u>Acquiring sense of dignity</u>. Although very few use the word "dignity" to describe their personal situation in relation to the EU integration, most Bulgarians that experience increased level of political competence and willingness for collective action report about increased sense of feeling good as persons, to see the results of their own work, and to be proud of it. These subjects report it over the background of sadness and humiliation that reigned in the first decade following the start of post-communist transition. At that time, they report to have lost the clear separation between "good" and "bad"; therefore they could not establish proper criteria to evaluate their own work; as a result, they could not claim being proud of what they were doing because of the sense of moral relativity that dominated society. They were not sure whether what they were doing was "right" or "wrong"; the only thing that mattered then was biological survival. The EU integration began restoring the sense of personal dignity. It began by the simple fact that the country was considered ready to begin accession negotiations and, later, to be invited to join the Union. In the sea of self-doubt, this process was perceived as if at least something in the country was done or could have been done right. With the process of integration under way, some subjects reclaimed being proud of their work by seeing it as small, but tangible elements in the new roadmap of integration. The EU integration restored the sense of moral absolutism, that some things are morally good. Feeling attached to these good things made some subjects feel personally ennobled.

  <u>Acquiring sense of freedom</u>. People that report increase sense of political competence and willingness for collective action are also reporting increased sense of having real choices in areas where they felt stuck for many years earlier. These choices may apply to matters such as life styles, sexual preferences, dressing, hairstyles, traveling, working, and hobbies. They may also apply to setting different time and subject priorities. The sense of having choice is born when the sense of emergence is put to rest. It is only partly due to better material standard of living. On the contrary, some subjects report, with certain sense of dignity, that they have chosen less lucrative alternatives because of the better sense of meaning attached to them. It is not any more, and for everyone, the best option associated with the higher material return. Making children, passing time in the nature alone, having fun with friends may become more important above certain point of material satisfaction than accumulating more and more money. Furthermore, making money becomes again more and more attached to some moral foundations. Making money per se, in some social circles, is not anymore considered as the only way to be present in society.

  <u>Acquiring new sense of teamwork</u>. Without exception, the Bulgarians who report increased political competence and willingness for collective action also report increased ability of teamwork, real or desired. They largely attribute this new feature to the EU integration as symbolic teamwork promoter. Traditionally the level of social trust in Bulgaria is low; the first post-communist decade, which was the time of biological survival, only further contributed to this phenomenon; the "other" was perceived largely in terms of a competitor that may pull important economic resources for himself and thus diminish the one's chances of survival. The teamwork, therefore, in all its forms was largely inhibited. It was not supported on any level of discursively. Being teamwork

oriented was tantamount to return to "old communist times" of collective behavior. The EU integration succeeded, within some social circles, in restoring the image of teamwork as positive value in itself, irrespectively of the social and political system, socialist or capitalist.

All these mechanisms, acting on either material or symbolic levels or on both, are common for most of those who report increased sense of civic competence and willingness of collective action. There are, however, two very different trajectories within this group of subjects. One of the trajectories increases the above-mentioned elements of democratic political culture, but pushes the subjects away from domestic political realm; the other one, on the contrary, makes the subjects much more involved with the domestic political system. In brief, the first trajectory creates more Europeans than Bulgarians; the other makes Bulgarians politically more active. The only factor that seems to contribute to this diversity of outcomes is the deep feeling of national group shame that is produced in the first group as opposed to the second, where the corresponding feeling is that of national pride. Both these feelings of shame and pride are attributable to the influence of the EU integration and to the sub-cultural perception of the chances of Bulgaria to go along the new roadmap. The first group answers this question with "no"; they do not see how Bulgaria can achieve the high EU criteria without changes in the way most people think. According to them, becoming European is not just a process of performing certain routine tasks; it also requires a profound identity change, a process of separation with the former values, history, and heroes. Being Bulgarian without saying goodbye to these old traits of identity makes these subjects feel ashamed to be part of such backward nation; they prefer to identify themselves with the EU as a beacon of civilization and high standards. They do not hesitate to embarrass Bulgaria anytime and anyhow they can; they would gladly defend any cause they consider just, in which Bulgaria is put on the bench of the defendants. On the contrary, the second group feels profoundly proud of being part of nation that has been attributed place within the EU. They feel confident about the chances of the country to fulfill all the conditionality that is required as member of the Union. There are no inhibiting national traits that make impossible such move forward; being European is not associated with abandoning itself, but is to acquire new progressive traits on the top of the already existing old traits. The biographical interviews show that it is this dichotomy pride-shame that is accountable for this trajectory diversity. It is this dichotomy that accounts for later institutional and strategic preferences, and not the other way around. People that feel ashamed for being Bulgarians along the process of EU integration, and because of this process, are much more likely to becomes detached symbolically and materially for Bulgarian social and political system. People that gain additional sense of pride within this process, are motivated to become more and more attached to their native society under all its forms. The emotional level is therefore the first level of reaction that allows for subsequent rational choices.

There are no Macedonians that experience similar pro-democratic cultural changes under the influence of the EU integration. This suspicious absence is, of course, partly due to the fact that the country is at the different stage of EU integration itself. Considering that Bulgarians that are positively affected by the EU integration are without exception actively involved with the process of EU integration may indicate that similar positive trend would become reality in Macedonia once the country experience similar

EU influence. However, this would be an arbitrary and too optimistic anticipation. The Macedonians that have potential to experience such positive surge in their political culture in the future do not filter directly the EU through the dichotomy national pride-national shame. The EU is directly not related to this dichotomy; it is, however, indirectly related to it through the comparison with other regional states, especially some former Yugoslav republics and Albania. The history of common federal statehood and subordinate position of Albanians in modern Macedonia have constructed a system of coordination within which the Macedonians feel proud every time they may do at least as well as their former Yugoslavia brethren and feel ashamed every time they do not do at least as well as neighboring Albania; the EU is considered neutral arbiter in this comparison. As far as the EU integration is concerned, the Macedonians would feel very proud if they manage to join the Union before some of the former Yugoslav republics and would feel very ashamed if they manage to cross the finish line of integration only after Albania. In either case, the dichotomy pride-shame is not related directly to the feeling of being Macedonian, which is unequivocally charged with positive connotations. Another reason why Macedonian could not pass through the same positive trajectories as Bulgarians do, is the fact that the group of Macedonians best prepared to follow the trajectory of "Europeanization", is already situated at the top of the democratic political culture having all necessary elements highly developed. If this group, for any reason, and under the impact of the EU integration, moves toward abandoning political activity on national level, this would represent a step backward, not forward, in their democratic political culture. Finally, those Macedonians who have potential for democratic culture increase appear not to link the EU integration with more opportunities to act home in any domain, political or economic. Some of them may move abroad, some may withdraw from large society toward family or toward small business; they have no particular hopes vested with the EU; this makes me doubt that they would live through this process of integration by acquiring better sense of vision, security, dignity, freedom, and teamwork. They would rather remain socially and politically marginalized, living either within or outside the country.

The following section narrates the trajectories of subjects, both in Bulgaria and Macedonia, that report decreasing sense, up to its total elimination, of voting, of feeling civically competent, and of willing to contemplate collective action. In most cases, the role of the EU integration is important, if not paramount; without it these trajectories could not take place for some of the subjects.

Economic independence. In both countries the feeling of economic independence is tantamount of feeling free not to engage in any public topic as far as there is no direct impact on the source of economic independence. People feel that they become bosses and do not need to report to anybody anymore; they need small but guaranteed market which is not subjects to frequent fluctuations; they feel independent from any large social projects; and their attitudes toward the politics reflect the parochial logic of relative isolation. The EU integration, as in the section that narrates the stable trajectory, is partly responsible for this type of behavior. There are some nuances for Bulgaria and Macedonia regarding the sense of economic independence and its impact on the voting behavior. In Bulgaria, people are much more cynical toward the politics; the economic independence is therefore a way to get out of the dirt, to make a family nest far away

from the storms of life. In Macedonia, the attitudes toward the politics is much less cynical; therefore, the business persons try to stay clear from being too much engaged with one particular political faction; the business is symbolically located above the politics, which are dividing factor; in Bulgaria the business is symbolically located outside the politics, at the social periphery. Therefore, there is a qualitative difference between Bulgarians and Macedonians who do stop voting as a result of the economic independence, with or without the EU integration impact. In Bulgaria, these people have been feeling originally politically less competent and socially mistrustful; stopping voting has cut the last cord that attached them to the large social projects. In Macedonia, these people have been feeling originally both competent and/or socially trustful; for them stopping voting does not cut the links with large social projects, it makes them feel only above the factional divisions linked to the democratic political life.

  "The game is over" mentality. Another mechanism, consistent with the "exit" strategy, having strong impact on the voting behavior in Bulgaria only, is the feeling that there is nothing to be done in order to change the social reality, that the big decisions have been already made. Making individual or collective contributions is a waste of time, money and energy, which may be much better spent in making money or in making nothing. The EU integration plays a role in this reasoning. On the one hand, political discourse, during the integration, puts accent on the European conditionality. The impression most Bulgarians have on this issue is that the country had lost all its power of bargain the day it decided to submit its application for EU membership. From that time on, Brussels imposed its will, and Bulgarians had to accept the consequences. The wave of multinational corporations that entered the country at about the same time was presented as a direct consequence of the EU integration; therefore it is of no surprise that most Bulgarians that lost jobs in the small retail and service businesses link their personal loss with the EU integration. If economic independence was valued because of its capacity to make people feel free from social links and responsibilities, the loss of this opportunity forced them again into proletariat. At this point this re-proletarization has not brought any re-politization; it seems that other psychological factors such as mistrust, anger and blame against society interfere with the possibility to get back into politics. Such people are at crossroad; the other options they have if they decide not to reintegrate society are immigration, alcoholism, or anti-social behavior.

  "Showing the politicians" mentality. Another symbolic mechanism, this time consistent with the "voice" strategy, makes sense of the voting absenteeism with the reasoning that this is the appropriate way of showing the politicians the lack of respect from the ordinary citizens. It is reported in Bulgaria only. This mentality is linked with the strong feeling of pain about the current social and political processes. It is not because these people do not want to vote, or because they feel civically incompetent that they have decided not to participate in political process; on the contrary, they feel competent enough and they strongly convictions that the ultimate way to try to influence the politicians is by sending message that they do not want to be part of the "democratic masquerade". They would gladly return to the politics if they see enough proof of mutual respect from the politicians. This mechanism, on symbolical level, is partly triggered by the EU integration. The EU is blamed for not have delivered on its promises for better quality of life, understood as more disposable income and more transparent administration, both being important parts, people believe, of the integration process.

People feel they have done their part of the deal by reducing consumption for years and accepting all sorts of new regulations coming from above; they now want to see the other side fulfilling its part of the contract. I put this behavior in the group of negative impacts because there is, so far, no indication that supports that such political strategy could have any positive and pro-democratic influence on the Bulgarian political life. This "voice" is largely unheard, which makes the politicians feel even less pressured from below to change their way of doing politics. There is yet another way to understand this "voice"; some citizens want the have real choice of party programs. The EU integration so far has led to uniformity of programs, which were largely following the EU conditionality. The choice between parties, as revealed early in the literature review by Raik and Bideleux, was not a choice between programs but between the best candidates to listen to and to execute the EU orders. With Bulgaria already within the EU, Bulgarian citizens now want this to change; they want back the democratic process, they want back their parties. They blame the EU for the current situation and expect the EU to allow the parties to be different in order to reflect the social interests.

    <u>Disillusionment with some social identifications</u>. A few Bulgarians make identifications with their social and political roles indirectly, through their larger social identifications, linked to their family history or to other factors that occurred later in life. As far as these identifications remain strong, these people feel confident to maintain their way of participation without change. When disillusionment occurs, this process is put in danger; people feel betrayed, without orientation, in need of isolation in order to make their mind. In Bulgaria, there are acts of disillusionment that relate to national and party affiliation. For some, taking part in the politics makes sense only within a polity where the ethnic group they belong to constitutes majority within general population. These people would not vote if they were given the chance to immigrate and to naturalize abroad. In other words, for such Bulgarians, being political makes sense only in Bulgaria and as far as Bulgarians represent ethnic majority. The manipulation of statistical data that shows the inevitable decline of the ethnic Bulgarians within the country acts as powerful inhibitor for political action. The EU integration may be partly blamed for being co-responsible for this demographic crisis. Another strong identification, this time represented by a political party, may also lead to disillusionment, and therefore to political apathy. In Bulgaria, such disillusionment occurs both in political left and right. On the left, the Communist party heir suffered defeat in the 2009 parliament election because of its strategic political alliance with the ethnic Turks Movement of Rights and Freedoms. People with strong identifications to this party felt betrayed by the party leadership and refused to cast ballots. The EU is associated with this alliance because it was presented to the public as having the EU blessing on the final stretch before the EU membership.

    <u>Ethnic minorities fear</u>. The previous mechanism is partially linked to the fear of ethnic minorities. Both countries' majorities have uneasy relations with Turks and Roma (Bulgaria) and with Albanians (Macedonia). Under some conditions, such fear could have led to increased politization. In fact, there is no indication that this would be the case in either country. On the contrary, in Bulgaria a few people would turn their backs to the politics and/or to the country because of the fear that the country is not "their" country anymore; in Macedonia, the fear of minorities leads to more social mistrust. In the latter case, the role of the EU integration is explicitly reported in some individual

interviews; the Union is presented as malicious external force that divides society by forcing on it special requirements to protect minority rights. Without this interference, these individuals report to feel much less fearful and therefore much more ready to contemplate acts of cooperation with local Albanians.

Conclusions

The two case studies, Bulgaria and Macedonia, show some interesting phenomena that do not fall within the diachronic logic of EU integration influence over the post-communist democratic culture development. Macedonia is not following on the steps of Bulgaria; it moves in different direction despite the identical foreign source of asymmetrical power relation, the EU. Some of the difference between the two countries can be attributed to the different starting points as far as the political culture is concerned. For example, Bulgarians are socially less trustful and politically more cynical than their Macedonian counterparts. Some of the differences, however, cannot be explained with this initial divergence. People with similar starting conditions evolve in different directions; the political trajectories in Bulgaria, outside the group of directly influenced as part of the chains of communication that link the EU and Bulgaria, are predominantly negative; people become politically less active, less competent and even less trustful as a result of the EU integration. In Macedonia, where the process of integration is still on much earlier stage, such negative evolution is the only direction of change. When put within the framework of dynamic interaction, Bulgaria and Macedonia show very different outcomes; Bulgarians as nation become less motivated to take part in the political process; Macedonians, on the contrary, become more motivated. The clash of similar bipolar set of political views in both countries gives dominance to different discourses regarding the political culture.

These different outcomes in Bulgaria and Macedonia, as different from each other, fall also partly outside the scale of influence within the traditional literature that makes the foreign influence contingent upon the transfer of institutions or of the domestic strategic choice or of any combination between them as part of the logic of rational choice neo-institutionalism. A complex factor grouping beliefs, such as the place of the religion in politics, attitudes, such as the role of external factors, and emotions, such as fear and shame, sets in motion different national trajectories, and different sub-cultural trajectories within each country that constantly defy both institutional and rational choice paradigms. The cultural level of social reality, the symbols and significances that are not firmly attached to formal institutions or interests, is relatively autonomous and creates its proper logic of social development, relatively independent from both formal institutions and instrumental rationality.

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