

## FROM THE HISTORICAL TYRANNY OF THE BALKANS TO PLURALISM: A NEW HISTORICAL- GEOGRAPHICAL READING

**Emilia SARNO \***

*\* Università Telematica Pegaso, Napoli, Italy,  
e-mail: emilia.sarno@tiscalinet.it*

**Abstract:** *From the Historical Tyranny of the Balkans to Pluralism: a New Historical-Geographical Reading.* The paper focuses the vision of the Balkan area, labelled as the ‘powder keg’ of Europe. The literature is discussed analysing the relationship between the term Balkan and the territory and how it acquired a political significance. Furthermore the ‘weight of history’ on territory geography, for the particular position of the Balkans in Europe, is discussed. Then the geographic features and the fundamental anthropological-territorial models are analysed allowing to re-consider the complexity of this composite region. The Balkan region is here re-interpreted looking at the major environmental factors and anthropological-territorial models developed in it, inasmuch as the region identity can be in the most authentic way understood through this factors. This approach can be considered as the starting point for a responsible pluralism in Balkans, whilst this new vision is needed to the UE which has to see this region in a different way.

**Rezumat:** *De la tirania istorică din Balcani la pluralism: o nouă viziune istorico-geografică.* Lucrarea se concentrează pe viziunea asupra zonei Balcanilor, etichetată drept ‘butoiul cu pulbere’ al Europei. Bibliografia este prezentată ca analizând legătura dintre termenul Balcani și teritoriu, precum și modul în care a dobândit o semnificație politică. În plus, este discutată și ‘greutatea istoriei’ asupra teritoriului geografic, din punct de vedere al localizării geografice a Balcanilor în Europa. Apoi, sunt analizate particularitățile geografice și modelele antropologico-teritoriale, ceea ce permite reconsiderarea complexității acestei regiuni compozite. Pornind de aici, regiunea Balcanilor este re-



interpretată făcând referire la factorii de mediu cei mai importanți și la modelele antropologico-teritoriale din cadrul său, în măsura în care identitatea regiunii poate fi înțeleasă în cel mai autentic mod, prin acești factori. Abordarea poate fi considerată ca punct de plecare pentru un pluralism responsabil în Balcani, în timp ce este nevoie de această nouă viziune pentru Uniunea Europeană care trebuie să privească regiunea Balcanilor într-un mod diferit.

**Key words:** *Balkans, identity, EU, landmarks, anthropological-territorial models.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Balcani, identitate, Uniunea Europeană, atracții turistice, modele antropologico-teritoriale.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary redefinition of the states of the Balkan area requires a new reflection on the historical-political process which has conditioned this change and on the image of the area which has continually labelled it as the ‘powder keg’ of Europe and developed expressions such as ‘Balkanized’ or ‘Balkanization’. According to Todorova (1997, p. 303), “The recurrent image of the Balkans, which first developed in its general sense around the period of the First World War, has been constant through time and has assumed the function of a dissertation”.

History is not the only factor involved, the “tyranny of geography” has made of the Balkans a particular region in which the many different ethnic groups and their identity has been a constant source of conflict. An understanding of the complex ‘tyranny’ of geography and history is fundamental to the knowledge of this large land area in order to both reconstruct its social-geographical characteristics and to be able to elaborate correctly the terms of the present-day dialogue with the European Union (EU).

Such a study necessarily requires an investigation into identity<sup>1</sup> in an attempt to show how some ‘fixed characteristics’ have been imposed on the area, whereas what is necessary is that any reading of the Balkans must start from the territory itself. It is only by examining the anthropological models and the territorial organization of the Balkans that such a complex mosaic can achieve the awareness of pluralism.

## 2. THE BALKAN TOPONYM AND THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY ON GEOGRAPHY

The geography determinism of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries reasoned by means of paradigms and wanted to classify, as they did with the Italian and Spanish peninsulas, the Balkan peninsula, which politically did not coincide with a single nation and whose borders were not easily identifiable (Bracewell, Drace-Francis, 1999).

---

1) Theme of identity is very important in geography; see some authors that represent a point of reference Paasi, 1995; Häkli, Paasi, 2003; Banini, 2009; Roca, Claval, Agnew, 2011.

The Balkans were defined as “a peninsula of the Mediterranean, extending south from Cyprus to the Danube and the Sava in the north” (Castellan, 1999, p.11), this definition however, was far from unanimous. Similarly, various definitions of the northern frontier were given; according to Vialli (1969) it should have coincided with the Trieste-Odessa geographical line, but which, according to others, coincided with the Kupa-Sava-Danube river borders, starting from the city of Fiume and reaching the mouth of the Danube. As Prévélakis (1997) has stated, there is no clear line of demarcation in the north, such as the Alps or the Pyrenees in Italy and Spain, which would indicate where the peninsula ends. Even should we consider the Balkan mountains as some kind of natural frontier, the exclusion of Romania and Bulgaria due to various factors, would not take into account their historical-political role in the area. The rivers of the Balkans, such as the Danube, make communication easier rather than create an obstacle. Franzinetti (2001) states that the idea of the Balkan mountains as inaccessible is contradicted by the presence of the wide Danube plain: there are here no insurmountable natural obstacles. If the southern border is apparently defined by the Mediterranean, the typically Mediterranean characteristics of Greece have little in common with the north.

The Balkans is therefore a composite geographic macro-region, which extends from the jagged Greek peninsula to the Danube and Europe. If this is the case, how did such an evidently inappropriate name ever come to be applied? The term Balkans is based on a mistaken idea, that is to say the Balkan mountain chain was believed to cross the whole of the northern part of the peninsula ranging from east to west. It is a rather modest chain of mountains and so the choice made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to choose it as an identifying element was purely nominal.

It is the name, rather than the geographical reality, which has acquired a political meaning: it indicated a vast area which, due to Turkish influence, had to be distinguished from Western European culture. The West had for a long time never even posed the question of the existence of the Balkans as a geographical reality (Wolff, 1994). The Balkan mountain chain had always existed, as Mazower (2000; 2007) comments, but it was only the crisis of the Turkish Empire which led the Europeans to try to give a name to, and define, the area.

The Western perception of the Balkans developed in relation to political factors such as the dissolution of the Turkish Empire (Duroselle, 1965; Jelavich, 1983). The term ‘Balkanization’ was used to indicate the existence of numerous fragmented states. They were an example of a political instability which was not considered as something positive in German politics, as at the time German politicians exalted nationalism. Todorova (1997) has noted that the expression ‘Balkanization’ appeared soon after the First World War and the first use of the term in the New York Times was on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1918. The journalist Rathenau used the word to indicate the apocalyptic devastation which might have struck Europe if strong nation states were not created. From that moment on the Balkan peninsula became the powder keg of Europe in the *weltanschauung* of the time. The term Balkanisation, even though it has been used in other contexts, seems to have become linked in particular to the Balkan area itself as if it were its specific characteristic accentuated by the wars of the final decades of the last century<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> In her study Todorova (1997) traces the history of the term Balkans and gives interesting information and documents. She also traces the linguistic origin of the word.

The political crisis of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought the area under the scrutiny of the West while the geographers were trying to define its name and the term Balkan came to the fore at the expense of other names such as South-Eastern Europe. According to Drace-Francis (1999), «South-Eastern Europe is first used in German in 1861, it was theorized and popularized by the geographer Theobald Fischer in an article of 1893 and another one of 1909 and it was subsequently promoted, notably by the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga, as a neutral term in the wake of the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913».

The name found favour with the geographers of that time who tended to use neutral terms, but it was not easy to agree on what was meant by, and the extent of the Eastern area, given that the heart of Eastern Europe was the Russian Empire. The problem was to define which was the southern limit of Eastern Europe. For this reason the Italian geographer Balbi (1840) used the term Eastern Peninsula, wanting to indicate the territorial extension of the East. Balbi applied the most neutral available term, which however made a precise identification of the area.

Laurie James (1842) chose to use the term Slavo-Grecian Peninsula with reference to the ethnic groups most present in the area. Drace-Francis (1999) relies on widespread school text-books and diplomatic documents and shows how the use of different terms was current up until the 1912-1913 wars, after which the term Balkans prevails to indicate the dissolution of the Turkish Empire and the unstable situation of the new states.

The denomination, formalized on the basis of a geopolitics vision and on the history of the area, seems to have roots in the far past based on the Eastern question and the creation of the Ottoman Empire until the Balkan wars (Vezenkov, 2006). The negative connotations of the word have developed through a long period of time in the general perception of Europeans (Russo, 1998). The area had for long been the domain of Turks and Moslems, and so represented a 'Near East' which was seen in opposition to Western European culture<sup>3</sup>. We agree with Duhamel (1941) that the term Balkan is the product of the tyranny of both the physical and historical environment.

### **3. THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY: A MOSAIC TO THE EAST OF THE WEST**

Given the peninsulas geographical position between East and West, it was in the ancient world considered useful by the Romans as a means of controlling commercial trade routes. The area starts to acquire its particular aspect when the Western Roman Empire fell into crisis and fragmentation. The Balkans remained unified under a single political body, the Eastern Roman Empire, but was in reality a mosaic of peoples and cultures as the linguistic differences highlight: "apart from Greek, which was the ecclesiastical language of church worship and above all of culture, the languages of Slav, Bulgarian and Serb also highlight the presence of various ethnic groups" (Castellan, 1999, p.52).

---

<sup>3</sup> In a latent way, the issues linked the Balkans were also related to the ideas of Diaspora and conflict between minorities. The process is well-known, as Slavs and Albanians emigrated to the Italian side of the Adriatic throughout the modern age. See Lizza, 2002.

The historical ethnic-linguistic groups present in the area are the Greeks, the Illyrian-Albanians, the Dacians and the Romanians, the major group being the Slavs.

These last were the most widespread and were formed by a number of sub-groups – Bulgarians, Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The Turks later added to this ethnic mix. The area is thus a mosaic in which the contrast is further marked by the presence of three major religions: Catholicism, Orthodox, and Moslem.

The history of the Eastern Roman Empire was marked by political and religious conflict between the Byzantine-Greeks and the Slav and Croat tribes. The Orthodox church imposed itself over the entire area and by so doing created a breach with the rest of Western Europe. It also refused to recognize Papal authority and has thus further contributed to the identity of the Balkans as a reality distinct from the West.

Two distinct factors emerge from the X to the XV centuries: the area was a mosaic of ethnicities in which the Greek-Orthodox was predominant.

The former factor becomes the predominant during the five centuries of Ottoman dominion. The Ottomans adopted a form of administration in which populations were grouped together without respecting ethnic and territorial differences in order to facilitate the administrative tasks of the imperial system; it thus favoured the consolidation of the most important ‘millet’, the Greek-Orthodox group, and promoted a social-economic organization of a feudal type.

The Ottoman system oppressed the area and made it particularly backward economically. At the same time the area both preserved and acquired a hybrid dimension even in its various names; “through the centuries the area has been called different names by Western observers, often termed ‘Turkey in Europe’ or ‘The Turkey of Europe’. The Ottomans labelled the territory Rum-ili or Rumeli, meaning ‘the land of the Romans’, because the area was the heir to the Eastern Roman Empire” (Franzineti, 2001 p.12)

Between the XIV and XVII centuries the Ottomans conquered the Balkan peninsula, the Near East and the North African Coast, coming to dominate part of the Mediterranean and creating a crisis in Christendom. By the end of the XVI century they had occupied Thessaly, Macedonia, Wallachia and Bulgaria, whilst Turkish pirates ravaged the Mediterranean attacking the Venetian and Genoese fleets. One of their main objectives was Constantinople because of its strategic position. After a first siege in 1422, the Sultan Mohammed II conquered the city in May 1453 as proof of the invincibility of the Turks. They then turned their attention East, to a number of Asian territories and then to North Africa. Turkish expansion stopped when the Vienna siege failed, in 1683, as the Turks aimed at conquering the heart of Europe<sup>4</sup>.

The Ottoman conquest of Hungarian territories as well as Moldavia and Wallachia, (principalities of Romania), demonstrates what has been stated in the first paragraph: these lands share with Southern areas a great deal of history, which is why they constitute some kind of unity. It is evident the heterogeneous nature of the Turkish Empire which would eventually lead to division and dysfunction in the state organisation and finally to conflict between the different ethnic groups of the Empire<sup>5</sup> (5).

---

<sup>4</sup> With the defeat of the Turks, the battle of Vienna in September 1683 ended the long siege, at which the city had been subjected. The Turks had already made an attempt at conquering Vienna in 1529.

<sup>5</sup> The first country to obtain freedom was Greece in 1821. The Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, from which Romania would be develop, obtained independence in 1859. In the 70’s of

The mosaic formation of the Balkans starts to get the upper hand following the dissolution of the Turkish Empire. This was not willed by the European powers but it was the will of the various ethnic groups present in the territory to obtain full independence and freedom. (Dogo, 1994). If the dissolution of the Empire was seen as something upsetting to the European powers, the process of the creation of new free states was a necessary phenomenon (Kostis, 2001). In 1918 the geo-political map of the Balkans changes and new states such as Albania, Turkey, the Kingdoms of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia<sup>6</sup> are added to the 'older' states of Greece, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Romania. The Kingdoms of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia were later to be part of the new state of Yugoslavia, and, as Rothschild (1974, p. 205) observes "the Serbian government had never been very enthusiastic about the unification of the area (Yugoslavia): its principal interest was to obtain an outlet to the Aegean sea and the Adriatic, not to protect the Croatian and Slovenian ports from usurpation". Serbian fears were not unfounded because the Yugoslavia monarchy (1929-1943) aimed at centralisation and tried to annul the historical borders between the regions, which created nationalist resentment.

The Second World War created havoc but nothing changed in the political geography of the Balkans after 1945: a major event was however, the establishment of anti-democratic regimes - right-wing and military in Greece and Communist in the other states - whilst the Yugoslavia continued to keep uneasily together different ethnic groups.

The establishment of Communism, however, was not uniform, and "Tito initiated an unorthodox form of the idea in Yugoslavia. A part of this 'unorthodoxy' was in Yugoslavia's international 'non-alignment' – a term which developed in the 1950's to indicate those states who chose not to be allied either to the Western powers or the Soviet Bloc" (Franzineti, 2001, p.69).

Tito's 'Communist heresy' was followed by Albania and its leader, Enver Hoxha, was hostile to any rapprochement with the Soviet Union, which gained him the sympathy of Communist China. Furthermore, the image of Bulgaria as always being faithful to the Soviet model of communism needs to be re-assessed if we consider the popular protests against the government and the actions taken in the 1950's and 60's (Crampton, 1987, Limenopoulou, 2004).

The geographical closeness of the Western powers probably played an important role; pressure from Great Britain or the United States and the possibility of commercial exchanges with other European states influenced these communist states in their option non-alignment. As far as the ex-Yugoslavia is concerned, apart from the crisis of the regime itself, each ethnic-cultural group desired to be free and autonomous and was conscious that it was not necessary to remain part of an artificially created state. It probably was the last painful action of the process of 'balkanization' which had begun about a century

---

the XIX century many small states such as Montenegro had started to form and gain independence in the central Balkans.

<sup>6</sup> The independence of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was proclaimed in 1918. The monarchy aimed at centralisation and the old historical regions were re-organised into 'Banovines' – areas deliberately created to annul the old historical ethnic regions. New states were created and the older ones tried to strengthen themselves. The formation of the states of Turkey and Bulgaria represent a watershed in this process.

before. Here 'balkanization' means the process of national self-determination which takes place in a dramatic and violent way<sup>7</sup> (Nation, 2003).

#### 4. GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL-TERRITORIAL MODELS

The Balkans is a complex and variegated region due also to historical and geographical factors as we have mentioned. We now re-interpret this history and look at the major environmental factors involved and what anthropological-territorial models have developed, because it is from these that the region's identity can be understood. The major environmental factors involved are the maritime climate, insularity, and the mountainous and flatland areas.

The Mediterranean has many basins and the coast is the Balkans' outlet onto this sea, a major area of interaction through the centuries, both from a human and geographical point of view. It is also the most densely populated and the most frequented by tourists.

The Adriatic and the Ionian, as well as the Marmara and Black seas, are all major arteries of communication as they are indispensable passageways towards Asia and Africa. The Aegean sea is fragmented into innumerable small islands which make it an integral part of a process of territorialisation which has favoured both commercial and human contact (for instance Athenian thalassocracy) as well as being a theatre for religious conflict between Catholics and Moslems.

The second factor, insularity, is functional to the coast, as can be seen in its most evident form around Greece as well as in the small islands along the Croatian and Montenegrin coasts which are an extension of the inhabited areas.

Insularity however, is also an internal characteristic because this fragmented geomorphological structure has made the valleys or the basins similar to islands or mountains. Fragmentation is, in fact, a fundamental aspect of the geomorphology of the Balkans: mountain chains and valleys alternate. Mountain chains form a barrier to the east of the Balkans, in the north we have the Carpathians, in the centre itself the Balkan chain and to the south the Rhodopes. To the west, mountain chains and valleys alternate from the north to the south up to the mountains of the Peloponnese, whilst the coast is dominated by the Dinaric Alps.

This fragmentation has been caused by the geographical complexity which derives from the position of the peninsula, midway between different tectonic plates. "In the Balkans all the geological areas, especially the most recent, are distinguished by constant activity. The young age of the geological structures create a geological puzzle" (Prévélakis 1997, p.19). A distinguishing feature of this geological puzzle is the vast Balkan Danube valley (about 1,200km long) which has always allowed, as we have already mentioned, an

---

<sup>7</sup> According to a study made by the American Center for the Control and Prevention of Diseases (Atlanta, Georgia, USA), and published in 2000 in *The Lancet Medical Journal*, between 1998 and 1999, 12,000 people were killed in Kosovo due to war. In 1993 Resolution 827 of the UN Security Council opened an International Criminal Court case in The Hague against Yugoslavia, with the aim of reviewing the crimes committed in the country since its dissolution in 1991. The International Criminal Court convicted 161 people of Crimes against humanity and genocide. See also Dell'Agnes and Squarcina, 2002.

easy access to central Eastern Europe. “Surrounding and separating mountain massifs, valleys and highlands make the peninsula more inhabitable” (Castellan, 1999, p.19), but above all they create valleys and basins crossed by rivers. The most important of these is the Danube, as it crosses Europe from West to East and is for the greater part navigable. It moves from the Black Forest to Bavaria and Austria, continues along the southern part of Slovakia and Hungary and marks the border between Serbia and Romania before flowing into the Black Sea. The description of its path demonstrates how it has been one of the major unifying factors in the complex geography of this area. It was, in fact, one of the major communication routes between East and West, together with the Via Egnatia (Heywood, 2002).

The four environmental factors just mentioned represent landmarks which are used as points of reference for some current anthropological - territorial models. The sea as a fragmented source of wealth, even in its insularity, is rich in fishing and coastal tourism. This environment has created its own anthropological model which was represented in the past by the city of Dubrovnik as far as commerce and international contacts are concerned. Dubrovnik is a model which, for fishing, has favoured continual mobility (Dogo, Pitassio, 2009). The coastal and insular areas have been revitalised by tourism, which is today one of the most fundamental factors in the economic development of the Balkans.

Another anthropological - territorial model is that of the mountainous and piedmont areas, where shepherds and farmers have been active, and where the Byzantine system survived to Turkish domination. The shepherds and farmers had only to pay the taxes imposed but were also granted a certain amount of freedom and consequently, were later to become primarily responsible for nationalist conflicts. The different ethnic groups were allowed to live according to their customs; the Albanians, for example, lived in ‘gjitonie’ that is to say, neighbourhoods formed according to the degree of family relationships, a fact which made them extremely united and enclosed in their communities. In the same way, the Croats had ‘Zadrugas’, which entailed the living together of many people in an area or even in the same large dwelling place (Roth, Brunnbauer, 2006). In the mountain and piedmont areas, municipalities and villages had become through the centuries the backbone of the territorial organisation of the Balkans: they prefigured on a microscopic scale, the nation states and their relationships (Castellan, 1999). They became areas of exchange and of manufacturing as well as artistic production. The main activity was transhumance, and the Balkan area has been marked by different forms of migration and different social groups of nomadic pastors, (Wallachians, the Romanians of the Carpathians, the Greek Sarakatsani), representing a frequent anthropological model.

Today, transhumance is less important and agricultural development has replaced it. It was in the lowlands that since the XV century the ‘timar’ was in force. This was a socio-economic model which used the land as a benefit in exchange for services and was based on the exploitation of the peasants. In effect, it was a form of feudalism. If this aspect is well-known, much less well-known are the rebellions of the peasants and the compromises which the Imperial structure adopted in the 18th century as an incentive for agriculture. This last, whilst having a highly negative connotation in the collective imagination of the peasants, remains the main characteristic of the economy of the Balkans where agriculture is a vital sector (Jordan, 2009). This explains the hostility with which collectivisation was received in a number of Balkan states, and which to this day has an effect on the national GDP. According to Volk (2010), in Albania, the primary sector counts for 18.5% of the GDP,



in Bosnia Herzegovina 9.1% and in Croatia 6.4%, in Macedonia 10.8%, in Montenegro 7.5%, and in Serbia 12%. A certain reduction is noticed in countries like Romania and Moldavia where agriculture counts for 5-7% of the GDP, whilst in Turkey and Bulgaria, it counts for 11-13%. These percentages<sup>8</sup> are far higher than in any other European Union countries (Monastiriotes, Petrakos, 2009).

In such a complex reality, where different anthropological and territorial models exist, we also have many different urban models (Roth, Brunnbauer, 2006; Dogo, Pitassio, 2009). The centres of this urban reality are the villages, the agro-towns and the cities, a reality which goes back to the ancient Greek city states. The cities developed along the coast whilst the mountainous landscape conditioned their formation, which was usually along the peripheral areas rather than the centre of the peninsula. Scopje is the only city of the Balkans to be found in a relatively central position. In relation to their location, the cities have developed different characteristics. The coastal cities are more Mediterranean and are centres of commerce and exchange. Good examples are Dubrovnik and Istanbul. The cities of the interior ended up assuming, above all, administrative functions according to a precise plan of the Ottoman Empire<sup>9</sup>.

“The Ottomans distinguished between the ‘kasaba’, a municipality whose function was primarily commercial and based on artisanship, the ‘palanka’, a fortified village or municipality and the ‘varosh’, the old Byzantine municipalities which indicated the Christian sectors of the city” (Castellan, 1999, p.152). The Ottoman cities were multi-ethnic in the sense that they were divided into areas according to ethnicity and function. These cities of Ottoman origin have had difficulty in adapting to commercial activity with the exception of Salonika, which “was a vast emporium at the crossroads between land and maritime routes” (Prévélakis, 1997, p. 63). It can reasonably be stated that location and function gave them a particular connotation, without however representing any particular ethnic identity. Only after the formation of nation states capital cities began develop, as they had to create links with the world. However, they remain multi-ethnic centres, which were in perfect harmony with the mosaic nature of the Balkans. A multifaceted identity emerges, made up of contradictions and contrasting models, which gave rise to a varied world<sup>10</sup>.

## 5. THE PLANNED CONSTRUCTION OF PLURALISM WITH A VIEW TO THE EU

Every nation which has over the past 20 years emerged in this area reflects the contrasting human and geographical aspects which have been presented in this paper. Any re-evaluation of the history and geography of the area must take into account the anthropological-territorial models here discussed. These are the real landmarks which, as reference points, are expressions of the complexity of this composite region. The Western

---

<sup>8</sup> For the data also see: [www.balcanicaucaso.org/aree](http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/aree).

<sup>9</sup> Cities in the classical sense of the word were few and they were invariably centres of Ottoman power.

<sup>10</sup> To the specificities of the Balkan cities see also Tsenkova, 2007.

need to define the peninsula with a fixed formula fails when confronted with the need of each diverse group in this area for independence and autonomy. As Cviic (1993) has noted, the crisis has become irreversible because each ethnic group of the western Balkans, since 1990 onwards, has not had any reason or need to remain united, not having, for example, an external enemy from whom it was necessary to unite in defence, and this contributed to the option for autonomy.

It has been certainly not straightforward process as Bulgarians, Romanians and Albanians have had difficulty in building their nations (Petrović, 1998). From the economic point of view, “these nations are facing problems in adapting their economies and societies to the liberal and capitalist model” (Cviic, 1993, p.127).

The path which these nations have taken is not just a question internal to the Balkans, but must take into account their geopolitical position in relation to Western Europe (Miller, 2007). “The Balkans are a part of Europe, despite being at the margins of European civilisation for a long period. They have been its borders, in a certain sense, towards another world, that of the Orient with all the values traditionally associated with borders” (Calabrò, 1999, p.16).

Even though democracy in these nations is fragile, it is the only real possibility of government, a reality which is to be built together with the EU, which has to assume a driving role and oversee these states, but in the same time Europe has to overcome ancient prejudices (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2005). First of all, it is necessary to oversee the process of modernisation in Romania and Bulgaria, both of which became EU member states in 2007, despite difficulties from a juridical point of view and an ongoing struggle against organised crime and corruption. Secondly, the EU must overcome historically entrenched attitudes, which have led to the isolation of the area and offer the Balkans some prospects for the future (Hosch, 2006). The Balkans must no longer be considered a frontier and, as was noted the European Commission (1999), it is fundamental to offer the area “a prospect of adherence based on the belief that stabilisation and integration are inextricably linked”. The conditions, however, vary from case to case. The stabilisation of the Balkans has yet to occur because no definite solution to some conflicts has yet been found and a certain persistent nationalistic rhetoric continues to condition public life. However, the EU remains the principal economic partner of the region and has a notable political influence (Brljavac, 2011).

This does not exclude the possibility that a further internal crisis might affect the region but Democratic pluralism must be defended (Waldenberg, 1998). The area with the greatest difficulties is that of the ex-Yugoslavia, where, despite the fact that problems remain critical, there are positive elements of reconstruction. Tim Judah (2009) has coined the term “Yugosphere”, given that there are still some common links between the ex-Yugoslavian republics, and that dialogue continue to be between them. Dialogue seems to be the only road to construct knowledgeable pluralism and reciprocal respect in a land marked by contrast. At the same time, all mutual prejudices must be abandoned in order to have a balanced relationship with the EU and embracing all the opportunities that the Union offers.

## REFERENCES

- Balbi, A.** (1840), *Compendio di geografia*, Torino.
- Banini, T.** (ed) (2009), *Identità territoriali. Riflessioni in prospettiva interdisciplinare*, *Geotema* 37, Bologna.
- Bracewell, W., Drace-Francis, A.** (1999), South-Eastern Europe: History, Concepts, Boundaries, *Balkanologie Revue d'études pluridisciplinaires*, III 2, <http://balkanologie.revues.org>.
- Brljavac, B.** (2011), Europeanisation Process of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Responsibility of the European Union?, *Balkanologie Revue d'études pluridisciplinaires*, XIII 1-2, <http://balkanologie.revues.org>.
- Calabrò, A.** (ed) (1999), *La pace e la Guerra I Balcani in cerca di futuro*, Il Sole 24 ore.
- Castellan, G.** (1999) *Histoire des Balkans*, Paris.
- Crampton, R. J.** (1987), *A short History of modern Bulgaria*, Cambridge.
- Cviic, C.** (1993), *Rifare i Balcani*, Bologna.
- Dell'Agnesse, E., Squarcina E.** (eds) (2002), *Geopolitiche dei Balcani. Luoghi, narrazioni, percorsi*, Milano.
- Dogo, M.** (1994), Verità nazionali e forzature storiografiche: il caso Kosovo, *Politica Internazionale* 3, pp. 11-15.
- Dogo, M., Pitassio, A.** (eds) (2009), *Città dei Balcani Città d'Europa*, Lecce.
- Drace-Francis, A.** (1999), The Prehistory of a Neologism: «South-Eastern Europe», *Balkanologie* 3, <http://balkanologie.revues.org>.
- Duhamel, G.** (1941), *Géographie cordiale de l'Europe*, Paris.
- Duroselle, J. B.** (1965), *L'Idée d'Europe dans l'histoire*, Paris.
- European Commission** (1999), *The Stabilization and Association Process for countries of South-Eastern Europe*, Brussels, COM (99) 235.
- Franzinetti, G.** (2001), *I Balcani dal 1878 a oggi*, Roma, 2001.
- Häkli, O., Paasi, A.** (2003), Geography, space and identity, in: J. Ohman and K. Simonsen (eds), *Voices from the North New trends in Nordic Human Geography*, Aldershot, pp. 141–56.
- Heywood, C.** (2002), The Via Egnatia in the Ottoman period. The Menzilhanes of the sol kol in the late 17th / early 18th century, in: C. Heywood (ed.), *Writing Ottoman history. Documents and interpretations*, 2002, Vol. CS725, chapter XI.
- Hosch, E.** (2006), *Storia dei Balcani*, Bologna.
- James, L.** (1842), *System of Universal Geography*, Edinburgh.
- Jelavich, B.** (1983), *History of the Balkans. Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, New York.
- Jordan, P.** (2009), Development of Rural Space in Post-Communist Southeast Europe After 1989: A comparative Analysis, *Journal for Geography* 4, pp. 89-102.
- Judah, T.** (2009), *Yugoslavia is Dead Long live the Yugosphere*, London.
- Kostis, K. P.** (2001), The formation of the States in Greece, 1830-1914, in: M. Dogo and G. Franzinetti (eds), *Disrupting and Reshaping. Early Stages of Nation-buiding in the Balkans*, Ravenna.
- Limenopoulou, K.** (2004), *The Politics of Ethnic Identity in the Balkans in a Post Communist Power Vacuum*, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens.
- Lizza, G.** (2002), Etnie e frantumazione etnica nei Balcani, in: P. Iuso and A. Pepe (eds), *La comunità internazionale e la questione balcanica*, Soveria Mannelli (CZ), pp. 57-63.
- Matvejevic, P.** (1999), Balcani, specchio del Mediterraneo, in: A. Calabrò (ed), *La pace e la Guerra I Balcani in cerca di futuro*, Milano, pp. 153-164.
- Mazower, M.** (2000), *The Balkans. From the End of Byzantium to the Present Day*. London.
- Mazower, M.** (2007), *The Balkans: A Short History*, London.
- Miller, B.** (2007), *States, Nations and the Great Powers*, Cambridge.

- Monastiriotis, V., Petrakos, G.** (2009), *Local Sustainable Development and Spatial Cohesion in the Post-transition Balkans: in search of a developmental model*, Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe.
- Mungiu-Pippidi, A.** (2005), *Deconstructing Balkan particularism: the ambiguous social capital of Southeastern Europe*, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 5, pp. 49-68.
- Nation, R. C.** (2003), *War in the Balkans 1991-2002*, Strategic Studies Institute.
- Paasi, A.** (1995), *Constructing territories, Boundaries and Regional Identities*, in: T Forsberg (ed), *Contested territory: Border disputes at the edge of the Former Soviet empire*, Aldershot, pp. 42-61.
- Petrović, R.** (1998), *Aspetti culturali dell'unificazione europea*, in: R. Petrović and F. Russo (eds), *L'altra Europa*, Napoli, 1998, pp. 111-120.
- Prévélakis, G.** (1997), *I Balcani*, Bologna.
- Roca, Z., Claval, P., Agnew, J.** (eds) (2011), *Landscapes, identities, development*, Los Angeles.
- Roth, K., Brunnbauer, U.** (eds) (2006), *Urban life and Culture in Southeastern Europe. Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*, Munich.
- Rothschild, J.** (1974), *East-Central Europe between the Wars*, Seattle.
- Todorova, M.** (1997), *Imagining the Balkans*, New York-Oxford.
- Tsenkova, S.** (2007), *Reinventing Strategic Planning in Post-socialist Cities: Experiences from Sofia*, *European Planning Studies* 15, pp. 295-317.
- Vezenkov, A.** (2006), *History against Geography: Should We Always Think of the Balkans as Part of Europe?*, in: A. MacLachlan and I.Torsen (eds), *History and Judgment*, 21, available at: [http://www.iwm.at/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=153&Itemid=125](http://www.iwm.at/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=153&Itemid=125).
- Vialli, V.** (1969), *Geografia*, Bologna.
- Volk, T.** (2010), *Agriculture in the Western Balkan countries*, Institute of Agricultural Development in Central and Eastern Europe.
- Waldenberg, M.** (1998), *Democrazia e problemi nazionali nell'Europa centro-orientale*, in R. Petrović and F. Russo (eds), *L'altra Europa*, Napoli, pp. 61-70.
- Wolff, L.** (1994), *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford.