

IN THE MIRROR OF OCCIDENT: The Idea of Europe in the Interwar Albanian Intellectual Discourses¹

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Abstract

This article investigates the ways “Europeanization” was perceived by the intellectual elite in Albania during the processes of nation-building in 1920s-1930s. This historical period was a crucial one in terms of the modernization efforts of Albanian society and serves as a mirror for the post-Communist “Europeanization” processes, within the framework of economic and cultural globalization trends. The period saw the development of state nationalism aiming to spread the national consciousness and to integrate the “peripheries” to the national core. Undertaking the building of a modern, literate and secular society, the political and intellectual elites in Albania looked to the Occident/Europe for suitable guidelines and models of nation-building and also for legitimization and acceptance in the “civilized world”. In this article attention will be paid to the public debates and the use of concept of the Occident/Europe by intellectuals, who advanced different political alternatives about the direction that the modernization of Albania should follow.

Introduction

At present the question of European identity is at the forefront of the debates about the current situation and the future of the European Union (EU). The recent globalization trends in economics, science and information have made social scientists approach the issue of Europeanization as an issue inseparable from the question of globalization. Although there is a tendency to consider Europeanization as a reaction to globalization, in fact Europeanization should be seen as an instance of globalization (Beck and Delanty 2006, 13). Thus one author asks that if Europeanization is part of globalization, then “to what extent is the EU in the driver’s seat, to what extent is it driven” (Nederveen Pieterse 1999, 4). Especially for the post-Communist nation-states, there seems to be a congruence of transition to democracy and the market economy with Europeanization and globalization.

¹ This paper is part of a PhD thesis in progress about the idea of Europe in the discourses of Albanian intellectuals during interwar and post-communist periods.

In the cultural and political spheres, very often the EU is compared to the achievement of the nation-state, and the possibility of a pan-European identity is thought of against the background of the existing national identities in Europe. Because cultural “thickness” of common history, traditions and myths is attributed to national identities, some argue about the impossibility, or at best the shallowness of the European identity (e.g. Smith 1997). On the other hand, it is argued that the development of EU is linked to the construction of a European post-national identity in a post-national constellation (e.g. Habermas 1998; 2001).

But the relationship between the nation and “Europe” is older than the EU. On one hand, the EU legitimizes itself by appealing to an idea of Europe, presenting itself as the embodiment of “Europe”, and as the realization of various historical projects advanced for the unity of Europe, against the divisions and vagaries of the nation-state. On the other hand, it is also true that since the advent of modernity the various nations in the continent have been imagined in conjunction with perceptions of “Europe”. This has been a two way process: not only have nations been constructed in the milieu of European or Western civilization, but also “Europe” has been imagined through the lens of the nation. That is why there has never been such thing as “Europe” in an essentialist sense, but many imaginings of Europe (Malmberg and Strath 2002).

As “Europe” is closely tied to the history of the nation-state in the last two hundred years, then the adjectives “European” and “national” are not alternatives, but are articulated in multiple ways (Malmberg and Strath 2000, 6). Questions such “How European is our nation?”, or “What does Europe think of us?”, or “Should we love or hate Europe?” have continually been asked in national contexts, therefore we may speak of the Europeanization of the nation-state before the EU. In this paper we will be dealing with the various meanings of Europe articulated in public debates for the way of development for the Albanian nation-state in the interwar period. The research questions that we will attempt to answer here are what are the uses of “Europe” articulated in Albanian intellectual discourses of the time and how do they vary according to the different political projects proposed by intellectuals for the future of the country.

The Albanian case during the inter-war period is very revealing for studying the meanings of Europe in nation-building processes in the periphery of the continent. Albania is one of the new nation-states in

Eastern Europe which came into existence, or regained their independence after the collapse of Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian empires at the end of the Great War. The interwar period is deemed essential for the national identity of these peoples, because it is a time when the national political and cultural elites in the new states of Eastern Europe were looking up to the West to provide legitimacy, moral inspiration and guidance, security and assistance to their countries, at a time when, ironically, the Western civilization was in crisis and Europe was turning into what Mark Mazower (1998) has aptly called the “dark continent”. But, considering the dismemberment during and after the Second World War, or incorporation to the communist empire, in the historical memory of these national states the interwar period has often been considered as the highest point of their aspiration to join European or Western “civilization”. The processes of transition and integrations into the European Union and NATO have culturally been guided by the notion of “returning to Europe”. As such, the interwar years are nostalgically viewed as a time when the nation was part of the “European civilization”, before being taken over by “Communist barbarism”.

Likewise, after the breakdown of the communist regime in 1990, many Albanian intellectuals consider the interwar period as the most “Western” one in the history of the country. The predominant discourses in Albania portray communism as another rupture with the natural course of Albania toward the West and intellectuals are seeking to “reconnect” the present with the ideas flourishing in Albanian press during 1920s and 1930s, so as to provide a contemporary moral and spiritual renewal of national identity, as well as guidance towards the integration process in NATO and the EU. For example in the introduction to *An Anthology of Albanian Thought 1870-1945*, published in 2003 and including contributions from the main intellectuals of the inter-war period, the editor writes about the “Western vision” these authors collectively served to the political orientation of Albania (Kulla 2003, 14). Such an uncritical assessment of their contributions, taken detached from the political context of the period, hides the layered and multiplicity of meanings that the idea of “West” (“Occident”), or “Europe” displayed in the public debates of the period.

This paper attempts to reveal the multiplicity of the meanings of the Occident/Europe in the political discourses of the Albanian intellectual elite in the interwar years. It will show that there was indeed a dominant discourse about “escaping” the East/Asia and “returning” to the Occident/Europe, to which nearly all of the intellectuals of the time

ascribed, but which nevertheless did allow the existence of more nuanced understandings of the idea of Europe, depending on the different projections of Albanian development and future that were debated at that time. By “discourse” we understand “a meaningful practice that forms the identities of subjects and objects” (Howarth and Stavravakis 2000, 3-4). The emphasis on discursive formations shows that the meanings of the concepts are not fixed in advance, but depend on the ways they are arranged in a discourse around nodal points.

The stabilization of the dominant discourse of the period in Albania was performed around the signifier of “Occident”. More than geography, it referred to the idea of civilization (or *the* Civilization), whose meaning depended on the opposition to its counterpart, the “East”, or “Orient”, or “Asia”. As such, it demonstrated most of the characteristics of that discourse Edward W. Said (1978) termed “Orientalism”. This was an Albanian variant of Orientalism (Sulstarova 2007), which borrowed the binary structure of Orientalism and applied it to the Albanian realities. The opposing categories of West and East were associated with other polarities, such as modern vs. backward, new vs. old, innovation vs. tradition, progress vs. stagnation, secularism vs. bigotry, emancipation vs. servitude, nation-state vs. Ottoman empire etc. The Occidental chain of signifiers represented the dominant trend of national identity, and the other, the Oriental one was considered as decadent and destined to perish.

Through this Orientalist discourse the intellectuals tried to suspend the meaning of the Albanian nation to a “transitional” period between Europe and Asia, West and East and to construct the subject position of the new intellectual as the harbinger or spiritual guidance towards the “New Albania”. This was made possible due to the political arrangement at that time. After 1924, King Zog I had built an authoritarian regime where there were no political parties. On the other hand the regime allowed for the freedom of press, up to certain limits, and for public criticism directed against the bureaucracy and the parliament, with the exception of the king himself, his family and the foreign policy with Italy. This gave opportunity to Albanian intellectuals to debate especially about the contemporary social and cultural situation in country and to advance ideas about its modernization. In the absence of the political parties, some of them were grouped around currents of thoughts, influenced by the contemporary ideas and ideologies in Europe. The idea of Europe gained several meanings, according to the projects that each current represented. Especially in the mid 1930s, there were attempts to formalize currents of

thoughts, despite the fact that there were not clear cut ideological divisions. We may put on the right-wing the “Neo-Albanianism” of Branko Merxhani and Vangjel Koça, the “enlightened dictatorship” of Ismet Toto, and Krist Maloki close to Catholic clerical circle in the city of Shkodra, who was in favor of different variants of a nationalist and authoritarian regime that would create an “organic” and modern Albanian nation. We may put on the left the “democrats”, like Migjeni, Nonda Bulka, Selim Shpuza, Petro Marko etc., who emphasized the dire social situation of the peasants and working classes and, to the extent the censure permitted them, hinted at the need for radical class-based transformations of Albanian society (Koka, 1985). In this paper we are going to deal mainly with texts from the 1930s as they best exemplify the “Occidental” trend of the interwar period, at the time when fascism was on the rise in Europe and the right-left polarization reached its peak in the civil war in Spain, as the continent was approaching World War II.

The rest of the paper exemplifies the hegemonic Orientalism and its different variants. The next section gives a short overview of the political and social situation of interwar Albania, the third section examines the Albanian version of Orientalism, the fourth one looks more closely to alternatives from the right and left in Albanian politics. The last section deals with the relevance of our argument for contemporary debates about “Europe”.

Interwar Albania

Albania came out of the First World War in very depressing conditions. During the war it had been invaded by Serbian, Greek, Italian, Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian and French armies battling one another, which had inflicted sufferings on a people who had already felt the savagery of the Balkan War. Its future seemed uncertain, because of the plans made by the Allies during the war to grant pieces of Albanian territory to the neighbors. But, due to a patriotic fervor and to the new international atmosphere after the war, Albania managed to preserve the 1913 boundaries of the state and to be accepted as a member to the League of Nations in 1921.

At this time, Albania was one of the most primitive countries in Europe in terms of development. Its economy was an agrarian one, in a country of nearly 1 million inhabitants, which nevertheless could not feed the population without importing grain every year. In the cities there were few manufactures and the only modern inter-city road system was constructed during the war for the supply needs of the invading armies. Despite the

various reforms, Albania remained a poor and underdeveloped country throughout the interwar period and was hit hard by the Great Depression. There the crisis lasted longer than in developed countries and reached its peak in 1934. By 1938 the level of foreign trade was still under that of year 1928 (Prifti and Shpuza 2007, 108-9). To overcome stagnation, Albania needed foreign investments and aid. It turned to Italy, which was interested in Albania for strategic reasons. The new fascist regime wanted to turn Albania into a base for expansion into the Balkans.

In early 1920s, after the stability of the state boundaries was secured, a degree of internal instability followed. There were frequent changes of government, sometimes including armed struggles between different contenders. The politician who dominated during the period was Ahmet Zog, originally a young chieftain from Mat region, in the north of Tirana. He overcame the opposition and managed to rule the country, first as prime-minister, then as president (1925-1928), and at last as “King of Albanians” (1928- 1939). Early in his career, Zog understood that the stability of his rule depended on the development of the country and he initiated many administrative, economic and cultural reforms. In an interview by the *Daily Telegraph* in 1928, King Zog declared that “we are centuries behind Europe in civilization... It is my determination to civilize my people and make them as far as possible adopt Western habits and customs” (Zog 1928, cited in Fischer 1995, 22). During his rule, Albania adopted the civil, penal and commercial legal codes of European countries, a central bank was established, a land reform was attempted, many public works were accomplished throughout the country a system of primary and secondary schools covered nearly all the country, foreign instructors were brought in to train a modern army, and efforts were made to change the traditional ways of living and to introduce Western modernity in education and cultural spheres.

Nevertheless, the costs of these reforms made Zog more and more dependent on Italy. He thought that he could take the Italian money and use it to strengthen the Albanian economy, in order to create a national unity that would deny the Italians the political control of the country (Fischer 1995, 37). This policy succeeded, in the sense that a Pyrrhic victory is a victory, until 1939, when Mussolini finally deposed him and invaded the country, at the eve of World War II. Despite the many failures, the regime of Zog provided Albania with a central government, the contours of a modern state, and unity for enough time to establish a strong national

identification among the cultural elite, as this is demonstrated by the lively intellectual debates on the development of the country.

The Albanian Orientalism

In the texts by Albanian intellectuals during the interwar period, the signifiers “Occident” and “Europe” accompanied diverse political, social, and economic demands and plans, in the interests of different groups of the population. “Europe” was articulated in the calls for socio-economic reforms, like the land redistribution, emancipation of women, literacy and education, and in general the improvement of the economic condition of the population. In the texts by different intellectuals of this period, “Occident” signified “Western civilization” and in geographical terms it usually covered Western Europe and USA, but sometimes even Central Europe. For example, in a story written by Migjeni (pseudonym of Millosh Gjergj Nikolla), an Albanian student from an unspecified “Central European” city, returns home to the city of Shkodra in Northern Albania, and seeing himself as the bearer of the European enlightened mentality tries to emancipate, without success, his traditional family (Migjeni, 1998, 131-152). Nearly all intellectuals active in public debates were “Westernizers”, including those of left-wing sympathies, who otherwise were critical of bourgeois civilization. One of the latter category, Migjeni, wrote the following verses in praise of the “Marvelous West”: “This is a song of the West, a song of the man who is elevated by self-confidence/His song is a beautiful hope, carried by wings of another life/Where the sun will change its course; is will rise in the West” (Migjeni 1998, 37-8). Images of the Occident exerted a powerful attraction to the intellectuals, because it represented of a new model of social organization and way of life, which they wished for Albania. In essentialist terms, they thought that Albanians belonged to Europe, thus their destiny is the European civilization. As one young intellectual, the journalist Ismet Toto, put it in an article in 1936: “Albania should be Europeanized, it should become a Switzerland in the Balkans... The logic of history, our geographic position, the spiritual capabilities of our people and all that is good and noble in this country, compel us to choose the way of *Europeanization* and the embracing of moral principles of means and manner invented by the science and the civilization of this continent” (Toto 1997, 60; emphasis in original).

The emblem of the modern civilization was considered to be the machine and the factory. Branko Merxhani (2003) compared the machine to a new god that replaced the traditional ones, first in Europe and now in all parts of the world (Merxhani 2003, 245). To be industrialized means to be

Westernized, and that is why another intellectual congratulates Albania for, 10 years after the proclamation of the monarchy, “entering in the rhythm of mechanical civilization and the technical progresses of the century” (Koça 1999, 40). In other words, Albania is bridging the gap that separates her from the industrially advanced countries of Europe.

Why there is such a gap between Albania and the Occident, or who is to blame for preventing Albania from being Occidental? According to the intellectuals of the time, the main culprit was the heritage of the Ottoman Empire. They argued that the lasting influence of the Ottoman invasion was the “pollution” of the Albanian, otherwise a European type, with Oriental influences. That is why they perceived of the post-Ottoman Albanian society as undergoing a battle between the “Occidentals” and “Orientals”. For example, according to the literary critic Krist Maloki, the Occidental type included those few individuals who worked hard and sacrificed themselves for the good of the collectivity, whereas the Oriental majority includes those who lead an idle and egoistic life. The solidarity of Orientals, if it existed was the solidarity of wolves, where each of them is always ready to attack his companions for his own interests (Maloki 2003 [1937]).

Who are the Albanian Orientals? The young intellectuals directed their main attacks to the ministers and high ranking bureaucrats of the time, most of whom were long time and close associates of the king. According to the young intellectuals, these men of power were remnants of the old Ottoman system, and by consequence they had old and Oriental mentalities and habits, which did not fit into a new European/Western Albania. For Foqion Postoli, writing in the early 1920s, the majority of officials in the Albanian government had an Asian mentality and they fought against everything that represents progress and Occidental civilization. His only hopes that the healthy minority of Western-minded officials that still exists in their midst would overcome the majority (Postoli 1990, 321-2). According to Selim Shpuza, writing in the mid 1930s, the respective perspectives of Albanian Occidentals and Orientals are irreconcilable to one another:

The Oriental considers the anachronism of the present old society left behind by the Ottoman rule as the best of societies, as the most beautiful and most ideal society in the whole world; but the Occidental, the one who sees the world and our inner life with the eyes of a European, cannot be satisfied with the poverty and ignorance in our country (Shpuza 1999, p.96-7).

These intellectuals were complaining that the administration of the state was in the hands of corrupted and conservative men, who knew only the cunning methods of Ottoman administration and were out of touch with the European realities. To appease these voices and to gain more internal support for his regime, King Zog in 1935 formed a new government with “liberal” young ministers. The “liberal” government of prime-minister Mehdi Frashëri was hailed in press by some intellectuals as the advent of a new era in Albania. But this experiment with “liberalism” was short-lived. Because of internal security concerns, and external pressure from Italy, which considered the new government too “anglophile”, the king decided after a while to return to his trusted aides and the Frashëri government resigned after losing majority support in the Parliament (Fischer 1996, 258-60). The press’ freedom was further restricted. These were disappointing developments for the “young” intellectuals, who continued their battle in the press against the “old” bureaucrats for a while, till the invasion of the country by Italy.

Alternatives from right and left

In the 1930s some intellectuals thought that the “Occidentalization” of the country required a reorganization of the state and the political system of the monarchy in order to implement the desired reform. They began debating about political alternatives that would vitalize the existing “stagnant” institutions filled with “Oriental” bureaucrats. Still, most of them were careful to exempt the king from the open critiques and indeed, to secure his approval and alliance for their projects.

The right-wing clash in Europe in 1930s was reflected in these debates of Albanian intellectuals. What is striking is the lack of voices calling for the establishment of liberal democracy in the country. Of course, liberal democracy could not be articulated freely in the press due to the pressure by the government censors, but other reasons existed as well. Most of the intellectuals thought that the country was not fit for liberal democracy, because of its backwardness, lack of strong middle classes, lack of proper education, lack of tolerance, etc. They feared that the establishment of political pluralism would degenerate into anarchy. A timid defense of political liberalism was articulated by Branko Merxhani, who advised for a gradual and disciplined path of monarchy towards “disciplined democracy”, first by establishing a responsible press, which would form sound public opinion; after that allowing the direct election of candidates by ballot only in the major cities and, only when the time was ripe, the

rural (i.e. the majority) population could be enfranchised (Merxhani 2003, 409; Koka 1985, 104). For his theses on liberalism, Merxhani attracted the wrath of other intellectuals; for example Krist Maloki called liberalism an "Oriental bazaar", and he was in favor of an autocratic regime, like the one in Italy, or Austria at that time (Maloki 2005, 161-165). King Zog for a while seemed attracted to the idea of "disciplined democracy" and to give more power to parliament over the government. In 1935, he trusted to Mehdi Frashëri the formation of a "liberal" government. But soon in the parliament a majority was formed against Frashëri, who was forced to resign. During the kingdom, this was the first time that the parliament overthrew the government. Nevertheless, King Zog thought that he would be able to realize the "Westernization" of Albania without further liberalizing the political system (Fischer 1996, 260-261).

Those intellectuals who thought that Albanians were not fit for liberal democracy proposed other alternatives in the press. More openly articulated was the right-wing dictatorship, euphemistically called "enlightened dictatorship", which according to its defenders was the Occidental political system of the 20th century. As for some of intellectuals inclined to the left, they hinted at a socialist revolution, although they could not articulate it openly, but which was implicit in their critique of Western capitalist society.

The most eloquent defender of the "enlightened dictatorship" was Ismet Toto, a young journalist and author who was very active in the 1930s. He articulated the aspiration of the youth for a European Albania, against the worldview of the old Oriental generation. Toto's assumption was that the battle of Albanian young intellectuals was part of the world youth movement rebelling against the "ancient regime" (Toto 1997, 56), and his conception has many similarities with the cult of the youth which developed in the fascist milieu in Italy (see Ledeen 1972, 3-25). Therefore, the main problem for him was how to organize the Albanian young people in the same way that Hitler and the Nazis organized the German youth into a disciplined whole (Toto 1997, 57). The organization of the youth should be part of the creation of an organic and disciplined society: "A strong nationalist climate, a social reorganization, a discipline and arrangement of all the classes and their interests, a strong activity towards Occidentalism, this is the ideal Albania" (Toto 1997, 70). All this can be accomplished only by a dictatorship with an Occidental outlook:

We want a powerful Albania, we want an organized Albania like the other states of Europe, we want an advanced Albania. Enough with the Orient... And we ask for dictatorship, because only the dictatorship will awaken in the heart of the people these passions; only dictatorship will bring to enlightenment the Albanian masses; because only dictatorship will sanctify the feelings, will grant health and will Europeanize the fatherland of Kastrioti [15th century prince who fought the Ottomans, and considered as the national hero of Albanian nation] (Toto 1997, 150).

According to him, and other supporters of “enlightened dictatorship”, liberalism was dead in Europe and the battle was waged between right and left dictatorships (Toto 1997, 189; Koka 1985, 61). As for the Albanians, they had never experienced democracy in their history, dictatorship was their permanent condition, thus the only question now was to give them an Occidental one (Toto 1997, 161, 175). As for the left dictatorship, there were no social conditions for its success in Albania and moreover, Europe would never permit a “red dictatorship” in Albania: “unless, the whole Europe became communist, even if we became one million Lenins, we cannot make Bolshevik Albania” (Toto 1997, 78).

Thus, the only alternative was a right-wing dictatorship, like those of Italy and Germany, but adapted to the Albanian conditions. Toto called for the king, as the leader of the young generation, to proclaim the dictatorship and work for building a regenerated nation. But his hopes were not fulfilled, because the king did not support his views. Having been disillusioned after the resignation of Frashëri government, Toto joined an unsuccessful *coup d'état*. This was led by his brother, the ex-Minister of the Interior in the Frashëri government. After the suicide of his brother, Ismet Toto surrendered to governmental forces, was trialed and executed in 1937.

The intellectuals who sympathized with Communism and the Soviet Union did not constitute a homogeneous group, either. Within the limits of the free speech during the monarchy, they criticized the government and the combined rule of “Oriental” landlords and urban bourgeoisie. They were also critical of the imperialist fervor of the European states and worried about the dependency of Albania on fascist Italy. Some left-wing publicists of the period were also part of clandestine communist groups.

In the 1930s, these intellectuals criticized the Occidental civilization, by focusing on two interrelated events in Europe: the economic crisis and the new imperialism of Italy and Germany. They highlighted the dire situation of the workers and peasants in Albania during the years of economic crises.

Migjeni, in an ironic twist in one of his short stories, based on the life of a common man in the city, pretended that at last the Albanian worker was equal to European worker, because both became unemployed: "So our worker wanders in the city roads. Looks for job. Like his colleagues in Berlin and London" (Migjeni 1998, 86). Nonda Bulka, a journalist, wrote in the same vein: "Do you consider a sign of civilization the wandering in the streets of London, New York, or Berlin, by millions of people demanding work or bread?" (Bulka 1980, 278).

Bulka and others observed the tense atmosphere of international relations in the middle of 1930s. In one 1935 article, he mocks the civilizing pretensions of the Occident, in the light of the Abyssinian war: "In the times of Noah used to live a great and civilized people, called "European people". The men comprising this group were divided in different nations, which quarreled like dogs with one-another. It was these people that decided to spread their civilization beyond Europe (Bulka 1980, 335). In this way, Great Britain and France "civilized" hundred millions of Africans and Asians and taught them English and French and sold these peoples commodities they did not need. Now comes Italy into the race and Britain says to her: "It is not human to rule another people. In the name of civilization you are not allowed to invade Abyssinia" (Bulka 1980, 336). Migjeni in the story "Bogy" allegorically pointed to the fear of communism, which he said the Western governments were using to control their restless peoples and to open the way to fascism: "The bogy has spread his legs from one side of the continent to the other... Fear of bogy they use like mothers who frighten the children in order to stay in peace, instead of asking why the children cry" (Migjeni 1998, 116-7).

The left-leaning intellectuals said that not everything could be borrowed from the Occident, when according to them, the European bourgeoisie society was in a deep crisis, revealed by the Great Depression and the rise of fascism. One could appropriate the latest achievements in science and culture, which served to the whole people and not only to the learned intellectuals. Also the intellectual should turn to the reality of people and popular culture and should not deal with constructing abstract systems of thought (Koka 1985, 284-5). At that time, Selim Shpuza asked if "it is right that intellectuals be busy with "perfectionism", in a time when the majority of people live in darkness" (Shpuza 1999, 145). In other words, they were rejecting the bourgeois aspects of the European civilization as well as the capitalist system and devoted their energies to an alternative social system which would be modern and beneficial to the people at the same time. Yet

communist Albania after World War II did not turn out to be precisely this system for which most of them had wished.

Conclusion

The notion of “returning to Europe” has had a strong cultural appeal in the Eastern European countries during transitions and many East Europeans look nostalgically at the interwar period as the time when their country was part of -or at least was entering- Europe. In other words, “returning to Europe” is interpreted as “returning to history”, after the long communist “pause”. This nostalgia occurs among some intellectuals in Albania too. During the contemporary debates about the “European” identity of Albanians, the arguments advanced by intellectuals of 1920s and 1930s are uncritically accepted as indication of the Western inclination of the Albanians. For example, last year one could read a laudatory article about the “Occidentalism” of Ismet Toto, where there was no mentioning of his fascist sympathies (Jorgaqi 2008). Likewise, one may find accusations against left-wing intellectuals of the 1930s for using “Occidentalism” as a mask to hide their subversive activities that aimed at the establishment of a communist regime in Albania (Plasari 2003, 12), thus not considering their articulation of “Occident” as part of a genuine effort of establishing a modern Albanian society.

As the Albanian case demonstrates, despite the frequent occurrence of the signifier “Occident”, one should be cautious when looking into the intellectual discourse of the interwar period to find cultural guidance or inspiration for today’s process of integration to the “West”. One should recall that both communism and fascism were considered by many intellectuals at that time to be possible ways for advancing or regenerating the European civilization of the future. Integration of East European countries into EU (and NATO) depends foremost on the democratization, inalienable human rights and the establishment of the state of law, which are seen as the means to overcome the effects and scars that totalitarianism left on the face of the continent and to ensure a future for European peoples that is different from the past.

Moreover, the cultural dimension of globalization that accompanies Europeanization calls for a greater scope of dialogue with different cultures and traditions, both inside and outside Europe. A simple and uncritical cultural “return” to European “roots”, “past”, “tradition” etc., may lead to the trap of Orientalism and to calls to defend the “civilization” against the barbarians at the gates. An essentialist cultural approach to

Europeanization may erect new walls in the continent, perhaps softer than that of the Iron Curtain, but nevertheless with the same negative effects.

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