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## 'Nesting Colonialisms': New and Old Patterns of Exclusion in the European Periphery

In June 2007, just before Portugal took over the EU presidency, Portuguese ambassador to the EU Alvaro de Mendoca e Moura told the following on the priorities of his country's presidency: *although enlargement process in general will remain in focus, because of its colonial past, Portugal will concentrate on cooperation with Africa, and human rights will be the main concern* (24ur.com, 11 June 2007).

A couple of months later, *The Financial Times* brought the statement of prime minister of Slovenia, the country that would succeed Portugal in presiding the EU, in which he stressed that *Slovenian interests in the Western Balkans are similar to interests which Portugal has in Africa* (Mladina 31, 4 August 2007, 11).

These two patterns of discourse exemplify ideological and discursive mechanism which I refer to as *nesting colonialisms*, drawing a parallel to the concept of *nesting orientalisms*, introduced by Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden (1992) to designate "a tendency for each region to view cultures and religions to the south and east of it as more conservative and primitive" (ibid., 4). Although orientalism and colonialism are complementary and closely intertwined concepts, in the context of European Union it nevertheless seems more appropriate to speak about *nesting colonialisms*, since colonial or expansionist past of particular national states serves as a basis for justifying a role of "experts" for particular regions outside the EU, while in production and reproduction of orientalist discourse this element of past involvement or common historical legacy is not necessarily present.

On discursive level, *nesting colonialisms* is most saliently marked by parallels and analogies. The analogy between Portugal and Africa on the one hand and Slovenia and the Western Balkans on the other is a rather radical form of nesting colonialisms, showing that the statements belonging to colonial discourse may be articulated even by representatives of the countries without a colonial past. This is possible due to the context in which the European Union membership is a basis for inclusion/exclusion. This context provides the EU member states with "a pool" of discursive patterns to be used for exclusion of those who are outside the Union. The "Western Balkans" are particularly prone to this kind of discursive transfers, because the Balkans were traditionally perceived as periphery that must be controlled by European centers of power and guided "to avoid slipping into the mistakes from the past" (Hammond 2006: 19). The point that the Balkans need some kind of colonial supremacy in order to save it from chaos and protect Europe from the dangers that chaos would bring is frequently made in the Western journalistic writings on the Balkans. Andrew Hammond (ibid., 20) provides some illustrative examples of this discourse:

Robert Carver, pondering Albania's endless cycles of unrest, finds the answer in 'European-enforced order and industry' and a reinvigoration of 'the centers of ultimate power' that

pertained in ‘the old colonial days’ (1988). Robert Kaplan (...) confidently asserts that ‘only Western imperialism – though few will like calling it that – can now unite European continent and save the Balkans from chaos’. In the early 1990s, the Canadian liberal intellectual, Michael Ignatieff, was finding a direct link between South-East European disorder and the absence of imperial restraint. Noting that the transition from communism was achieved without the Great Power regulation that marked Versailles in 1919 or Yalta in 1945, he says of the Balkans: ‘Not surprisingly, their nation states are collapsing, as in Somalia and in many other nations of Africa. In crucial zones of the world, once heavily policed by empire – notably the Balkans – populations find themselves without an imperial arbiter to appeal to. Small wonder then, that, unrestrained by stronger hands, they have set upon each other for that final settling of scores so long deferred by the presence of empire (1993).

Many researchers of contemporary European discourses argue that “imagining the Balkans as ‘The Third World Zone’ of Europe helped to create a sense of much needed identity and common purpose in the European Union” (Erjavec and Volčič 2007: 124, cf. Mastnak 1998).

Let us now turn to another analogy that indicates the mechanism of nesting colonialisms. Differently from the analogy between Slovenia and Portugal, here the parallel is drawn between the countries that were closely related in the past – Austria and Slovenia:

Slovenian politician Jelko Kacin explained the Austrian presence in the Slovenian market in the following way: “Austrian investments are traditionally present in Slovenia because of simple historical reasons. The first is that Slovenia was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, subordinated to Vienna, not to Budapest. The second reason lies in the fact that the Austrians knew that Slovenia contributed to one fourth of the Yugoslav GDP and to more than a third of the whole Yugoslav export. It is also important how Austrians in general perceive this land. Austro-Hungarian Empire ceased to exist in 1919 – less than one hundred years ago. Austrian generations grew up knowing that this land used to belong to them. This also explains their sometimes paternalistic and superior attitude towards the Slovenians.” Kacin also pointed out that he is sure that *Austria deals with Slovenia in a similar way as Slovenia deals with Southeastern Europe*” (*Mladina*, 8 March 2004, emphasis mine).

The relationship between Austria and Slovenia, and the attitude of these two EU countries towards the Western Balkans is complex due to numerous historical legacies that these countries share. Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia–Herzegovina were all parts of the Habsburg Monarchy; Slovenia shares Yugoslav legacy with all states of the Western Balkans excluding Albania, while the socialist legacy is common to all former Yugoslav republics as well as for Albania. The common historical experience is a basis for nesting colonialism established through analogy between Austria, Slovenia and the Western Balkans. Although Austria has not been a European colonial power, its expansionism during the Habsburg era is often identified as “colonizing;”<sup>1</sup> in Austrian public discourses it caused paternalistic attitude towards other former parts of the monarchy. In Slovenia, Austrian politics was often interpreted as post-colonial both in the past and after Slovenia became a member of the EU. As Karin Kneissl (2002: 167) points out, this neocolonial attitude was often criticized by Slovenian politicians and

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<sup>1</sup> Post-colonial legacies of the Habsburg Empire recently attracted significant attention of scholars: cf. Feichtinger, Prutsch, Csáky (eds.) 2003, Ruthner 2003, Uhl 2002.

journalists after Austria became the EU member in 1998. From the Slovenian viewpoint, Austria obstructed further enlargement of the Union. In Slovenian newspapers titles such as *Is Slovenia an Austrian colony* (*Delo*, 10 September 1999), *Still an Austrian colony* (*Večer*, 13 September 1999) appeared. Expressions such as, “tutorship”, “hegemonic intentions”, “hypocrisy”, “haughtiness” were frequent in media text related to Austrian policy towards Slovenia (Kneissl 2002: 167).

Austrians are the most numerous foreign investors in Slovenia, while almost two thirds of Slovenians foreign investments are directed towards markets of “the Western Balkans” (*Mladina*, 4 August 2007). Nesting colonialisms therefore do not remain exclusively in the domain of discourse: reemployment of colonial patterns in the discourse of European politicians is being justified by the colonial past, essentially characterized by economic subordination. In contemporary Europe, these discursive patterns are again intrinsically connected by new forms of economic subordination – another reason to speak of nesting colonialisms rather than of nesting orientalisms.

Because of partially overlapping historical legacies, the relationship between Austria, Slovenia, and the Western Balkans cannot be reduced only to the process of linear translation of colonial patterns (both discursive and economic) from Austria to Slovenia. It also contains a kind of “competition” for expert role for the Western Balkans between the two countries. Both of them listed the Western Balkans among the priorities of their EU presidency (Austria presided the EU Council in the first half of 2006, Slovenia in the first half of 2008). Common historical legacies that Austria and Slovenia as members of the EU share with the Western Balkan countries are the basis for claiming a *special knowledge* about the region and a special role they take over in the EU as *experts* for the Western Balkans. In Austrian and Slovenian political discourses, the origins of that special knowledge are, however, treated differently: while in the Austrian case shared experiences from the past (which where a result of Austrian expansion towards the southeast) are explicitly mentioned, Slovenian politicians rather avoid mentioning where the special knowledge about the Western Balkans comes from – i.e. Yugoslav and socialist legacy that Slovenia shares with the Western Balkan countries.

On the web site of the Austrian foreign ministry, there is a statement that the Western Balkans is a priority of Austrian foreign policy (<http://www.austria.org/western-balkans/>). This statement is supported with the following arguments:

- a. argument of common legacy: *Due to centuries of political, cultural and economic interrelations, Austrian foreign policy has always attached particular importance to the Balkans*
- b. argument of special knowledge: *Austria has traditionally played a very pro-active role in the foreign policy measures taken by the EU to assist the Balkans in overcoming their problems. Thanks to its profound knowledge of the processes in the region, Austria is in a position to contribute effectively to crisis management in the Balkans*

In Austrian media and political discourses both arguments are often explicated. Moreover, it is possible to establish continuity between discourses from the Habsburg monarchy and the contemporary ones: Statistician Hugo Bach wrote in 1888 that “the cited data leave little doubt that the promotion of national education in Serbia has to be ascribed primarily to the influence of the adjacent [Habsburg] Monarchy. According to the 1874 Serbian census a number of Serbian citizens had been born in Austria–Hungary. This demonstrates that *the historical mission to carry culture into the East has been fully*

*accomplished on Serbian soil*" (Promitzer 2003: 192, emphasis mine). In 2006, *Der Standard* brings the following statement: *Austrians enjoy high esteem in Bosnia due to educational reform conducted by Habsburg Monarchy after 1887 annexation* (*Der Standard*, 16. 6. 2006).

In the Slovenian discourse, on the other hand, one finds statements about the knowledge on the region, but no references to the historical ties and shared experiences that necessitated the possession of such knowledge. The Slovenian foreign minister Dimitrij Rupel stated that *Slovenia knows the circumstances in the region very well* (B92, 31 March 2007), without explaining the origins of this knowledge.

The difference in discourses on the Western Balkans articulated by Austrian and Slovenian politicians is to be explained by different historical roles of the two countries. Slovenia's role in the region has never been characterized by expansionism. Together with other parts of the Balkans, it was rather "colonized" by one of the two empires that were present in this part of Europe until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, socialist legacy of Slovenia makes position on the symbolic map of modern Europe ambiguous. In 1993, in their introduction to a special issue of *Filozofski vestnik*, entitled *Questioning Europe*, the editors Jelica Šumič-Riha and Tomaž Mastnak pictured the position of Slovenia in relation to Europe in the following way:

We find ourselves in a[n] 'inside/outside' position, in some aspects closer to Europe and in others more far away. Up until three years ago, we were 'outside' because we lived in a communist country. In Slovenia, as in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Baltic States, asserting that we were Europeans meant criticizing communism and the imperial structures imposed on us. We accepted the European identity game only to realize that, in the end, we could only lose. When communism collapsed, we continued to be excluded from the Europe in which we live culturally, politically, economically, historically. Europe had needed communism more when we did; and when we freed ourselves from it Europe kept us in the position of the Other, only the reasons for that have changed: ideological and political considerations are being succeeded by racial ones (Mastnak and Šumič-Riha 1993: 7-8).

Despite the fact that Yugoslavia was established in 1918, the Slovenian Yugoslav legacy is nowadays widely equated with socialism, which is, on the other hand, perceived exclusively in terms of totalitarianism in European political discourses. The fact that Slovenia shared a socialist and Yugoslav experience with the Western Balkan countries, which makes this country similar to others in the region, is mentioned in speeches of EU officials, while Slovenian politicians rather do not mention it. In 2004, Javier Solana emphasized that "you [Slovenia] have to be eager to guide other countries towards the EU. In this sense, you have a responsibility to other countries which try to achieve what you did" (24ur.com, 28.9.2004). On a recent EU conference held in Ljubljana, the president of the EU Parliament stated that "Slovenian presidency to the EU is the best indicator of thorough changes that took place in the region in last 20 years, which is an amazing achievement, having in mind the fact that only 20 years ago Slovenia was part of communist Yugoslavia."

The argument of common past is missing also in those statements in which Slovenian politicians offer help to the former Yugoslav republics on their "way to the European Union." Slovenian minister of foreign affairs Dimitrij Rupel stressed during his visit to Serbia in 2003 that "Slovenia is ready to help Serbia and Montenegro with its experiences and connections" (24ur.com, 28.8.2003). On the occasion

of opening the Slovenian embassy in Montenegro, Rupel stated that “Slovenia is ready to share its experiences regarding the accession to the EU with Montenegro” (www.b92, 23.6.2006).

If Slovenian politicians mention the socialist legacy of the Western Balkan countries, they do it from a neutral and distanced position, without referring to Slovenia’s own socialist past. The Prime Minister Janša stressed that “No one has the right to deny a European perspective of the Southeast European countries, which suffered under totalitarian regimes for a long time” (*Delo*, 5.6.2005).

Despite the fact that many former socialist states joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, the socialist *Other* is still one of the most pervasive images serving as a basis for building a common European identity. Habermas and Derrida (2003: 296) argue that “contemporary Europe has been shaped by the experience of the totalitarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and through the Holocaust.” Socialism in Europe is treated in this context in exclusively moral terms, as a totalitarian regime and thus positioned next to Nazism. Because of such perception, socialism as another European legacy, as “the experience that shaped the lives of three to four generations in Eastern Europe (...) is still frozen in ideological straightjacket” (Todorova 2002: 15). In this light, the absence of explicit articulation of argument of common socialist past comes as no surprise in Slovenia’s case.

In conclusion, I want to stress the usefulness of the concept of *historical legacy* in thinking about discursive patterns that prevail in discourses of particular member states about the accession of the Western Balkan countries to the EU. As stressed by Maria Todorova, historical legacy seems to be particularly useful as an analytical category because it does not exclude advantages of spatial analysis, but adds temporal dimension to space and enables consideration of historical particularities (Todorova 2005: 86–87). As opposed to tradition, historical legacy is not a result of an active process of conscious selection of elements from the past: historical legacy includes “everything what was preserved, whether we like it or not” (ibid., 88). Historical legacies thus became tools for negotiation of positions and roles of particular states in the political map of contemporary Europe. They are reinterpreted, borrowed or tabooed in this negotiation process, depending on a history of a state in question and on a degree of its perceived “Europeaness.” Colonialism and socialism are European legacies that were both subject to strong criticism and distancing, but only the latter is stigmatized and reduced to suppressive political system in political discourses of contemporary Europe, while the former, in spite of its suppressive, expansionist and exploitative nature, is overtly used as a basis for legitimization of newly established power relations on the continent. This fact only underlines what Šumič-Riha and Mastnak bitterly noticed in their questioning of Europe: the new lines of demarcation by no means erase the old ones.

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