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***NATIONAL IDENTITY UNDER SIEGE. THE IMAGINARY DEFENCE HEDGE AND  
THE RISE OF RADICAL DISCOURSE<sup>1</sup>***

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*Abstract: The present paper would like to analyze the global context of accelerated inter connections between several dimension of social life and the reaction of the society to this changes which are putting under siege ( real or imaginary) the concepts of national identities and national values. In case of Europe and Eastern Europe the globalization, European integration, NATO joining and post communist cultural "imports" managed to create a sensation of insecurity at the level of national identity and cultural development of the societies. In this event frame the opposition toward this changes and influences managed to create a set of reactions and managed to build around the concept of national identities and values a hedge which real or imaginary base are playing a key role in the social development of the countries. These new defense constructions are many times based on negative attitude toward other societies or intolerance toward surrounding world or other communities. For this purpose the study would like to analyze this problem from the relevant point of view of globalization contextualized in the historical and social development of the eastern European countries. Analyzing the social, political and economic development in countries like Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia or Greece we intend to create an imaginary map of this identity issues based on real factors that are influencing the development of this societies in the contemporary globalized world.*

**Keywords:** *globalization, cultural globalization, national identity, extremism, integration.*

### **1. Introduction**

The present paper intent is to create a frame of analysis for the national identity and its dynamics in the contemporary world, where imaginary or real threats are putting pressure on the foggy concept of national identity. Increased mobility, virtual reality, cultural exchanges are reshaping the structure of the societies in a way that creates disarray among its conservatory elements, creating a sense of insecurity at social and identity level. In the European Union the past years had known a substantial growth of populist rhetoric in public space or political arena, where the major debate topics were hijacked by fake or imaginary issues concentrated around the "anti everything" or "autarchy" discourse. This type of discourse and attitude change were shaped by real global issues, but the solutions offered by the political elites, public communicators or opinion makers can be characterized as false ones.

I will divide the present paper in two parts. The first part will concentrate on the problems related to globalization, integration and cultural transfers which are relevant to the topic of national identity in a globalised world. In the second part my attention will be on the dynamic of social and political changes in the eastern European regional and the rise of radical discourse in the past decade. In this context my purpose is to offer a frame of analysis

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to recent events and to analyze the dynamics of the society and its defense mechanisms against issues created by the process of globalization.

## **2. Issue context**

The contemporary world, the dynamic of foreign relations and the modifications of the social dimensions have known a radical change in the last two decades. The collapse of the bipolar system based on the ideological-political antagonism between West and East has created not only a power void at an international level, but it also opened the path towards new challenges for the states of the world. The accelerations of the global interconnectivity have led to a quicker globalization process with direct effect on human lives and on communities. The postwar technological revolution and the expansion of mass communication means had created a special context at the end of the past century, a context which modified the human perception on time and space and which put under siege consecrated values from different regions of the world.

Power, security and the threats on security have known a substantial change through their adaptation to the new directions of global development and to the new technological accomplishments. As a consequence, violence and use of violence in order to obtain political result or access to power adapted themselves to the modern instrument. In this context, the prevailing of some conservative mindsets, but especially radical ones, have created a solid base for new hot points of violence and offered a stronger legitimacy to those involved in the social conflicts of the new millennium. From this standpoint, the birth of contemporary fundamentalist discourse can be considered to be the sum of several historic, social and economic effects catalyzed by contemporary dilemmas and social issues.

These contemporary dilemmas with the difficult history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, legacy of the two world war and the territorial changes after the First World War are not helping the fragile social structures of eastern European states, which are facing their own historical fears catalyzed by the contemporary threats. On the other hand the cultural, religious, ethnic diversity in the Eastern European region creates real cohabitation problems which are magnified in the light of the globalization phenomenon<sup>2</sup>.

## **3. The “sins” of globalization and integration**

The last quarter of century has known a major change at the level of interactions and social exchanges were the exchanged speed and time managed to change the human perspective over the surrounding environment. By bringing closer the distant geographical areas of the world, creating a real time virtual world the technology revolution from the second part of the 20th century managed to offer new opportunities for social development but created cultural flow corridors that in some cases produced negative effects to. In this contemporary frame of events the globalization is view many times in a pessimistic light, a destructive force which is attempting to the old ways of several communities and society.

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Iwan Griffiths, *National and Ethnic Conflict. Threats to European Security*, SIPRI Research Report No. 5, 1993, pp. 4-14

The idea of center and periphery, or other views of neo-Marxist<sup>3</sup> school are representing the backbone negative of attitudes toward the globalization process, where the imperial expansion of some economical or cultural powers are criticized and blamed for almost every negative development in peripheral societies. The reality is that the societies are not prepared for the effects created by the technological revolution and the fastness of information flow/exchange through the virtual or physic pathways<sup>4</sup>. The new social issues, political problems or economic crisis cannot be handled in real time by societies or political leadership due to the complexity of the interaction web in which these issues are integrated.

On the other hand this complex web of interconnections, interdependencies or exchanges is creating the basis for the rise of populist and radical discourse, due to the simple fact that every negative event or direction of development cannot be separated from the others in this way all of discourse logic is targeted to the big picture represented by the process of globalization and the “cultural imperialism”<sup>5</sup>. In this way the globalization became the main element of radical discourse and its effects are expanded on every dimension of social life, even on ones that are not affected by the process itself. The globalization as external economic constraint<sup>6</sup> or the European integration<sup>7</sup> has become the favorite elements of radical discourse in Europe, especially Eastern Europe, and paired with the autarchic national identity centered ideas had become the leading argument of any radical discourse from the soft to the hard one.

For example the Greek or Hungarian social life and the changes related to the global economic context created a proper ground for this type of discourse, where the external interference over and the imagined threats over national identity managed to catalyze the society in the direction of a radical point of view over a short period of time. Of course this attitude changes have real issues in the background but it is hilarious to say that Hungary’s main problem are related to the expansion of cultural imperialism of the west or to the Roma community which is creating a nationwide climate of insecurity. Neither the Greek base of radical discourse<sup>8</sup> has more legitimacy and covers little part of the reality, not because their imaginary threats and source of problems are represented by the German republic and the European Union or euro-zone, but because their welfare is bound to the idea of an unexplored money source (represented by the world war II reparation and debt<sup>9</sup>) and to the idea of autarchic national future. Both cases and their radical discourse promoters have some merits but the globalized world and the complex interdependency is based on some rules of competition and regulated economic flows cannot be deconstructed by the will of one state or nor should be possible.

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<sup>3</sup> David Held, Anthony McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-Globalization. Beyond the Great Divide*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2007

<sup>4</sup> James Lull, *Media. Communication. Culture: A global Approach*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000, *passim*

<sup>5</sup> John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999, cap. 1

<sup>6</sup> Colin Hay, Ben Rosamond, Globalization, European Integration and the Discursive Construction of Economic Imperatives in *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol.9/2, 2002, pp. 147-167

<sup>7</sup> *The rise of anti-EU populism: why, and what to do about it?* in European Policy Center’s Policy Brief from 12 September 2011

<sup>8</sup> Greek support for the EU in 2007 was +26 percent but by 2012 it changed to -63 percent. Support for the two biggest political parties, New Democracy and PASOK, has also collapsed in favor of Syriza party

<sup>9</sup> Alexis Tsipras lead government are demanding World War II reparations for German occupation of Greece in the amount of ~250 billion euro

In parallel with the globalization the European integration represents the second set of negative arguments for the rise of national discourse due to the union's purpose as a unifying political structure. From its beginning the European construction was based on the idea of integration and consolidation through an economical and political union which could ride the tide of cold war military or economic conflict. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the communist regimes in the eastern countries, the European Union had the opportunity to expand and unify the European continent under one standard. The European integration became an opportunity for undeveloped eastern country to become members in a select club of states with political and economical power which could sustain and help their need to develop and consolidate their societies. After the accession of the first 10 states in 2004 and the last two in 2007 the European Union became aware of the burden of integration and consolidation of the newcomers, whose economy and social structures were far undeveloped and in some way incompatible with the early members. The first cracks in the European construction appeared at the moment of the ratification of the constitutional treaty, followed by the economic crisis which managed to affect in depth the economy of every member. With the deepening of the economic crisis, the national economies were put under enormous pressure for which the government was unable to answer in a pragmatic and clear way. This lack of decision and consensus over the actions that needs to be taking, the radical discourse of euro-skeptics and anti-globalists begin to rise and take roots in the affected societies.

The populist discourse and the general negative reactions toward external interference and international financial institutions started to take shape under the umbrella of new/old political formations which took profit of this political opportunity and acceded to the power through elections. This was the case of the Hungarian Jobbik Party, Greek Syriza, British UKIP, etc. By the year 2013 the wave of radical discourse and radical movements started toward international institution, organization reach its high point, when the xenophobic, racial, hate speech became integrated part of the public discourse vocabulary becoming the symbol of virtue in politics and society.

#### 4. The “virtue” of national identity

“National identity, at the basic level, is an awareness of difference, that is, a feeling and recognition of 'we' and 'they' “<sup>10</sup> is probably the most simple but the most close to the reality definition of identity at national level. Of course this definition does not cover the complexity of identity issues of the nations as Anthony D. Smith is doing it in his studies<sup>11</sup>, but from the perspective of contemporary problems this antagonistic view is the main base of the raise of radical discourse. The difference between academic definition and conceptualization is slightly distinct from the identity perception of radical discourse target groups. Ernest Gellner<sup>12</sup> point of view regarding the difference between the national identity and its perception at the top or bottom of the society creates two set of interpretation and understanding of the elements of identity.

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<sup>10</sup> Yoonmi Lee, *Modern Education, Textbooks, and the Image of a Nation*, London, Routledge, 2012

<sup>11</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, London, Penguin Books, 1991, passim

<sup>12</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983, passim.

In Smith's opinion the nation has multi-dimensional structure with five basic attributes which are defining their basic values and actions related to neighbors or other nations<sup>13</sup>.

1. Nations need to have a territory or a geographical homeland
2. They have a common myth and historical memory
3. A common culture, which need to be a mass culture and it need to be a public one
4. They need to have a common judicial/legal system applicable for every individual of the nation (citizenship)
5. Common economy and territorial mobility for the individuals

This definition excludes the nations without states from the equation but from historical experience it can be said that creating myths or enemies of the group does not need the existence of the state, this process exist in almost all communities the statehood offers just the juridical and political legitimacy for actions. The effects of globalization or regional integration affects them in the same way that affects the nations with states, just the speed of cultural decay/integration differs due to the lack of some kind of institutional protection and preservation mechanism.

Smith's definition may be a clear one for the political or cultural leadership of a nation, but for the masses this type of definition sometimes is incomprehensible. In these cases they tend to create their own set of attributes which are more or less in concordance with the reality or with the need of the nation itself. Mostly the mass creates or modifies attributes related to the common myth system and territorial boundaries, to justify their contemporary social, economical or political actions or failures. The national history and the myths surrounding it are defining the national reactions to several external or internal issues that are jeopardizing the ideal image of the national identity<sup>14</sup>.

In case of Eastern Europe the national identity and its virtual border were put under siege from external changes not only at cultural or financial level but on political level too. After the fall of the eastern block and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact the sense of social security, military security or economical stability has stepped in the world of free market and free competition. Many of these countries were not fully prepared to make this step. In the case of Democratic Republic of Germany the thing were pretty clear, the Federal state took over the initiative and managed to know how transfer. Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland had some soft dictatorial regimes which created a proper context for some type of economical and social freedom. On the other hand the case of Romania or Bulgaria where the political regimes were more aligned to the hard line, and the political corruption and nepotism weakened the structures of the state, did not managed to adapt themselves in to the new form of economical interaction. This context and the emerging economical crisis (from 2008) created a socio-economical climate in which the disappointment sustained by the sentiment of social insecurity and economical weakness created a proper ground for the new radical discourse in the public space. This social weakness and the imagined threats represented by the globalization, European Union or other external factors managed to put under siege the sentiment of national security and social welfare. Probably at academic or professional circles

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<sup>13</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, London, Penguin Books, 1991, pp. 14-15

<sup>14</sup> Stefan Berger, On the Role of Myths and History in the Construction of National Identity in Modern Europe in *European History Quarterly* July 2009/39, pp.490-502

the relation of globalization with the contemporary social and economical issues are organized in somewhat logical and methodologically correct manner, in the public discourse this became impossible due to the structure of the promoters of the new discourse based on half truths or misleading explications. In these times of crisis the radical discourse managed to use the weakness of the public and put the national identity under an imaginary siege. This imaginary siege created the need for defense mechanisms, based on the specificity of the national identity and many times regardless of historical truth or social reality.

This process of siege mentality on the other hand managed to create a set of fake imagined defense mechanisms which had no relation with the reality or with the needs of society to resolve the social or economical issues. For this the best example is the Roma community from Hungary<sup>15</sup>, Bulgaria<sup>16</sup> and Slovakia<sup>17</sup>, where the economical degradation of the entire society and the nationalist/extremist discourse created the imaginary enemy or scapegoat. The search for scapegoats was extended by the rising radical groups, and the list of enemies of national identity was compiled from representatives from every dimension of social life. Regardless of the true or false nature of the issue the radical discourse grouped the enemies of national identity in three major groups:

Economic enemies: European Union, International Monetary Fund/World Bank, European Central Bank, World Trade Organization, international corporations, banking sector, import companies ( for not promoting national products), George Soros, Jews, etc.

Cultural enemies: globalization, the United States of America as cultural imperialist state, corporations, Hollywood, foreign literature, foreign television stations, foreign state ( usually neighbor states), pop music personalities, other ethnic groups (Gypsies, Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, Greeks), etc.

Political enemies: USA, European Union, Russian Federation, neighbor states, international military or political organizations as NATO or UN, Israel, Ukraine etc.

As we can see the above list contains an amalgam of organizations, international actors or private persons which at some point are on the black list of hate speech or scapegoat list for several extremist organization or political parties. In fact the national identity foggy concept is under siege by anything that is foreign or has somehow influence negatively the society in which the extremist discourse has a somewhat important presence. By a short analysis or glance at this type of pro national identity discourse any reader can see the relative disorder in ideas and concepts due to the fact that the language that needs to be aggressive not necessary true. In this context it is no surprise the huge success of Hungarian and Greek nationalist/pro-national identity parties' electoral success in the last years. Due to their propaganda concentrated on the siege mentality and on the need to save the national identity from real or imaginary enemies managed to gather for the a large public support regardless of the relation of their discourse with the reality. In a perverse way Hungarian Jobbik managed to convince the public that the foreign enemies are attempting on the welfare of the state, and the Greek Syriza managed to convince the public that the economic crisis is not based on

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<sup>15</sup> *Accelerating Pattern of Anti-Roma Violence in Hungary*, A Report from the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights Harvard School of Public Health and Harvard University, Boston February 2014

<sup>16</sup> *Factsheet: Roma Rights in Jeopardy*, European Roma Right Center, 16 February 2012

<sup>17</sup> *Roma people in Europe in the 21st century: violence, exclusion, insecurity*, European Association for the Defense of Human Rights, 2012

almost 20 years of fiscal policies based on lie and fake financial reports but on international created context.

### Conclusion

The rise of radical discourse and the siege mentality created by the contemporary global context has managed to influence public perception over the attributes of national identity in a way that not every times produces the best results for the societies in discussion. Imaginary issues created by the process of globalization or regional integration have an impact over the public mentalities and offers opportunities for political or social groups to create a set of defense mechanisms and to accede to power on the basis of fear exploitation. This process of radicalization of discourse over the national identity issues is more and more present in the eastern European public sphere, although it has some roots in the reality the majority of arguments are based on fake solutions or ideas.

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