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**THE BALKANS BETWEEN THE NEOLIBERAL UTOPIA OF  
THE „OPEN SOCIETY“ AND THE REALITIES OF THE  
DEPENDENT DIVIDED SOCIETY OF PERIPHERAL  
CAPITALISM<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

*The paper presents the results of the author's research in the postsocialist transition of the Balkan societies. It presents a summary of the results of transition in the given societies within the last 20 years. After singling out the inherent limitations of the strategy of dependent modernization, which has brought about the peripherization of economy, society and culture of the Balkan nations, the paper endeavours to give its contribution to the search for an alternative development model. It is precisely in the social democratic development strategy that the author sees the alternative to the contemporary neoliberal strategy as it is within such a model that a socially responsible transition can be carried out.*

**Key words:** transition, development strategies, the Balkans, peripheral capitalism, social democratic alternative.

**БАЛКАН ИЗМЕЂУ НЕОЛИБЕРАЛНЕ УТОПИЈЕ „ОТВОРЕНОГ  
ДРУШТВА“ И СТВАРНОСТИ ЗАВИСНОГ ДРУШТВА ПЕРИФЕРНОГ  
КАПИТАЛИЗМА**

**Апстракт**

*У раду су презентовани резултати ауторових истраживања о постсоцијалистичкој транзицији балканских друштава. Аутор даје резиме двадесетогодишњег биланса транзиције. Указујући на унутрашње границе стратегије зависне модернизације која је довела до периферизације привреде, друштва и културе балканских друштава, аутор у исто време трага за алтернативним концептом развоја. Управо у социјалдемократској стратегији развоја аутор види алтернативу садашњој неолибералној стратегији и пожељну перспективу – транзицију са социјалном одговорношћу.*

**Кључне речи:** Транзиција, стратегије развоја, Балкан, периферни капитализам, социјалдемократска алтернатива.

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The research of the twenty-year aftermaths of transition of the post-socialist societies on the Balkans, in the context of global and regional processes and through the prism of sociological imagination, has brought us to the following conclusions:

*Implosion of socialism* and the statement that the cold war epoch has come to an end (though it has not in fact stopped but only changed the forms of its appearance), the *Balkan region* has lost its geopolitical rent – as privileged geospace of the transborder world, as scales between the worlds and it has experienced radical *geopolitical transition from the East to the West*, towards the Euro-Atlantic world of integration and alliance, from the periphery of the East to a new periphery of the West.

Noisily, with the new-democratic-phrases announced project of an “open society” and free market, in the practice of the Balkan societies in transition, has turned into its opposite, namely, *in the production of the world of semi-colonial dependent societies of peripheral capitalism*. In the words of Remarque, there is “nothing new” on the Balkans: the dreams and the reality are widely set apart. Instead of the open society, what is being realized in effect is the movement to the dependent society, to the Balkan “nowhere land,” that is, to re-balkanization of the Balkans.

Most of the newly-formed Balkan elites, after 1989, have uncritically accepted *the philosophy of neoliberalism and the strategy of development* (whose determinants are comprised in the doctrine of hyperliberalism – market fundamentalism, “shock therapy”, radical privatization, liberalization and de-regulation, monetary economic policy) which is here realized in the form of *dependent modernization*, subdevelopment (development of underdevelopment), *peripherization of economy, society and culture and lumpenpolitics*.

*Subglobalization of the Balkans*, in the form of Eurointegrations (through the inclusion of the most of the countries in the EU) has not essentially changed the place of the region in the network of the world division of labor. It has still remained a *zone of periphery*, subdued to the interests of megacapital, European and world transcorporations. It has remained the region of cheap raw materials, cheap work force, extended market for foreign corporations and enormous exploitation of work force.

*In Serbia the project of modernization has been realized, in practice, as countermodernization*. Nomenclature capitalism and “economy of destruction” in so-called phase of “blocked transition” in Serbia (1990-2000), under the leadership of new-democratic neoliberal reformers (after 2000), have turned into countermodernization, in the *destruction of economy and society* (whose characteristics are radical deindustrialization, permanent recession, uncontrolled financial indebtedness of the country, mass unemployment and pauperization of the widest social layers). *What is in effect is the formation of degenerate social structure of the society* with hierarchical pyramid of the social power (thin layer of the rich on the top and the ruling elite, a destroyed and molten-away middle layer and a huge number of members of low classes – new and old paupers, de-classed working class, marginalized groups – unemployed, pensioners, refugees, etc.).

*New bourgeoisie*, as a social class, in Serbia and on the Balkans, is constituted from three groups (layers): a) *entrepreneurial*, b) *nomenclature*, and c) *lumpenbourgeoisie*. With the exception of the first group which is the carrier of progressive entrepreneurial and business initiative, the other two groups of neobourgeoisie are non-business like,

consumption-oriented while the third one is both the offshoot and the protagonist of economic and social pathology and criminalization of the society.

*In Serbia and on the Balkans, unfortunately, there is no generated strategy of long-term development and active regional cooperation and integration.* Instead, what is at work are the processes of further *political disintegration* and fragmentation which are otherwise stimulated by the formation of ethnic regions – instead of economic-developmental ones – which can, in its turn, lead to further re-tribalization of the region and weakening of the national states.

*Political elites* are here uncritically turned towards the West, towards the new Rome (just as they were, previously, to Moscow). On this pathway they are exalted to go along the footsteps of new-dogmatic orientation (*“Europe Has No Alternative!”*) thus forgetting that only man, his life, freedom, dignity and happiness are the highest values – without alternative; all other institutions are transient and have only an instrumental value.

*Contemporary world crisis and its globalization* are induced by the neoliberal “shock doctrine” and monetary philosophy of development which has subjected the real economy to the logic of profit of the financial capital and the TNC of the world center countries. Hence the coming out of the crisis makes it *necessary to critically re-question* the real causes of the crisis generators as well as *radical modification of the global strategy of the development* in the world on the concept of sustainable, humane and just socialdemocratic development (*„Popularum Progresio“*).

10. Critical questioning of the transition aftermath on the Balkans leads us to the findings about the necessity to modify the present neoliberal strategy of development which has put profit before people and this with the *socialdemocratic strategy* with the social responsibility for the development, the life quality for all instead for just a privileged minority in the world.

If we start from the thesis that the postsocialist societies’ transition was historically indispensable due to further development of the society’s production forces, this does not mean that we can also accept the thesis that its empirical form was also indispensable – embodied in the neoliberal peripheral capitalism. Such choice is epitomized in the given strategy, on the Balkans, is an expression of certain constellation of class and political powers in the world and on the Balkans. *Unfortunately, the Balkan society „for already a century have been modifying the form of the semi-peripheral society: from primitive capitalism towards authoritarian socialism and, then, back towards primitive capitalism.“*<sup>2</sup>

*Authoritarian socialism and hyperliberalism*, though being rivals, with respect to the project of a great social transformation, class and human emancipation, have a similar logic – subjection, exploitation of human forces.<sup>3</sup> That is why *Immanuel Wallerstein*<sup>4</sup> and *Mihajlo Marković* are right in saying that in 1989, real authoritarian and classical liberalism have both crumbled so that *further development alternatives should be looked for in the concept of mixed postcapitalist society with socialist and liberal*

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<sup>2</sup> M. Pečujlić, *Challenges of Transition – New World and Postsocialist Societies (Izazovi tranzicije – novi svet i postsocijalistička društva)*, Pravni fakultet, Belgrade, 1997., p. 140

<sup>3</sup> M. Pečujlić, *Ibid*, p. 138

<sup>4</sup> I. Wallerstein, *After Liberalism (Posle liberalizma)*, Službeni glasnik, Belgrade, 2005

elements.<sup>5</sup> In a word, if transition is really historically indispensable, yet, it does mean that the historical restoration in peripheral – primitive capitalism represents an iron law. There is a superior alternative of social development that *M. Pečujlić* writes about, namely, „social capitalism (merging of capitalism and democratic socialism – socialdemocracy) as a pathway of real civilization movements ahead.“<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of the ebbing suffered so far by the authentic idea of social-democracy in Europe and the world, it is our opinion that *in the social-democratic strategy of social development we should look for a transition form of the responsible management of social changes* (through the transition with social responsibility, mixed forms of property relations, share-holding of the employed and developed forms of participation and social democracy), towards *democratic socialism* as a real possible alternative of the future development of the world in the function of uniform development of all citizens and peoples of the world as well as human emancipation. If the opposite takes place, the forces of the world development will go on being blocked while mankind will continue to move, for a long time, in the forms of the structural crisis (as an expression of the conflict between the social character of the production forces and new forms of the private property acquisition and management) accompanied with numerous social controversies and conflicts. *The Balkans will*, in the given geopolitical and transition context, remain for a long time a zone of peripheral capitalism, of high risk or, as R. Aron would define it, *geospace of unfinished war and belligerent peace*.

*Contemporary structural crisis* is produced by the neoliberal strategy of social development which has brought the suppression of the real economy sector, disassembling of the welfare state and renewal of the social issue in the world. In that context, the forms of social and regional inequalities between work and capital, the North and the South have increased as well as numerous contradictions at present. It can be said that we are facing *a global civil war in the world*, between the privileged rich minority (“Golden Billion”) and the remaining majority of the lumpen world. Some researchers speak not only about social-Darwinization of social relations but also about *economic genocide*, homicidal capitalism, “*disaster capitalism*” (N. Klein). Exposed to the impact of the neoliberal model of development (“*exploitation sans rivages*” – P. Bourdieu) is also the *European Union* in which the socialdemocratic model of the state is suppressed and replaced by the Anglo-Saxon model. In order to come out of this whirlpool of transition and asymmetrical globalization, it is necessary to make a radical turn towards the socialdemocratic model of development thus bringing Europe and the world back to their social soul and thus linking the idea of freedom (democracy) with the idea of brotherhood and equality. This is the imperative of the universal values of the civil revolution without which the world cannot make further steps towards the formation of mankind as a community of equal peoples and emancipated citizens.

*The future of the Balkans is not in re-tailoring the borders of the past but in mutual cooperation and integration* of the Balkan peoples and states, in opening up towards the challenges of modernization and development, Eurointegration and globalization. But in these processes, the Balkan elites and peoples have to defend their interests and identity,

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<sup>5</sup> M. Marković, N. Milošević, „Liberalizam versus levica“, („Liberalism Versus the Left“), Treći program RB, II/1990, p. 150

<sup>6</sup> M. Pečujlić, *Challenges of Transition – New World and Postsocialist Societies (Izazovi tranzicije – novi svet i postsocijalistička društva)*, Pravni fakultet, Belgrade, 1997., p. 139

cherish the strategy of cooperation and dialogue of diverse cultures as well as partnership of diverse civilizations. They have to *develop regional self-awareness about their own identities* thus avoiding the traps of empty generalizations of cosmopolitanism. Since the pathways to Europe and the world, that is, “bridges over the European river” (K. Kosik) do not mean a lackey’s denial of one’s own national and regional identity. On the contrary, without preserving identity, culture of diversity, Europe would very soon turn into a new cave or uniform imperial barrack.<sup>7</sup> The way to new society and European integration must not mean disassembling of peoples and citizens, but, instead, a struggle for establishment of genuine integral democracy and equality of peoples as well as respect of the unity of diverse cultures and civilizations, globalization of cooperation and understanding among peoples.<sup>8</sup>

*Eurointegration of the Balkans* should not represent the creation of a new iron curtain of the European Union towards Russia and Euro-Asian space, towards the countries of the East, North or South. In this context, the strategic partnership of Europe and Russia is equally important for the development of multipolar world and Euro-Atlantic integrations.

If the European Union wants to develop into a *genuine republic of European citizens and peoples* instead of a new plutocratic empire of megacapital powers, then it has to respect the principles of equality and diversity, freedom of justice and solidarity in international relations. If it fails to do that, under the slogans of “an open society,” global economy and expansion of liberal empires, it will grow into a new Leviathan, a monster in the service of the usurer international capital. In order to avoid these devastating traps of the civilization breakdown, *the EU must return to its original model of the sociodemocratic development* thus setting up the foundations for a multipolar order and upon them reintegrating and mobilizing all of its forces for the oncoming challenges in the world and in the struggle for the future of the world and man.

In this world of globalization, *all of us have to change* and, above all, respect Kant’s principle of moral imperative – do so as the moral principle of love for man and mankind is above all or Marx’s libertarian slogan that *freedom of every individual is the condition of freedom of all*.

17. If the *critical theory of transition* reminds us that the transition time is not a friendly sports match and that in the transition epoch no one enjoys the luxury of standing apart,<sup>9</sup> then this must also be obligatory for the academic community of scientists and sociologists to analyze in a professionally responsible way not only the realized achievements of the transition but also to *search for alternative projects of radically improved future*, on the pathway of realizing an economically rich, democratically developed, free and just and solidarity society. In that context, *sociology*

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<sup>7</sup> K. Kosik, *Bridges over the European River and Other Essays*, (Mostovi preko evropske reke i drugi spisi), Braničevo, Požarevac, 2008

<sup>8</sup> On the Euro-illusionary understanding of the European Union, K. Kosik, in his book, *Bridges over the European River and Other Essays*, says that, among other things, we do not enter Europe but we move from one cave to another, from the cave gray, barrack-like, surrounded by barbed-wire into a cave oversaturated with comfort, lit with ads replacing stars and the sun (Braničevo, Požarevac, 2008, p. 78)

<sup>9</sup> I. Wallerstein, *The Decline of American Power*, (Opadanje američke moći), CID, Podgorica, 2004, p. 178

really must avoid being, in the current processes of peripherization of economy, society and culture on the Balkan geospace, instrumentalized and abused as a servant of the ongoing policy. Starting from the thesis that the future of man and mankind are neither theologically nor naturally predestined but it depends on the cognitive moral and political role and actions of every actor including science, we can say that *science should honorably serve the truth, goodness and emancipation of man*. In the overreaching scope of this ethics of vocation and cognitive goals of science and sociology – while stressing the need for impartial and inexhaustive search for new alternatives – I am bringing these conclusions to the close with the *message from I. Wallerstein*, representative of the critical sociology and an influential antiglobalist, fighter for peace and freedom in the world. In it, he says that we desperately need to scrutinize alternative possibilities for the realization of historical system which would be truly sensible so as to substitute the frenetic and dying one in which we live. It is where sociology can play a role but only sociology which refuses to separate the search for Truth from the search for Goodness, only sociology which is able to overcome the gap between two cultures, only sociology which can fully accept permanent uncertainty and to enjoy the opportunities given by this uncertainty to the human creativity and new more real rationality (*(Ratio – nalităt materiel of Max Weber)*).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> I. Wallerstein, Ibid, p. 174