Preface and Acknowledgements

Can we be optimistic about the future of Europe? More than trying to provoke sarcasm and negative emotions, this question is an invitation to reconsider the current concerns and imagine their impact on future developments. The examination of Europe as a whole or the European Union and its relations with both European and non-European neighbors is rarely straightforward. This means that credible conclusions and accompanying decision-making depend on careful examination of both specific phenomena (such as individual crisis and policies) and a larger picture (such as longer trajectories as the result of major geopolitical shifts). Accordingly, while some of the available analyses tend to speculate and suggest what needs to be done in order to overcome problems, some others go as far as to claim that the Brussels administration and the individual European leaderships have failed to consolidate the European integrationist project, seeing its collapse as the most probable outcome. As we have witnessed, every crisis and consequent evaluations have inspired individual member states to point the finger and use the momentum to discredit one another, rightfully or not, thus contributing to the debate about fragmentation of the EU. They have expressed strong feelings and disagreements concerning Brexit, the powerful role of Germany, the alleged lack of responsiveness from the Mediterranean region, the Europeanization fatigue of the Central and Eastern European members, the (im)possible democratization and EU accession of the Western Balkans, and so on. In any case, past events have shaped present political and socioeconomic cooperation (or its deficiencies) and there is no reason to believe that present challenges will not influence future arrangements at supranational or intergovernmental level, and between the EU or its individual members and the states on the outskirts (in the case of enlargement). Whichever the period, the question of belonging and the (un)wanted Other has penetrated discussions; while the very notion of otherness has often been associated with migration and the potential threat stemming from the growing influx of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, the Other has also come from within, in the form of proper states or regions, some of which often referred to as semi-periphery.

This volume brings together a diverse group of researchers interested in Europe's past, present, and future, all trying to shed light on the understanding of Europeanness and the position of those who may, at times or continuously, be viewed as the Other. It starts by reviewing some of the dominant arguments in the field, altogether suggesting that the EU has struggled with the development of a joint position, required in order to speak with a single voice and convey clear messages about crucial matters. Such a deficiency has surely affected its credibility, not only among its own member states, but also in the wider context, beyond the EU's official borders. Here, by looking at a range of challenges, the focus is on the gap between the EU elites and ordinary people or public intellectuals, as well as between the so-called core and (semi-)periphery, which in return has implied

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more consideration of intergovernmental rather than supranational ways forward. While such shifts do serve certain policy agendas, they simultaneously open questions concerning the so much spoken about European unity or solidarity, and the subsequent opening to external interferences, either cultural or geopolitical. As also observed, such a context has been accompanied by the emergence of political alternatives and escalation of political polarization, with a number of political parties and elected establishments seeking to consolidate their EU-skeptic popular support through the exploitation of the Other and unwanted Europeanness.

Following the introductory reflections, the volume is broadly divided into two parts. The first part reminds us of some truly relevant evaluations. Jan Květina examines Jean Jacques Rousseau's involvement in the debate about the collapsing Polish state, which he joined with his last political work *Considerations on the Government in Poland*. While this work is often ignored when considering Rousseau's political thinking (and this is largely due to the uncertainty concerning Rousseau's interest in the Polish matters), its main controversy derives from the author's message, which is in stark contrast with the general body and arguments of his well-known political writings. In his conclusion, Rousseau urged Poles not to change their traditional yet problematic constitution, maintaining that it was its very essence that had actually shaped the Polish nation to be what it was – a preference indirectly suggesting that later Rousseau might have become an open advocate of hierarchical status quo. Going forward, Marius-Mircea Mitrache looks at the process of mental mapping of East-Central Europe and the French interest in the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Back then, some scholars, including several eminent geographers, maintained that the milieu goals of French foreign policy were inextricably linked to East-Central Europe. However, it was only during the First World War, in the aftermath of the collapse of Czarist Russia, that the French leadership started to perceive nations of the region as potential allies. As it happened to be the case, during the Paris Peace Conference, the junction between the scholarly expertise and the new French diplomatic ambitions came to view East-Central Europe not only as a mental map for French foreign policy milieu goals, but also as a geopolitical representation of possibilism.

Moving to a different region, Jasmin Hasanović looks at the complex relationship between Europeanization and Balkanization, and the auto-colonial narrative in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While having in mind the often pejorative (mis)perceptions of the Balkans, he shows how the negative imagination of the region formed an important spatial identity, which operates as the otherness representing the essential inferiority and alienation in the discourse of the geopolitical core. Accordingly, the progressiveness of Europeanization and the repressiveness of Balkanization are to be enlightened as inseparable ideological artefacts of the post-socialist Bosnia and Herzegovina's political and social realty, as well as in most of the (Western) Balkan countries. This theoretical insight contributes to identifying their local materialization as a form of auto-colonialism, symbolically significant for decomposing of the

former Yugoslav state. By being aware of the available pluralities and of the friend-enemy line, and thus the colonial narrative that places the Balkans beyond the political consideration alone, the author seeks to draw possibilities for alternate, counter-hegemonistic, narratives arising out of the liminality of the Balkans. The dilemma about belonging or the complex relationship between Europeanization and anti-Europeanization is also featured in Kürşad Ertuğrul's debate about Turkish coming to represent the incomplete Other of the center. He argues that while Turkey's early application for the then European Community membership was seen as necessary by the ruling elites, the whole process has regularly been countered by a conservative backlash emphasizing the Ottoman heritage, the relevance of Islam, and the so-called Turkish authentic culture. Interestingly, even the modernist Turkish left was critical of the European project emphasizing its imperialist character and has supported the conservative assertion of the historical and cultural difference of Turkish society. More recently, with the Justice and Development Party in charge, Turkey has experienced different forms of authoritarianism, altogether reasserting Turkish differences and making its relationship with Europe an eternal suspense.

The first part rounds off with William Jay Risch's evaluation of the role the European Union played as a symbol in mobilizing popular protest and opposition to protest in Ukraine's Euromaidan Revolution. As argued, Euromaidan supporters at home and abroad viewed the protests as a European rebirth, as a spiritual and national awakening. Their opponents, both at home and abroad, saw Europe poisoning relations with Russia and dividing Ukraine. The uprising in Kyiv produced what seemed to be a civil war as protesters and security forces exchanged fire with each other on Independence Square (the Maidan), and in provincial cities like Lviv, crowds ransacked administrative buildings and even seized weapons (or claimed to have done so). The so-called Russian Spring, while coordinated and manipulated by Russia, was at first a spontaneous protest of the bloodshed in Kyiv, which Europe was responsible for provoking. The armed seizure of power in Crimea and the Donbas unleashed hatred and fear of pro-Russian forces, threatening to destroy Ukraine's European integration aspirations and the Ukrainian state itself. In the years that followed, seizing administrative buildings, a practice of Euromaidan protesters, became a legitimate act of political protest. Instead of upholding the rule of law and the principles of nonviolent protest, the Euromaidan Revolution thus became a national tragedy suggesting the EU's limitations in transforming the post-Soviet sphere.

The second part of the volume is concerned with a number of ongoing processes. To begin with, Lia Tsuladze examines how the idea of Europe and Georgians' Europeanness is invented and reinvented through the political, intellectual, and population's discourses. They reveal Georgians' ambivalent views regarding pragmatic considerations and identity concerns related to the country's Europeanization; both

elite and popular discourses construct an EU that improves the protection of human rights in Georgia concurrently doubting that Georgians need to be taught human rights because of their natural tolerance. In addition, these discourses present the EU as Georgia's security guarantee and doubt that the EU can really safeguard the country against Russian threats. Also, both discourses assume that Georgia shares European values and are concerned that European values might threaten Georgian traditions. The question of values and complexities concerning the wanted and unwanted aspects of European integration are also at the core of Biljana Vankovska's analysis of Macedonia's EU path. From its onset, the EU accession process has been a means rather than an objective goal: troublesome states in the region (including Macedonia) were meant to be civilized and pacified after the Yugoslav imbroglio – yet not necessarily fully integrated. Up to 2019, the so-called name dispute with Greece served as a good excuse for the long drawn out process; once the Prespa Agreement was signed and Macedonia renamed to North Macedonia, Euro-optimists have come to believe that all the obstacles have disappeared. However, the October 2019 EU summit uncovered a deep-rooted lack of enthusiasm; while the Brussels elite has used different mechanisms to incentivize and legitimize the state-building process in its near neighborhood, the end result is a series of stabilitocracies that live in a geopolitical limbo.

The Albanian matters are discussed in two chapters. First, Migena Pengili questions whether or not Albania can actually Europeanize. Its recent past, including the domestic uncertainties caused by violent political developments and the incapacity of the political elite to manage the local election processes, suggests that Tirana's readiness to join the EU is a matter of serious concern. Still, given that the net advantages of EU membership are beyond question, and also given the fact that the Europeanization logic about one size fitting all does not always work, the author argues that the European stakeholders should be prepared to act as mediators, so that the Albanian state could eventually move ahead. A Europeanized Albania is a strategic necessity not only because of its location, but also its impact on the future standing of the Western Balkans and the region's subsequent impact on the EU. Second, Leandrit Mehmeti is interested in Kosovo's EU perspective. He addresses the role of governments in Kosovo and Serbia, as well as different EU institutions, in the understanding and development of EU integration and enlargement challenges. More precisely, the chapter looks at corruption and state capture as obstacles to successful democratization, the expected outcomes of the normalization process between Belgrade and Prishtina, and wider geopolitical considerations closely related to Kosovo's (in)stability. While acknowledging the cruciality of the EU in the region, the EU's approach is in need of major adjustments, largely because of the emerging geopolitical challenges; in fact, the more the Brussels leadership sticks with the current model, the higher the risk of seeing the region opt for alternative geopolitical arrangements, with potentially unfavorable consequences.

The second part ends with another chapter on Turkey, which is surely insightful when approaching other cases of EU accession. Elif Uzgören discusses how Turkey's course is analyzed in the European studies literature, as well as how the Turkish EU membership is studied in the context of crises and the rise of populism. As argued, in contrast to the dominant theoretical explanations that have rarely managed to shed light on future prospects, the critical political economy approaches are truly important since they help us to examine European trends within the structural tendencies largely defined by globalization and neoliberalism. As such, they provide us with useful tools in order to challenge the existing power relations and welcome alternative socio-economic options. In the author's view, integration and enlargement decisions are not outcomes of economic or market necessity but are determined by class struggle, and with this in mind, it is difficult to predict future developments. Moreover, EU accession is not a priority for the Turkish political establishment; while the 2000s were characterized by reforms and negotiations with the EU, since the 2010s, the overall environment has changed and the relations between Ankara and Brussels further deteriorated. In fact, Turkey is seen as moving away from the EU.

The volume finishes with Zuzana Lučkay Mihalčinová's thought-provoking reflection on the question of dignity in Europe. While stressing that the EU is definitely going through a difficult time, stretched between various political forces who wish to see it vanish and those clearly passionate about the European integrationist project and thus hoping for its survival. While creating unions of humans where sharing, communication, and mutual support seem rational and also logical, the obsession with unwanted Europeanness and its participation in a strategic coalition seems ludicrous. However, as insisted, we are still short-sighted; geographical facts, past experiences, and scientific evidence are too often ignored vis-à-vis politics and policymaking. Looking at the EU framework, this chapter argues that regaining human dignity is impossible; while according to different human right provisions, human dignity cannot be lost and it is inviolable, the problem we are confronted with is that the very concept of human dignity appears too elusive. It is an abstract notion which is either too complex for many people to grasp or considered too abstract to have practical impact, or, in fact, both. Accordingly, in her remarks, Lučkay Mihalčinová addresses the differences between human dignity and the applicable, descriptive dignity, the understanding of which is likely to clarify the conflicting nature of Europeanness.

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