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The Paradoxes of a Regional Construction

One of the issues that repeatedly arose in the Serbian public sphere is connected to the region Vojvodina (Vajdaság or Délvidék for Hungarians). There is widespread suspicion that the country's territorial integrity may suffer changes, irreversibly damaging its national essence. From the time of its constitution as part of Serbia, the political and cultural debate over Vojvodina's place on the discursive raised new issues. This situation continually generates intense conflicts focusing on questions of regional loyalty and national identity among intellectuals and politicians. Serbia is an unfinished nation-state, and issues related to the territorial frame of a nation-state appear whenever structural transformation becomes evident.

Many intellectuals and politicians engaged in regional identification point out that Vojvodina may more easily integrate into a European framework. By emphasizing that Vojvodina belonged to earlier Central Europe, regionalists intend to construct and endorse the distinctiveness (its codes of tradition in which ethnical pluralism has played a crucial role) of this region. Regionalists frequently argue that the uncertain position of Vojvodina's is the result of centralist coercion.

It should not be forgotten that re-actualizing Vojvodina as a regional and multiethnic locus where different cultural, social, and political items are exchanged remains a possibility. In order to properly depict the unique character of Vojvodina, wide-ranging, everyday and economic relations between members of different ethnic groups should be mentioned. Comprehensive communication and well-coordinated realization of common interests illustrate habitual behavioral pattern-making it necessary to observe both elements of micro-history and the impact of accumulated social capital that underlay Vojvodina's political history. Such underlying elements in the tradi-

tion of customary interactions highlight the complexity of Vojvodina as a historically specific region.

Obviously, micro-history cannot be identified with political articulation, and the correlation of the two ought to be dealt with separately. In this article I argue on the one hand, that due to traces of ethnic and religious heterogeneity, and a different conception of historical experiences, great efforts, if not, assimilation-processes are required to internalize and accept Vojvodina as part of Serbia. On the other hand, I take into account that after 1918, despite symbolic boundaries, the new constellation of power managed to subordinate and assimilate a tremendous part of the regional codes. Consequently, Vojvodina with its conflation of points of reference, embodies the contradiction between nation-building and regional identification arising from its tradition, or rather between the homogenizing nation-state and regional heterogeneity.

The history of Vojvodina bears the hallmark of the political, demographic and cultural dynamics of the victorious Habsburg Monarchy, which also incorporated 'historic Hungary'. Following the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburgs moved quickly to populate its vast territories.¹ Although the populating processes were sometimes officially directed, at other times, some had an air of spontaneity. Nevertheless, the Habsburg's intention clearly encouraged ethnic diversity, which brought about certain alterations of the religious map. The Habsburgs endorsed anti-Reformation and hence, a large number of people were drawn to Catholicism. The previous movement towards Reformation had been carried out collectively within language-national groups, thus creating religious confessions rooted inside particular national boundaries. These religious dynamics contributed significantly to the miscellany of Vojvodina.

The Habsburg policy comprised both the tendencies of proto-modernization and the interests of preserving the Empire with its constellation of diverse entities. The enlightened absolutism of the Habsburg Empire and Germanization (i.e. supra-national bureaucracy coupled with multi-ethnic conscription) were inevitably confronted by rising nationalism over modernization tendencies. The end of the 18th century and the entire 19th century were marked by frequent conflicts between the multi-ethnic Empire and the dynamics of nationalism. The very paradox of the dynamics of nationalism within the proto-modernization of the Habsburg Empire carried the seed of

¹ Throughout the article I follow certain ideas developed in A. Losonczi: Vojvodina as a realm of regional tendencies. In D. Vujadinovic, L. Veljak, Vl. Goati, V. Pavicevic (eds.): *Between Authoritarianism and Democracy*. Beograd/Podgorica/Zagreb, 2003. 351–371.

future violent conflicts, and of the modalities of political shifts. This presented a paradox since the further proto-modernization advanced, the greater the intensity of the intentions for national emancipation and revival became, which had far-reaching but disputable consequences for multi-national constructs.

Examining other characteristics, it should be pointed out that certain forms of administrative regionalism had previously existed in the area of present-day Vojvodina. However, Vojvodina as a separate entity is a product of 19th century political decisions and represents an expression of a certain historic blueprint. In light of the Hungarian struggle for emancipation from the Habsburgs, and upon the Emperor's order, certain forms of decentralization were constituted. Yet, the Serbs were unsatisfied with the outcomes of decentralization, as the degree of autonomy was very small. For instance, the German was the language of administration, which was far from their expectations. The disappointment over the achieved degree of autonomy was followed by a settlement of differences between Hungarian and Monarchy political leadership. In 1860, the Imperial Decree abolished these forms of decentralization, and the Monarchy reinstated the system of districts.

In the 19th Century milieu, the attitude towards the national-minority issue had a specific connotation owing to the attitude of the Hungarian political elite towards the aspirations and demands of their national minorities. Namely, the Hungarians enjoyed a special status in the Monarchy, which incited national demands from other ethnic groups (especially Serbs). The Hungarian political elite's actions were in keeping with the codes of liberal nationalism of the 19th Century. Their opinion was that modern society had mechanisms for attaching national identity in economic, political and governing spheres. The problem that had been raised, however, cast doubt on the feasibility of a nation-state as a milieu for the development of integration potentials in a genuinely multi-national context. Attempts to find a solution, and the rigidity with which the problem was tackled, all but pointed to the difficulties of liberal nationalism in resolving the national-minority integration issue.

At the end of World War I, and in the context of the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy (with favorable historical circumstances), the region of the present-day Vojvodina affiliated itself with the emerging Yugoslavia, the *co-national* aspirations of Vojvodina Serbs playing the decisive role.² Hence

² The recent elections in Vojvodina demonstrate the great influence of a nationalist party that has been playing a crucial role during the last decade (Serb Radical Party). It is indica-

the population of this region became a part of the multi-national pattern of Yugoslavia, which was equally burdened with conflicts related to the distribution of political and economic powers, and considerable features of hierarchy and non-democratic structures. Other ethnic groups especially with regard to national identity perceived affiliation with Yugoslavia differently. With such a model of political unity, the centralizing impact of the state became predominant. Concurrently, roles changed: minority groups became the majority and the majority ethnic groups became minorities trying to reinforce their minority rights along the windy paths of political negotiation and through bureaucratically complex communication with the League of Nations. Despite the fact that Vojvodina represents a separate cultural memory, it is related to national referential points, the myth of common memories, shared destiny, and symbols of ethnic heritages. Moreover, as we now know, it is from these elements that modern national identities are reconstituted in each generation, as the nation becomes more inclusive. This is a fact that is often oversimplified by affirming a detached cultural memory for societal actors in Vojvodina. The integrationists, or the supporters of a homogeneous nation-state, construct Vojvodina as the returned, undeteriorated, pure and eternal national essence. Nevertheless, regionalists neglect the tensions that arose from the contradiction between national and regional cultural memories, and likewise ignore the homogenizing effects of the endorsed national form.

Between the two world wars, 'Vojvodina', as a political program, was present on the political scene, but it was actually no more than a point of reference for the political orientation of the majority group (the Serbs). Referring to Vojvodina brought about the regional agents' dissatisfaction with the economic and political positions of the region and with the absence of a far-reaching decentralization within the new Yugoslavia. 'Vojvodina', after World War I, however, could not contain the inclusive political process broadly comprising minority demands and, ultimately, a political co-existence based upon equal relations between various groups.³ It is of little relevance here to make a through

tive, that as a ruling party at local levels, it announced its intent to rewrite the memory of the majority. For example, up to now representation of Novi Sad (the capital of Vojvodina) was connected to the constitutive act confirmed by a Habsburg empress. From now on, the main symbolic referential point should be the entering of the Serb Royal Army in Novi Sad at 1918.

³ About the political state of affairs between the Wars, see R. Končar: *Opozicione partije i autonomija Vojvodine 1929 – 1941*. [Oppositional parties and the Autonomy of Vojvodina 1929–1941] Novi Sad, 1995.

analysis of relations between the majority (Serbs) and various minorities (Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks, Ruthenians, etc.), but it is important to note that regional tendencies were burdened with an unquestioned acceptance of *exclusionist patterns of nation-building*.

After World War II, Vojvodina was subordinated to the Communist rule and later gained a regional outline within the Yugoslav State structure. Vojvodina has remained multi-ethnic despite numerous challenges and events. Vojvodina emerged from World War II with painful scars and serious losses. No doubt, the events of World War II were marked by violence and inter-ethnic hatred and are still a source of conflict-inducing memories. Yugoslavia was one among a few states with a federal structure and a considerable degree of decentralization that remained within the Communist ideological frames; i.e. regionalization was carried out in compliance with the standards for preserving Party-power. This meant that the region was understood as an organic part of the ideological structure and therefore, necessary to integrate into the territorial distribution of power. All Vojvodinan elements – historical and territorial codes – had to be fitted into the ideological construct of Yugoslav reality. Obviously, territorial differentiation was a network of channels for the division of power in the Communist creation of reality. The classical principles of a federation, like subsidiary, or power control, had to be rewritten according to the altered imperatives of political action as the word ‘control’ could not be used and was replaced by ‘the territorial distribution of power’.

In 1974, the Constitution of Yugoslavia was adopted, strengthening the decentralization of the country. It immediately brought about criticism by the Serbian political elite, especially as Vojvodina had a dual constitutional status, being part of Serbia and Yugoslavia at the same time. Broad disputes over the adoption of the Constitution revealed the discontent of Serbian political elite with the quasi-statehood of Vojvodina, who concluded that the status of Vojvodina was dubious in a number of ways from the standpoint of Serbian national interests. The broad political context demonstrated the paradoxical meanings of nationalism: official ideological rhetoric strongly excluded nationalism from the public sphere, but made it stronger underground.⁴

⁴ At this point I agree with D. Jovic: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia, A Critical Review of Explanatory Approaches. *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 4, Nr. 1, 2001. 5. An assessment on Russia, *mutatis mutandis*, could be applied to the case of Yugoslavia too: “far from suppressing nationhood, the communist regime institutionalized it”. See Rogers Brubaker: *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 17.

During the 1980s, ethnocentric discourse gradually won public support in Serbia and, finally, gained 'street', populist forms. In 1987, the rising ethnocentric populism was affirmed in the ousting of the Vojvodina political elite who suffered from a national identity deficit on the one hand, and the discontentment caused by its repressive internal policy among even of those who were not committed to ethnocentrism on the other. The defeat of the isolated and lonely Vojvodina political elite did not only mean reshaping maneuver space in Yugoslavia, but it also represented a symbolic departure from 'the sins of the past' – a demarcation line to the past which implied 'weakening and blackmailing of Serbia'.

When Milošević's regime took over power, it cancelled elements of autonomy in Vojvodina, which had been derived from the Communist perception of Yugoslav reality. This period was loaded with elements of armed *ethno-anarchy*. Ethnocentrism targeted institutions perceived as limiting the strength and affirmation of ethnic essence. This can explain the collapse, the destruction of institutions, and the instrumentalization of the state. Furthermore, it was necessary to convert segments of everyday reality into signs of ethnocentric practice, which entailed discursive strategies concerning the re-discovered unity of blood and territory. Such a constellation opened the door to *myth-political* discourses. It was not a question of a return to the past, or to history, but rather of an integration of history and historicity into myth-political media. Moreover, discourse of the ruling ideology suggested that focusing on the issue of Vojvodina autonomy was contrary to the unification of the national interests in Serbia, i.e. that any regionalization could damage the unified Serbia. The correlation between the concepts of nation and centralism was re-affirmed a number of times. Admittedly, during the 1990s, the national discourse was modified, but the inner structure of Serbia remained unchanged.

With the overthrow of Milošević's regime deliberations on regionalism entered a new, post-Milošević stage. The political actors keen on the autonomy of Vojvodina systematically indicated their dissatisfaction with what had been achieved and, pointed out the uninterrupted centralism, thus bringing the autonomy issue into the focus of political discourse. Having become a topic of current political conflicts, the state of affairs in Vojvodina shook the very foundations of Serbia, which continues to try to re-associate with European tendencies. Although more or less all of the politically relevant actors admit that some changes are inevitable, the range of such changes is still unclear. For instance, regionalization concepts based upon the assumption that

Serbia should remain a unitary state, with certain asymmetric features reflecting the particularities of its regions, have existed in Serbia for some time.⁵ Regional actors understand this as an alibi-concept – an intention to preserve centralist features in changed circumstances.

Finally, it should be taken into account that the structure of inter-ethnic relations has changed. Indeed, if we examine earlier periods, the genesis of ‘a multi-ethnic community free of domination of any one particular group’ can be seen.⁶ Even a superficial look at the statistic data for the 20th century, however, reveals the changes that have brought about the development of the majority and minorities, amongst whom the biggest is Hungarian, then Croatian, Slovak and Romanian. Demographic processes, assimilation trends, modernization’s influence, as well as populating policies, have changed proportional relations between ethnic groups and their opportunities to make use of the resources. The statistics also reveal that the minority population has considerably shrunk, which points towards certain political influences that, along with ‘natural’ assimilation tendencies, have instigated change in the ethnic pattern (namely, the percentage of minority population decrease ranges from 7% to 17% in a ten-year period). It is evident that reflections on regionalism in Vojvodina cannot be immersed in an abstract equality discourse, but should rather enjoy an asymmetry created by the relations between the majority and the minorities.

Let us turn from with the historical analysis and ask, “How can we establish *normative standpoints* for regional identity?” Identification commonly implies a process of bringing into consciousness an *unconscious* image of oneself. In the identity analysis, it is always advisable to examine the route between unconscious images and the process of bringing them into consciousness.⁷ Regional identification should denote *collectively* created images of oneself upon which a certain community perceives and explains itself. The existence of regional identity implies that the political and economic organization of a region is considered a collective enterprise of all the inhabitants of the region. This means that the root of regional identity comprises a certain collective structure and allegiance which are to be understood as touchstones for the inhabitants of that region. The members of the region do not perceive themselves as ran-

⁵ This is a concept elaborated by M. Jovičić: *Regionalna država*. [Regional state] Beograd, 1996.

⁶ See Charles Ingrao: *Istorijski preduslovi regionalizacije: Vojvodina, nasleđe Austrijske Monarhije i njene južne strategije* [Historical preconditions of regionalisation: Vojvodina, or the heritage of Austrian Monarchy and her strategy for South] In N. Čuk Skenderović (ed.): *Ogledi o regionalizaciji*. [On regionalisation] Subotica, 2001. 191.

⁷ O. Marquard – K. Stierle (eds.): *Identität*, in *Poetic und Hermeneutik XVIII*, München, 1979.

domly gathered individuals as they exercise a higher level of obligation towards each other than towards other citizens of the state. They single themselves out from the state macro-region and confirm their particularity through common actions. Hence, regional identity is viable only if there is a habitual inclination towards understanding between the members of the region. Collective identification cannot be realized without substantial elements of trust. Any group inhabiting the given region has to be confident that its voice will be heard and that its aspirations will be taken into account. In other words, regional identity creation is always closely followed by the creation of a framework for litigation and deliberation between the protagonists of the region.⁸

Referring to the region implies that all members of the region, upon certain recognized values, commonly join a broader community. Hence, when a region exists, its members perceive themselves as citizens of the state, but communicate such a perception through regional membership. When there is a region, then all its members identify themselves with certain features and outcomes of the given region. A steady-patterned identity cannot solely be formed on the contradistinctions to the exterior. Dichotomies cannot define all the components of identity. In other words, regional identity has to be established upon its own value patterns, i.e. upon its own pre-established values.

Decentralization implies such processes as when policy design and executive-power practices are transferred onto sub-state levels. It is possible, of course, that a number of different functions are transferred onto sub-levels, i.e. that the decentralized institutions hold a variety of responsibilities and a number of different modalities of power.

At the same time, an analysis of the history of Yugoslavia, calls for a word of warning: *territorial decentralization may not be identified with a regional, "unfettered" form of litigation*. Decentralization may be wielded as an institutional framework for power distribution among power-holders, as was the case in the former Yugoslavia; the country utilized some forms of territorial decentralization, but only in order to attain a certain type of power. 1980s Kosovo exemplifies such a situation. Namely, the territorial decentralization of Kosovo during that period demonstrated that it is possible to carry out the process in such a way that neither the members of the ethnic majority, nor those of the minority, could identify with it. The members of the region, de-

⁸ About 'unfettered consensus' see Charles Taylor: *Invoking Civil Society*, Chicago: Center for Psychosocial Studies, 1990, or reprinted in Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit (eds.) *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997. 66–77. Consensus here is not teleologically placed.

spite being territorially intertwined, did not comprehend their belonging as a basis for the realization of democratic initiatives. This and other instances have proven that decentralization can be a *mechanism of power* inconsistent with pluralism and aimed at a coercive unification of society. Therefore, territorial decentralization became an instrument for facilitating the participation of the political and cultural elite in the re-distribution of wealth.

With regard to regionalism, it seems important to emphasize the difference between:

1) decentralization as a basis for certain autonomous actions of regional/local governance, i.e. decentralization as a basis for the autonomy of a certain territorial entity, and

2) regionalism as a basis for democratic litigation between different actors in order to achieve mutual recognition.

The earlier remark on the difference between the majority and minority should not be forgotten. In accordance with this, *regional communication related to Vojvodina is a history of singular solutions to the dialectic of inequality and equality, a series of locally situated inscriptions of equality into the realm of inequality*. Minorities disrupt the organizational principle of society based on the bias of an exclusive nation-state, and make themselves visible as social partners; they make their voices heard. Minority communities holding firm on the notion that all groups are equal disrupted national hierarchy.

That common political identity in a plural society has to be negotiated, is empirical knowledge. Such litigation should rather be understood as a *process* than a completed situation. They are negotiations on political standards rather than a mere territorial decentralization. As a final point, the aforementioned litigation ought to extend to various spheres, from everyday life outwards. The normative projection offered here revives Tocqueville's idea of various forms of *self-government*, which enable the affirmation of cultural identities. Not one, single instance of Vojvodina's past corresponds to this idea. Cultural identities and ethnic-minority patterns in Vojvodina could gain their full meaning only through a network of various forms of self-government, institutions and civil associations.

Possible aspects of regional legitimization can be enumerated as follows:

1. *Tradition as a source of legitimization* Tradition appears to be a possible basis for legitimization not only because various actors in Vojvodina refer to it as such, but also because it may indeed be a substantial source of legitimate outcomes. However, it is unclear whether tradition in Vojvodina includes the con-

notations that can serve as the basis for the construction of the regional collective identity. Namely, the tradition seems to be void of the meanings over which consensus in the aforementioned sense could be expected.

This is explicitly illustrated by the fact that various attempts connect it with certain historical situations. It is obvious that evoking 19th century (1848 to be precise), or evoking 1918 and 1945, do not meet the aforementioned criteria. These historical situations are susceptible to various, often-contradictory interpretations and cannot be referential for regional identity. It should be born in mind that some crucial decisions were closely connected to the fulfillment of a particular national concept (1918), and that the event did not include a large part of the population in the decision-making process. A closer look at more recent history reveals similar difficulties. Vojvodina was granted quasi-state prerogatives by the 1974 Constitution, thus becoming incorporated into the Communist way of unification of the society. It is not difficult to conclude that the outcomes of this period were such that the multicultural configuration suffered a negative transformation. The integration of minorities into the 'ruling cohesion' resulted in assimilation policies and the re-tailoring of the ethnic map.

Such a gloomy diagnosis does not mean that, over the decades, everyday routine forms of cohabitation in Vojvodina have not developed various kinds of tolerance (this was argued previously in connection with the micro-history). On the contrary, tolerance has been the load-bearing pillar of practical concerns over various modalities of cohabitation. The disruption of explicit or implicit hierarchy in society, however, has shown that individual and collective tolerance is rather ineffective when an institutional confirmation of pluralistic cultures is attempted. This diagnosis focuses on the fact that historical situations that can be invoked are too controversial and that they imply exclusion of a considerable part of the population from deciding their own destiny. This is a model of 'ascribed', imposed consensus. Hence, it follows that revitalizing tradition contains insurmountable weaknesses as a possible source of legitimating in Vojvodina.

2. *Vojvodina as a Framework of Supra-national Tendencies* There are arguments which claim that regionalism should be made accessible both for reinvigorating national aspirations of the majority, and for minorities' orientations burdened with invidious ethnicization. Such arguments are prerequisites of the attitude that perceives Vojvodina as an attained equilibrium between national and democratic aspirations. They result from a critical attitude to-

wards the boost of ethno-nationalism in Serbia during the 1990s, and link the tradition of resistance to crude particularization.

a) In order to examine similar situations, knowledge of ethnically composed, regional aspirations should be assumed. Regionalism often combines divergent claims, and cannot be understood as a framework which *eo ipso* generates supra-national orientations.

b) Besides the aforementioned, the fact that Vojvodina consists of the majority and a number of minorities amongst whom advantages and disadvantages of membership are not equally distributed should also be taken into account. Structural inequality between various groups repeatedly requires alteration in the practice of forming collective identity upon rigid, abstractly stipulated features. Litigation between majority and minorities occur as reiterations of previous inscriptions of equality. Supra-national features of collective identity are undoubtedly rooted in certain domains – economic, for instance. However, a rigid formation of collective identity based upon such domains has a devastating influence on the exploitation of cultural resources, which are relevant for the development of a particular cultural identity. If the creation of regional collective identity is based upon a rigid, abstract attitude, it produces a pattern, which provides structural domination of the majority. It is a well-known fact that democratic procedures void of corrective mechanisms systematically produce disadvantages for minority groups.

With regard to Vojvodina, the aforementioned statement ought to be especially clear as regional identity can be caught in the net of majority democracy unless it opens itself to institutional affirmation of minority identities. We are quite accustomed to actions that represent regional demands before a broader community, i.e. which design the presentation of regionalism. Actually, they design the presentation from a *collective* identity standpoint. The actors of such a presentation, however, are not open to the creation of minority identities within the regional identity, i.e. they are against the fragmentation of the regional space according to minority identities. When they criticize minority demands as ‘too ethnic’, they invoke individual freedom as contrasted to collective identities. *De facto*, they prioritize a certain type of collective identity (regional) over other types of collective identity. Otherwise, such regional identity becomes prey to the majority democracy, the outcome of which is a *neutralization of plurality*.

3. *Territorial Autonomy as a basis for Legitimizing* This puts forth, as in the previous assertions, that there is a profound difference between decentralization and

the development of regional identity, and that life together based on litigation, temporarily posed consensus, cannot be identified with territorial autonomy. The possibility of democratization that is not connected with a territorial entity of the regional kind is another empirical reason to support such assertions.

The strategy of establishing territorial autonomy can also imply the traditional correlation between the state and the territory. Namely, it is customary to conceive of a state or parts of a state, as entities with a certain territory, and vice versa, territories and parts of territories are seen as inclusive components of a state. *However*, certain tendencies and reflections encourage a profound correction to this view. The contemporary practice includes both territorial and de-territorialized forms of democracy and therefore, it cannot be inferred that territorial autonomy necessarily ensures democratization.⁹

4. *Vojvodina as a Euro-region*. The idea of Vojvodina as a Euro-region is grounded on a) a critical reaction against anti-European tendencies in Serbia and consequently, on the demand to associate with European structures, b) on the increase in significance of Euro-regions on this continent in the 1980s and 1990s. Primarily, Euro-region is understood as a type of co-operation that goes beyond borders and integrates representatives of local and regional governance and other social actors. Besides the obvious common economic interests, regionalisms in Europe are also established in order to stimulate an extended co-operation aimed at re-strengthening mutual trust – a capacity frequently lacked in Central and Eastern Europe. In other words, regional networking and learning how to co-operate serve as a means of establishing associations along existing borders, surmounting the accumulated problems of the past.¹⁰

Intensifying Euro-regionalism, however, would not cancel the need for the framing of *ethnic differentiation* in Vojvodina. There is a link between memory, history, and democracy. Moreover, intensifying Euro-regionalism may also mean the creation of sub-regions in Vojvodina, i.e. the formation of border sub-territories that co-operate with similar border sub-territories in other countries. This would mean a formation of certain regions within Vojvodina and, in a way, a division of its territory along newly established sub-regional lines. As a final point, such a tendency would be in complete accordance with European standards. Democracy may also develop as a net-

⁹ B. S. Frey: Flexible citizenship for a global society. *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, Vol. 2, Nr. 1, 2003. 93–114.

¹⁰ As it is known, the DMT Euro-region, which includes Vojvodina as well, was established in 1997. As the subsequent events were highly unfavourable for the realisation of a broader network, the DMT potentials have remained unexploited.

work of associations and as a fragmented system of sub-regional tendencies. Sub-regions may become representative manifestations of democracy in the same way, as localities may be the promoters of the ‘spirit of freedom’. Therefore, it can be inferred that Vojvodina should not be automatically treated as an area of territorial autonomy, but possibly as a framework of various civil and sub-regional tendencies.

5. *Vojvodina as an Economic Entity* At first glance it might seem surprising to link remarks on nationalism with economy. Nevertheless, the argument insists that successful implementation of reforms in post-Milosevic era requires a strengthening of the nation as a collective. Taking into consideration the significant social discontent that built up after the political changes in Serbia, it is clear that references to nationalism as the cement of “reforms” have a *seductive* meaning in the discursive sphere. Especially relevant here is the ambition to affirm “liberal” nationalism in the *discursive conflicts of certain elite*. It is thus stressed that strengthening national loyalty, i.e. of a nationally mediated community, can provide a starting point for market-based reforms. This is partially because liberal nationalism may meet the interests of the new economic and cultural elite. The distribution of cultural, economic resources can strongly correspond to the interests of those economic and cultural elite.

Liberal nationalists express the hope that the expansion of the codes of market might *deactivate* regional aspirations. That is, supporters of integration believe that a sense of distinctness has lived out its days and could not survive after economic liberalization. Because the market is liberated to grow and operate freely according to its own principles, constructions of regional identity (integrationists believe that these constructions always reflected top-down arrangements) would disappear.

Liberal nationalists acknowledge regional differences and do not negate the significance of handling regional disparities in various fields. However, the role of the economy in identity patterns necessitates a clarification of the social-economic system in which the economic interests would be articulated. It is certain that social dynamics in Serbia will bring about an expansion of market standards and bear out the codes of economic liberalization. The liberated market facilitates the development of economic freedom and the expression of economic will but also intensifies the struggle of interests. Social theoreticians frequently discuss elimination processes and the outcomes of the growing importance of market standards. The advance of market standards carries a ‘de-contextualization’ and reshapes social relations ‘within un-

specified expansion of time and space'. This means that market expansion nullifies traditional identities, amongst which it may undermine local and regional identities, as well.

This interpretation of the relation between market and identification, if applied to Vojvodina, will demonstrate that ongoing economic liberalization will almost certainly lead to disintegration of the hitherto fragile types of regional identity. It is highly probable that market logic will produce the same contradictory effects as in the previously mentioned situations, and strengthen the confusion in relation to regional identity. The regionalists do not have an adequate answer to these questions.

Conclusions

In this article I examined the phenomenological and normative dimensions of Vojvodina and considered the perpetual confusion in relation to regional identity. My goal was to demonstrate the antinomical character of regional self-understanding, and to articulate the discursive position that critiques both the regionalists and integrationists. Integrationists praise the pristine unity of the nation. The discursive construction of regionalists reifies regional identity and neglects: a) the tensions between the nationalizing and regionalizing processes, b) the claims of national minorities which are described as the continual inscription of equality into structural inequality between majority and minority. However, such treatment typically fails to grasp the varied forms in which this process occurs and the different understandings that motivate key actors in their approach to regionalization. They ignore the extent to which regionalization is the complex of many different forces and processes – processes occurring on various spatial and temporal scales and originating in widely dispersed places and/or networks of places. They neglect the extent to which regionalization involves complex, causal hierarchies rather than a unilinear, bottom-up or top-down movement, as well as the extent to which regionalization is always a contingent product of tendencies and counter-tendencies. One should not commit the error of essentializing regional identities.

Various starting-points for the development of regional identity in Vojvodina have been discussed in this paper. They are based on the notion that identification is a complex idea, the content of which can be fully understood only if its various dimensions are examined. Therefore, the subjects of collective regional identity must be sensitive to particular identities within the region. In addition, institutionalization of cultural differences enables the creation of a regional identity from *within*; they reach beyond the territo-

rial decentralization standards.¹¹ This does not call into question the validity of territorial decentralization, but it does not seem sufficient to cover the plurality of cultural patterns in Vojvodina.

¹¹ A. A. Caglar: Hyphenated Identities and the Limits of Culture. In T. Modood and P. Webner (eds.): *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism Identity and Community*. London-New York, 1997. 169.