

Are we to believe Huntington?

By **Xhavit Shala**

Twelve years ago, Samuel Huntington,¹ the American professor and distinguished thinker on security policies predicted the expansion of the European Union up to the borders of the western civilization. He considered religion as a very important element of civilization and in 1993 delineated the European boundaries of this civilization². According to him, this boundary line coincides with the historical border between the Hapsburgs and the Ottoman Empire. Speaking about the countries that had not entered the European Union yet but which were considered by him part of the the western civilization, the general says: “The people on the north and west of this line are either protestant or catholic ... dhe they can now look forward towards admission into a common European market and consolidation of democratic institutions.” While speaking about countries which according to him were not part of the western civilization (he puts the Balkan countries here), he says that the “people in the east and the south of this line are either orthodox or Muslims; historically speaking they belonged the Ottoman and Czarist empires and they are unlikely to develop stable democratic political systems.”³

The Thessaloniki summit of the EU countries in 2003, which decided in favor of continuing the process of enlargement with the states on the eastern side of the western civilization’s dividing line, seems to have disproved Huntington’s point. However, the last 2004 EU enlargement added ten new countries that were perceived byHuntington as part of the western civilization.

Discussions about the future of the EU began to be clouded in the summer of 2005 after the failure of the referendums on the EU constitution. The failure to pass the constitution was officially translated as a sign of fatigue and indicative of the need that EU countries had to catch their breath following the last enlargement. But the problem appears to be more serious. The future of the European project itself is in question. The shadow of Huntington is seriously hovering over the European skies. The EU countries have now been divided in two groups, in those which support the entry of the Balkan countries to the union, and in those that oppose it. Rather than being a debate about the Balkans, the matter seems to be focused on certain countries reluctance to accept Turkey into the EU.

The failure of the referendums only exposed the disagreements about the future of the EU that were already existent. Several senior EU politicians have expressed skepticism towards the idea of EU enlargement. They have warned against the danger of EU disintegration. The former German chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, held the position that it

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² Article first printed in daily “Korrieri”, December 19, 2005, and Issue 3 “Drita Islame”, March 2006

³ Samuel P. Huntington, “the Clash of Civilizations?”.

was impossible to have 27 countries fully integrated and that is why it was necessary to create a nucleus of countries called Euro-Europa. It could be imagined that a system of states surrounding this nucleus could be connected with the EU. A new treaty for a new type of association could be offered to those countries that desired to enter the EU but for various reasons could not join it. The former chancellor thus declared his vision of a “three-speeds Europe”.⁴ The European Union would remain present in the East and Southeast not only in the form of the existent “SAA”, but by encouraging other forms of integration also, such as regional or Mediterranean integrations.

More recently, there have been German politicians again that have spurred the debate about the future of the EU. The EMP Elmar Brook, a German Christian democrat, and chairman of the EU Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs, is working to materialize the proposals of the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. A few days ago he proposed that the EU create a special status for the western Balkans and Turkey⁵. According to him this status would provide an association that would somewhere between full membership and an EU neighboring country. The goal of this proposal is to create a new instrument that is to replace the existing SAA and pre-accession agreements. This instrument, unlike the existing ones, does not necessarily ensure a future access into the EU for these countries but it merely provides for a different type of an open ended arrangement.

The proposal has found some support and it is expected to be discussed again in January of next year. The official argument used to justify this proposal is the need to find a balance between enlargement and the consolidation of the EU. In spite of the justification, the proposal for a new instrument for the countries aspiring entry into the EU raises serious suspicions among the countries of the western Balkans including Turkey about the real chances of eventual membership into the EU. The new status that is proposed that is defined as something between membership and an EU neighboring country status can almost sound similar to the Serb proposal for the status of Kosovo, more than autonomy, less than independence. While the Serb proposal aims to keep Kosovo from ever becoming an independent country, the proposal on the new status intends to keep the countries of the western Balkans and Turkey near (but not in) Europe for an undefined period of time.

Such proposals in Brussels, even when simply discussed could contribute to releasing new negative energies in the still troubled region of the Balkans. The integration of the western Balkan countries into the EU has an extraordinarily important impact on the security of the region and of Europe itself. “The destabilization of the region would cost Europe more than just the European perspective of conscientious and reforming countries,” the German Chancellor Schroeder said a short while after the failure of the EU constitution⁶. With the offer of prospective membership, the EU has in its hand and

⁴ Paskal Milo, European Union, f. 340.

⁵ Deutsche Welle, November 30, 2005.

⁶ German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder supports the EU perspective of Western Balkan countries. “The destabilization of the region would be more costly than its European perspective,” he said after meeting with the Macedonian Prime Minister, Vlado Bućkovski. “Whoever puts into doubt this perspective put into

important instrument that can push the aspirant countries in the path of reforms, fight against organized crime and trafficking and to respect human rights.

Otherwise, Europe must become prepared to maintain peacekeeping mission permanently in areas bordering its civilization. In spite of the eventual membership of these countries into NATO and improved security capacities which that will bring, only accession into the EU would provide these countries with the demonstration of having completed their transition into the modern democratic world.

In the American opinion as well, only the European integration of the Balkans is the way to ensuring security in the region. The United States want a Europe that is “whole, free and at peace,” which can happen only if the Balkans become part of Europe, Nicholas Burns, the US Undersecretary of State said in his last visit to Kosovo.⁷

EU politicians have yet to confess the role that religious card and civilization plays in the EU integration processes. But the commotion that has surrounded the case of Turkey’s membership is taking place in the context of this country’s Muslim population. This example and the proposal about a new instrument that would regulate relations between the western Balkan countries and the EU is resuscitating Huntington’s thesis which foresaw the expansion of the EU up to the borders of the western civilization. Despite the commotion about Turkey, Albanians feel part of the western civilization. Religious diversity and harmony in Albania is an additional argument that demonstrates the added strength of our membership bid. It is our conviction that both Kosovo and Albania will find their future in the EU. This time, Albanians decide against believing Huntington’s prediction.

Tirana, December 19, 2005

doubt the stability. He acts against the interest of the European Union, including the German interests, » Schroeder clearly stated. This are not just interest of a political nature but of economic nature also, as Schroeder later elaborated “If I were to tell you how much the current instability in the Balkans costs us, the presence of German troops there, you would be surprised. Instability is more expensive for Europe than the European perspective of some self-aware and reforming countries. This must get inside the people’s brains. Schroeder did not agree to give any deadline about when these countries would enter the EU (Deutsche Welle comment.)

⁷ According to an article published on 06.07.2005 by the Associated Press, Nicholas Burns, the US Undersecretary of State said : “The United States desires a Europe that is whole, safe and at peace, which can happen only if the Balkans also are part of it ”. But these countries felt betrayed when a high EU official said that last month that Europe now needs to catch « her breath ».