

Chasing the Specters, Dodging the Ghosts: Borders and the Processes of Europeanization in Croatia

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ABSTRACT This article analyzes discursive bordering practices in the processes of Europeanization in Croatia. It attempts to inscribe a border-related, anthropologically seated notion of tidemarks more firmly within the research on symbolic geographies of the Balkans. The article provides an overview of spatial imagining and (re)bordering of the Balkans and Europe, and it discusses metaphors that accompany those formations, such as bulwarks, bridges, or crossroads. Then, examples from long-term empirical research on the perception of the European Union in Croatia are analyzed through the lens of tidemarks. The analysis includes interviews with negotiators with the EU, students of the Faculty of Law at the University of Zagreb, union leader in the region of Međimurje, as well as the speech delivered by Croatian Prime Minister Zoran Milanović at the ceremony marking the country's accession to the EU. In conclusion, the article proposes that discerning the varying historical and ideological meanings of tidemarks within the realm of symbolic geography deepens the understanding of the European Union and processes of Europeanization in general.

Key words: symbolic geography, tidemarks, Europeanization, Croatia, EU accession, 1990s.

1. Introduction

The question of “drawing the line” has implicitly defined much of the research of symbolic geography in the Balkans in the past thirty years.¹ Many of the concepts and metaphors that were devised within the *critique of Balkanism*,² but also within the broader field of research on the “imagining of Eastern Europe” – such as *nesting orientalisms* (Bakić-Hayden & Hayden, 1992; Bakić-Hayden, 1995), *gradation of Europeanness* (Kuus, 2004), or *civilizational slope* (Melegh, 2006) – evoke spatial thinking and imagining and, more particularly, examine where and for what purposes are borders drawn or erased on mental maps. In the context of EU enlargement, these concepts examined, among other things, how various regional belongings are used in order to create a specific hierarchy of nations. Thus, the (North)West Europe is above its (South)East, Central Europe is contrasted with Russia, while EU is more civilized and advanced when compared to the “W/Restern Balkans.”³ In this article, our goal is to focus on borders as a crucial analytic category, and to demonstrate the workings of borders of existing political entities, such as the EU, and of those that are past, imagined or emerging – the borders of a more elusive, ghostly and spectral nature, which appear in certain social and political contexts and disappear in others.

In this paper, we shall draw upon the critique of Balkanism to examine pre- and post-EU accession (re)bordering practices in Croatia, as regional symbolic geographies – particularly the opposition between ‘Europe’ and the ‘Balkans’ – that were particularly prolific and mobilizing at the time when most of the fieldwork research used in this article was conducted.

Our intent is to uncover under-the-radar potency of symbolic geography in what is presented as rational, bureaucratic and political process of the accession. As a semi-peripheral European country which is, as of 2013, still the latest member of the European Union, discursive differentiations in which this accession process was embedded are relevant to other countries in the Western Balkan region, which are undergoing the same process as aspiring members. Research on this process is relevant to the understanding of the functioning of the European Union as well, as imprints that accession leaves on various levels of (semi)-periphery delineate and demystify, perspective by perspective and account by account, the mechanisms of the Europeanization processes.

Kolosov and Więckovski assert that during the past decade or so the study of borders in Central and Eastern Europe has significantly “moved from a dominant concern

¹ This article was created within the project Infrapolitical Practices and Changes: From the 1990s to Lived Futures (INFRA), financed by the European Union – NextGenerationEU.

² Cf. Patterson 2003.

³ The term W/Restern Balkans is a variation of the term “Restern Balkans”, used to denote the countries of Western Balkans remaining outside the EU (Krajina & Blanuša 2016; Jović 2015).

with formal state frontiers and ethno-cultural areas to the study of borders at diverse socio-spatial and geographical scales” (2018, 6). In line with that general trend, this article applies Sarah Green’s theoretical concept of tidemarks on long-term empirical research on the processes of Europeanization in Croatia. It aims at inscribing research on borders more firmly into the critique of Balkanism as well as at exploring a perspective capable of approaching a political process such as EU accession on multiple levels: from the heights of geopolitical discourses of power all the way to seemingly more ephemeral or insignificant practices of everyday life (cf. Kuus, 2010; 2014).

The notion of tidemark (Green, 2009; 2018) we are applying is an evolving and innovative concept that “combines space and historical time, and envisages both space and time as being lively and contingent” (2018:81). According to Green, tidemarks are “what is left after some kind of past activity has occurred,” and they often imply “more activity to come” (2009:7), which accentuates their ability to switch between dormant and active modes.⁴

Not necessarily placed on territorial edges – and Europe is more, as Étienne Balibar and others suggest, about overlapping folds or zones, *postcolonial* and new migrant communities than about clear-cut national borders anyway (Balibar and Williams, 2002; Balibar, 2009) – tidemarks challenge the idea of a border as solely a line, “a static entity, fixed in place, without time” (Green 2009:7) to encompass the notion of trace, time, and space (2018:78). At the same time, tidemarks do retain certain qualities of a line, especially in their performative function of “cutting through the meshwork,” which is understood as “an attempt to carve out a certain reality from the clutter of the world” (75). With its capacity to encompass the complexity as well as volatility and inconsistency of embodied experiences, the notion of tidemarks seems to be particularly suitable for anthropological approaches. In our research tidemarks are used as the lens through which people establish spatial and temporal coordinates to integrate and respond to processes and changes underway. In order to understand why and for what purpose tidemarks are drawn upon, it is necessary to pay attention to the stitches used to sew in the historical and cultural threads.

At times, we shall also use the concept of phantom borders (*Phantomgrenzen*), which, as noted by the research network “Phantom Borders in Eastern Central Europe” (2010-2017), commenced from the preoccupation with “former, predominantly political borders that structure today’s world,” as “[i]n numerous cases, historical spaces (the Habsburg Empire, Ottoman Empire, the division of Germany and Poland et al.) persist or re-emerge, such as in form of voting behavior, infrastructure networks or social practices” (2013). This “creative metaphor” aims more broadly as well, at cap-

⁴ American anthropologists Bryan McKinley and Jones Brayboy have, for example, used the concept to reflect the ways in which traces of processes such as neoliberalization in the academia form “tidemarks of our time” (2013, 1), therefore forming new traces which will linger into the future.

turing that which is “simultaneously imagined (produced and passed on discursively), experienced (perceived as experience and updated in practice by the actors and scientific observers), and designed (by territorialization processes)” (von Hirschhausen, Grandits, Kraft, Müller, Serrier, 2019:377). In this article, however, we shall primarily use the term in the sense of “tangible traces (...) of now defunct political entities and their external borders” (ibid:370; cf. also Zajc, 2019b:298).

2. Research Design and Questions

Examples in this paper are drawn from an extensive and long-term, ongoing research of the perception of the European Union in Croatia, which began in 2007. From it, we have selected accounts that we found useful in terms of the main focus on (re) bordering in the processes of Europeanization. The main axes of the overall research design at the same time mirror key facets of our theoretical underpinning.

Europeanization as a term has multiple meanings (cf. Olsen, 2002), and groups of interviewees included in this research were primarily selected around the strict notion of Europeanization-as-enlargement, although the widest sense of the term, which is almost interchangeable with “Westernization”, continuously overlaps with the former, therefore making them inseparable in the analysis. The interviews included actors ranging from those most directly involved with the enlargement and EU (negotiators), via those related to the accession through a more passive relation to the EU (as was the case with law students, who attended a course on European Public Law), to those who are at the receiving end of the open-border economic regime (union leader).

The interviews were used as a research tool useful in obtaining “descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale, 1996:6), and interviewees’ perspectives reflect varying gender, generational, and particularly class perspectives. Thus, for example, the results of the research performed with negotiators provide more coherent and elegant findings as members of the elite – “intellectuals of statecraft” such as journalists, academics, politicians, or government officials (Kuus, 2010) – tend to rely on or readily accept academically and culturally established mythopoetic narratives even when they assume mutually opposed political perspectives (Besteman and Gusterson, 2005:2). Moreover, elites are often educated in the tradition of arts and humanities which, as Merje Kuus argues, additionally legitimizes them to speak on behalf of culture and identity, particularly when it comes to “[t]he culturalist narratives of foreign policy in Central Europe – for example, the ‘return to Europe’ narrative” and this “points to the need to carefully unpack such cultural resources” (Kuus, 2010:16). Including a broader range of perspectives was therefore necessary for a thicker and more complex depiction of Europeanization processes.

Finally, an important shift takes place between the pre-accession period of “great expectations” and the post-accession period marked by general affective deflation.

We are using the material gained from qualitative analysis of semi-structured and unstructured interviews to describe how the interweaving of space and historical time may affect the establishing and interpretation of the contemporary border-making regimes. With this aim in mind, we focus on the Europeanization processes related to Croatia’s accession to the EU. The analysis will be dedicated to examining the following questions: (1) whether tidemarks are a useful tool in the analysis of symbolic geographies of accession, (2) how does the focus on borders contribute to the understanding of processes of Europeanization-as-enlargement, (3) what does focus on borders reveal about the EU and its discursive imprints in the (semi)-peripheral country such as Croatia?

3. Metaphors in and of the Periphery

In symbolic geography, metaphors often accompany the justification for drawing and/or erasing the borders on mental maps. We shall restrict our selection to several metaphors relevant for the analysis underway.

The nation-building context of the 1990s in Croatia incited the reinsertion of the metaphor of bulwark. An important notion in contemporary Croatian national mythology may, indeed, be that of bulwark which is faced eastward, protecting Christianity or, more broadly, the West from the Ottoman Empire or East. Nevertheless, a meticulous analysis conducted by Ivo Žanić discerns between many different versions and usages of this notion. In certain contexts, the “bulwark” encompassed “Croatia as a whole in relation to a larger whole” (Žanić 2003:179), such as Western Europe, while at other times it referred only to its certain parts, such as the Adriatic coast. In some periods and interpretations, it had a religious connotation, but borders were also drawn along ethnic and ideological lines. The direction that the bulwark faced could have also been reversed to protect the East from the West which is “envious” and “suspicious,” while Serbian and Croatian peoples united to fight together against Germanization and Italianization – as evoked in an account from the second half of the 19th century (176).

The metaphor of crossroad, on the other hand, emphasized the geographic importance of the country albeit in a more neutral manner while the metaphor of bridge at times fostered the idea of two-way, inclusive communication with the (Eastern) neighborhood (cf. Žanić, 2003). However, this was subject to criticism as well. Among other reasons, for the servility of its transfer function which – to phrase it in contemporary terms – facilitates the free movement of goods, capital, services, and people but does not benefit from any of it (cf. *ibid.*). In order to avoid “geographic egoism” (Maxwell,

2011), it may be sound to keep in mind that the same metaphor of the bridge, which presupposes the centrality of a country's nexus, travels around Europe. Germany, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Turkey are but some of the countries that were, in different periods and political contexts, presented as crucial links between the East and West (cf. *ibid.*).

Finally, in the title of her book,⁵ which represents a contribution to global history, Marie-Janine Čalić (2019) puts forward cauldron as a pivotal metaphor for the region. It appropriates the meanings associated with this pre-modern object and ties them to the productive, creative agency of this European region. Instead of simply tracing the outside influences and their various reflections within the region, the author interweaves its myriad historical threads and distinct individuals tightly into the greater continental and global fabric of currents, changes, and upheavals so that the region appears not only as an inextricable part but also as a generative force of European and global history.

4. Croatian Symbolic Geography (and its Discontents)

In the analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with Croatian negotiators with the European Union,⁶ we followed the line of research that examines how “divisions and linkages that history, culture, religion, politics, and empire have drawn for Europe are still forces at play today in the mental maps that decision-makers bring to their policies” (Liotta, 2005:69). The research question which elicited the most answers concerning such “divisions and linkages” asked the interviewees to place Croatia in terms of the region or regions to which the country belongs (cf. Obad, 2009).⁷

⁵ “The Great Cauldron: A History of Southeastern Europe”. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

⁶ Six negotiators with the European Union were interviewed at the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008. At the time, the negotiators were men and women in their thirties and forties – an elite group of experts, some of whom were employed as public officials at ministries and other state institutions.

⁷ The nucleus of this article is a working paper (Obad 2010), which was later reworked into an article (Obad, 2015). Theoretical aspects of the research presented here were partially developed within COST Action IS0803 “Remaking eastern borders in Europe: A network exploring social, moral and material relocations of Europe’s eastern peripheries” (2009-2013), which focused on the “transformations of ‘Eastern’ European borders,” the ways in which they “are made meaningful or rendered irrelevant, how they generate a sense of location, belonging, worth, distance or alienation” (EastBordNet, internet). Parts of the research included were performed within TRANSWORK “Transformation of Labour in Post-transitional Croatia” IP-2016-06-7388 (2017-2022), financed by the Croatian Science Foundation, and “Post-socialism and Cultural Subject: Hybrid Practices of Cultural Mediation” 189-1890667-0663 (2007-2013), financed by the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. The research presented in the article is consistent with the Code of Ethics of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, and all subjects of the research have provided consent for their participation.

The recurrent theme in these parts of the interviews was the notion of Croatia as more advanced and adjusted to the “Western culture and civilization” than its South-Eastern neighbors, which is reminiscent of the overlap of symbolic geography and politics that Busch and Krzyżanowsky point to: the reproduction of the “exclusive visions of Europe” that is present in the “core EU voice” (2007:117), is often compatible with the national myths of the newer members of the Union according to which “‘non-Europe’ starts the other side of their own eastern borders” (118). Closely tied to these *exclusive visions* is the metaphor of bulwark, together with its tendency to push the “final” Eastern frontier a bit further away (cf. Maxwell, 2011).

Although most of the interviewees maintained that the reasons in favor of joining the European Union are strictly rational, the answers to the question of regional belonging provided an insight into the symbolic geography of the Croatian accession to the EU in which issues related to culture and history were prominent, as is the case with the following quotation in which negotiator places Croatia in relation to the wider Balkan region.

*We have no use in making comparisons with Bosnia, with Serbia, with Montenegro, with Albania, with Bulgaria, and Romania, only to conclude that in nine out of ten analytical charts Croatia is in the first place. It was clear to me even before somebody began with such an analysis. But by its economic structure and history, economic position in the period of Yugoslavia still, Croatia is somewhere, here, with the countries of Central Europe so that this membership in the European Union will, in a way, close that chapter which began already with the dissolution of Austria-Hungary.*⁸

In the interviews with the negotiators, references to the Habsburg Empire reoccurred abundantly, and these references can be interpreted as the re-emerging of an old imperial border, therefore a phantom border (*Phantomgrenze*) in its stricter sense of examining the workings of former borders of political entities.

Many times, though, such references were not about the Croatian Habsburg legacy, for legacy would “refer more firmly to the past and its direct involvement with the present and potential future” (Green, 2011:15). They were rather about tidemarks: the concrete, material marks as well as, if not more about tidal epistemological shifts that contribute to “an ongoing reworking of differences” (ibid.). And in this particular context, the imperial tidemark arose to place Croats on an equal footing with other EU members – if not the “heroic Europe,” the club of countries which can claim to be “*producer* of modernity’s main achievements” (Boatça, 2010:57), then at least the “decadent Europe” of past empires (ibid; cf. also Dzenovska, 2018). In confronting the gradating discourse of EU enlargement, historical links with the West came to be

⁸ A part of the empirical material analyzed here has already been used in Obad (2009) and Obad (2011).

regarded as valuable, and “imperial” tidemarks were employed to carve out a niche of familiarity for a prospective EU member.

Another tidemark that emerged in the above-cited quotation may be more intricate: the numbering of a series of “Balkan” states which are supposedly less developed than Croatia is followed by a direct reference to Yugoslavia. That the notion of “the Balkans” and socialist Yugoslavia are somehow intertwined is not a new idea: in the predominant discourse of the 1990s in Croatia, “the Balkans” was equated with Islam or Orthodoxy, with Serbia, and, even more generally, with all things which were not recognized as European, Western, modern, or, for that matter, urban (Jansen, 2001:47). Moreover, to paraphrase Bakić-Hayden and Hayden (1992), the Balkanist discourse participated in the replacing of the ideological “other” of communism with the geographical and cultural “other” (1992:4) in the process in which communism became yet another “Balkan” thing.⁹ For the largest part, the Balkanist discourse of the 1990s in Croatia had nothing to do with the Balkans: it was primarily about “Yugoslavia and the causes and consequences of its dissolution” (Matošević and Škokić, 2014:31). In the conducted interviews, the Balkan/Yugoslav tidemark was often pushed Eastward in order to reinforce the difference between Croatia and the rest of the region, while the metaphorical bulwark was repeatedly placed in the eastward direction. Although conducted in the end of 2000s, the symbolic geography represented in the interviews of Croatian negotiators with the EU is directly linked to a political narrative established by political elites in the 1990s, and it retains its politically mobilizing potential to this day.

Apart from the more abstract notions of culture, society, and history, (re)bordering processes can also be built upon rather concrete, material differences. The abovementioned research network “Phantom Borders”, for example, focused on “institutional framework including land registries, bureaucratic processes and also the co-operative and welfare systems” as well as “rail and infrastructure networks or urban environments and regional planning” since material environments are “capable of surviving political domination” (Phantomgrenzen in Ostmitteleuropa, 2013). As László Kontler asserts, “symbolic’ geography is influenced by subjective or emotional as well as objective or structural factors” (1999:9), and ignoring the latter may sometimes result in unproductive blindness to the fact that not all differences are to be dismissed as prejudice or subsumed under stereotypes and negative representations coming from the “outside” (cf. Đerić, 2006).

In the following example, a negotiator points out that in the accession process it is of utmost importance that Croatia applies the accession criteria. Although there was a clear insistence on the rationality and intelligibility of the accession procedure, the same interviewee also mentions Croatia’s “mutual history” with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Italy as something of potential value in the process.

⁹ Cf. also: Jansen 2001.

So, probably a land-registry that we have used since – which was great – since Maria Theresa, qualifies us to have some, I don't know, maybe to have some books in better order than, maybe, Serbia or Bosnia have or, I don't know, which maybe Greece had. I don't know how much it will contribute. But we definitely are in that South European surrounding, and there is no mystery about it, we are here.

The mentioning of the land registry speaks of the “irreducibility of historical time in borders,” since “time is crucial to experiences of the border, and an element that makes clear that border is something best thought of as an active entity” (Green 2018:77). Here, the physical trace of an old empire once again raises an imperial tidemark in the midst of the EU accession process in Croatia, and we should certainly be careful not to overly instill power asymmetry in the interpretation, for *having books in better order* may be an advantage regardless of the discursive mechanisms of the accession process in which this particular trace is embedded (Obad, 2015:102; on the importance of land registries cf. von Hirschhausen, Grandits, Kraft, Müller and Serrier, 2019:384-385; Zajc, 2019a). At the same time, however, we need to note that some other traces and legacies – railways and highways, factories in both urban and rural areas, processes of massive urbanization, unprecedented increases in literacy rates (Čalić, 2019:472) and decisively strengthened women's rights and social position (ibid:477) – were in these interviews not considered relevant advantages in the accession simply because the socialist period was, in repetitive acts of omitting, cast as irrelevant in the processes of Europeanization. The attempt at burying a substantial historic period underground to reconnect with a previous, long-forgotten one is the reason why the metaphors of crossroads or cauldrons could not have accompanied these spatial imaginings, pointing, once again, to the self-effacing, and divisive effects of accepting the logic of gradation of Europeanness (cf. Kuus, 2004).

The political context of negotiations could also be discerned in the interviews, and it sometimes disrupted the expected directions of power asymmetry in regional symbolic geography. Although the negotiators, for example, mostly did not directly discuss the role of Slovenia in the freezing of negotiation process at the time, some references to that country pointed to a troubled relationship. This time, however, instead of accentuating the common Habsburg legacy, Slovenian political leadership was reproached for emanating the “big teacher” and “great mage,” of treating the rest of the countries in the region as if they were “approximately, at the cave level”.

As the following negotiator with the EU explained, it was not in Slovenia's best interest to support Croatia's joining the EU and taking over the role of the mediator with the rest of the region.

And now, they [the Slovenes] present themselves as though they were, I paraphrase, the bulwark of Christianity. I mean, not Christianity but that sort of, in that sense, world.

As the imperial tidemark subsides, the present political border re-emerges as the point of separation between the EU and the “Restern Balkans”. This time, the view comes from the other, subordinate side, the position onto which negative stereotypes are inscribed. From this perspective, the separation is not accepted as self-understanding, a rational consequence of slower development, of different historical trajectories, or differing cultures and mentalities. In this turn of tables, Slovenia is instead ridiculed for attempting to rise above the rest of the countries and its supposed attempt to become an (EU) bulwark is leveled through the shared, all-too-familiar, Balkan or Yugoslav past.

We find a similar reversal of the civilizational slope in the interviews conducted with Croatian law students.¹⁰ Several quantitative surveys performed in the pre-accession Croatia indicated that Croatian students and young people were more Eurosceptical than older generations in Croatia (see Ilišin and Mendeš, 2005:204; Čulig, Kufrin and Landripet 2007:51; Kersan-Škabić and Tomić 2009). In the interviews performed, however, the main target of students’ critique was not the EU, but the predominant representation of the Union in the elite political and media discourses as the only right choice without a proper discussion (cf. Obad, 2011).

Since this paper focuses on spatial aspects of symbolic geographies, we quote an example in which a student recounts her visit to the building of the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest. In front of the building, the guard informs her and the group of friends that she travels with that “for Europe” tickets are “for free,” while “for the other ones it’s not free”.

So, he only said: “for Europe”. Now, we are looking at whether to ask him is it the European Union, or what? All in all: Europe, Europe. [...] And in front of us: Italians, Germans, French, all different languages. OK. He bumped in, I don’t know, a friend of mine, he will go alone, so that all five of us don’t have to. And he returns. “Freaking Europe, and this, and that, now each one of us [has to] pay 15 euros each.” And what? We are not European Community, we are not European Union, we are the Balkans. Then we teased them: “Come on, we have the longest border with you,¹¹ we are neighbors. So what? We signed the Stabilisation Agreement,” this and that. Nothing. It does not work. We entered inside, and everything there was made of wood, was made of Slavonian oak. (...) Then we teased each other: Do I have to come to Budapest and pay 15 euros to watch Slavonian oakwood?¹²

¹⁰ In the first half of 2009, 15 students who were attending a course on European Public Law at the Faculty of Law in Zagreb were interviewed. Most of them were aged between 19 and 22, both male and female.

¹¹ This is not true: Croatia’s longest land border is with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¹² Slavonia is a lowland region in the east of Croatia that borders Hungary. The region is known, among other things, for the production of oakwood highly valued in the wood industry for its strength and durability.

At the entrance to the Hungarian Parliament building the material trace in the form of Slavonian oakwood, which leaves room for “doubt, speculation, and interpretation” (Green 2018:70), collides with a more recent “eurotidemark,” which introduces differentiation between EU and non-EU citizens. Whereas the imperial tidemark associates Croatia with a historical era in which that region and Hungary were part of the same entity, the newer tidemark excludes Croatia from the common EU space. In this example, the imperial tidemark subverts the civilizational slope as it presents eurotidemark as permeable and weak, a border that is more of a travesty than an object worthy of respect (cf. Obad, 2015:103). As in the previous example with Slovenia, another bordering EU member state – Hungary – is discursively lowered through common past and legacy.

5. Crossing the Bridge, Tilting the Slope

The ceremony at the central square in Zagreb dedicated to Croatia’s accession to the European Union in 2013 was far from euphoric. The country was still experiencing deep consequences of the great financial crisis of 2008 and the lowering support rates in favor of joining the EU, following an exhaustingly long negotiation period, nudged the government to initiate changes to the Constitution through which requirements for a referendum on country’s entering this union were significantly loosened. Though a number of speeches were held at Ban Jelačić Square on the evening of June 30th 2013, interspersed with segments of the accompanying programme, of particular interest for this research was one held by then Prime Minister Zoran Milanović.¹³

In many respects, the speech openly engaged with the classic Balkanist repertoire. “Whatever you may have been told about us,” the Prime Minister posited in the first part of the speech, addressing implicitly foreign dignitaries, “you should know that this is a country of rational people who have a realistic perception of themselves, their country and the role of themselves and their country in Europe and the world.” Milanović specified that the country is not escaping anywhere, thus apparently countering the phrase “escape from the Balkans,” and that Croatia will help other countries in the region to meet the “European criteria” as quickly as possible, thus evoking the conciliatory metaphor of bridge. Later in his speech, he utilizes the conciliatory metaphor of bridge.

In the part in which he talks about Croatian identities, Milanović mentions the Central European and Western civilizational influence which “perhaps decisively overtook all spheres of our society,” thereby tying Europeanization-as-enlargement to Europeanization-as-Westernization. He mentions the “bitter-sweet Mediterranean” as well,

¹³ The speech of Prime Minister Zoran Milanović at the ceremony marking Croatia’s joining the EU is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9SfD4OZmMk&ab_channel=Politi%C4%8Dkaskaznica

but does not avoid including the Balkan component – “which implies Oriental influences” and which is “also an important and unavoidable element of our identity and our history” – a statement opposed to the predominantly balkanophobic political elites from the 1990s onward.

Even less expectedly, Milanović talked about the “most sublime unity” with the countries and peoples of the region “in the anti-fascist struggle during the Second World War” – a rare reference to the legacy of Yugoslavia within the context of EU accession. He proceeded to talk about how those countries were mutually connected by “allegiance to values of solidarity and freedom-loving that we wish to imprint even deeper in the foundations of Europe,” another uncommon tribute to the “region” in contemporary Croatia, which also speaks of the aspiration and capacity of those countries to contribute to, and not merely align with the European values.

In the final parts of the speech, Milanović talked about “developing and encouraging intellectual curiosity” as the main strategic goal of Croatia within united Europe, adding in a manner in tune with values of social democracy that education, understood as “keys to freer and fuller life”, should be accessible to people “regardless of their social status, nationality, religion or origin.” At the same time, the speech perpetuates a patriarchal perspective: not a single woman is mentioned in the string of important individuals from Croatia, mostly in the spheres of arts and science.

When the Prime Minister mentions the wars in the 1990s, he says that because of those events Croatia drifted apart from Serbia, Montenegro, “and even Bosnia and Herzegovina.” The war, he says, was an event in which the country “proved its loyalty to freedom,” even though retrospectively “becoming aware of its own stumbles,” a vague reference that might, among other things, refer to war crimes committed by the Croatian side. “That path was substantially proper, just and righteous,” posits the Prime Minister.

An analysis of political stances related to nationalism and the 1990s in the political career of Zoran Milanović would require a separate article (cf. Vugdelija, 2020), but for now we should bear in mind, as Mishkova posits, that an anti-Balkanist stance does not necessarily overcome nationalist frameworks for “Balkan regionalism could at one time erode and, at another, buttress national differences” (2018:233).

In this account, the old, imperial tidemark still vaguely represents Westernness, while the Yugoslav tidemark, implicit or appearing in the colder, detached form of “region,” arises beyond “Oriental influences” to signify progressive tendencies as well. The third relevant tidemark relates to the current, state borders of Croatia, which are meant to be kept and not erased: regarding the “Restern Balkans,” in the tension between recognizing the effects of difficult past and the offering of helping hand, and regarding

the EU, through an emphasis on individuality, rationality and generating of instead of merely adhering to “European values”. Altogether, this particular narrative is closer to the metaphor of cauldron than any of those previously examined. Such a shift, however, arises at the point of Croatia’s accession as if all of a sudden a ban on discursive heterogeneity is lifted.

In the most recent set of interviews conducted in 2020, the importance of symbolic geography has diminished substantially.¹⁴ A small but telling side-effect of the country’s joining the EU is the disappearance of the “Europe” trope in the “I-hate-my-country” everyday accounts (cf. Obad, 2016): if “we” were good enough to enter the club, regardless of “our” corruption, “our” conservatism, “our” patriarchy, or “our” nationalism, could it be because the club is not as elite as expected?

In the interviews conducted in Međimurje in 2020, local union leaders analyze the current situation regarding the much-touted greenfield investments in this northernmost Croatian region. The local workers we talk to mention the region’s industriousness, adherence to “Western standards” as well as proximity to Austria. Nevertheless, the EU is old news now, United Kingdom being the last country to change its shape, and the disappearance of borders in favor of free movement of goods, capital, services, and people directly affects the local labor market. In the following interview, a 60-year-old man, president of a union established in 2006 in the town of Čakovec, affirms that the attractiveness of the region for foreign investment lies in its convenient geographic location, and he does not fail to mention the traditional presence of industry since the “first capitalism” of Austria-Hungary introduced factories in the region. However, the most important pull factor, he claims, is not something to boast or be nostalgic about: cheap labor force.

When depicting the recent shifts and developments, he explains that many workers have decided to leave the country in search of higher salaries in Western EU members, such as Germany. A positive consequence of accession is that employers, both foreign and domestic, obey the law more readily than before. The workers are still, nonetheless, paid poorly. Based on an example from a factory that produces automobile parts, he explains a scheme through which losses in certain local companies are generated on purpose. A parent company, situated in a Western European country, founds a “daughter company” in Croatia and is the sole purchaser of its products. As goods produced in the Croatian subsidiary are sold for an overly cheap price to its parent company, it operates with losses and survives on financial “help” from the parent company. Due to this instigated financial crisis, there is no space, our interlocutor claims, for negotiations on the increase of salaries and workers’ rights.

¹⁴ From 2017 to 2020, 25 interviews on formal and informal work practices in various parts of Croatia were performed with men and women from diverse social and professional backgrounds within TRANSWORK project.

“The business approach of those market chains, foreign ones, and some companies, not all, some foreign companies, that demonstrate business losses... They put together those seats, they make it, stitch it up and it goes to Germany. Once in Germany, its price increases several times. But not while in Croatia. This is why their business results are poor. And then its parent company covers its losses so that it can stay liquid and work. (...) And then when we or the state puts pressure, he goes: ‘Come on, dude... Don’t. I am barely alive. And I have to ask for money from those abroad...’”

With the country joining the EU, tidemarks eventually subside or, rather, shift to be mobilized in relation to new subjects, such is currently the case with migrant population attempting to cross the Schengen border. As the excitement surrounding discursively created maps and elated views from the above gradually disappears, the story of Europeanization up close is more tightly related to capital and geopolitical power than regional specters and border ghosts.

6. Conclusion

The concept of tidemarks is a useful tool in the research of symbolic geography primarily because of its capacity to simultaneously account for the temporal, spatial and various material dimensions of border-making processes. It has the ability to unpack the “multiple, fluid, networked, rhizomatic, and constantly shifting differences or relations” (Green, 2018:70). From the anthropological perspective, tidemarks are particularly advantageous because of their capacity to capture the “multiple, unpredictable, power-inflected, imagined and visceral way that everyday life tends to occur” (Green, 2009:17).

In the examples we outlined in this paper, the tidemarks that denoted Croatia’s imperial legacy were mainly used as a means of questioning the political border that separated Croatia from the EU. In the interviews with negotiators, and, to a much lesser extent, in some of the students’ interviews, the old, imperial tidemarks were used in the positioning on the “civilizational slope”: the movement upward is prescribed through processes of “gradual Westernization” while the scapegoating of “more ‘Eastern actors’ or social arrangements” is a collateral effect (Melegh, 2006:5). These tidemarks were raised in order to reinforce the (Western) European aspect of Croatian national identity as well as to demonstrate that the border of the European Union is arbitrary, not much more than a provisional line that only proves how “‘Europe’ ends where politicians want it to end” (Todorova, 2009 [1997]:139).

That idea is particularly relevant to the analysis of the speech of Prime Minister Zoran Milanović that cast Croatia as an “overlapping zone” of Central Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Balkan/Yugoslav realm. In it, the Balkan tidemark gained public legitimacy on the very eve of the accession, when the discursive battle is over and new

borders are contractually sealed and materialized. This serves as a reminder that bulwarks can rise, fall and switch directions swiftly and also that many different cut-outs from the difficult and unruly historical legacies are possible. In the case of Croatia, discursive accession via Central Europe / Habsburg legacy largely meant forgoing the socialist legacy, which further accentuated the dependent, tagalong impulse of the aspiring member.

The focus on borders in the accession and post-accession period in Croatia contributes to a sharper understanding of historical, ideological, and political underpinnings mobilized in the processes of Europeanization. Evoked identities – Western, European, Central European, or Balkan – may give an air of softness and ambiguousness regarding their ideological background and material consequences. Contrary to the tendency for deconstructivist escapism, of which critique of Balkanism and similar perspectives are at times accused, we believe that learning to read through the smokescreen of symbolic geographies is the path toward engaging with political and economic processes underway more readily and deeply. With a focus on “drawing the line” the notions evoked become more historicized, politicized, and more clearly linked to past entities such as Austria-Hungary or the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were. The concept of tidemarks allows us to capture different scales of those meanings in the aforementioned sense of leveling the realms of geopolitics with practices of everyday life, but also in the sense of tracing the past as well as capturing emerging “borders-within-borders”.

In this article we shifted between the bird’s-eye view of geopolitical discursive practices and the frog’s-eye view of everyday life, each perspective depicting a different facet of the European Union. From persistent pushing away of the Balkan border to its sudden inclusion and/or decreased relevance following the accession. From the firmness of the EU borders toward those “outside” to the everyday struggles of workers who face the unadvertised consequences of the borderless regime. Whether paradoxical or mutually exclusive, these are all simultaneously existing, parallel truths about Europe whose significance and symbolic weight is graded upon class, race, and other embodied forms of power.

As long as the notions related to symbolic geography hold power, they have the potential to mobilize people, while divorcing space from power remains a task in itself.

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Ganjanje utvara, izbjegavanje duhova: granice i procesi europeizacije u Hrvatskoj

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Sažetak

U članku se analiziraju diskurzivne prakse stvaranja granica u procesima europeizacije u Hrvatskoj. Člankom se koncept plimnih oznaka, koji je povezan s granicama i antropološki utemeljen, pokušava čvršće povezati s istraživanjima simboličkih geografija Balkana. Nudi se pregled prostornog zamišljanja i (ponovnog) ocrtanja granica Balkana i Europe, te se raspravlja o metaforama koje prate ta uobličavanja, poput bedema, mostova ili raskrižja. Nadalje, analiziraju se primjeri iz dugogodišnjih empirijskih istraživanja percepcije Europske unije u Hrvatskoj kroz prizmu plimnih oznaka. Analiza uključuje intervju s pregovaračima s EU-om, studentima Pravnoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, sindikalnim vođom iz regije Međimurje, kao i govor koji je hrvatski premijer Zoran Milanović održao na ceremoniji obilježavanja ulaska zemlje u EU. Zaključno, člankom se zagovara viđenje po kojem razaznavanje raznih povijesnih i ideoloških značenja plimnih oznaka unutar područja simboličke geografije produbljuje razumijevanje Europske unije i procesa europeizacije općenito.

Ključne riječi: simbolička geografija, plimne oznake, europeizacija, Hrvatska, pristupanje EU-u, 1990-e.