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Multiculturalim, Interethnic Coexistence and Higher Education: An Example From SEEU

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1. Multiculturalism: Brief Theoretical Introduction

Among the most widely used expressions in today's post-modern society are terms like multiculturalism, multi-culture, and *multi-culturality*. The issue of multiculturalism, which has its origins in western and primarily the Anglo-American social and political anthropology is a problem regarding the communication between members of different cultures, ethnicities and religions. Multiculturalism fosters differences by emphasizing the need for tolerance and uniqueness of the groups that seek identity and protection within a tolerant society. According to Andrew Heywood, this notion is a description and normative tool for cultural diversity, which is a result of the presence of two or more groups in society whose convictions and practices create different collective identities.[1]

Multiculturalism is closely connected to the diversity of communities which originates from racial, ethnical and linguistic differences, with the affirmation that differences are the pillars of human unity. That is a philosophy that respects the individual as a human being or as God's creature, as H. Goodings stated. In the freedom of the identification of the self, you are either a black or a white man, a man or a woman, an American or a Frenchman, a Muslim or a Christian, etc. The notion was first used in 1971 by Pierre Trudeau, a former Canadian Prime Minister. Among other things he mentioned that "the notion of biculturalism does not fully reflect

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1 Andrew Heywood, *Politika*, translated by Jovan Jovanović, Clio, Beograd, 2004, p. 231.

our society. That is why the concept of multiculturalism is more appropriate in this case." One of the definitions of multiculturalism in anthropological and sociological literature is the following: "Multiculturalism is a policy by which public relations among the different cultures of a society are regulated, including the utilization of languages and symbols."

The topic of multiculturalism represents an important part of political programs in countries throughout the world and has an impact in bolstering the revision of public policies with the aim of finding a modus which is the most appropriate in fulfilling the requirements of different communities. From a normative point of view, it means the recognition of differences, of the responsibility to respect different cultures and the benefit of the whole society arising from moral and cultural differences. A well-known thinker, Charles Taylor, stated that multiculturalism is a policy of recognition, an antipode of non-recognition or wrong recognition, which can be very dangerous for society and can include means of humiliation and lock the person in an unreal, deformed and reduced shape of existence. Having in mind the fact that most people tend to stay close to their culture, the thesis for multiculturalism implies that special cultural-ethnical communities need to enjoy their rights and institutionalization of those rights is the best way to achieve the *completeness* of each society.

Multiculturalism accepts the importance of religion, ethnicity, lifestyles and the feeling of being valued by both individuals and groups. Diversity and multi-layering are inseparable parts of every community in every phase of history. According to Martinell, human societies are multicolored and multicultural: "Only cloning people in a particular matrix will enable the formation of mono-cultural and mono-identity societies".[2]

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2   Ali Pajaziti, *Fjalor i sociologjisë*, Logos-A, Shkup, 2009, p. 431-432.

2. Multiculturalism as a challenge for the Balkans and the Republic of Macedonia: From Ottoman Multiculturalism to a Post-Ohrid Framework

The Balkans are well known, especially in recent decades, as a synonym for turbulent conditions, intolerance, conflict, aggressive nationalism and cultural differences that cause alienation of the other, where they still watch over the *mythological leviathan*. It is no accident that the term *homo balkanicus* denotes an individual who is part of the collective identity but failed to achieve empathy with her neighbor, and who is oriented toward extreme politicization and social segregation. Former Yugoslavia was a *sui generis* example of experimentation with diversity and multiculturalism. From 1945 the regime implemented a policy which enabled a mixture of cultures, while after 1952 the building of the Yugoslav culture was started based on the interaction of all Yugoslavian national cultures. Pavkovic called this policy "interactive multiculturalism", which was abandoned in face of the reaction of the Slovenian intellectuals. At the beginning of the 1960s that policy was replaced by a strictly segregationist multiculturalism which did not allow the mixing and creation of a Creole culture but sought the equality and cultural development of each nation and nationality. Later, from the early 1990's, this was followed by an aggressive nationalism that formed a factor in the fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia.[3]

The Republic of Macedonia presents a Balkan historical, political, economic and cultural reality. It is a part of this geographical area known for its ethnic and cultural diversity. Some authors have characterized the Republic of Macedonia as the epicenter, or the heart of the Balkans.[4] The territory of the Republic of Macedonia in all periods of human civilization was a part of great empires and civilizations. Due to its favorable geographical position as a crossroads of civilizations and religions, it is known in history as "Catena Mundi".[5] Macedonia is a cultural mosaic with a multiethnic and multi- confessional basis, *unitas multiplex*. It is a corridor where East and

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3 Aleksandar Pavković, "Multikulturalizam kao uvod u rasparčavanje države - slučaj Jugoslavije", *Sociološki pregled*, 1998, vol. 32, No. 2, p. 155-170.

4 Ahmet Davutoğlu, lecture held at Sts. Cyril and Methodius on the occasion of his proclamation of *Doctor Honoris Causa*, March 25, 2010.

5 Ferid Muhiq, *Shkupi – kryeqendra e shtatë portave*, Skenpoint, Скопје, 2007, p. 4.

West, Islam and Christianity merge. This illustrates the symbolism of the cultural components of the Islamic and Orthodox provenance, mosques, churches that meet in all four corners of this country.

The best example of all this is Skopje, the capital city and its old Turkish bazaar, which is a kind of Macedonia in miniature and where one can find elements of this diverse culture and civilization. The church Sveti Spas, the Mustafa Pasha Mosque, the goldsmith specializing in silver work, the bag maker, the shoemaker next to the blacksmith, the voice of the bagpipe, tambura[6] and çifteli,[7] all reflect the city of Skopje in all its authenticity. Skopje has another, very important symbol, the Stone Bridge, a monument with a great history, something that has importance for the citizens of Skopje and for any other visitor. A local philosopher gives an excellent description of the metaphor of the bridge:

> Every bridge is a metaphysical miracle, the one in Skopje in particular. By crossing it, you do not cross only from one to the other side of the river Vardar. This bridge merges the cultures, rooted and flourishing in one place, in the city of Skopje. Therefore, it can be seen as a corridor between civilizations. Its arches, even today, connect Europe and Asia, East and West, Christianity and Islam, uniting them in an unprecedented way. On the same bridge we can see carved messages from the Koran and an orthodox Bishop throwing the cross in the waters of the Vardar on Epiphany. Because of this bridge, Vardar in Skopje is also known as the Second Bosphorus. The knowledgeable say, the real Bosphorus.[8]

The cultural mosaic called Macedonia is very special because of its deep diversity (Taylor, 1994) and it is a natural symbol for this country. If we analyze the statistical data, we will notice that various ethnic and religious groups exist here.[9] This diversity existed in Macedonia even before multiculturalism as politics and theory have developed. It is older than

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6 The **tanpura, tambora**, or **tambura** is a long necked plucked lute, a stringed instrument found in different versions in different places; a three-stringed guitar.

7 The **Çifteli** (Definite Albanian form: *Çiftelia*) is an Albanian wooden, largely acoustic string instrument, with only two strings (in Albanian, *çifteli* means double-stringed).

8 Ферид Мухиќ, *Скопје: Градот на седумте порти*, Скенпоинт, Скопје, 2007, p. 29.

9 Државен Завод за Статистика. Попис на населението, домаќинствата и становите во Република Македонија 2002, Skopje, 2005, p. 34.

the notion of multiculturalism, which entails the contemporary notions of human rights and rights. The old empires dating from ancient times were entities in which different communities, religions, ethnicities and cultures were mutually intertwined.

The Ottoman Empire defined cultural diversity by defining the cultural and religious rights of the non-Islamic (Christian and Jewish) communities. This system, known as the "millet" system (system of religious communities),[10] enabled the regulation of ethical, religious and language issues, promoting tolerance for everybody.[11]

In the post-Ottoman period, things started to change. Different nationalisms generated intolerance, because the process of forming a nation (nation-building) was based on the premises of exclusivity, ethnocentrism and ethnic nationalism. During the socialist period the question of human rights and the attitude towards different cultures were neglected. With the 1974 constitution, Macedonia was defined as a pluralistic state and between the years of 1989 and 1991 the politics of a national state were designed. This trend changed after the conflict in 2001, when the Framework Agreement actually redefined the country in accordance with a multicultural concept, which meant promoting a civil and non-ethnical society (Engstrom). But in the last couple of years, new developments are starting to go in negative directions, especially between the two biggest ethnic communities. This has revealed the fact that the Macedonia democracy is a *limited democracy* (I. Aceski) and that the actual politics resembles F. Zakaria`s concept of *illiberal democracy*.[12]

Multiculturalism, which is a common reflection of this society, resulted from several unconsidered steps (Macedonian Encyclopedia, Skopje 2014) that created tense situations. According to the analysts, post-framework Macedonia, instead of steadily advancing in the process of establishing internal peace and Europeanization, became an oasis of stagnation, tension, segregation and a model of *divided society*.

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10   Enis Sulstarova, *Në pasqyrën e Oksidentit: Studime dhe artikuj*, Logos-A, Shkup, 2010, pp. 16-31.

11   See: Ѓорге Иванов, " Милетскиот систем – модел на религиозна толеранција", *Политичка Мисла*, Godina 2, br. 8, dekemvri 2004 (Skopje), p. 67-77.

12   See: Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, New York, 2003; http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/53577/fareed-zakaria/the-rise-of-illiberal-democracy

3. Education and Multiculturalism: SEEU Example

The South-East European University, which was established in 2001 to promote higher education in the Albanian language as well as increasing the proportion of Albanian youth in higher education in Albanian in the Republic of Macedonia, is a new, modern educational institution with already proven qualities. As the first private public non-profit university in the country, it has managed to develop into a higher education model for the region, offering quality accredited study programs in compliance with the international trends and the Bologna Declaration and, especially with the demands of the local and international labor market. This university follows the principle that education enables advances in science, technology and cooperation as well as contributing to the progress and development of society.[13]

SEEU, which promotes equality, has also established the maxim *to be open to everyone, to implement justice and reward merit regardless of ethnicity and to improve inter-ethnic understanding* as one of the elements of its mission. In this context, particular attention is given to the multilingual, multicultural and geographical features of the region. The university is a model institution where otherness and distinctness or diversity may be a bridge for connecting the representatives of different cultural elements. SEEU's main thesis is the concept that interethnic and intercultural dialogue may be strengthened through education. This institution is an example of multi-ethnic and multi-lingual education, which international institutions characterize as an impressive language policy[14] in South-Eastern Europe. SEEU has proved that it successfully combines the experience of the American and European universities, synthesizing them with its distinctness and daily advancement in promoting an open and rational society.

This institution, with over 7000 students,[15] of which, according to ethnicity, 82 % are Albanian, 15 % Macedonian and 3 % other (Turkish, Roma etc.) currently offers 23 first-cycle programs and 29 second-cycle

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13 *Студии на ЈИЕУ: Можности повеќе од било каде*, Tetovo, 2009, pg. 3. *Studime në UEJL: Viti Akademik 2010/2011*, Tetovo 2010, p. 3.

14 *EUA Report, Institutional Review Programme*, Brussel, 2005.

15 *Lajm*, April 6, 2010, p. 6.

programs in five faculties. All this is supported by a modern and efficient infrastructure with high international educational standards, which completes the mosaic of success of a unique educational institution in the country and the Balkans.

If we perceive Macedonia as a multicultural country, then SEEU can be considered as the most authentic reflection of its multiculturalism. Here, the students can pursue studies in three languages - Albanian, Macedonian and English. The University implements the so-called *flexible use of languages*, which means use of the local languages while at the same time enabling students to use the *linguo franca* of today's world (the English language), as well as German, Italian and French.

In order to have a clearer picture of the correlation between multiculturalism and education, i.e. multiculturalism as a practice in SEEU, we will present the data collected from a study which included the SEEU staff – the administration (6.3 % and the academic staff (93.7%)[16]. The research is based on a sample of 80 respondents which comprises 1/5 of all the SEEU staff, meaning that the collected data is highly representative. 67.9% of the respondents had an MA degree, 19.8% had a PhD degree and 12.3 % had a BA degree. As for ethnical background, 79% were Albanians, 17.3% Macedonians and 3.8% others.

After the introductory questions the questionnaire continues with the questions that reflect the perceptions of the SEEU staff regarding the image of the University, its ethnic and cultural diversity, academic careers and their relation to values and traditions.

One of the key questions in this research is "We should recognize that cultural and ethnic diversity is a fundamental characteristic of the SEEU" (question 43). The majority of the respondents, namely 80.5%, answered positively and only 3.9% said the opposite. An interesting point is that only one third of the respondents (31.1%) thought that "It is best for SEEU if all people forget their different ethnic and cultural backgrounds as soon as

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16 We would like to thank Linda Ziberi for the quantitative part of the research and Agron Rustemi who did the statistical processing (Linda Ziberi & Canchu Lin, "The influence of organizational culture on the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) on a university campus, from the perspective of social influence theory", Bowling Green State University School of Media and Communication, 2010, reserach in progress).

possible" (question 45), meaning that the cultural and ethnic background are a valuable part of the self perception of the SEEU staff. Nevertheless, they are not seen as an obstacle for the creation of a respectable individual in society. This is probably due to experience in the communist period, when the system tried to disregard the differences and to create a *super-nation* which later proved to be an absurd and unsuccessful social engineering project. The answers to the 37th question demonstrate that in spite of all the differences people still feel as part of one big family. Only a minority of the respondents (1/10) had doubts about the cohesiveness of the institution.

Respondents did not support the fact that "The unity of this organization is weakened by people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds abiding by their old ways/traditions".(question number 47). Only 39% answered in favor of neglecting and marginalizing the tradition, meaning that unity at SEEU will improve if they do not stick to their traditions.
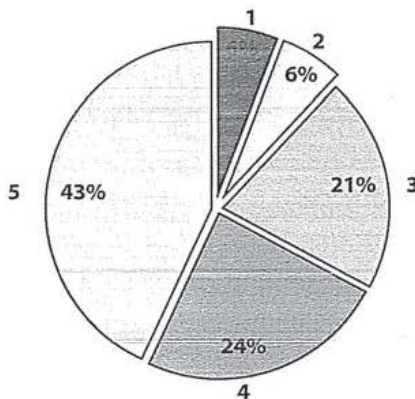
Diagram 1. We should do more to learn about the customs and heritage of different ethnic and cultural groups in this organization.

From the diagram (where scale 1 refers to "strongly disagree", and scale 5 means "strongly agree") it can be seen that more than 10% think that there is no need to learn about the inheritance of the others. It can be concluded that only a little more than 10% of the examinees think that there is no need to learn from the inheritance of the others. It means that the absolute majority of the examinees hold the opinion that the level of knowledge of the other

cultures is not high enough, that there is need for permanent knowledge and learning about ethnical and cultural differences (question number 46). The absolute number of examinees (85.2% vs 2.7%) have the opinion that "An organization that has a variety of ethnic and cultural groups is better able to tackle new problems as they occur." (question number 46).

From the further data analysis we can conclude that only 49.4% of those surveyed declared that they can feel ethnical superiority, which means that although the percentage of the majority community in this institution is much larger (82%), they succeed in developing a tolerant climate and cosmopolitan values.

Table 1. I am proud to be an employee of SEEU.

	Fre-quency	%
Strongly disagree	3	3.8
Disagree	2	2.5
Neither agree nor disagree	6	7.5
Agree	11	13.8
Strongly agree	58	72.5
Total	80	100.0

As can be seen from the table only a small number of the university staff members tested have doubts about identification with the Institution. 86% of teaching staff and administrative staff at SEEU are proud to work in this institution. (question number 31). These facts are in direct correlation with the answers to question 40 ("SEEU's image in the community represents me well"). 77% of the examinees agree with this, 81.6% said that they are ready to continue at SEEU for their entire career (question number 35).

The staff employed at SEEU try to present the institution in the best possible way and to present the University in public as a very respectable institution. Only 7.7% of those surveyed declared that the situation at SEEU is not as good as it should be. This means that those employed in this institution are satisfied with the standards developed at SEEU and work actively on promoting values incorporated in their everyday academic communication.

4. Conclusions

Multiculturalism, as a policy for building *healthy coexistence* with otherness, has been present at the Balkans since the *Ottoman ethos* (Deliso). Universities should be places where openness, transparency, tolerance and cosmopolitanism are cherished as a discourse which will further be shown in other societal categories, from the demos to the elite. Macedonia has a history of coexistence and the potential for a peaceful co-existence and this experience should be used for developing constructive policies, especially in the field of culture and education.

The SEEU, as *the most European creation in the Balkans* (O. Ren), is a real revitalization of the educational system in the Republic of Macedonia and the society at large, because with its image of an international and multilingual university, it implements contemporary standards of a multicultural society. From many aspects it can be treated as an extraterritorial component of our academic world.

From empirical research we conclude that:

» Cultural and ethnic diversity is perceived as a high value by the employees in SEEU.

» The differences are no obstacle to communication and the building of bridges of cooperation, and the campus and the practice of SEEU academism are adequate modes for the integration of diversities.

» Quantitative majority does not always imply a sense of superiority. Academic circles have to teach people that they should depend on individual values and not on numerical facts.

» The government or leadership should change the concept of education, should eliminate the idealization of national histories and should develop verbal and *organic communication* rather than contextual ones.

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Appendix: List of questions

19.	I strongly feel that I'm an ethnic majority in this organization.	1	2	3	4	5
31.	I am proud to be an employee of SEEU.	1	2	3	4	5
35.	I would be willing to spend the rest of my career with SEEU.	1	2	3	4	5
37.	I would describe SEEU as a large "family" in which most members feel a sense of belonging.	1	2	3	4	5
40.	SEEU's image in the community represents me well.	1	2	3	4	5
43.	We should recognize cultural and ethnic diversity is a fundamental characteristic of SEEU.	1	2	3	4	5
45.	It is best for SEEU if all people forget their different ethnic and cultural backgrounds as soon as possible.	1	2	3	4	5
46.	An organization that has a variety of ethnic and cultural groups is more able to tackle new problems as they occur.	1	2	3	4	5
47.	The unity of this organization is weakened by people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds	1	2	3	4	5
50.	We should do more to learn about the customs and heritage of different ethnic and cultural groups in this organization.	1	2	3	4	5