THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE GLOBALISING WORLD FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE INDIVIDUAL*

Bogdan Bogdanov

Discussing the viewpoint of the individual necessitates that we first consider a related topic – namely, the nature of the usual comments on such issues in private gatherings, at public forums and in the writings of journalists and political scientists.

By 'nature', I mean a certain category of statements in such comments – statements which view Bulgaria and the European Union either as objects with specific characteristics or as subjects who do things or have things happen to them. Both types of statements are formulated either in the singular, referring to Bulgaria and the European Union, or in the plural, referring to Bulgarians and Europeans. The world is also spoken of in this manner – as a place or as a multitude of human beings. Undoubtedly, the alternating of these two types of statement facilitates commenting on such issues; however, it also leads to a rather simplistic understanding of the nature of such objects/subjects.

Take, for instance, the object/subject Bulgaria. As an object of the above-mentioned type of discourse, Bulgaria is once viewed as a country, then as a multitude of humans. Let us first consider the country. It has three synonymous representations – as a land, a place of nature, and a territory with fixed boundaries. That may be so, but regarded as part of greater entities such as the Balkans and Europe, Bulgaria acquires characteristics in addition to those relating only to her – in other words, she is not a self-enclosed thing. What is more, the country is composed of differing places, cities and other types of settlement, and it is often more precise to speak of Bulgaria in the plural.

This brings us to another level, that which we call culture. The above statement about Bulgaria being part of other entities is particularly true of her neighbouring cultural zones, where Bulgarian cultural features are evident not only in the Macedonian and Serbian cultures, but also in the non-Slavic Greek culture. And the same applies to Bulgaria as a state and a society. Features of the Bulgarian state and society can be found elsewhere, too – either because we have borrowed certain institutions or because the latter were shaped in a larger region, as is the case of the Soviet-dominated Eastern Bloc during socialism.

Of course, each of the levels within Bulgaria, and the entity resulting from their interlinking, is a combination of elements. That is why an element may be present in the entity of a neighbouring country like Romania or Greece, but bearing some new characteristic given it by the entity formed from its combination with other elements. The Bulgarian characteristic is precisely such a characteristic, but it is not easy to represent as being simultaneously singular and multiple, and as expressed through numerous sub-characteristics, spatial or temporal.

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The same contradiction also emerges when we consider the people: Bulgarians form a multitude divided into sub-multitudes according to ethnic origin, place of residence, religious beliefs, political views, occupation and whatnot. Multitudes are multitudes, but they are something else, too: they form a greater entity, as is evident from the terms 'the Bulgarian people' and 'Bulgarian civic community'. This entity sets up cultural, social and political institutions, and organises the multitude of Bulgarians into the unit of society. This unit is not uniform, either, as the levels of cultural society and real-life society within it do not overlap.

Likewise, the levels of living person and Bulgarian citizen do not coincide within the individual. That is why we specify what a Bulgarian actually is by enumerating: he is a human being first, then a citizen, he is bonded to others like him in various types of groups, and he is a participant in two bigger, different groups – the historic community of the Bulgarian people and the contemporary civic community which today is not only Bulgarian, but also European. The Bulgarian individual is a complex being, a combination of characteristics acquired through his many participations. And, just as Bulgaria is land, nature, material environment, and human multitude organised in various ways, so is the Bulgarian individual on one level a human being, a man or a woman, at a younger or older age, and on another level a Bulgarian who has trained in and practices a certain profession, believes in this or that and is bonded to one type of people or another.

The number of these levels is not a constant. At times, a particular level prevails, while at others a different one takes priority; at some point one is predominantly a Bulgarian, at another a student, for instance, or something else. The quality predicates resulting from these levels of connection enter into various alternating combinations which are differently 'edited' by one's personal biography and one's psycho-physiological characteristics. Hence the facilitating statement that an individual is a unique thing difficult to represent.

Of course, representation *is* possible in principle, as an average. By 'individual' I mean this average which repeats itself. Figuratively, it can be represented as the first part of an algebraic formula. This first part, consisting of universally valid coefficients, is like a smaller formula before the brackets in the otherwise longer full formula of the Bulgarian individual. What are the coefficients that make it up? Broadly speaking, they are two: a more general one, that of what is human, and a more specific one, that of what is Bulgarian.

I employ this mathematical metaphor to emphasize that discussing the European Union and the globalising world is ineffective if it is based on the notion that each Bulgarian is a self-identical object placed into a self-identical box (i.e. country), for both are complex things which are not functionally self-identical. So what, actually, is the Bulgarian individual then? A complex system of superstructured, relatively open levels, carried by the relatively closed system of the living body in its environment. Among these more open levels are Bulgaria, the European Union, and the entity of the world.

This definition relies on the concept of closed system, as it posits that the Bulgarian individual, Bulgaria, the European Union and the globalising world are made up of different, functionally intersecting levels that are in mixed relations with one another, both constraining and fortifying.

Which is why they act as if they were living things: they follow the model of the living human being which, being living, does not exist in isolation, but is bonded to others like it and to an environment – in other words, it acts all the time as part of greater entities. That is what Bulgaria, the European Union and the globalising world are, in fact – entity environments which are, to the living human being, both constraints and fortifiers.

The good thing about the concept of complex system is that it puts forward the idea of the specific character of such entities, reminding us that both they and the individual are not merely units, but are complexes where the functions of openness and closedness are interwoven. Like all complex systems, Bulgaria, the European Unit and the globalising world enter into correlative combinations of openness and closedness with one another. Bulgaria, with its established institutions and culture, is a more closed entity than the European Union, which is still hesitant as to its institutions and its constitution, as to whether it should be more closedly or more openly ordered. At the same time, the apparently more open – compared to Bulgaria – European Union is a more closed entity compared to the great globalising world.

Undoubtedly, closedness can go to extremes. The socialist era was marked by attempts to close off the open-closed social system entirely. The system was closed to a greater degree than it should ever be, and this led to its falling apart. Incidentally, this falling apart brought about an opening process of which we are witnesses. Is it possible that this process could travel its full course, in which Bulgaria would be swallowed up by the European Union or the entity of the globalising world? Depending on circumstances, a country may stop existing, as has happened in history. The modern understanding is that such developments are not functional, as the complex system is a functional balance between openness and closedness, between dependence and independence.

Knowledge of the latter would help avoid certain simplistic ideas which are often present in discussions of Bulgaria in the context of the European Union. Like the statement that, because European excise duties on petrol have resulted in higher taxi fares, the European Union is more of a bad thing than a good one. What is wrong with this kind of discourse is the quick transition from a single fact/example to a single-minded understanding of a reality, thus leading to a simplistic interpretation of the complex reality of systems such as Bulgarian and the European Union.

The question is whether this so-called complexity can be represented as characteristics and forms of expression. It can. A speaker may rely on the following major form of expression of the complex system: that it is not an objective fixture but is autopoietic, i.e. it depends on itself. Or he may bring up another major form of expression: that elements of one system are also elements of another, which may mean, firstly, that one system intersects with another or, secondly, is a subsystem of it without being part of it. The first case brings us to the above-mentioned example of Bulgarian culture and neighbouring cultures on the Balkans, and the second one to the relationships between Bulgaria and the European Union.

The issue here is what type of discourse would better serve such a discussion. If the subject is approached scientifically, then the characteristics of the so-called complex system must be taken into consideration. Naturally, their number will vary in the different types of scientific discourse. Anyway, there is no recipe for most appropriate manner of scientific discourse and, in my opinion, it is best to follow the principles of what is called comprehensive sociology, which makes use of various separate notions such as that of the complex open system, but also takes into account that, just like any other type of discourse, scientific discourse is a comprehension situation.

It is comprehensive sociology that my present discourse is based on. On the one hand, I employ separate notions, one of which – that of the complex system – I have already clarified. I should also consider the notion of community. Since we define the human being as a function of its participation in communities, we should differentiate between immediate natural communities and mediate virtual ones, and we should know that ethnic and national communities belong more to the former category. Also, we should be aware that some communities establish institutions whose organisation is characterised both by equality of those participating in them and hierarchical inequalities such as leading roles, while other communities, especially virtual ones, do not set up institutions and are organised only along the principle of equality.

These two notions – of complex system and community – are quite sufficient for my present scientific-rhetoric exposition to proceed well. That is why, on the one hand, I insist that the nature of objects such as Bulgaria, the European Union and the globalising world must be taken into consideration, but, on the other, I rely more on examples and try to avoid overuse of unusual concepts. For that reason, I will now abandon the rather difficult concept of complex system and employ the more easily comprehensible one of freedom.

It is hardly debatable that an individual may be defined as a free person. But what, actually, is freedom? It is something real, sustained by rights and legal regulations, it is something desired and expected, but it is also something that is not always achieved. Yet, it is an indubitable value, which is why we usually speak of it in the singular and do not ask itself about its various, otherwise-named forms. Such a form is, for instance, the real mobility of the human being. We can convict and imprison someone and thus restrict his mobility. We can restrict it even further by incarcerating him. But that person will still be mobile, will still have minimal freedom within his unfreedom. Which comes to show that freedom/mobility is always in relation to some unfreedom.

After 1989, Bulgarians gradually attained greater freedom in terms of real mobility. Nowadays, it would seem that all of us have equal rights in that respect. Rights and opportunities, however, are different things, and opportunities are determined not only by material status, but by personal attitude as well. The European Union guarantees such and such freedoms of mobility, but a large part of them will never be utilised – by some because they do not have the requisite means, and by others because they do not wish to be mobile.

The point is, freedom is expressed through various freedoms: it is a multiple thing. It has always been so, but we realise it only now that humanity has grown to unbelievable proportions, as has the real mobility of human beings. That is why we claim that, unlike the abstract, singular freedom of the past, modern freedom is in fact a large number of specific freedoms. This lays

emphasis on one more difference, that between freedoms actually utilised and ideal freedoms, and on the need to understand that these do not coincide but combine in such a manner that freedom is a passage from real to ideal freedoms or, in certain cases, vice versa.

Hence the following duality. On the one hand, no human being is ever completely absorbed by the system it exists in – because no one dwells within one system only, but within a number of intersecting systems. Which makes the commonly accepted notion that we are in Bulgaria imprecise. Yes, as Bulgarians, we are in Bulgaria, but we are not only Bulgarians, so in certain respects we are not in Bulgaria. However attached he may be to his native country, an individual is never fully absorbed by her, as his own particular world remains unabsorbed by the environment he lives in. And what happens when he leaves the country and goes elsewhere? He takes his own particular world with him, and then his worlds are at least two – his own, seemingly small yet more defined world, and that vaguer foreign world which not only does not absorb the personal world but feeds on its energies just as the personal world feeds on the energies of the new place and country.

Why this state of duality? Because freedom/mobility has been expressed both really and ideally. The individual not only moves from one place to another, but chooses one set of opinions over another and follows certain models of understanding rather than others. Symbols, images and memories so far accumulated form a parallel world for him, like a computer back-up, a saved copy that may come to serve if the system breaks down. Historically, real and ideal freedom have crossed each other's way in more closed, traditional forms of existence, too, although in the past people were not so mobile and this happened less frequently.

And that is where the major difference lies between the traditional closed world of the past and the more open world of the present. Unlike the more recent past of the 18th and the 19th centuries, when basic human experiences were related to the disaccord between real and ideal freedom, nowadays more and more people possess a kind of exteriorised ideal state of freedom. I refer to the modern means of access, to the technology with which an individual can, without actually moving from one place to another, enter distant areas, gain information, participate, interact, or create his own texts. I have in mind the opportunities provided by the internet for shopping, concluding deals, paying bills, expressing opinions or voting. All of these are a significant addition to the other forms of access that a person has available as a citizen of a modern, democratic, European-style society.

As contemporary people, we tend to evaluate all these forms of freedom as being entirely positive. The point is, however, that they are functions of something else that is harder to evaluate – the growing real, but also ideal mobility of modern human beings, and the fact that they themselves define their views and values. Obviously, this self-definition is not easy, and many human beings find it truly difficult – which is why they often suffer from crises of values, from a sense of insufficiency, or lack, of meaning.

Hence the nostalgia for times of set values achieved through community bondedness. Such is, for example, the nostalgia for the totalitarian socialist past, experienced not only by those who benefited from it. It would be much more logical, however, to feel nostalgia for the more distant times of the traditional society. Why? Because of the flexible organisation of the passing of time then, because days and years were divided so that at some point, together with others, a person

was one, then another, and thus, though always together with others, he was by definition different, neither left to himself nor one and the same.

This is no longer so in present-day Bulgaria, with its traditional culture destroyed and its atomised people moving in all directions while trying by themselves to define the changing, depending on circumstances, formulas of their identity. This is not at all easy when the rules for bonding and entering into dependency relationships are not firmly established, and in many cases are missing. Hence the benefit of being part of the European Union, from which, among other things, we expect to obtain the lacking standards for regulating and coping with the growing mobility and the flood of oncoming freedoms, whose utilisation confuses and poses difficulties to the extent that certain people have already begun to prefer traditional unfreedom.

Here is a positive example. In the American Senate, a Muslim senator proposes that the tradition of swearing on the Bible be amended so that Muslims can swear on the Koran. Naturally, there are opponents to this proposal, but it is passed with a sufficient majority – and so a new freedom is gained. Thus we can judge to what extent a country is developed, in the contemporary meaning of the word, by the number of specific freedoms utilised within it.

It is certainly essential whether freedoms are utilised. Because, even when there are clear rules of use existent, freedoms and accesses may not be utilised and the individual may not be bonded to the unfunctioning whole of society. In this respect, the individual stands with one foot outside the time and country he lives in. Despite the contemporary right to choose, his basic freedom may consist in the exact opposite, in the preference that someone else makes choices instead of him. There are such people, tagging themselves onto others or willingly sacrificing their right to immediate freedom in the name of subordination through which they can gain benefits or some other freedom.

This also applies to the utilisation of so-called accesses. We have access to a wide range of objects and things, to politics and what not, we have the access to enter whatever system we want, to obtain information, to participate and interact, and even to exercise power. But some people use certain accesses, others use different ones, and some do not use any at all. The latter may be obstructed by persons or circumstances, but also by their own mindset. Take the Bulgarian example – we do not make use of the specific freedoms available to us, for a number of reasons. Because the rules of use are not clear or because the potential users are accustomed to lacking such freedoms and do not know or prefer not to know that they are available. Yes, when there are elections, the right to vote is utilised – but even then, by half of all Bulgarians at most.

If we look at our everyday way life, we will discover that things are no different. Let me give a personal example. I do not set foot in court. If my neighbours disturb my sleep by making noise at night, I move to another room rather than phone the police. I tell myself, ‘Bulgarian courts are slow, and the police are inefficient’. Am I doing the right thing, then? Psychologically, I may be, but not socially. For I am actually undermining the functioning of society, the system of functioning freedom.

That is how it is in most countries of the European Union, too. Why? Because of something that is inherent in the principle of the so-called complex system. The individual is made up of levels.

Two such levels are those of the contemporary citizen and of the human being. These levels do not overlap. The human being has many facets, one of which is his behaviour as a private being dependent on his small material world, which in many cases seems to him more real than the big social world. Among these facets of the living human being is also the fact of the living constantly evading the surrounding actual: social life with other people.

The same also happens within the smaller society of New Bulgarian University. NBU is a university institution providing a number of accesses. These, however, are utilised only partially or are not utilised at all by both students and staff. In some cases because the rules are not advertised well enough, but in others because of the underdeveloped mindset of students and staff – the consequence being that both often act not as citizens but as subjects. Of course, it is also true that, in comparison with other Bulgarian universities, utilization of these so-called accesses is much further advanced.

And now, leaning on the viewpoint of the individual human being, let us turn to the complex system of the European Union and expand on the above said.

Within the great system of the European Union, the functions of openness and closedness are interwoven. On the one hand, the Union is open to the more closed nation states it brings together; on the other, it is closed to the great globalising world. It opens up the nation states to common institutions and standards which enhance their vitality, but it also provides, through its union wholeness, protection when they go out into the field of international competition. This is not a final fixture but a process towards improvement within the delicate balance of the functioning openness/closedness. Why delicate? Because, being internally open, and opening the member states to one another, the European Union must be sufficiently closed and stable as a system.

Hence the debate on the efficiency of this or that form of closedness. As a common system of law, and of domestic and foreign policy, this form must be acquired and assimilated by the member states, but it must also be externally efficient, in regard to the globalising world with which the European Union is in working competition. The fact is that this globalising world is also a process. On the one hand, it is made up of institutions such as the UN and NATO which are difficult to coordinate, and on the other, influential countries such as the USA, Japan and China also have their say. And there is the problem – Japan and the USA show better potential than the EU for productivity, organisation and development rate. Closedness to these countries is therefore not a completely positive sign, but a somewhat negative one as well.

It would be easy to oversimplify things if we were to continue in this direction. The strength of the European Union is not only in its actuality as a system of institutions and superstructured standards which fortify the countries within it. Its strength is in its relation to Europe, which, as it is, is not the same thing as the European Union. We could speak of the European Union as the currently topical Europe, but it would be better if, following the paradigm outlined above, we said that Europe is a different open complex system with which the European Union only partially overlaps. That system also has many levels. One is its developed urban culture, another its material wealth, a third – the European way of life which provides Europeans with high mobility. A fourth level is that of European values.

These values are usually spoken of in general, and they are rarely enumerated as interrelated positions. Their enumeration is a problem because they are not a definite number and may be formulated differently. But, one way or another, there are relatively indisputable basic super-values. One of them is the above-discussed mobility of the individual, which takes the form of so many specific freedoms, rights and accesses. Another is the secular rationality of the European attitude to the world, which in its own turn is linked to the appreciation of many different things in the world. This is not unrelated to the fact that Europeans live in a world of many roads and directions of mobility, a flexible system of many ways of existing, separately or together.

That is why, as Europeans, we both exist on our own and take part in different types of togetherness systems – and why we are so concerned with the formula of our identity, which is made up of both these facts. This formula is a given, determined by inclinations and enduring belongings, but it has also been reworked. The problem arises of how to cope with the balance of given and reworked. Obviously, it does not take place on the fully individual or the fully conscious level. That is what the others, those wiser than us, are for – to counsel us. Hence the motorics of social existence: our participation in groups and smaller units, such as friendly or married couples, which often do our thinking for us.

And yet, given the high degree of present-day mobility, these forms of support are not sufficient. Our personal identity formula should be much more flexible. Because to the usual community relationships of the traditional, more closed environment of close people and native country, more and more external environments are now being added, such as the many levels of the system of the European Union. How to achieve this flexibility? By amassing experience, of course, by real mobility in the increasingly open world – and also by expanding the potential of what I called ideal mobility.

How can this be done? Through education. It is the most reliable means of protecting oneself from the crises which the modern human being undergoes as a result of the great opening-up of the world. To be educated means to have acquired the requisite mental and personal traits to be able to move on your own. It also means being able, without suffering a crisis, to remain alone when necessitated or required by some specific activity, as well as being able, again without any crisis, to form a group with other people in order to attain some goal – i.e., being able to pass smoothly from one form to another of social unity.

For modern mobility is problematic. He who accepts it positively must, in order to accept himself, possess the necessary mental tools: concepts and paradigms of understanding. He must be able to proceed from one paradigm to another rather than lock onto a single one, expecting everything from it. This is a difficult business, which accounts for the numerous fundamental types of explanation for things – e.g. theories or rigid patterns into which everything must fit. One type of practical fundamentality is close bondedness to a group of people. Such is the function of religious fervour, whose good point is that it offers the believer a more open world which goes beyond human life on earth and is in this respect critical of the restraints of everyday material and social existence.

As we can see, the issue of the European Union and the globalising world necessitates answers and solutions. On the one hand, there is the palliative solution of reducing the many levels of the great open world to a single one of them. This can be done either by temporarily closing oneself

off into a small, real world here and now, or by binding oneself to the symbols of a rigid paradigm of understanding. On the other hand, there is the hard way of education, with all it involves: learning foreign languages, accustoming oneself to the incessant flow of information on an infinite number of subjects, participating in various social organised activities, accumulating concepts and cultivating the ability to distinguish between the notion of something and the reality of that thing. Naturally, educating oneself also means becoming well acquainted with a certain area of knowledge and acquiring a profession. But to a much greater extent it means interdisciplinarity – which, as you well know, is something we insist on at NBU.

As far as knowledge is concerned, one useful thing to remember may be what was said above about the open complex system. It is not easy to apply, of course, because it is complicated, but also for the exact opposite reason – because it is a formula, and may lead to schematic explanations. It would be better if, in the course of explaining things, we replaced this formula with another, then with a third one, and so on. Only this kind of explanation, which takes inot account the dynamics of life, would protect us from the delusion that Bulgaria and the European Union as objects coincide with Bulgaria and the European Union as realities. They do not coincide for a number of reasons, a basic one being that discourse is never simply about pointing out things as existent, but also about projecting them as desired and ideal. Which, incidentally, is one form of expression of human freedom.