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Eurovision Song Contest as a Stage: Performing Identities, Nationalism and Politics

The purpose of this article is to understand whether the Eurovision Song Contest as an initially planned project to shape the common European identity serves its objective. To address this question, the paper considers the developments of the contest throughout its enlargement history towards the East.

The multidimensional nature of the contest required a multidisciplinary methodological approach, combining ethnomusicology, performance and media studies. To address the role and perceptions of the ESC in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus, several case studies have been conducted, with a primary focus on conflicting countries. The ESC in this article is represented as a manifestation of banal nationalism, a term suggested by Michael Billig who argues, that modern nationalism has an 'unnoticed', seemingly harmless nature, hidden in peoples' everyday practices. The paper addresses nationalism in the ESC as a 'bottom-up' process coming from the people, as opposed to 'top-down' nationalism coming from the elites or individual professional composers.

According to my research, the ESC has become more divided throughout its enlargement history, and has turned into a stage of many identities. This divisiveness is being expressed through nationalism and politics involved in the contest. The former is a result of competitive nature of the contest and existing conflicts between the relatively new participant countries, while the latter is mainly a result of regionalized voting system.

Key words: *Eurovision, tolerance, politics, nationalism, Caucasus.*

Էլեն Գրիգորյան

Գլոբալիզացիայի և տարածաշրջանային համագործակցության վերլուծական կենտրոն

Եվրատեսիլ երգի մրցույթը որպես ինքնությունների, ազգայնականության և քաղաքականության արտահայտման բեմ

Այս հոդվածի նպատակն է պարզել՝ արդյոք Եվրատեսիլ երգի մրցույթը եղել է նախագծված պլան՝ ձևավորել ընդհանուր եվրոպական ինքնություն, և ծառայում է իր նպատակին: Այս հարցին պատասխանելու նպատակով հոդվածն անդրադառնում է Եվրատեսիլի զարգացումներին՝ շեշտադրելով մրցույթի դեպի Արևելք ընդլայնման վրա:

Ելնելով մրցույթի բազմաչափ բնույթից՝ հետազոտության ընթացքում կիրառվել է բազմազիտակարգային մեթոդաբանություն՝ ընդգրկելով էթնոտերաժապահության, կատարողական և ԶԼՄ-ի ուսումնասիրություններ (performance and media studies): Եվրատեսիլի դերը և մրցույթի ընկալումն Արևելյան Եվրոպայում և Հարավային Կովկասում լուսաբանելու նպատակով որոշակի դեպքերի ուսումնասիրություն է արվել՝ կոնֆլիկտող երկրների վրա հիմնական կենտրոնացմամբ:

Եվրատեսիլը հոդվածում ներկայացված է որպես բանալ ազգայնականության արտահայտություն: Միքայել Բիլլիգի կողմից առաջ քաշված այս տեսությունը

սնդում է, որ ժամանակակից ազգայնականությունը չի ընկալվում որպես այդպիսին և մարդկանց ամենօրյա պրակտիկաներում անընդհատ վերարտադրման արդյունք է:

Հեղինակն անդրադառնում է Եվրատեսիլին՝ որպես «ներքևից վերև» ազգայնականության գործընթացի, որը գալիս է հասարակությունից, հակառակ «վերևից-ներքև» ազգայնականության, որը էլիտաների կամ անհատ պրոֆեսիոնալ կոմպոզիտորների գործունեության արդյունք է:

Հետազոտության արդյունքում պարզ դարձավ, որ Եվրատեսիլն իր ընդլայնման պատմության ընթացքում դարձել է ավելի ու ավելի մասնատված՝ վերածվելով բազում ինքնությունների բեմի: Այդ մասնատվածությունն արտահայտվում է մրցույթում ազգայնականության և քաղաքականության ամրապնդմամբ, որոնք մրցակցության, քվեարկության ռեզիոնավացված համակարգի և անդամ-երկրների միջև առկա կոնֆլիկտների արդյունք են:

Բանալի բառեր. *Եվրատեսիլ, հանդրորոշականություն, ազգայնականություն, Կովկաս, քաղաքականություն:*

Элен Григорян

Конкурс «Евровидение» - сцена для репрезентации идентичностей, национализма и политики

Целью данной статьи является понять концепцию Евровидения, как первоначального проекта, служащего инструментом для формирования общей европейской идентичности и понять насколько данный проект оправдывает свои цели. Для рассмотрения данного вопроса, исследовательская работа анализирует развитие событий конкурса на протяжении всей ее истории расширения на Восток. Согласно моим исследованиям, на протяжении своей истории расширения Евровидение стало более разделенным, и стал площадкой многих идентичностей. Такой раскол в настоящее время выражается посредством национализма и политики, вовлеченной в конкурс.

Introduction

Eurovision Song Contest (henceforth ESC or Eurovision), a pan-European musical TV competition, has entered the houses of Europeans since 1956, when the first ESC contest took place between seven European states in Lugano, Switzerland (EBU... 2016). As one of the symbolic pillars of Europe, having been a result of the disastrous Second World War (henceforth WW2), the ESC was designed to symbolize the unity of European states. It primarily took place between the member countries of the European Broadcasting Union (henceforth EBU), which was designed to bridge public broadcasters of European countries to form European identity. Since then the EBU has enlarged immensely, along with the path of the European Union enlargement (henceforth EU), and has crossed the borders of the EU by including countries of a wider Europe.

ESC, being the most popular product of the union was believed to be a mechanism to foster common European identity. It included the two most effective (Bohlman 2011) spheres of forming and transforming identities: media and music, which brought to a success reaching over 1 billion viewers. At the beginning, through unit-

ing the whole West of Europe, it followed the EU path by moving to the East of Europe since 1990s. This changed the nature of the ESC, and contested the notion of what is considered as 'European'. Since then the ESC entered a new era, by displaying the 'New Europe', a term used by Europe after the Eastern Enlargement of the EU, encompassing former Eastern Bloc and Soviet counties.

The paper argues that this enlargement, reaching the borders of today's Council of Europe totally changed the nature of the contest, by bringing new objectives and meanings to the contest.

The research question of the article is as follows: Does the ESC, as a popular music event, bring unity among the participants, or does it emphasize the fragmentation and disunity between former and new members even more? In other words, my paper aims to understand the balance between the concepts of 'unity' and 'diversity' in the ESC and to answer the question whether the ESC contributes to the formation of 'pan-European' identity as a cultural rather than civic identity, or it creates more disunity among the member-states through enforcing nationalism and politics.

My hypothesis is based on the belief that the 'Unity in Diversity' motto adopted by both the EU and the ESC, which emphasizes the importance of finding a balance between unity and diversity, does not work in favour of the unity principle, but on the contrary, is too diverse to sustain this balance. These results the ESC to become a stage of many unities divided from each other. The recent criticism influencing on the image of the contest negatively, motivated me to try to understand what the reasons are standing behind that.

Various books and articles, and particularly newspapers have covered ESC as a platform for European identity building, nationalism and image branding. However, there has not been any academic analysis of the role of the ESC in the South Caucasus and the analyses of ESC in the context of conflicts. Hence, the paper contributes to the overall academic knowledge on the topic, through strengthening the existing theories on national image branding processes and national self-representation in the ESC and adding new empirical data. It also suggests a new approach in the ESC studies, through analysing it in the context of conflicts in wider Europe.

Sources of information include academic articles, books as well as social media and newspapers, which have dedicated a massive attention to the contest. The paper is a result of an inspiration from Philip Bohlman's book (2011) called 'Music, Nationalism and Making of the New Europe'.

Here I introduce the need of a multidisciplinary study of the ESC, through combining ethnomusicology, performance and media studies, which propose to analyse the ESC as social phenomenon, rather than autonomous arts event, which can shape and form identities and nationalism. The approach is used to show how the event can construct national, regional and pan-European boundaries and how it can serve for nation branding and self-representation of the nation. It also includes a discussion on the ESC European project as a platform for European identity building through media and music.

The paper is written in the social constructivist framework, and has a high influence of Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities', which studies nations as imagined communities, which are social constructs rather than objective artefacts. As nations, as well as national identities are socially constructed, that means that the continuation of their life is a result of the society constantly legitimizing and objectifying them. This approach especially helps to understand the European identity building processes and the reaffirming of the notions of nation and nationalism in the ESC.

Methodology

This research, which aims to understand the balance between the concepts of 'unity' and 'diversity' in the context of the ESC, is based on content and visual analysis. It includes the methodology of Musical Anthropology or Ethnomusicology, Performance and Media studies, which are highly social phenomena, being able to shape, form and transform social constructs, such as identities, nationalism, cross borders, places and time. The case studies mainly consist of content and discourse analysis, including an analysis of musical lyrics, videos as well as the media. The latter contains online international newspaper sections such as BBC, the Telegraph, the Guardian, the New York Times, several blogs, and more.

Eurovision Song Contest as a Part of the European Project

The Eurovision Song Contest is one of the most watched non-sporting events in the world. It is held among the member countries of the European Broadcasting Union. The latter consists of state-owned public service broadcasters and private broadcasters with public missions (Raykoff and Tobin 2007: 87). The most popular output of the EBU is Eurovision, which is being broadcast in all the ESC member states. It was supposed to be cooperation between public broadcasters so that every European had an access to Eurovision. The EBU initiators believed that by uniting television and music the big musical show would unite Europe and promote the European project (The EBU... 2016). The idea behind was to connect the people of Europe through media.

The Role of Media in Identity Building

The ESC uses media and music to connect Europe to form identities. By simultaneously broadcasting an event shared by Europeans to reaffirm, as B. Anderson calls it 'European imagined community' (1983).

The idea that I claim is that European identity is a constructed identity, which is perceived by Europeans as a secondary identity, and civil identity, which creates a sense of civic, legal belonging and does not replace national identity. It is interesting to follow the European identity building process because it was planned after the WW2, so it is a special example of modern identity building.

The obstacles, which make the common European identity develop, are banal nationalism (Billig 1995) and non-unity in media. The ESC was also a way to create

an ‘invented tradition’ a term coming from ‘The Invention of Tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), which indicates that even though we perceive traditions as granted, they are socially constructed.

The annually repetitive nature of the contest was a way to create a ‘pan-European tradition’ of watching the contest with families at home and feeling a common sense of belonging.

On the other hand, the broadcasting union crosses borders by creating one place and travels through time zones, by determining the hour of the ESC: everyone watches the ESC irrespective of different time zones. Media transports Europeans from all around the continent to a respective country and makes them become a part of a bigger community (Kirkegaard 2013).

Ethnomusicological Approach

Ethnomusicology is an interdisciplinary study of musical cultures within societies around the world, which emphasizes cultural, social, cognitive, and other roles of music rather than its sound component (Nettl 1983: 25). The approach of it is to bring music out from its traditional study environment, which looks at it as a structure of musical sound, as a system in itself, but not as a part of the society it was created by. As Jeff Todd Titon has described it, Ethnomusicology is the study of ‘people making music’ (2009: 12).

Music and musical performance have always accompanied societies since the ancient period of human history until today, and have had certain functions depending on their social context (Sachs 2008). Merriam in his book mentions that music is interrelated with the rest of culture. It can and does shape and channel social, political, economic, religious and other kinds of behavior (Merriam 1964: 16-17). Music has been and is part of peoples’ everyday life: from accompanying various rituals and ceremonies, to its national, political expressions. Ethnomusicologists have long been curious in how it mobilizes the society, unifies people in parades and sport events.

The classical definition of music characterizes it as a cultural activity, which can include sound, rhythm and timbre (which is considered to be the ‘colour’ of a musical sound) as main elements (Grove et al 1954: 53-54). Various musical genres and styles may consist of or lack some of these elements. Music in Ethnomusicology includes all possible manifestations of vocal techniques ranging from singing to rapping, from instrumental pieces of music to vocal pieces. Such a broad definition of music is related to Ethnomusicology’s research scope, which includes the world music with all its diversity. As Martin Stokes states, there are different conceptions of music in different cultures. In some communities, there is no word existing for ‘music’ (1997: 13).

Nevertheless, the activity that they perform in their everyday life is described as music by musicological society, if it includes at least one component of what is defined as music traditionally in the world’s mainstream media, public sphere and

academy. Thus, in this paper the term 'music' will be used in its larger meaning and will mainly refer to the songs of a variety of genres performed in the contest.

The belief that art music should be autonomous was developed in the writings of early German romantics. Music wasn't supposed to be about anything. Instead, it would be purely aesthetic and *autonomous* (Bohlman 2011: 10-11). As stated by P. Bohlman, composers with national spirit were believed to never being able to become immortal, because their music was not free of the burden of social context. As stated by absolutists, such composers had not reached the level of understanding, that art music is *autonomous*, and modern music is *absolute music* (Bohlman 2011: 10). The new approach towards music goes beyond the borders of 'art', from serving purely aesthetic demands.

Modernism gave birth to the notion of absolute music and to the old musicological school, which would analyse the 'aesthetic', high art music and develop the 'science of music' (Bohlman 2011: 11). On top of the fosterment of sciences and individualism, Musicology became a highly specialized and specified space of the study of music. Music was regarded as something having an individualist rather than collectivist nature, and, as a consequence, the forms of joint, shared music such as religious or ethnic songs were excluded from academic research. As Bohlman claims, a part of this joint music, nevertheless, was 'museumized' and archived in Conservatories as 'pure', 'authentic' art music of the people of the past, outside of its cultural context.

Inconsistently, social and cultural worlds that have been shaped by modernism (industrial-capitalist order, the nation-state and secular nationalism) would be hard to imagine without music (accompanied with patriotic songs and national anthems). Modernism reaffirmed the hierarchy between musical genres through aesthetic standards of this era (Bourdieu 2010: 260-264). It clearly defined that classical art music is the universal, absolute and autonomous, individualist music, and the rest of music, namely popular music was not considered as art. Art was perceived as something, which was supposed to be 'beautiful' and emotionally powerful (Bourdieu 2010: 265). Likewise, as music was categorized as art, it was required to fulfil the same criteria. As a matter of fact, aesthetics is itself a highly cultural and subjective modelling of beautiful and good, which changes over time and space.

The purpose of the prior notice is that this perception and definition of 'good music' has been so deeply rooted in the western society and ranged over the world, that even today it still may provide with definition on what is 'good' and what is 'bad' music (Bohlman 2011: 13). As we will see later, popular music along with Eurovision song contest has been criticized through the standards of music determined at the time of modernism.

Funnily enough, sociologist T. Adorno argued that western classical art music of modernism had itself been nationalist and politicized (Adorno 1988: 130-139). This work was a massive breakthrough in the evolution of Musicology, which made the

old school, rethink about the scope of Musicology and reconsider the methodology of studying music academically.

Most of the academic literature (Adorno's book, J. Baily's 'The Role of Music in the Creation of an Afghan National Identity, 1923-73'; Z. Mach's, 'National Anthems: The Case of Chopin as a National Composer', etc.) covering the intersection between music and nationalism refer to nationalism as a project designed in the top of the society, through the political elites, where music has been used as means to reach the people. In this paper, I will follow the approach of P. Bohlman, who states that apart from being a top-down project, nationalism could also be considered as a process coming from the bottom to the top. I will elaborate on this process in the paper, by arguing that sport events, as well as the Eurovision Song Contest are good examples of nationalism coming from the people.

Based on the methodology of the new theoretical school, Ethnomusicology, music in this paper will be considered as a domain, that is not only a social and cultural phenomenon, which simply reflects social structures, but is actively involved in shaping these structures. Eurovision Song Contest, the longest running TV song competition of popular music, which has been an official project to unite Europe after the WW2, has been criticized to be politicized, a failed project as a cultural ground of the European project.

The aim of this paper is to lay out the processes of identity building, politics and self-representation of nations in the Eurovision Song contest. There has already been done some research about it previously. I will try to look at the work already done and through my research and new examples say, whether the Eurovision song contest becomes a stage of national self-representation and nationalism.

Nationalism in the Eurovision Song Contest

The Eurovision Song Contest as a Performance

From ethnomusicological perspective, Eurovision Song Contest can be regarded as a multifaceted phenomenon, in which meanings are socially constructed, manipulated. As the former researches have argued, it is something more than just a song contest. ESC encompasses various aspects. The following chapter will address nationalism and boundary building through the ESC. For this reason, a multidisciplinary approach is required, which includes Performance Studies and Ethnomusicology.

When discussing Eurovision, we could remark that it is a live event, which encompasses live performers, live audience, stage, stagecraft, music and dance. Apart from its musical component, the overall stage performance plays an enormous role in it. In Performance Studies stagecraft is one of the main elements of the integrated art performance. Its challenging function is to construct a meaning in the performance through non-verbal technology, magnify the presence and immediacy of the performance (Cook 2003: 203). Stage crafters use the darkened room, the large

screen, design, and costumes to make the performance live and real. Together with scenographers, who are responsible for the artistic perspective of the performance, stage crafters influence on the audience. Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth elaborate on this and reaffirm, that Scenography does not solely create and present images to an audience; it is concentrated upon audience reception and engagement (McKinney and Butterworth 2009: 4).

Erika Fischer-Lichte in 'The Transformative Power of Performance' defines performance as an event, which encompasses processes of communication between the performer and audience, and between members of the audience (2008: 161). Pursuant to her argument, a performer invites the audience to participate in the performance during the whole event in multiple ways. A 'good' performance is the one that succeeds making the audience co-participants. Thus, the transformative power of performance, according to Fischer-Lichte, is the power, which transforms the passive listener and viewer into an active participant (2008: 161). In a musical performance, the physical stage, the scenery, the costumes and the stage semiotics aim to influence on the audience and to make the transformation possible. Fischer-Lichte's work mainly analyses the theatre art performance, however it could be applicable to any public event, such as carnivals, fests, social movements, sport events, as well as the Eurovision Song Contest. A while later we will address the nationalist semiotics on the stage of the ESC and its contribution to the overall nationalist spirit of the contest.

Caroline Heim has described the stages of communication between the audience and the performers. At the beginning, the artist and the audience are clearly divided from each other both physically and mentally through the stage (Heim 2016: 61-63). This could be relevant for football stadiums as well: the field is clearly separated from the tribune. Then during the massive event magic happens: the sharing of an experience with others, joint feelings and emotions create a sense of social belonging and unify or separate the audience according to their social identities.

Consequently, contest events, which hinge on the principle of competition between states, accordingly enforce national identities and nationalism among the audience. In this respect, we could classify, for instance, the UEFA European Championship and the ESC into the same category. Sanna Inthorn and other researchers have discussed the processes of collective identity building in football stadiums (Inthorn 2012: 96-109). Similarly, both football and Eurovision fans watch a nationalism driven from competition.

Nationalism Driven from Competition

P. Bohlman has analysed the national identity building in music contests, particularly in the ESC. In his opinion, competition is the main driving force of nationalism and of its expression through music (Bohlman 2011: 59-60). National anthems accompany the athletic event, when nations compete against each other. Similarly, war and colonialism, as fierce competitions between nations and empires, produced

music that would serve military competition (music in the marches or bagpipe repertoires that provoke nations to war).

As M. Stokes states, nationalist music is a result of the process of social groups defining themselves through their ability to articulate differences between self and other (1997: 13). This binary system of opposing the 'other' by musical means has been discussed by Malcolm Chapman in his 'Thoughts on Celtic music' article, where he analyzes how the Scottish and the Welsh people invented their 'national culture' to express their 'otherness' from the dominant English culture and how music became a tool in this process of the invention of tradition (1997: 29-49). Blacking claims, that Celtic, African, Mediterranean, Arab, European musics are being defined in competitions, festivals and tourist promotions (1987: 133-134). These divisions bring chauvinist agendas and unfounded arguments, because the reality is that it is hard to 'pack' music in certain borders and give it a name. The process of defining music is usually accompanied with ethnic, national, supra-national identity building.

Modern competitions, as Bohlman claims also encompass musical practices that symbolize the nation and serve the desire to demonstrate 'otherness' (2011: 27-28). As Stokes claims, music is a symbolic phenomenon, which is highly important to nation-states (1997: 27-28).

An important statement that he does is that a nationalist music may be political, economic, cultural, or ideological, but they must all include the competition feature. Nationalist music emerges at those times and places when nations confront each other or compete with each other. In consequence, competition with other nation-states is essential in nationalist music. Folk and popular music contests, including the ESC, that play out in the nationalized media, are potential generators of nationalist music. These musical competitions, as Bohlman puts it, provide postmodern means of mobilizing the people of the nation-state to express a new form of nationalism. The latter consists more and more of the symbolic language of nationalist musics of all kinds (Bohlman 2011: 62). The spectators waving national flags, bearing them on their cheeks, or exclaiming the name of their respective countries, reiterate nationalism subliminally. Thereupon, the audience 'performs' nationalism after the process of assimilation into the performance, the performer and the audience, sharing the same feelings.

Banality in the ESC Nationalism

Reestablishing nationalism in mass events through national symbolism might be seen as less urgent to analyze: most of the research has been done in extreme manifestations of nationalism. Nevertheless, Michael Billig has argued, that modern nationalism has a 'hidden,' seemingly harmless nature, which makes it a powerful ideology (1995: 38). He examines and challenges the 'daily life' nationalism (*banal nationalism*) by arguing that most political violence and political movements are based on it in today's world. The term 'nationalism' in public and academic discourse

is usually used within the context of those who struggle to create new states, or has to do with extreme right-wing politics. The notion 'identity' is the basis of nationalism. National identity, according to Billig is being reproduced daily by nationalized media, by politicians referring to people as nationals rather than citizens, by sport events and musical contests. This nationalism is banal, however, as Hannah Arendt states, 'banality is not synonymous with harmlessness' (Billig 1995: 40).

When discussing about the intersections between nationalism and the ESC, it is important to remark, that nationalism is a product of the age of modern nation-states, and that the nation-states in turn are products of modernism (Gellner 1983: 53). As Gellner explains, modernism and the rise of state, brought an ideological transformation of collective identity. Nation-states were formed in a certain period of time, and according to Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Anthony Giddens, they are not founded upon 'objective' criteria (such as the possession of a separate language). In fact, nations have to be imagined as communities to be able to sustain.

The reproduction of nation-states depends upon a rationale of collective remembering and forgetting, and of imagination and imaginative repetition (Anderson 1983: 187-193). Thus, Billig explains, that these 'imagined' and daily constructed banal nationalism reiterates the existing social system of nation-states. Nationalism, B. Anderson argues, is more than a form of identity. He defines it as an ideological consciousness, in which national identities and nationalism are perceived 'natural' (1983: 188). The ESC itself represents an example of banal nationalism, which appears as invisible and harmless. Nevertheless, it is a pan-European event, which reproduces the clichés of nationhood and nationalism.

P. Bohlman states, that people in the ESC apply songs to express national identities (2011: 4). They dance the folk dances and participate in military marches. Europeans are involved in shaping nationalism themselves in the ESC, because their votes determine the winner of the ESC and they are co-performers of nationalism through national symbols. Nationalism does not enter music from the top, from state institutions and individuals, but from the bottom.

Politicization of the Eurovision Song Contest

As mentioned earlier, the ESC was established after the WW2 with a specific objective: to bring unity to Europe, create a sense of 'European community' and European identity. Both music and media are believed to cross spaces and borders, so this could be a successful project. As politicization was a possible obstacle in pursuing the idea of unity, politics became the impermissible word for the ESC. Even though the rules of the contest change frequently, 'no politicization' rule has been in the list of the code of conduct of the ESC since the very beginning of its history (ESC Rules... 2016). It says that 'no lyrics, speeches, gestures of a political or similar nature shall be permitted during the Eurovision Song Contest. No messages promoting any organization, institution, political cause or other, company, brand, products

or services shall be allowed in the Shows and within any official Eurovision Song Contest. A breach of this rule may result in disqualification' (ESC Rules... 2016). Even though the abuse of this rule seems to have quite harsh consequences, it is dubious whether the ESC is very consistent in sticking to this rule. It has often been criticized for its politicized nature in public and in social media in many ways, among which the voting plays a big role.

Voting: Driven from Political or Cultural Forces?

The EU has always supported regionalism, because it was considered as the main way to overcome or soften nationalism. Since the 1990s, the new stage of European nationalism: neo-nationalism rose. Regionalism however had the opposite effect by strengthening nationalism even more. The cultural policy of the EU started supporting regional programs, such as Austria's 'Music der Regionen' (Music of the Regions). World music producers also, started concentrating on making 'music of regions' and going beyond the borders of national. However, soon it was clear that regionalism could bring secessions and conflicts in regions in disputed territories. If we follow the policies of the ESC, it will be clear that at the beginning there was a support for regionalism, and in many cases, there were various minority representing artists, bringing their traditional culture to the stage. However, the new rules banning to wave regional flags in the ESC stage show all the problematic issues that the contest has to cope with.

In the ESC, each country represents its original song to be performed live. Then countries vote for each other, without being allowed to vote for the performance of their own country. Today voting is done through public televoting and the professional jury, who determine the winning entry of the competition (Voting in ESC...2016). The main criticism of the public about the ESC voting is that it is politicized, biased and that the voting reflects everything but music. The idea behind the ESC was to unite Europe, however it seems that some parts of Europe are more united than others (Royston2016). The main trend in the ESC voting that is noticed by the viewers is the existence of regional alliances. Several groups or separate countries systematically vote for each other, which rises arguments whether the voting is driven by the quality of the songs or it has other reasons. Statisticians from UCL and Imperial College have published the main regional alliances or blocs according to the voting results of the entire history of the ESC (Pipa2014). Even though the blocs vary slightly in different researches, most of the analysts have agreed on the existence of the following blocs:

- The Balkans: former Yugoslavian countries, together with Romania and Albania.
- The former Soviet Union countries and their satellite Eastern European states.

- Scandinavia together with Iceland, Latvia and Lithuania (Fricker and Gluhivic 2013: 111-112).

The most evident examples could be Belarus constantly awarding its highest points only to Russia or Ukraine and Cyprus-Greece cooperation. Usually the main principle lying behind the blocs is geographical proximity. However, Malta steadily voting for the UK does not follow this logic (Palmer and Dodds 2016). The statistics show that the UK public is the most skeptical about the ESC being non-political and explain UK's notorious results in the past 15 years by the isolated situation of the island from the rest of the continent. However, being a part of a bloc doesn't necessarily secure a victory (Pipa 2016). Norway is still a very unsuccessful country in the ESC, leaving the contest with no points four times.

The existence of voting blocs mainly impacts on the points of the countries positively. The research has shown that there is almost no systematic negative voting between the countries and discrimination against certain countries (even though in Western countries there is a belief of such alliance between Eastern European countries, which affects negatively on the West).

Nevertheless, in 2014 Armenia, who came fourth in the contest was the last one in the Azerbaijan televote and by the jury. Armenia voted for Azerbaijan the same way, though Azerbaijan in general came 22nd out of 26. The reason behind this was the antagonism derived from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between these two countries, which has been expressed in the ESC multiple times. We will elaborate on it a while later.

Even though it is undeniable, that the voting of the ESC is affected from politics, there are also other factors, such as cultural cohesion and migration. For instance, Annmette Kirkegaard has done a research on the 'Nordic voting bloc' and come to the conclusion, that the similarity between languages and culture was one of the main reason of this working alliance (2016: 79-90). According to her, being able to understand the lyrics of the songs and 'decode' the cultural language of the neighbor can influence on voting.

Adam Lee, a journalist and editorial consultant from London, whose blog launched in 2009, *wiwibloggs*, is currently the most-read website on the ESC, has said, that even if Russia showed up without a song, it would still make it to the final (Westvott2014). Along with today's political alliance of some Eastern European and South Caucasian countries with Russia and wish to show allegiance to Russia, the cultural factor affects on Russia's success as well. According to Lee, influence of the shared Soviet heritage naturally guarantees the Russian act to do well. Sietse Bakker, a Eurovision Song contest event supervisor, in her interview said that taste, 'a certain cultural sound you're familiar with,' can drive to voting (Vranis 2016). He explains that in Eurovision culture and politics go hand in hand. It is possible to find out more or less clear voting blocs, but it almost impossible to clearly interpret the

motives of these blocs and identify their nature. Regarding the earlier mentioned example of Greece and Cyprus, he states, that the two countries share long historical ties, watch the same media, speak the same language and are connected with family and friend ties, which influences the voting results (Vranis 2016).

The existence of these regional alliances rises questions, whether or not the competition and voting blocs emphasize Europe's disunity even more. Although fragmented voting blocs are spread throughout the continent, the main discourse of division is between Eastern and Western Europes. Sieg explains this musical divisiveness through the economic divisiveness of the two parts of the same continent: Western Europe has unified due to its mercantile and industrial strength by gaining the status of the 'first world', whereas, in Eastern Europe the picture has been different (Sieg 2013: 111). European Union has itself divided the continent into parts, as the European Economic Union included the west, but not east and still beard the name 'European.' Former Eastern bloc countries didn't have similar economic growth, which would be reflected later in their label of 'forth world'. Today the ESC emphasized these differences between the two Europes more than ever.

Another factor that impacts on the ESC voting results is the voting of diaspora communities for the countries of their origin or the countries which they identify themselves with. This explains why Germany awards Turkey with very high points (Raykoff and Tobin 2007: 140). Similarly, Poland, Lithuania, Serbia and Armenia are believed to get visible votes from their diaspora. The ESC 2016 reaffirmed this notion, when Poland's representative Michal Spzak, who had got seven points from the juries, ended up in the third place by earning 222 points from televote.

BBC Magazine points out, that Poland has received its top highest scores from the top ten countries having the largest Polish population (Austria, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands, Ireland, France and Spain) (Veen 2016). Likewise, the televote awarded Lithuania 12 points from UK, Ireland and Norway. The 3 countries, again, have the largest Lithuanian communities. Nevertheless, the jury gave the performance very low points: the UK awarded four, Norwegian jury gave two points, and the Irish jury did not give any points. While Serbia was placed eleventh by the televote, even though the overall jury votes had ranked the performance 23rd. Again, the countries that pushed Serbia up on the ranking list were Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Slovenia, which are famous of their Serb minority.

Even though the international media has hardly discussed the role of Armenian diaspora in Armenia's considerably high ranking since its participation in the contest, the vast majority of Armenians are convinced, that the diaspora, which is more than twice as big as the overall population of Armenia, is a strong factor in Armenia's success. Both in public and official discourse it is believed as such, and there are no attempts to hide this fact. On the contrary, during the whole show Armenian TV commentators of the ESC openly exhort the diaspora Armenians to vote for the Armenian

contestant. Furthermore, the Armenian Minister of Diaspora Hranush Hakobyan almost every year sends an official message to Armenian diaspora, asking to vote for that year's contestant (Minister of Diaspora... 2012). This seems to be nonsense: why would the Minister of Diaspora exhort the Armenian communities to vote for Armenia in a competition, having been labeled as 'kitschy' and camp musical show.

Here comes the difference between perceptions and attitude towards Eurovision in Western and Eastern European countries. Particularly, for developing countries, such as Armenia, the ESC is an international platform, where it can represent itself 'properly', 'show' its adversary country Azerbaijan Armenia's strength. Even the speech of the minister is ultimately full of opposing phrases against Azerbaijan. Even in her message directed to the diaspora community to vote for Armenian contestants in the Junior Eurovision Contest, Hranush Hakobyan uses implications to preceding events between Armenia and Azerbaijan. 'We have to show everyone that Armenians win with their centuries-old culture, wit, intellect, just like our chess players, and do not 'win' by axing an officer in his sleep'- This extract from the Minister's speech implicates 2 main ideas mentioned above: 1. showing everyone who the Armenians are (the thesis of national self-representation, nation branding), 2. That they never axe an officer in his sleep and then being called as heroes.

The second implication refers to an incident that has taken place in Budapest in 2004. Ramil Safarov, an Azeri military officer had murdered by an axe a sleeping fellow student, an Armenian fellow officer, whose name was Gurgun Margaryan at one of the nights of NATO English-language courses (Safarov... 2012). Hungary sent Safarov to Azerbaijan by presuming that he would be imprisoned in Azerbaijan. Yet as soon as he arrived in Baku, he was pardoned and welcomed as a national hero and promoted to major, which angered and frustrated the Armenian side. As a matter of fact, during the entire musical event both of the sides perform in nationalist language, and the binary oppositions of 'us' and 'them' persist. As a consequence, both Armenia and Azerbaijan express nationalist rhetoric in their performances.

The ESC is taken very seriously both by the public and by the elites, as the ESC is perceived as a stage of nation branding. Armenia along with other countries has constantly used the ESC stage to raise political issues, which we will elaborate later. Both of the countries see each other as their main rivals in the competition. This tension, hatred and nationalism have been reflected in the ESC in many ways, which we will demonstrate a bit later.

The statistics illustrate that diaspora voting has always existed. Nonetheless, the new system of voting, which has been established from 2016, brings more balance between the jury vote and televote, and has emphasized the diaspora voting trends more. In the new system, the votes of the jury have more role to play in the results than before. Due to this, diaspora voting has relatively lost its influence in 2016.

ESC as a Continuation of War by Other Means: Nation Branding(Case Studies)

Armenia-Azerbaijan

Carl von Clausewitz has once said 'War is the continuation of politics by other means', which reflected the politics and the perception of war of the time. The history of the European Union is directly related to establishing peace in the continent, however, the ESC seems to be the 'continuation of war by other means'.

Armenia and Azerbaijan not once have used the ESC as a means to continue war at the ESC. In 2006 Armenia had its debut in the ESC being represented by an Armenian singer Andre born in Nagorno Karabakh. Azerbaijan protested against writing 'Nagorno Karabakh' as a birthplace of the Armenian representative, stating that de jure it is in the territory of Azerbaijan (Abrahamyan 2016). As a result, the EBU removed the birthplace section from the contestant's profile. Thereafter, when both of the countries were already in the contest, (Azerbaijan's debut was in 2008), the conflict in the ESC went further.

Traditionally, during the contest, before each performance there is an introductory video, which presents each country. In 2009 Azerbaijan complained to the EBU that the introductory 'postcard' clip of Armenia for the semi-final included the Armenian monument 'We are our mountains', located in the conflict zone, Nagorno Karabakh (Abrahamyan 2016). After the EBU agreed to remove the monument from the clip, Armenian media complained that Azerbaijan must also be forbidden to display the Maqbaratoshoara and Segonbad monuments in its entry video, as they are the symbols the cities of Tabriz and Urmia, which are located in Iran's Azerbaijan region, however the monuments were not removed from the video (Adams 2012).

The tensions continued, when in the final show while presenting the votes from Armenia, the Armenian spokesperson Sirusho held a clipboard with the picture of the monument on it, and had video screen of the 'We are our mountains' in her background, which infuriated the Azerbaijan side (Armenian Points... 2009). Nevertheless, according to Armenian official data 1.065 Armenians voted for Azerbaijani contestant, which was overall reflected in one point given to Azerbaijan.

Again, in 2009 it turned out that the Azerbaijani broadcaster, Ictimai Televiziya had blurred out the number of Armenia so that there was no vote coming from Azerbaijan to the Armenian contestant. The broadcaster had also distorted the TV signal during the performance of sisters Inga and Anush representing Armenia. After finding out about these all the EBU fined the Azerbaijani broadcaster 2700 euro (Krikorian 2011). In the same year Ministry of National Security in Baku interrogated those Azeri citizens who had voted for Armenia to give explanations. They were accused as potential security threat for the government (Adams 2012). According to the Azerbaijani official data 43 Azerbaijanis voted for Armenia. One of the voters, Rovshan Nasirli had explained, that the song of Armenian sisters Inga and Anush Arshakyan called "Jan Jan" was a better reflection of Azeri music than 'Always', the entry of Azerbaijan (Burnett 2009).

This is an evident example of cultural and taste similarities between countries located in the same region, which impact on people's votes apart from political reasons. He had also mentioned that his interrogators told him that they had the names and addresses of all 43 Azerbaijanis who had voted for Armenia. Nasirli also mentioned that the interrogators had warned him that they had the names and addresses of all the 43 voters (Radio Liberty... 2009). Even though the Azerbaijani Minister of Youth and Sport Azad Rahimov denied the information about the interrogation done by the Ministry of National Security, after investigation the EBU accused Azerbaijan for breaching the privacy of voters and threatened to ban Azerbaijan from taking part in the contest, but after all limited itself with only a strict warning (AzerNews.az... 2009).

The Junior Eurovision Contest also does not avoid political influences. In 2010, after the victory of 14 years old (at that time) contestant Vladimir Arzumanyan, the contest moved to Armenia. Armenian media claimed that Azerbaijan's broadcaster had cut off the show after it was clear that the winner was the Armenian contestant. The broadcaster however explained it to have been a technical problem (Janbazian 2015).

Two years after, in 2012 the ESC moved to Azerbaijan after, following Azerbaijan's victory in the preceding year. The Armenian delegation expressed its worries about the security of the Armenian contestant and the doubts about taking part in the competition. Azerbaijan officially replied by promising the security of all the delegations including Armenians (Radio Liberty... 2012). However, following the death of an Armenian soldier in February 23th from Azeri sniper attack in February 23th, former Armenian representatives of the ESC, Emmy and Eva Rivas, organized a public petition not to participate in the contest. On March 7 Armenia withdrew from the contest, which was going to take place in May 22nd and 25th in Baku. 'We refuse to perform in a country, notorious for mass killings and massacres of Armenians, a country where hatred for Armenian people is a part of governmental policy, a country banning the entrance of any person of Armenian nationality regardless of citizenship,' the statement said. In the months leading up to the contest, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said that 'the Armenians of the world' were 'our main enemies'.

So, as we can see the ESC with the initial ideology lying behind it has not been able to make the war vanish at least on the stage of Europe, but on the contrary, has become a tool in the hands of the governments to lobby against each other and continue the war by other means.

The most recent scandal between the two countries was in 2016 when the Armenian contestant Iveta Mukuchyan waved the Nagorno-Karabakh regional flag (Royston 2016). This caused anger in Azerbaijan and endangered the peaceful atmosphere of delegations and fans in the contest. Immediately after Azerbaijan expressed discontent against this incident, the managing committee of the ESC announced its decision on sanctioning Armenia through financial penalty. Only around two weeks before the first semi-final of the contest (in April 30th) the ESC organizers

announced the rule, which banned regional flags during the event (Duffy 2016). The day of the semi-final (in May 10th) such an obvious breach of the contest rule was not expected from anyone. No matter how much the ESC tries to keep the focus of the event on music, it still stays very political.

The rule on banning the regional flags in the ESC attracted massive attention in the UK, as Joe Woolford this year's singer representing the UK is Welsh (The Telegraph... 2016). Consequently, the Welsh flag would be banned as well. Accidentally published draft version of the flags that are considered as priority to ban for the ESC included the flags of disputed territories such as the flags of Kosovo, Crimea, Northern Cyprus, Nagorno-Karabakh, Scotland, Palestine as well as terrorist groups such as ISIS and Hamas (Flag Controversy...2016). The leakage of this list inferred disgruntlement throughout the social media as the people living in these territories felt offended seeing their countries being in a list with a terrorist organization, for which the ESC had to apologize publicly by stating that they did not mean to offend anyone (WorldNews... 2016). As stated by the ESC rule, the only allowed flags are those of the states, which are part of the UN as well as the flags of the European Union and the rainbow flag, as it symbolizes diversity, and tolerance, which is the driving principle of the ESC. However, it can be banned in case it is used for political means.

When a Swedish journalist asked Iveta Mukuchyan why she raised the regional flag of a disputed territory, she answered that she represents her motherland, and her heart is with her country and her people. She added that by raising the flag she wanted to claim peace on the border, and with her song 'Love wave' she aimed to spread the wave of love and peace in the region. The governing body of the ESC stated that they strongly condemn the flag's appearance as it beaches the primary objective of no politicization of the contest and affects negatively on the ESC brand. The breached Rule 1.2.2h of the 2016 ESC states that 'no messages promoting any organization, institution, political cause or other, company, brand, products or services shall be allowed in the shows' (ESC Rules... 2016).

Georgia-Russia

And finally, Georgia was considering whether to participate in 2009 ESC, one year after the Georgia-Russia war, which was going to take place in Russia. They decided to join however with a song with a very controversial lyrics and title called 'We don't wanna put in', which was associated with 'we don't wanna Putin' (Georgia ESC... 2016). Although Georgian delegation refused to change the title and the lyrics of the song, by stating that it does not have any political references, the ESC made it clear that Georgia would not be able to participate with that song. The words "put in" are sung with accented pronunciation as 'poot een', which is how the Russian prime minister's name is pronounced. In the end Georgia decided to withdraw.

Along with South Caucasian countries Russia also emphasizes the importance of the ESC. In 2009, after the victory of Dima Bilan with the song called 'Believe' in Belgrade, the ESC moved to Moscow. Russia, like Azerbaijan spent enormous

amount of money and efforts to make the show as special as possible (Pravda.ru... 2009). Swedish television executive Svante Stockselius, who was the ESC executive supervisor, told BBC that V. Putin, the Russian prime minister at that time, had attended the Eurovision rehearsal to take care that everything went well (Fidgen 2016). In Western European countries, although there are countries enthusiastic and enrolled in the ESC, like Sweden and the UK, in rest of the countries it is not really popular (Fidgen 2016). In Western Europe it has been popular in gay community, way before the winning entry of Conchita Wurst.

For Russia, like for South Caucasian countries, the ESC is a national priority. In his interview the Russian contestant, Sergey Lazarev confirmed that the ESC is very important for Russia (Konstantopoulos 2015). They associate it to the Olympic games, where both representing and winning the competition is about the reputation and image for your country. Hence, Russia prepared for the ESC the way it did for hosting the Olympic games in Sochi 2014, by making the most expensive Olympic games ever (both winter and summer), to promote Russia, to show Europe that Russia can do, said Stockselius (Royston 2016). That is why Russia puts huge efforts to win the competition every year, even though it has won only once so far. Russia spends a lot of finances each year to win the contest and prepares for it professionally. In 2016 for the entry of Sergey Lazarev, Russia had collected a team of professionals, who had worked on each detail promising victory in the competition. This is why Russia was the bookmakers' favourite to win the contest. In 2014 and 2016, after being booed on the ESC stage, Russia prepared for the contest very seriously to restore its status.

According to Daniel Gould, who has written articles about the ESC, they hired two composers: Russian national artist Philip Kirkorov and a Greek musician called Dimitris Kontopoulos, who had both written many Eurovision songs previously (Fidgen 2016). They had a Cypriot vocal coach called Alex Panayi, who had worked with many successful Eurovision performances before and one the most successful Swedish backing singers on the stage. BBC Eurovision Twitter called it 'Olympic staging' (BBC Twitter... 2016).

The analogy between preparations for the Olympic games and the ESC, demonstrate the two main theses highlighted above: The main feature of the ESC the competition between states, which enforces nationalism, like in sport events, 2. It becomes a means for national self-representation and image branding in Russia as well as in the South Caucasus. Lazarev himself has done the analogy between the Olympic games and the ESC, and has claimed that it is immensely popular in Russia (Konstantopoulos 2015). The outstanding hosting by Russia becomes a way to show its cultural and political power to Europe.

Ukraine-Russia

The new restriction of 2016 on regional flags and the attempts to make the contest apolitical, nevertheless, did not influence on the ESC's reputation positively, as Jamaladinova, an ethnic Tatar born in Kyrgyzstan, representing Ukraine won with

a controversial song resulting a bigger scandal. The new voting system, which made the jury's vote stronger, helped her overpass Russia and Australia (Akkoc 2016). Before the contest the Russian contestant was an obvious candidate to win, however Russia ended up the third after Ukraine and Australia.

Russia did not share the overall festive mood of the event and considered Jamala's song to be directed against Russia and admonish the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (The Guardian... 2016). They showed it through twitter. The main argument was that it was a very political and biased victory. They claimed, that Ukraine's song called '1944' had political lyrics (it was about the deportation of more than 240.000 ethnic Tatars by Stalin from Ukraine's Crimea region after the WW2, in 1994 and about the sorrows that the singer's great-grandmothers family had witnessed). It could easily be linked to Russia's annexation of Crimea (John 2016). Russian media openly regarded him as a winner, ignoring the results of the competition.

The Russian Minister of Security and Defence addressed the ESC final results, by mentioning that it was highly political ('Anti-Kremlin' song... 2016). He said that as a response to the disrespect for the ESC rules Russia should not take part in next year's Eurovision, which will take place in Ukraine. He ironically added, that he would not be surprised, if the contest took place in Maidan. The latter is the square in Kiev, where social protest started and threw out the former corrupt government and the centre where the wind of change came from. In 2014 and 2015 the ESC audience had booed the Russian entries, because of the country's anti-gay rules and the Crimean events in 2014 (Wallop 2016).

In 2009 Russia was planning to restart the Intervision Contest, which was a Soviet version of Eurovision, existing in 1970s to connect China and Central Asian allies with a musical show. Even though after the announcement of the idea by the president of Russia, there were not any further steps taken to implement the project. After the feeling of being unwelcome in the ESC, Russia might return to the former idea (Merelli 2014). Unlike Georgia, whose title had a too obvious political statement, Jamala's song represents the sorrow and grief of Tatars, which I believe has a stronger link with today's politics than Georgia's song, in which the lyrics, apart from the title did not imply anything. The lyrics containing "While her song avoids direct reference to Vladimir Putin's 2014 annexation of Crimea, Ms Jamaladinova, whose stage name is Jamala, has left no-one in any doubt about where her sympathies lie. The Russian side conceived the performance to be a metaphor against the Russian annexation of Crimea. The following lyrics did not leave a doubt about it not only in Russia but in the European media.

*"When strangers are coming,
They come to your house,
They kill you all,
And say we're not guilty,
Not guilty"* (Jamala... 2016).

During her interview with the AFP news agency in February, she said that she wanted to show what has is currently happening with Tatars, who feel helpless after the seizure of her homeland by Russia. Later she mentioned that it was emotionally hard for her to recall all the memories over and over again, however she felt that it was necessary at that time, as Tatars need the others' supports. After the Soviet Union collapsed, many Tatars returned to Crimea, and today they keep resisting the annexation of Crimea (Freeman 2016).

Conclusion

To sum up, the ESC is a comprehensive event, which encompasses various social structures, identities and values. After the WW2, along with the creation of the European Economic Community, there was a feeling that there was a need for creating a pan-European invented tradition, an event, which would create a common sense of belonging to the imagined European community, to foster peace and unity all over the continent.

It was established to serve the European project and shape European identity. Throughout its historical developments the ESC was enlarging by embracing more and more diverse communities. Since the beginning of the 21st century the diversification and enlargement towards East brought new meanings in the competition. 'New European' states perceive the ESC differently from the 'Old European' participants. To be able to measure the success and failure of the ESC in creating this imaginary community, the paper aimed to analyze and answer to the question, whether the ESC, as a popular music event, shapes a common sense of identity and brings unity among the participating member states, which it was initially designed for. My answer for this question has two answers, which I will explain below.

According to my research, today's ESC community, 43 participating member states, stretching from West of the continent to the East and from North to the South, the ESC reflects much more divided than united Europe. The enlargement history of the contest made it very diverse by making the ESC a stage of many identities. This divisiveness is being expressed through several means:

- Competition
 - Regionalized voting system
 - Existing conflicts between the participant countries.
1. As I argue in the paper, the basic principal of the contest is competition, which primarily divides the states based on their national identities and makes them compete against each other. This makes the contest become musical Olympic games, based on the principle of who is stronger. Competition ultimately results nationalism, a nationalism, which is not defined as such. This is a sort of nationalism, which follows us in our everyday lives through hanging flags in the city, or media, which divides

- national and international news or politicians, referring to their citizens as a nation.
2. The existence of voting alliances between the participating countries has both cultural and political reasons, which could be explained by shared history and culture.
 3. The borders of the wider Europe are not as peaceful as the borders of those who have agreed half a century ago to stop war between each other. The existing conflicts between the new members give the contest a spirit of nationalism and politics, thus by removing the event from its initial context. The ESC becomes a continuation of war by other means.

The ESC is itself a very divided, often regionalized event, which tries to bridge Western, Central, Northern, Eastern and Southern Europes. These regions have their shared cultural and political past among each other, which has shaped their common senses of familiarity. My specific concentration was on Russia's 'otherness' and the South Caucasus, which bring new meanings to the show event. The fact, that Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and other Eastern European countries perceive the ESC as an opportunity for nation branding, raising political problems and continuing a conflict by other means, illustrates how far they can push the contest away from its initial objectives.

To conclude, today there is an overall imbalance between the notions of 'unity' and 'diversity'. The imbalance is expressed through conflicting and contradicting social, political and cultural values, which are being 'performed' on the stage of ESC.

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