U.PORTO
FLUP FACULDADE DE LETRAS
UNIVERSIDADE DO PORTO

MESTRADO EM HISTÓRIA, RELAÇÕES INTERNACIONAIS E COOPERAÇÃO
ESPECIALIZAÇÃO EM ESTUDOS POLÍTICOS

Promoting Europeanness through a new 'standard of Civilisation'

The case of the Eurovision Song Contest

Pedro Ramos

M

2024

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Dissertação realizada no âmbito do Mestrado em História, Relações Internacionais e Cooperação, orientada pela Professora Doutora Joana Castro Pereira

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Table of contents

Declaração de honra / *Declaration of Honour* 2
Resumo 4
Abstract 5
List of abbreviations and acronyms 6
Introduction 7
1.Between Civilisation, a Song Contest and EU integration: a literature review 14
2.Methodology 41
3. A Standard of Civilisation that emerged through music 44
3.1. The standard is not dead 44
3.2. Europeanness on the Eurovision Song Contest as a new Standard of Civilisation 46
3.3. Europeanness on the Eurovision stage and its impact 61
3.4. Cultural Conditionality 67
4.Application 77
4.1. Serbia 77
4.1.1. Lane Moje 77
4.1.2. Molitva 82
4.2. Germany 89
4.2.1. Ein bißchen Frieden 90
4.2.2. Satellite 94
5.Discussion 101
Final remarks 113
Bibliography 117

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[Porto, Portugal, 13 de setembro de 2024]

[Pedro Miguel Braga Ramos]

Acknowledgements

To the ones that know me, my friends are one of the things that I value the most in this world. No matter how hard I think, how emotional I get, words cannot describe how grateful I am to have the people I have in my life. I do not need to cite names but, if you are reading this, please know your friendship has brought me here.

Naturally, I would like to acknowledge and thank from the bottom of my heart my professor and thesis mentor Joana Castro Pereira. She is my greatest inspiration in the academic world and a person I deeply admire, both on a personal and on a professional level. Needless to say, this work was only possible due to her prompt availability and guidance.

To my possible Eurovision fans out there, this study is to reiterate the power and true meaning of this contest, for better and for worse. This is a reminder that this show is about so much more than just music.

Resumo

Tendo sido criado com o propósito de unir o continente após a Segunda Guerra Mundial, o Festival Eurovisão rapidamente se transformou no palco perfeito para os países expressarem a sua cultura e pertença à Europa. Com a dissolução do bloco soviético e o aumento do número de novos países participantes no festival, este viu-se enredado na questão de saber se o conceito de "Europeaneidade" (ou sentir-se Europeu) seria afetado. Analisando-o através da teoria das Relações Internacionais da Escola Inglesa, argumento que, no contexto do concurso, o conceito que permite a formação e manutenção de sociedades internacionais – 'padrão de civilização' – ganha forma sob o conceito de "Europeaneidade" e é uma instituição importante na sua tentativa de unir a Europa. Tão importante que pode ser uma ferramenta essencial para aprofundar a transformação da sociedade internacional regional europeia, promovendo a integração na União Europeia e mostrando uma aproximação entre ambos os conceitos. O objetivo desta dissertação é interpretar como os países não pertencentes à União Europeia expressaram ou expressam a sua "Europeaneidade" em palco e como tal pode ser visto como uma estratégia para se conformarem ao padrão, alinhando-se culturalmente com a União ("condicionalidade cultural"), cuja consequência se poderá traduzir em "discursos" de adesão à mesma. Esta dissertação visa também contribuir para a evidência de que a Escola Inglesa se constitui como uma lente teórica adequada para pensar questões que não são comummente consideradas como "questões de alta política". Pretende igualmente interpretar a integração europeia através de uma ideia cada vez maior de que a adesão à União é mais do que uma condicionalidade económica e política – é também uma União fortalecida por valores, cultura e, dentro desta, música.

Palavras-chave: Eurovisão; Europeaneidade; Padrão de Civilização; Escola Inglesa, Relações Internacionais

Abstract

Having been created with the purpose of uniting the continent after the Second World War, the Eurovision Song Contest quickly became the perfect stage where countries could express their culture and their belonging to Europe. With the increasing number of countries participating in Eurovision after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the event took a step up regarding to whether this diversity could affect the concept of 'Europeanness'. Analysing it through the English School theory of International Relations, I argue that, in the context of the contest, the concept that enables international societies to be formed and maintained – 'standard of Civilisation' – takes shape in the concept of 'Europeanness' and it is an important institution in its attempt to unite Europe. So important, that it might be a tool to further transform Europe's regional international society by promoting integration in the European Union by showing closeness between both concepts. The aim of this research project is to interpret how the different ways non-European Union countries express their 'Europeanness' on stage can be seen as a strategy to conform to the standard as a means of culturally aligning with the Union ('cultural conditionality'), which reverberates on discourses about a possible membership. This research project aims to contribute to the evidence that the English School provides itself as an adequate framework for thinking through less 'high politics issues'. It also aims to interpret European integration through an ever-growing idea that the EU membership is more than economic and political conditionality – it is also an Union strengthened by common values, culture and, within the latter, music.

Key-words: Eurovision; Europeanness; Standard of Civilisation; English School, International Relations

List of abbreviations and acronyms

CEE ..... Central and Eastern Europe

CoE ..... Council of Europe

EBU ..... European Broadcasting Union

EC ..... European Commission

ECSC ..... European Coal and Steel Community

EEA ..... European Economic Area

EEC ..... European Economic Community

EFTA ..... European Free Trade Association

EP ..... European Parliament

ESC ..... Eurovision Song Contest

EU ..... European Union

FRA ..... Federal Republic of Germany

IMF ..... International Monetary Fund

IR ..... International Relations

IS ..... International Society

LGBTQIA+ ..... Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual

NATO ..... North Atlantic Treaty Organization

PSM ..... Public Service Media

SOC ..... Standard of Civilisation

UN ..... United Nations

WTO ..... World Trading Organization

Introduction

> I realized that the song contest in fact has a mission in Europe. I think it's not about the music; or rather, the music is a tool that we use to bring the broadcasters and the populations of Europe together. Without that tool it wouldn't happen. To me, the song contest is a battlefield where you can allow yourself to be a patriot. […] You can support your own country. You can say the others stink. It's harmless but it's very significant. (Franck, 2013, p. 99)

WWII left the world devastated and Europe in ruinous condition. Amidst the rubble, Europe found itself seeking ways to rebuild, not just the infrastructure, but also the spirit of the continent. The period immediately after WWII saw a spate of initiatives in Europe aimed at economic and political integration. Institutions like the ECSC and later the EEC were established to promote cooperation and avoid a repetition of the conflicts. These, however, ran in tandem with a realization of the necessity for cultural and social projects which could bring the people closer at a personal level (Wellings & Kalman, 2019, pp. 1-7). The ESC was thus born out of this in the context of a larger vision of the EBU, established in 1950, to promote unity and collaboration in a Europe recovering from the devastation caused by World War II. With its wide-based propaganda value and convincing element, broadcasting was to serve as an ideal tool for this realization, and the ESC emerged as an important initiative within this greater mission.

Inspired by Italy's Sanremo Music Festival, the ESC emerged envisioned as a cultural initiative to bridge the divides that war had exacerbated, using music as a medium to transcend language barriers, connect individuals across the continent and celebrating European culture as an opportunity for countries to share their musical heritage. It came into being in 1956 as a forum to present musical talent from all over Europe, with, in its initial year, just seven western European countries participating-Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Switzerland-each putting forward a song representative of that country's distinct cultural entity (Eurovision, 2024). The ESC thus gave countries the opportunity to express heritage and ideals, to feel part of a greater European community. This was a cultural exchange that

contributed to the post-war unification of the continent by creating one space where differences would be celebrated and commonalities realized. Every year, the ESC would turn out to be one of the mainstays of households across Europe because it contributed toward a shared cultural experience. The competition format, in which countries had to vote for other countries' performances, called for a wide array of appreciation for and interaction with the neighbours' culture. This mutual recognition and appreciation had, as its base, the very important process of building up a sense of European solidarity. One cannot stress enough how important this ESC endeavor was for unity in post-war Europe: the ESC provided a regular, highly visible event celebrating the idea of a connected and cooperative Europe.

But this event was more than a musical competition. Coincidentally or not, it ended up serving as a means to promote Western values such as democracy, freedom of expression and cultural diversity. In this contest, the countries of Western Europe appeared as open and modern, representatives of the exact opposite of what they thought the Eastern Bloc was: closed, controlled by the regimes. By promoting this vision and embodying this aesthetic, the ESC constituted a form of soft power: one that subtly shaped perceptions and desires (Dubin, 2023, p. 43). The contest dramatized the attractiveness of Western cultural and political values, reinforcing the desirability of democratic governance and cultural freedom (Vuletic, 2018, pp. 198-199). Throughout the Cold War, the ESC had an added poignancy as the embodiment of a cultural diplomacy for Western Europe. For all intents and purposes, it was to be a non-political arena where countries from either side of the Iron Curtain could engage each other through music, despite Eastern Bloc countries being remarkably absent from the contest until the 1990s. The ESC thus became yet another subtle battlefield for ideological influence that reflected the bigger geopolitical divide of the era. The competition provided the necessary avenue for the Western European countries to show cultural vibrancy and give a different narrative from the rigid, repressive impression of the Soviet-controlled East, albeit the fact that even Eastern Europe had once their version of the ESC – the Intervision Song Contest (Vuletic, 2018).

The geopolitical configuration of Europe changed dramatically with the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reconfiguration of Eastern Europe, more challenges and opportunities were placed on the ESC. That contest, dominated until that time by Western European countries, received an unprecedented influx of participants from CEE. These were fresh influxes of participants, bringing cultures onto the stage that really enriched this contest and gave it a wider breadth (Wellings & Kalman, 2019, p. 9). Adding countries with different historical experiences and cultural backgrounds to the mix further disrupted the previous Western-centric view of European identity through the raising and positing of critical questions about what the concept of 'Europeanness' was all about. That meant the ESC became then a stage for the microcosm of the larger debate about what it means to be European in a post-Cold War era. Performances and songs from newly participating countries often reflected their own specific cultural narratives and aspirations in view of being integrated into the European community to show how 'Europeanness' itself is a constantly renegotiated concept through cultural exchange and interaction, an idea that would make sure that different visions of European identity could be put forward, negotiated, and celebrated through the stage. Jones and Subotic (2011) go as far as even stating that Europeanness is ‘fundamentally a process of political imagination’ (p. 543).

The fall of the Iron Curtain supposedly signaled an end to decades of political and ideological split in Europe, so we sought to believe. Countries which were behind the Curtain now sought to reintegrate with the rest of the continent, and Eurovision provided an ideal platform where these nations could prove their cultural heritage and show their European identity. The contest became a mega platform for the expression of their newly earned freedom and reconnecting with a more extensive European audience. For most of these countries, participation in ESC became a symbolic move towards integration with Western Europe. It was an opportunity to project an image that was modern, progressive, and in tune with the values and norms of the European community (Vuletic, 2018, pp. 198-199). From their odd-sounding cultural traditions to the adoption of the latest trends from Europe, many performances from these nations were ridden with elements that made them different. This combination of the old and

the new, of the local and the global, spoke volumes about the position these held within the European family.

From the cultural phenomenon that has captured the hearts of millions, ESC represents an ambitious project in its very foundation: to create unity and to understand European countries right after the catastrophe of World War (Vuletic, 2018, p. 36). The historical development and further refinement of its concept are testimony to historical shifts in geopolitical landscapes, especially after the fall of the Iron Curtain. This thesis aims to explores the potential of Eurovision's role in shaping and being shaped by the concept of 'Europeanness', analysing it through the English School theory of International Relations (IR). I argue that, in the context of the contest, the concept that enables international societies to be formed and maintained – the 'standard of civilisation' (SOC) – takes shape in the concept of 'Europeanness' and it is an important institution in its attempt to unite Europe. So important, that it might be a tool to further transform Europe's regional international society by promoting EU integration by showing closeness to this new SOC. In other words, the different ways in which the Eurovision Member States express their understanding of 'Europeanness' in their performances demonstrates that the concept can be understood as an updated version of the SOC that allows the maintenance of an international European society, much as it happened in the nineteen and twentieth centuries. The aim of this thesis is to interpret how the different ways (non-)EU countries express their 'Europeanness' on stage can be seen as a strategy to conform to the standard as a means of 'cultural conditionality' to belong to the EU which reverberates on discourses about EU membership. It also aims to interpret European integration through an ever-growing idea that the EU membership is more than economic and political conditionality – it is also an EU strengthened by common culture, values… and music. 'The contest gives the opportunity to European countries to be on stage in front of the rest of the continent, and it has been used consequently as a tool […] for Central and Eastern European countries to 'return' to Europe' (Iglesias, 2015, p. 233).

This thesis adds to the ever-growing literature interpreting politics through apparently banal events, and it establishes that the English School, in fact, offers an

appropriate framework for the said purpose. Alternatively put, my objective is to underline how the English School's framework allows understanding international politics beyond traditional studies on 'high politics'. The present study also attempts to make a more substantial contribution to the IR research by trying to show the relevance of the framework of the concept of the SOC in English School in understanding the ESC as a cultural phenomenon, when it normally deals with issues concerning diplomacy, conflict, and international law. Moreover, this study advances the proposition that the SOC framework applies well to cultural events also and provides a new prospect for European integration, proving that the dividing line between 'high' and 'low' politics is tenuous.

The studies about the Eurovision are very limited in scope and it is undoubtedly an underexplored domain where numerous studies should be conducted to grasp the dynamics of the European international society. They usually contend nation-building, nation-branding, analysis of voting dynamics, analysis of its normative value and impact and seldom connection is usually made with actual IR theories. By applying the SOC framework to the ESC, the research not only seeks to broaden the scope of the English School theory, highlighting its relevance for understanding cultural and social processes within international societies through the concept of SOC, but also incorporate in the European regional international society (IS). The concept of SOC is a fundamental element in the creation and maintenance of international societies. International society is not limited to the one we live in today – there are several and they can juxtapose and coexist. More than being a global phenomenon (which would be the concept of global society), we can talk and study regional international societies, being Europe and the EU two examples of these regional IS, since in both cases states are ‘conscious of certain common interests and common values, [that] form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions’ (Bull, 2002, p. 13). This work will also be relevant as it will analyse the dynamics of the EU’s regional EIS through Eurovision, since most analyses of European IS focus on the processes of accession and

integration into the EU, but never before has an attempt been made to correlate the latter and Eurovision.

Additionally, I advocate for a new perspective that sees 'Europeanness' within the ESC as a contemporary practice of ‘conditionality and discrimination that constitute the new ‘standard of civilisation’ in modern form (Buzan, 2014, p. 586) and can influence countries' access to the EU, in the sense that it is based on cultural issues of division, separation and integration in the form of processes of alterity: civilised (‘us’), barbarians (‘them’) and savages (‘them’). Since the criteria of political and economic conditionality are already so important in the processes of accession to the European Union, and after having made the parallel between the concepts (SOC and Europeanness), I intend to argue a kind of 'cultural conditionality' in the processes of European integration. Being the enlargement of the Union is an ever-present topic in European politics, by exploring cultural expressions (in the form of Eurovision) and its strategic signalling in the sense of how the whole show serves as a platform for cultural alignment and readiness for closer integration with the EU, impact the integration discourse by assessing how these cultural expressions influence discourses surrounding EU membership and the broader process of European integration. While anchoring its focus on the ESC as a cultural phenomenon, it also aspires to bring into light the non-economic and non-political dimensions of EU integration. It tries to prove that cultural identity and common values are among the pivots of integration processes which complement more traditional economic and political criteria.

This thesis will follow the following structure: first, I will do a literature review, followed directly by the methodology of this study. Then following section focuses on exploring the origins and development of the term SOC and its influence on IR. I will then examine the developing notion of 'Europeanness' and its connection with Eurovision, which seeks to explain what it means to be European. I then discuss the notion of 'Europeanness' as a potential contemporary morph or descendant of SOC, in ways similar to the notions of 'democracy', 'human rights', and 'good governance' could be various manifestations of the former notion (Buzan, 2014, pp. 585-592; Bowden, 2014, p. 627). Then, I elaborate on how ‘Europeanness’ is expressed on stage by anchoring

myself in Allatson's (2007) perspective of the Euro kitsch drive, as well as how this might translate into actual consequences for EU integration by exposing important media discourses of important EU figures. Then, I enhance the previous argument by exploring how the concept of conditionality based on cultural norms is also crucial to EU membership, which is not solely determined by traditional conditionality parameters but also by cultural factors that signify a country's alignment with European norms and values. The term 'cultural conditionality' suggests that EU and non-EU countries use cultural platforms like the ESC to demonstrate their adherence to European cultural standards, thereby reinforcing their eligibility for EU membership. The section following the previous one is dedicated to applying the previously delimited arguments to two specific cases – Serbia and Germany – with a discussion of the results. The last section is saved for the concluding remarks.

1. Between Civilisation, a Song Contest and EU integration: a literature review

As one of the aims of this thesis is to analyse the EU through the lens of the English School, it is undoubtfully necessary to elaborate on one of the theories main theorising concepts: the IS. Regarding this conceptual framework, *The Anarchical Society* by Bull (2002) is perhaps one of the most emblematic Englisch School references. In his book, the author differentiates between the concept of international system (system of states) and international society (society of states). While the former 'is formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on one another's decisions to cause them to behave – at least in some measure – as parts of a whole' (Bull, 2002, pp. 9-10), the latter comes into being 'when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions' (Bull, 2002, p. 13). Bull also mentions the concept of 'world society' which encompasses the broader international community beyond just states, including non-state actors and international organizations but 'does not exist except as an idea or myth which may one day become powerful, but has not done so yet' (Bull, 2002, p. 82).

But what are the foundations to these statements? How do we reach these two states of interaction? According to Bull, the question starts with the problematic of order: while domestic order is characterised by a central authority (the state) and hierarchy, the international one is defined by the absence of a centralized authority that can enforce rules and norms among states. This leads to a specific kind of order in the international system that leads to states being sovereign and independent actors (Bull, 2002, pp. 44-49). In what seems a chaotic and disorderly system, 'Bull's approach argues that states are usually committed to limiting the use of force, ensuring respect for property and preserving trust not only in relations between citizens but in their dealings with one another as independent political communities' (Linklater, 2005, p. 91). In the world order, this materialises in norms and rules that condition and guide interaction

between states such as the principles of sovereignty, non-intervention and prohibition of the use of force. Complementing these systemic principles, Bull (2002) also adds the role of primary institutions such as balance of power, international law and diplomacy with the aim of maintaining stability and order among states.

In this debate, Brown (2001) fears that the concept presented by Bull (2002) is 'rarely subjected to scrutiny'. In other words, Brown warns us about the specificities of the concept in IR *vis-à-vis* its sociological meaning and the possible incoherence: 'Sociologists tend to regard 'society' as a somewhat portentous term, conveying something highly significant and specific about the relationships it summarizes' (Brown, 2001, p. 427). The concept introduced by Bull proposes a 'looser' meaning of society, whose meaning has its roots in its state-centric, anarchic and norm-oriented nature and, therefore, the differences between the areas of study must be acknowledged to prevent an overlapping of concepts and meanings. For Brown, 'the idea of an international society is taken to be a rather loose, sociologically imprecise, way of describing the inter-state system.' (Brown, 2001, p. 433). Even if this theorist raises some methodological concerns about the English School usage of this concept, it is still one of the most used and accepted frameworks among English School and non-English School theorists and since it is out of the scope of this work to theorise the concept, I will still be making use of the mainstream concept previously described.

Many authors explore the importance and impact of many international societies. Adam Watson (1992) explores the different international societies that existed throughout history (from ancient civilizations to modern state-centric nations) and how they contributed to our current global international society. Perhaps the most important one for this case may be the European IS that emerged and consolidated during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The work of Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (1984) in *The Expansion of International Society* sets the stage for exploration of the historical development of the global IS. In their book, the authors argue that the European IS emerged in the context of the Thirty Years' War, Westphalian peace treaties, the development of diplomatic practices and, in sum, the emergence of the state system. It expanded through the processes of colonization and imperialism by imposing European

norms, values and practices that slowly admitted new members if they followed these impositions.

More recent works such as *Regions in International Society* by Karmazin, Costa-Buranelli and Yongjin (2014) attest to another gap in the mainstream English School: 'The English School' has understood international society, which is its key concept, to be globally homogeneous and to be sharing the same characteristics at least as far as the most fundamental ones are concerned' (Karmazin, Costa-Buranelli, Zhang, & Merke, 2014, p. 1). Because the global IS is originally western and European, all alien and non-Western elements are suppressed and unrepresented. By exploring recent works of the IS studies at a regional level, the authors emphasize the need to recognize 'how such second-order societies exist not only at the global level, but also at the sub-global (regional) level' (Karmazin, Costa-Buranelli, Zhang, & Merke, 2014, p. 2) . They reflect on certain methodological questions that need to be refined in this new area of studies: a better conceptualisation of 'region', a better conceptualisation of institution that can adapt to regional differences and a more interpretative methodology 'to investigate the differentiation of meanings and institutional behaviours in regions in comparison with the global level, and also to understand the degree of internalisation of institutions and norms' (Karmazin, Costa-Buranelli, Zhang, & Merke, 2014, pp. 37-38).

The idea of discussing the (European) IS is useful in the sense that it is the output, it is the materialization of the interactions between states and their subjective understanding of what unites them. Perhaps the easiest way to introduce the concept is to refer to one of most important academics in the field: Gerrit Gong. In his work *The Standard of 'Civilization' in International Society*' Gong (1984) marks the emergence of the SOC as new page in the perception of unity between certain European nations in the context of colonialism and overseas imperialism. Before this, the European nations were bound by their Christian values through the institution of Christendom. With the emergence of the humanistic philosophical trend of the Enlightenment and the state-centric system of the Treaty of Westphalia, soon the main unifying point was the identification with 'Europe' as a geographical and political idea. This idea was further strengthened when Europeans were faced with the discovery of new societies in Africa,

the Americas and Asia, which led to the practical problem of protecting European life, liberty and property. But what was exactly this standard?

> [A] standard of civilization is an expression of the assumptions, tacit and explicit, used to distinguish those that belong to a particular society from those that do not […] those who fulfil the· requirements of a particular society's standard of civilization are brought inside its circle of 'civilized' members, while those who do not so conform are left outside as 'not civilized' or possibly 'uncivilized'. Second, standards of civilization apply to individual states or individual societies, as well as to systems of states or international societies of states. (Gong, 1984, p. 3)

In practical terms, the SOC operated through the violent European imposition of a set of criteria to which the native societies should follow to be deemed 'civilised': it should guarantee basic rights such as life, dignity, property…; it should exist as an organized and efficient political bureaucracy; it should adhere to the international law and system of positive law within its borders; it should maintain permanent diplomatic relations and it should conform to norms and practices of the 'civilized international society' (Gong, 1984, pp. 14-15). The standard thus operated as legal and doctrinal status that give Europeans the 'right' to paternalize and 'guide' 'uncivilized' societies, limiting their recognition in international law to candidate countries. 'The 'standard of civilisation' thus supported a partly racist taxonomy of 'savage, barbarian and civilised' as a way of classifying the non-European world in relation to Europe, and gate-keeping on entry to European, and later Western, international society' (Buzan, 2014, p. 578) by creating pressure to conform to Western rules and values which posed a challenge to candidate countries in the sense that they had to go against their own cultural grain to attain entry into the soon global international society.

Nonetheless, it was only in the nineteenth century that Europeans understood that international society could grow beyond their borders and become a global one by promoting their own status and doing so by downgrading members of the other Eurasian international societies (Little, 2015, p. 26). As Buzan states, it was done on unequal terms in the sense that much of the non-West world was absorbed into European empires and only allowed 'entry' in a phased admission once they were

deemed ‘civilised’ (Buzan, 2014, p. 578). The instant inability of any non-European society to meet these criteria meant falling into a sub-par not-worthy category that was usually followed by ‘the right of extraterritoriality […] regulated relations between sovereign civilised states and quasi-sovereign uncivilised states in regard to their respective rights over, and obligations to, the citizens of civilised states living and operating in countries where capitulations were in force’ (Bowden, 2014, p. 617).

Buzan further elaborates on its historical development: with the II World War and the mass atrocities committed in the name of ‘civilisation’, the concept became something of an anachronism. It was also the time when the mass decolonization processes happened and so the ‘standard account’ and its access to the global international society with ‘all’ its rights and obligations saw a massive dissemination to all the globe. Nowadays, and with the constant evolution and complexification of the international system/society, ‘the capacity for self-government necessary to cope with that rises inexorably, meaning the standard of the ‘standard’ continues to become more demanding’ (Buzan, 2014, p. 580). So, in Buzan’s view, the current debate is not so much about the obsolescence of the concept but rather how it evolved and morphed into our times. In his view, concepts like ‘democracy’, ‘good governance’, ‘capitalism’, ‘environment’, ‘development’ and ‘human rights’ are all modern versions of the old ‘standard of civilisation’ (Buzan, 2014, pp. 585-592). The ‘standard’ today has pretty much the same function as it did in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, as Bowden would say: ‘at first, they divide and separate, then comes either exclusion or coercion to conform. Standards of civilisation have long been a means of intervening in the affairs of other peoples, often in the name of inclusion’ (Bowden, 2014, p. 629).

One of the consequences of the SOC is the moral fragility of certain words such as ‘civilisation’, ‘modernity’ and ‘progress’ and, therefore, all the words that may have derived from the SOC. According to Gong, ‘Christianity's universalist aspirations were easily transformed into notions of a universal civilization which could progress by adhering to scientific principles. Progress toward civilization would come as the universal laws of physics, chemistry, and biology were applied’ (Gong, 1984, p. 51). This is dangerous because it legally legitimizes the practices that were perpetuated for two

centuries. Fidler (2001) elaborates on this thought, in the sense that he gives the input of international law as the basis, as the implementation of the SOC. To illustrate this, he shows how the SOC was consecrated in international law until the twentieth century in the International Court of Justice: Article 38 (1) was connected to the standard account in the sense that the 'general principals of law recognized by civilized nations are a source of international law'. Therefore, '[t]he SOC was the operative international legal principle in this effort at civilizational harmonization and it helped create a Westphalian civilization' (Fidler D. , 2001, p. 139). Thus, the SOC was the justification that Westerners found to conduct political and economic relations with non-Western societies. By placing SOC at the centre of international law, it was deemed legal and rightful to conduct capitulations to remake the world through the West's eye. And how was that realized? Through treaties that assumed the SOC as customary international law that craved out their exterritorial rights.

> Western expansion changed the concept of "civilization" from one dominated by "Christianity, chivalry and trade" to one focused on whether a State "was sufficiently stable to undertake binding commitments under international law and whether it was able and willing to protect adequately the life, liber and property of foreigners". The SOC can thus be seen as a pragmatic principle of international law that allowed States to trade and interact. Whether a country was civilized was more a question of the adoption of Westphalian mechanics than the acceptance of Western culture. (Fidler D. , 2001, p. 144)

Nonetheless, we should also take into account that just like the other societies had to adapt to the standard account, the West had to loosen its concept of SOC and to adapt to the ever-growing diversity of peoples that encompassed the also ever-growing IS. Andrew Linklater brings exactly this approach and contests the usual misconception that the SOC is an exclusive Western phenomenon. It should be reminded that it was the very contact with 'new' societies that made it possible for Europeans to 'develop' and create an image of themselves. For example, he states that Europeans had not always seen China as 'inferior'. When they first reached the Middle Kingdom, they found a society with their own SOC, with their own rules, with their own technological advantages (Linklater, 2016, p. 11). For Linklater, it was the very colonization and direct

contact with different people that created a 'civilised' Europe, or by other words, Europe's inability to cope with difference. 'The relationship between colonial expansion and doctrines of civilization provides a reminder […] that the Europeans did not become 'civilized' as a result of purely endogenous social processes that included growing conformity with the rules of conduct' (Linklater, 2016, p. 4).

Overall, the SOC seems to be a concept that gather a certain amount of consensus even if many different authors came to give their own contribute regarding the topic. This does not mean, however, that all authors state the same premisses or necessarily agree with each other. Barry Buzan (2014) disagrees with Gong that the standard could be composed by a set of criteria, being more of an arbitrary 'measure provided by the governing practices of the leading-edge powers in the West […] [covering] such things as law, property rights, individual rights, religious rights, diplomatic practice' (Buzan, 2014, p. 580). Likewise, while Gong (1984) tends to mention the SOC and the European 'standard account', authors like Linklater (2016), Buzan (2014), Bowden (2014) and Wight (1977) tend to emphasize or at least refer that the SOC has been a feature present in many, if not all societies throughout history. It is just the one that was spread globally was the European.

Keene (2014) raises a concern regarding the expansion of the IS and the 'family of civilised members'. In his view, neither the former nor the latter offer us any insight about the nature of these countries (the ones that came to 'enter' the IS and the ones that were already 'integrated'). The author, thus, proposes a new way at looking at these two ideas by allocating and categorizing them according to three kinds of power: material capability (strength), perception of status by others (prestige) and legal rights they possess (authority). In his paper, the author argues that this 'stratification' of the IS is way more insightful than the 'entry', even because the 'family of civilized nations' appears to be a status-group, made up of states who differed widely in terms of their material capability, and to some extent legal rights, but who were all in a similar status situation in terms of the 'social estimation of honour' (Keene, 2014, p. 653). Another concern of the author is that, although it is widely recognized in the English School that eurocentrism and colonialism play a huge role in configurating and explain the

expansion of the IS, it is not yet recognized that it further deceives and undermines the concept of 'entry' into the IS. The author argues that the mainstream analysis of the IS is done through an institutional approach (by identifying the shared norms and institutions) rather than a relational approach. And so, in Keene's view, the English School theorists should go beyond analysing which countries were taking part in multilateral congresses and combine it with other measures such as treaty-making capabilities and relations.

An even bigger debate is the debate over the impact of culture (and hence, the SOC) and cultural unity in the IS. In *The Anarchical Society*, Bull advocates for a more 'practical' IS in which, although culture has its place and purpose, it is not the main driver towards unity, meaning that order can exist between states which might not belong to a particular civilization. What is needed, according to Bull, is a 'diplomatic culture' (that is, a system of conventions and institutions which preserves order between states with radically different cultures, ideologies and aspirations) between members of an IS, which is further enhanced if their way of life (or 'international political culture') is similar (Bull, 2002, pp. 316-320). On the other hand, Martin Wight thought of cultural unity as a concept that is independent from IS, but that enables its formation and maintenance: 'We must assume that a states-system will not come into being without a degree of cultural unity among its members' (Wight, 1977, p. 33). In his view, the sense of belonging and familiarity of members of state-systems to a certain 'civilization' made it easier to found common institutions and values to face the problem of order in the international system, as Bull would say.

In one of his articles, Barry Buzan (2010, p. 2) further addresses this discussion, but chooses to investigate another hypothesis: whether the expansion of the European IS 'inevitably and permanently weakened the society of states by casting it against a multicultural world society that is unable to supply much 'cultural unity'?'. To do this, the author presents two accounts of the expansion theory of the IS: the Vanguardist account and the Syncretist account. While the former emphasizes Europe's role in expanding the IS through a 'one-way view of cultural transmission from the West to the rest of the world', the latter focusses on cultural transmission, that is, 'the interplay of

civilizations during the expansion process' (Buzan, 2010, p. 3), similarly what was previously mentioned by Linklater. The author does give us four possible outcomes for the future of the IS. With a Vanguard homogenization, the IS as a whole suffers a process of assimilation in which the cultural unity would be maintained by the 'victory' of westernisation. In other words, 'the Vanguard displaces and replaces other cultures, or it converts the rest of the world to its own standard of civilization, creating a universal culture based on a widespread acceptance of Western values, practices and institutions' (Buzan, 2010, p. 21). The Syncretic homogenization would then be victory of cultural mixing and adaptation. The values and practices of the IS would not be tied to any specific 'civilization', but to a mix of cultural interplay where all societies would accept the intercultural nature of the IS. A Layered outcome would be a partial failure of both previous outcomes. The West loses power and fails to 'fully convert' the IS to its values while non-Western power rises into the international system and contests the actual paradigm. We would then live in this layered system, where 'a decentred international society in which different regions including the West, pursued their own cultural values and regional international orders' (Buzan, 2010, p. 21). Finally, the failure would be an attempt of the West to impose the Vanguardist homogenization, while generating enough backlash to stop Syncretism. The consequence would be something like the 'The Clash of Civilizations' by Samuel Huntington.

Moving on to the concept of 'Europeanness' often portrayed as 'European identity', 'Europeanism' (as an ideology), 'Europeanisation' and many similar alternatives, all ultimately refer broadly to the 'feeling of being European as an integral part of one's own social identity' (Ciaglia, Fuest, & Heinemann, 2020, p. 11). According to the Ciaglia, Fuest and Heinemann (2010), European identity is interpreted as a pivotal role in stabilizing and advancing the political institutions of Europe, most notably the EU. The notion is that a distinct European identity fosters mutual trust among Europeans, simplifying cooperation and the search for compromises in the complex landscape of European politics. Within the conceptual framework of European identity, two dimensions are usually emphasised: civic identity and cultural identity. A European 'civic identity' involves feeling part of a European political system or even a 'European state'

which sets up rules, laws, and rights relevant to individuals' lives. This latter dimension ties 'Europe' much more closely than the former to the 'European Union.' In contrast, a European 'cultural identity' is less strongly related to political attitudes and is rooted in the assumption that other Europeans share a common culture, values, or history that makes them more similar to one another than to non-Europeans. This is an important distinction to make, as identity-activating interventions typically elicit quite different responses from these two dimensions. (Ciaglia, Fuest, & Heinemann, 2020, pp. 9-11)

This definition does not offer, however, a strong political and historical context and definition of the concept. Although not new per se, it certainly suffered changes throughout its emergence as a concept. According to Ostrowski (2021), its origins emerged in the context of late 19th century ideological innovation with its origins dating back to the welfare state turn of liberalism in the 1870s and suffering constant changes ever since (Ostrowski, 2021, p. 1). For the author, Europeanism is very flexible as an ideology: its meaning is always forged according to the mainstream political ideology. And so Ostrowski's view is that might end up being 'ahistorical', 'reductionist', 'intended to capture and idealised rendering of European perfection' and 'an insufficiently-deconstructed essentialism towards the role of actually-existing institutional realisations of Europeanism for its conceptual content' (Ostrowski, 2021, pp. 1-3), which makes it a diffuse topic among social sciences and an overall difficult concept to define. (Albaladejo, 2019) goes beyond and argues that the idea of 'Europe' dates back to Ancient Greece, as '[c]ulture is one of the foundations of transnations and it exists in spaces that are not precisely defined as nations or states' (Albaladejo, 2019, p. 398).

Despite its ever-changing meaning, the author argues that all attempts to theorize about Europeanism try to define three major points: the boundaries of European consolidation (or which parts of the continent make part of the definition of 'Europe'), the degree of European consolidation (or where should 'Europe' deepen its integration and which areas of social life should be prioritised) and the actual realization of European consolidation (or the means to actual achieve this consolidation of 'Europe'). More specific to the boundaries of European consolidation, the question of eligibility on the part of countries from more peripheral regions, and the criteria on

which that eligibility would be based, have been an issue of greater dissension. These debates have ranked the regions in descending order of eligibility, placing Scandinavia, Iberia, Eastern/Southeastern Europe, Britain, Turkey, and Russia in turn. Some have preferred a more restricted understanding of 'true Europe,' related to the concept of Mitteleuropa, while others have used an expansive view through the use of Europe's constitutive others: for instance, Euro-Americanism, Atlanticism, or Eurasianism. The axis on which the debates on European unity have historically pivoted in the twentieth century has been the relations between France and Germany, particularly in the post-1945 period. Together with the Benelux countries and Italy, this made the 'core Europe,' where all the epicentres of the continentalist projects of European unification were found, representative examples of post-World War II Christian-and-Social-Democratic settlements, democratic politics, and shared post-Enlightenment confessional-secularist coexistence. 'Core' Europe is, therefore, more than a geographical description; it is a political, economic, and cultural label (Ostrowski, 2021, p. 6). One of the more resilient tropes of these debates is the question of a distinctive European culture, at times augmented to one of European superiority over Europe's constitutive others. This is often seen as a norm setter for the rest of the world. It is a position from which institutionalized Europeanness has surely benefited, especially in regions proximate to the EU, though equally not without exclusions.

The question of European consolidation would immediately bring up a number of critical questions that have defined the Europeanist discourse: for instance, on the degree of consolidation Europe would require and also in which sphere of social life this process should be a priority (Ostrowski, 2021, p. 9). Another significant debate is over the character of European consolidation, whether it is to be above all a political, or an economic, or a cultural project; and which of these three rival visions of 'Europeanisation' is or is not an indispensable precondition for the attainment of the others. Traditionally, dominant logic in Europeanists' discourse has underlined the need for substantial antecedent economic integration to favour prospects of success. This was demonstrated by the fact that the sequential development, starting with the economic groundwork, resulted in first the creation of the ECSC, followed by the EEC. It was only

after substantial movement on economic integration that political unification made it to the fore (Ostrowski, 2021, p. 10). Closely connected with the above is the question of 'how many Europes' these unification plans should lead to. Most Europeanist models assumed from the outset that these various forms of consolidation would meld over time in a single European entity possessing a universal set of institutions. This indeed reflects the implicit underlying approach to EU enlargement, whereby non-EU European countries accession candidates as well as members of the EEA/EFTA are not considered as constituents of a distinctive 'Europe' but as adjuncts or 'members-in-waiting' for the complete range of current and future European institutions. However, this integrative ideal has been constantly contested through the ideational history of Europeanism, with the irrepressible counter logic being the emergence of views that manage to infer the coexistence of overlapping 'Europes' at different 'speeds' of development (Ostrowski, 2021, p. 12). This has been realized through mechanisms such as 'opt-outs' at the slow end of the spectrum and 'enhanced cooperation' at the fast end, a fact that makes consolidation and integration dynamic in nature.

The pursuit of European consolidation lies at the heart of Europeanist discourse. However, Europeanists fundamentally differ in their approaches to achieving this goal, giving rise to a tension that not only impacts how Europeanism is put into practice but also shapes the envisioned content of Europeanism itself. Proactive Europeanism tends to present 'Europe' as a ‘coherent plan, which may be viewed either as an immediately manifesting crystalline whole or, more commonly, as a predetermined and predictable sequence of incremental stages that logically build upon one another through material logic’ (Ostrowski, 2021, pp. 13-14). In contrast, reactive Europeanism envisions its final form as shaped by and responsive to the incremental staging-points marking the progress of Europeanization. Each successive stage remains open to ad hoc renegotiation, leading to stochastic evolution and a 'Europe' that evolves incrementally. The last domain of ideological contestation among the Europeanists is that which concerns the endpoint of their striving in light of transnational collaboration. Whereas for some, united, integrated Europe represents the terminus, for others, it presents a transition stage toward a higher degree of global consolidation. The main ideological

question is the end. Whether or not there exists a describable point when Europeanism definitely 'stops', meaning Europeanization has stopped. This debate shapes both the path and what should constitute the ultimate goals of the Europeanist effort.

In this thought process, Arat-Koç (2010) tries to describe the nowadays concept of Europeanism. With the increasing concern of defining the meaning and boundaries of Europe after the end of the Cold war and the enlargement of the EU and NATO, the western hegemony of values allowed a specific, prosperous view of Europe in which its leaders define its boundaries and what being 'European' means. So, it is not particularly focused on historical and geographical backgrounds, but it is rather political and it reflects the power structures that define and control the boundaries and borders of 'Europe' (Arat-Koç, 2010, p. 182). 'Europeanness' is therefore the dominant western, monolithic and exclusionary consciousness of Europe that defines itself through this discourse of an economically, culturally and politically homogeneous body of developed neoliberal capitalist states (Arat-Koç, 2010, p. 181) that is actively contested on the margins of Europe, where the perception of the West is still that of backwardness, underdevelopment, uncivilized and divergent of their political regimes and, in general, not suitable for 'Europe' and thus are excluded.

Since much of modern day Europeanness is defined by the EU, Kuus (2004) main focus is exactly interpreting the concept through the eyes of EU enlargement and the dynamics created by the dichotomy of Europe versus Eastern Europe. 'The representational pattern that privileges the fully European 'Europe' over the not-yet-fully European 'Eastern Europe' continues not as a marginal incident but as a central premise of EU and NATO enlargement' (Kuus, 2004, p. 484). For the author, the concept of Europeanness rests on the ever-longing 'learning process' of 'Eastern' countries must prove they are capable and willing to internalize Western norms. The sole enlargement of 'Europe' has brought the idea of a united Europe but the processes succeeding it proved that, more than a product of its history and geography, it was made by discourses of erasure and exclusion. The emergence of a dichotomy between East and West enabled not only the constant confrontation between 'Europeanness' and 'Eastness', but also 'Orientalist' assumptions' on Eastern European countries that Kuus names as

'flexible othering' that doesn't necessarily unites Eastern Europe to 'Europe' by erasing the former, but rather multiplies it into various 'Eastern Europes' (Kuus, 2004, p. 484). This discourse is particularly effective because of the West's imposition, but also because it is internalized by each country against its neighbours. It acts as a 'subjectivational practice' in which countries not only Orientalize the 'other', but also Occidentalise themselves as the West of the 'other'. 'Europe', 'Central Europe' and 'Eastern Europe' are not physical places, but an 'intellectual and political project that functions to pass alterity further east', a gradation of Europeanness based on the ability not to challenge the West/East dichotomy but to align with the 'right side', which is inherently that one that opposes Russia.

As Simonsen (2004) emphasizes, the Nordic countries and Greece were not nominated as 'Eastern' Europe because their identities aligned as 'cultural bridges between West and East' (Simonsen, 2004, p. 358). Even then, those who were deemed once 'not fully European' are now part of the 'family of European nations' because the borders of 'Europeanness' are redefined not by eliminating the dichotomy, but by moving the border further eastwards. More than being a threat, Russia is the reference which allows the existence of 'Europeanness', which is an interesting regard because as Bonnett (2002) reminds us, early Bolshevik USSR used to identify itself with Western values and Eastern values with 'everything that was old and rotten'. Only after the ideological differences deepened was the 'West' interpreted as synonymous with 'Capitalism', therefore making the USSR leaders turn to a more Russocentric approach of their own values in which highlight the uniqueness of the communist project with 'Eastern' characteristics (Bonnett, 2002).

The process of 'othering' is pretty much present in all definitions of 'Europeanness'. But in Slootmaeckers' (2019) view the sole definition of Europeanness is about a process of Othering in which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are constantly (re)defined. In his paper, the author argues that a recent redefinition of the concept involves the issue of sexuality and gender, more precisely the LGBTQIA+ issue. He argues that the EU's presentation as LGBTQIA+-friendly emerges as an attempt to redefine its identity. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of Varsovian

Pact, the EEC had the issue of reunifying and avoiding new security threats in Europe. To do this, the EU began to identify itself with the principles of democracy (and later with human rights and fundamental threats). A good example of this shift in identity is the establishment of the Copenhagen Criteria as a key principle for acceding countries to follow for 'not just a precondition for membership applications, but a central part of the pre-accession negotiations, reinforcing the notion that to be fully European one must adhere to EU values' (Slootmaeckers, 2019, p. 354).

To conceptualize this transition, Slootmaeckers (2019) introduces the concepts of geopolitical, temporal, and normative Othering. While the first relies 'on security issues and realpolitik to define the symbolic boundaries of the EU' and the second relies on 'positioning the Self and the Other in different temporalities' (with the Self ignoring its own past and/or being more advanced than the other), the normative one highlights the boundaries of difference in norms (Slootmaeckers, 2019, p. 349). Therefore, the previous contextualization at the end of twentieth century marks the contextualization necessary to mark an EU rebranding of identity and boundaries, changing from a focus on geopolitical and temporal Othering, to a normative one.

When resistance from far-right politics rises as opposition to LGBTQIA+ equality norms, the EU reinforces its self-image where the EU is portrayed 'as the place in the world where LGBTQIA+ people are exceptionally accepted and protected' (Slootmaeckers, 2019, p. 356). By intensifying its identity markers (and therefore the Othering process), the Copenhagen Criteria were made a pivotal element of the enlargement process in order to accentuate the differences between the threatened identity markers of the Self against the Other and by denouncing internal parts of the Self that resembled the Other. In the second case it was expressed through resolutions of official EU institutions in which they condemn homophobic attacks coming from Eastern countries (from the EU). '[R]ather than being a tool to discipline new member states, the resolutions are better conceived as being part of the EU's normative Othering processes through which the EU's borders were redrawn to define both inferior Other within and universal norm-violating Others outside the EU' (Slootmaeckers, 2019, p. 354).

Slootmaeckers (2019) elaborates on the outputs and implications of this 'new' identity and speculates on the future of the Othering process of the EU. As he noted, the reaction of the EU to the internal resistance of its LGBTQIA+-friendly identity from the 2000s onward did little in effectively underpinning its identity within the organization. Paradoxically, because of its focus on external matters, it actually exacerbated opposition to this identity. With anti-gender politics gaining ground within the EU, it is likely that the practice of categorizing homophobia as an external problem will become less sustainable. These anti-gender movements strive for a redefinition of the identity of the EU based on what they perceive as traditional values. While this trend is continuing and European norms are being debated increasingly, it will affect the EU's external relations, since potential members may use internal disagreements in the challenge of advancing LGBTQIA+ rights. In this scenario, the conventional process of designating others as different may lose its effectiveness. Instead, it is probable that the categorization processes within the enlargement process will adapt to encompass new dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. The author even speculates that we may witness a change back to geopolitical and temporal Othering, or even a combination of the three (Slootmaeckers, 2019, p. 357).

Szulc (2022) also follows this thought process that the EU is more and more closely associated with LGBTQIA+ rights as part of a larger project of redefining boundaries associated with Europe (in this case self-presentation of Europe as a bastion of democracy and human rights). While developing the concepts of Uncanny Europe and Protective Europeanness-the author anchors in the concepts of Rainbow Europe, Fortress Europe, and Freezer Europe-these could be considered fundamental interpretations of a particular form of Europeanness. The concept 'Rainbow Europe' is one that perceives Europe as one that has been, and continues to be, fundamentally and historically LGBTQIA+-friendly, progressive, and inclusive. In contrast, 'Fortress Europe' underlines a tendency to see the external sexual Others as fundamentally different and non-European, usually through racialized ways. 'Freezer Europe' reaches to the perception of the internal sexual Others at the edges of Europe as falling behind on European values and norms, and are essentially 'not European yet' (Szulc, 2022, pp. 388-

389). Then the author dwells on the concept of ‘Uncanny Europe’, a complex notion where Europe appears both alien and familiar, challenging a clear East-West divide. It raises the possibility of East countries moving toward the West to achieve full European status. As for ‘Protective Europeanness’, the concept emerges as a response to growing discrimination, as migrants and their families engage in transnational activities and identify more strongly with transnational aspects. Both ‘Protective Europeanness’ and ‘Uncanny Europe’ allow for the promotion of a specific form of Europeanness. In the framework of EU values and identity, discriminated individuals find not only material protection but also symbolic protection. Thus, the capacity to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals becomes contingent on the perpetuation of the image of Western Europe as 'Rainbow Europe'. The image is representative of an exceptional standard-one that embodies values of civilization, modernity, development, capitalism, human rights, and gender and sexual liberation (Szulc, 2022, pp. 392-398).

In his paper, Risse (2005) addresses Haas’ (1995) study of countries ‘shifting royalties’ toward supranational institutions in which states give in due to appreciation of the new center of attachment as an end in itself; due to pressure of the new center of authority into conformity; and ‘as a side product of otherwise instrumental behavior toward another ultimate end’ (Risse, 2005, p. 293). In the same paper, the author reaches the conclusion that national and supranational institutions do not necessarily go against each other. In fact, they can complement each other by a process of socialization where Europeanness or ‘becoming European’ is gradually being embedded in understandings of national identities (Risse, 2005, p. 305). It is also argued that federal states have an easier time changing their collective understandings to include Europe in their identity than unitary and centralized states.

For Albadalejo (2019), a common European literature is vital to the cohesion of the EU because it reminds us that it is one of the foundations of Europeanness. Anchoring his research in the concept of ‘ectopic literature’, that is, ‘literary production that is a consequence of the movement of writers or people who will become writers in the space that is the target of their travel’, the author believes that the creation and movement of literature contributes to the creation and maintenance of a European

identity. Even if Greek and Roman literature, Provençal poetry, Renaissance and Baroque literature, the Enlightenment, Romantic literature and so on have their specific geographical origins, they are all regarded as European literature which intensifies the idea of Europe 'as a puzzle whose pieces come together following a solid cultural dynamic of mutual enrichment, and that converge to a whole that is more than the sum of its parts' (Albaladejo, 2019, p. 405).

In this debate, Waal, Weyenberg and Volk (2022) warn us about the problems of heritage in the concept of Europeanism because it can be instrumentalized by political and non-political actors to demarcate boundaries of Europe and show (non-)belonging to the mainstream idea of Europe: 'This appeal is dangerous […] because it creates […] an opposition between 'white, Christian, reason Europeans' and the rest who do not fit this category' (Waal, Weyenberg, & Volk, 2022, p. 164). Aware of the possibilities of its impact, the EU is also prone to promote campaign such as the 2018 Year of European Cultural Heritage campaign through the slogan 'Sharing heritage, sharing values'. This is also evident when Ursula von der Leyen said the famous sentence 'Protecting our European way of life' (Stevis-Gridneff, 2019). This way, the authors fear that heritage might be used as a kind of 'cultural fundamentalism, that is, discrimination on the basis of culture as a means of inclusion and exclusion (Waal, Weyenberg, & Volk, 2022, p. 164).

Further, Vos (2017) contributes to the debate on culture and its role in promoting Europeanness by discussing how the EU manages culture as one of the means for promoting its values and identity. The author relates that the EC has granted funding for accession state cultural programs as a softer counterpart of its more rigid conditionality measures. The EU therefore wants to invest in culture to contribute to transnational cooperation, economic growth, social cohesion, and an increased feeling of belonging to the EU. While culture is part of the *acquis Communautaire* and therefore of the policy of conditionality of the EU, the EC invests in culture in accession states due to the belief that culture will favour EU integration. This will be both a political as well as a socio-economic endeavour. At the political level, cultural investments in accession processes try to demonstrate how the accession state is culturally compatible with Europe and,

therefore, deserves to contribute to shaping European culture and identity. Socioeconomically, investing in culture can trigger changes relevant to the general process of accession and to the conditionality policy. Culture works as a means toward attaining the general EU goals (Vos, 2017, p. 677). This has been achieved through the establishment of new multi-level governance forms which create interdependency amongst national actors; through compliance with strict funding criteria in which the Commission functions as gatekeeper in order to steer project proposals in a manner fully in accordance with its wide policy priorities, focusing on those priorities set by the Commission and the member states of the EU; and by highlighting European partnership in funding distribution, which is necessary to attain very specific policy goals and which creates competition for different funding tools, the accession states are converging into cultural approaches moulded by Western European models. In other words, this is the approach that proliferates the vision of the EU on how the 'true Europeans' conduct political, social, and economic life in the EU (Vos, 2017, pp. 680-683).

These measures are not the only ones employed by the EU. As we have seen before, in 1993, the Copenhagen Summit adopted a declaration emphasizing 'common heritage, interests, and special obligations' for Member States' foreign policy and as an attempt of identity redefinition based on Western values. A substantial milestone arrived with the 1985 'Adonnino Report,' which proposed measures like the European flag, anthem, and student exchange programs, including Erasmus. But according to Ciaglia, Fuest and Heinemann (2020) post-Adonnino identity-promoting initiatives have often been ad hoc and not well-connected to academic literature. This has led to an unbalanced emphasis on measures primarily targeting young and mobile individuals who already have a European perspective.

As for the identification by Europeans with the EU, Armbruster's, Rollo's and Meinhoj's (2010) study focuses on the fact that in practical terms, 'Europeanness' and the EU are something quite vague in European border communities. For most of them, 'feeling European' was something based on local or national identification even if 'the European Union provided some prism of people's identification, positive or negative, with a stronger implicit overlap between the EU and Europe on the western side and a

more ambivalent and explicit double vision of the eastern side' (Armbruster, Rollo, & Meinhoj, 2010, p. 897). This study is definitely a reminder that the EU is much more present in the Western-European core and among elites than in the majority of the population. In Bruter's (2004) research, the author also addresses this topic, but with a focus group of people of the 'mainstream' core. As expected, citizens from countries such as France, the Netherlands and the UK perform way better in identifying what the EU and 'feeling European' might mean. Bruter (2004) denotes that most participants articulated a predominantly 'civic' view of the EU while a minority articulated a 'cultural' one. The first ones evoked images of 'borderlessness, circulation of citizens, common civic area, new policy making and prosperity', while the second ones identified elements like 'peace, harmony, the fading of historical divisions and co-operation between similar people and cultures' (Bruter, 2004, p. 36). Clyqc (2021) adds his contribute by rethinking European identity in the context of big metropoles where there is a big diversity in ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The author argues that many immigrants and ethnic minorities don't really connect with the national identities that most citizens relate (and way deeper than with the EU), but feel a clear sense of Europeanness and identification with EU values that enables them to slowly become key actors in European identity formation. Finally, Ciaglia's, Fuest's and Heinemann's (2020) study warn us that are many determinants and variables that affect one's identification with European identity, such as one's experiences (transnational contact, discuss of politics), resources (socio-economic status, education, language skills), demographics (age, gender) and personality/attitudes (personality traits, values, religion, national/regional identity, trust in EU institutions.

Conditionality refers to a set of requirements, criteria, or conditions that candidate countries or potential candidates should meet with the aim of progressing in their integration process with the EU. Such a principle is often used by the latter as an instrument through which reforms are promoted and facilitated in aspiring member states. The political conditionality is based on the very concept of democracy, 'which has emerged as the predominant form of political governance within the Westphalian international state system. This development has been strengthened by the emergence

of an international norm which considers democracy spreading to be an accepted and necessary component of international behavior' (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 76). Most notably, however, acceptance of democracy promotion as an international norm is manifested in its incorporation into the activities of the UN-an institutional organization with fundamental democratic principles on which it was based-but actively endorsing and promoting democracy through its norm-setting capabilities. Through human rights treaties, various UN organs have contributed immensely to the codification of democratic principles in international law as well as their gradual evolution into legally binding global standards. International law has, therefore, gradually evolved to the point where democracy can be viewed as an 'entitlement' that should be both protected as well as promoted. Moreover, democracy is commonly regarded as the apotheosis of western-style 'civilised' statehood, a concept born and nurtured in Europe. (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 77).

The concept of the economic conditionality is closely related to the requirement for policy adoption in order to restructure the domestic economies of candidate states, whose logical continuation would include the market liberalization. In this regard, the economic conditionality represents a substantial tool for the development of capitalism. This, in turn, is an economic conditionality closely related to the political one and the pursuit of 'good governance' that features highly in the global and regional organizations such as the IMF, WTO, and the European Union. To be more concrete, the establishment of a liberal economic order and its success, propagated in economic conditionality, are considered to depend on fostering a liberal political-democratic order through political conditionality. Most of the international organizations today provides sufficient encouragement to any potential member or recipient of the aid to have them re-think their domestic political and economic frameworks and, therefore, making democracy and market liberalization a pre-requisite for membership or aid. (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 77).

Alternatively, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2004) focus on the 'governance by conditionality' aspect of EU enlargement. The authors refer to the practice of setting specific conditions that a candidate country should meet so that its accession to the EU would be viable. In this direction, typical conditions set are related to the adoption of

the rules, standards and regulations of the EU, as well as the promotion of relevant reforms. The authors outline the mechanism through which the EU imposes conditionality, primarily based on an external incentives model, by which the EU offers rewards, such as membership or financial aid, in exchange for compliance; a social learning model, in which the candidate countries internalize the EU norms due to the legitimacy they attribute to the EU; and finally, the lesson-drawing model, whereby countries voluntarily adopt the EU's policies and practices since they consider them as effective solutions for domestic problems (pp. 663-668). Here the authors take a different approach towards types of conditionality, namely democratic and acquis conditionality. In return, the former calls for respect of political criteria on democracy, human rights, and rule of law from the candidate countries. In other words, guided by the Copenhagen criteria that spell out in detail what political standards a country must meet to join the EU, the latter refers to an obligation of candidate countries to adopt and then implement the acquis Communautaire, or the whole body of EU legislation and policies. Adoption of the acquis represents a statutory condition of accession to the EU and presumes significant legal and institutional changes in candidate countries.

IR and political studies of Eurovision vary in terms of issues and scope but generally tend to conceptualize the contest as a cultural phenomenon reflecting and sometimes even influencing larger geopolitical and sociopolitical dynamics within Europe. Specific themes to be discussed within the context of IR studies include how Eurovision works as a tool of soft power through cultural and public diplomacy whereby countries leverage their participation as a means through which to project some certain image or narrative across the remainder of Europe and the world. For instance, countries may have a goal of increasing their soft power by showcasing their cultural distinctiveness or by aligning themselves with broader European values. Some consider the contest an opportunity for representing a country positively, rebranding, or otherwise staking a claim to an international identity. For example, countries that have just gone through some sort of political or economic crisis participate in Eurovision to show just how modern and stable they are.

Among these is Dean Vuletic (2018) attests for one of these examples by debating the interplay between public diplomacy and decision-making processes in the context of the ESC. Specifically, the author reflects upon how the ESC can be utilized as a channel for public diplomacy by participant countries, using the contest for visibility in building both international opinion and diplomatic relations. In itself, the contest is a tool of public diplomacy, where countries project national image, cultural values, and political messages through participation in and performance at the contest. This competition gives countries a way to express themselves on the international stage and enact soft power approaches through the entries they put forward in competition. These decisions are well above mere artistic justification and are informed by political, cultural, and strategic reasoning but are instead dictated by diplomatic imperatives and interests, p. 301. This further implies that Eurovision's significance goes beyond the confines of the competition itself in terms of having specific connotation in IR. Indeed, states use Eurovision as an instrument of making allies, overcoming political conflicts, and winning prestige in the world arena. For instance, Zahavi and Ariely (2024) 'estimate that exposure to the ESC increased public sympathy for the EU, irrespective of the ESC being formally unrelated to the EU'. (p. 8). The ESC is not directly involved with the EU, but the results of this research indicate the potential indirect role of being a very successful albeit unintentional tool of public diplomacy on behalf of the EU. They emphasize it holds the potential to decide on the image of the EU in events that are not formally related to the EU. This cultural product, independent as it may be from the EU, carries a value of cultural identity for Europe and is pertinent to external perceptions of the EU.

Voting patterns are one of the most extensive topics studied about the ESC, which often reveal geopolitical alliances and regional blocs. Researchers analyse how countries tend to vote for their neighbours or cultural allies, revealing underlying political relationships. The ‘bloc voting’ phenomenon, where countries in specific regions (e.g., the Balkans, Scandinavia, or the former Soviet states) exchange votes, is a common topic of analysis. Presumably, these patterns denote some sort of links, historical, cultural, or political. One of the first works to actually do an extensive

Eurovision study on the phenomenon of 'bloc voting' was the work of Gad Yair (1995). Through a detailed analysis of voting patterns, Yair argues that the contest in these ways reflects basic geopolitical relationships and cultural affinities within Europe, claiming that Eurovision is not only a cultural event but also a reflection of the political and cultural landscapes of Europe. Indeed, clear patterns in voting behaviour are highlighted in the study, heavily influenced by political alliances, historical ties, and cultural proximity. All too often, countries vote for their neighbours or for those who have cultural similarities with them; the voting blocs are usually predictable. The greater geopolitical and cultural dynamic within the continent is revealed by the voting behaviour of participating countries, and this yields three clear blocs: Western, Northern, and Mediterranean (p. 153).

The paper uses the ESC voting patterns as a kind of prism through which one can have a viewpoint on the process of European integration. While the contest aims to unify, the persistence of voting blocs and favouritism brings out into the open the divided nature of Europe and sends a message of how thoughtfully complicated this notion of a cohesive European identity really is. Notwithstanding such a division, Yair acknowledges the symbolic role of the ESC in promoting a sense of European unity. The contest is a forum in which European countries come together; yet, however, the practice of voting shows tensions and alliances. Yair also stresses the significant thought of the 'core-periphery' divide into which Europe is split, as is reflected in the ESC. On the whole, the countries of Western Europe – the supposed 'core' – tend to win the contest and receive higher scores consistently. Indeed, the countries of Eastern and Southern Europe, which represent the 'periphery', usually receive fewer votes and are generally given less prominence (Yair, 1995, pp. 159-160). This idea is further developed one year later together with Daniel Maman (1996) where the authors explore the voting patterns and the distribution of power in the ESC by analysing how the contest reflects broader social and political structures, particularly focusing on the concept of hegemon. Here, hegemony is a structure that sustains itself within the contest where some countries always emerge at the top of the voting results. This is not accidental but rather reflects underlying social, cultural, and political hierarchies across Europe, further accentuated

by the concept of core and periphery (pp. 322-324). By analysing the voting data, Yair and Maman show that Eurovision contest voting is not based on quality but, rather, geopolitical considerations, cultural proximity, and historical alliances reinforce the hegemony of core countries. The authors place the Eurovision voting patterns within the greater historical and political context of Europe. They are suggesting here that this competition, in fact, has reflected the power relation and interrelations that exist between European nations, or to put it in other words, the core countries are more likely to impose cultural and political influence upon peripheral ones.

Many authors after Yair studied this phenomenon with different statistical methods, but most of them prevailed culture as one the main factor for bloc voting (Charron, 2013; García & Tanase, 2013; Mantzaris, Rein, & Hopkins, 2018). Some like Ginsburgh and Noury (2007) seem to slightly disregard this phenomenon, stating that even if there are many factors involved, the quality of the entry is still the main determinant of a good result, while most of them consider it a staple in the contest (Yair, 1995; Charron, 2013; García & Tanase, 2013). In contrast, according to Spierdijk and Vellekoop (2009), biases of peer voting have a strong impact on the final results of ESC, and their outcomes usually do not reflect the quality of the performances. Gatherer gives a very interesting twist to the debate by distinguishing between cultural tastes and cultural epidemic. They analyse whether countries might vote for each other in Eurovision because they share similar cultural preferences or because they were influenced by the voting pattern of others, which they name 'cultural epidemic'. They investigate the extent to which these can be explained by these two different mechanisms and finds support for both common cultural tastes and cultural epidemic in Eurovision voting. Whereas some patterns of voting can clearly be explained through cultural similarities, other patterns suggest countries could be influenced by the voting behaviour of their neighbours and result in a bloc voting or regional clustering.

Further, Eurovision is discussed in terms of normative values, particularly regarding how the contest represents or fosters social changes such as LGBTQIA+ rights, gender equality, and diversity. The competition is often regarded as one arena in which progressive values are fostered, and where countries can exhibit their attitude toward

these values. Yet, it also points to tensions within the European IS between more liberal and conservative societies. In this regard, Catherine Baker (2016), for instance, considered the ESC as a cultural space where LGBTQIA+ identity and European belonging intersect, allowing it to be of critical importance as a platform for the expression and visibility of the LGBTQIA+ communities across Europe, and how that visibility is intertwined with broader conceptions of European identity (p. 103). For instance, the paper underlines the intricacies of this dynamic when it states that Eurovision can only establish some positive visibility for LGBTQIA+ individuals while at the same time supporting exclusionary practices through processes of marginalization targeting countries and cultures that may happen to be deemed not to fit into the norms of Western European sexualities and modernity. Some even criticise the fact that the promotion of LGBTQIA+ rights in Eurovision sometimes assumes the 'homonationalistic' mode, presenting marshalling LGBTQIA+ inclusion as proof of European modernity and superiority against non-European or less progressive countries (p. 101). This is in line with the above-discussed 'Othering' processes, whereby Slootmaekers (2019) investigated how the EU has used LGBTQIA+ rights as a means of identity building, especially during the expansion process, and claimed that the advancement of LGBTQIA+ equality has become one of the constitutive features of the way in which the EU constructs its identity, not least with regard to the distinction drawn between candidate countries in Eastern Europe, where it is portrayed as 'lagging behind'.

An example of this could be Heller's (2007) analysis of the Russian duo t.A.T.u. that represented the country in 2003, exploring how t.A.T.u., known for their provocative portrayal of a lesbian relationship acted as a calculated political statement that played into and against both Russian and Western expectations. The controversial image of the duo and their subversion of the traditional gender and sexual norms brought to relief tensions between Russia's national image and its aspirations for European integration in light of the growing Western discourse on LGBTQIA+ rights. Heller also considers how the duo's participation reflected Russia's complex relationship with the West, where the country simultaneously sought to assert its independence and align itself with European modernity. Perhaps also one of the most studied areas is the

analysis of performances such as this and how Eurovision is used to express nationalism, a reflection of state identity. At the same time, the contest could constitute a stage on which nations claim their sovereignty, celebrate cultural heritage, or engage in nationalist narratives. For some countries, Eurovision is a way of coming out from under the subjection of disreputable stereotypes or historical representations and presents to the world a new self, modern. Indeed, this is rather well illustrated with the post-conflict or states in transition participating in Eurovision. They usually convey Eastern, post-communist countries (Iglesias, 2015) (Miazhevich, 2012) (Ural, 2019) since they are the ones that usually require a (nation-) rebranding by conveying certain, specific messages and their analysis is hugely dependent on the specificities of the country's history, performance chosen and message conveyed.

2. Methodology

The present research has adopted a qualitative research design, particularly suitable for investigations into complex phenomena such as ESC performances, where the elaboration of meanings is not visible or, alternatively, is hardly quantifiable. Qualitative methods have thus been ideal to grasp subjective experience, the interpretations, and the socio-cultural contexts influencing performances, both in their creation and reception on the part of audiences. Qualitative research, in this direction, could focus on the non-numerical data per se (narratives, visual components, or symbolic gestures) and thus give these an in-depth analysis of subtle layers of identity, symbolism, and representation, as may be found within ESC. In fact, that would be very apt for such a cultural phenomenon that draws so heavily upon performance and interpretation and their socio-political contexts. Qualitative investigation is also open-ended; it opens insights into a wide range of perspectives that might even reveal new insights in respect of how ESC performances reflect broader socio-cultural and political changes in Europe. This study is also apt for qualitative research because it fits into the framework of the English School through an understanding of IS by its shared norms and cultural expressions. Thus, and as shown until here, the SOC and IS concepts of the English School are critical in this research. In this perspective, the research aims to reveal how, through an analysis of how 'Europeanness' is represented and imagined in the ESC performances, these cultural expressions maintain (and even reproduce) an IS – the European one. The SOC herein is captured in the cultural values and beliefs advanced in the ESC, which become standards against which European identity and membership are measured. Qualitative research, therefore, uncovers the rich, complex tapestry of meanings within ESC, but it also connects those findings into broader theoretical concepts, showing how this cultural event, like ESC, may influence and reflect international societal norms and integration.

To build my argument, and part of what makes my study unique, I will anchor myself in the thought of three studies of different authors: Allatson (2007), Stivachtis (2008) and Slootmaeckers (2019). Although with different aims and scopes, there is a common ground that made it possible and necessary to bridge their thoughts that made

it possible to reach my main argument about Europeanness and cultural conditionality as two concepts that can operate through the ESC.

As mentioned before, this present thesis will involve examination and analysis of Eurovision performances, which through expression of certain elements will form their portrayed ideal of 'Europeanness'. This includes an in-depth analysis of various aspects such as song lyrics, stage design, costumes, choreography, and musical styles employed by participating countries. Whereas the current research closely investigates those elements in order to disclose how cultural narratives and identities are created, negotiated, and communicated on the ESC stage, it also examines media discourse about ESC entries. This encompasses a diverse range of sources and include, but are not limited to, official ESC commentary, news articles, social media reactions, and public discussions. The multi-faceted approach of capturing the breadth of EU high-authority discourses surrounding ESC performances covers how these entries are perceived, interpreted, and discussed from an EU integration point of view.

This study will focus on two countries – Serbia and Germany – two European countries that have very different backgrounds, but share similarities in recent past history. Notwithstanding the differences in their culture and history, one of the most important aspects that sets them apart in this study is the fact that one of them managed to become part of the EU and the other did not. This is important in the sense that it gives us a greater scope and analysis of Eurovision's impact that conduces a modern SOC on the European IS. The selection criteria for case studies are deliberately selected to capture a range of experiences, including performances that have garnered attention for their innovative approaches or significant cultural resonance, as well as instances where countries have strategically aligned (or not) their ESC entries with European norms and values and gathering attention from important European figures, which led (or not) to discourses regarding EU integration.

Furthermore, by including at least one country with active aspirations for EU membership, the study taps into the complex interplay between cultural expression, political ambition, and European integration. Serbia's case study offers a dynamic lens through which to explore how notions of Europeanness are negotiated, contested, and

reinforced within the ESC, shedding light on the evolving dynamics of European identity and belonging. I expect that this study's approach can document and analyze cultural expressions within the ESC, while having broader relevance for discourses on European identity, diversity, and integration, enhancing our understanding of what it means 'to be European' in the 21st century.

On ethical issues, while the theme does not raise major considerations, cultural sensitivity will be the general guiding rule throughout the research. The ESC is very diverse in cultural expressions, all with varied backgrounds and significances. Among my aims is to decentralise the dominating Eurocentric approaches in IR; thus, appreciating and respecting these various cultural contexts are founded upon this study. This, in turn, will ensure that the given research works to understand and present performances and media content in a manner that pays respect to the complexity of the cultural expressions involved, taking into consideration the diverse socio-political contexts and historical backgrounds represented by the participating countries themselves. In turn, this present research also draws from that to conduct an analysis in a culturally sensitive way, as adequate and respectful as possible regarding the ways in which 'Europeanness' is expressed and interpreted within the ESC.

3. A Standard of Civilisation that emerged through music

3.1. The standard is not dead

The presence of the different standards throughout history and societies should be underlined in order for a full understanding to take place regarding my interpretation of this new possible standard. Most importantly, SOCs have been well documented to be present across diverse societies; they are anchored in the unique cultural specificities and norms of their respective communities but also profoundly shape their perceptions of outsiders. These standards were theoretical constructs rooted in the cultural, technological, and societal accomplishments of various civilizations. Prominent regional international systems and societies including the Arab, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese civilizations preceded the European standard. Their own governance systems, legal structures, religions, and culture broadly speaking enabled distinct worldviews that consequently made interactions among political entities belonging to different regional societies operate on fundamentally diverse moral and legal grounds. The distinct and exclusive cultural rules within each regional society rendered relationships between entities from separate societies incomparable to those within the same societal sphere.

For instance, the SOC of the Sumerians was rooted in agriculture and legal sophistication. That may have biased their perceptions of other societies as being somewhat less civilized since most did not possess the superior agricultural systems nor did they establish a codified system of laws. Similarly, the code of conduct derived from Confucianism in ancient China was inclined towards a society that was well-structured and deeply shrouded with ethical values. Outsiders were, therefore, considered morally or socially less cultivated because of failing to subscribe to Confucianism. In the Islamic world, scientific, mathematical and administrative innovations created a paradigm by which non-Islamic society was intellectually unsophisticated. Indeed, these standards very often acted as a yardstick and therefore contributed to the 'othering' of those neighbouring or faraway societies that did not meet their established benchmarks in culture or societal parameters and thus shaped the interactions and perceptions of outsiders (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 73).

The ever-presence of SOC throughout history gives us a hint on how it has not vanished after the second World War, even if it lost its momentum due to the atrocities committed in the name of civilisation, the ever-presence of different standards throughout history and societies gives us a hint on how the standard did not simply vanish. During the post-colonial era, the concept of 'civilisation' has been condemned as an unjust system that promotes domination and exploitation. This eventually is discriminatory since it denoted equal political right to the political communities of the other continents, either by colonization by European powers or granted a form of independence which was inferior. The notion of 'civilisation' offended the representatives of the non-European civilizations. The preferential legal status claimed by European states was abused and gave rise to movements demanding abolition of the same. When the old concept of 'civilization' finally lost its credibility, new candidates as successors appeared, assuming the mantel of contemporary standards in international society. According to Stivachtis (2008), the remarkable similarity between the former SOC and the paradigm of 'human rights' is evident, given their shared emphasis on fundamental rights encompassing life, liberty, property, and individual dignity. ‘The reason why human rights have become a new SOC is that it can easily be used as a criterion not only for conditionality regarding membership, but also for suspending the right of non-intervention that states enjoy as a corollary of sovereignty’ (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 83). During the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, discussions among International Law Commission delegates highlighted the importance of seeking principles from the constitutions of 'civilised' states, those that respect fundamental human rights. Furthermore, what adds to this evolution is the elevation of protecting human rights as a new benchmark for European countries. For instance, the European Human Rights Conventions mandate compulsory jurisdiction, and European bodies like the CoE possess the authority to suspend a country's membership for human rights violations (Stivachtis, 2008, pp. 74-75).

As previously states and in Buzan’s (2014) view, democracy remains a contentious institution in global society, defining the accepted form of government and signalling what is deemed ‘civilised’. However, its universal legitimacy is still evolving,

though democracy promotion has gained traction internationally. Key democratic values of human rights, representative governance, and the rule of law wield considerable influence and may even have set the standard of legitimacy for states in the international arena. Because of this fact, democracy promotion continues to be essentially a normative Western practice that tends to support a hierarchical international order with the West at the top. On the contrary, the status of democracy as an international norm intimates the authoritarian regimes. The struggle for democracy is often associated with the protection of human rights and the promotion of peace, leading advocates of democracy to associate it with 'civilization' and undemocratic systems with 'barbarity,' notions which are closely associated with those of SOC in the past (Buzan, 2014, pp. 588-589).

Another inheritor of the SOC heritage could be the notion of 'development' in countries. This is not an entirely new emergence to take over after the decline of SOC but a direct extension of it. An account left by the colonial era account created a lasting legacy within the post-colonial world discourse on aid and development. ‘The colonial obligation of the metropolitan powers to bring the natives up to a European ‘standard of civilisation’ morphed into an obligation on the part of the rich world to assist in the development of the ‘third world’ or ‘less developed countries’ (Buzan, 2014, p. 591). Development, perceived as the entitlement to attain modernity, seems to have assumed the role of a primary successor to imperialism and colonialism. It derives its legitimacy from both a sense of responsibility on the part of former colonial powers and a sense of entitlement within post-colonial states.

3.2. Europeanness on the Eurovision Song Contest as a new Standard of Civilisation

The examples raised by previously-mentioned authors serve as an illustration of how the SOC lives deeply in today’s international politics and how it might be perceived as the norm while possibly going unnoticed of its origins. It also serves the purpose of

showing that its subtlety and omnipresence in international politics should be also applied to other concepts, in the sense that we should question other concepts commonly used to understand how the SOC morphed into our days and how it affects the way we conduct international relations. This recognition prompts a broader examination of how the SOC may have evolved into other concepts within IR.

That being said, my argument is that Europeanness, a theme that is recurrently brought in the context of the ESC, might be a morphed form of the SOC that evolved into our days. In the Eurovision context, Europeanness functions as a concept reflecting Western standards, norms and rules since it has evolved from the historical roots of the SOC and continues to shape perceptions and behaviours in the modern world. The ESC is a cultural and entertaining event, and it becomes the arena where Europeanness is manifested and becomes the contemporary norm which is in line with the cultural and social standards of the West. Furthermore, and as it has been proven from its frequent recurrence in the contest, accepting Europeanness in the context of ESC may be a step towards alignment with the EU. By participating in or adhering to the Eurovision standards of Europeanness, countries or entities may be positioning themselves as culturally and socially in sync with Western ideals, and by extension, one step closer to the EU. This implies that fulfilling the criteria associated with Europeanness in the ESC might be perceived as a form of cultural convergence, fostering a sense of belonging or alignment with the Western world.

By the nineteenth century, the expansion of European international society went global, including Asian and African political entities within its ambit. Many non-European states sought membership in this international society striving not only for equal treatment but also to enlarge influence in international affairs as well. Consequently, European states had to establish the criteria for admitting non-European political communities into the international society they had established. 'Political communities which aspired to membership of the European society had to meet the SOC. The SOC was an expression of the assumptions used to distinguish those that belonged to the expanding European society of states from those that did not' (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 73). Likewise, what first started to be a small group of European countries competing in

1956, the event ended up encompassing 37 countries in 2023. Much like the first steps of contemporary international society, it was first reserved for westerners and then, little by little, it made its way up by selecting those who 'deserved' to be part of this new European family.

For a country to aspire to participate in this new SOC, it 'just' has to be an active member of the EBU. But to be part of the EBU, and according to its statutes, countries must follow a certain number of criteria, such as: public service remit, meaning that broadcasting organizations must fulfil a public service remit as defined by law, charter, or similar legal instrument; geographic eligibility, meaning that membership application is open to broadcasting organizations from countries within the International Telecommunication Union European Broadcasting Area or member countries of the CoE, even if they are situated outside the European Broadcasting Area; provision of a national broadcasting service: Organizations must provide a broadcasting service of national character and importance in their country, authorized by competent authorities; varied and balanced programming catering to all sections of the population, including minority interests; substantial proportion of programs; virtually all national households should be able to receive their major radio and/or television program service with satisfactory technical quality; independence from sports rights agencies and, finally, accession states must be able to fulfil membership obligations. These include contribute to program exchanges, acting on the basis of solidarity and good faith, being compliant with the EBU statutes and rules, prevent prejudicial initiatives and provide necessary information to the EBU and, lastly and most interesting to this analysis, furthering its purposes. In between these purposes we can find the promotion of PSM, such as radio and television, as well as values related to PSM such universality, independence and diversity; promotion of values related to a democratic society and its progression, such as freedom of expression and information; promotion of liberty and diversity of the media, facilitating the unrestricted dissemination of information and ideas, and fostering the unrestricted development of viewpoints; utilizing and advancing information and communication technology to uphold the universal right to freely express, seek, receive, and share information; fostering cultural diversity, encouraging

intercultural dialogue and interactions to advance tolerance and solidarity; safeguarding and advancing Europe's cultural legacy while promoting the growth of its audiovisual content; strengthening the identity of communities, enhancing social cohesion, and fostering the inclusion of all individuals, groups, and communities; and meeting the public's demands for diverse, high-quality programs in the realms of information, education, culture, and entertainment through the creation and distribution of a broad spectrum of content (European Broadcasting Union, 2023).

But these are only the formal legal conditions of membership in the EBU, concerning standards of broadcasting, compliance with regulations, and technical provisions. In practice, while these criteria on paper may look rather simple, Eurovision participation contains more complex and subtle aspects, with nationalism, culture, and values playing a great role in it within a hierarchical frame dominated by Western values. That is realized through judging criteria, voting patterns, general aesthetic preference, and the very essence of the structure and voting mechanism of the competition, which is persistently partial to Western type and content. The jury system, made up of music industry professionals coming from different countries, often epitomizes Western standards of musical and performance excellence, to say nothing of the fact that even public voting is likely to entrench these biases. This might be a challenge for countries from Eastern Europe, the Balkans, or other regions with other cultural traditions. On one hand, they want to present their authentic cultural expressions, while on the other hand, there exists the need to mold and frame entries according to tastes and expectations predominantly shaped by a Western aesthetic and jury, something that has been changing over time with almost all of Eastern Europe represented in Eurovision and the voting being opened to all the world (Eurovision, 2024). Still, this balancing act often means subtler negotiations and compromises, whereby countries try to seek favourable recognition without trading off their cultural identities. This would mean the countries that fall beyond the Western cultural circle would need more effort to gain the same momentum in praise and appreciation. It has also become, bit by bit, something more than just a show: a stage for fostering cohesion and ideals throughout Europe. It encourages the participating countries to espouse vital values such as inclusivity,

diversity, and respect for human rights. A wish to succeed in Eurovision can be yet another step closer to integration into the European community among would-be EU states by showing their attitude toward shared values throughout the continent. On his book *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*, Vuletic (2018) touches exactly on these points, arguing that Eurovision exudes a certain set of values which are intrinsic to the contest and are followed by its member-states, which I will lean into to support my theory.

Firstly, the term 'diversity' has acquired importance when the EU broadened its scope to more social issues than those narrowly conceived when the EU was established largely as an economic union. Successively, EU law extended its scope of applicability to incorporate basic rights and protections of minorities. For this reason, Europe, in light of the above understanding, has felt the need for policies which would accommodate diversity and combat discriminatory practices. EU economic policies simultaneously facilitated more migration within Europe. Generally speaking, as barriers to the movement of people between countries fell, along with increases in job and higher educational opportunities, more people began moving within the continent. What has emerged is an enriching intra-European migration with a diverse range of cultural influences and views.

Much like the SOC and with a continuing trend of development regarding expanding the EU's legal competence to include diversity in the form of fundamental rights, the ESC came about to reflect that very development, embracing the EU's favourite principle- diversity. While Eurovision has consistently displayed artists who have gained international popularity, the post-Cold War era is a period in which more conscious acknowledgment of migration effects the competition. Artists from various cultural backgrounds came to the fore and represented the multicultural face of contemporary Europe. Meanwhile, issues of diversity are an ever-more pressing concern in European societies and in their national broadcasters. Eurovision stands as a beacon for cultural exchange and social cohesion. This story of ESC diversity goes back to the Cold War era, when racial diversity was already a fact, with non-white artists often representing countries with colonial pasts, if anything because of the moral ambiguity

of this fact. In addition, EU expansion to CEE countries catalysed the growth of immigrant communities in Western Europe from these regions, driven by intra-EU migration. In addition, the Roma, often targeted by right-wing populist groups because of their alleged refusal to integrate, were one of the groups moving westward from the CEE countries during the time of EU expansion (Vuletic, 2018, p. 166). Similar to LGBTQIA+ visibility within the ESC, which was developing in conjunction with significant changes to the competition format. While the ESC started to be organized in larger and more impressive arenas, on screen, the LGBTQIA+ community became more represented, the tendency kept growing with the introduction of televoting. Changes happened in a broader framework of developments in society: the struggle for queer rights in Europe, especially in the EU, became stronger and louder. This changing scene was reflected in the proactive stance taken on issues such as discrimination-the inclusion of anti-discrimination measures featured in the Treaty of Amsterdam-but it was through non-member states of the EU that moves towards queer representation within the ESC became advanced, pointing to a complex interplay between LGBTQIA+ visibility and geopolitics within the contest (Vuletic, 2018, p. 171).

This makes the representation of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Eurovision entries of CEE countries a strategic way to present these countries as being more inclusive, more LGBTQIA+ friendly, than perhaps the actual political and social climates were. This framing served to position these nations as defending the values embraced by the EU, even though most Western European countries had actually done more to institutionalize LGBTQIA+ rights since 1990. Of course, it is also important to note that there has been some unevenness regarding progress on LGBTQIA+ rights in Western Europe. Unlike accession conditions placed on CEE states, member states of Western Europe who joined the EU before 1995 did not have specific standards set regarding LGBTQIA+ rights. However, and as Vuletic (2016) denotes, language is one exception to this norm. 'With the abolition of the language rule in 1999, most entries were subsequently performed in English: the original emphasis in the ESC rules on promoting national diversity in the contest was thus lost' (p.176). This was one such shift away from

linguistic diversity as a method by which to ensure and promote a celebration of both national languages and cultures that has changed the contest dynamic.

The author further claims that over time, commercialization has developed to be one of the salient features and values of Eurovision. Especially during the Cold War era, the reason given for the withdrawal of various national broadcasting organizations from the ESC was often based on issues of the commercialization of the contest and its cost. While there were indeed political and programmatic reasons as well, the cost factor was a big stumbling block. To address these financial burdens and make ESC more viable, a set of measures were enacted over the years, including participation fees in 1973 that had the intention of easing the burden on host broadcasting organizations, commercial cooperation with record companies to finance the context in 1983 that coincided with the deregulation of media markets in Western Europe and the proliferation of commercial television broadcasters, direct sponsorship from global grands beginning in 1991, and a set of other modern commercial measures, such as advertising and branding, and the introduction of televoting, sale of CD compilations featuring all entries from the respective year, the introduction of a generic logo with a heart in the 'v' in Eurovision that is adaptable to display the flag of the host country, upgrade in the venue selection to include concert halls and public arenas along with the sales of tickets for the live event were all measures to enhance the contest commercial appeal as well as reduce the financial burden to host broadcasting organizations (Vuletic 2018, p. 178). The composition of the ESC representatives led to appropriate questions on whose interest they actually represented-commercial entities, the national broadcaster, the public, or a mixture of interest from these stakeholders (Vuletic, 2018, p. 187). With the persistent commercialization of the ESC, one was left with the question: What or who was actually represented in the event of competition as national representation? All in all, this whole contest represents the general trend in the industry of commercialization of media, and it became crucially important to adapt to new economic realities while preserving the essence and spirit of the ESC.

Despite the evident move toward commercialization since 1989, its value as an economic enterprise was still questionable at this point. In contrast, the creation of the

ESC initially corresponded with Eurovision Network's primary objective: to stimulate co-operation between public broadcasters in order to share the load (and expense) of television productions. Nevertheless, it also attracted a lot of criticism for imposing significant financial burdens on national broadcasting organizations. Although Celine Dion's success in 1988 had marked a breakthrough, the ESC was never quite able to launch its contestants to international success. This hindered established artists from competing. A step further in this line of reasoning, for national broadcasters, hosting the ESC proved a varied financial investment. Even if it supplied them with priceless experience in staging an event viewed across the world and strengthened their position within the television business, some public broadcasters suffered a financial burden, while others could profit from it. With regard to the commercial effect that the event had on the host cities, it varied; for already established tourist destinations, the increase in visitor numbers was quite small, while for smaller cities it usually gains a lot in terms of international publicity. Yet, the most significant benefits existed for those states that positioned the contest as a means of rebranding and repositioning of cultural and political discourses, which is most vividly present among East European hosts since 2002, though sometimes it echoed political problems more in international life in some countries (Vuletic, 2018, p. 187). In that respect, branding initiatives were one evidence of an increasingly high priority given to marketing and image-building.

Finally, Vuletic contends that democracy is the ultimate central value of ESC. Notably, ESC and CoE share a deep-seated historical linkage which underlines the overlap between cultural diplomacy and European unification. Though distinct organizations with different mandates, their interaction and influence they have exerted on one another have served to change Europe's cultural topography and create meaning itself for democratic values (Vuletic, 2018, pp. 3-4, 36). Although founded in 1950, the EBU became an organization immediately after the CoE was established as a forerunner in European cultural cooperation. The EBU did not depend on any previously formed organization and thus, alongside the CoE, they initiated their activities in European cultural cooperation much earlier than the other organizations which later united to form the contemporary EU or developed their cultural policies. The close relations

between EBU and CoE were further manifested when, in 2004, a reference of the latter was incorporated into the statutes of the former. This indeed reflects an important role played by the CoE towards facilitation of cultural co-operation that assisted the early Eurovision Network development. Also in 2011, the CoE and EBU signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which is indicative of an interest being taken in standard-setting activities and-more significant for further development-in areas related to human rights protection and consistent with greater European values: 'both parties agree to engage in standard–setting activities. The EBU should pursue further and more consequential actions related to the protection of human rights, it should use recent actions taken by the International Olympic Committee [...] in order to undertake more consequential efforts related to human rights protection (Dubin, Vuletic & Obregón, 2023, p. 45). In this respect, and after a series of scandals regarding vote manipulation in national finals, the EBU organizing the ESC attempted to safeguard the credibility of the competition. Most significantly, it enacted a rule of three years' suspension of the national broadcasting corporations guilty of manipulating votes, thus demonstrating the seriousness with which the EBU approached democratic principles within the Eurovision context. It is equally specific to the instances at the European Court of Human Rights, a body under the CoE, and it is even invoking the European Convention on Human Rights, an instrument under the CoE scope, so to say (Vuletic, 2018, p.191).

Yet, the democratic linkage of the ESC has also been scrutinized. This can be especially said to be in relation to entries selected democratically unclear through inner-circle within national broadcasters. Such practices have often formed the object of popular disapproval and are a number of suspicions as to the integrity of the democratic process. Indeed, debates about public voting for the ESC since 1989 illustrated democratic deficiencies within liberal democracies and the EU itself, and questioned to what degree political clout and citizen engagement national broadcasters had in their choices and results at the ESC. This could be explained by the fact that the ESC enjoyed a privileged status as the only example of direct democracy within cultural diplomacy, with the involvement of the public in participant selection and winner determination distinguishing it from other international events. In those countries with at least liberal

democratic principles inside the EBU, several questions remained over just how transparent and inclusive their respective broadcasting bodies really were (Vuletic, 2018, p. 192). Just as the EU debates on successive treaty reforms that increase popular participation in the EU decision-making process and introduce transparency in voting, so it was within the ESC that a similar debate emerged between those supported the full restitution of public voting and those who believed expert input from music industry professionals provided an independent check on popular opinion. A key divergence, however, lies in how the ESC and EU's voting systems were set up to deal with the differences in population size among the member states: whereas this was accounted for in decision-making in the EU through mechanisms such as qualified majority voting, in addition to seats in the EP being allocated according to population, the ESC maintained the principle of one vote per participating state (Vuletic, 2018, p. 192).

The ESC gained symbolic meaning for what happened during the democratization processes of Portugal and Spain in the 1970s, but especially for those CEE countries which were shaking off the shackles of the Cold War. A case in point includes countries like Ukraine, freed from its authoritarian regimes, which find solace in the symbolic power of ESC during the struggles for democratic transition. In the meantime, in authoritarian regimes which were EBU members, government control over broadcasters proceeded unabated, although and despite the EBU's reputation as champion of democracy and European values, it 'sought to distance itself from the human rights abuses, noting that the ESC is an apolitical event and essentially washing it hands of what it seemed to consider a domestic political matter' (Dubin, Vuletic & Obregón, 2023, p. 38). Although it did seem that the vote represented the opinion of their respective nations, such votes were made not through governmental or EBU wishes, but rather national broadcasting companies, juries and the people. The EBU and its broadcasters-with their public service mandates-are working for independence from governmental interference and commercial pressures. This is thus naturally the case, as governments neither wanted to be associated with such a contest perceived to be incompetent; this perception was particularly made after a country recorded poor performances in the ESC. In many cases, government attitudes would easily change as

soon as a state emerged the winner since the organization of the event would require financial and logistical endorsements, availing an avenue to pursue cultural diplomacy initiatives.

Meanwhile, the concept of the ‘Big Four', extended later to the 'Big Five' by the return of Italy to the ESC in 2011, was created in 2004 to secure the representativity of the largest states in the ESC, to the detriment of the democratic principle of equality. These states, whose public broadcasters are considerable financial contributors to the EBU, would be excluded from the semi-finals. This may have had a knock-on effect on viewer and commercial revenue for the final event. However, while the concept of the 'Big Five' was by no means new within the EBU (and thus drew on historical precedent from the Cold War era) its introduction was intended to keep the major states represented. Participation in the 'Big Five'-despite the direct entry into the final-did not always translate into notable success for their entries (Vuletic, 2018, p. 193).

> The increasing commercialization of the ESC and the social diversity promoted through the contest’s entries after 1989 both highlighted the ESC’s fraught relationship with democratic values. Throughout its history, the ESC also grappled with issues of democracy through its voting system, especially the inclusion of public voting in the national selections and the final itself (Vuletic, 2018, p. 189)

The post-Cold War period in Europe was marked by debates on what actually constituted 'European values', ambiguity as to the very concept of 'Europe' and related principles that was also manifested in the ESC. While the EBU tried to articulate these values in terms of cultural diversity, human rights, commercialization, and liberal democracy, it did not go unrecognized that very often member states broadcasting entities deviated from these ideals, especially if they were not part of the historical 'European family of civilised members'. It served as a platform to extend European values, was seen as consolidating liberal democracy for those who already were under these values, and the 'savage' regimes which were authoritarian in nature would have to submit themselves to the values of democracy (Vuletic, 2018, p. 199).

> Democracy promotion serves as a tool for the pursuit of economic self-interest on the part of the international system’s most economically powerful states.

> What is rather interesting in this debate is the addition of a cultural dimension in denouncing democracy promotion as the attempted Westernization of non-Western peoples. Consequently, it has been argued that democracy promotion essentially amounts to a form of 'neo-colonialism' within the international society (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 79)

Although the author portrays these set of values that are shown in Eurovision, I aim to show that these set of values are more politicized and instrumentalized to serve a purpose: induce the new standard of Europeanness to all countries that participate in the ESC. As shown previously, these values are in the basis of the purposes of the EBU, a western-dominated institution, and they should be followed by its member-states. For the hegemonic western countries that have won the majority of the times, (some) have a direct pass to the final in the form of the 'Big Five' and usually gather the majority of the points, this is guaranteed, but for the marginalized countries it is a constant struggle and push to prove their Europeanness.

Comparing the old SOC and 'Europeanness' as a possible new SOC, we can detect some similarities: both are assumptions made by westerners based on their cultural values that helps to categorize those who belong to a certain society and those who do not based on those assumptions. It is not a coincidence that the countries that impose this 'new' standard in the twenty-first century are the same ones that imposed the SOC in the last two centuries to be a part of the society of states. Much like the first steps of the contemporary international society, it was first reserved for westerners that slowly expanded to those who were 'uncivilized' but had a certain degree of 'development' (for instance the European eastern enlargement in comparison to the 'uncivilized' Japan or China). Once again, and if we remember Bowden's words regarding the purpose of these standards, in the name of inclusion, the standard first divides and then separates so then it is possible to exclude or coerce to conform (Bowden, 2014, p. 629). The reason why 'Europeanness' has become a new SOC in the Eurovision context is that it can easily be used as a criterion not only for conditionality regarding membership in the contest, but also being one step closer to the 'European values', and hence closer to the 'civilised family of states'. Because the concept of 'Europeanness' sets benchmarks against which all can be assessed, it naturally generates a performance hierarchy among states: those

who are 'European', those who are worthy of one day becoming 'European' and those who are not. That tendency is endlessly reproduced as the concept evolves itself and as the EU and the ESC advances further East and perhaps to places that are not geographically categorised as Europe. Like in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ESC Member States had to define the conditions under which they would admit candidate states. As a result, European states which aspire to belong to the 'European family' and the EU try to meet the cultural criteria associated with 'Europeanness', namely diversity, commercialization and democracy. Like the SOC, 'Europeanness' is an expression of the assumptions used to distinguish those that belong to the expanding EU from those that do not. Those who would fulfil these cultural conditions set by the Western European states will have a bigger chance of being brought inside while those which do not conform will be left outside (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 81). Much as the distinction between 'Civilized', 'Uncivilized/Barbarian' and 'Savage' that categorized the group's access to the society of states, the Eurovision separates the countries in 'European', 'Eastern' and 'non-participant':' European' compared to 'Civilised' if it corroborates their political, economic and cultural values and ideals of 'Europe'; 'Eastern' compared to 'Uncivilized/Barbarian' if it has the potential to meet these criteria but their norms and values do not quite align yet with the 'European' ones, and 'non-participant' compared to 'Savage' in the sense that it has no reflection of 'European' values and thus does not deserve to be part of the Eurovision and the EU. 'Consequently, the democratization of the 'barbarians' (former communist and post-Soviet states) became an accepted and necessary component of international behaviour. Peace, stability and predictability in international relations could only be achieved through the democratization of the non-democratic 'Other' (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 79).

In this perspective, Eurovision excludes those who are not considered worthy of being part of the 'European family', and 'Eastern' is categorized as a 'variant of third world—and hence a space under Western tutelage' (Kuus, 2004, p. 475) which allows the maintenance of a Western hegemony in the contest. In fact, if we draw the literature on voting blocs on Eurovision, we can see a clear predominance of these countries when

it comes to winners (Yair, 1995, p. 156). Even if the East enlargement allowed those countries to have a winning streak during one decade (from 2001 to 2011 with some exceptions), we can see a clear returning of a western supremacy from 2012 onwards. In the realm of the ESC, just like the enlargement of the EU and NATO (Kuus, 2004) there exists a persistent dichotomy between East and West. While certain Eastern European segments, notably the EU accession nations, ardently compete to affirm their European credentials, others, like the founding member States, enjoy the privilege of being deemed 'fully European' and even judge those who do not, specifically Russia, who remains viewed as not yet meeting the standards for complete European acceptance. This notion of Eastern Europe persists due to its adaptability, serving the convenient constructs of both Western and Eastern European perceptions of Europe. The idea of Eastern Europe requiring guidance from the European continent has long been identified as a generalized 'other,' integral to Europe's self-conception, not entirely foreign but situated as a transitional zone between Europe and Asia, regarded as a learner. Bessis advocates that the West needs both the ones that are closely (and culturally) related to them 'since it is by their resemblance that the power and seductiveness of the West can be measured' and the ones that are culturally distant from them 'since this allows them to construct their own archaeology by identifying incomplete versions of themselves' (Bessis, 2003, p. 191).

This disconnection from the intricacies of CEE countries further occurs with the goal of working out the legacies of communism but puts this region again into the hands of the Western sphere. The EU expansion narrative represents East-Central Europe as taking its journey toward the West under western mentorship. This suggests an evolution from 'Eastern' to 'European', contingent on accepting the Western norms (Kuus, 2004, p. 475) or in other words to be selected to participate in Eurovision and to be able to reciprocate the Western norms on stage, namely diversity, commercialization and democracy. This Otherness is not exclusively a burden of the Western gaze but a signification internalized by East-Central Europeans themselves. The story of peripheral Europe in continuous search for membership and an external Europe excluded from membership discussion is literally surfacing not only from Western Europe but also from

within East-Central Europe. These dynamics of Eurovision underpin the continuous negotiation, by the participating countries, in the fields of identity, inclusion, and processes of Europeanization-areas that represent broader cultural, political, and historical complexities within the European landscape.

The economic and legal transformations precipitated by capitulations in the context of the expansion of the European SOC symbolized the transformation of non-Western nations into replicas of the West. This way, Western expansion shifted the definition of 'civilisation' from being primarily rooted in religious and cultural values to assessing a state's capacity to adhere to the principles of international law. The SOC, therefore, became a convenient tool of trade and communication with its functioning pivot in the machinery of the Westphalian system. In addition, these transformations were precipitated by practical as well as the philosophical issues posed by the global diffusion of the Western power. On the practical level, the norm was confronted by the challenge of safeguarding lives, liberty, and property of the Western citizens in non-Western territories. Philosophically, it was for the determination of which country had to be given legal recognition and legal personality in the international law book list (Fidler, 2001, p. 141). The standard account, addressing these challenges, required restructuring of non-Western government, legal system, economic framework, and societal structures to the standard provided by the West, which has left an indentation in the non-Western areas of governance, law and economics. The latter criterion was whether a non-Western government was sufficiently stable to undertake international commitments and to extend adequate protection for the life, liberty, and property of foreigners. Significantly, the SOC did not require particular governmental forms nor did it impose the same treatment of nationals as Western norms required. It did not insist on total Westernization but adopted an openly Westphalian one, which put an emphasis on the capacity to function properly in the international system and society. That being said, the cultural reach was not the its main purpose. Even if the enforcement of European standards in non-European regions led to a cultural clash, pitting fundamental European practices against those of non-European societies, it was a pragmatic tool to achieve concrete European goals in the context of the last two centuries. Under the old

SOC, non-European communities were compelled not just to adopt European regulations but also to assimilate European values, ethics, economic principles, and trade methods associated with liberalism and capitalism. Consequently, this standard became regarded, among its multiple roles, as a tool for the expansion of capitalism and the safeguarding of its operations in foreign territories (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 78).

The world we have evolved into is very complex one, and so are the ways that new SOC has to reinvent itself to stay relevant as a mechanism of hegemony and domination. A new SOC emerges, and I argue that the Europeanness that operates in the ESC might have bigger aims and bigger impacts on the European (regional) international society. But first, it is important to elaborate on how it translates into practice.

3.3. Europeanness on the Eurovision stage and its impact

The ESC is incomparably more than a musical competition; it is rather a specific platform that knits together music, aesthetics, and socio-cultural dynamics through which 'Europe' articulates its quest for unity. Based on Allatson's (2007) work, the aesthetic of Europeanness within the Eurovision would be characterized by its musical and sartorial elements that do not merely entertain audiences but rather shape the very essence of the European unity project. This celebration of Europeanness is further anything but mere entertainment, it is deeply embedded in the ESC's fabric and is a clue to its meaning and governing imaginary.

Several markers constitute Europeanness (or the Euro kitsch drive as Allatson (2007) puts into words) which defines the particular aesthetic and cultural effect of the ESC. First of all, it surpasses the linguistic and cultural barriers because through the simplification in the lyrics of the songs, participants are able to express their feelings universally, without the obstacles of a specific language that not everyone understands. Further, the Europeanness manifests itself through performances with an ethno-national stereotyping bias, where participants present performances of traditional folk

styles and dress that represent their 'national' identity to familiarized-exotic tastes. The other manifestation of this Europeanness consciousness is the combination of tradition with a cover of contemporary pop music, teasing audiences with both the 'utterly unknown' and the familiar (p. 94), dynamic that disarms radical alterity through a process of exoticizing the familiar and familiarizing the exotic. The broader social and cultural relevance of staged 'Europeanness' in the contest rests on it acting as a mechanism of management for cultural and ethnic contact, extending contemporary theoretical explanations of hybridity or creolization beyond entertainment. In this context, one may view Europeanness as a device that domesticates radical differences- a safe space where diverse cultures are pacified by the perception of a cultural and entertaining event and can mix without succumbing to either the transcultural or ethno-national conflict (Allatson 2007, p. 93).

This safe space can be a mere glass wall because much as Buzan's (2010) syncretist view of the IS (where its expansion was done on the basis of cultural transmission during the expansion process), the concept of 'Europeanness', particularly as represented on the Eurovision stage, is a dynamic and evolving standard that reflects broader geopolitical and cultural tensions between Western Europe and its Eastern counterparts that is perpetually reshaped by both the dominant Western powers and the historically marginalized Eastern European nations. This constant negotiation between identity and cultural expression is highly represented in the duality between what is perceived as 'pop' and 'ethno' performances at Eurovision. The index marker setting the conditions for what is 'pop' comes from Western Europe, associated with modernity, progress, and a universalized notion of 'civilised' culture. Everything else is disowned to be 'ethno(pop)'. The former has its universal appeal and globalized sound; it is quite often seen as an embodiment of this very Western ideal. On the other hand, historically suspicious of Western cultural and political hegemony, Eastern European countries position their participation in Eurovision with a mixture of pop elements and ethno-cultural ones. The performances underlined an appeal to the unique national identities with elements mentioned above, while seeking an adjustment to Western-defined standards of Europeanness, a duality that more than reflecting cultural diversity,

attests to hierarchy dynamics within Europe. CEE countries can also use ethno elements to resist Western homogenization while while bridging pop influences to signal membership in the greater European project. This can result in both the 'subjectivational practice' mentioned by Kuus (2004), where countries orientate the 'other' and occidentalise themselves as the West of the 'other' in order to prove their Europeanness but also in practices of self-orientalisation for making themselves distinct through the strategy of exoticizing the familiar and familiarizing the exotic. It is in this sense that the Eurovision stage becomes an area where the notion of Europeanness is contested and re-defined, acted out between Western cultural hegemony and Eastern European resistance or adjustment.

The historical success of the ESC is also inextricably linked to its ability to sort out cultural unification, not least regarding its ambition to include ex-Communist states. The ease with which this has been achieved testifies to the extraordinary skills that the ESC has developed in dealing with cultural unification within the 'European' values and norms that have been debated so far. Not least, the ESC explicitly – and unequivocally – states the pan-European dimension of identity and borderless dialogue as its very reason for being. Contestants are charged with representing their national distinctions in a manner that appeals to a wider European audience while they operate within a familiarized-exotic paradigm and struggle to differentiate themselves from the familiarized competition (Allatson, 2007, p. 93). This novelty underlines ESC's role as a catalyst in bringing about a cultural unity and dialogue in a diverse European landscape that ultimately aims at unity through homogenization of cultural values based on the western view of the world. The aspirational vision of unity by ESC, as revealed in its track record in fostering ethno-national harmony and cooperative relationship underlines Europeanness as a practical venture. This drive thus acts as one of raising consciousness and tempering conflict, while creating the possibility for diverse communities to harmonize and to envision themselves in a greater whole within a connected space which nurtures peace amidst a feeling of bounded unfamiliarity. These scenarios, characterized by the fusion of language, social dynamics, and culture without emphasizing an initial sense of purity or essence, mark the post-colonial era — a global

landscape shaped by cultural interconnections rooted in colonial expansion, now framed by the structures of multinational capitalism. Likewise, Europeanness operates on a transnational capitalism platform which is constructed from the same continent that also historically gave birth to most of the global empires, hence setting the fundamental framework for linguistic and cultural amalgamation (Allatson, 2007, p. 95).

But how is the Europeanness consciousness translated into reality, outside of the Eurovision stage? What are the consequences of actively aligning with this standard? As previously shown in the literature review, Eurovision is often interpreted as a tool of diplomacy (whether cultural or public) that impacts countries and EU's image. It is then not a coincidence that the EU tries to associate itself with Eurovision, even if indirectly. It has even funded studies on 'how Eurovision has affected and reflected cultural, economic, political and social change in post-war Europe [and] on pertinent current issues including democracy, integration, nationalism, prosperity, sexuality, technology and war. Furthermore, it addressed how Eurovision has reflected changing ideas about the values that are considered integral to Europeanism' (European Commission, 2016). The possibility of one day belonging to the EU induces hope in states that aim to belong to the European family of states, such as the President of Kyrgyzstan saying 'We are dreaming of being part of Europe' (Hudson, 2000, p. 411).

When a country aligns itself with European values on the Eurovision stage, it can be a strong symbol of shared ideas and principles across the continent. Presentation on stage goes far beyond the captivating audience for public voting. A European international mega event that is formed, forms and informs images of Europe on the basis of its most powerful members also urges countries to symbolically prove to 'Europe' that they are worthy of belonging there. For instance, 'while an entry not sung in a state's native language and without folk elements may appear non-national or international in style, it can also be symbolic of a desire for European integration or international cooperation in the right political context (Vuletic, 2018, p. 305). A powerful stimulus is thus generated when a Eurovision winner or participant conveys values like diversity, inclusion, tolerance, human rights, democracy, and commercialization. This might be voiced at a grand international platform that is generally widely recognized by

the significant leaders and policymakers of the EU and EBU, and to that effect they may congratulate the country-participant for its commitment towards shared values. This comes in the form of congratulatory remarks, social media platforms, formal communication, and notes of appreciation, taking note of these countries for standing up for the ideals of Europe. This is how EU leaders enforce the culture in the setting of Europe through recognition and celebration of countries who push forward European values through Eurovision. By such acknowledgement, reinforcement of diplomatic bonds comes along, and a sense of belonging to a community with a shared purpose. Examples of these situations can be shown when the former EU Commissioner Olli Rehn congratulated Serbia's win at Eurovision by stating 'This is a European vote for a European Serbia (Tzortzi, 2007), or Ursula von der Leyen stated 'Tonight your song won our heart. We are celebrating your victory all over the world. The EU is with you' (EU NeighboursEast, 2022) upon Ukraine's victory in 2022. Likewise, Germany's former minister for Foreign Affairs Guido Westerwelle hoped that the 2012 ESC (the subsequent year after Azerbaijan's victory at the ESC) would be an opportunity to 'promote our democratic values' (as cited in Vuletic, p. 197). An even more substantial statement would be the former President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso after a meeting with the president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev:

> I look forward to continuing our cooperation and to bringing Azerbaijan and the EU even closer together. I think we can be inspired by Azerbaijan's impressive victory in the Eurovision Song Contest last month, which was a first step in that regard. The fact that a majority of the Europeans voted for Azerbaijan in this European contest showed the sincere good will there is in Europe regarding Azerbaijan. I know that this will be a year in which the international spotlight will be in your country, and I am sure that you will use this time to show commitment to the modernisation of your country and also how committed you are on our European common values (as cited in Vuletic, pp. 196-197)

When EU leaders applaud or congratulate a country on the Eurovision stage for alignment with European values, they do so by implicitly acknowledging a country's pursuit of embracing and upholding the very principles that lie at the core of the EU, almost to the extent of hinting that a country is in shared values with the EU and perhaps

ripe enough to begin the journey into deeper integration. Whereas accession negotiations with the EU are indeed complex processes fraught with a host of political, economic, and social considerations, one important aspect of the negotiations involves lining up the candidate country's legal framework, institutions, and societal norms to conform to those of the EU, especially regarding alignment in cultural settings referred to under the *acquis Communautaire* and in the Copenhagen criteria. Applying European values, as represented on the stage of Eurovision, can be understood as a positive determinant of the readiness of the country against the criteria of EU membership; congratulations from EU leaders can only become evidence that the EU does indeed appreciate a new actor, also as one hinting that this may put it on the track for more serious discussions over potential accession. While these congratulations cannot mean the explicit guarantee of EU accession negotiations, they create a positive atmosphere and thus provide a background for further engagement both from the country in question and from the EU side, underlining that shared values represent a motivational basis for European integration and opened up a possibility of future more intensive cooperation and partnership.

On 30th August 2013, the EC issued a press release where it announced a close cooperation between the EU and the EBU on promoting freedom of expression and PSM in European Neighbourhood and accession countries. This way, the EU recognized the EBU as a pivotal partner in advancing its core values, especially when it comes to fostering these norms on the less civilised Other. 'Independent and sustainable PSM promotes freedom of expression and values which are essential for well-informed democracies. We look forward to expanding our work in partnership with the Commission not only in the accession countries but also in other EU neighbouring countries', stated Commissioner Füle on this partnership (European Commission, 2013). The same document still highlights that the EBU is well-equipped to support public broadcasters in navigating reforms with its wealth of expertise and experience, notably shown by the EBU's Partnership Programme, co-funded by the European Commission for the Enlargement region, that has been instrumental in strengthening EBU Members in Western Balkan countries preparing for EU accession.

On July 24, 2012 the EBU and the EU signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding', where both parties understand PSM as a driving cataclysm that promotes full societal and cultural diversity within a democratic society and by showing commitment to 'expand and protect freedom of expression and media pluralism, entrench democratic values […] [and that] [i]n accordance with the Copenhagen accession criteria, the countries aspiring to become members of the EU are expected to demonstrate a credible commitment and track-record in promoting the fundamental rights and freedoms' (European Commission and the European Broadcasting Union, 2012). This document blatantly exposes the importance of cultural conditionality for acceding the EU by making the EBU a driving force for accession countries 'that will bring the candidate countries and potential candidates closer to EU accession'. One of the direct objectives of this document is to directly link the purposes and outputs of this memorandum to the Commission's annual Enlargement Strategy and Progress Reports, while also promoting 'approximation of regulatory frameworks with European standards and in transposing the EU's media-related acquis into national legislation'.

> Eurovision matters in contemporary Europe because culture legitimises political structures. Culture, in the sense of shared symbols that allow for membership of a particular self-defining group, shades into ideology when it provides a representation of what is, alongside a vision of what some people wish there to be. Culture provides a form of legitimacy for the social and political structures that exist to frame, govern and give expression to collective communities. It does so by aligning identities with these structures of governance so that, ideally, collectivities are never ruled by people who could be considered alien to the in-group. (Wellings & Kalman, 2019, p. 17)

3.4. Cultural Conditionality

According to Wellings and Kalman (2019), the European project had become 'a rather elitist adventure, essentially economic', and because of this, 'prosaic' and limiting view, it had left no room for enthusiasm, for the mobilisation of energies, or even, as

Delors put it, 'falling in love with Europe' (p. 2). Even if its truthfulness is debated, the famous words 'If I had to do it over again, I would begin with culture' are attributed to Jean Monnet, one of the key figures in the establishment of the EU. This section is dedicated to explore the concept of cultural conditionality, which derives from the concepts of conditionality in the context of EU accession and that will work closely with the SOC.

Much as the conditions to accede the EU have become more demanding and broader, I argue that these conditions have evolved more than just traditional conditions to involve cultural conditions, making a direct parallelism with the nature of the SOC. What I aim to assert is that, much like membership, political and economic conditionality, culture plays an important role as a condition to access the EU, and much of this cultural conditionality is expressed, executed and underpinned in and by Eurovision, a place where 'Europeanness' (understood as a modern SOC) projects Western views, norms and standards that aim to determine what countries are allowed into the modern civilized society of states (or the EU by other words). I base myself in Hearn's (2006) understanding of culture as 'the sum of mental phenomena that orient and structure life in social groups' (p. 170) that works together with politics to create an ideology of belonging as an aim to reference Eurovision as a cultural production that sustains and creates a particular form of European identity that coincides with the EU one, and thus, they work in favour of mutually promoting each other by forming symbiotic associations, even if they are two distinct entities.

Undoubtedly, culture does play a decisive role in the accession process of those aspiring to join the ranks of the EU. Besides conventional criteria of membership, political alignment, and economic stability, culture is a founding block that helps to constitute identities and values for the prospective member states. The inclusion of the cultural conditionality underlines the importance of the shared values and heritage within the process of integration and underlines the necessity of correspondence with the European cultural norms and traditions that carry such principles and policies as the possible SOC alternative, like democracy, commercialization and diversity form an organic part of the European identity. For accession countries, the adherence to these

cultural values primarily translates into commitment to those qualities which render a nation civilized and deserving of being admitted to a community of similar thinking states.

The enforcement of these standards demands administration, while continual progress in their fulfilment necessitates vigilant monitoring by a coalition of states already integrated into an international society, and in this case the (regional) international society is the EU and the coalition of states are the states that form it (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 76). Likewise, the continuous administration and monitoring translates into the congratulations and speeches that surround that represent the role of tutelage and sense of condescension that the West has exerted in the past and still does to this date. The EU actively administers the standards that aspiring states must meet to secure entry into these organizations/societies and diligently oversee their progress towards accession. Much like the old SOC, the formulation and implementation of behavioural standards presupposes the existence of a society of states intricately integrated into a broader international system. The acknowledgment of these standards by non-members results in a transformation of the society's boundaries, exemplified by the historical expansion of the European society of states into the contemporary global international society through the application of the SOC (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 76).

The EU is a manifestation of a regional international society that has a consolidated identity within the greater and more varied European international system. The expansion process is one of greater subjection of candidates to 'European standards' that enables the gradual expansion of the regional European international society and the transformation of this society into more consolidated whole. Consequently, and besides the political and economic ones, cultural criteria is also imposed on European countries that want to join the EU. Similar to SOC, this conditionality mirrors the criteria that separate those included in the EU enlargement from those excluded. Those which fulfil the standard of the EU conditionality enter the Union, while those which do not comply remain outside (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 81).

The EU and its members states position themselves as authoritative definers of standards, while also regulating and outlining different stages and levels of cooperation

between European and non-European states. To solidify the ever-growing conditions to which the outsiders must follow, the EU also invested in legal and judicial tools, such as new treaties, the *acquis Communautaire* and the Copenhagen Criteria, all of which echoes the imperial bureaucracy of the nineteenth century, reflecting an authoritative worldview and actions dictated by powerful political actors, particularly in the West (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 86). The Copenhagen Summit in 1993 represented a milestone in the accession process of the EU since it laid down for the first time the criteria under which countries could be admitted as new members. The criteria underline that applicants have to possess stable democratic institutions, a functioning market economy, and align themselves with the political, economic, and monetary union goals set out by the EU; while bearing a striking resemblance to the historical SOC (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 86) especially when document portrays the EU acts as a tutelage figure that 'trains, follows and gives guidance' to those trying to enter the group (European Comission, 2013). The fact that political and economic conditionality are mentioned proactively denote that culture will not surpass the importance of political and economic conditionality, but that does not mean that it does not have a place in EU negotiation processes. While not explicitly mentioning cultural aspects as a prerequisite for EU accession, the Copenhagen Criteria implicitly acknowledge their significance by emphasizing the importance of institutions that uphold democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the protection of minorities, all of which contribute to the broader cultural context of a candidate country aligning with European values and that are also an integral part of the EU's and ESC's identity or, in other words, to the Western liberal capitalist view of the world, meaning that the guidelines set forth during the Copenhagen Summit serve as a benchmark for EU's attempt to incorporate cultural conditionality.

While in Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier's (2004) study democratic and acquis conditionality are viewed mainly as instruments through which the EU influences domestic policy and reforms in CEE countries for eventual accession into the EU, this perspective frames these various tools as ends in themselves. They focus on how the EU uses conditionality as a tool to align the candidate countries according to the EU

legislative framework and democratic standards and, therefore, to meet the criteria for membership. According to the authors, conditionality is the most important tool through which the EU projects its governance beyond its boundaries and incorporates new members. Such conditions can, however, be thought of less narrowly as technical requirements and more in connection with a type of greater ideological project. The Copenhagen Criteria and the *acquis Communautaire* perhaps have less to do with rules or minimum thresholds for entry and more to do with carrying a particular vision of what it is to be part of Europe, itself hinged around a certain set of cultural values. In my alternative interpretation, these criteria are tools of proliferating a particular worldview that the EU desires to spread to candidate states. And so, I interpret the Copenhagen Criteria and the acquis as not just mechanisms of compliance with EU norms but devices of cultural and ideological alignment. The EU conditions can, thus, be seen as an endeavour to shape the legal-institutional frameworks of the candidate countries but also their social values and cultural orientations. Thus, in this sense, these criteria symbolize the intent of the EU to establish a common European identity through a certain view of Europe that is more than simple political and economic integration. We could go further to suggest that democratic and acquis conditionality are not only technical steps toward accession but have, instead, become part of a wider approach in creating a coherent European identity based upon common values and shared cultural principles. This perspective underlines how, for the EU, membership implies more than the fulfilment of a set of political and legal criteria but involves adherence to a deeper ideological and cultural project reflecting one specific vision of Europe. Consequently, the conditionality of the EU in this wider interpretation is simply a means to an end and that is to create a united Europe, united not only in terms of governance but also culturally as well as in values.

According to Slootmaeckers (2019), EU identity is conceptualized as a result of a network of relationships between Self and Other, each ruled by specific processes of differentiation. Whether one identity is more salient than the others depends on which Self/Other relation is emphasized and which process of differentiation is triggered. Othering theory offers insight into the construction of Self and Other, wherein the

former is defined in relation to the latter. It encompasses the act of delineation and distinction that separates 'us' from 'them'. Identity, as shaped by the Self, is never fixed or singular, but rather contextual and contingent on relational dynamics. The multifaceted nature of the Self means that different identities emerge depending on which aspects of the Self/Other relationship are emphasized in the processes of differentiation (p. 348). There are, according to the author, three distinct types of Othering processes that govern these Self/Other relationships, often intertwining in various combinations, which include geopolitical, normative, and temporal Othering. While geopolitical Othering constructs symbolic boundaries along the lines of security concerns and realpolitik, normative processes emphasize normative differences. Temporal Othering, by contrast relies on boundary construction and maintenance through the location of the Self and the Other in different temporalities where the Other is often backward or through the rejection of the Self's past versions. It is in the interaction of these processes that various Self/Other relations are constituted and maintained (Slootmaeckers, 2019, p. 351). The moment the Other accepts its positioning *vis-a-vis* the Self, the establishment and maintenance of symbolic boundaries or their accentuation require least effort. But this Self meets with resistance from the Other, which requires an additional effort of affirming the identity of the Self, and underlining the Other's differences; hence, an intensification of Othering.

With the end of the Cold War, if on one hand it rearranged the borders of European states, it also raised questions about what the EU's identity and purpose. The EU began, in this new environment, to face a twin challenge: one of creating a union of European states that would minimize the threat of security, and on the other hand, to define clear borders for the enlarged union. To address these challenges and to commit to its enlargement, it moved beyond its traditional temporal and geopolitical frameworks into embracing normative processes as integral parts of its identity construction. The recognition of democracy as a foundational principle was at the core of this, later supplemented by the emphasis on human rights and fundamental freedoms. These evolving principles reflected not only a commitment to shared values by the Union but also guiding criteria for expansion that, quite naturally, led to the

Copenhagen criteria. These criteria required candidate countries to have stable democratic institutions with respect for the rule of law and human rights as prerequisites EU membership (Slootmaeckers, 2019, p. 352). Subsequently, the Amsterdam Treaty of 1999 enshrined these normative foundations in the EU's legal framework, codifying the Copenhagen criteria as essential conditions for accession. The consolidated version of the TEU even states that '[a]ny European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union', article which, in turn, mentions that '[t]he Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail' (Official Journal of the European Union, 2012).

Whereby, the introduction of the Copenhagen criteria represented an important shift in how the EU framed its others, from temporally framing others to a more normative one. This kind of shift in framing called for a re-evaluation of the enlargement discourse. It was the development of the notion of 'Eastness' as a counterpart to the EU's 'Europeanness' accordingly to Kuus (2007). While the normative processes of Othering gained the upper hand, the geopolitical and temporal processes of Othering did not disappear but coexisted with the former, even showing a tension between the two. Whereas the criteria were, at least in principle, to serve as a yardstick for accession, geopolitical considerations more often than not dominated the decision of which countries would belong to this enlargement round. Perceived security risks because of conflict zones in the region permitted compromises on the strict application of normative standards, which entailed difficult interactions between security concerns and normative values. (Slootmaeckers, 2019, p. 354). Nonetheless, the reason why the Copenhagen Criteria and the other legal documents can be seen as cultural conditionality is because it serves as a tool of soft power that submits accession countries to the old and new 'European' norms of the standard of civilization. This fact also denotes that culture does play a role in European enlargement, even if it does not

surpass the importance of political and economic conditionality. Much as the concept of 'Europeanness', it operates as a benchmark to assess which countries are deemed culturally ready for 'European standards' after being 'guided' and 'warded' by those same countries. What I aimed to show is that Eurovision can be viewed as one of the mechanisms through which this cultural guidance and mentoring process occurs. Through participation in Eurovision, countries are both submitted to European norms, while also being able to shape it and even contest it.

The same idea can be applied to the *acquis Communautaire*. Like Fidler (2001) argues, Western nations used international law to impose policies, institutions and values embedded in Western Civilisation in the past, the *acquis Communautaire* serves the same purpose of operating as the international legal principle of civilizational harmonization that assists the SOC in materializing the EU (p. 139). Likewise, it mandated the reordering of non-Western world in the image of the West, meaning that the East 'Other' has now to comply to this document. The *acquis Communautaire* pierces State sovereignty and non-Western cultures more deeply than the mechanisms of the old SOC in the sense that it encompasses all parts of life, including culture itself. The set of EU legislation and regulations that follows represents the norms to be accepted by the countries, placing them more towards European integration. In distinguishing the countries that have accepted such a set of norms, the *acquis Communautaire* serves as a guideline on the readiness of countries for European standards and thus provides itself as a benchmark for assessment for candidate countries. Although culture per se definitely is not its main focus, it also provides an important mechanism regarding the assessment of alignment by the candidate member states in terms of 'Europeanness' with the core of democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. *Acquis Communautaire* represents the commitment of the EU to values that surpass traditional preoccupation with time and geopolitics in the simple investment of embedding such principles as integral parts of what the EU is, what criteria for its expansion would be, and making sure new members comply not only legally but also culturally and politically with the foundational values set for the Union. As the EU does this, it acts as a tutelage figure: providing training and guidance with oversight in candidate countries, a role

which continuous evaluation by the EU ensures that new members internalize values defining their view of 'Europeanness' fully.

> [O]ne of the lessons learned from the previous enlargements was that fundamental rights was insufficiently engaged within the pre-accession period. To overcome these issues, the enlargement strategy was altered to make the Copenhagen criteria a central feature of the enlargement process of the Western Balkan countries. This was achieved by introducing a chapter (Chapter 23) in the negotiation process that specifically deals with fundamental rights. This move made fundamental rights not just a precondition for membership applications, but a central part of the pre-accession negotiations, reinforcing the notion that to be fully European one must adhere to EU values. (Slootmaeckers, 2019, p. 354)

This far, the discussed relationship between the new SOC, referred here as 'Europeanness', and cultural conditionality within the Eurovision context is complex and involves more than mere performances. It is a reinforcing bond representative of a coming together of two different yet related poles, which constitute the two sides of the same coin in the making up of the accession process of countries joining the 'civilised European family of states'. Europeanness is a concept that disguises a number of norms, standards, and conditions; it gets a ringing meaning from those very countries that came together to establish the Westphalian system, and through Eurovision, extends these ever-evolving rules to the accession countries, marking the transition from a conception based purely on traditional geopolitical considerations to a more nuanced framework based on democratic values, human rights, and cultural integration. In return, these test countries which want to validate and belong to the European community. On the other hand, cultural conditionality is a tool for a systematic review of the extent to which applying member states indicate 'Europeanness' in distinguishing between countries which have submitted to these norms and standards and which, therefore, are closer to this highly desired status of European integration. The process involved compliance not only with the regulatory frameworks provided by bodies such as the EBU but also active engagement in public scrutiny and assessment. Candidate countries will face the intricacies of the Eurovision negotiations, meeting the regulations of EBU and trying to be a representative symbol of Europe to the rest of the world. But beyond

performances, it is a complex structure entailing diplomatic negotiations with membership with the EBU, the search for European leaders to gain approval, and even building a 'European' identity that one day might even translate into EU integration. Accession to Eurovision participation is more than musical expression; it forms part of a microcosm of the broader journey of accession. This calls for a collective effort in radiating and projecting the European values internally so that a close affinity can be attained among the participant nations.

4. Application

4.1. Serbia

The first country worth analysing is Serbia. Not only it has won recently, but it is also not part of the EU, which makes up a perfect a scenario to analyse how 'Europeanness' and cultural conditionality have been playing a role for Serbia in Eurovision and its journey on EU integration. It cannot go without saying that its recent troubled history inevitably influences how Europeanness is received in the contest.

4.1.1. Lane Moje

Yugoslavia was Eurovision's one and only Socialist state to ever take part in the contest. After severing ties with the Eastern Bloc, it sought closer connections with the West and NATO, a shift away from Soviet influence that allowed Yugoslavia to establish new relationships with Western countries, which allowed socialist Yugoslavia becoming one of the twenty-three founding members of the EBU, in 1950. It participated from 1961 to 1992 (with some absences in-between), until the calamity of the Yugoslav Wars led to a decade of isolation but the countries that disintegrated Yugoslavia were slowly integrated back into the contest. For Serbia's case, it re-entered the EBU in 2001 as a joint state with Montenegro, following the fall of the Milošević regime. This year also marked the start of the EU's support for the country after a decade of sanctions, wars, and isolation. The joint state competed in the ESC in 2004 and 2005, securing second place in Istanbul in 2004 after Ukraine's Ruslana. They did not participate in 2006 due to Montenegro's independence referendum and, since then, Serbia has participated until this present moment, with the climax of its victory on the year of its debut.

Two performances are specifically worth analysing, especially because it was when Serbia was best received and best evaluated in the contest and where 'Europeanness' and cultural conditionality really played a significant role in shaping the trajectory of the country in Eurovision: 'Lane Moje' and 'Molitva'. The first entry at Eurovision for Serbia and Montenegro as a Federation since the Yugoslavian wars

allowed Serbia and Montenegro to follow the broader strategy of reintegration into the European community after the turmoil caused by the Yugoslav Wars and subsequent international isolation. This entry was significant not only for its musical and production qualities but for symbolic reasons, too, in the country's efforts to 'Return to Europe' (Jordan, 2015) and thereby seeking to move beyond the shadows of its recent turbulent history.

Sending 'Lane Moje' as the ESC representative was a very symbolic choice by Serbia and Montenegro, since it was a ballad that combined elements of Balkan folk music with modern-day elements. With a song that could speak to their cultural heritage and artistic merits, in sending a ballad that fused Balkan folk music with a more contemporary flavor, the country tried to paint a new image of itself different from and finally new and positive to the rest of Europe for the first time since the recent Yugoslav War (Joksimović, 2004). By highlighting only the deeply personal and relatable experiences of love, loss and longing, which are universal and resonate deeply across cultures, Serbia tried to humanize its people (to show empathy toward them also in view of the European audience) and by doing so, reshape its reputation from a conflict-ridden area to a nation bearing rich, emotional, and cultural stories to tell.

The poetic verses, coupled with the melancholic melody, were written by Željko Joksimović himself and lyricist Leontina Vukomanović, and thus are filled with deep emotional undercurrents that reflect in the themes of yearning and nostalgia. Traditional instruments – flute and violin – give it an authentic ethnic feel while remaining modern to the core: a perfect blend that seamlessly bridges old and new. The fusion was symbolic of Serbia's attempt to connect the bridges of its historical European identity with its present aspirations, consolidating its position within the modern European cultural landscape. To base this on an effort for a 'Return to Europe', as Jordan (2015) would put into words, was to claim part of the greater European cultural community, assume its values, and contribute to its artistic landscape. They enjoyed an enormous success: the song 'Lane Moje' came in second place within 2004 ESC-something quite unexpected, which underlined all of a sudden the winning concept of Serbia and Montenegro during the time when the country was searching for its place

and urged to re-brand itself. One such positive reception was the significant building block in changing international opinion about Serbia and Montenegro, managing to show that this 'new' country could finally make its positive contribution to European culture and society.

Slowly delving into how Europeanness and cultural conditionality played a role in this case, 'Lane Moje' was an entry that heavily relied on negotiation of identity, perhaps even an attempt of nation-branding. According to Baker (2023), 'in the ESC, 'Balkan' musical practices were well-suited for capitalising on audiences' thirst for exoticism, but also carried high cultural risks lest they frame nations as 'backward' rather than as knowing, cosmopolitan purveyors of tradition' (p. 98) which is in line what I discussed previously about countries exoticizing the familiar and familiarizing the exotic, as well as their prompt to self-orientalisation. Presenting a pro-European identity in the Balkan region through music often involves reducing Orientalist elements in musical compositions and incorporating more Western influences, such as jazz and pop. On the other hand, and while not necessarily anti-European projecting a traditional and national image emphasizes cultural heritage The choice of clothes in which the performer will appear on stage during an ESC performance also performs this function: either a traditional costume or a combination of old and modern elements testifies to the mixture of Eastern and Western features. Contrarily, a thoroughly Western modern dress or even more outlandish fashion invites one into a shift away from both national and historical familiarity into some type of indefinable pan-European identity that is unpredictable in nature and anti-traditional or even anti-national for that matter, as part of a nationalistic discourse that refuses other ways of presentation of the nation (Khaze, 2019, p. 94).

In this landscape, where negotiation of identity can subtly dictate the perception of a whole country, Joksimović managed to negotiate and balance Serbia (and Montenegro's) image as European and Balkan in the context of the European IS. On its mission to reframe its international image of a warmonger, conflictual and destroyed country, to a serene, gentle, and peaceful nation and it succeeded at that by its staging and by blending the ethno genre with pop, which is Khaze's (2019) words, 'transcends

the East-West divide and blends the symbols, traditions and lived experiences of the two under one umbrella' (p. 93). This eclectic mixture thus served to bring to light the ability of Serbia and Montenegro to adapt and integrate into the contemporary European musical landscape. The composition of the song also comes quite close to Western musical aesthetics, with a melodic structure and orchestration appealing to broader European tastes. The staging was done in faded light and focused on earthy colours to enhance the intimate and introspective mood. The background featured abstract visuals and soft colours so as not to overwhelm but create an atmosphere that supported the music, very much a withheld approach to allow the emotional intensity of performance to take centre stage. Each detail participated in the creation of an identity based on the fabrication of an 'imagined' memory of the country, creating an image that others were assumed to want but at the same time an image of which it felt true love for its past and present self. Joksimović was accompanied by a small group of performers: a flutist, violinist, and backing vocals all in sleek, dark clothes, which echoed the overall dark tone of the song (Joksimović, 2004).

The members of his makeshift orchestra are adorned in an almost medieval-like attire, while Joksimović himself wears a contemporary, minimalist white suit, accented by an 'ethno' belt—a modern twist on traditional Serbian costume with a gold needle. By presenting himself as sophisticated and reserved through his impeccably styled hair, neatly trimmed beard and somewhat detached from the rest that was happening on stage (Joksimović, 2004), the Serbian team aimed to reshape the image of the Balkan/Serbian male through a modern and minimalist wardrobe, accessories, and makeup that brought back the idea of Serbia's medieval tradition and the Byzantine Empire, deliberately avoiding references to the Ottoman legacy often associated with the Balkans in a hope to legitimise its 'European' roots by idealising a shared common past. The visual identity, essential to the overall construction, is almost entirely derived from the memories of medieval Serbia. Joksimović's performance, embodying a gentle pastoral masculinity, has been interpreted as an attempt to reshape Western perceptions of Serbia following the Yugoslav wars.

The performance of 'Lane Moje' can be viewed as an act of eclecticism, a bridge between East and West carefully curated to appeal to the European audience whilst retaining its affinity with traditional Serbian cultural heritage. Serbia-Montenegro presented its image as modern and sophisticated-not entirely bereft of its heritage-appropriating itself as pro-European. This nation-building strategy sought to reinterpret the national image in a form palatable to contemporary European tastes. Symbolic of Serbia and Montenegro's desire to be considered part of united Europe, it legitimized that desire through its medieval pre-Ottoman roots. That falls into the category of 'flexible othering' and 'self-Occidentalisation' that Kuus (2004) mentioned.

Having this concern in mind, Serbia and Montenegro's main concern was to deliver a performance that was tangible to the audiences and resonated with its 'European' roots and not necessarily aiming already to fully commit to the European values that Eurovision exudes. There was no intention to show democracy as a value Serbia values, and much of the commercialization value resides in the country's acceptance that it started being a reality that they have to abide that was not present during its Yugoslavian times. However, a there could be an argument that the way that Serbia decided to present itself on stage could expand the contest's cultural diversity. As Mitrovic (2010) states, it represented Serbia as a 'country in the Balkans, a country of peasants, but peasants who recognise European values. That new face, i.e. a new form of identity, brings a certain dose of 'exoticism' into the image of Serbia and Europe' (p. 179). Although not a significant effort and as beforementioned, it had been missing the contest for quite some time and the cultural input it brings surely elevates the contest.

This lack of clear direction regarding the entry's exudence of values translated in the lack of discourses regarding EU accession. But that does not equate to lack of success of the country demonstrating its Europeanness. According to what I exposed previously, the fact that the country was able to participate in Eurovision after 12 years of absence is a testament to the fact that Western Europe 'conceded an opportunity' for the country to reintegrate the European IS, by allowing the status of 'non-participant' to a 'Eastern participating country', with a parallelism between the change from 'Savage' to

'Barbarian/Uncivilized'. Additionally, the entry was extremely well-received by the juries and public, finishing second which attests to the fact that, although not clear in its values, it was a solid attempt to re-establish its identity and align itself with European values at Eurovision, namely commercialization and diversity. The lack of discourses might also indicate that the country still needs tutelage from the West and hence the lack of a clear impact regarding cultural conditionality, which was 'confirmed' by the repetitive disintegration of the federation in 2006.

'Lane Moje' was definitely an attempt from Serbia and Montenegro to show their Europeanness, especially as it was their first appearance in around a decade, after sanctions and isolation from the European IS. It could not detach itself too much of its cultural image and perception, but there was a good mix between Europeanism and Orientalism that was appealing in both remaining familiar to audiences while exoticizing its image that was mainly done through the staging and the imagery shown on stage. What can be said about the European values shows in Eurovision are the acceptance of the ongoing commercialization that had been happening since its absence in the previous decade, and the addition of Serbia and Montenegro's cultural diversity to the contest, shown both song-wise and staging-wise. Just the ability to participate again in Eurovision after a decade of isolation was already a sign of the standard's receptibility to the country and although there were no intensive discourses around further integration in the European IS, its second placement in the final was a statement of its success that would soon lead to Serbia's more intensive commitment to the cultural conditionality.

4.1.2. Molitva

Notwithstanding the fact that 'Lane Moje' was a great accomplishment for the country at the time, it was 3 years later, when Serbia debuted as a country, that the impact of its entry skyrocketed to the extent that is still today one of the most emblematic victories at the ESC and one of the most interesting study cases. And so, in 2007, Serbia made its remarkable impact at Eurovision with Marija Šerifović's

performance of ‘Molitva’ (Prayer). This entry was not only notable for its victory but also for its deep symbolic significance. It represented Serbia's ongoing effort to 'Return to Europe’, now taking a whole new level in succeeding in aligning with European values and attempting to transcend the memories of its recent troubled history.

This song is a powerful ballad with a strong emotional weight. Written by Vladimir Graić and with the lyrics provided by Saša Milošević Mare, it was characterized by an intensive, soulful melody and touching lyrics. One part of the secret of Molitva's success in 2007 is the fact that it was a ballad in the national language, joining together sacred and lay love. This makes it very distinct compared to earlier winner entries of the 2000s. The lyrics here create a soulful prayer for love and solace that personify longing, hope, and emotional strength. The previous entry touches on several themes of an emotional vulnerability juxtaposed with inner strength. This great emotional depth was intended to override the bounds of language, appealing to that greater universal experience of love and longing. What also made it different from the rest of the winners was that the performance wasn't the usual flamboyant catching-the-eyes over-the-top nature, which many entries are associated with Eurovision (Šerifović, 2007).

Although Marija Šerifović’s ‘Molitva’ lacked the traditional elements of camp often associated with Eurovision performances, its underlying meaning introduced a new twist that was soon categorized as ‘lesbian camp’ (Baker, 2023, p. 101). Šerifović and her backing vocalists’ appearance heavily relied on the audience’s ability to perceive the performance as gay. They were all dressed in typical ‘male’ black suits with ties, creating a striking visual contrast to the more flamboyant and glamorous costumes usually seen on the Eurovision stage. One of the most moving moments of the performance was when the vocalists’ held hands and locked hands with Šerifović to connect the two halves of the heart tattooed on their hands. This symbolic gesture was rich in emotional and visual impact, and was certainly a novelty coming from Serbia: queerness and national identity were performed on the same stage. In Vuletic (2018) words, ‘[i]t was primarily performance design that queered ‘Molitva’ on stage (p. 191), which was central to the performance’s impact. Šerifović’s gender-non-conforming, casually-rumpled appearance contrasted sharply with her backing vocalists’ high-femme

style. This juxtaposition created a butch/femme (Baker, 2023, p. 101) impression that challenged traditional gender norms and highlighted the diversity within the LGBTQIA+ community. The intimate movements and interactions between Šerifović and her vocalists further emphasized the performance's emotional depth and its subtle nod to queer culture. It subtly yet powerfully conveyed a message of acceptance and inclusivity, resonating deeply with audiences who understood its significance and it was regarded with special significance as a victory for the LGBTQIA+, Roma and overall minorities communities in Serbia.

The appraisals upon Serbia's victory and following its organization on the next year were vast and diverse on authors. Externally, some international media praised the organization of the contest on the following year after Serbia's victory. Multiple internal media reports and newspapers such as the CNN, BBC, DeutscheWelle went on their way to publicly praise Serbia's efforts to organize such an important European event as 'the greatest Eurovision so far', presenting 'the country to the world as a normal European nation after years of pariah status in the 1990s' (DeutscheWelle and CNN cited in Mitrovic, 2010, p. 177). However, the most important recognition by far was from the former EU enlargement commissioner Olli Rehn, that congratulated Serbia on its victory by affirming it was 'A European vote for a European Serbia' (Tzortzi, 2007 cited in Jones & Subotic, 2011, p. 550) which had a tremendous impact on Serbian politics.

Internally, Aleksandar Tijanić, the director of Radio-Television of Serbia, and Mladan Dinkić, former Serbian Minister of Economy and Regional Development, emphasized that the 53rd ESC would showcase a 'new face of Serbia' (Mitrović, 2010, p. 176). This portrayal aimed to distance the country from the Balkan stereotypes of xenophobia and nationalist rhetoric that had previously dominated its post-socialist transition, which aimed to envision an image of Serbia as a nation that had emancipated itself from its troubled past and was ready to embrace a more cosmopolitan and European identity. Tijanić was an active advocate of Šerifović's success and future impact that it would have on Serbia. He highlighted the traditional Serbian hospitality and underlined that guests would feel welcome and safe in Belgrade. A number of embassies have issued warnings on the risks during the Pride parade in Belgrade. 'I

refuse to look at visitors as gay or straight people. For us, they're participants and guests' (as cited in Mitrović, 2010, p. 176). This position of showing charity to the community was especially important considering the country's history of homophobic violence, which included right-wing extremists disrupting Belgrade's first gay pride parade in 2001. Tijanić also commented after the contest on the 'excellent organisation' of Eurovision (Mitrović, 2010, p. 176), which he felt had played an important role in showcasing Serbia positively on the international stage. He noted that the commendations from foreign visitors were genuine and a testament to the success of the event. The contest, according to Tijanić, helped alter the stereotypical image of Serbia, showcasing Belgrade and its citizens in a favourable light: 'In this way we have managed to change the stereotypical image of Serbia and that is priceless' (Mitrović, 2010, p. 176).

The director of Šerifović's performance, Gorčin Stojanović, noted that she did what Serbian politicians did not: to fill in the gap between Serbia and Europe (Traynor, 2007 cited in Jones & Subotic, 2011, p. 550). This view was also shared by the President himself, Boris Tadić, who congratulated the organizers for having considerably improved the international image of Serbia and for reconfirming its place in Europe, stating 'Serbia and its capital have again proved to be part of Europe' (Mitrović, 2010, p. 177). Šerifović was seen as representative of 'independent Serbia' (Mitrović, 2010) – an effort to rebrand the country and to mark its 'return to Europe' (Jordan, 2015) after the political turbulence following the disintegration of the federation in June 2006. Her desire for a 'new Serbia' further underlined how political parties in Serbia tried to hijack her victory for their cause. Securing Eurovision victories between 2001 and 2011 showed that countries could compete with Western nations through memorable performances, which played to, and perhaps revised viewers' preconceptions. Šerifović's win also came at a politically sensitive time when European leaders were concerned over Serbia's political direction, especially with the election of ultranationalist Tomislav Nikolić as speaker of the Serbian Parliament. Quite the opposite, Šerifović's victory symbolized Serbia as pro-European rather than the resurgence of aggressive nationalism and Tijanić was said to be relieved that Serbia had not sent 'some war song' (Traynor, 2007 cited in

Jones & Subotic, 2011, p. 550) but instead one which captured a positive reception from European audiences.

Molitva constitutes itself as a step up in Serbia's attempt to 'Return to Europe' and be closer to the civilised family of European states by presenting this 'New face of Serbia'. It did so in aligning with the Eurovision values as much as possible. Unlike 'Lane Moje', which worry was more about negotiating different identities than to align with any ESC values, 'Molitva' had the main goal of aligning with the values of diversity and inclusion. As stated before, the pressure to be perceived as modern and progressive, rather than 'Eastern' (ethnocentric) and uncivilized, greatly influences cultural production and the politics of EU accession. Post-socialist candidates were required to show that they had aligned with the EU by implementing the comprehensive set of obligations such as the *Acquis* if their will was to join the EU. These obligations encompassed areas such as the rule of law, safety standards, border security, and social rights. After the EU included protection from homophobic discrimination in the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam and with the Copenhagen Criteria, demonstrating progress on LGBTQIA+ rights also became essential for accession.

As my analysis on Molitva as being showing, its importance resides less on musical composition and more on performance settings. Even if it looks less about the direct dichotomy and perceptions between West and East, and more about flattering Western norms, and as Baker (2023) states, [t]his imagined modern, progressive and tolerant 'Europe', critical scholarship in postcolonial queer studies was pointing out, is commonly played off against Islam, the Global South and its diasporas to stigmatise them as 'behind' Europe, creating racialised symbolic boundaries around 'Europe' and even within European city space (p. 106). Again, and as shown with cultural conditionality, it is not about ethical perceptions of society and how it should work, but more as a set of criteria that the same SOC perpetrators set as a benchmarking for EU accession.

The impact of the new SOC and cultural conditionality were felt more intensely inside the country than outside. As already shown, discourses and appraisals were more substantive from Serbians than actual European figures, although there was no direct

progress from Europeanness and cultural conditionality regarding EU integration. It is observed that Molitva left a mark in Serbian politics, which shows the perception of the impact of Serbia's performance on its journey to join the EU. The song did this with deep changes to queer politics within the country. When Molitva won the ESC and Belgrade was the host, Pride had not been held in Serbia since 2001 and the next attempt to happen again occurred in September of 2009, but threats by the far-right huddled the march out of the city proper, and organizers called it off so the event did not lose visibility. Belgrade held its second Pride in October 2010 under heavy police protection that clashed with violent far-right counter-demonstrators. Pride was banned from 2011 to 2013 but continued peacefully in 2014 under Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, amid heightened international interest in LGBTQIA+ rights. The peaceful 2014 Pride happened five months after Conchita Wurst's ESC win, although the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church blamed the LGBTQIA+ community for the devastating floods on the previous summer (Baker, 2023, p. 103). The ability to hold Pride depended on state support, the readiness to manage far-right groups, and the government's wish to show that Serbia is ready for Europeanization; this, in turn, made Belgrade Pride a place where LGBTQIA+ visibility was confined to foreign news cameras and was enforced by police as one of the ways of fulfilling expectations set by the EU. The opportunistic attitude of Vučić as far as LGBTQIA+ visibility is concerned became even more evident with the appointment of Ana Brnabić to the position of prime minister in 2017. Brnabić, the first woman and openly LGBTQIA+ prime minister of Serbia, and the second openly lesbian head of government in the world, did not make the reforms on LGBTQIA+ rights her priority; she joined the Belgrade Pride between 2017 and 2019, despite all criticism by the activists (Baker, 2023, pp. 103-107). Following Baker’s (2023) words, this Šerifović's influence could be termed as the 'Molitva factor, signalling national identity and progress of LGBTQIA+ rights as a proxy for European belongings. In this way, Vučić’s appointment of Brnabic can, therefore, be regarded as one of instrumentalizing this litmus test, though Šerifović's victory on its own did not make Brnabić a thinkable prime minister. However, it is perhaps in understanding precisely how 'Molitva' helped reframe Serbia for a European audience in 2007–8 that one might find insight into

Vučić's motivations for appointing a lesbian, gender-non-conforming prime minister in 2017, as well as the impact of having hosted the ESC and welcomed foreign LGBTQIA+ visitors on subsequent LGBTQIA+ rights developments in Serbia.

The positive remarks by Olli Rehn about Serbia's victory in Eurovision imply that Serbia was in a position to overcome its status as an 'Eastern participating country' or as 'Uncivilized/Barbarian' and attain full status as 'European' and 'Civilised.' It was, within the world of Eurovision, immensely significant, showing a prospect of the further integration of Serbia into the EU. However, the fact that Serbia is still excluded from becoming a member of the EU underlines the continued influence of temporal and geopolitical Othering, pointed out by Slootmaeckers (2019). Even as normative changes hint at inclusiveness, these more profound and entrenched ways of Othering are the significant obstacle to accession. With respect to cultural conditionality, Serbia with 'Molitva' showed practical implementation of chapter 23 of the *Acquis Communautaire* and the principles of the Copenhagen Criteria. This performance attempted to place Serbia from a position of 'Other' to part of the European 'Self'; this necessarily reduced both normative and temporal Othering. Presenting 'Molitva' as a performance embracing LGBTQIA+ themes placed Serbia in a values-based relationship with Europe, one of diversity and democracy, as referenced by Olli Rehn when he called it a 'vote for European Serbia', and symbolically attempted to erase some of the negativity of Serbia's recent past.

It does not mean, however, as noted above that the geopolitical and temporal Othering did not remain relevant. As a matter of fact, in the case of Serbia, this led to a conflict between the former and the two latter. While Šerifović's win projected an image of a progressive and inclusive Serbia, which aligned with the minimisation of normative Othering, geopolitically, the reality was far more complex. Ongoing tensions and the undecided status of Kosovo positioned Serbia as a country mired in ethnic and territorial conflicts, which clearly stood in the way of its hopes for integration into Europe, allowing geopolitical othering to undermine further integration and prevent it from translating broader European integration for Serbia. Thus, geopolitical Othering played the significant role of tempering the celebratory narrative of diversity and inclusion that the

victory could have symbolized. The intractable and problematic political situation of Serbia is thrown back to its post-socialist transition and the lasting effects of the Yugoslav wars, placing it temporally as a country trying to catch up with its Western European compeers. Šerifović's victory – elevated highly to relevance by her identity as an LGBTQIA+ individual – suggested that there was a break with the past and an embrace of contemporary European values of diversity and inclusion. Yet, this cultural achievement was in dissonance in terms of time with the political reality of Serbia's situation. Kosovo conflict became a harbinger of unresolved past for Serbia and all the difficulties it faced in aligning norms and standards with those of the European Union. The celebration of diversity on the Eurovision stage was in jarring contrast to the temporal conception of Serbia as a nation still mired in ethnic nationalism and conflict. In this way, temporal Othering reiterates the view that Serbia was culturally not yet ready for European integration.

'Molitva' was Serbia's biggest success at aligning with Europeanness and cultural conditionality. Through its impact and the subsequent developments in queer politics in Serbia in the following years, Šerifović's win highlighted Serbia's normative alignment with European values of diversity and acceptance, but the political climate concerning the Kosovo conflict suggested otherwise and undermined any further developments regarding EU integration, even because it's temporal Othering highlited that there is still much to do regarding its normative values (in this case, regarding minority rights). Šerifović's victory could have been a powerful symbol of normative convergence with Europe, if the clash between Otherings had not been so contrasting.

4.2. Germany

Germany provides a good case study because it is in the opposite spectrum of Serbia: a 'fully Western European country' that has always been involved in European international agreements and organizations, hence it is an interesting standpoint to study how Europeanness and cultural conditionality plays on a fully complacent SOC

perpetrator. What it does share in common with Serbia is its recent dark and troubled history (which we will soon see that it has interest in erasing it), in this case Nazism, Holocaust, World War II, as well as its previous continental and overseas imperialism and occupation. In this section, two performances and its repercussions will be analysed, both of them representing the two times Germany has won Eurovision: 'Ein bißchen Frieden' by Nicole and 'Sattelite' by Lena.

4.2.1. Ein bißchen Frieden

Germany's victory in 1982 was a long overdue event, considering that the country had been participating since the beginning of the ESC in 1956. Much of Nicole's victory in 1982 is reliant on the historical context that the country found itself in. On the height of Cold War tension, the FRG found itself in an odd position amidst geopolitical turmoil and domestic unrest. The then government was under strong pressure from its NATO allies because of an arms race, which grew extraordinarily after the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. Following the Soviet deployment of new medium-range missiles in Ukraine in 1979, West Germany agreed in December 1979 to deploy both missiles on German territory. Intended to bring West Germany into step with NATO's nuclear deterrent strategy, this highly unpopular decision was seen as a reluctant concession by Germany. In West Germany, the arms race brought widespread fear and outrage which led the anti-nuclear peace movement to have refounded itself. The highpoint of this movement came in October 1981 when 300,000 demonstrators came to Bonn for what was the largest peace demonstration in Federal Republic history. Resonating across the continent, major peace demonstrations held in cities like Brussels, London, and Amsterdam similarly saw hundreds of thousands take to the streets to protest against the arms race. These protests came hand in glove with the establishment of the women's peace camp at Greenham Common in Britain and underlined the broad transnational solidarity against nuclear proliferation (Lewis, 2019, p. 35).

And so, it is in this context that West Germany selected a female artist for their Eurovision entry who embodied a timely and pressing theme that resonated deeply with

Europeans for two reasons. The obvious one, and taking account the international context in which this was sent, Nicole's whole entry package struck a chord with Europeans, reflecting the widespread anxiety about the escalating Cold War and nuclear arms race of the early 1980s. The chosen song was a folk ballad, performed by the youthful Nicole that was not even 18 years-old at the time. Seated with a large guitar, Nicole's performance was visually striking by evoking memories of the antiwar movement from the previous decade, popularized by American folk singers which is reinforced by the use of an acoustic guitar instead of an electric one (Lewis, 2019, p. 34). The performance was dominated by a black and white colour scheme with her backing singers dressed in white as she wore a modest contrasting black dress with her long hair falling over her shoulders, and positioned behind her gleaming guitar while she plead for 'a little peace' which designed to appeal to a broad, mainstream European audience. This deliberate styling aimed to enhance her universal appeal and underscore the song's plea for peace. The simplicity and clarity of the message were conveyed through the song's lyrics, music, and visuals. Nicole appeared like a young woman in her comfort space, strumming her guitar and expressing her anxieties about nuclear threats. The song's instrumentation was simple and emotive, perfectly aligning with its message and creating a cohesive blend of music and visuals. Musically, the song featured straightforward harmonies, simple melodic lines, and short, repetitive motifs (Nicole, 1982).

Besides the widespread resonance of the peace theme within Europeans that felt the fear of the arms race, Nicole's entry acknowledged the FRA's situation as a largely powerless victim of Cold War geopolitics (Lewis, 2019, pp. 34-36). It did not touch on sensible political topics such as withdrawal of NATO troops from German territory, it did not have a nationalist appeal for sovereignty, it did not even call for German reunification, a subject that did not become mainstream until it became a reality in 1990. There was nothing overtly nationalistic or patriotic about the song or its message, and there were no references to missiles or arms in its staging or costumes, it did not have the intention of being a counter-cultural act that might have divided the audience and Nicole was not a peace activist, only an ordinary young girl that was chosen due to some

specific characteristics that would better appeal to an audience. And hence, Germany's success lay in the broad appeal of both the song and the singer, elevating the song's message beyond geopolitics to a universal level.

The less obvious reason, and delving deeper into our Europeanness and cultural conditionality played a role here, could be centred on the fact that after World War II, Germany, being at the centre of the conflict, suffered a deep damage in its reputation with Europe. As a consequence of this event, Germany was naturally regarded with fear and suspicion by Europeans due to its role in the war and atrocities committed during the Nazi regime. Viewed naturally as defeated and divided, it carried a heavy burden of the past. In this context, West Germany's participation in the ESC is a microcosm of the broader narrative of its transformation and reintegration into Europe post-World War II. It took an active approach in trying to atone for its aggressive acts by fully adopting a pro-European stance in politics, economic development, and culture. In other ways, central to understanding Germany's participation in the ESC is FRG's openness to Westernization, interference in its sovereignty, and support of Western projects as part of a way to distance itself from its Nazi past, rebranding as a peaceful, democratic nation committed to European unity. In Eurovision, this translates in supporting expansion of Eurovision to Eastern countries (after the fall of the Iron Curtain), following the same record that was happening on expansion of the EU, and Germany's openness to the Americanization of German popular culture post-war, with Germany enthusiastically embracing American music styles like jazz and swing. Aiding the liberalization of German society after 1945, these genres were seen as symbols of moderation and progressivism, but so was European symbolism, which led to FRG consistently emphasizing a European rather than a purely German identity. A notable aspect of Germany's Eurovision entries is their avoidance of traditional German symbols such as the Alps, beer halls, lederhosen, dirndls, and yodelling. This, however, is precisely part of a deliberate move away from such symbols, at least in international contexts, as a way of underlining a reformed and Europeanized identity. A similar commitment is evident in an eagerness to perform in languages other than German and a cosmopolitan nature of artists selected to represent the country (Lewis, 2019, pp. 31-32).

This approach runs as a consistent theme throughout postwar German history, visible in its approach to Eurovision reflecting this broader political and cultural strategy of supporting European integration, and cultural diplomacy. So, in the first decades of the contest, FRG's main goal at Eurovision was to thoroughly rebrand its image through reaffirming its Europeanness, or in Lewis (2019) words, show that it was a 'good European'. While capitalising on the international context, 'Ein bißchen Frieden' also tried to brand FRG's image as a renewed, peaceful, benevolent neighbour and ultimately a 'good European' via a feminine performer representing a nation with a history of aggression that softened Germany's image and alleviated fears of Germany asserting itself as a European power and that drew inspiration from. Every aspect of Nicole's performance portrayed Germany as a subdued and humbled nation, simply pleading not to be caught in another war, which was also enhanced by the folk American influence in Nicole's performance, as a consequence of the ongoing Americanization that was mentioned before. The image projected was that of a peace-loving and pacified European Germany. Here, the FRG's Europeanness exuded the values of democracy, which heavily relies on the audience ability to associate liberal democracy with peace. Moreover, the fact that a nation perceived as suspicious and dangerous sent an entry indirectly requesting peace in a continent on the verge of a possible nuclear war was greatly appealing. Much like Serbia, Germany also had to 'Return to Europe' but it had long started on this journey and started on a completely different standpoint, as it was always involved in all processes of European integration after the II World War. The German journey was characterized by its foundational role in European institutions based on the gradual process of alignment with the values of Western democracy, the economic model, and the political frame. Such alignment brought Germany fully into acceptance and leadership within Europe and had a privileged spot for the journey to reshape its image as one of the most important countries in Europe, almost always at the core of the SOC. On the other hand, Serbia's path was about overcoming burdens of recent history, and reconstituting its national identity in a post-conflict environment without the benefit of any privilege for an 'outsider' of the old and new SOC. Either way, Germany's reinvention as 'the Good European' at the ESC is testimony to its efforts at

proving its commitment both to the contest and to European unity without the wish to dominate. The balanced participation thus displays Germany's contentment with the competition without really needing to win, but rather falling in line with the greater aim of being a responsible, peace-loving, and integrated member of the European community.

> Especially for perpetrator nations, or ones with a troubled history of aggression, occupation and violence, the ESC offers a powerful symbolic means of making amends for histories of violence. The history of Eurovision can thus shed interesting light on what culture is able to bring to the story of postwar. (Lewis, 2019, p.21)

'Ein bißchen Frieden' was a significant remark on Germany's attempt to rebuild its reputation as a warmonger, in a way even returning to Europe as Serbia would have to do years later. However, its standpoint as a major Western European country enabled it to just have to pacify its neighbours and not necessarily prove its belonging to Europe. Germany's reputation as a civilized country was almost always uncontested It naturally experienced a significant negative impact after the II World War, but it was a matter of time with its constant effort to redeem its image by being the 'good European'. Nicole crystalized this image as a fully civilized Western European country and it was possible that there were discourses surrounding its exudence of Europeanness might have existed, but being an entry from 1982 made it difficult to find any. Although only introduced in the early 2000s, 'Ein bißchen Frieden' already followed the cultural conditionality of the Copenhagen Criteria and chapter 23 of the *Acquis Communautaire* that emphasize the importance of democratic institutions by the message of the song, possibly indicating a shift that would soon determine the future of EU enlargement: normative Othering.

4.2.2. Satellite

Decades afterwards, and to everyone's surprise, reunited Germany came first in the 2010 ESC edition with the entry 'Satellite' by Lena. Satellite could be set apart for being an infectious pop tune due to its upbeat tempo and catchy chorus. The lyrics of this song

were about young woman infatuated and emotionally dependent upon her lover with metaphorical expression to be a satellite orbiting the person she loves. The chorus itself, 'Love, oh, love / I gotta tell you how I feel about you / 'Cause I, oh, I can't go a minute without your love', epitomizes the song in light of uncomplicated, candid emotions that are as easily relatable as well (Lena, 2010).

One that sees and hears ‘Satellite’ might consider it an ordinary performance, but if closer attention is paid, there is a lot to unfold about this entry. Choosing 18-year-old Lena Meyer-Landrut, who had not even completed school, proved to be a brilliant decision, since her infectious charm and lively girly charisma captivated audiences, leading her song to rapidly climb the charts even before the contest. The elements to craft an intimate atmosphere that carries well to both the audience in the theatre and the on-television viewers were chosen meticulously from singer to song chosen to the whole staging to seemingly and symbiotically complement each other. This was possible with a straightforward staging, featuring Lena alone on stage with the spotlight firmly on her, with the camera capturing her from various angles, creating the effect of it orbiting around her. Her awkward, knock-kneed dancing, and spontaneous arm movements gave the impression of a young teenager enthusiastically dancing in her living room to her favourite tune. Her performance style was laid-back and quirky with a touch of playful awkwardness that only served to make people love her even more and kept her apart from the other performances, which were clean and choreographed in their tunes as much as in their movements. The simple outfit, like a plain short black dress, did not divert the charisma of Lena and the energy of her song into elaborate costume and props, and she could express herself as some kind of teenager who tries to dress up and doesn't quite know how to look grown-up. Yet, the subtle glimpse of a small tattoo under her arm indicated that she was a modern girl of her time, possibly embodying a new European sensibility. The song, which spoke of hopeless teenage crushes, was a perfect match for her voice and image (Lena, 2010). Germany, through Lena, presented itself as fun-loving, cute, and slightly quirky, contrasting sharply with previous performances that were more serious. Lena's stripped-back, un-camp

performance was a refreshing change for Eurovision in 2010, standing out amidst the camp, glamour, and glitter of the more spectacular and extravagant acts.

Satellite's success in Eurovision 2010 also represented Germany's shifting identity within Europe. As Lewis (2019) says, while Germany's role in the ESC during the earlier years (including 1982) reflected its position as a 'European Germany', 'Satellite' could reveal comments about its shift toward a 'German Europe'. This transition has to do with the growing influence of Germany over European policies, especially through its ordo-liberalist economic principles. The German form of liberal democracy, ordo-liberalism, emphasizes strict rule observance, fiscal prudence, and economic stability at the expense of a country like Greece (pp. 27-28; 38). The German Bundestag voted for the first Greek bailout package in May 2010 as it was deemed necessary step to stabilize the Euro in furtherance of an ordo-liberal German vision of Europe. During this period, Germany seemed to be attempting the establishment of a sense of good taste through restraint-a responsible and respectful neighbour. The simplicity and charm in Lena's performance in ESC managed to further tone down this rigid image. Her understated appearance and relatable stage presence did the trick for Germany to pose itself as a benign and friendly participant in the European cultural landscape, disguising its more austere and domineering economic policies that it was enforcing, which was also the new-found self-confidence and likeability that Germany had showcased during the 2006 FIFA World Cup. This representation was so important because Germany was trying to relax the economic policies it had instituted throughout most of Europe. And so, success for Lena's entry symbolized a 'German Europe' that seemed palatable to the rest of the continent, at least as long as it came dressed up in the form of an attractive, youthful performer. As Germany's tough economic policies-most notably, the successive bailouts of Greece-hardened its reputation as Europe's no-nonsense disciplinarian, this approach began to break down. And so, by 2015, Germany’s reputation had changed from the fun and loveable Lena into a perceived heartless hegemon. This is reflected in the bad ESC results in 2015, 2016, and 2017, when Germany ranked near the bottom. Thus, Lena's 2010 win with 'Satellite' might be read as a short-term victory in a wider campaign to present a consistently friendly European face in the light of growing hegemony and

supremacy. Whilst her performance did much to gentle Germany's image at that moment, the dismal underlying reality of a 'German Europe' would ultimately supersede such efforts, which in turn saw a drop in both Germany's ESC fortunes and its popularity on the continent (pp. 40-41).

Similar to 'Molitva', Lena's entry stood out as an uncamp entry, away from all the glitter and spectacular performances that usually array Eurovision. What it does differ from 'Molitva' is its deliberate effort to present a dequeered image, a stark contrast to Eurovision's often openness to diversity. This strategic move served to project a sanitized, heteronormative image of Germany, subtly positioning queerness as an attribute of the East. By presenting a straightforward, heteronormative act, Germany could subtly suggest that queerness and the more flamboyant elements of Eurovision belonged elsewhere, implicitly (and explicitly as we will soon see) in the East. Most of these decisions fell to Stefan Raab, tasked with Germany's national selection and the driving force behind Lena's Eurovision participation, had a central role in crafting this narrative. Indeed, and as elaborated by Rehberg (2013), Stefan Raab, who masterminded Lena's selection and staging, let a barely disguised homophobic attitude against Eurovision's camp aspects shine through. His rhetoric during the national selection mirrored a standard heteronormative response, displaying a reactionary homosexual panic towards the event's evident campiness and its implications for sexual politics. Raab has not shy to state his queerphobic remarks regarding Eastern European entries, including referring to Marija Šerifović as 'this little, fat Serbian boy'.

> He pointed out Eastern European entries as sexually exotic, and in the case of Serbia denied the female gender to a singer whose stage performance was coded as lesbian. Raab's anti-queer attitude, which made room for homophobic and sexist jokes, was not simply an individual characteristic but also initiated a new discourse on the ESC in Germany (Rehberg, 2013, pp. 183-184)

Raab meticulously tried not to implement any ideas that would be associated with camp aesthetics. In his public statements and on his TV show, he often likened Eurovision to football, a sport known for its homophobic fan base and one where Germany typically performs well. This analogy was a deliberate tactic by Raab to evoke

a subdued sense of German identity that, following the 2006 World Cup, could be openly celebrated in a festive way, thus challenging the long-standing German aversion to displaying national pride (Rehberg, 2013, p. 182) Raab's contempt for Eurovision can be seen as a strategy to heterosexualize the contest by equating its aesthetically questionable aspects with queerness, a term he used derogatorily. He portrayed Eastern Europe as the epicentre of Eurovision's queerness, contrasting it with Lena's serious and authentically feminine performance. By constructing Lena as an authentically feminine and non-queer candidate, Raab projected Eurovision's queerness onto Eastern Europe, positioning the contest as a straight event from a German and Western European perspective, which is further confirmed by his queerphobic remarks (p. 183-184). This approach had the consequence of elevating not only the German entry but also securing Eastern Europe as the Other in an affirmation of a cultural hierarchy. Insofar as Germany's entry dequeered itself, it simultaneously queered Eastern Europe in defence against the (perhaps too well-done) assimilation (interpreted as a threat) of Eastern Europe of Western norms that they would wish to gatekeep. Crucial to understand this approach is the underlined role of Anglo-American youth culture in framing pop cultural hierarchies between West and East. Eurovision was more of a 'lesser pop', even Eurotrash, a definition that would be important for Raab to project into the Other, representing an aesthetic failure from the perspective of hegemonic Anglo-American pop culture (p. 185).

In this sense, 'Satellite' is different from the previous entries in the sense that it does not try to exude Europeanness in a specific way (even if it ends up doing so because the SOC always involves negotiations and interpretations), show certain values or try to 'Return to Europe' as Nicole did in 1982. This time, and as Lewis (2019) argues, we were already in the reginal IS of 'German Europe' that need not show its belonging to Europe. What happened to a lot of countries that were subdued to the old SOC is that they had to follow the Westphalian prerogatives to be accepted in international society. Once they started demanding equal terms via the recognition of their sovereignty, they were faced with western opposition. Similarly, this was Germany's subtle attempt (disguised in Lena's dequeered fresh approachability) to get back control of the new SOC. Here,

German's Europeanness was an act of resistance towards the demands of equal terms that Eastern countries had been achieving via the victories they had been having since 2001, much of it by 'appropriation' of the camp and queer aesthetic that many times awarded Western countries with victories, especially since the victory of transgender woman Dana International in 1998. Even if it seems contradictory in the sense that it was the EBU's decision to allow this competition to be a safe space for queer representation and EU's decision to further incorporate normative settings in accession negotiations, the recognition of equal terms threatens the Western European Identity. And so, as Rehberg (2013) argues, Germany here decided to distance itself from queer aesthetics and projected back the queerness in the contest into Eastern Europe, reaffirming the temporal Othering that separates 'Europe' from 'Eastern Europe'. The fact that Eastern countries had been mirroring the hegemonic formula that has been successful because they are reaching a state of equality that is not desired from the perspective of a perpetrator of a SOC. At most, this Europeanness underlyingly exuded the value of (liberal) democracy for implicitly looking like a friendly naïve girl, when it actually tries to fade the reality of Germany's ordo-liberalism view of the continent.

> For a country like Germany the stakes in this situation seem particularly high. In previous decades Germany used Eurovision as a site to prove how much it belonged to Europe (much as Eastern European countries do now), culminating in Nicole's victory in 1982. Claiming its place in Europe by means of a pop song seemed especially precarious for a country whose popular culture in particular has been instrumentalized by the propaganda machinery of fascism. Eastern Europe's approach to the ESC represents an uncomfortable reminder of Germany's own campaign to be accepted within the European community. (Rehberg, 2013, p 185)

As per with 'Ein bißchen Frieden', 'Satellite' led to no major 'discourses' praising Germany for aligning with European values. If anything, it came as a surprise that Germany won and what was said in the media was exactly regarding this factor. It comes as no surprise, once again, because it already integrates the EU as one of its key players and it is one of the main SOC perpetrators. 'Satellite' followed the value of commercialization, even trying to commercialize Lena's image as new the German pop-

star, leading to her representing Germany on the following year, which did not nearly reach the same level of success. In the same line of thought, 'My Cassette Player' and 'Good news' albums, which included the 2010 and 2011 Lenas' Eurovision entries, were heavily pushed to sell Europe-wise and turn Lena into the new European popstar. What is interesting to denote here, is that regarding the value of diversity there is a subversion here – not only it did not exude it, it tried to penalize it by projecting queerness into Eastern Europe, inverting one of the European values as a way to try and take control of the standard. This leads to an interesting dynamic in the sense that it is still expected that the 'Other' fulfils the cultural criteria to minimize the normative Othering, when the 'Self' actively tried to discourage it and not being penalized by it. Therefore, and as per 'Ein bißchen Frieden', Germany naturally remains as a member of the civilised member of states.

5. Discussion

This study has significant implications for the broader scientific discourse in two key areas: the diverse range of Eurovision studies and the ES. Notwithstanding the fact that there were few cases analysed, this study has some interesting results and remarks, underscoring the importance of Europeanness and cultural conditionality on the European IS. The results of this study shed light on Vuletic's (2018) study that participating countries tend to engage with the ESC as a form of public diplomacy by their projection of political messages, national image and cultural values when they take part and perform in the contest. However here, the focus of the public diplomacy is to show an image that aligns with the Europeans values and to demonstrate their 'most Europeanness' on stage. This is especially true and more haunting to CEE countries that aim to accede the EU (which was the case of both entries from Serbia), while fully Western countries have the privilege of even being able to contest the values that they wanted to dictate when threatened, which was the case for Germany's Satellite. Likewise, Vos (2017) and Zahavi and Ariely's (2024) findings are especially important for corroborating the results of my study. Not only the ESC has potential as an inadvertent yet impactful instrument of public diplomacy for the EU, but even the EU and participating countries are aware of this, shown by the studies invested and conducted by the EU (European Commission, 2016) in understanding the possible impacts of Europeanism and the Memorandums of Understanding signed between both EU and the EBU, as well participating countries actively trying to align with this (un)related public diplomacy tool of the EU.

ESC winners represent the maximum exponent of Europeanness, even managing to surpass (mainly) cultural differences of the voting blocs because according to most relevant ESC literature of the voting blocs (Yair, 1995; Yair & Maman, 1996; Gatherer, 2007; Spierdijk & Vellekoop, 2009; Charron, 2013; García & Tanase, 2013; Mantzaris, Rein, & Hopkins, 2018), countries tend to vote for entries that they can somehow relate to their culture, forming cultural clusters or blocs, in which these countries tend to vote for each other. This happens because there is a consensus from both perpetrators and 'followers' of the current SOC (jury- and public-wise) that the intended contestant

represented the highest values of Europeanness – namely diversity, commercialization and democracy. This means that this study reinterprets Ginsburgh and Noury (2007) study in the sense that the 'quality of the entry' that the authors state as the biggest factor for a good ESC result is here interpreted as the before-mentioned values. Ultimately, even the quality of the entry has a subjectivational underlying meaning that is prone to the established cultural European values. This is particularly evident when Germany, a country that is constantly penalized by the voting blocs, managed to win twice (with even higher remark in 2010 as there were many more countries participating and that accentuated the power of voting blocs). These results lead us to interesting remarks for further research: If winners represent the ultimate expression of Europeanness, does it suggest that cultural biases have been temporarily suspended for a more inclusive identity? Or does it mean that winners could represent such a higher form of Europeanness that corresponds to dominant cultural or political narratives, reinforcing rather than transcending existing divides?

Just like the old SOC, Europeanness in the ESC is constantly mutating and this evolution is both shaped by the old perpetrators, as well as Eastern Europeans. If the former lay the foundations and strategies to which Europeanness might be expressed, the latter both mimic these foundations to be accepted as fully Europeanness and reinterpret it in their own way, contributing to this constant evolution of Europeanness, which corroborates previous literature that the SOCs is in constant mutation (Linklater, 2016). This construction of Europeanness is, in no way, about Western Europe having established a static standard for Eastern Europe to follow. Rather, it is a complex process of mimicry, adaptation, resistance, and reinterpretation in which both perpetrators and Eastern European countries are actively involved. It hints at a notion that it is a dynamic interplay of Europeanness is or should be, rather than a sole imposition of norms in a unidirectional sense, following the Syncretist account interpretation of the expansion theory explained by Buzan (2010). The fact that even Western European countries, such as Germany, have had to prove their Europeanness at different historical moments, suggests that European identity is not a fixed or naturalized category but is constantly being negotiated and contested. However, most of these processes can be a double-

edged sword, since it is also a strategy of gaining legitimacy and recognition within the European community. The fact that CEE countries (in this case through the case of Serbia) have to carefully balance its identity (and/or projection its image) between 'Eastern' and 'European' (hence Western) aligns highly as a mix of Kuus' (2004) 'subjectivational practice' of Orientalising the Other and Occidentalisation as the West of the Other and Allatson's (2007) 'exoticizing the familiar and familiarizing the exotic' also show the real power discrepancies with the requirement of Eastern countries aligning themselves toward norms and values predominantly set by the West. This instability opens up possibilities for alternative interpretations and constructions of what it means to be European, which challenges the idea that there is a single, universal standard of Europeanness.

This leads to the fact that the erasure of the past seems to be a common theme of this SOC, which corroborates Slootmaeckers (2019) idea of temporal Othering. Europeanness is all about showing an image that emphasizes the minimization of normative and temporal Othering, a superiority characteristic that distances the Self from the Other through the means of norms and erasure of the past, strategies that represent a moral superiority that was present in the old SOC (Linklater, 2016). This superiority has to be achieved through erasure of any negative parts of a country's history that might undermine their Europeanness by going against its values and enhancing the positive sides that might be closer associated with the concept of 'Europe'. In Serbia's case, this was done through an erasure of its Communist past and emphasis on its medieval past and willingness to adapt to 'European norms', while Germany tried to erase its Nazi past while emphasizing its openness to the European project. That means being European requires a country to act and behave within particular norms and also clean up or sanitize its history. Such erasing is problematic because superficially or selectively engaging with the past, rather than a genuine reckoning with historical injustices, while also perpetuating the binary division between Self and Other reinforces a hierarchy where some histories and narratives are valorised over others. However, it seems in line with the old SOC in the sense that it eventually was such a powerful tool to access the eligibility to the IS that the Third World ended up

pursuing the norms of the standard to actively maximize their changes to join the civilised family of states that had access to the IS (Buzan, 2014; Little, 2015).

Being the purpose of Europeanness and cultural conditionality the same, they operate better together, but that does not mean that it is always the case. As stated before, Europeanness and cultural conditionality are two sides of the same coin, but they operate on different ways. If Europeanness is a concept that is constantly mutating and contested by perpetrators and Eastern Europe, cultural conditionality is a concept perpetrated only by Western Europe and that seems to apply more to Eastern Europe, much like the other forms of conditionality (Stivachtis, 2008) (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004). Europeanness can more easily be translated into the actual result of the entry on the contest, whereas cultural conditionality can be easily read if a principle from EU legal frameworks can be found in the actual performance and the (lack of) following developments in EU accession negotiations. While Europeanness/SOC is a norm that can be used to shape and interpret reality, cultural conditionality expresses itself via tangible legal documents and frameworks which allows Western Europe to control it as a means to condition acceding countries. As already mentioned, the concept of Europeanness is in an ever-lasting dispute that even Western Europe has to assure that it has its grip on it. In other words, Europeanness, as a fluid and evolving construct, is shaped by cultural, social, and political dynamics within Europe, reflecting a continuous negotiation of identity and belonging among European countries, much like Kuus (2004) defined that NATO and EU have prominent representational pattern of enlargement in which the CEE countries will be in an ever-longing learning process of the Western norms. In contrast, cultural conditionality is more rigid and prescriptive, primarily driven by Western European standards and expectations, and is enforced through tangible legal frameworks and documents such as the Copenhagen Criteria and the *acquis Communautaire*. Although symbiotic, this dynamic also denotes a fundamental tension: while Europeanness is portrayed as an inclusive, evolving concept that invites participation from all European countries, cultural conditionality serves as a gatekeeping mechanism, particularly for Eastern European nations seeking EU membership. This tension has its roots in the essence of every SOC, much like Bowden

(2014) denoted that ‘at first, they divide and separate, then comes either exclusion or coercion to conform (p. 629).

This dynamic raises an important question about the inclusivity and fairness of the European project: does this dynamic encourage all countries to embrace Europeanness, while only some being subjected to the stringent cultural conditionality, reflecting an asymmetry in how European identity and values are negotiated and enforced? This reflects what Germany in 2010 tried to do, with disregarding diversity not only going against many of the documents that regard cultural conditionality, but also not getting them penalized while trying to contest Western Europe’s own vision of Europeanness that was being ‘appropriated’ by Eastern Europe, which aligns with Bull and Watson’s (1984) view of the SOC as a systemic unjust treatment. This systemic characteristic expects that the ‘Other’ fulfils the cultural criteria to minimize the normative Othering, when the ‘Self’ actively tried to discourage it and not being penalized by it. Conversely, Serbia’s attempt to be more open to the LGBTQIA+ community reinforced its outdated perception by all the setbacks it had with pride parades, confrontations with far-right movements and inability to grant the same amount of rights as Western countries, enhanced by the geopolitical Othering-perception of the situation in Kosovo. This is not to say that cultural conditionality stops playing a role for fully-European countries, but its consequences are certainly heavier for those who seek to accede to the EU.

By acting through the Othering processes that Slootmaechers (2017) refers, cultural conditionality disproportionately affects CEE countries, creating an expectation that these countries must adhere to specific cultural and normative criteria to gain EU accession, while the same compliance is not as hardly demanded by its definers. Despite attempts to present a more inclusive stance and align with EU expectations on LGBTQIA+ rights, Serbia’s struggles with internal political and social resistance, compounded by the geopolitical complexities while Stefan Raab actively tried to project queerness onto Eastern Europe and disregard for a value they actively promote illustrate this dynamic. This situation highlights the double standards at play: while Western countries like Germany can selectively adhere to or contest Europeanness without being penalised,

Eastern European countries are held to stricter compliance with cultural conditionality, reinforcing existing power imbalances within the EU. This serves to further crystallize the dynamic of Eastern Europe as backward area in Europe, which acts through a form of normative gatekeeping in which the Self defines the standard and the Other must comply, not only in terms of the ultimate goal of EU accession but regarding the basic terms of aligning with Western European values and norms. Cultural conditionality is here a part of a deeper ideological project aimed at promoting a shared European identity. The Copenhagen Criteria and the *acquis Communautaire*, in this view, are not just benchmarks but instruments for cultural and ideological alignment, reflecting the EU's vision of what it means to be European. Therefore, my interpretation of the acquis differs from Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2004) which view this type of conditionality as tools the EU uses to shape the domestic policies of CEE countries, treating these conditions as technical requirements that candidate countries must meet for EU accession.

Europeanness appraisals for Eastern countries proves to be a great motor for internal change regarding cultural conditionality, corroborated by Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier's (2004) findings regarding (mostly) acquis conditionality's effectiveness. In Serbia's case, Molitva had a huge impact on LGTQIA+ politics and saw developments regarding the community's rights, which aimed at aligning with the important before-mentioned documents that promote it. It did so because Olli Rehn's appraisal of their Europeanness and the possibility of integrating the EU was deeply interiorized by Serbian politicians, emulating the SOC's 'paternalistic relationship with those states seeking admission to or assistance from these organizations' (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 87). On the other hand, it can be argued that cultural conditionality can be instrumentalized by Eastern Europe as a quick way to gain attention to EU officials. The notion that cultural conditionality could be instrumentalized by Eastern European countries as a performative act to gain favour with EU officials adds an important layer of complexity. In a way, Brnabić's passiveness as one of the few currently ruling politicians from the LGBTQIA+ community in the world, but 'refusing' to advance its own community rights (Baker, 2023), could be a great testament for this statement. The minor developments

in the rights of LGBTQIA+ people following Serbia's Eurovision win might also be read as performative, without deeper or more sustained commitment to such values. The performative nature of such compliance, and therefore the implications for the authenticity of such reforms, can thus raise questions over the extent to which such changes betray any real transformation in societal attitudes or superficial adjustments in order to reach minimum requirements that satisfy accession criteria into the EU. However, this perspective may oversimplify motivations and actions of Eastern European countries, the latter being usually driven by a very complex mixture of true aspiration for European integration, strategic manoeuvring, and domestic political considerations. It is thus essential to overcome a Western perception that Eastern European countries act only in order to find an approval in the 'Self'. This assumption sidelines the agency of Eastern European nations and their powers of interpretation, negotiation, and occasionally resistance against the imposed cultural conditionality.

As previously stated, and according to Slootmaeckers (2019), aligning with strategies that minimize normative Othering does not guarantee EU accession due to the tensions created with geopolitical and temporal Othering. The latter are still very much present in EU accession and in certain ways even connected with the former. Needless to say, that even if Serbia won with one of the most ‘diverse’ entries in Eurovision and all the repercussion that came with it did not necessarily translate to EU integration due to the before-mentioned reasons. The differential outcomes for countries that perform well in Eurovision versus their EU accession prospects suggest that inclusivity in the cultural domain does not automatically extend to political inclusion within the EU. This discrepancy challenges the notion of a unified European identity and suggests that cultural performances alone cannot resolve the deeper, structural exclusions inherent in the EU’s political framework. The opposite can also be problematized and hypothesized: would not Germany still be a key component in the European project, had it not deeply succeeded with ‘Ein bißchen Frieden’? In other words, as Dawson and Fawn (2001) would put into words:

> Little else, however, has been decided in the post-socialist purgatory that is central and eastern Europe. While most countries have publicly repented of

> their former failings, and some have laboured diligently to reform, all know that, notwithstanding the criteria for entry announced at the EU's Copenhagen Summit in 1993, it will not be by their own efforts, but by acts of grace in Brussels and Washington that they will be raised to what they perceive to be the twin paradise of EU and NATO membership. If admitted, it will not be because of any merit on their part, but because of what those organisations see to be in their own best interests. In particular, the EU has already demonstrated that it is quite incapable of matching the level of generosity demonstrated by West Germany's unquestioning embrace, at huge cost, of the former East Germany in 1990 (Dawson & Fawn, 2001, p. 3)

Nonetheless and like any conceptual lens, analysing Eurovision through the conceptual framework of Europeanness and cultural conditionality allows us to better understand the subtlety of the intricacies and struggle that revolve around EU integration through a cultural standpoint, as well as understand the dynamics of the European IS by analysing both the performances from a certain year and all the aspects that derived to/from them.

The research conducted here highlights the potential of the English School in analysing themes that are not typically categorized as 'high politics' by having an object of study that generally does not fall within the traditional domain of high politics – the ESC – which usually focuses on issues like state security, military conflict, and diplomatic relations. This study did not have nor has the intention to deepen the (non-) binary categorization of high/low politics, but phenomena that may usually be considered as low-politics such as Eurovision, may have the ability to influence high-politics issues. In this context, while Eurovision can be regarded as a cultural/entertaining event, the present thesis supports the view that the song contest, in fact, can function like a prism through which one can even make an evaluation of more serious political dynamics regarding EU enlargement. This challenges the conventional literature that separates cultural events from political analysis, demonstrating that Eurovision can be a meaningful site for understanding political behaviour, alliances, and identity formation in Europe.

The conventional presentation of the English School is that it occupies a middle ground that weighs the emphasis on power and security that is characteristic of the tradition of realism with the focus on institutions and cooperation highlighted by liberalism. I do hope, however that the findings of this project contest the English School's traditional posing as a *via media* between realism and liberalism by posing that the theory is equipped with more than adequate analytical tools to handle and explain complex IR dynamics. What the English School is uniquely qualified to do is to provide specific insights into how the international system works, especially in the way it focuses on norms, values, and societal standards that go beyond purely power calculations or institutional arrangements. By applying the framework of the English School to an analysis of Eurovision and its intersection with EU politics, this research shows the depth and versatility of the approach by proving that this framework can analyse not only traditional IR topics but also culturally, nuanced phenomena of substantial political significance. It extends the scope of the English School well beyond its usual confines and does so in a way that suggests the theory can serve as a powerful instrument for the examination of an extensive range of international issues-from the formal to the informal, from the explicitly political to the culturally significant.

The observation that culture plays a central role in explaining the dynamics of the ESC, EU accession politics, and the overall landscape of the European IS aligns closely with Wight's (1977) assertion regarding the necessity of a minimal degree of unity for the creation and maintenance of an international society. The author states that an international society necessarily rests upon shared norms, values, and cultural understandings – a common ground among members. In its absence, IS would lose coherence and stability because there will be no corresponding forms of interaction, cooperation, or coexistence. On the other hand, and since Watson's (1992) work leans towards a more historical and structural analysis of international society (focusing on the evolution of the state system) does not align so much with the analysis of this study, as it emphasises cultural events like Eurovision as mechanisms for promoting norms and values not so much with Watson's more structural and state-centric approach to understanding international society.

This study and its results brought a dynamism to the concept of the SOC, a major theoretical construct with the English School that seems to have reached a point of stagnation in contemporary scholarship. It has largely been absorbed into broader and more commonly discussed notions such as democracy, development, modernity, and human rights. Scholars who have deeply explored SOC, like Gong (1985), have helped anchor our understanding of its historical significance, particularly in how it was used to delineate 'civilised' from 'uncivilised' states in international law and society. However, recent studies on SOC's evolution have tended to treat it as a historical concept that has seamlessly transitioned into more contemporary norms without critically examining its ongoing relevance or impact. One of the few exceptions to this trend is Fidler's (2001) and Stivachtis (2008), who critically examined how the SOC has re-emerged in international law with renewed strength and influence and how membership conditionality could be a modern morph of the SOC in EU politics, respectively. In both of these studies, the authors studies suggest that SOC is not merely a concept that once shaped our global IS, but has undergone significant transformation and reemerged with new (and old) mechanisms to shape the IS in favour of the old SOC perpetrators. Much like Fidler argues that the SOC had come back stronger by the instrumentalization of international law to impose now a more intrusive, liberal, globalized civilization on the word, my analysis and results point in the same direction, but applied to the regional context of the European IS, reinforcing Karmazin, Costa-Buranelli and Yongjin's (2014) plea for better methodological approaches towards regional ISs.

My interpretation and results represent a modern mutation of the old SOC, reflecting its underlying principles of inclusion and exclusion, but now applied within a cultural and symbolic framework rather than a purely legal or political one. In the context of the European IS, Europeanness at the ESC functions as a contemporary standard that nations are implicitly expected to align with if they wish to be perceived as part of the 'European' community. This alignment or deviation is based on the way countries present themselves on a global stage through cultural performance, but also through indirect diplomatic engagement and adherence to international treaties that subdue a specific, updated vision of the world by the same perpetrators of the old SOC.

The ESC thus acts a stage in which European countries project their conformity or defiance with Europeanness. This reflects the way in which they literally personify and reinterpretively mold what it actually means to be European. Based on my updated understanding of the SOC working through the ESC, this study highlighted how that concept functions within the contemporary European IS. Even if not legally binding, these results reveal the impact and consequences of a standard that carries significant power in shaping views and affecting the soft power relationships among European countries through an 'ordinary' cultural event that can have real impact on the European IS. This approach underlines the lasting importance of SOC as a way to understand the intricacies of international society even as it changes from its historical roots into present-day settings.

To conclude this section, limitations of this study need to be outlined because those naturally delineate the scope and depth of conclusions able to be drawn. First, case objects in this research are limited in numbers (only precisely two countries with two performances each) which narrows down possible generalizations or extrapolations from those findings, due to the sample size. Another important limitation involves the intrinsically interpretative aspect of performance analysis, especially while trying to unveil what such performances may or may not attempt to say, or what audiences and analysts believe they say. Eurovision performances can be complex in their meaning and subject to different interpretations depending on the cultural, political, and social lenses applied in the analysis and the fact that quantifying European values like democracy and commercialization on the Eurovision stage constitute additional challenges certainly does not help. Whereas diversity may be a little bit easier to see from the visual and thematic aspects of performances, democracy and commercialization are more abstract concepts that do not manifest as clearly in a performance setting. This makes analysis difficult because of the inability to measure their values, which also doubts the robustness of every conclusion that may be drawn about their presence or significance in Eurovision entries. Another cause for the subjectivity in research is the inability to identify clearly quantifiable metrics in regard to how these values are embodied in performances.

Additionally, although cultural display via performances in the ESC may indicate willingness to align with European values, EU accession is far more complex than a single variable, ranging from a variety of criteria that cannot solely be captured through a cultural event like Eurovision. Thus, Serbia's major success through Molitva reflects exactly this matter – the fact that deeper political, legal and geopolitical challenges can be understood as an obstacle that prevent the success from translating to EU accession, but cannot be solved by the same cultural standpoint that denoted them. Finally, the assumption of a uniform set of values and norms may even inadvertently suppress cultural plurality within Western Europe and enforce a monolithic vision of Europeanness that does not fully accommodate the diversity between the hegemonic definers of Europeanness.

Final remarks

To this day there is still much debate about whether Eurovision is just a musical competition or if it is only about politics. In this thesis, I have argued that neither of these statements represent the ESC's true nature. If it is not clear by now, Eurovision is neither only a music competition, nor just about politics, nor just both. There is more than enough literature that states culture as one of the elements that is either lacking, invested in or capable of 'saving' the EU, proven by, if anything else, the huge investments in the EU in understanding the impact of the ESC in the concept of Europeanness (European Commission, 2016) and the overall investments in culture by the EU that Vos (2017) stated. Armbruster, Rollo and Meinhoj (2010) found out that Europeanness is quite a vague concept for those feeling left out of the EU's prism of action, with the vague associations being closely related with Western Europe. Even on the heart of the EU, the association made with the EU is fragantly deeper on a civic level than a cultural one (Bruter, 2004). Albadalejo (2019) adverted us that a common European literature is crucial in the unity of the EU, as it draws back Europe's historical foundations and reminds us of the idea of Europe as a 'puzzle' in which culture plays a role at assembling it together. As Monnet and Delors would respectively have put into words, the first stage of the contruction of the EU forgot was too elitist and economic, impeding the masses to 'fall in love with Europe' and 'If I had to do it over again, I would begin with culture' (as cited in Wellings & Kalman, 2019, p. 2), attesting exactly for what I argue and have argued throughout this study: voluntary or not, intentionally or not, Eurovision is part of a bigger ideological project, where culture serves as both its foundation and primary vehicle for execution. As Ursula von der Leyen once said, 'Protecting our European way of life' (Stevis-Gridneff, 2019) is a key concern of the EU. But what is really the European way of life, if not an euphemism for an updated version of the SOC?

This thesis argued that the SOC, like many other authors did (Fidler, 2001; Stivachtis 2008; Buzan 2014), is more present than ever in international politics. However, the originality of it all resides in my interpretation of how it manifests itself, where it operates, and the possible consequences, an element that is usually lacking in

other interpretations. In other words, I interpreted that 'Europeanness' is a possible morph of the old European SOC that brought the global IS together, that manifests itself via the the ESC and that creates conditions that propitiate EU accession (or at least indications towards it). 'Promoting Europeanness through a new standard of Civilisation' because in all the interpretations made of this concept, no one has seen it as a concept that is actively promoted through the (most of the) means that the standard that brought the global IS together. With its differences, it has the same characteristics of the old SOC, operates in similar way and is perpetrated by the majority of countries that once perpetrated the standard account.

This standard, however, and for what accounts my investigation, manifests itself through the ESC and has very clear values (diversity, commercialization and democracy) that can be exuded on stage through the various elements that can be expressed in a performance (lyrics, staging, attire, melody, the performer itself). If successfully representative of the values that constitute this new SOC, this might reverberate in positive appraisals and/or discourses regarding EU accession (if applicable) that can be enacted by various entities, being EU representatives the most important ones. This happens because culture (and therefore the before-mentioned values) works together with politics to create an ideology of belonging (Hearn, 2006) and, specifically in this case, reference Eurovision as a cultural production that sustains and creates a particular form of European identity that coincides with the EU and works symbiotically with it. By making a paralelism with other forms of conditionality (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004; Stivachtis 2008), it is possible to argue that culture constitutes one of the forms of conditionality that operates symbiolitcally with the standard of Europeanness by following, on the first step, the so-called European values and, in this case, on the Eurovision stage (and that later might reverberate in the discourses that were previously mentioned); and later, guaranteeing that these values are expressely integrated in the accession country by fulfilling legal requirements expressed in documents such as the Copenhagen Criteria and the *acquis Communautaire*.

To do this, and after the literature review on topics such as the English School, the IS, the SOC, Europeanness, conditionality and the studies regarding Eurovision, I

gathered the work of five main studies from different authors – Allatson (2007), Stivachtis (2008), Vuletic (2018) and Slootmaeckers (2019) – that enabled me to form a though process to reach my main arguments, namely that the concept of Europeanness is a contemporaneous form of the SOC; that the expression of Europeanness in Eurovision can foster European integration through the means of discourses regarding EU accession; and that culture can also be interpreted as a type of conditionality that followed and that is in accordance with legal documents such as the Copenhagen Criteria and the *acquis Communautaire*. After stating my thought process, I then proceeded to apply my argument to two performances for two countries – Serbia and Germany – which made sure I encompassed two very distinct countries, with two very geopolitical stances in the European IS, with different stories that was later discovered that what they had in common was a past that needed to be erased.

The findings of this study asserted that Eurovision was a site of cultural diplomacy, especially what concerned the projection of Europeanness that had been far more demanding for the CEE countries aspiring to membership in the EU. It is even more evident when we denote that countries like Germany from the Western European part are able to content/redefine European values set primarily by their ideological quadrant without facing any major repercussions, while CEE countries must conform closely to diversity, commercialization and democracy. The latter is never black or white, but a constant battle of redefinance of what these values truly mean. Both the Serbian and German entries are examples of how countries use the ESC in light of negotiating their image and place in Europe, often strategically erasing unfavourable historical narratives that do not serve their view of Europeanness. The findings indicate that Europeanness is fluid – it adopts influences from West and East, even if Western influence are, by definition, way more impactful – but cultural conditionality is rigid and thus particularly burdensome for CEE countries in their quests for accession to the EU. This dynamic underlines the tension between an evolving European identity and the gatekeeping mechanisms of the EU accession process. Moreover, it provided a revitalization to the English School (and more specifically to the concept of the SOC) by showing how it has the necessary tools to study less conventional topics, or topics that can influence the

usual conventional topics. So, the concept of the SOC was applied to a modern cultural context – the ESC – which in turn serves as a contemporary stage for reinforcing or challenging European identity.

For future research, it would be important to test this argument with more cases (performances and countries), since the ones applied here are very limited in scope, which naturally limited the generalizations and extrapolations done. Likewise, and since most recent controversies were not considered in this study, it would be interesting to delve into the ban of Russia and Belarus from the competition, the Ukraine's victory in 2022 or the EBU's attitude towards the Israeli situation in 2024. Moreover, it would be interesting to deepen this argument even more, as it is a brand-new understanding of how this updated SOC can operate. I believe there are still a lot of possibilities to develop this thought process and to uncover even more dynamics within Eurovision and the European IS. Another interesting topic to reflect on is perhaps the quantification of the European values of diversity, commercialization and democracy (with more emphasis on the latter two), or at least a better interpretation of its manifestation.

As a way to conclude, and once again, Ursula von der Leyen wanted to protect the European way of life and the European values. There is, however, a clear clash between this 'cultural fundamentalism' that Waal, Weyenberg and Volk (2022) warn can be problematic due to discrimination on the basis of culture as a means of inclusion and exclusion by demarcating boundaries of Europe and demonstrating (non-)belonging to the mainstream idea of Europe, and an idea of Europe that is constantly being followed, contested and evolving, which is evident by the President of Kyrgyzstan stating 'We are dreaming of being part of Europe' (Hudson, 2000, p. 411). And what is more symbolic of this life-style and these values, as well as this clash, than the biggest musical event in the world that brings more than 163 million European viewers together (Eurovision, 2024) and showcases it to the rest of the world? Eurovision is not just about music, nor politics, nor only both. Eurovision is music, Eurovision is art, Eurovision is culture, Eurovision is politics, Eurovision is a testament of the European Standard of Civilisation.

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