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Abstract

This article researches the Europeanisation of the restaurant scenes in Sofia and Belgrade, capitals of an actual EU member-state and an aspiring one. By comparing the representations of foreign cuisines in aspects such as presumed depth and breadth of customers' knowledge, incorporation of culinary terms, use of authentic ingredients and presence of native chefs, the research establishes similarities between tastes and lifestyle aspirations in the two cities, but also differences in their realization. This comparison outlines the structural advantages provided by EU membership with its facilitation of the movement of goods and people. Considering the researched material within the debate over European integration endangering local identities, the article contradicts this and demonstrates how the influx of foreign cuisines creates pressures to modernize and reassert national cuisines, integrating them within their culinary region.

Keywords	Europeanisation; Food history; cultural history; Serbia; Bulgaria; European Union; Balkan history
Taxonomy	Cultural History, Cultural Influences on Food Choice, Contemporary Period, Urban History, Consumer Attitudes
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Corresponding Author	Albena Shkodrova

Rediscovering Europe and National Cuisine

How EU Integration is shaping food tastes in Sofia and Belgrade in the 21st century

Albena Shkodrova, Research Fellow at MoSa (Modernity and Society, 1800-2000), History Department, KU Leuven, Belgium

Abstract

This article researches the Europeanisation of the restaurant scenes in Sofia and Belgrade, capitals of an actual EU member-state and an aspiring one. By comparing the representations of foreign cuisines in aspects such as presumed depth and breadth of customers' knowledge, incorporation of culinary terms, use of authentic ingredients and presence of native chefs, the research establishes similarities between tastes and lifestyle aspirations in the two cities, but also differences in their realisation. This comparison outlines the structural advantages provided by EU membership with its facilitation of the movement of goods and people. Considering the researched material within the debate over European integration endangering local identities, the article contradicts this and demonstrates how the influx of foreign cuisines creates pressures to modernize and reassert national cuisines, integrating them within their culinary region.

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Notes on the author:

Albena Shkodrova is a journalist and a historian. For seven years she has been the editor in chief of Bulgaria's gourmet magazine Bacchus. Her book *Communist Gourmet: The Curious History of Food in the People's Republic of Bulgaria* (2014) became a bestseller in Bulgaria. Its English edition by CEU Press is expected in 2019. In 2017 Albena Shkodrova defended in Belgium her PhD *Rebellious Cooks: Practical and Hedonistic Powers of Writing Recipes in Communist Bulgaria*. She is now a research fellow at MoSa (Modernity and Society, 1800-2000) at the History Department of KU Leuven, Belgium.

Rediscovering Europe and National Cuisine

How EU Integration is shaping food tastes in Sofia and Belgrade in the 21st century

Scene 1

Cinecittà is an Italian restaurant in Sofia. Opened in 2012, it is run by a Bulgarian-speaking Italian. As the name suggests, it is situated near the “Cinema Centre” - the former communist state studios in the outskirts of the city where in the last 12 years over 300 international films have been produced, including *Conan the Barbarian* and *The Black Dalia*.

Its menu also has a cinematic quality and reads as if it were taken out of mouths of world-renowned chefs such as those featured in the documentary *Chef's Table*: “*Velouté* of Hokkaido pumpkin with porcini and truffles”; “Chocolate ravioli with *confit de canard* and *foie gras* with pesto made from pistachios and cream of chestnut”, “Succulent Iberico pork, cooked for 24 hours at a low temperature of 63 degrees, with caramelized shallots and pureed Borlotti beans”. Even the Italian-standard Caprese salad is given a baroque description: “Fresh mozzarella without added preservatives, produced by a small dairy farm (Gioie d’Italia) in Puglia, pink tomatoes, pesto”.

Written in Bulgarian and in Italian, Cinecittà’s menu opens with the restaurant’s concept: Serving a modernised version of “classical” Italian dishes in which top-quality ingredients are minimally processed in order to highlight their natural flavours. It informs diners that staples such as olive oil, flour, cheeses and cured meats are imported from Italy. A list of organic and biodiverse Bulgarian farms is reported to deliver the rest of the ingredients.

One might think that the menu was designed to address the expectations of visiting Hollywood stars, who can, indeed, be seen around; however, the *osteria* mainly caters to locals. In fact, dozens of restaurants in Sofia feature similar menus, overwhelming their customers with the names of refined or exotic ingredients and

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59 references to their remote or exclusive origin, offering somewhat excessively
60 complex and imaginative cuisine. To first-class restaurants, and increasingly so to
61 less flamboyant ones too, the elaborateness of dishes and their descriptions have
62 come to be seen as a standard.
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66 Sofia's restaurant scene may still lack consistency in the quality of food and service,
67 and the food that is served may often fail to meet the ambitious claims of the menus.
68 Yet anyone who remembers the grey, suffocating bore communist Sofia's restaurants
69 were two and a half decades ago, with their plain food and often malicious
70 treatment, would be startled to see their transformation. For according to any
71 standard, places like Cinecittà, which number just a few dozen in Sofia, speak of
72 developed professional cooking and high customer expectations.
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75 **Scene 2**

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78 Not far from the port of Belgrade on the Danube, squeezed between a local
79 supermarket and a print shop, surrounded by residential blocks, is Homa. If
80 interpreted as being written in Cyrillic, the sign with the name reads Noma, the
81 same as the famous Copenhagen venue often described as the best restaurant in the
82 world. The pun is intended, and Homa profiles itself as a fine dining establishment.
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86 A New York Times article described it as "a white haute-cuisine temple with soaring
87 glass windows and a pleasant patio" (Sherwood, 2016). Indeed, the menu is
88 imaginative. The dishes combine things like *foie gras* with blackberry on carob and
89 sunflower butter, or venison fillet and black truffle *carpaccio* with juniper and Pinot
90 Noir dressing served with mustard ice cream.
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94 The selection does not contain exuberant references to boutique foreign producers
95 like that of Sofia's Cinectittá, but the cuisine sounds ambitiously modern. Like in
96 Sofia, Belgrade restaurants with similarly inventive menus have begun to open only
97 in the last decade. Those fine dining spots that do not resemble traditional
98 restaurants are still sparse, according to the owners of Homa, mainly due to the
99 "income levels and the ability to travel" of the city's residents, on whom the success
100 of these establishments depends (Guttman, 2015). Regardless, restaurants like
101 Homa increasingly challenge the idea of the Serbian capital as a place of "sausage-
102 filled cuisine" (Sherwood, 2016).
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115 **Introduction**
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118 The reasons behind the changing urban foodscape in Bulgaria and Serbia, as in any
119 place in world, are complex. Global developments, including the boom of culinary
120 information available on the Internet and the increasing interest in new tastes
121 amongst European and global middle-class consumers fuelled by intensifying
122 international trade and tourism, are responsible in part (Scholliers, 2007, 2009).
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126 But what is specific to Bulgaria and Serbia is that after a shared period of isolation
127 from the Western part of the continent, the last decade was defined by efforts
128 toward reunification. Processes of integration on the cultural, economic and political
129 levels between formerly divided Eastern and Western Europe have guided important
130 cultural and political transformation in the former satellites of the Soviet Union, and
131 Bulgaria was no exception. The country's accession to the European Union has been
132 a central transformative threshold. Serbia also lived through a period of isolation -
133 especially in the turbulent post-Yugoslav years - and then headed towards a closer
134 relationship with the countries of the European Union.
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139 This article enquires about how this reorientation has affected people's diets,
140 foodways and tastes. It explores how Europeanisation is understood in the two
141 countries, how is it constituted, and how it changes foodways and food tastes in the
142 Balkans. To offset the effects of actual EU membership on this part of the public
143 foodscape, I use the comparison between the restaurant scenes in Sofia and
144 Belgrade. While restaurants are not representative of people's daily diets, they do
145 simultaneously serve as trend-setters and reflect consumers' food culture and
146 expectations. Seeking out evidence of the impact Europeanisation has had on local
147 cuisines, the article analyses the intricate ways in which the "national" and the
148 "European" interact, as well as how tensions between them are being resolved. With
149 this article I continue the discussion of whether Europeanisation threatens to
150 obliterate the national character of material and/or immaterial culture and argue
151 that, in contrast, it in fact contributes to engagement with and the re-invention of
152 national cuisines in both their material and immaterial aspects.
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159 Food is seen by scholars as an excellent lens with which to observe social changes in
160 former communist Europe - several researchers have argued that it is a particularly
161 important indicator of social development in the region, as it has been "central to
162 both socialist and post-socialist reformist projects, as social engineers have used
163 food to promote new societies based on modernity, progress, and culturedness" (see
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171 Caldwell, 2009:3, quoting Glants and Toomre, 1997).
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174 What “Europeanisation” means on a cultural, economic and political level has been
175 and continues to be debated, but it seems that controversies are played out more in
176 public debates than within academia. Many scholars generally agree on the positive
177 social effects of the Europeanisation process. Borneman and Fowler (1997: 489)
178 described Europeanisation as a process that redefines “forms of identification with
179 territory and people”. The identities resulting from it transcend traditional ideas of
180 society and polity and are cosmopolitan, rather than related to “something specific
181 as a European People, a European society, a European supra-state or European
182 heritage” (Delanty and Rumford, 2005: 23). Following these arguments, Wilson
183 (2006: 17) asserted that Europeanisation might be seen as a radical change in “the
184 groundwork of local, regional and national social, economic and political frames of
185 reference”.
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191 These developments have frequently troubled different social layers in Eastern
192 European countries. While the post-communist enthusiasm over newly acquired
193 political and cultural freedoms has receded, doubts have arisen, often fuelled by
194 growing nationalism and populism. One of the most vocal is the fear that
195 Europeanisation might be endangering national identities. Food, as an important
196 element of identity construction, has therefore been an object of emotional
197 discussions (Gavrilova, 2015).
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202 Reacting to rising public fears of possible cultural assimilation, unification and
203 obliteration of the national, scholars have analysed some of the consequences of
204 European integration and found the opposite of assimilation. Zinger (2010) and
205 Milenković (2013) noted that integration ensures sovereignty over the
206 interpretation of past and over current cultural referential frameworks. Focusing on
207 food, De Soucey (2010: 433) demonstrated how EU policies facilitate and
208 accommodate what she calls the use of food “to demarcate and sustain the emotive
209 power of national attachment”.
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213 Acknowledging this debate as socially important, this article offers some evidence of
214 how closer interactions with EU countries stimulate local culture. Observed
215 differences between Sofia and Belgrade also reveal the effect of actual EU
216 membership on people’s everyday routines.
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220 The choice of comparing Sofia and Belgrade rests on the fact that both countries are
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227 pursuing a future within the European Union; while Bulgaria has been an EU
228 member since January 2007, Serbia is still negotiating its membership (a process
229 that began in 2014).
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233 The analogy is further facilitated by the cultural and gastronomic proximity between
234 the two cities, their similar size and national role against which the degree of
235 European integration currently constitutes a difference. The cuisine of Serbia, just
236 like that of Bulgaria, belongs to the shared pool of Balkan cuisine, which is a
237 historical crossroads of Oriental, Mediterranean and Central-European influences.
238 Centred on meats and bread, the culinary tastes of the two nations have been
239 established as being relatively much closer to one another than to other countries in
240 the region, such as Greece or Turkey (Krusteva-Blagoeva, 2010:16), even if the latter
241 two cuisines are undoubtedly the origin of many regional dishes.
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246 Apart from the great similarities between the two national cuisines and foodways, as
247 well as both countries' shared past, some differences are also of importance to this
248 research. During the period of state socialism in the 20th century, the Yugoslav
249 federation enjoyed much greater freedom of movement for people and trade with
250 the West than Bulgaria. Under the later years of Tito and under Milošević, Serbs
251 migrated in significant numbers to and from Austria, Western Germany and
252 Switzerland, amongst other places, where many of them worked in the HoReCa
253 (Hotel, Restaurant, Catering) business. Such cultural exchange was far more limited
254 in Bulgaria under Zhivkov.
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259 Another difference came from the structure of the Yugoslav federation, which placed
260 Belgrade as the capital of multiple nations and territories, including the Adriatic
261 coast. As the regions of Istria and Dalmatia were historically greatly influenced by
262 Venice, their cuisines incorporate many foods and foodways associated today with
263 Italian cuisine. One important example of this historical influence is the production
264 of local varieties of hand-made pasta in these territories, which today are part of
265 Croatia. Additionally, seafood constitutes an important part of the menu.
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269 The 1990s set Sofia and Belgrade further apart: the wars in former Yugoslavia
270 pushing the Serbian capital into isolation while Sofia made small but generally
271 consistent steps towards EU membership.
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275 In recent years, both countries have shared their path towards European integration
276 as well as the general social consensus that this integration will present a
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'normalisation' of state systems and people's lives (see Caldwell, 2009 on Eastern Europe and Zikić, 2012 and Brujic, 2015 on Serbia). These differences and similarities are taken into account and discussed further in the analysis of the source material.

290 **Sources and methods**

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The study is based on an analysis of online self-presentation of popular restaurants that were operating in Sofia and Belgrade at the time of research. The most popular online restaurant guides according to the global rating system Alexa,¹ Na vidiku for Belgrade and Zavedenia for Sofia, were used to select groups of relevant restaurants in the two cities.²

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In both cases, an overlap was sought out between restaurants' ratings and their self-identification as "European", meaning that they specialize in a particular cuisine of a European-Union nation or that of a region which includes EU lands (such cases were "Mediterranean" and "International"), and not being indicated as serving local cuisine. In this way I formed two equally-sized groups in Belgrade and Sofia consisting of 22 restaurants each. The restaurants in the groups turned out to be within the average to upmarket price range. The web guides referenced do not present exhaustive data-bases of the two cities' restaurants, hence the two samples represent only a portion of the popular restaurants falling into the relevant group. However, they are equal in quality and representativeness, as they are based on significant primary material (the selection methods were applied to 820 restaurants in Belgrade and 1,025 restaurants in Sofia).

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After identifying the groups, I researched the restaurants' websites, their menus and, in some cases, their Facebook pages. Barthes' idea (1997) of the dish as "a

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¹ Alexa was formerly an independent global site-ranking system; it is now part of the Amazon group.

² As Na vidiku is a general guide, rather one solely for restaurants, its data was supplemented with that of the most popular amongst the (relatively) specialized restaurant guides, Belgrade Beat. As Na vidiku did not suggest significant ratings-related activity, and Belgrade Beat does not include any system to rate the restaurants, Trip Advisor was used to finalize the selection. For Sofia only, Zavedenia was used alone, as it is a vibrant restaurants-only guide of great popularity and offers both a general overview and an indication of the popularity of restaurants.

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339 functional unit of a system of communication” was used in previous research in
340 Bulgaria by scholars like Ivanova and Vukov (2010) and Gavrilova (2015). I
341 borrowed their approach to restaurant food and menus and applied quantitative and
342 qualitative methods, including discourse analysis and close reading, to map the
343 information from the sources in two tables which then served as a basis for the
344 comparative analysis. To answer the research question of how Europeanisation as a
345 general trend and EU membership as a technical element of it have affected food
346 tastes and foodways, the sources were studied with a focus on the language of
347 descriptions, ingredients, types of dishes, contained references to cuisines, regions
348 of origin and producers, expected and demonstrated expertise, and presentation of
349 the chefs. The presupposed customer interest as well as presumed specific
350 knowledge were also examined.
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356 A marked difference in the restaurants of different price categories in both capitals
357 suggested a significant differentiation in food culture and the expectations of
358 customers from different social groups. My research does not capture these
359 differences: further research of greater complexity is needed to provide enough
360 information to allow for such analysis. Another limitation of the analysis is that it is
361 based on sources allowing for only a rudimentary time perspective. This weakness is
362 to some extent compensated for via references to other sources.
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367 The next section presents the findings of the comparative analysis: how the term
368 “European” is used by the restaurants in the samples; how European national
369 cuisines are represented in each of the groups; and the scope of access to specialized
370 knowledge, ingredients and human resources which is evident in the restaurants’
371 menus and (self-)presentations. After that, I explore how “Europeanisation”
372 constructs and resolves tensions within a generic binomial opposition to the
373 “national” and I also discuss the role of European integration in the observed trends
374 and its impact on broader foodscapes.
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379 **Identifying as ‘European’**

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382 The research brought up one obvious contrast in the inclination among Sofia and
383 Belgrade restaurants to use the label “European”. Neither of the two Serbian
384 restaurant guides uses the term as a tag. It is also not encountered in the self-
385 presentation of the restaurants on their websites. The two most popular
386 identification tags referring to European cuisines are “Italian” (10 in the group) and
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“Mediterranean” (9). The more general “international” is also used (5), while “French” and “Spanish” are each used once.

By contrast, the term “European” is commonplace in the Bulgarian Zavedenia. A search for the word delivers 511 results in Sofia alone. Additionally, “European” is widely used on the restaurant websites and in their menus (12 in the group of 22, as presented on Zavedenia). In some cases, it seems as though it is used to signify Bulgarian cuisine as part of a greater pool, and sometimes it labels a specific national cuisine from Western Europe or indicates the broad region. “Mediterranean” (6 in the group) and “international” (4) are also popular labels. Equally present are the national tags “Italian” (10), “Greek” (3), “Spanish” (1) and “French” (1).

Thus, identification as “European” seems to be far more common in the Bulgarian group, but there are still substantial similarities in both guides’ representation of the countries’ national cuisines; the Mediterranean region dominates the foodscape outside of national cuisine.

It is difficult to attribute the frequent use of the label “European” in Bulgaria only to the abundance of non-European restaurants, as such restaurants seem to be equally plentiful in both capitals: any restaurant guide search delivers dozens of Indian, Japanese and Chinese establishments. A more likely explanation might be that “European” is not as strongly constituted as a category of generalisation in Serbia as it is in Bulgaria. In Sofia the notion was boosted by post-communist aspirations for reunification with Western Europe, combined with the general national self-depreciation typical of the period. Having lived through communist isolationism, many people believed that although the country may be part of Europe geographically, the regime had kept it withdrawn from there in an economic and cultural sense. However, this is an interpretational hypothesis and further, separate research needs to be pursued in order to test it.

What, then, does being “European” consist of? The structure of information in the studied restaurant guides already offers a good illustration of the described taste for Italian/Mediterranean cuisine. The two categories on Na vidiku referring to European cuisine are “Italian restaurants” and “Gyro places”. In Belgrade Beat they are “Mediterranean” and “Italian”. There are separate sections for Mexican, Asian and Sushi, but not for Greek, Balkan, French, Spanish or any other European national or regional cuisine.

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453 Zavedenia offers a search featuring a dozen national European cuisine labels (from
454 Italian, Greek, Irish, Spanish, German and French to the very marginal Hungarian
455 and Czech). But among them, only “Mediterranean” and “Pizzerias” comprise
456 separate categories in the section for top restaurants. Finally, the three common
457 pillars of the popular idea of “Italian food” (pasta, pizza and risotto) can be found on
458 almost every menu around town.
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462 The second most popular cuisine in both cities seems to be Greek. Although Greek
463 restaurants are far less represented, Greek dishes very often appear on menus and
464 comprise an important part of the locally represented “Mediterranean” cuisine. One
465 reason for this specific situation might be that many Greek dishes and foodways,
466 which are shared by the Balkan regional pool of cuisines, were incorporated in the
467 past and are either considered by Serbs and Bulgarians “as their own” or are simply
468 seen as ubiquitously regional and are not associated with Greece.
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472 It may sound paradoxical, but French cuisine in some respects occupies the same
473 status as Greek food in Sofia and Belgrade: some elements of it have been
474 assimilated, while others are being reintroduced as an important part of the
475 Mediterranean pool of dishes. Having played a central role in the shaping of the
476 European restaurant menu (see Fergusson 2004 and Iomaire 2009, amongst
477 others), French cuisine was incorporated into the restaurant culture of both
478 countries under communism. The communist tourist organization Balkantourist,
479 which ran nearly half of the restaurants in Bulgaria, made dishes like *Chateaubriand*
480 steak, fish *orly*, or *cordon bleu* ubiquitous; by 1989, they were perceived to be
481 generic international restaurant dishes.
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483 The situation in Serbia was similar, as the movement of people working in the
484 HoReCa industry across Europe also ensured access to international hotel standards.
485 Some traces of this can even be found in the contemporary menus of the sample -
486 Salon 1905 offers the old-school restaurant dish, Tournedo Rossini,³ and Dorian
487 Grey offers a clear French beef bouillon.
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493 In recent decades, French cuisine has been rediscovered in a different light. The
494 flavours of Southern France are featured on the menus of many Mediterranean
495 restaurants. Strictly French restaurants are rarer. One place in the Belgrade group
496 defines its menu as being based on French cuisine but also not confined within the
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500 ³ A dish prepared with beef filet mignon with *foie gras*, truffles and Madeira sauce.
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507 limits of it. At least three French restaurants run by French chefs exist in Sofia, but
508 none of them found their way into the sample due to relatively low ratings.
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511 Another cuisine of interest appears to be that of Spain, but it is also less represented,
512 with only one restaurant having a consistently Spanish menu in the Sofia sample.
513 One Spanish-Latin American and one Spanish-Latin-American-Asian fusion
514 restaurant exist in Belgrade. Other cuisines with proximity and historical influence -
515 Central-European and Austrian or German - remain very occasionally presented.
516 Food originating north of Paris seems to be limited to Belgian chocolate and beer
517 and Dutch Gouda cheese.
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521 This hierarchy of the local taste for varying foreign cuisines is by no means
522 exceptionally Eastern European. In her study on West Germany, Mohring (2008:
523 136) quoted coinciding survey results: almost 50 per cent of respondents “preferred
524 Italian restaurants, followed by Chinese and Greek restaurants (21 per cent and 18
525 per cent, respectively). French cuisine was named by only 2 per cent and Spanish
526 cuisine by just 1 per cent.
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529 530 **The Depth of Knowledge**

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532 Here “depth of knowledge” is used to describe two closely related inquiries: how
533 detailed and far-reaching the restaurant’s competence was regarding the specific
534 cuisine, as demonstrated through the menu, and how exhaustive the knowledge
535 expected of customers was.
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540 While in both countries Italian cuisine seems to enjoy the greatest popularity, its
541 introduction has a different history. Serbs’ affection for this cuisine seems to date at
542 least back to the golden years of Tito’s Yugoslavia or earlier. Already by the 1940s in
543 Slovenia, the influence of immigration from fascist Italy was being felt (Godina-
544 Golija, 2003). One of the contemporary Italian restaurants in Belgrade presents its
545 opening as a “return” of the old passion for Italian cuisine in Serbia:
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550 When eight years ago (...) La Piazza opened, in Belgrade returns the real
551 passion for the tastes of the Apennines. The Italian cuisine, which was in
552 these lands for long the only present and accepted national cuisine besides
553 our domestic one, had slightly lost its charms before the influx of Far Eastern
554 and Fusion cuisine. (...) (La Piazza, 2018). [SIC!]
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565 Italian flavours were also introduced to Belgrade via the Adriatic seacoast, in Istria
566 and Dalmatia, where several generations of Serbs spent their summers familiarising
567 themselves with the local home-made pasta production, inherited from the times of
568 the Venetian Republic. Bulgarians, in contrast, discovered Italian cuisine only after
569 the end of communism. No cookbook from before 1944 indicates any serious
570 knowledge of it, and state-socialism's isolationism also contributed for the delay. In
571 the 1980s a local version of pizza, called "garnished pitta", was introduced as a street
572 food, and in 1989 Bulgarians were still using the word "pasta" solely as the name of
573 a type of layered cake.
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578 Currently in both Balkan capitals, the local restaurants' menus indicate that a
579 process of incorporating Italian dishes into the traditional diet is under way: pizza,
580 pasta and risotto are ubiquitous. While there is a clear awareness of their Italian
581 origin, they have been blended with the local food and adapted to local tastes. The
582 internationally popular types of Italian sauces are almost considered generic, as are
583 many types of pasta. But the range of well-incorporated dishes subject to
584 recreation/adaptation is much broader than that and reaches through all parts of
585 the menu.
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589 One common observation in Belgrade and Sofia is that since many restaurants offer
590 these well-known "standards", places which seek identification as Italian find it
591 difficult to profile themselves. Some find solutions such as excelling in making
592 homemade pasta or particularly skilfully baked pizza. There are several examples in
593 Belgrade, like Trattoria Campania, which invited 2017 world champion *maestro*
594 *pizzaiuolo* Michele Leo to showcase his work to customers, or La Campanella,
595 advertising its Chef Pantelev as a World Pizza Association member and Federazione
596 Italiana Pizzaioli nel Mondo alumnus.
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601 Another currently more popular way for Italian restaurants to profile themselves is
602 by expanding their menus towards less familiar territories. The bulk of restaurants
603 in both cities are making similar efforts by offering a range of Italian starters and
604 cooked dishes. There is some difference, though, in the direction in which this is
605 done in Belgrade and Sofia.
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609 In Belgrade the focus and goal seem to be set on the authenticity of the recipes.
610 Overall, dishes beyond the standards seem to either refer to authentic Italian recipes
611 or to combinations of generic (not specified in terms of origin) ingredients which
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619 aim at producing Italian tastes. For example, some typical dishes of this sort would
620 be chicken medallions wrapped in *pancetta* and stuffed with basil and mozzarella,
621 beef in a Parmigiano crust (on Cuoco's menu), chicken filet with broccoli and
622 Gorgonzola (La Piazza) or chicken with mozzarella and rocket (Amici).
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626 Sometimes the names of the dishes include references to particular regions of Italy,
627 for example "Ragu alla Napoletana" or "Calamari all'Amalfitana" (Trattoria
628 Campania). Authenticity is also sought through indicating the origin of ingredients:
629 there are a lot of examples featuring the more popular ingredients (Parmigiano
630 Romano, for instance) and an exceptionally broad range of products with mentioned
631 origin.
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635 Italian restaurants in Sofia also exploit the authenticity concept, to a greater extent
636 than in Belgrade. But one difference that stands out is the availability of modernized
637 and even author's versions of Italian dishes. The foremost example of this in the
638 selected group is Cinecittà. While its menu is strongly connected with Italian cuisine,
639 including multiple references and ingredients, it is also an exuberant modernist
640 reinterpretation of familiar Italian tastes. It broadly seems that if by the late 1980s
641 Belgrade had a significant advance on Sofia in its familiarity with Italian cuisine, now
642 the situation has been reversed.
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647 In general, creative attitudes towards Italian cuisine are visible on the menus of
648 many Mediterranean restaurants, which do include Italian recipes, ingredients and
649 tastes but do not vow to be limited by them. Such an approach can be found in both
650 countries and has particularly pronounced results in Sofia, where many menus
651 intensively exploit the increasing access to information, techniques and ingredients.
652 In Belgrade, one example is Amphora, which employs the concept of *carpaccio* to a
653 dessert made of pineapple and also offers a "cream-cappuccino with shrimp". In
654 Sofia's Este, the chefs offer their own authored recipes, an example dish being the
655 "Goat cheese beetroot cannelloni with 'Jamon Iberico de Bellota', black cherries, pear
656 chutney, horseradish and maple syrup".
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662 Greek and French cuisine have been appropriated in a similar way, but with some
663 peculiarities. Greek cuisine has historically co-created and been co-created along
664 with that of Serbia and Bulgaria within the Ottoman-influenced Balkan region. But
665 Greece's greater access to seafood, vast coastline and warmer climate have worked
666 to profile its food in some important ways. Contemporary Bulgarian and Serbian
667 cuisines share many dishes and features with Northern mainland Greek cuisine:
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675 abundant filo-pastry dishes, the ubiquitous use of feta and yogurt, the combination
676 of mint with meat, particularly lamb, and vegetable and bean dishes baked in clay
677 pots, to name but a few.
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680 Probably due to this, contemporary Greek restaurants in the two capitals profile
681 themselves with dishes which Greek cuisine does not share with the local cuisines.
682 The contemporary presentation in Sofia and Belgrade is strongly influenced by
683 typical Greek restaurants on the seaside, called *psarotaverna*. Important elements of
684 the menu are grilled fresh or sun-dried octopus, deep-fried calamari, *tarama* caviar
685 and olives, *skordalya* dip and grilled freshly caught Mediterranean fish.
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690 The popularity of this type of food in Bulgaria is directly related to the political
691 process of its integration within the EU, which has allowed Bulgarians to freely
692 travel to Greece since 2001. In the following years, hundreds of thousands of
693 Bulgarians began visiting this country and their number has grown exponentially as
694 of late: from half a million in 2012 to over two and a half million in 2016. Currently,
695 Greece remains the most-visited destination for Bulgarian tourists (Dnevnik, 2017).
696 The number of Serbs travelling to Greece for tourism in the last year fluctuated
697 between 620 and 990 thousand (UNTWO, 2018).
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701
702 The comparison between the Greek restaurants from the two groups shows that
703 both explicitly strive to defend their claim to authenticity and present themselves as
704 a piece of Greece's seaside on the Balkan mainland. Piatakia in Belgrade describes
705 itself as "more than a just a Greek restaurant".
706

707
708 It is a Greek destination in Belgrade, a get-away, a Greek lifestyle and
709 philosophy spot, with Greek colours, flavours, aromas and the most
710 important – people, all those who have at least one thing in common: a wish
711 to relax and enjoy the journey with us (...) Traveling every day together, we
712 don't make clients but friends (Piatakia, 2018).
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717 In the same vein, Yamas in Sofia announces that its "menu offers authentic and
718 traditional Greek dishes which would make you feel that you are in Greece itself."
719 This type of restaurant marketing, as a momentary escape into the world of holidays
720 and carefree time spent along southern beaches, is widely used across Central and
721 Northern Europe (see Mohring, 2008), where Greece is a popular recreational
722 destination.
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733 Both the restaurant in Belgrade and the one in Sofia presuppose a significant degree
734 of knowledge about Greek cuisine on the part of their customers, which could be
735 explained by the popularity of Greece as a tourist destination in both countries. The
736 difference between the two is that the menu of the Bulgarian restaurant is broader
737 and offers a greater variety of fresh fish (thirteen kinds of fish, compared to four).
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741 The restaurants offering Greek cuisine as part of Mediterranean food sometimes
742 also turn towards claiming such authenticity, but more often they feel free to
743 interpret the recipes creatively. A typical example is this variation of a Greek salad
744 from Sofia's Capo: "Aromatic peeled almonds, cucumber, salad onions, fresh peppers,
745 herbal mousse, white cheese, mixed green lettuce with Mediterranean pitta bread,
746 olive oil and Kalamata olives".
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750 As mentioned above, French restaurants are practically non-existent in Belgrade and
751 number just a few in Sofia. French dishes do appear in the Mediterranean mélange,
752 though, again with particular reference to Sofia's restaurants. Belgrade's
753 Kalemegdanska Terasa, Casa Nova, Dorian Gray and Salon 1905 feature French
754 bistro classics such as onion soup, snails, *foie gras* and Niçoise salad. Sofia's menus,
755 in contrast, tend to offer variations and innovations of these: "*Foie gras* with
756 kumquat purée, saffron chicory, white asparagus cream and sweet potato
757 sauce" (Este); "*Foie gras* with Saint Jacque and miso" (Capo).
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762 Lastly, Spanish cuisine is also currently represented in the two capitals, and while
763 interest in it seems equally peripheral, there are slight differences in its
764 representation. In Belgrade two restaurants in the studied group offer Spanish
765 cuisine, and at both of them it is blended with related cuisines: one treats it as part
766 of the Spanish-Latin-American pool and the other incorporates it into a recent fusion
767 cuisine trend that connects Latino/Spanish and Far Eastern cuisines.
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771 The version in Sofia is more limited to strictly Spanish cuisine, with references to
772 regions like Galicia and Valencia. In some cases, information is given to verify the use
773 of correct ingredients, such as the sort of rice used in the paella. The paella itself is
774 offered not only in its rice version, but also with tiny *fideuà* noodles, a variation on
775 the dish that is generally less popular across Europe. The restaurant also offers less
776 internationalised dishes, such as *callos madrinellos*, *mollejas de lechazo* and
777 *carrilleras*.
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789 Thus, the researched material indicates that Sofia's restaurants see a greater need to
790 prove their "authenticity". They offer broader segments of the represented national
791 cuisines and demonstrate more confidence in the knowledge of their customers,
792 whose expectations they also seem to find higher. This appears to be related to the
793 increased presence of chefs who are native to the relevant cuisines. It also seems to
794 stem from the more extensive travel opportunities of the targeted customers. As a
795 result, the examined group of restaurants in Sofia seeks (and finds ways) to
796 demonstrate a deeper knowledge of and commitment to the European cuisines it
797 presents to local customers.
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801 **Chefs and their ingredients**

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804 If in the range and depth of culinary knowledge there seem to be many similarities
805 between Sofia and Belgrade, such are less obvious when it comes to access to
806 ingredients. A general overview showed that there is a certain pool of widespread
807 foods originating from EU countries and which are widely available, used and named
808 without any explanations. This pool happens to appear on the menu of any
809 restaurant, specialized or not in the specific cuisine, to which the ingredient is
810 related. The bulk of these foods are cured meats and cheeses, but it also includes
811 some vegetables untypical for local cuisines.
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816 The main difference between the restaurants in Sofia and in Belgrade is their access
817 to ingredients from European Union countries beyond this pool. As a gross
818 generalization, four restaurants from the group of 22 in Belgrade include a
819 significant number of specific ingredients apart from this pool on their menus, while
820 the same is valid for 15 restaurants out of the group of 22 in Sofia. Another six
821 restaurants in both cities have a few such ingredients on their menus, while 12 in
822 Belgrade and one in Sofia do not seem to work with anything beyond this main pool.
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827 Further illustration of this difference is that the Bulgarian restaurants in the group
828 more greatly emphasize the origin of their ingredients. In Serbia, four restaurants
829 provide specific ingredients, offering a formidable range of Italian cheeses and
830 meats, while the other menus accentuate the originality or ethnic affiliation of the
831 recipes but stick to using ingredients which are more conventional for the local
832 market, sometimes loosely indicating their national origin (like the "Spanish cheese"
833 on De Frida's menu).
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843 In comparison, the restaurants in Sofia demonstrate what seems to be excessive
844 attention to their ingredients, both regarding quality and origin. The cheeses,
845 particularly the Italian ones, are somewhat expansive and this is also true of the
846 cured meats section. But most notably developed seems to be the list of raw meats,
847 seafood and other ingredients in which the choice is indeed abundant: menus often
848 employ lengthy and enticing explanations that test their clients' geographical
849 knowledge and endurance to temptation. They include a cascade of soft-shell crab,
850 Greek blue crab, yellowfin tuna, French-farmed chicken, quail and their eggs, Black
851 Angus meat (Protected Geographical Indication, 5th stage of marbleisation), French
852 Charolais beef, horse and bison meat, sweetbreads from milk-fed lambs (Protected
853 Geographical Indication from Ireland) and many others. Lentils and beans, leafy
854 vegetables, potatoes of all colours and other long lists of ingredients add to the
855 baroque opulence.
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862 For the restaurants from the Sofia sample, just offering “pork chops” as was the
863 norm for so many years in Bulgaria seems to be perceived as inadequate. It seems
864 that informing the customer about which corner of the world the meat comes from,
865 how the animal was raised, how the meat was transformed by careful, considerate
866 and skilful hands and precise equipment, etc. have all become indispensable to
867 serving a dish in a good restaurant.
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871 The ingredients are not simply mentioned but are employed to facilitate several
872 concepts pursued by Sofia's restaurant menus: authenticity, abundance and
873 travelling with your palate. These three lines, also present in Belgrade, here seem to
874 have gone to the extreme in an ambition to impress and convince clients of the
875 Bulgarian capital's cosmopolitanism and sophistication today – a sophistication
876 which sometimes comes with misspellings and typos.
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880 Another difference which transpires from the comparison between the two groups
881 of restaurants is the presence of “native-cooking” chefs representing their cuisines.
882 On the websites of the Belgrade group, one Greek chef, who cooks for the Greek
883 restaurant, one French *patissier*, who works part-time to prepare the desserts at
884 Voules-Vous, and one Italian consultant are mentioned. The presence of Italians is
885 particularly visible in Sofia's restaurants: five native Italian chefs/owners/
886 sommeliers, one Italian-Bulgarian and one German-Bulgarian (a celebrity chef in
887 Bulgaria who offers author's cuisine in his restaurant André). Both in Belgrade and
888 in Sofia, some restaurants emphasise their owners' or chefs' experience abroad
889 (such is the cases for Belgrade's Salon 105 and Little Bay and Yamas in Sofia).
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901 Overall, the restaurants' self-presentations suggest a slight difference between the
902 two cities in the attention which is attributed to the personality of the chef. In Sofia,
903 thirteen of the restaurants profile their chefs; in Belgrade, only six do so. The
904 concept of author's cuisine also seems more prominent and celebrated in Sofia than
905 in Belgrade at this stage.
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908 909 910 **Building and resolving tensions with national cuisine**

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912 One might expect the broadening representation of European cuisines in both
913 countries to create certain tensions within the national foodscapes. The very
914 identification of a restaurant as one that offers foreign ethnic cuisine positions it, in
915 a certain sense, as "alien" and opposed to what is one's own, the "national".
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919 This generic binomial opposition taps into an existing public anxiousness that
920 European integration will challenge and threaten national identities with fading
921 away. Such feeling has been identified on a more general level as a contest over
922 national identity (Milenković, 2013). It is also visible in recurring discourse over the
923 European Union "banning" ingredients or dishes that are considered as essential
924 elements of national foodways. Publications of this nature, often based on
925 misinterpretations about different consumer-protection measures, have appeared
926 regularly in the Bulgarian press since the country became a member-state. One of
927 the latest examples was the claim that the EU is about to "ban tripe soup, *rakia* and
928 *duners*" (Berberov, 2017). Tripe soup is often announced as the nation's "best-loved"
929 soup (Zvezdev, 2013) and *rakia*, a traditionally produced drink high in alcohol, is
930 also seen as an essential element of the national food/drink-way. Within this
931 discourse, Europeanisation is seen as a process of de-nationalisation.
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937 Thinking along the same lines, one could presume that the influx of new ingredients
938 and of foreign food culture would increasingly marginalize their local counterparts.
939 In fact, my material suggests that quite the opposite occurs. Yet there are clear
940 indications that the increasing presence and knowledge of foreign cuisines has a
941 developmental impact on local ones, as I will now show.
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945 It seems that the introduction of food and foodways from Europe has pushed local
946 chefs to invest more energy into local food too, trying to adapt it to their
947 understanding of modern diets and modern tastes. Whether Italian, French or
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955 Mediterranean, even the most clearly profiled restaurants regularly sneak at least a
956 couple of local dishes onto the menu. Borrowing techniques and ideas, they try to
957 adapt them to the higher demands of their often wealthy and knowledgeable
958 customers. This happens all the more often in restaurants which avoid strictly
959 identifying with national cuisines, opting for eclectically composed menus instead.
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963 In an environment where many caterers adapt to mass popular tastes with “no
964 search for authentic dishes with original names and from local
965 ingredients” (Gavrilova, 2015), “European cuisine” restaurants, which are also
966 upper-class places, work to promote the value of the regional and the local. Their
967 menus clearly suggest that an appreciation for this has developed for both foreign
968 and national products. It is often expressed through concrete references, rather than
969 general and vague claims such as those observed by Gavrilova in her study of the
970 notion of the “national” in contemporary Bulgarian restaurants indicated as serving
971 local cuisine.
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976 Looking back at the recent impact of the post-communist opening up of Bulgarian
977 cuisine, a range of rediscovered domestic products, dishes and foodways can be
978 identified, all of which resulted from internationalisation. Some of them came in the
979 1990s with the commodification of previously non-commercial products such as
980 wild mushrooms, in particular the porcini abundant in Bulgaria’s forests, fresh (not
981 dried) herbs like basil and oregano, Black Sea fish (marinated in an artisanal
982 manner) and cheeses in their smoked, fresh, unsalted and soft forms, among others.
983 The Italian restaurants were the first to start exploiting combinations with porcini
984 mushrooms in the 1990s. Sprigs of fresh herbs, however available they may have
985 been in the wild, were first introduced by the newly opened high-end restaurants
986 which attempted French and Italian-inspired fine dining in the 2000s. The idea of
987 producing and consuming fresh (non-matured) and reduced-salt cheeses was also
988 influenced by a growing public familiarity with mozzarella.
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994 The restaurant menus in Belgrade also suggest a growing understanding of the value
995 of local ingredients. Many products appear with articulated reference to their origin
996 (for example, Montenegrin and Nieguś prosciutto or cheese from the Croatian island
997 of Pag) to add value to the food being offered.
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1000
1001 While the abundance of techniques, ingredients and equipment may not beautify
1002 local cuisines in all cases, it does push for their redefinition. Those restaurants
1003 which offer author’s cuisine work particularly hard to recreate and modernize
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1011 Bulgarian cuisine and align it with the standards of the modern Western cuisines in
1012 which many of their chefs were trained. Local dishes are freshened up by
1013 unexpected ingredients, lightened textures and challenged stereotypes. One of many
1014 examples would be the transformation of potato salad – typically boiled potatoes,
1015 white onions, perhaps some smoked mackerel, vinegar and sunflower oil – into
1016 “Bulgarian potato salad with leek, quail egg, homemade smoked trout fillet and trout
1017 caviar” (Andrè).
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1022 Other ingredients previously unused in cooking, though popular in Bulgaria, have
1023 been introduced to add originality. Lavender, roses and *Mursal* tea can be found as
1024 reimagined, edible components of complex meals.
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1027 Similar examples can be found in the development of Serbian menus in recent years.
1028 National cuisine is often reworked by chefs to become as interesting to customers as
1029 the food borrowed from other European cuisines. The menu at Homa is an example
1030 of this. Much-loved Serbian *kaymak*, which for years was usually served up
1031 unadorned as three ice-cream balls on a leaf of lettuce, is here presented as Zlatar's
1032 breaded *kaymak* with local black truffles and walnuts.
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1036 Thus, the idea that the European obliterates the local is not supported by actual
1037 practices going on within the “Europeanising” restaurant scene. It seems that it
1038 instead pushes chefs to search for modern representations of national cuisines,
1039 adapted to customers’ heightened expectations – and challenging them. In that
1040 regard, they pursue more complexity, increase the presence of relevant local
1041 ingredients and lighten fare by using vegetables more freely than meat, which
1042 dominated restaurant menus in the two countries for decades. This latest trend
1043 could also be interpreted as a (delayed) adoption of what has been a dominant
1044 element in Europe since the 1970s: nutritional ideology about the healthy nature of
1045 a Mediterranean diet.
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1051 Another aspect which reduces the possibility of building up tensions between the
1052 “European” and the “national” seems to be the quite liberally conceptualised idea of
1053 national cuisine in both countries. While restaurants focused on national cuisine
1054 seem to be actively constructing this (Gavrilova, 2015), popular writing on it in
1055 many cases acknowledges the existence of multiple foreign influences as well as the
1056 lack of clear borders between national, on the one side, and regional and European
1057 cuisines on the other. The website of Sofia’s Amphora, for example, has republished
1058 an article from Wikipedia presenting Bulgarian cuisine as a “synthesis of European
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1067 and Oriental cuisines". It also avoids inventing traditions, rather choosing to
1068 explicitly attribute some "national" dishes' authorship to the communist tourism
1069 industry.⁴
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1073 In Serbia, too, the discourse on national cuisine being influenced by and closely
1074 related to other Balkan cuisines is very apparent. The country's national foodways
1075 are often described as belonging to the pool of Balkan and Mediterranean food: "a
1076 rough generalisation would be that it is a combination of Greek, Bulgarian, Turkish
1077 and Hungarian cuisine," writes one website (serbia.com, 2018).⁵
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1081 To post-communist Europe, past aspirations for Europeanisation in many ways
1082 expressed a desire to join the material and cultural world of Western Europe. It was
1083 an imaginary world beyond the Iron Curtain that was the object of such desires for
1084 integration. And indeed, looking at the data quoted regarding European cuisines'
1085 representation in Sofia and Belgrade, one might conclude that the "Europeanisation"
1086 of the restaurant scenes in Sofia and Belgrade has consisted of approximating those
1087 of Western Europe.
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1091 However, food is a specific domain where other factors such as proximity of taste,
1092 nutritional ideologies, local geography and the economy also play a role. As
1093 demonstrated by the research material, not all of Western Europe has been
1094 embraced with the same enthusiasm: when it comes to food; instead, local
1095 preferences tend towards southern, Mediterranean cuisines. Promoted widely since
1096 the 1960s, the Mediterranean diet has been appropriated as a standard across the
1097 entire continent (Scarpellini, 2018).
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1100
1101 In this sense, the "internationalisation" of the restaurant scene in the Balkans may
1102 appear to be following suit after Northern Europe. In a way, it is. But there is more to
1103 it. The above discussed rediscovery and reinvention of local ingredients, seemingly
1104 inspired by the new presence of Mediterranean cuisines, suggests an important
1105 difference between the processes taking place in the Balkans and in North-Western
1106 Europe. While to countries like Germany, the choice seems to be between "domestic"
1107 and "foreign" (see Mohring, 2008, for an example of German cuisine being viewed as
1108 old-fashioned, bourgeois and narrow-minded as opposed to the leftist and modern
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1113 ⁴ <https://sofia.zavedenia.com/2739/news/9414/Tradicionnata.bylga>
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1115 ⁵ Similar interpretations are found from other media sources, such as *Kapital* magazine,
1116 2018 and *Travelling Serbia*, 2018, amongst others.
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1123 Greek and Italian, p. 141), in the Balkans this seems to signify a reunification of the
1124 region within its natural borders.
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1127 It has often been argued that national cuisines are by default imagined, as foodways
1128 traverse national borders and only regional cuisines actually exist (Mintz, 1996;
1129 Bradatan, 2003; Krusteva-Blagoeva, 2010). In this sense, the processes of
1130 “Europeanisation” in Sofia and Belgrade could also be seen as a reintegration of
1131 national cuisines into their traditional food regions.
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1134 1135 1136 Conclusion 1137

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1139 The source material suggests that just as they share a history, Sofia and Belgrade in
1140 many ways share the same modernity. Their citizens’ food preferences and food
1141 hierarchies have a similar background and seem to be heading in the same direction.
1142 Acknowledging food as part of the cultural industry as a co-creator of lifestyles (Bell
1143 and Vallentine 1997; Gavrilova 2015), one might argue that an identical lifestyle
1144 ideal transpires in the two Balkan capitals: one which presupposes cosmopolitanism
1145 and savvy, wealth and knowledge drawn from any corner of the world.
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1150 However, there are also important differences. While the aspirations of
1151 restaurateurs might be pointing in the same direction, their dreams seem slightly
1152 easier to manifest in Sofia. The restaurant business in Sofia appears to cater to more
1153 demanding customers and possess access to a greater variety of specific luxury
1154 products from different geographical regions within the EU; it may also be better
1155 able to differentiate between them. Sofia additionally demonstrates its greater
1156 access to knowhow, which is directly brought in by greater numbers of migrating
1157 chefs. The equal access to culinary knowledge in Sofia and Belgrade facilitated by the
1158 Internet contrasts the different levels of access to products, as well as possibilities to
1159 travel and migrate.
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1164 If Europeanisation is essentially a cultural transformation, one associated with
1165 cosmopolitanism (Denalty and Rumford, 2005), it is challenging to identify and
1166 separate the effect of each on the developments observed here. However, the source
1167 material reveals clearly the instrumental role of European Union membership in the
1168 pursuit of Europeanisation as a goal on the level of everyday life. In particular, it
1169 seems that the freedom of movement of people and goods which comes with
1170 membership is responsible for certain technical-economic advantages. By
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1179 facilitating access to ingredients, know-how and first-hand experience, and by
1180 changing the expectations of customers, seems to modify the entire cultural
1181 framework.
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1185 Just as Zinger (2010) and Milenković (2013) have argued, EU integration seems to
1186 ensure more sovereignty over the interpretation of cultural referential frameworks.
1187 In this particular case, it seems to be providing greater sovereignty over foodways
1188 and definitions of national cuisine: they are no longer shaped by deficits or ideology,
1189 as they were under communism, but by possibilities and ideas.
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1192 Acknowledging that there is no such thing as fixed and objective “traditions” but that
1193 instead there is a notion of tradition that loosely follows changing foodways also
1194 means agreeing with the concept that food traditions are being constantly
1195 renegotiated. It seems that this process, when it goes hand in hand with actual
1196 integration in the EU, takes place with the involvement of better informed players
1197 and is empowered by greater access to resources and, hence, increased availability
1198 of choices.
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