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ESSAYS

Policy reactions to the Covid-19 pandemic: an overview of political and economic influences across Europe

TAMÁS GINTER



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Abstract: *The reactions of the respective governments of the European Union both to the sanitary and economic risks of the Covid-19 pandemic varied tremendously. The objective of this paper is to explain the variation in lockdown and economic measures by political and institutional factors. Both the respective restrictive and economic measures throughout the European Union are presented. The first unit of the paper consists of a literature review of political factors (such as institutional structures and capacities, ideology and the effect of upcoming elections) that may have influenced the stringency of the restrictive measures introduced. As no previous study researched the effects of the above factors on the magnitude of economic packages, a regression analysis was conducted to examine if political ideology, democratic freedom and the timely proximity of elections influenced the extent of economic aid. While these factors could not prove to show significant influence on the extent of economic stimulus packages, several possible explanations are provided in order to understand the relative homogeneity of fiscal and monetary intervention in the EU.*

Keywords: *Covid-19, lockdown measures, economic stimulus packages*

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic struck the entire world in late 2019 and early 2020. The majority of the developed world had not experienced a pandemic for decades and many of its countries lacked the institutional structure for a standardised procedure for preventing the spread of the virus. The reactions to the spread of the

pandemic therefore showed significant variation on the national level between policies tackling Covid-19. Also, the various restrictive measures caused severe economic problems throughout the globe. In order to moderate the economic consequences, several economic measures were implemented. However, the political motives and underlying factors behind the implementation of these interventions should be understood in order to appropriately trace back the course of events from the outbreak of the pandemic. Therefore, in this study I aim to answer the question: what political variables influenced the introduction and the intensity of the – long unexperienced – measures?

Answering this research question requires a twofold understanding of the events since early 2020. First, it reviews the current scientific literature regarding political influences on the stringency of lockdown measures. Second, based on this knowledge, I examine a far less widely researched area – namely, that of political influences on economic interventions during the pandemic. By doing so, a broader political-economic framework can be presented in order to explain the extraordinary measures one has experienced since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Restrictive measures across Europe and their quantification

As a response to the outbreak of Covid-19 and in order to tackle the pandemic, several restrictive measures were introduced. According to the classification of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC 2021), five major categories of such state interventions can be identified. First, stay-at-home orders were introduced in almost all countries of Europe either on a regional or national basis. Second, the closure of educational institutions was ordered in the majority of European countries, ranging from nurseries to universities – tententially rather the latter being ordered to close compared to the former. Third, various restrictions applied to private and public gatherings. Separate measures tended to apply to outdoor and indoor events that could range from a total ban to a limitation of the number of participants. Fourth, severe restrictions of business operations applied in order to tackle the pandemic, applying primarily but not exclusively to the hospitality sector and other services. Fifth, while less stringent than bans, further aspects of private and business life were regulated, e.g. home office suggestions and orders for both the public and private sectors.

In order to reasonably compare the respective national policies regarding restrictive state interventions, these measure packages need to be quantified. The development of the Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) – which is almost exclusively used in the respective scientific literature – has addressed this matter. The OxCGRT is a compound index ranging from 0 to 100 (with 100 being the most stringent response) and is aggregated from four

sub-factors. The respective sub-factors are (1) the lockdown stringency index (reflecting measures such as curfews and school closures), (2) the economic support index (reflecting economic measures such as debt relief or income support), (3) the containment and health index (reflecting i.a. contact tracing, testing policy and healthcare investments) and (4) an overall government response index (reflecting the tendency of governments to strengthen or loosen previous measures). The OxCGRT provides an opportunity for examining country differences on a daily basis and allows for examining the effect of lockdown stringency on Covid-19 related infections and mortality (Hale et al. 2020).

The political explanation of lockdown stringency variation

The following unit of the paper reviews the existing research explaining the variation in lockdown measures. Despite being a novel field of research, several political and economic models were set up in order to understand why certain governments imposed more stringent measures than others. These explaining factors cover a wide range of political concepts from institutional explanations to political ideology.

First of all, governments' reactions to the pandemic can be understood by examining the respective national and regional institutional backgrounds. Capano et al. (2020) state that the reactions depend on two factors: if a given country had experienced pandemics in the nearer past (such as SARS in certain parts of Asia) and how much its institutions were prepared for a future sanitary crisis. As the region of my analysis (the European Union) had not faced major pandemics since the Spanish flu, European governments' strategies depended on their institutional preparedness. Institutional preparedness was tendentially higher in Western Europe compared to the Eastern part of the continent. Capano et al. argue therefore that European countries with an efficient institutional background for sanitary crises reacted relatively late, slow and responded weaker due to the fact that they felt confident about tackling the pandemic. Countries lacking well-prepared institutions reacted with shock: as they were not informed, they reacted late, but eventually very strictly in order to protect their dubious sanitary capacities. However, Ferraresi et al. (2020a) contradict the above statement by postulating that the higher the institutional capacities, the slower a country imposed lockdown measures (i.e. the more days passed between the first registered case and the introduction of restrictive measures). This may be explained by assuming that well-functioning institutions mostly exist in highly democratic countries, while checks and balances of democracies necessarily increase the respective governments' reaction time compared to that of their less democratic counterparts.

Toshkov, Yesilkagit, Carroll et al. (2020) consider further institutional factors in order to explain European governments' reaction time to the outbreak of

the pandemic in early 2020. According to their findings, more democratic and well-functioning countries (i.e. countries scoring high on rule of law, corruption control, freedom index, regulatory quality) tended to introduce lockdown measures significantly later compared to their less democratic and worse functioning counterparts. Also, countries' healthcare-related qualities (such as the number of hospital beds, separate health care ministries and ministers being medical doctors) had a positive effect on the early introduction of restrictive measures. In addition, a high level of interpersonal trust significantly delayed the introduction of lockdowns, school closures and state of emergency. These rather counterintuitive findings can be explained by political psychological factors: as Covid-19 did not spread simultaneously in Europe, countries hit later by the pandemic acted earlier with hindsight to the experiences of Italy and Spain, primarily. In addition, interpersonal trust in Western Europe (i.e. the countries affected earlier) is in general higher than in the Eastern parts of the continent, enabling voluntary compliance to distancing and self-isolation suggestions.

The policy variation across political systems has caused widespread debates both among scientists and the public media. Due to the fact that several non-Western and non-democratic countries have (claimed to have) had a significantly lower number of Covid-19 cases and deaths, a body of literature started to doubt the efficiency of Western democratic systems in tackling the pandemic (or any further future crisis requiring fast action from the respective government). Toshkov et al. (2020) conclude in their comprehensive study that while institutional capacities do influence the speed of imposing restrictive measures, no significant causal effect can be proved in the relation between reaction time and political and economic ideology. Furthermore, no significant effect can be discovered regarding the frameworks of political institutions, such as unicameral or bicameral parliaments, federal and central governments, nor in the case of political pluralism (i.e. the number and diversity of political parties in a country).

While Toshkov et al. could not prove that there is a significant correlation between lockdown measures and the characteristics of the respective political systems, some disprove the above statement. Cepaluni, Dorsch and Branyiczki (2020) postulate that policy responses intended to tackle the pandemic were late and inefficient in democracies compared to non-democratic countries, resulting in a higher death toll in the democratic world. Ferraresi et al. (2020b) examined the relationship between lockdown stringency and the quality of democracy, using political stability as a proxy variable. According to the authors, countries with higher political stability (and hence with a higher quality of democratic mechanisms) imposed significantly more stringent measures than their less democratic counterparts, particularly at the beginning of the pandemic. However, it is important to note that political stability can be experienced in several authoritarian countries, too (particularly in China and Russia), therefore a more

valid conclusion may be that in countries where political consensus could be easily achieved, the characteristics or the political system allowed for the timely execution of stringent restrictive measures.

Secondly, political factors have to be taken into account when explaining policy differences in pandemic-tackling strategies. Kavakli (2020) suggests that leadership attitudes may also have influenced policy responses to Covid-19. According to Kavakli's findings, in countries with leaders described as populist, lockdown measures were tendentially less stringent and were also introduced significantly later than in their pluralist counterparts. The author's explanation for the lag in populist leaders' reactions is the fact that populists tend to have distrust towards experts and their recommendations. While this is a possible solution, I argue that there may be further underlying reasons. First, several populist leaders have good foreign relations with China (see e.g. Toplišek 2020) and emphasising the economic and sanitary risks of the virus could have significantly worsened these bilateral relations. Therefore, foreign policy could overwrite sanitary and lockdown policies. Second, learning effects and path dependency can also explain these trends: after some populist leaders hesitated to introduce Covid-19 measures, others may have followed suit having trusted their fellow colleagues with a similar ideological background. Third, due to international conflicts around populist leaders, internal legitimacy is crucial for populists. Internal legitimacy can be best maintained by economic success, and introducing stringent and long-lasting lockdown measures were jeopardising economic growth.

Adolph et al. (2020) reach a similar conclusion after the analysis of a U.S. sample across all fifty states. The authors postulate that there is a significant difference in reaction speed between states with differing political preferences. States with Republican governors and more Trump supporters introduced social distancing measures later than their democratic counterparts (while controlled for other variables), proving Kavakli's statement regarding the less stringent preferences of populist politics.

As stated above, policy-makers have to face a dilemma when introducing measures against the pandemic: lockdown measures jeopardise economic growth, while the lack of measures may result in a significant number of evitable deaths. Governments were therefore facing a trade-off between saving healthcare systems and saving economies, considering the risks of losing voters caused by the collapse of any of the two. Pulejo and Querubín (2020) argue that voters' decisions are more affected by a shrinking economy compared to the consequences of a sanitary crisis. The authors found that in countries where the incumbent government is candidated at the upcoming elections and where elections are to take place in the nearer future, restrictive measures were significantly less stringent compared to their counterparts where elections would be held in the more distant future. However, Ferraresi et al. (2020b)

found that in countries where the upcoming parliamentary elections are to take place in 2021, lockdown measures were significantly more stringent compared to countries not in a pre-electoral year. According to the argumentation of the authors, political consensus was characterised by pro-lockdown attitudes and therefore by imposing such measures early, the incumbent leadership expected to maximise votes by introducing a stringent lockdown. This contradiction can be most easily explained by methodological disparities: while Pulejo and Querubín treat the proximity of upcoming elections as a scale variable, Ferraresi et al. use a binary approach.

Economic measures across Europe and their quantification

As already demonstrated in the previous section of the paper, while varying in stringency, restrictive measures were introduced all over the developed world ranging from the ban of mass events to severe curfews. These measures worked as a shock to the global and local economies, resulting in a severe economic crisis: the GDP of the European Union is estimated to have shrunk by 6.4 % in 2020 (Eurostat 2021b). In order to reduce the immediate economic shock caused by the lockdown measures, governments introduced several economic stimulus packages consisting of varying tools. As the shock induced by the sudden economic changes caused by the pandemic, several financial instruments were implemented by governments in order to mitigate the crisis. The means of economic stimulus can be grouped in further subcategories. First, fiscal measures were implemented affecting both the expenditure and the revenue sides of the respective budgets. Second, somewhat unconventional monetary interventions were executed due to the limited possibility of lowering the interest rate. Third, measures affecting the respective balances of payment were introduced.

Fiscal packages of unprecedented magnitude were introduced in order to mitigate the economic consequences of the pandemic. The European Central Bank reported that on average countries of the European Union spent approx. 4 % of their respective GDP on fiscal measures in 2020 (Haroutunian – Osterloh – Sławińska 2021). The authors offer a two-dimensional framework for the analysis of fiscal instruments (see Figure 1.). These instruments can be categorised by cash-flow side (i.e. expenditure or revenue) and measure type (liquidity measures vs. budgetary measures), resulting in a subset of four categories. Liquidity measures include guarantees and loans (on the expenditure side) and various tax measures (on the revenue side, such as tax deferrals). Budgetary measures on the other hand include various supporting measures (to companies and households), increased public investment and both direct and indirect tax cuts (Haroutunian – Osterloh – Sławińska 2021).

Figure 1: Fiscal instruments

Categories of fiscal instrument

	Liquidity measures	Budgetary measures
Expenditure side	Guarantees	Short-time work schemes
	Loans	Support to firms Support to households Public investment
Revenue side	Tax deferrals	Indirect tax cuts
	Other tax measures	Direct tax/social contribution cuts

Source: Haroutunian – Osterloh – Sławińska 2021

The fiscal measures listed above were primarily intended to mitigate the economic consequences of the pandemic; however, vast budget rearrangements were also required due to the unexpected healthcare expenditures (Haroutunian – Osterloh – Sławińska 2021). While the extent of fiscal measures implemented in response to Covid-19 were of yet unseen magnitude, literature suggests that high-income countries introduced significantly larger fiscal measures compared to their lower-income counterparts (Benmelech – Tzur-Ilan 2020).

Monetary measures implemented in order to mitigate the effects of the pandemic were somewhat unconventional compared to the means used in previous crises. Interest rates in the developed world were at a historical low (Benmelech – Tzur-Ilan 2020) with some central banks pegging the interest at 0% or even in the negative range. Therefore, reducing the interest rate of the central banks (the ECB or the respective national banks) in order to stimulate investment was barely an option for the high-income countries of the world. Consequently, the interest rate of the ECB remained unchanged throughout 2020 (European Central Bank 2021) and alternative monetary instruments were used. The European Central Bank therefore launched asset purchase programmes, stimulating both the private and the public sectors. Furthermore, long-term refinancing operations were conducted, with which i.a. the conditions of credit repayment were eased (Aguilar García et al. 2020).

In addition, governments used financial instruments that affected the respective balances of payment. Due to the significant increase of healthcare expenditures and the shrinkage of tax revenue, governments needed to reconsider state financing. Consequently, the European Union temporarily allowed higher budget deficits for the member states than the 3% limit regulated in the Maastricht criteria, resulting in each EU-27 country exceeding this margin (Haroutunian – Osterloh – Sławińska 2021). In order to finance the higher expenditures, government debt was increased in most of the EU countries, on average resulting in a 10% increase of public debt (Eurostat 2021a). The increase

of public debt resulted on the one hand from the decrease of GDP and on the other hand from the raise of debt securities in particular (Eurostat 2021a).

As already demonstrated, policy responses heavily vary from country to country, let them be lockdowns or packages stimulating the economy. In order to better understand the magnitude of economic stimulus, a standardised indicator is needed for countrywide comparison. Contrary to the research on lockdown stringency (where exclusively the Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker was used), in the case of economic stimulus packages there exist hitherto two indicators quantifying the magnitude of the economic measures.

Elgin, Basbug and Yamalan (2020) designed the Covid-19 Economic Stimulus Index (CESI) in order to quantify economic policy responses. The CESI consists of four separate indicator components: (1) fiscal policy stimulus (i.a. the reduction of taxes and the possibility of tax payment deferral), (2) the reduction of the interest rates (issued by the respective central banks and by the ECB in the euro zone), (3) a financial macro-package (i.a. state guarantees for loans not repaid) and (4) measures affecting the balance of payment (increasing public debt, issuing state bonds, etc.). The index ranges from -5 (minimal economic stimulus) to $+5$ (maximal economic stimulus) and shows a close-to-normal distribution. As the CESI was developed for measuring the economic packages of each country in the world and as the EU-27 is an economically highly developed region, the vast majority of the EU countries score high on the positive end of the scale. The countries with the biggest stimulus package (proportionate to their economic capacities) are Sweden, Austria, Malta and Luxembourg, while only Denmark, Bulgaria and Hungary score slightly below zero with their moderate economic policy response.

Siddik (2020) constructed an economic stimulus index with methodological correction of that of Elgin et al. (2020). While the components of the two indices overlap, Siddik created the Index of Covid-19 Economic Stimulus (ICES) applying the Euclidian distance formula instead of Elgin et al.'s principal component analysis. The possible values range from 0 to 1 (with 0 being no stimulus index and 1 being the maximal economic stimulus possible), similar to the well-known indices of HDI and GINI. Furthermore, the ICES is a quarterly indicator, in contrast with the one-time calculated CESI. Siddik concludes that the countries with the most intense economic response were Chile, Switzerland, Croatia, Sweden and the Netherlands proportionate to their respective GDPs.

As reviewed in the first section of this study, despite the novel nature of Covid-19 related political economic research, the policy variation with regard to restrictive measures has been studied by numerous scientists. What's more, arbitrary as it may seem, political ideology and institutional structures could to some extent have determined the stringency of measures imposed. This, however, does not apply to the research of political effects on economic measures: no empirical analysis studied hitherto such causal relations. Several explanations can be provided for this disparity.

First, the mass media and public concern was related more to the measures restricting personal freedom than economic stimulus packages: the prior have a much more direct influence on people's everyday lives. Second, the impact of economic stimulus packages lags in time compared to the effect of lockdown measures (i.e. death tolls are published much earlier than quarterly macroeconomic indicators). Third, the lockdown stringency indicator (OxCGRT) is based on a more thorough methodology compared to the existing economic indicators with data being segmented on a daily and country basis from the very beginning of the pandemic on (Hale et al. 2020). Compared to that, the economic indicators developed are either on a one-time basis (CESI; Elgin – Basbug – Yalaman 2020) or only refer to a shorter period of time (ICES; Siddik 2020).

This, however, does not imply that the research on the magnitude of economic stimulus and its political determination was less important compared to that of lockdown stringency. As demonstrated above, there is a significant variation in the extent of economic measures and an explanation on its political background would be beneficial in both the prevention of future crises and the better understanding of economic ideology. Therefore, in the following section of the paper I attempt to identify political-ideological patterns in economic stimulus measures based on the review of lockdown stringency literature in the first unit of the study.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature referring to the explanation of the variation in lockdown stringency, similar hypotheses can be formed in order to examine the underlying reasons for the differing magnitude of the respective economic stimulus packages. These hypotheses are the following:

- (1) The magnitude of the economic stimulus package was lower in countries with right-wing governments in power compared to their left-wing counterparts, as right-wing governments tend to prefer a lower level of state intervention.
- (2) The magnitude of the economic stimulus package was lower in countries with populist governments in power compared to their pluralist counterparts as populist countries tended to impose less stringent lockdowns, hence less economic compensation was required.
- (3) The magnitude of the economic stimulus package was higher in democratic countries compared to their more autocratic counterparts as democracies with well-functioning institutions tended to impose more stringent lockdowns.
- (4) The magnitude of the economic stimulus package was higher in countries where general elections are to take place sooner.

Methods

The sample ($N = 27$) consists of the EU-27 countries (i.e. United Kingdom excluded). The Index of Covid-19 Economic Stimulus (ICES; Siddik 2020) was used to measure the magnitude of Covid-19 related economic interventions. As Siddik published four separate values for four different time periods (monthly between June and September 2020), the average of the respective values was calculated. The reasons for using the Index of Covid-19 Economic Stimulus (and not Elgin et al.'s Covid-19 Economic Stimulus Index) are twofold. First, while based on the methodology of the Covid-19 Economic Stimulus Index, Siddik introduced several corrections to the original index, resulting in a better standardised indicator. Second, the Covid-19 Economic Stimulus Index was calculated using early 2020 data and is static, while the Index of Covid-19 Economic Stimulus is an aggregate of monthly indices from mid-2020. The ICES shows a close-to-normal distribution on a global sample. This characteristic did not change when narrowing down the sample to the EU-27.

The indicators of populism and economic ideology were retrieved from the openly available dataset of the Global Party Survey (Norris 2020). The database of the Global Party Survey contains an aggregate index for the populist tendencies and the economic preferences on the left-right axis for every major political party in the entire world. Both the 'populism' and the 'economic ideology' variables scale from 1 to 4 (from 'left' to 'right' and from 'pluralist' to 'populist', respectively). Each value was assigned accordingly to the governing party in the respective EU countries. In case of a change in government in 2020, the values were assigned to the party or parties in power between June and September 2020 (i.e. the timeframe in which the ICES index was calculated). In case of coalition governments, the mean values of the respective parties' indices were calculated.

While in previous research (e.g. Ferraresi et al. 2020b) regarding the impact of elections' timely proximity was measured with a dummy variable (i.e. if elections take place in the upcoming year or not), in this analysis the proximity of the upcoming elections was measured in years for better differentiation. (A monthly or daily differentiation was not possible due to the fact that in certain countries the exact day and month of the next general elections had not yet been published.) In case the next general elections were to take place in 2020 (after September, i.e. the latest time when the ICES index was available), the variable had the value '0'. Otherwise, it was calculated as follows: $\text{election_date} = \text{next_general_elections} - 2020$. Therefore, the possible values of the variable ranged between '0' and '4'. Democracy was measured through the democracy index of Freedom House (2020) on a range between '0' and '100' (where the higher number indicates the higher democratic freedom in a certain country).

According to the above hypotheses the following linear regression model was established:

$$ICES = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Economic ideology} + \beta_2 * \text{Populism} + \beta_3 * \text{Democracy} + \beta_4 * \text{Next election}$$

(-)
(+)
(+)
(+)

As this study analyses only the countries of the EU-27, a relatively small sample (N=27) was used for this research. Due to both extent and conceptual limitations, N is limited. First, the extent limitations of this paper do not allow for the presentation of the respective economic policies on a global scope. Second, the vast majority of research regarding the political effects on lockdown stringency work with European and/or Western samples. The main reason behind this is that non-Western political systems are hardly comparable with their Western counterparts. The effects of the proximity of upcoming elections can barely be examined in e.g. absolute monarchies or autocracies where elections are often rigged and therefore have limited influence on economic policy-making. Similarly, the terms of political left-right can have highly different meanings (if any) in countries with a highly differing cultural background.

The fact that the sample size is small does, however, have some consequences for the interpretation of the results. There is a high probability of the type II error, due to the fact that a small sample size predicts less significant results. Also, the research of small samples has limited statistical power (for indices as effect size etc.; see e.g. Slavin – Smith 2008). An alternative for enlarging the sample size would have been the usage of a panel database with using the monthly ICES indicators. However, the ICES rates barely vary over time (see Siddik 2020). The values originate from four consecutive months between June and September 2020, while the timely effects would be sensible in case of at least a quarterly comparison throughout a longer timeframe. With minimal variation of the economic stimulus index and without a theoretical background of causal changes throughout summer 2020, a panel analysis would have increased the possibility of type I error. Furthermore, none of the independent variables (government ideology, electoral proximity, etc.) changed throughout this rather short time span. Consequently, once longitudinal variables are available, the model can be extended by panel analysis.

The usage of OLS regression is based on previous research reviewed in the first unit of the paper. Being a brand-new field of research, previous theoretical knowledge on the variables that should be included in the model is limited. However, based on the available literature, the variables included in this analysis were supposed to have affected the magnitude of the economic stimulus packages. Also, previous studies used single equation models – future research may elaborate this further, as it is theoretically possible that feedback effects exist between the dependent and the independent variables. This, however, is more

probable in case of variables omitted in this analysis (such as GDP or lockdown stringency, see in the Conclusions unit), future analyses should nevertheless take this factor into account.

Results

The OLS regression analysis shows a moderate goodness of fit with an R squared value of .1624. The OLS regression analysis suggested the following regression equation:

$$ICES_{\text{predicted}} = -.3008 + .0024 * \text{Economic ideology} + .0246 * \text{Populism} + .0062 * \text{Democracy} - .0243 * \text{Next election}$$

None of the independent variables are significant at the level of 5%. Table 1 represents the respective regression coefficients, standard errors and p values.

Table 1: Regression coefficients

	Coefficient	SE Coefficient	t	p
Constant	-.3008	.3613	-.8327	.4139
Economic ideology	.0024	.0204	.1184	.9068
Populism	.0246	.0268	.9180	.3686
Democracy	.0062	.0034	.8268	.0813
Next election	-.0243	.0140	-1.7268	.0982

No significant effect can be shown between political independent variables and the magnitude of the respective national economic stimulus packages. It is particularly surprising that left-wing and right-wing governments don't differ with respect to economic intervention, as right-wing governments insist on refraining from major state intervention. However, the crisis induced by the lockdown measures trying to tackle the pandemic is a yet unexperienced situation. First, it is a crisis induced by the state: businesses did not have a drop in revenue due to incorrect expectations or exogeneous shocks, but due to the state ordering them to close. Therefore, regardless of the economic ideology and other political characteristics of the respective governments, state compensation was justifiable even for right-wing leadership. Second, the nature of the crisis differs from those experienced in the past decades. While the former crises were dominantly of financial nature (e.g. the Dot-com bubble or the crisis of 2008–2009), the economic crisis of 2020 was induced by state interventions,

massively distorting supply and demand. Therefore, in order not to aggravate the recession, even tendentially non-intervening governments had to provide financial aid to citizens and businesses.

Conclusion

Summarising the results, none of the examined independent variables (i.e. economic ideology, populism, the quality of democracy and upcoming elections) have a significant effect ($p < .05$) on the magnitude of the national economic stimulus packages. Therefore, the hypotheses stated could not be justified by the empirical analysis. The lack of significant tendencies can be explained both methodologically and conceptually. First, the ICES was developed on a global sample (Siddik, 2020), while this study examined only the EU-27. As all states of the European Union belong to the high-income part of the world, the sizes of the magnitude packages may have had a marginal variation compared to that of the global sample. Also, as demonstrated above, economic measures introduced in the aftermath of the pandemic were extremely extensive compared to previous crises. Furthermore, there was an international consensus of the necessity of state intervention (particularly because the 2020 recession was the result of state intervention as the priority was the introduction of stringent lockdown measures compared to minimising economic damage). Therefore, economic ideology mattered less when it came to financial aid programmes.

Despite the lack of significant results, further research on the topic can be highly suggested for several reasons. On the one hand, further research can implement several methodological extensions to the current study. The sample of this study could and should be extended for a wider (eventually global) sample, also, further variables can be added to the model. In particular, the effect of moderating variables should be examined (such as GDP or the mediating effect of lockdown stringency). On the other hand, by the time this study was written, both the sanitary and the economic crises were ongoing in the world. Therefore, once the crisis is over, adjusted indices should be calculated in order to accurately reflect economic aid provided by national governments. All in all, the political effects of lockdown stringency are far more extensively studied compared to those on economic measures – while financial aid affects citizens not necessarily less than lockdowns do.

While innovative and based on previous Covid-19 related research at the same time, this study also has its limitations. These limitations are methodological and conceptual at the same time; some methodological limitations (such as extending the analysis to a global sample) have already been discussed in the Methods section of the paper. It is, however, important to note the relevance of the effect of moderating variables. Such moderating variables include demographic and economic characteristics of the respective countries. These variables, such as

median age, general health status, healthcare capacities or GDP, public debt, etc., could have easily affected both lockdown and financial measures. Countries that are old, less healthy or have dysfunctional healthcare systems might have had to impose more stringent lockdown measures due to the moral and political costs of the victims of Covid-19. More stringent lockdowns resulted in a deeper economic recession, therefore stimulus packages of greater magnitude were required; however, these may have been limited by the financial capacities by the respective states. Therefore, the analysis of the interaction between the primary demographic variables, lockdown measures and eventually the economic stimulus packages would be highly beneficial in future research.

Discussion

Despite being an extraordinarily recent field of research, due to the global and severe nature of the crisis, in less than one year's time sufficient results have been collected to analyse political and economic influences on coronavirus-related policy making. New indicators have been developed, enabling policy comparison by quantifying Covid-19 measures. These indicators quantify both the stringency of Covid-19 related lockdown measures (OxCGR; Hale et al. 2020) and national economic responses mitigating the financial consequences of lockdowns (Covid-19 Economic Stimulus Index, Elgin – Basbug – Yalaman 2020; and the Index of Covid-19 Economic Stimulus, Siddik 2020).

The above indices allowed for a reasonable comparison between national Covid-19 related policies. Having reviewed the literature about political influences on restrictive measures, several concluding remarks can be stated. First of all, the quality of democracy seems to have had an effect on the measures introduced. More democratic countries imposed lockdowns relatively late (Cepaluni – Dorsch – Branyiczki 2020); however, these measures were significantly more stringent than those in their less democratic counterparts (Toshkov – Yesilkagit – Carroll et al. 2020). Also, more democratic countries tended to provide financial aid of greater magnitude to their citizens. While these correlations do exist, several other factors have to be taken into account that may be responsible for this covariation. First, more democratic countries are predominantly high-income countries as well (see International Monetary Foundation 2020 and Freedom House 2020). Therefore, their financial possibilities have allowed for the implementation of huge stimulus packages. This also allowed the introduction of stringent lockdown measures as it seemed possible to compensate the loss of closed businesses. Second, more democratic countries are not only better-off than autocracies, but also have a higher population median age (CIA 2021). As Covid-19 is particularly dangerous to the age group of 60 and above (Bonanad et al. 2020), the sanitary and political costs of not doing everything it takes to prevent the spread of the pandemic were significantly higher than in younger populations.

Furthermore, the role of political ideology was examined with regard to Covid-19 related government decisions. Strangely enough, ideology did not show to have an effect on the magnitude of economic stimulus packages. This may demonstrate that in times of crises ‘we are all Keynesians’, as Milton Friedman allegedly said. However, there exists an alternative solution for the enormous financial intervention of states. Namely, the 2020 economic crisis was not a result of bubbles and offset expectations. Instead, states deliberately shut down (and restructured) their economies as a response to the pandemic, making it morally and politically impossible not to compensate their citizens and companies. In this respect, the recession induced by Covid-19 can be better compared to the world wars than to ‘regular’ economic crises.

Political ideology, however, did have an effect on restrictive measures: populist governments introduced significantly less stringent lockdowns than their pluralist counterparts (Pulejo – Querubín 2020). While several explanations suggested (e.g. populist leaders ignored the suggestions of experts in epidemiology), I argue this was a sheer coincidence in the first wave of the pandemic in early 2020. Learning effects in politics are common and as the world’s most significant populist leaders at that time (such as Donald Trump or Jair Bolsonaro) denied the risks of Covid-19, their populist colleagues in office followed suit. Also, banal as it may sound, the timely proximity of upcoming general elections influenced the extent of state interventions restricting private and public life. In countries where elections were to take place soon lockdown measures were significantly less stringent. This phenomenon can be explained in two ways. On the one hand, political success relies on economic growth: ‘it’s the economy, stupid’ as James Carville said. Lockdown measures jeopardised economic growth while economic stimulus packages (that do not significantly differ in size as a function of the timely proximity of the elections) mitigated the effects of lockdowns – in countries with less restrictive measures proportionally even more. On the other hand, a (rather trivial) alternative explanation can also be offered: restrictive measures are unpopular, while helicopter money is not. Therefore, the economic cycles of democracies and political rationality can provide a sufficient explanation for these tendencies.

To conclude, it is hard to deny that political effects have influenced Covid-19-related policy-making. However – while this study aimed at summarising and further analysing these tendencies – it is also important to bear in mind further factors that may have influenced these policies. These factors are mostly trivial ones. GDP and public debt may have well defined the financial limits of the respective countries when it came to providing financial aid. Also, geographic and demographic characteristics could have played a significant role in tackling the pandemic: older populations were at unproportionately higher risk of Covid-19 caused mortality while islands could better prohibit importing the virus than landlocked countries. It is therefore essential to further research

given characteristics that may have equally or even more influenced tackling the pandemic and mitigating the effects of the recession.

It is also clear, however, that our knowledge of the sanitary and economic crises starting in early 2020 is limited. We are still in the middle of the pandemic and the recession and while vaccination and further medical advances may be able to solve the sanitary issues, the economic consequences will definitely remain for years. Therefore, the research of what happened from 2020 on is essential for the future understanding how such shocks function and what the appropriate answers are to them. While hopefully pandemics will not repeat themselves in the near future, we need knowledge on the efficient tackling of such crises: ‘*si vis pacem, para bellum*’.¹

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Local government fighting COVID-19: the Case of Slovenian Municipalities¹

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Abstract: *When the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus broke out, it was initially assumed that Slovenian municipalities would successfully cope with the crisis situation due to their experience in dealing with natural and other disasters. Nevertheless, the unprecedented pandemic posed significant challenges to local governments, especially in the first wave, from managing responses to an unknown crisis situation to ensuring the safety of citizens in times of extreme uncertainty. Using a four-dimensional framework, the article analyses the results of the first post-COVID-19 survey of mayors of Slovenian municipalities, which reveals differences and similarities in policies to contain and prevent the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus disease. The analysis proves that there is no single and well-established procedure for dealing with a crisis situation. Indeed, responses varied from municipality to municipality, and the intensity of action depended to a large extent on the commitment, initiative and innovation of the individual mayor.*

Key words: *decision making, crisis, COVID-19, municipality, Slovenia.*

The Year of Unexpected, Unknown and Uncertainty

As we entered 2020, no one could have guessed that this year would have gone down in history as *Annus Horribilis*. In the Republic of Slovenia, the public expected a dynamic political arena in which the conflicts² between the coalition and the opposition would intensify, but no one expected – despite the first

1 The author acknowledges the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (research core funding P5-0206, Defence Science).

2 More about political situation in Slovenia in Haček (2019).

information about the spread of the unknown virus in China spread through various media – such drastic changes in everyday life.

The first unexpected situation arose at the end of January 2020, when former Prime Minister Marjan Šarec resigned at a press conference without informing his coalition partners about this decision. At the same time, Šarec called for early elections (although there was already a serious threat from the COVID-19 pandemic); however, two (now former) coalition partners recognised the seriousness of the situation and started coalition negotiations with the opposition leader Janez Janša. On 12 March 2020, the new centre-right government was formed, ironically just hours after the former Minister of Health had declared a coronavirus epidemic for the entire Slovenian territory. Certainly, this was the worst possible time to form a government, but alas, the new government had little choice but to immediately begin implementing the Infectious Disease Strategy and the National Plan. However, it did not take long to discover that the previous government had left the country unprepared, as the National Strategic Reserve Centre was virtually empty in terms of basic protective equipment (such as masks, gloves and other sanitary materials).

Meanwhile, the number of infected citizens increased rapidly, partly due to the unfortunate timing that coincided with the return of (COVID-19 infected) citizens from abroad (especially Italy) after winter (ski) holidays. This led to a rapid spread of the disease in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and among health and medical staff; the virus soon invaded nursing homes for the elderly. In the absence of a functioning national government, the municipalities carried a heavy burden during the first wave of the pandemic. This was somehow to be expected, as they have extensive experience in dealing with various crisis situations (Prebilič – Kukovič 2021; Prebilič 2022), mostly caused by natural and other disasters. However, the COVID-19 situation was much more difficult, as it presented at least a threefold challenge: It was a completely new phenomenon, unknown to the medical profession; the disease was spreading throughout the population, which meant that, unlike natural and other disasters, its effects were not spatially limited and therefore required simultaneous action throughout the country; last but not least, the lack of experience with the disease and the rapid changes in lifestyles triggered various emotional reactions among citizens, ranging from fear and anxiety to anger and loss of trust in the various “crisis managers”, which undoubtedly included local leaders. In this respect, municipalities were forced to adopt improvised measures and responses to an unknown crisis, depending mainly on the activation, initiative and improvisation of the mayor, as well as ensuring the safety of citizens in the midst of extreme uncertainty.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the struggle of Slovenian municipalities in the fight against the COVID-19 crisis. The article presents the results of the first survey of mayors of Slovenian municipalities after the COVID-19 crisis,

which reveals differences and similarities in the measures taken at the municipal level to contain and prevent the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. We test the assumption that a so-called “bottom-up” approach to the COVID-19 crisis has emerged in Slovenian municipalities.

The main research method was a survey of Slovenian mayors conducted between 15 June 2021 and 15 July 2021. The invitation to the survey was sent to all 212 mayors of Slovenian municipalities, to which 76 mayors responded, representing 36 % of the mayor population.³ The time frame of the analysis referred specifically to the first (spring 2020) and, to a lesser extent, the second (autumn and winter 2020–2021) wave of the COVID-19 epidemic. The survey was divided into two parts: The first part contained 18 closed-ended questions and the second part contained seven open-ended questions. While all 76 mayors answered the first part of the survey, some chose not to answer the second part, while others answered this part in particular detail. Prior to the survey, we conducted a smaller number of interviews with selected mayors to test the validity and meaningfulness of the questions.

In the first part of the article, we address crisis management and then lead into the second part of the article, where we focus on the local policies adopted in order to contain and prevent the spread of coronavirus through four dimensions:⁴ 1) beginning preparations for the COVID-19 crisis; 2) activating the first stage of response to the COVID-19 crisis; 3) disclosing COVID-19 crisis information; and 4) balancing COVID-19 measures and local economy.

Managing Crisis Situations

We start the chapter with a discussion of old and new ways of crisis management that (local) authorities can use. Baubion (2013) describes how authorities in the past have mainly relied on ‘siloe approaches’ characterized by crisis management by individual sectors rather than at a central level. He highlights the many features of this approach, such as risk assessments, allocating budgets for emergency response, developing contingency plans, procuring equipment and supplies, creating crisis management structures, and conducting training and crisis simulations. Experts use experience-based scenarios in this approach as a tool for assessing risks and creating recovery plans. Therefore, we can conclude that the purpose of this crisis management approach is to create an authority that is ready to implement a resolution plan, has a response capability, and is able to allocate resources. In addition, Baubion (2013) presented a new approach to crisis management that is more suitable for previously unknown crises. This approach is characterized by being unprecedented and by incorporating

3 More about the survey in Kukovič (2021).

4 Our four-dimensional framework is based on the idea of the five-dimensional approach of Zhou and Xin (2021).

threats and risks that are unknown. Instead of comprehensive planning based on predefined scenarios, the new method envisages the creation of a response network that can be adapted and expanded according to the needs and dynamics of the crisis. From this perspective, the new approach can be described as “whole-of-government” or “whole-of-society” with the authority having the role of facilitating the participation of the entities that make up the response network. Strong leadership and shared values and principles are extremely important to the successful implementation of this approach.

Joyce (2021: 3–5) adds that the analysis of studies of (local) authorities operating in crisis, emergency or disaster situations also highlights the following aspects of crisis management:

- *Decision-making style*: Two styles are discussed, namely the command-control style, which presumably leads to faster actions and is more suitable for the traditional mode of crisis management (Boin – ’t Hart 2003), and the pragmatic-experimental style, which involves learning, flexibility and refinement of strategy and is more suitable for novel crises (Ansell and Boin 2019).
- *Authority’s organisational centralisation*: It is argued that centralised decision making is not appropriate for managing novel crises. Instead, multi-level coordination (i.e., centralised leadership combined with distributed discretion) through less centralised control is more appropriate.
- *Expert advice*: An authority responsible for strategic preparedness planning should emphasise expert simulation to support risk assessment. In addition, the availability and influence of different advices can affect the authority’s prioritisation, the strategic planning, and decisions and actions.
- *Strong leadership*: In times of crisis, strong leadership is critical to avoid uncertainty. This can be demonstrated by leaders’ realistic promises as they seek to reassure the public as much as possible about the situation. On the other hand, weak leaders may be tempted to make unrealistic promises about what the authority can do and how quickly the crisis will be resolved (Boin – ’t Hart 2003).
- *Competent response*: An authority must take the right actions in preparing for and responding to a crisis situation, as well as execute strategic decisions in an effective way. Key decisions may include deciding how much effort and resources should go into prevention and how much into treating the affected people.
- *Blame game*: A blame game can be defined as public debates and disputes over who is responsible for mistakes or failures. Elected leaders can suffer reputational damage from the blame game that can develop during and after a crisis.

If we apply the above aspects of crisis management to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, the following diagram can be designed.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the managing COVID-19 pandemic



Source: Author's own presentation based on Joyce (2021: 6).

In modern democracies, local authorities play an essential role in achieving social governance, political inclusion, cultural development, environmental protection and economic growth. From this point of view, local government oversees administrative, political, social and environmental issues (Koprić 2012: 8–9), which means that it has a relatively strong influence in a given area (Kukovič 2018). Among the main obligations and various specific tasks assumed by local leadership, prevention of potential risks and dealing with public emergencies are two of the most important. Therefore, the sudden occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic was a real challenge and a great test for local governments.

Variance of Local Government Responses in Slovenia

Arising from the general perspective, the exercise of local self-government is a demanding task, primarily related to the division of competences between the state and the municipality as the only local government unit in Slovenia (Kukovič et al 2016: 303–306; Haček 2020: 88–89). Thus, the inhabitants of Slovenia exercise local self-government in the municipalities, which are essen-

tially responsible for such a wide range of activities⁵ that cannot be found in any other system of government. It should be noted that Slovenian municipalities are not responsible for the performance of all public functions in their territory, but only for matters of local importance (Haček 2020: 87–88). When dealing with crisis situations (such as natural and other disasters), the municipality is responsible for organising rescue and relief operations in order to protect and rescue, as well as for managing all local matters of public importance (Local Self-Government Act 2007: Article 21).

Dealing with a crisis is not an easy task for any authority, especially when it involves managing a completely unknown, highly virulent virus in local communities where people are used to social contact. Because of its high infectivity and multiple modes of transmission, coronavirus has been shown to be very difficult to contain. At least in the early stages of COVID-19 crisis and in the absence of a fully functional national government, mayors, as local leaders, were cast in the role of decision-makers and protectors of human health.

1) Beginning preparations for the COVID-19 crisis

We begin our analysis of responses to the COVID-19 with the first dimension, which highlights the vigilance of local authorities in responding to the initial information about the COVID-19 pandemic and implementing preventive measures. We asked mayors when they started preparing for the COVID-19 situation, and about a third of respondents (34%) answered that they started preparing as soon as they heard about the infections in neighbouring countries, i.e. before the first case was confirmed in Slovenia. In addition, almost half of the mayors (48 %) answered that they started preparing the crisis team, the basic strategy to prevent the spread, checking sanitary and first aid equipment and other activities immediately after the first infected person was detected in Slovenia. Only 18 % of mayors answered that they started preparations only when the Slovenian government had already declared the epidemic for the entire national territory.

In addition, we asked the mayors about specific activities that were part of the preparations. Table 1 shows that the most common activities carried out by mayors during preparations for the upcoming COVID-19 crisis were the review and definition of preventive measures (84 %) and the formation of a team of experts to prepare emergency plans (73 %). More than half of the participating mayors (57 %) also conducted a review and inventory of protective equipment and brainstormed on the potential risks that the COVID-19 crisis (could) cause to citizens. A slightly smaller age of mayors took preparations a step further by determining the appropriate infrastructure in the event of quarantine and isolation or simulating the worst-case scenario that could affect their municipality.

5 From public primary health care, pre- and primary education, care for the elderly, social and housing issues, public local transport, water supply, sewerage, garbage collection, etc.

Table 1: Activities that were included in preparations for the COVID-19 crisis

		%
1	review and definition of preventive measures	84
2	formation of a team of experts to prepare emergency plans	73
3	consideration and anticipation of potential risks	57
4	worst-case scenario simulation	23
5	a review and inventory of protective equipment	57
6	determining the appropriate infrastructure in the event of quarantine and isolation	39

* The percentages in the table present share of mayors that expressed agreement.

In addition to the listed activities, the mayors carried out some other actions as part of the preparations, such as activating the municipal Civil Protection forces, self-initiating provision of protective equipment, informing citizens about the new coronavirus and its possible spread, coordinating possible actions in case of disease cases in schools and kindergartens, preventively cancelling all (major) public events, restricting access to closed public spaces where a larger number of people could gather, and the like. Based on these data, we note that the mayors were very self-initiated and did not wait for instructions from the national government.

2) Activating the first stage of response to the COVID-19 crisis

The timing of the decision to raise the health emergency varied from municipality to municipality and depended on many factors, such as the number of confirmed cases, the number of potentially infected persons, and mortality rates. As a first step, mayors were asked about their reaction when the first infected cases appeared in the municipality.

Table 2: Response upon detection of the first infected cases with coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 in the municipality

		%
1	issuing a normative act restricting movement in the municipality	36
2	inform citizens of instructions to prevent the spread of infection	89
3	proposing restrictions on visits and access to the elderly home	18
4	proposing temporary closing of the school and kindergarten	17
5	ban on the use of all municipal playgrounds, sports facilities and other public areas	88
6	prohibited by decree gatherings in municipal public places	68

* The percentages in the table present share of mayors that expressed agreement.

Once the virus began to spread in the municipality, most mayors (89 %) stepped up to inform citizens of instructions to prevent the spread of infection. As shown in Table 2, the majority of mayors (88 %) also banned the use of all municipal playgrounds, sports facilities, and other public areas. In addition, more than half of the mayors (68 %) strictly prohibited by decree gatherings in municipal public places (both indoor and outdoor). More than a third of mayors (36 %) issued a normative act restricting movement in the municipality. As the virus was extremely dangerous for the elderly population and had already invaded homes for the elderly, some mayors proposed restrictions on visits and access to facilities with this vulnerable population. As the virus spread to kindergartens and schools, some mayors proposed closing these facilities. One mayor even closed the primary school to prevent further spread of the virus, although this policy is not even part of the mayor's powers. At the same time, mayors set up centres to help citizens, established an emergency telephone number and even organised the production of masks and distributed them to households. They also helped to procure and provide protective equipment for key services in the municipality.

Despite all the above responses and measures, the number of infected citizens increased, and some mayors began to tighten measures more and more. Based on this, we were interested in the factors that contributed to stricter measures. In a second step, we asked the mayors what was the reason for tightening the initial decisions. Table 3 shows that two-thirds (67 %) of the mayors introduced stricter measures because they followed the instructions of the advisory group to the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and/or the national government (62%). In addition, half of the respondents took stricter measures based on calculations and forecasts – they considered the number of

Table 3: Factors that contributed to stricter measures

		%
1	the number of confirmed cases in the municipality	52
2	number of confirmed cases in nearby municipalities	49
3	assessment of crisis escalation / estimated number of potential infections	50
4	personal experience (the mayor or someone from the family was infected)	2
5	number of COVID-19 deaths / mortality rate	9
6	recommendations of the municipal expert team	38
7	instructions from the national government	62
8	instructions of the advisory group to the Government of the Republic of Slovenia	67

* The percentages in the table present share of mayors that expressed agreement.

confirmed cases in the municipality and/or in neighbouring municipalities and estimated the number of potential infections and the escalation of the crisis. In addition, the mayors discussed the situation with the municipal expert team and forces from Civil Protection and took decisive action on their recommendations. Some mayors took stricter measures based on the number of COVID-19 deaths in their municipality and the mortality rate in the country. Finally, two% of the mayors had personal experience with coronavirus.

Analysis of the responses to COVID-19 reveals differences between the communities. Since there were no uniform guidelines or protocols for dealing with the COVID-19 situation, responses varied and depended mainly on the mayor's individual actions, commitment, efforts, innovation and ingenuity, and leadership skills. In addition, the COVID-19 situation varied widely. While some municipalities faced increasing numbers of infected citizens and were severely affected by the consequences, other municipalities had no infections at all. However, we can identify some common responses, such as the sharing of information among citizens and different types of bans, such as the use of municipal playgrounds and other facilities, as well as gatherings in public places. Depending on the situation in the municipality, some mayors have taken stricter measures, especially after the advisory group of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia issued instructions to do so.

3) Disclosing COVID-19 crisis information

This dimension represents a necessary step and responsibility for local authorities to manage the COVID-19 crisis. At the beginning of the outbreak, and even more so with the first infected people in the community, fear, distrust, concern, and criticism of detection put pressure on the local leadership. According to Zhou and Xin (2021), timely release of information about the crisis is the best way to reassure the public and diffuse social fears. However, the release of information is also delicate because it is very controversial to reveal information about confirmed cases, including patients' workplaces and residences and the like. Too much information could violate patients' personal privacy and cause unnecessary panic among the public.

Based on this perspective, we asked mayors how they handle the disclosure of sensitive information such as the number of infected cases in the municipality, the number of sick citizens, the locations of local coronavirus outbreaks, and information about actions that affect and limit people's daily lives. Many mayors (80 %) responded that they have started to publish all the important information on the official municipal website and update it daily. In addition, in 78 % of the municipalities, citizens were informed about the COVID-19 situation in their municipality through various local media (TV, radio, local newspaper, etc.). One third of the mayors responded that the local leadership and officials of the municipality communicated with citizens by email and some

even by phone (28 %). A few mayors (10 %) decided to hold press conferences and address citizens in this way.

According to the mayors' responses, they were very active and innovative in finding ways to keep in touch with citizens and provide information in a timely manner. In addition to posting information on the municipality's official website, many mayors also used social media. Some mayors (together with the municipal administration and the local team of experts) prepared special brochures with basic information on measures to protect against the coronavirus and prevent its spread, which were distributed by mail to all households in the municipality. Some mayors informed specific groups of citizens through the leadership of local associations (e.g. pensioners' association, youth association, sports clubs and others).

However, it is important to note that all of the above activities were carried out during the initial outbreak of the coronavirus and during the first wave. The role of the municipalities diminished once various online platforms were established by the national government and/or non-governmental organisations, as all important information was already publicly available. Thus, municipalities began to update official municipal websites and social media accounts less frequently. For example, only half of the municipalities updated their official websites concerning COVID-19 at least once a week 18 months after the first wave.

4) Balancing COVID-19 measures and local economy

Probably the most difficult task for local self-government (besides the protection and health of citizens) was to coordinate measures to protect against and prevent the spread of the coronavirus and to ensure the functioning of the local economy. Local leadership was therefore under immense pressure to meet two competing objectives – maintaining economic activity (and therefore jobs) in their municipality and containing the coronavirus. This was particularly difficult in settings where massive spread was occurring in the local community or in local businesses.

During the first and second waves, we had observed some major outbreaks of coronavirus in local businesses that were well managed and quickly suppressed. Surprisingly, this outbreak did not have a major impact on production and – from this – we wanted to find out how municipalities were coping with this challenge. Therefore, we asked the mayors how they were balancing the needs of the local economy in terms of maintaining production on the one hand, and ensuring and providing a safe working environment for workers on the other. According to their responses, they immediately began discussions with local business leaders and established regular weekly meetings with key employers in the municipality. They coordinated and unified infection control measures and agreed on common actions such as providing protective equipment, enabling continuous testing for potential infections and providing

all necessary information. One of the mayors described the situation in the municipality as follows:

With the help of the fire brigades, we distributed masks, disinfectants, and other protective equipment to all industries operating in the municipality, and provided local businesses with daily instructions from the government and National Institute of Public Health. The municipality promoted strict compliance and a way of working that reduced contact between people (i.e. working from home, completing only the most urgent tasks, conducting programmes online, announcing arrivals at public facilities, etc.). We also cut back on doing all non-essential activities. In collaboration with Civil Protection forces and the local health centre, we made it possible for employees of local companies to be regularly tested for coronavirus and later vaccinated. It is worth highlighting that the local business community responded very quickly and reduced the risk of coronavirus infection and transmission through mutually agreed measures (see Kukovič 2021).

Since small business is one of the most important branches of development in Slovenia, the presence of craft and entrepreneurial activities in an individual municipality is of key importance. Even though Slovenian municipalities have very limited competences in the field of (local) economy, they need to be attentive and active in order to create a stimulating and favourable local environment for the development and functioning of (small) entrepreneurship, to which the municipality's financial and non-financial incentives certainly contribute, especially in times of crisis and post-crisis. Unfortunately, smaller local businesses, especially cafes, bars, pubs, restaurants, businesses related to tourism and the entertainment industry have been hit much harder compared to larger local industry, as measures to protect against and prevent the spread of the corona virus have closed virtually all of them. As a result, owners have started to think about possible closures or even bankruptcies, which could lead to a massive unemployment crisis.

This is also the reason why the local authorities gave special attention to these local businesses. The majority of mayors supported small local entrepreneurs with financial and non-financial resources. For example, the municipalities advertised local businesses on the municipality's official website and encouraged citizens to use the services of local businesses, restaurants and bars that offered takeaway food and/or drinks. In addition, municipalities provided financial support, such as exemption from paying monthly rents and cancellation of debts for municipally owned buildings.

It is now clear that the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis are being felt in the local economy, especially in tourism-oriented municipalities and will continue for some time. It is expected that in municipalities with a lower threat or fewer cases of COVID-19, smaller businesses could reopen sooner and the local

economy could return to normal. From the responses of the mayors, we can conclude that they are well aware of the situation and want to provide support and assistance also in the post-crisis period.

Conclusion

COVID-19 disease has brought fear, suffering and an unimaginable challenge to humanity. The pandemic has triggered a series of global and interconnected health, economic, social, institutional, and political crises, leaving unimaginable consequences in its wake. Although we can track daily statistics on the number of infected, survivors, and people sickened, the statistics themselves do not cover all the effects of the pandemic. People have suffered in many ways: Families were separated; access to health services was difficult, even impossible in some places; emergency care was limited or even cancelled; schools were closed; people were isolated as coronavirus containment measures ordered isolation, lockdown, and disruption of social life. However, the psychological pressures and fears escalated as the economy ground to a halt, bringing mass layoffs and plunging many people into an existential crisis. The COVID-19 crisis or “great plague of our time” (Keane 2020; Boin et al. 2021) revealed the fragility of health and economic systems, as well as the social and institutional fabric of trust (Kukovič 2022).

During the first wave of the COVID-19 epidemic, Slovenian municipalities were at the forefront of addressing the new and unknown crisis across the country, with mayors taking the leading role – from informing citizens to taking (more or less) stringent measures, sometimes even beyond the scope of their competence. Our analysis shed light on the aforementioned measures along four dimensions. The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data revealed that mayors acted on their own initiative during the preparatory phase and were also inventive in terms of responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Since there were no uniform guidelines or protocols for dealing with the COVID-19 crisis, responses varied and depended mainly on activation, commitment, effort, innovation, ingenuity, leadership, as well as the overall epidemic situation in the municipality. However, we can identify some common responses and actions, such as information sharing among citizens and different types of restrictions, such as banning the use of municipal playgrounds and other facilities, as well as gatherings in public places. In addition, mayors were very active and innovative in finding ways to stay connected to citizens and share information in a timely manner, as well as in supporting local economy, especially smaller businesses in the service, tourism, and entertainment sectors that were most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our findings confirm the bottom-up approach that emerged in Slovenian municipalities, especially during the initial outbreak and the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis.

Once the new government managed to be organised, and especially in the later stages of the pandemic, the national government, a special government expert advisory group and the National Centre for Disease Control took over the dynamics of the responses to the COVID-19 crisis and started to help municipalities with clear instructions. Many interventions were (and still are) directly mandated by the Ministry of Health and the national government. Since then, municipalities (together with Civil Protection forces) have mostly taken on more supportive and logistical roles than decision-making ones. Similar is the case for testing and vaccination policies. Moreover, the majority of mayors supported the joint vaccination declaration and encouraged citizens to get vaccinated, also using the approach of leading by example. Based on the results of the study, we conclude that the COVID-19 crisis has reconfirmed that local government is primarily there to provide services to the people, which is especially the case in times of crisis.

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The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the European Union's public health policy

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Abstract: *In the spring of 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic emerged as one of the most complex and most serious challenges of the European Union, threatening the lives and quality of life of European citizens and the economy and healthcare systems of EU Member States. The fight against the pandemic required the collaboration of many different disciplines and sectors, and over time it had become clear that co-operation between EU Member States and EU organisations is essential for successful crisis management. This cross-border healthcare emergency has seriously tested the mechanisms set by EU treaties and legislations, as well as the organisations responsible for shaping and implementing the European Union's public health policy. Over the past year we have gained valuable data on how the system of rules and task sharing mechanisms have supported the fight against the pandemic and its effects. By reviewing and examining our findings, we may find answers about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the European Union's public health policy and how it can be further developed.*

Keywords: *COVID-19; public health; European Union; health policy; healthcare*

Introduction

The appearance of the coronavirus (SARS-COV-2), which causes severe respiratory syndrome, was reported by the Chinese authorities in Wuhan in December 2019 (ECDC 2020a: 1). The pandemic caused by the virus was named coronavirus-19, or COVID-19 (Esakandari 2020: 1). Typical symptoms of the disease include fever, dry cough and loss of taste and smell. Though a significant proportion of the infected are asymptomatic, COVID-19 can be severe or even fatal in

many cases. By 20 January 2020, nearly 300 cases had already been registered in China and the virus had also appeared in neighbouring Asian countries. As a result of the rapid spread of the virus, by 21 February 2020, a total of 47 cases had been identified in nine European countries (Spiteri et al, 2020: 1). By 11 March, a total of 118,000 cases of COVID-19 had been identified across 114 countries, at which point the Director-General of the WHO declared the situation a pandemic, urging national governments to act immediately (WHO 2020). The pandemic posed a serious challenge to the public health systems and economies of the EU Member States, and required advanced solutions from the EU itself. By March 2020, it became clear that the pandemic would be the strongest test of the Union's public health policy to date.

In our study, we examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on public health policy in the European Union, seeking answers to the following main questions: What EU rules and task-sharing mechanisms were in place to address the pandemic and its public health impact in 2020? To what extent can we consider the European Union's public health policy to be effective in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020? To successfully manage future pandemics, in which direction should EU public health policy be further developed?

We hypothesise that the regulations and task-sharing mechanisms established before 2020 for EU public health policy did not provide the relevant EU institutions with sufficient powers and tools to manage the COVID-19 pandemic fully. As a policy with supportive powers under the Lisbon Treaty, we hypothesise that EU public health policy has not proved sufficient to coordinate Member States' public health measures properly. We hypothesise that to coordinate future pandemics more effectively at the EU level, it is necessary to provide broader tools and support mechanisms for the public health policy at the EU level and the institutions responsible for its implementation.

The theoretical framework of the study

As a theoretical framework of the study, we used the model of institutional rational choice (IRC). The central concept of IRC is the institution itself, which means formal organisations and the system of public policy instruments. The IRC sought to establish a standard explanatory model capable of describing, explaining and predicting social actions in different institutions and their outcomes based on uniform principles (Gajduschek et. al, 2010: 35–36). The IRC is a general language that captures the way rules, the physical-material conditions of the world and the various characteristics of the community determine the scenes and places for action, the incentives that affect individuals and the resulting social outcomes (Sabatier 1999: 59). With the theory's help, we can understand why the institutions and public policies created to solve various social problems are successful or unsuccessful. We can also formulate forecasts

and provide normative guidelines on the type of institutions we can expect the right choices and methods to achieve a given policy goal. The IRC is a theoretical framework for examining and understanding a wide variety of public policy areas (Gajduschek et al. 2010: 36). The IRC provides a complicated approach to analysing situations where multiple organisations and actors' complex strategies and actions can be identified (Ostrom, 2005: 188).

Based on this theoretical approach, EU public health policy can be defined and interpreted by examining the roles of relevant EU legislation, mechanisms and EU organisations. Examining the sets of rules that define the EU's public health policy, the division of tasks between EU organisations will help understand the value system and logic that defined the Union's epidemic management in 2020. By comparing the actions taken by EU organisations with their significant public health outcomes, it is possible to assess whether the EU has achieved the objectives set out in its public health policy. Thus, the IRC application will contribute to the critical legislative and organisational aspects of disease management at the EU level and thus to the future development of EU public health policy.

Methods

As the first step of a systematic scientific assessment, we summarised the societal needs and problems posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, we outlined the European Union's public health policy's main objectives concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and categorised the Union's main responsibilities for repressing the pandemic and supporting health systems. In the next section of the analysis, we summarised the EU rule-making systems and task-sharing mechanisms in place for these tasks before 2020 and the actions taken by EU organisations during the coronavirus pandemic. In the next step, we assessed the EU public health policy's effectiveness in terms of output and outcome indicators related to the main objectives and measures. Outcome indicators were COVID-19 deaths in 2020 and excess deaths in 2020, which showed whether the Union's public health policy goals (such as curbing the epidemic and protecting the health and lives of citizens) had been achieved. Output indicators were used to assess the information that showed whether the measures enabled EU organisations to coordinate Member States' non-pharmaceutical measures, vaccine procurement and cross-border health services (such as the heterogeneity of the Member States' stringency index, or face-covering policies). Finally, we examined the direction in which the Union's public health policy should move to manage future epidemics successfully and the resolutions formulated by key EU actors and organisations in this regard.

In the systematic scientific evaluation of the Union's public health policy, we studied domestic and international scientific literature, as well as international treaties and legislation. In addition, we analysed the text of the main treaties, decisions, recommendations and resolutions published in Eur-Lex and issued by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council. The study did not examine the effects of the pandemic from aspects beyond the European Union's public health policy, such as economic aspects, or aspects related to Schengen. The time period examined by the study ranges from the start of the pandemic until 31 December 2020.

Results

Social needs and problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic

In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic affected certain groups of European citizens in a wide-ranging and different way, resulting in the emergence of a very complex set of problems facing the governments of the Member States and the European Union. Uncertainties about the spread of the virus, its mechanism of action and uncertainties about the treatment options for the disease caused concern and fear among citizens. The pandemic posed a serious threat to the lives and quality of life of the population. The elderly and those with chronic illnesses are at increased risk (Wolff 2020).

Due to the rapid spread of the SARS-COV-2 virus, there was a possibility of overloading health capacities in a short time, and that could cause a significant reduction in the chances of survival for people with COVID-19 disease. Due to the burden on the health system, individuals with other non-COVID-19 medical conditions sometimes did not receive timely or adequate quality care, and that could have been perceived as a threat by the population (Shaun 2020). Fear and stress of infection, as well as increasing isolation due to social distancing and quarantine, have increased mental health problems among certain social groups (Xiong 2020).

The economic effects of restrictive measures to slow the spread of the pandemic have also been significant and far-reaching. Turnover and revenue have fallen sharply in many sectors including aviation, vehicle manufacturing, raw material processing, construction and tourism (World Bank 2020). Hundreds of thousands of people lost their jobs in a short time or were forced to earn less on reduced working hours. The pandemic also created serious challenges to the education systems of the countries, especially where digital solutions in education were less prevalent, or less advanced, or where specific social groups had less access to these tools. In addition, EU Member States were affected by the effects of the pandemic in different ways and to distinct degrees due to their dissimilar economic structures.

Each and every country developed a need to deal with the emergency caused by the pandemic, such as protecting people's health and lives, or preventing the healthcare system from collapsing. On the other hand, it became necessary to apply restrictive measures only to an extent, and only for as long as it's epidemiologically justified in order to prevent the collapse of certain economic sectors. In addition, it seemed clear that EU Member States needed to coordinate their crisis management measures as if when a Member State did not take appropriate measures to reduce the spread of the pandemic, the healthcare and economic systems of other EU Member States could be affected.

The main objectives of the European Union's public health policy in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic

The Treaty of Lisbon adopted in 2007 clarifies the competences of the Member States and of the Union in the public health policy. The competence of the Member States is to provide healthcare services and related resources, whilst pursuant to Articles 2C and 2E of the Treaty the Union has competence in the field of supporting and coordinating Member State activities aimed at the protection of human health and development of health (Council of the European Union 2007: 47–48). In addition to these, the Union and the Member States have divided competence in regard to public health safety risks.

By adopting the Treaty of Lisbon, Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union contains the provisions on the field of public health. Pursuant to par. 1 of this Article 'a high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Union policies and activities', and the Union action supplementing the national policy shall be aimed at, inter alia, the prevention, research of factors and reasons risking the health, as well as at education and notification (Official Journal of the European Union 2012: 122). Article 168, par. 2 motivates the harmonisation of the policy and activities of the Member States, sharing their good practice in the aforementioned fields, and encourages the Member States to establish co-operations aimed at the development of the healthcare services of border regions.

Pursuant to par. 4, the Union has competence in taking 'measures regarding setting up the high-level and safety provisions of medicines and medical products' (Official Journal of the European Union 2012: 123). Paragraph 5 highlights that the Union action shall be inclusive of 'monitoring, early warning of and combating serious cross-border threats to health' (Official Journal of the European Union 2012: 123). Paragraphs 5 and 7 set out, however, that the Union shall respect the health policy of the Member States, excluding any kind of harmonisation in the fields subject to par. 1 and 2, and in accordance with the Treaty of Lisbon, it sets out, that the provision of healthcare services shall still remain the exclusive competence of the Member States.

Based on the overview described above, the European Union's public health policy's fundamental objective is to protect the lives and health of EU citizens, with the more specific aim of reducing the pandemic and supporting the health systems of the Member States. Measures to reduce the pandemic and thereby reduce the reproductive rate of the virus (ECDC 2020b), as well as interventions to support the functioning of health systems, can be summarised as follows:

- a) Decreasing the number of contacts (e.g., adapting stay at home restrictions, cancellation of public events and gatherings, school and workplace closures, restrictions on internal movement, international travel controls);
- b) Decreasing the risk of transmission (e.g., obligatory use of face masks in outdoor and indoor spaces, application of hand and respiratory hygiene rules);
- c) Controlling the infection source (e.g., open public testing, contact tracing, isolation of symptomatic cases not requiring hospitalisation, quarantining of contacts).
- d) Reducing the proportion of the population susceptible to infection (with safe and effective vaccinations).
- e) Supporting stressed health systems by providing health capacities, tools and human resources.

These interventions can be grouped into three main categories, which also define the responsibilities of the European Union: Reducing the number of physical contacts, reducing the likelihood of infection transmission and controlling the infection source (1) can be achieved through non-pharmaceutical measures and their coordination at the EU level. Reducing the proportion of the population susceptible to infection (2) can be achieved by applying pharmaceutical measures and their coordination at the EU level. Support for health systems (3) can be achieved by coordinating cross-border health coordination at the EU level. In the next section of the analysis, we summarised for these three areas of responsibility which EU rule systems and task-sharing mechanisms were in place before 2020 and what measures were implemented by EU organisations during the coronavirus pandemic.

Overview of pre-pandemic EU regulatory frameworks, task-sharing mechanisms and EU actions in 2020

Coordination of non-pharmaceutical measures taken by Member States at EU level

Regulations established before 2020 to support the implementation of this task

The pandemics caused by the SARS-COV-1 virus emerging in 2002⁶, and the H1N1/09 virus in 2009⁷, raised the attention of the European Union and the Member States on the significance of transnational healthcare emergencies. The Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council in 2013 on serious cross-border threats to health constituted an important basis of those regulations and mechanisms, which arose as opportunities in spring 2020 by the European Union and the Member States in regard to controlling the pandemics caused by the SARS-COV-2 virus. The purpose of the decision is to assist the control of pandemics risking human health and the prevention of the spread thereof by supporting pandemic co-operation and coordination between the Member States (European Parliament 2013). To this end, the Decision includes such provisions and guidelines which enable the risk assessment, monitoring of cross-border health risks as well as the coordination of counter-actions against them.

Pursuant to Article 4 of Title II, the Member States shall develop preparedness and response plans, on whose content they shall notify the specified Union bodies, as well as all Member States every third year (European Parliament 2013: 7). The purpose of arrangements, in addition to the harmonisation of the plans, is the exchange of good practices and experience.

Article 6 of Title III provides that a pandemic supervisory network shall be established, and the Member State authorities have to send the specified pandemic data categories and information to this network (European Parliament 2013: 8). Such data are, inter alia, information regarding the emergence and spread of contagious diseases of known or unknown origin. The establishment of an early notice and rapid response system monitoring the transnational health risks is provided in Article 8 of Title IV, which promotes Union-level risk assessment and supports communication between the Member States, and pro-

6 The SARS-COV-1 virus appeared in China in November 2002, and by September 2003 nearly 8,000 infections had been identified worldwide. One in ten infected had died from the disease caused by the virus (Rabenau et al. 2005: 1).

7 The H1N1 virus, which emerged in Mexico in 2009 and caused an epidemic, contained genes for swine flu, bird flu and human flu. By June 2009, nearly 30,000 cases had been identified worldwide, and on 11 June, the WHO declared a pandemic (Sullivan et al. 2009: 1).

vides a quick alarm. The alert as per Article 9 may be made by a Member State, *inter alia*, when a rapidly spreading pandemic exceeding the national response-ability, causing a large number of cases or deaths to emerge in the area, which may affect multiple Member States (European Parliament 2013: 9–10). Article 11 of the Decision provides in detail which European Union bodies shall play a key role in the coordination of the response on the emergency situation, and sets out the notification and reporting obligations of the Member States on the public health measures taken by them, and highlights that the Member States may also ask for assistance from each other.

EU organisations supporting the task

The European Commission is the proposal-maker, decision-preparation, enforcement and control body of the European Union, which has as many members as the Member States (Greer et al. 2019: 30). The main duties of the Commission are to initiate different laws, control the observing of the provisions and the enforcement of professional policies. Pursuant to par. 30 of the Decision on transnational severe health risks, adopted in 2013, the Commission gets enforcement competences in order to harmonise and coordinate the Member State actions related to the health crisis (European Parliament 2013: 5). Pursuant to Article 19 of the Decision, the Commission shall make reports to the European Parliament and the Council every third year on the operation of the pandemic supervisory network and the quick response system.

One of the main corresponding bodies of the Commission is the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANCO), which is responsible for the formation and enforcement of public health and food safety policies (Greer et al. 2019: 30–31). In the Strategic Plan of the Directorate-General for the term between 2016–2020, the monitoring and effective management of transnational health risks are presented as a priority, and the target is set up to increase the number of those Member States which improved their preparation and response abilities (European Commission 2016).

One of the main European Union professional bodies in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic is the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, established in 2004 (European Parliament 2004). The purpose of the operation of the organisation is to support the effective and coordinated management of pandemics (Greer 2019: 58–59). For this purpose, the ECDC operates the early warning and rapid response system, conducts risk assessments and data analyses regarding contagious diseases of unknown origin, risking human health. The organisation plays an active role in the European pandemic expert education by implementing scientific training programs and conferences. The ECDC further provides advice to each institute of the European Union and the Member States and establishes co-operations with the European Medicines

Agency, the World Health Organization and international pandemics organisations beyond Europe.

Main actions implemented by EU organisations in 2020

As early as 25 January 2020, the ECDC indicated in its weekly flash report that the coronavirus which had emerged in China's Wuhan Province could be considered as a pandemic threat and its global spread was highly likely (ECDC 2020b: 8). However, EU Member States were slow to respond to the emergency and initially adopted different strategies, notably Sweden and the United Kingdom, which had initially aimed at achieving herd immunity, but over time all countries recognised that non-pharmaceutical measures had to be taken due to the rapid spread of the pandemic and the hastily overburdened healthcare structures.

On 16 March, the European Commission published its guidelines on border management measures, which, in addition to protecting citizens' health, were to ensure the free movement of goods and services (European Commission 2020a). The guidelines set out a number of considerations for Member States to design their public health measures and restrictions. Although the European Commission was less proactive in the initial phase of the pandemic, by 15 April it issued a timetable and a set of criteria to Member States, which facilitated the planned lifting of restrictions (European Commission 2020c). The document sets out three main criteria that need to be assessed before restrictions can be lifted. First, it has to be examined whether there has been a significant reduction in the spread of the pandemic (e.g. the number of new cases), then the available sufficient healthcare (e.g. utilisation of ICU beds) and adequate monitoring capacities (e.g. testing and contact tracing) need to be taken into consideration. The guidelines underscored that evidence-based decision-making was particularly recommended for Member States and they are also encouraged to coordinate their actions with other Member States and comply with EU rules.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the ECDC has continuously provided epidemiological assessments, comparative analyses of individual Member States' measures and recommendations in many areas based on scientific evidence (ECDC 2020c; ECDC 2020d).

Management of pharmaceutical measures at the EU level

Regulations established before 2020 to support the implementation of this task

The Decision of the European Parliament and the Council on serious cross-border threats to health contains essential elements for managing pharmaceutical measures at the EU level. Article 5 of Title II contains the provisions on joint

procurements related to healthcare counter-measures, claiming that the process is ensured for all Member States; however, participation to the proceeding is not mandatory. Prior to initiating the joint procurement, the participating Member States shall agree in a separate agreement on the practical and professional implementation aspects of the process.

EU organisations supporting the task

The European Medicines Agency plays a significant role in the management of transnational risks, since the duty of the organisation is the scientific evaluation of distribution requests of medicines, monitoring and supervision of the safety of medicines (Greer et al. 2019: 121–122). Therefore, during a world pandemic, this agency evaluates the potential medicines aimed at the management of a contagious disease, as well as vaccines aimed at the reduction of the spread of the disease.⁸

Main actions implemented by EU organisations in 2020

In its Regulation of 14 April 2020, the Council of the European Union introduced emergency support to finance epidemic-related expenditure, allowing the Commission, in co-operation with the Member States, to procure, transfer and stock up products and services to the Member States (the Council of the European Union 2020). As described by Greer and his colleagues, the joint procurement agreement allows Member States to jointly procure medicines, medical devices, services and goods in the event of cross-border health threats (Greer et al 2020).

The coordination of cross-border healthcare co-operation at the EU level.

Regulations established before 2020 to support the implementation of this task

The Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare, adopted in 2011, may be deemed a key moment from the aspect of healthcare co-operations between the Member States. The purpose of the Directive is to support the access of citizens to cross-border healthcare services, thus assisting patient mobility and co-operation between the Member States (European Parliament 2011). From the aspect of the

⁸ The headquarters of the agency was moved from London to Amsterdam after Brexit (consilium.europa.eu 2020).

access of citizens, Article 31 of the Directive shall be highlighted, providing that when a patient is unable to use the healthcare required by the Member States as per his/her residence within the deadline based on medical grounds, (s)he may enjoy healthcare in another Member States following such request. Article 6 of Chapter II of the Directive provides that each Member State has to establish national contact points, whose purpose is to support the citizens in exercising their rights related to transnational healthcare services (European Parliament 2011: 57). Therefore, the national contact points establish co-operations with each other, with the professional and patient organisations and health insurance companies operating in their Member States. Chapter III of the Directive has further provisions on the reimbursement of transnational healthcare costs, whilst Chapter IV contains guidelines regarding mutual assistance and co-operation between the Member States, also motivating the Member States in the development of border region co-operations, exchange of information and experience. (European Parliament 2011: 60–62).

EU organisations supporting the task

The Health Security Committee was established by Article 17 of the Decision on transnational severe health risks, adopted in 2013 (European Parliament 2013: 13). Pursuant to the Decision, the duty of the committee, which has two representatives per each Member State, is the harmonisation of readiness and response planning, coordination of response on transnational health crises, in co-operation with the European Commission and the Member States.

Main actions implemented by EU organizations in 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic affected Member States at different times and to different degrees in the spring of 2020, and health systems were overwhelmed in some countries. Under the Cross-border Healthcare Directive adopted in 2011 (European Parliament 2011) and the European Commission's Communication promoting cross-border co-operation in healthcare adopted on 3 April 2020, many Member States have requested and received assistance from the European Union and from other Member States, by that means effectively reducing the pressure on their health systems (European Commission 2020b). In this context, during the pandemic's spring and autumn waves, hospital beds, equipment, emergency transport and hospital care were provided to citizens of other Member States by countries less burdened at the time. The Commission's April communication emphasises that the cross-border assistance in healthcare is coordinated by the Health Security Committee, which coordinates requests for assistance and organises the necessary measures through the Early Warning and Response System. The communication also details the criteria and the rules

already in place for the reimbursement of medical expenses incurred in the Member State providing treatment, and encourages Member States to develop healthcare co-operation in border regions.

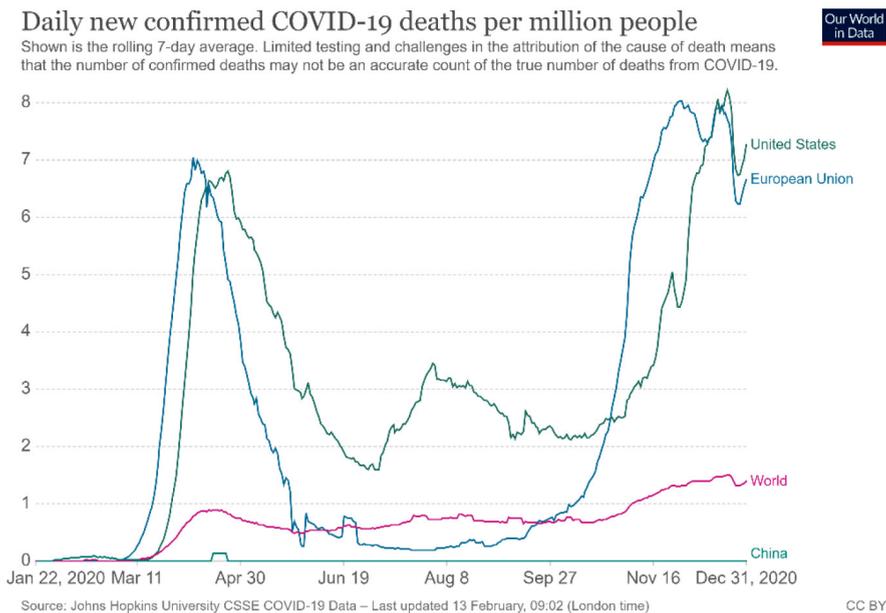
In the next chapter of the analysis, we examine the effectiveness of the European Union’s public health policy in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 regarding the resources at its disposal.

Evaluation of the results of the measures taken by the European Union

Evaluation of the outcome of the fundamental objective of EU public health policy

The European Union’s primary objectives have not been met, namely to protect the health and lives of the population and to reduce the risk and adverse effects of the epidemic, with significant deaths at the EU level during the spring and autumn waves of the epidemic in 2020. The daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths per million people in 2020 was well above the world average for most of 2020, as well as the average Chinese mortality data (Fig. 1). The limitation of the analysis of COVID-19 mortality data is that neither EU Member States nor the rest of the world has a standardised COVID-19 case definition.

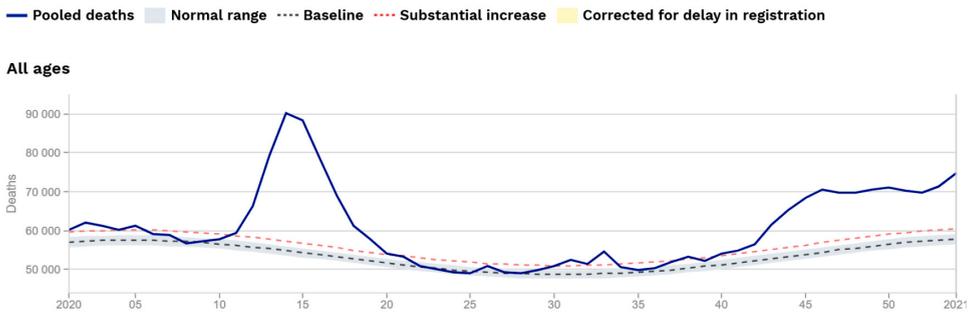
Figure 1: Daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths per million people in the USA, the EU, China and the World from 24 January 2020 to 31 December 2020.



Source: University of Oxford (2020)

It is also advisable to examine the extent of excess mortality. The Euromomo database contains weekly mortality data for 21 EU Member States as well as Switzerland and Norway. Based on this, between March and May 2020 and between October and December 2020, the EU Member States' mortality rate increased substantially compared to previous years (Fig. 2.).

Figure 2: Pooled weekly total number of deaths in the data-providing EuroMOMO partner countries in 2020.



Source: Euromomo database (2020)

The evaluation of the coordination of non-pharmaceutical measures at the Union level

To assess the coordination of non-pharmaceutical measures to reduce physical contact, we used the 'stringency index' as an output indicator developed by the University of Oxford, which consists of nine components: school closures, workplace closures, stay-at-home requirements, restrictions on public gatherings, closures of public transport, cancellation of public events, public information campaigns, restrictions on internal movements and international travel controls. The severity of each Member State's restrictive measures is indicated by the index with values between 0 and 100, with a value of '0' being the least stringent and a value of '100' being the most stringent. If the Member States' stringency indexes show a heterogeneous picture, it can be said that the measures of the Member States have not been fully harmonised.

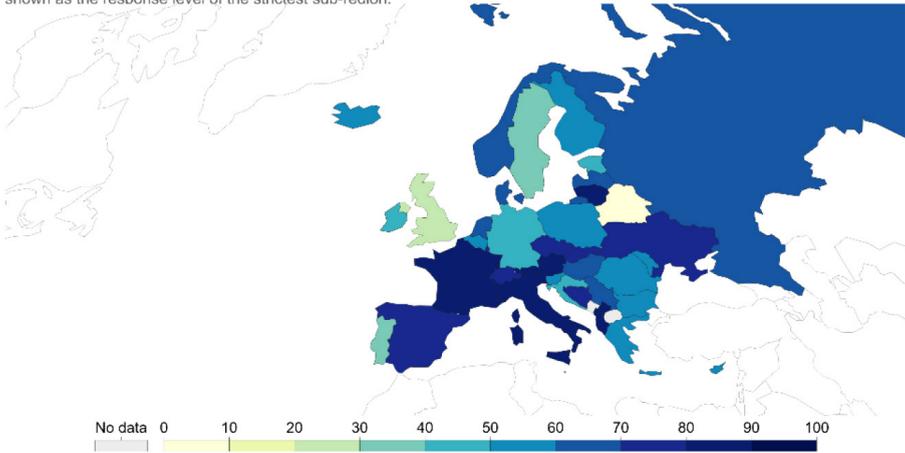
On 17 March 2020, six days after the WHO declared a pandemic, EU Member States' stringency index showed an enormous difference. Of the 27 Member States, three were between 20 and 40, 12 were between 40 and 60, eight were between 60 and 80 and four were between 80 and 90 (Fig. 3).

Figure 3: European countries' stringency index values on 17 March 2020

COVID-19: Government Stringency Index, Mar 17, 2020



This is a composite measure based on nine response indicators including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest). If policies vary at the subnational level, the index is shown as the response level of the strictest sub-region.



Source: Hale, Webster, Petherick, Phillips, and Kira (2020). Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker – Last updated 13 February, 09:14 (London time)
Note: This index simply records the number and strictness of government policies, and should not be interpreted as 'scoring' the appropriateness or effectiveness of a country's response.
OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

Source: University of Oxford (2020)

When the COVID-19 epidemic broke out in the spring of 2020, a significant number of EU Member States reacted late and the EU did not have sufficient resources to fully coordinate Member States' actions. As a result, the wide, community-based spread of the virus was not prevented in many countries. This has led to significant morbidity and mortality numbers, the overburdening of health systems and economic decline due to the introduction of necessarily applied non-pharmaceutical measures.

By April 2020, the restrictive measures were significantly tightened and the stringency indexes were standardised. Of the 27 Member States, two were between 60 and 70, 23 were between 70 and 90 and two were between 90 and 100 (Fig. 4).

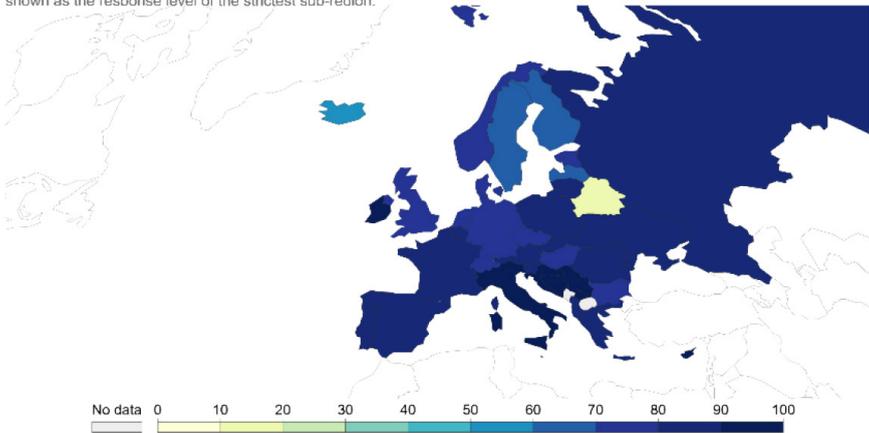
In assessing the coordination of non-pharmacological measures to decrease the risk of transmission, we examined mask-wearing policies in Member States. If the Member States' mask-wearing policies show a heterogeneous picture, it indicates a lack of harmonisation.

On 13 May 2020, two months after the situation was classified as a pandemic, eight out of 27 Member States had no guidelines, three countries only recommended wearing a mask. In 12 countries mask-wearing was obligatory only in parts of public spaces. In three countries mask-wearing was obligatory in all

Figure 4: European countries stringency index values on 13 April 2020

COVID-19: Government Stringency Index, Apr 13, 2020

This is a composite measure based on nine response indicators including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest). If policies vary at the subnational level, the index is shown as the response level of the strictest sub-region.



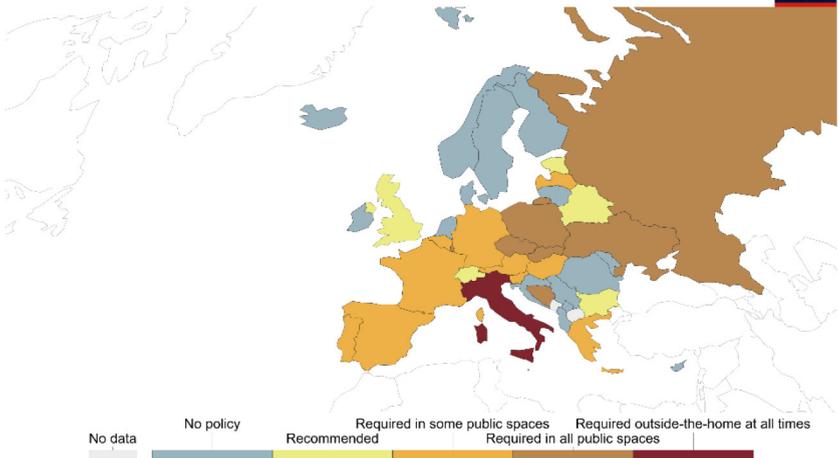
Source: Hale, Webster, Petherick, Phillips, and Kira (2020). Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker – Last updated 13 February, 09:14 (London time)

Note: This index simply records the number and strictness of government policies, and should not be interpreted as 'scoring' the appropriateness or effectiveness of a country's response.
OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

Source: University of Oxford (2020)

Figure 5: European countries face covering policies on 13 May 2020

Face covering policies during the COVID-19 pandemic, May 13, 2020



Source: Hale, Webster, Petherick, Phillips, and Kira (2020). Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker – Last updated 13 February, 09:14 (London time)

Note: There may be sub-national or regional differences in restrictions. The policy categories shown may not apply at all sub-national levels. A country is coded as having these restrictions if at least some sub-national regions have implemented them.
OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

Source: University of Oxford (2020)

public spaces, while in the case of one country, mask wearing was mandatory both indoors and outdoors (Fig. 5).

Although the delayed response of Member States and EU organisations was initially replaced by a more proactive approach over time, EU Member States still don't have a uniform face covering strategy.

A similar observation can be made regarding the coordination of Member States' infection source control, i.e. screening and contact tracing strategies at the EU level. On 15 June 2020, in five of the 27 Member States, only those who had symptoms and belonged to a specific group were tested (e.g. health workers, hospitalisation, returning from abroad). All symptomatic individuals were tested in 18 Member States and a testing strategy for both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals was in place in seven Member States (Fig. 6). The testing policies of the Member States thus showed a heterogenic picture, indicating a lack of harmonisation.

Figure 6: European countries testing policies on 15 June 2020



Source: University of Oxford (2020)

European Union organisations have facilitated the planned implementation and coordination of lifting restrictions by formulating guidelines and criteria, which is a significant achievement in terms of mitigating economic damage, though Member State governments are not obliged to take decisions on the basis of these criteria. The same applies to the recommendations made in the

ECDC's public health assessments, and to the recommendations made in papers comparing the epidemiological management strategies of Member States. Until adequate vaccines or therapies become available to provide effective treatment for the disease, a wrong decision by the government of a single Member State to overemphasise economic or other interests could pose significant public health risks for all Member States.

Evaluation of the management of pharmaceutical measures at the EU level

According to the information provided by the European Commission on 31 December 2020, the EU would procure 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine under a joint procurement agreement with several manufacturers, which will be made available to the Member States (European Commission 2020f). The benefit of joint procurement is that, in addition to scarce production capacity, it still provides equitable access to the vaccine for all Member States involved in the procurement, and vaccine manufacturers are less able to manipulate Member States competing for the vaccine. The joint procurement of vaccines is a significant achievement, allowing all Member States to start their immunisation programs simultaneously and, if successful, to phase out restrictive measures. It should also be noted that, in the case of vaccines, more comprehensive research, development and production processes have made it possible for the EU Member States to obtain vaccines through joint procurement. In contrast, in the initial phase of the pandemic, due to the rapid spread of the virus, it was impossible to implement joint procurement, which required lengthy consultations for drugs and medical equipment needed to treat the disease.

Evaluation of the coordination of cross-border health co-operation at the EU level

EU organisations have made significant progress in coordinating cross-border co-operation in healthcare: Member States have taken over the treatment and care of patients from countries whose hospital capacity has been overburdened, thus improving the chances of survival for many EU citizens. During both the spring and autumn waves of the pandemic, several EU Member States requested and received assistance through EU mediation (e.g. Germany provided the capacity to Italy, the Czech Republic, Belgium), and the Member States offered each other medical capacity, human resources and medical equipment. The Health Security Committee played an essential role in cross-border coordination, linking the EU Member States requesting assistance with the Member States offering health capabilities.

Discussion

The question may arise as to the direction in which the European Union's public health policy can develop in light of the 2020 pandemic experience. Before and after the COVID-19 crisis, several experts argued that the creation of a European Health Union and the extension of EU competences in public health policy were a less realistic goal due to the large differences between Member States' health systems (Vollaard et al. 2016; Clemens et al, 2020). According to Clemens and colleagues, decentralised operations better able to respond to differing needs in each Member State, and the European Union must be left to play a coordinating role in supporting action and development. According to Guy, the 168(7) paragraph of the TFEU (the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) does not allow the Union to take comprehensive action in the field of public health and has a major impact on Member States' public health policies; therefore, it's more of a symbiotic relationship between the Member States and the Union (Guy, 2020).

However, according to his analysis, the European Union can influence Member States' public health policies in an indirect way, for example through EU budgetary policies or the European Semester's country-specific recommendations. According to other authors, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic shows that the powers of EU organisations need to be expanded in order to manage health emergencies more effectively, for example, by providing the ECDC with broader powers and by funding, developing a common emergency, testing and contact tracing strategy, further developing the EU civil protection system, developing common stockpiles and staff (Alemanno 2020; Greer et al. 2020).

Although the opinions of the healthcare experts are controversial, the motion of the European Parliament issued on 7 July 2020, aimed at joint commitment initiated by five families of parties (PPE, S & D, Renew, Vers/Ale, GUE/NGL) on the Union's public health strategy after the COVID-19 pandemic assumes that the European Member States might head towards a closer healthcare co-operation and integration (European Parliament 2020).

The problem identification of the motion declares, *inter alia*, that the EU has no sufficient tools to appropriately manage pandemics, moreover, significant benefits might arise as a result of access to transnational healthcare services and the better harmonisation of Member State measures. The motion highlights further that the Union Treaties and Regulations provide more room to achieve the public health objectives compared to as of today, and the social and economic processes make the Union's public health policy even more significant. The motion calls the Member States to enhance their co-operation in the field of healthcare, perform stress tests evaluating their healthcare system.

The motion requires the Commission to make a proposal on the minimum requirements of quality healthcare and to make a proposal on establishing

a European response mechanism assisting the management of health crises. According to the motion, in the future, the healthcare and the financing thereof will get a more emphasised role in the process of the European Semester; and in the field of public health, joint procurements may also get a bigger role. The motion further aims at the expansion of financing and the competences of the ECDC, enabling the organisation to work out mandatory guidelines for the Member States and to become able to more efficiently manage the research. The president of the European Commission also confirmed in her speech made in the European Parliament on 7 September 2020, that the Commission's objective is to create a stronger healthcare union and the development of the Union's risk and crisis management system, highlighting the reinforcement of the European Medicines Agency and the ECDC (European Commission, 2020e).

Conclusion

In the spring of 2020, EU Member States had to deal simultaneously with a complex set of problems that threatened human health, rising unemployment, declining government revenues and rising public spending, and various social conflicts. The IRC has proved to be an appropriate tool for evaluating the EU public health policy. The review of EU regulations, task-sharing mechanisms and organisations' functions helped to understand the value system and logic that defined the Union's epidemic management in 2020.

Based on our analysis, our first hypothesis was confirmed as the regulations and task-sharing mechanisms established before EU public health policy until 2020 did not provide the relevant EU institutions with adequate powers to address the COVID-19 epidemic fully. The pre-pandemic EU rules and task-sharing mechanisms only partially covered the complex set of tasks needed to manage the crisis. In many areas, the EU did not have the powers and opportunities to unify Member States' actions.

The analysed data partially confirmed our second hypothesis. Although EU treaties and legislation state that the operation of the health system and the management of emergencies are the responsibility of the Member States, over time it has become clear that if Member States' risk assessments are not based on a uniform methodology and these governments do not take uniform action, it could cause serious problems for other Member States. The rules established before the COVID-19 pandemic and the mechanisms for the division of responsibilities and tasks between EU and Member State organisations were only partially able to ensure the protection of the physical and mental health of European citizens or the effective management of the pandemic. Important differences could be identified between the Member States in strategies to reduce the number of physical contacts, in measures to reduce the likelihood of transmission and control the source of infection, both in the spring and au-

tumn of the pandemic. Significant heterogeneity levels were identified in the Member States' stringency indexes, face-covering policies and testing strategy. At the same time, the European Union has made crucial progress in managing vaccine procurement and coordinating cross-border healthcare.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the reviewed international literature and the analysed data confirmed our third hypothesis. A risk assessment based on standard criteria, data collection and indicators is essential for adequately managing future epidemics at the EU level. It is also necessary to provide broader tools and support mechanisms for the public health policy at the EU level and the institutions responsible for its implementation.

The Member States and the European Union must make progress in preventing epidemics and managing health crises, especially in coordinating non-pharmaceutical measures. Based on the literature and decisions and documents issued by EU organisations, it seems that closer co-operation between Member States' health systems could be developed. Overall, the emergence and the consequences of this new type of coronavirus could accelerate the transformation of the European Union's public health policy and it can help promote closer co-operation between European health systems.

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Framing and Agenda Setting of the Day of Republika Srpska and its 2016 Referendum

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Abstract: *The purpose of this article is to explore broadsheet newspaper framing and agenda-setting of two events using the five-frame model developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). This article provides insight into how the leading broadsheet newspaper within BiH's Republika Srpska frames relationships between the three main ethnic groups and is the first such study to occur in BiH. By identifying and exploring the most common frames in Glas Srpske during the five-year period (from 31 December 2015 to 30 December 2020), the research is meant to answer the following research questions: How does Glas Srpske frame the conversation about it and portray the Day of Republika Srpska (RS) and Referendum of the RS Day? The results, which find Attribution of Responsibility and Conflict frames to be the more prevalent in Glas Srpske, illustrate contentious politics that reinforce differences between ethnic groups in BiH. These events and the controversial narrative surrounding them are relevant more than ever in the light of the recent non-paper 'Western Balkans – A Way Forward'.*

Keywords: *Bosnia and Herzegovina, framing, agenda-setting, Day of Republika Srpska, RS Day referendum, Glas Srpske, non-paper*

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to explore broadsheet newspaper framing of two events using the five-frame model originally developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). This provides insight into how the main broadsheet newspaper within Bosnia and Herzegovina's two Entities frames relationships between

the three main ethnic groups¹ in the country. Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is comprised of two Entities: Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation of BiH or FBiH). Along with the two Entities, the country also has an autonomous self-governing administrative unit under the sovereignty of the state of BiH: the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Brčko District). The focus of this article is within RS and the main broadsheet newspaper, *Glas Srpske* ('Voice of Srpska'). The research findings are then couched within the leaked 'non-paper' (Cirman – Vuković 2021) of April 2021 – allegedly written by the prime minister of Slovenia – that caused a firestorm across BiH and the wider Western Balkan region, as it suggested the dissolution of BiH as well as major reorganisation of other countries in the Western Balkans along ethnic lines.

In order to understand RS, we must first understand the environment in which it arose. BiH was one of six constituent republics that comprised the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFR Yugoslavia), which was a one-party, socialist federal state. BiH held its first democratic multi-party election in December 1990 while still part of SFR Yugoslavia; the overwhelming majority of votes were cast for the main ethnic-nationalist parties: the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ-BiH; Croat), the Party of Democratic Action (SDA; Bosniak) and the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS; Serb). On 14 October 1991, the SDS deputies left the Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina due to a plan to vote on Bosnian-Herzegovinian legislative sovereignty within Yugoslavia (but not independence). After the SDS departure from the Assembly of BiH, HDZ-BiH and SDA deputies voted in favour of legislative sovereignty. Several days later, the SDS proclaimed a Serb National Assembly, located in Banja Luka (Malcolm 2002: 228).

On 9 January 1992, the Serb National Assembly declared the creation of the Republic of the Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which would be an integral part of Yugoslavia (Malcolm 2002). The Serb National Assembly adopted a 'Declaration to Proclaim the Republic of the Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina', which would cover the areas of 'Serb autonomous regions and areas, and other Serb ethnic units in BiH' (Venice Commission 2013: 5). The name was changed to 'Republika Srpska' in August 1992 (Cigar – Williams 2002). The day after the Serb National Assembly adopted its constitution, BiH held a two-day vote (29 February – 1 March 1992) on independence from Yugoslavia.² BiH declared its independence in March 1992 and the European Community recognised its independence on 6 April 1992. The same day, the Siege of Sarajevo began, and the war had started.

1 Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs.

2 The referendum asked: "Are you in favour of a sovereign and independent Bosnia-Herzegovina, a state of equal citizens and nations of Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats, and others who live in it?" Out of the 63.6% constituents who cast their vote, 99.7% voted for independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many Bosnian-Serbs boycotted the referendum (Bjö drkdahl 2018).

The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, better known as the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords (DPA), brought the three and a half year Bosnian War to an end. It established the current consociational (Lijphart 1977) ethnic power-sharing arrangement as well as the de-facto partition of BiH (Malcolm 2002: 270) between the Bosnian-Serbs and the Bosniaks/Croats through the creation of two Entities: Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH. Maksic (2009) argues that the 1995 DPA transformed BiH into ‘a weak union of two deeply autonomous ethno-territories’ (p. 4), which ‘legalized and legitimized’ (Björkdahl 2018: 38) Republika Srpska.³ According to Toal (2013), the peace accords ‘institutionalized an ethno-territorial division of BiH organized around war territories, locking nationalist antagonism into the very structure of the state’ (p. 199). Although it institutionalised ethnic division, it also promoted the return of refugees and displaced persons to their pre-war homes, through Annex VII.

Literature Review

Mass media has four main roles in a democratic society (Votmer 2006): (1) inform the citizenry; (2) put forth issues of debate; (3) serve as a ‘watchdog’ against the government; and (4) *vox populi*. In the American context, Cook (1998) refers to the news media as the fourth branch of government. For societies in transition, the importance of the ‘watchdog’ role cannot be overstated; according to Votmer (2006: 5), this is because one of the main tasks of democratisation is to establish mechanisms that hold political elites accountable, and thus responsive, to the citizenry.

The theory of media dependency states that for societies in transition or facing instability, citizens are more reliant on mass media for information, and as such are more susceptible to their effects (Loveless 2008: 162). Individual citizens of the mass public ‘...can become dependent on a particular medium for their information and that people dependent on different media tend to have different pictures of the world’ (Loveless 2008: 166). Schmitt-Beck (1999: 222), argues that what the mass media ‘...tell us about the “world outside” becomes the foundation of the “pictures in our heads” – the beliefs and opinions, for example, upon which we act...’. When citizens become reliant on a particular medium and source for their information, they tend to have different views of the political world.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) argue that the mass media plays an important role in public opinion formation – in what the authors call the ‘agenda-setting function’ of the mass media – as well (p. 176). They state that the audiences not

3 The other entity, the Federation of BiH, was created via the 1994 Washington Agreement, which brought an end to the Muslim-Croat War (June 1992 to February 1994; Ramet 2002: 216–217).

only learn about a given issue, but also how much importance they should attach to said issue; this importance is derived from the amount of information in a news story and its position on the issue in question. The way in which the media frames an issue, the amount of time spent covering it and any opinions (biases) given towards the issue at hand all play an important role in public opinion formation. Zaller (1996) is a proponent of mass media effects, and argues that the mass media affects public opinion development on political events and personalities. For Zaller (1996), mass media influence consists more in telling people *what to think about* rather than telling them *what to think*. The way an issue is framed has an effect on how individuals perceive and explain national issues. Nelson et al. (1997) found that the manner in which a news outlet framed a specific event had an effect on how the news event was perceived by the public. Similarly, Hall (1997) and Mendelsohn (1993) find that the way specific events are described, framed and presented is of significance because the media helps construct an individual's understanding of specific events. In the case of referenda framing, Dekavalla (2016) found that Scottish newspapers framed the 2014 Scottish independence referendum through the lens of policy and political competition (i.e., elections) rather than the frame of constitutionalism or the right of self-determination. Noelle-Neumann (1974) takes media framing further than the other authors who advocate it; she claims that the mass media are the *creators* of public opinion. Other scholars have dismissed mass media effects in favour of 'minimal effects' (e.g., Bennett – Iyengar 2008; McGuire 1986; Newton 2006).

Regarding newspaper readership in the former SFR Yugoslavia, there was no true national (pan-Yugoslav) news media, with the exception of *Borba*.⁴ Rather, the mass media was controlled at the individual republican or provincial level by the respective republican or provincial communist party. The consequence of this was that as the decentralisation of SFR Yugoslavia took place (most notably via the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution), the individual broadsheet newspapers delineated along republican lines – increasingly gearing their news stories toward their respective republican or provincial audiences (Robinson 1977: 192–199). According to Ramet (2002), one cannot overemphasise the importance of the fragmentation of broadsheet newspaper readership along republican and ethno-national lines in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) in contributing to increasing tensions in the late 1980s and early 1990s. She argues that:

[w]ith Bosnian Croats reading *Vjesnik* and *Večernji list*, Bosnian Serbs reading *Politika* and *Politika ekspres*, and Bosnian Muslims reading *Oslobodjenje*, the growing divergences in the points of view among the respective media were

4 *Borba* was the official newspaper of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia.

very quickly reflected in growing divergences in the perspectives of the three largest nationality groups of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Ramet 2002: 41).

Since the end of the war in 1995, BiH has had three main broadsheet newspapers that cater to the three main ethnic communities: *Dnevni avaz* (Bosniak), *Dnevni list* (Croat) and *Glas Srpske* (Serb). This segmented media market is conducive to the promotion and continuation of ethnic nationalism. According to Snyder and Ballentine (1996), the main reason for this is that segmented media markets incentivise political elites'... to promote nationalist populism as a substitute for true democratization' (p. 19). Sivac-Bryant (2008: 107) concurs, arguing that nationalist political parties and the mass media continue their dominance of the public discourse, thus preventing true democratisation and consolidation to occur. The challenge, according to the USAID 'Strengthening Independent Media in Bosnia and Herzegovina Project' (2013: 1) is that journalists'... adhere to "patriotism" rather than professionalism, and serve mostly special interests – not the public. The lack of professional and unbiased media prevents constructive public dialogue and further development of democracy' in the country. The divisive role of the media is a serious issue that the USAID has been working on, stating that BiH is facing '...an increase in nationalistic rhetoric in political discourse and the media, which greatly influences public sentiment and attitudes' (2013: 1). This biased and ethno-centric media is not fulfilling one of the key roles of the mass media for societies in transition: the 'watchdog' role (Vltmer 2006: 5), which is supposed to hold all political elites accountable to the citizenry. In BiH, this may decrease the process of ethnic reconciliation and even democratisation.

Broadsheet newspapers in BiH present the academic and policy communities prime ground for discourse analysis due to its segmented media market. According to Boreus and Bergström (2017: 8), 'discourse analysis is used to study the ideational aspects of texts.' Media discourse analysis in this fragmented society allows us to explore possible change of foci or ideological changes over time via the use of specific key words, which will be explained in the data and methodology section.

The 'Day of Republika Srpska' Holiday and its 2016 Referendum

The Republic of the Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina was declared on 9 January 1992 by the Serb National Assembly, prior to the start of the Bosnian War. The date also coincides with St. Stephen's Day, which is an Orthodox Christian holiday. Saint Stephen (in Serbian: *Sveti Stefan*) is also the patron saint of Republika Srpska. According to Bishop Jefrem, 'It is difficult to choose a better heavenly protector of Republika Srpska than Saint Stephen the Archdeacon, who preached the truth, suffered for the truth and in the end won' (Orthodox

Times 2021). Furthermore, Stanić (2019) argues that Serbs bear a very close resemblance to Saint Stephen by stating: ‘Like this saint, our people have been accused of many things, many false witnesses have testified against us’ (Kulaga – Momic 2020: 2–3). Lastly, Milorad Dodik, who is the current Serb member of BiH’s tripartite presidency (and former President of Republika Srpska) stresses the right of RS to celebrate its holidays while describing RS as ‘a Christian country and the country of the Serbian people where all other peoples can live as well’ (Agencija 2020: 2). Thus, the date appears only to have symbolism related to the Serbs and Serbian Orthodox traditions, which ultimately reflects a Serb-centric view of the entity and potential desire for statehood. Apart from the symbolism, the date seemed to have a practical purpose as well. According to Biserko (2006), Radovan Karadžić⁵ stated:

We hurried to declare a republic on January 9 because of the possibility that the European Community would declare the independence of BiH on January 10. In order for that manipulation not to take place, we had to react immediately. After the recognition, any of our political actions would have a much smaller practical effect, and the Serbs in Bosnia would have found themselves in a very difficult situation (...) We have opened the process of democratic transformation into a three-in-one community, a republic of three peoples or three republics. Each of these communities establishes sovereignty for itself, and that sovereignty does not extend to another national community (*Politika* 12 January 1992).

The celebration of RS Day on January 9 is part of a larger discussion dating back to 2004 and pertaining to the equal representation and inclusivity of all three constitutive peoples in BiH with respect to the BiH Constitution (i.e., in relation to the ‘Law on the Family Patron-Saints’ Days and Church Holidays of RS’. In 2007, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska adopted the Act on the Holiday of Republika Srpska and recognised January 9 as the Day of Republika Srpska. In 2013, then-Bosniak member of BiH’s tripartite presidency, Bakir Izetbegović, submitted an appeal (case U–3/13) to the BiH Constitutional Court regarding the constitutionality of Article 3 (b) of the ‘Law on Holidays of Republika Srpska’ according to which the Day of Republika Srpska is an official holiday in RS.

In April 2015, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska adopted a ‘Declaration about the RS Law on Holidays’, stating that it would disregard the pending decision of the BiH Constitutional Court if it was not in line with the publicly expressed RS view. The Declaration further questioned the legitimacy and pres-

5 Radovan Karadžić was the first President of Republika Srpska and was convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY, March 2016) for war crimes during the Bosnian War, including genocide.

ence of foreign judges at the BiH Constitutional Court. Moreover, it asked the BiH Parliamentary Assembly to Adopt a Law on the BiH Constitutional Court. In addition, the RS Prime Minister and the RS National Assembly Speaker argued that if the BiH Constitutional Court annulled the RS Law on Holidays, it would not be a legal but rather political decision. Therefore, the decision would not be implemented in RS (OHR Special Report 2016). The BiH Constitutional Court assessed the constitutionality of the Article in question and consulted with the Venice Commission whether celebrating the Day of RS on January 9 would cause discrimination of Bosniaks, Croats and Others residing in RS. On 26 November 2015, the Court ruled by majority vote (5–3) that:

the Article 3 (b) of the Law on Holidays of the Republika Srpska (*Službeni glasnik Republike Srpske* No.43/07) is not in conformity with Article I/2 of the Constitution of BiH and the Article II/4 of the Constitution of BiH in conjunction with Article 1 (1) and Article 2 (a) and (c) of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, and Article 1 of Protocol No.12 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom (*Službeni glasnik BiH* No.77/16 2016).

The ruling of the BiH Constitutional Court did not dispute the right of RS to celebrate the Day of Republika Srpska; rather, it objected to the specific date of January 9, because it was not an acceptable date to all ethnic groups in RS. The RS National Assembly was given six months (until 25 June 2016) to modify Article 3(b) of the Law on Holidays of Republika Srpska to fit with the Constitution of BiH and inform the Court about the measures taken to implement the decision of the Court (*Službeni glasnik BiH* No.77/16 2016). These modifications were meant to reflect the identity, culture and traditions of all three constitutive people of BiH.⁶

The RS National Assembly submitted an appeal, which was denied on 17 September 2016 (Bassuener – Mujanovic 2017). Ignoring the ruling, the RS Day Referendum took place in September 2016. Valentin Inzko, the then-High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, stated that by carrying out the proposed referendum, RS authorities would later claim precedent had been set and would in the future hold additional referenda on the status of Republika Srpska within BiH (OHR Special Report 2016). That is, since what is now RS was proclaimed on 9 January 1992 (before BiH declared independence from Yugoslavia), they have the right to have a referendum on outright independence from BiH. This view was reiterated by Inzko in the 18 May 2017 issue of *Glas Srpske*, where he ‘...stressed that the entities do not have the right to secede’ (*Glas Srpske*, p. 2).

6 Bosniaks (Sunni Muslim), Croats (Roman Catholic) and Serbs (Serbian Orthodox).

Despite the BiH Constitutional Court's ruling, Republika Srpska continued to celebrate its national day on January 9. On 25 September 2016, RS held a referendum on the view of its citizens towards the Day of Republika Srpska. The referendum asked its citizens: 'Do you support that January 9 be observed and celebrated as the Day of Republika Srpska?' In the referendum, 680,116 citizens voted out of 1,219,399 citizens who had the right to vote. The turnout of 55.57 % was enough to declare the referendum valid according to the RS Law on Referendum and Citizens' Initiative, which states that over 50 % of registered citizens must turn out to vote. The result of the referendum was that 99.81 % (or 677,721 registered voters) voted 'yes' and only 1,291 voted 'no' (Kulaga 2016: 4).

Republika Srpska argued that the referendum was a democratic tool. At the same time, the FBiH and the international community questioned the referendum's true purpose – whether it was to ensure that this date was an official RS holiday or if it was a matter of RS identity, potentially separate from BiH in the future. The Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jonathan Moore, stated the referendum was unnecessary as it could not change the original ruling of the BiH Constitutional Court and 'RS politicians certainly know what the people think... [and the referendum] is a "waste of money and time' (Domazet 2016: 5). The total cost of the conduct of the referendum was 1.42 million Bosnian Marks (or approx. 726,034.00 Euros).

After the referendum, the RS National Assembly adopted a 'Law on the Day of Republika Srpska', which was created 'on the basis of confirmed will of the citizens of RS' (Službeni glasnik Republike Srpske: No.113/16) due to the referendum results. According to this law, January 9 would be considered a secular holiday without any religious affiliation. The decision of the BiH Constitutional Court remains unchanged but the Day of Republika Srpska continues to be observed and celebrated within RS.

Data and Methodology

After 1995, there exist three main broadsheet newspapers that cater to the three constituent peoples in BiH: *Dnevni avaz* (Bosniak), *Dnevni list* (Croat) and *Glas Srpske* (Serb). The Bosnian-Serb newspaper *Glas Srpske* is written in the Serbian language using the Cyrillic alphabet; it is published in Banja Luka, the administrative capitol of Republika Srpska. As Loveless (2008: 166), states, individuals '...can become dependent on a particular medium for their information and that people dependent on different media tend to have different pictures of the world'. *Glas Srpske* was chosen because the authors are interested in the presentation and portrayal of events from the Bosnian-Serb perspective. Specifically, we are interested in the presentation and portrayal of the 'Day of Republika Srpska' and the 'RS Day Referendum' since both events had taken place in RS. Thus, it will reveal what and how information

on the RS Day and RS Day Referendum was conveyed to its readers, who are concentrated in RS.

We use the five/frame model originally developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000)⁷, which has also been used by other scholars in exploring broadsheet newspapers in countries such as Chile (e.g., Gronemeyer – Porath 2017), France, the Netherlands (e.g., Dirikx – Gelders 2010) and the United States (e.g., An and Gower 2009). The five frames of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) are: attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality and economic consequences. Attribution of responsibility illustrates an issue or a problem by attributing responsibility for its cause or solution to either an individual, group or the government. The Human Interest frame adds ‘a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem’ (Semetko – Valkenburg 2000: 95). The Conflict frame stresses the difference between conflicting parties (i.e., individuals, groups, institutions) to capture audience attention. The Economic Consequences frame portrays how an issue or event will economically affect individuals, groups, institutions, regions or even a country. Lastly, the Morality frame places the issue, event or problem in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions (Semetko – Valkenburg 2000). We therefore present two hypotheses:

H1: ‘Conflict’ and ‘Attribution of Responsibility’ will be the most prevalent frames in *Glas Srpske*.

H2: The referendum will be framed as a democratic right of all RS citizens.

The dataset consists of 1,516 newspaper issues and an analysis of 907 identified articles published during the five-year period, from 31 December 2015 to 30 December 2020.⁸ This time frame allowed for baseline measurement of news reporting preceding and following the celebration of RS Day and the 2016 RS Day

7 The frames were slightly modified to fit the BiH context and topic. Each issue was reviewed and the specific search terms included: RS Day, Referendum and January 9. Each article was read at least three times (i.e., the first time to get a general idea about the article, the second time to carefully code it and the third time, the article was re-read to determine its overall tone). While Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) model consisted of 20 questions, this research consisted of 24 questions, which measure the frequency of five frames in stories related to the RS Day and RS Day referendum. The additional questions were: ‘Does the story suggest that a non-Serb ethnic individual or a non-Serb ethnic/other groups of people in society is/are responsible for the issue’ (attribution of responsibility frame); ‘Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?’ (human interest frame); ‘Does the story reflect disagreement between individuals/ethnic groups/entities?’ (conflict frame); ‘Does the story contain any moral message’ (morality frame); and ‘Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?’ (economic consequences frame). The possible answer for each question was either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and were coded as: yes (1) and no (0).

8 During the 5-year period, *Glas Srpske* published 1,527 issues; some issues covering multiple days. In total, the analysis included 99.3 % of published newspaper issues.

Referendum. The dataset covers all available newspaper issues obtained through a purchased subscription of *Glas Srpske*. All issues had the same format; they were the print issues in PDF format. For each available issue, all articles mentioning the RS Day and RS referendum were entirely coded, meaning if an article from the front page continued in an inside page, the latent text was coded as well.

We use SPSS Statistics v.26 to conduct our statistical analyses. In order to confirm that our data is indeed appropriate to conduct a factor analysis, we first run a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy Test (KMO Test), which has a range of 0–1. The data has a KMO value of 0.829, which Kaiser (1974: 35) deems ‘meritorious’. We also test for Cronbach’s α , which is an internal consistency measurement ($\alpha = 0.753$). Our preliminary tests confirm that a factor analysis is indeed appropriate for the data. With this ‘meritorious’ score, a principal component analysis was conducted with a coefficient cut-off of 0.50 on a rotated component matrix (see: Table 1), thus allowing us to learn more about the underlying structure of the data (Anderson 1963: 137). Using a principal component analysis and having an eigenvalue of one or higher, we find that eight components (factors) load. Table 1 represents the rotated component matrix, which estimates the correlations between each of the variables and the estimated components. It helps us understand what the components represent (this is explained in the Results section). These eight factors account for a cumulative 54.103% of the variance in the variables. Four subscale items⁹ did not surpass the coefficient cut-off of 0.50; no items double-loaded in this analysis.

Table 1: Rotated Component Matrix

Items (frames listed in parentheses)	Factors							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Does the story suggest that some level of RS gov't has the ability to alleviate the problem? (Attribution of Responsibility Frame)	.751							
Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue? (Attribution of Responsibility Frame)	.690							
Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue? (Conflict Frame)	.672							
Does the story suggest that some level of the RS government is responsible for the issue/problem? (NOTE - by responsible it is meant to be responsible for either causing or solving the issue) (Attribution of Responsibility Frame)	.657							

9 (1) Does the story suggest that a non-Serb ethnic individual or a non-Serb ethnic/other group of people in society is responsible for the issue-problem? (Attribution of Responsibility); (2) Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action? (Attribution of Responsibility); (3) Does the story contain any moral message? (Morality); and (4) Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action? (Economic Consequences).

Does the story suggest that some level of F-BiH government has the ability to alleviate the problem? (Attribution of Responsibility Frame)	.637							
Does the story suggest that some level of the F-BiH government is responsible for the issue/problem? (NOTE - by responsible it is meant to be responsible for either causing it or solving the issue) (Attribution of Responsibility Frame)	.610							
Does the story suggest that the decision of Constitutional Court is responsible for the the issue? (Attribution of Responsibility Frame)	.591							
Does one party-individual-group-country reproach another? (Conflict Frame)		.754						
Does the story reflect disagreement between Bosnian-Serbs' political individuals/parties? (Conflict Frame)		.573						
Does the story reflect disagreement between individuals-ethnic groups-entities? (Conflict Frame)		.518						
Does the story provide a human example or "human face" on the issue? (Human Interest Frame)			.717					
Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion? (Human Interest Frame)			.619					
Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors? (Human Interest Frame)			.563					
Does the story make reference to morality, God, religion and other religious tenets? (Morality Frame)				.663				
Does the story refer to winners and losers? (Conflict Frame)				.656				
Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave according to democratic principles/rights/tools or mentions democracy in general? (Morality Frame)					.620			
Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future? (Economic Consequences Frame)						.797		
Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved? (Economic Consequences Frame)							.759	
Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem? (Human Interest Frame)							.521	
Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion? (Human Interest Frame)								.811

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. All loadings less than 0.50 are suppressed.

Rotation converged in 12 iterations.

Table 2: Level of Use of Frames in Glas Srpske, per Year

		Attribution of Responsibility	Conflict	Human Interest	Morality	Economic Consequences
2016 ¹⁰	M:	0.31	0.28	0.06	0.15	0.03
	SD:	0.463	0.451	0.237	0.362	0.158
2017	M:	0.15	0.22	0.06	0.15	0.01
	SD:	0.356	0.412	0.236	0.360	0.098
2018	M:	0.10	0.15	0.09	0.11	0.05
	SD:	0.294	0.355	0.280	0.310	0.225
2019	M:	0.13	0.14	0.11	0.09	0.02
	SD:	0.336	0.352	0.307	0.294	0.146
2020	M:	0.09	0.16	0.16	0.11	0.04
	SD:	0.287	0.367	0.367	0.312	0.198
Study Period, 31. 12. 2015 – 30. 12. 2020	M:	0.21	0.23	0.08	0.14	0.03
	SD:	0.406	0.418	0.266	0.344	0.159

(M=mean score; SD=standard deviation)

Results

The framing items that comprise the first and second principal components confirm our hypotheses due to them consisting of either ‘Attribution of Responsibility’ or ‘Conflict’ subscale items, although one ‘Conflict’ subscale item loads on the fourth factor with a ‘Morality’ subscale item. The eight factors from Table 1 present a potential issue since several ‘Human Interest’ and ‘Economic Consequences’ subscale items load on independent factors, thus extending from the baseline five of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) to our present eight. All eight factors (Table 1) have strong loadings. However, three of our eight factors consist of single subscale items from either the Human Interest, Morality or Economic Consequences frames. We therefore keep the original five frames ‘as is’ in our frame analyses, of course excluding the four subscale items that did not load in the matrix (see footnote 9 for the non-loading items).

¹⁰ Includes 31 December 2015 issue.

The most common frame within *Glas Srpske* that mentioned our key words for the period 31 December 2015 through 30 December 2020 was the ‘Conflict’ frame (mean: 0.23); the second most common frame was ‘Attribution of Responsibility’ (0.21); third was ‘Morality’ (0.14); fourth was ‘Human Interest’ (0.08) and fifth was ‘Economic Consequences’ (0.03). When broken down by year, the ‘Conflict’ frame is still the most prevalent, with the exception of 2016, where ‘Attribution of Responsibility’ is more prevalent. Hypothesis 1, which states: “‘Conflict’ and ‘Attribution of Responsibility’ will be the most prevalent frames in *Glas Srpske*’ may be accepted. Not only did the research show that the usage of these two frames in *Glas Srpske* stressed the differences of opinions and views regarding these two events, but it also fits with other research and literature, which show that ‘Conflict’ and ‘Attribution of Responsibilities’ are commonly used in the news (e.g., Semetko – Valkenburg 2000: 95), but not always simultaneously as it was in our case. See Table 2 for full breakdown by year.

However, in the context of BiH and its complex interethnic relations, these two frames appear to describe its contentious politics. In terms of ‘Attribution of Responsibility’, they are presented differently between Republika Srpska and Federation of BiH. In particular, the news portrayed RS as the one responsible for solving the problem while the Federation of BiH is portrayed as causing the problem, which means that the FBiH could alleviate the problem as well (the high mean score for ‘Attribution of Responsibility’ in 2016 and subsequent drop may reflect pre/post referendum foci). Although the Federation of BiH is framed in such a way, the FBiH is typically used as a stand-in for the Bosniaks – that is, the FBiH as a legal political entity is not wholly to blame, but rather Bosniaks as an ethnic group are to blame. An example of this may be seen via the title and subsequent article published in *Glas Srpske* on 31 December 2016. The article title mentions the Federation of BiH, whereas the article itself (first sentence provided below) solely blames Bosniaks.

Title:

Provokacije iz FBiH povodom Dana Republike

[‘Provocation from FBiH Regarding the Day of the Republic’]

‘Bosniak associations again sent provocative messages to Banja Luka stating that the verdicts handed down at The Hague Tribunal and the Court of BiH indicate that the RS was institutionally and systematically behind the genocide. The letter, signed by 29 Bosniak associations, arrived on Friday at the address of the Mayor of Banja Luka, Igor Radojičić, and a member of the City Assembly.’

When it comes to conflict, the research further confirmed that individuals and groups reproached each other reflecting disagreements between political figures, political parties and ethnic groups. It is important to state that one of the additional questions added to Semetko and Valkenburg's model was 'Does the story reflect disagreement between Bosnian-Serb political individuals/political parties?' The reason for adding this question was that we wanted to see whether *Glas Srpske* illustrated a united front between Bosnian-Serbs and political parties regarding the Day of Republika Srpska and the RS Day Referendum. The findings show that there have been disagreements with Bosnian-Serb political parties. While the major Bosnian-Serb political parties (i.e., the Serbian Democratic Party, SDS; and the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, SNSD) supported these two events, they disagreed regarding the date on which the referendum should take the place. The SDS advocated for the referendum to take place after the election, questioning whether the referendum was used as an election campaign by the SNSD since the referendum was scheduled seven days prior to the 2016 BiH elections, held on 2 October 2016.

Previous studies in the United States (e.g., Neuman et al. 1992; Graber 1993) identified that the economic consequences frame is one of the more common frames in the news, as it explains the effect specific events or issues have financially on an individual, group, country, etc. However, our research revealed that this was the least common frame, meaning that the news did not stress the financial cost or burden that these two events would potentially have on RS. Interestingly, the cost associated with holding the referendum was only mentioned twice (1.42 million Bosnian Marks) while the cost for one of the Day of Republika Srpska was barely mentioned and was reported to be 498,280.00 Bosnian Marks in 2018 (*Glas Srpske* 28 May 2018). The majority of the articles related to the 'Economic Consequences' frame discussed the cost related to building and infrastructure projects, which would be named 'January 9' or an initiative started by Milorad Dodik asking local communities to name one street or a town square 'January 9'. In general, *Glas Srpske* reflects no particular interest in economic consequences, loss or profit brought about with these two events. This shows that the emphasis is on discursively maximising emotional salience to the date or mobilisation of affect as opposed to deliberative calculations. Simply put, national pride – in this instance, Serb national pride tied to Republika Srpska via January 9 – does not have a price tag (and nor should it). This emotional attachment to January 9 is therefore tied to Serb identity within RS. Outside of RS, the referendum was described by the Head of the OSCE Mission to BiH, Jonathan Moore, as a waste of money, a distraction from real problems and used to boost the popularity of certain Bosnian-Serb politicians ahead of local elections (the referendum was held seven days prior to the 2016 elections) (Domazet 2016: 5). The views of the international community in BiH tend to have the opposite affect and are used by Bosnian-Serb politicians in RS

to show how they are ‘under siege’ by outside forces and must resist. This therefore increases an emotional attachment to the RS and celebrating January 9.

We now turn to our second hypothesis, which states: ‘The referendum will be framed as a democratic right of all RS citizens.’ This is measured via the following ‘Morality’ subscale item: ‘Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave according to democratic principles/rights/tools or mentions democracy in general?’ This subscale item has a coefficient of 0.620, per our principle component analysis (Table 1). The overall mean score is 0.11, with the highest mean score in 2016 (0.17) and the lowest in 2019 (0.03); see Table 3 for the full results. On the surface, this seems logical given that the referendum was held on 25 September 2016 and news coverage would taper off in later years. However, Hypothesis 2 must be rejected on the basis of such low yearly scores. This finding is also in line with that of Dekavalla (2016), in which she found that Scottish newspapers did not frame the 2014 independence referendum as a democratic right (the right of self-determination). In our case, the legality of the extra-legal referendum as a ‘democratic right’ is not at the heart of the matter within the pages of *Glas Srpske*; rather, the mobilisation of affect is the heart of discursive structure. The statistical results of this content analysis shows the discursive focus of *Glas Srpske* is ‘who is to blame’ (the moral ‘Us’ vs. the profane ‘Other’) rather than specific foci on ‘democratic rights’ of the (Bosnian-Serb) citizenry in Republika Srpska. Although this is the case, the record shows 55.57% of registered voters in RS turned out to vote, with 99.81 voting in favour of the January 9 holiday (*Glas Srpske* 2016).

Table 3: Framing of Democratic Rights in *Glas Srpske*, per Year. Referendum as a Democratic Right of RS Citizens

year	mean score	standard deviation
2016 ¹¹	0.17	0,380
2017	0.08	0,276
2018	0,06	0,235
2019	0,03	0,159
2020	0,05	0,159
Study period 31. 12. 2015 – 30. 12. 2020	0,11	0,315

The strength of this study is that it attempts to analyse in depth the contentious issues as they are portrayed through the main Bosnian-Serb newspaper. A limitation of this study is that the analysis explores one of the three main broadsheet newspapers in BiH. The research would contribute to the political science sub-

¹¹ Includes 31 December 2015 issue.

field of political communication as the research on framing and agenda setting of news coverage in BiH regarding national holidays and referendums is to our knowledge, non-existent. It also shows the lack of focus on ‘democratic rights’ and more on aspects of ‘who to blame’.

Concluding remarks

The leaked ‘non-paper’ of April 2021, entitled ‘Western Balkans – A Way Forward’ was allegedly written by Slovene Prime Minister Janez Janša (Slovenian Democratic Party). It was leaked by the Slovene news portal *necenzurirano.si* on 15 April 2021 (Cirman – Vuković 2021) as our research project came to an end. The authenticity of this ‘non-paper’ has not been acknowledged, but nevertheless caused a firestorm across the wider Western Balkan region due to its proposal of partition along ethnic lines to solve the various ‘national questions’ of the former Yugoslavia, such as joining a larger part of Republika Srpska with Serbia, either uniting Bosnian-Croat areas with Croatia or providing those areas special status within BiH, and uniting Kosovo with Albania.¹² This thus breaks with not only the Dayton Peace Accords, but also the international concept of *Uti possidetis, ita possidetis* (e.g., Ramet 2002: 210). Section 2.d of the non-paper states that ‘Bosniaks will thus gain an independently functioning state and assume full responsibility for it’, however; this is simply a re-hashing of the failed 1993 Vance-Owen Peace Plan, which sparked conflict between Bosniaks and Bosnian-Croats in Herzegovina. After the non-paper ‘Western Balkans – A Way Forward’ became available, Komšić claimed as much, stating:

They offer an option that was offered to us even before the war started, and it was offered again during the war; basically the option of a small Bosniak state – or, as they say, ‘Muslim.’ This paper, this kind of politics, everything that gives birth to those ideas prevails in certain European countries, and deep down, it is fuelled by anti-Islamism and anti-Semitism... (cited in Dragojlović 2021).

12 This was only the most recent ‘non-paper’ that caused controversy in the region. Before the leak, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Croatia, Gordan Grlić Radman, submitted a non-paper about BiH to EU-members on March 22, 2021 (RTL, April 19, 2021). The non-paper focused on key reforms, including the reform of the electoral law. Željko Komšić, the Croat member of BiH’s tripartite presidency, responded through his own non-paper, in which he warned about direct influences and interference of neighbouring countries (i.e., Croatia and Serbia) as well as Russia, and ‘systematic destruction of the state institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and obstruction of their functioning through the officials appointed by HDZ and SNSD, through the House of Peoples and the Council of Ministers’ (Klix, April 2, 2021). Moreover, Komšić also pointed out how the EU Mission in BiH had shown ‘the level of servitude towards the demands coming from SNSD (Dodik) and HDZ BiH (Čović)’ by trying to accommodate their demands, which are ‘not in line with the strengthening of the state institutions or making decisions for the benefit of all citizens of BiH’ (Klix, April 2, 2016).

The author(s) of these type of non-papers need to understand that they promote ethno-religious nationalism and ethnic exclusivism, and are contrary to BiH's best interest in keeping the post-Dayton peace. To some extent, the non-paper resembles Karadžić's statement regarding the creation of the precursor of Republika Srpska, the Republic of the Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As may be seen from our analysis of *Glas Srpske*, the 'Conflict' frame is already prevalent, which shows that there is a lack of consensus and cooperation among certain political elites representing the constituent peoples of BiH. The focus needs to be on building these relationships for the best interest of BiH, not giving an opportunity to those already wanting to secede taking a piece of BiH with them. The assumption that everyone should be satisfied by having their own ethnically homogeneous state at the expense of the historically multi-ethnic BiH can lead to its downfall and result in further conflicts. It is crucial that the international community – especially the United States and European Union – not tolerate ethno-national secessionist rhetoric, whose end goal is the disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus, as mentioned previously, violates the Dayton Peace Accords and *Uti possidetis, ita possidetis*. BiH cannot become another 'lessons learned' (again) for the international community. Further analysis of this 'non-paper' is beyond the scope of this present article, but deserved to be commented on.

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Economic Cyber-Espionage in the Visegrád Four Countries: a Hungarian Perspective

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Abstract: *This article explores the regulatory framework of reference of economic cyber-espionage in Europe, with a particular focus on the V4 region (comprising Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic) and taking Hungary as a case study. Europe Union member states, including the V4 countries, are particularly exposed to economic cyber-espionage, because of the advanced know-how of the companies based therein. Under international law, there exists no uniform approach to the matter; also at the European Union level, the legal framework appears rather fragmented and the same holds true at the national level and within the V4 group, where each country has adopted its own relevant regulation. After a general overview of the relevant international and EU regulatory framework of reference, this article overviews the modus operandi of the V4 and examines its approach to economic cyber-espionage, with a special focus on Hungary as case study. As already remarked at the European and international levels, cybersecurity policies and regulations, including those regarding economic cyber-espionage operations, should be drafted in coordination among states; the V4 group can become a privileged platform of discussion to advance in the regulatory harmonisation of the issues at stake.*

Keywords: *economic cyber-espionage; Visegrád Group; Hungary; cyber-security; governance*

Introduction

More and more companies around the world and in Europe are becoming the target of cyberattacks, whose consequences have ranged from money losses and information theft to infrastructure destabilisation. Among the cyber chal-

lenges that the economic sector faces (e.g. phishing attacks, ransomware and cryptojacking), economic cyber-espionage is a crucial one, namely the attempt to acquire trade secrets held by companies by the state where they are based or third states or by other (non-governmental) companies – in the latter case, it is more common to talk about ‘corporate’ or ‘industrial’ cyber-espionage (UNODC 2018).

Europe is a particularly exposed region, because of the advanced know-how of the companies based therein (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2018). In particular, Central European countries, including the Visegrád Four (or V4) countries (comprising Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic), have experienced several (economic) cyber-espionage incidents: in 2013, CrySyS Lab, a Hungarian cyber laboratory discovered a near decade-long cyber espionage operation that was targeting several public and private entities, mainly in Eastern European countries – the so-called TeamSpy operation (Lennon 2013); in 2019, a Slovakian cybersecurity firm, ESET, unmasked an espionage operation ongoing since about 2013 and targeting public institutions of Central European countries (Wielgos 2019). According to a survey conducted by Legal Week Intelligence and CMS, ‘CEE companies realise that cyber threats are for real and require effective measures to protect against’ (Legal Week Intelligence – CMS 2018). Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic and the relevant increasing dependence on digital technologies have created additional opportunities for cyber-incidents (Fidler 2020a): as regards the V4 region, we can briefly recall the ransomware attack on national health facilities in the Czech Republic in April 2020 (Fidler 2020b), and the cyber-attack against the national vaccine registration website in Hungary in February 2021 (Eder 2021).

Hungary in particular, can be considered a very interesting case study in this respect: it was one of the first countries in Central Europe to formulate its national cybersecurity strategy; even though it is quite difficult to find official and public data and information on economic cyber-espionage operations, it seems to be a particularly vulnerable country because of its weak security systems (around 50 % of large companies in Hungary have addressed cyber security issues in the last years), and because of the recent Chinese economic interests in the region, it risks to become ‘a Trojan horse for Chinese [...] influence’ (Panyi 2021b).

When talking about cyber threats to companies, it should be highlighted from the outset the lack of relevant detailed public data about cyber incidents they are victims of. As also affirmed in the 2018 Principles for Responsible Investment’s (PRI)¹ Report, *Stepping up governance on cyber security* (Ravishankar – Mooney – Hader 2018), while there is increasing awareness of companies about cyber risks and the need to deal with them, still there is a general lack

1 PRI is an investor initiative in partnership with UNEP Finance Initiative and the UN Global Compact.

of information publicly disclosed on cyberattacks. Companies generally do not disclose to the public either the cyberthreats they have been victim of, nor the measures they adopt to deal with cyber challenges – due to a number of reasons, including the fear of bad reputation in case of disclosure of cyberattacks or the fear of becoming a target or vulnerable to hackers (PRI 2018). On the other hand, companies recognise the need to cooperate in order to deal with cyber challenges and the advantages of sharing knowledge and best practices also with national institutions (PRI 2018).

At the national level, we can find some data and statistics, but they are generally not comprehensive and detailed. In the V4 region, for example, we can rely on the following sources: in Slovakia, the website of National Cyber Security Centre SK-CERT² and the annual report of the national CSIRT.SK;³ in the Czech Republic, the website of the National Cyber Security Centre⁴ and the Cyber Security Status Reports and Security Incidents Reports;⁵ in Poland, the incident reports prepared by CERT Polska;⁶ while in Hungary we can rely on the website of the National Institute of Cyber Defense (NKI) of the National Security Service.⁷

Moreover, we can rely on reports and data published by private companies and institutions.⁸

Overall, the lack of clear and comprehensive (and harmonised) data is surely an obstacle when it comes to understand how to regulate in the most efficient way this phenomenon. A study that was prepared in 2018 for the European Commission on cyber theft of trade secrets⁹ confirmed that there is limited qualitative and quantitative information available on cyber theft of trade secrets (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2018: 15) and calls for a more appropriate regulatory framework in the field (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2018: 42).

2 See the official website of SKCERT at <<https://www.skcert.sk/en/statistics/index.html>> accessed 31 May 2021.

3 See the latest report of CSIRT.SK, *Report 2016* (2016) <<https://www.csirt.gov.sk/doc/CSIRT-SK-Report-2016.pdf>> accessed 31 May 2021.

4 See the official website of the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) at <<https://www.govcert.cz/cs/informacni-servis/hrozby>> accessed 31 May 2021.

5 Ibid.

6 See the official website of NASK CERT Polska at <<https://www.cert.pl/en/>> accessed 31 May 2021.

7 See the official website of the National Cyber Security Center at <<https://nki.gov.hu>> accessed 31 May 2021.

8 An interesting initiative in this respect is the Digital and Cyberspace Policy program's cyber operations tracker, a public database of state-sponsored incidents that have occurred since 2005, where anyone can contribute by sending information about known cyber-incidents. The initiative is carried out within the US-based Council on Foreign Relations think tank. See all the relevant information at the official website at <<https://www.cfr.org/interactive/cyber-operations/cyber-operations#CyberOperations>> accessed 31 May 2021.

9 European Commission, *Trade secrets* <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/intellectual-property/trade-secrets_en> accessed 31 May 2021.

Turning to the regulatory framework of reference, which (legal) instruments do states have to address the challenges of economic cyber-espionage? The regulatory picture today is highly fragmented. Before illustrating it in detail, it is necessary first to briefly consider the theoretical framework of reference for economic cyber-espionage, as the following paragraph explores.

Building up a(n international) theoretical framework for economic cyber espionage.

Economic espionage can be defined as ‘the act of acquiring trade secrets [...] without the permission of the owner of the information’ (Hua 2015: 67); as it has been rightly affirmed, it is

a less visible but more widespread form of attack that is conducted by employees against their own employers, by competing private companies, and by governments seeking to protect or expand their national economies (Van Arnam 2001: 95).

Although the phenomenon of economic espionage and – with the widespread utilisation of cyberspace – economic *cyber*-espionage, are constantly increasing, and although espionage is often referred to as the ‘world’s second oldest profession’ (Reynolds 2004), there is still little data about it, as already outlined in the previous paragraph.

All businesses can become the target of economic (cyber-)espionage: suffice it to recall that, in 2000, the network of Microsoft was put under attack by hackers allegedly based in Russia (Van Arnam 2001: 96); in 2017, the cyber group APT28 targeted several countries across Europe and the Middle East, stealing passwords and credentials from the networks of the healthcare sector (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2018: 25); also in 2017, the WannaCry ransomware in just a few hours affected 200,000 computers and the security of hospitals (NHS), public transport (Deutsche Bahn), banks (Deutsche Bank), service providers (Telefónica), delivery services (FedEx) and businesses across the globe (Tasheva 2017: 1). When we consider the V4 region, in particular, it is worth recalling that in Slovakia, according to the November 2019 report of the IT provider GAMO, up to 53 % of companies in Slovakia have experienced cyber incidents;¹⁰ in the Czech Republic, the Czech Statistical Office reported that one in five domestic companies faced a cyberattack in 2018 (Kenety 2020); the *5th issue of the Global State of Information Security Survey* report drafted by PwC Polska found that 44 % of Polish companies suffered financial losses due to cyber-

10 GAMO, Vzdělávajte sa v téme kyberbezpečnosti (12 November 2019) <<https://www.gamo.sk/novinky/vzdelavajte-sa-v-teme-kyberbezpecnosti>> accessed 3 September 2021.

attacks;¹¹ and in Hungary, around 50 % of large companies have addressed cyber security issues, as reported by EURACTIV Slovensko (Zachová *et al.* 2018). As reported by ENISA, '[i]n 2019, the number of nation-state-sponsored cyberattacks targeting the economy increased and it is likely to continue this way'.¹²

But is economic (cyber-)espionage lawful under international law? The answer is not clear. Indeed, while some scholars affirm that economic espionage during peacetime violates international law – considering the activity of economic espionage as a form of invasion on the territorial integrity and sovereignty of a state (Garcia-Mora 1964) – others support the idea that the widespread use of economic espionage during peacetime has rendered it accepted and lawful under international law (McDougal 1973).

The same considerations apply also to economic *cyber*-espionage. In such cases, we should add to the theoretical picture the cyberspace element: globalisation has made the international economy widely interconnected and at the same time vulnerable to possible cyber-threats (Magen 2017: 4).

In any case, it is true that, to date, the activity of espionage is not prohibited by any international conventions; on the other hand, misappropriation of trade secrets has started to be dealt with by international, regional and national regulations, as the following paragraphs analyse in more detail.

Economic Cyber-Espionage: the Legal Framework of Reference at the International Level...

Under international law, there exists no uniform approach to and no unique instrument for dealing with economic cyber-espionage (Lotrionte 2015; Schmitt – Vihul 2017: 170): while the G20 Leaders' Communiqué of 2015 stated that 'no country should conduct or support ICT-enabled theft of intellectual property, including trade secrets',¹³ the United Nations report of the same year does not include economic cyber-espionage among states' possible behaviour in cyberspace (Jančárková – Minárik 2019).¹⁴

When it comes to the international regulation of cybersecurity, the only binding instrument to date is the Convention on Cybercrime of the Council of Europe,¹⁵ which focuses on infringements of copyright, computer-related fraud

11 PwC Polska, Cyber-roulette in Poland. Why do companies try their luck when dealing with cybercriminals? 5th Issue of the Global State of Information Security Survey (2018) <<https://www.pwc.pl/en/services/cyber-security.html>> accessed 3 September 2021.

12 ENISA, Threat Landscape 2020. Cyber espionage (20 October 2020) <<https://www.enisa.europa.eu/publications/enisa-threat-landscape-2020-cyber-espionage>> accessed 3 September 2021.

13 G20 Leaders, Communiqué of 2015, para 26 <<http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2015/151116-communiqué.html>> accessed 31 May 2021.

14 UNGA Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security, 22 July 2015, A/70/174.

15 Budapest Convention, CETS No.185, signed on 23 November 2001 and entered into force on 1 July 2004.

and violations of network security. It has been ratified to date by 64 states and has been used as a guideline for developing domestic legislation in the field.

There are also a number of multilateral initiatives addressing cybercrime and cybersecurity issues at the international level, like the work of the G7 Cyber Expert Group,¹⁶ the Council of Europe,¹⁷ the G20, the United Nations,¹⁸ the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),¹⁹ the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)²⁰ and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).²¹

Worth mentioning are also private codification initiatives like the Tallinn Manual 2.0, which deals with international law applicable to cyber operations, and which includes Rule 32 (Peacetime cyber espionage), according to which '[a]lthough peacetime cyber espionage by States does not per se violate international law, the method by which it is carried out might do so'. The Commentary to Rule 32 makes it clear that 'customary international law does not prohibit espionage per se. [...] On the contrary, a number of States have by domestic law authorised their security services to engage in espionage, including cyber espionage' (Schmitt – Vihul 2017: para. 5); on the other hand, '[d]espite the absence of an international law prohibition of espionage, states are entitled to, and have, enacted domestic legislation that criminalises cyber espionage carried out against them' (Schmitt – Vihul 2017: para. 17).

16 Established in November 2015, with the aim to identify the main cyber security risks in the financial sector and propose relevant actions. The Group published the *G7 Fundamental Elements of Cybersecurity for the Financial Sector* (October 2016) and the *G7 Fundamental Elements for Effective Assessment of Cybersecurity* (October 2017). More information is available at the website <<https://www.banque-france.fr/en/economics/international-relations/international-groups-g20g7/focus-g7-cyber-expert-group>> accessed 31 May 2021.

17 The Council of Europe has launched the *Action against Cybercrime*, which helps to protect societies worldwide from the threat of cybercrime. See all relevant information at the official website <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/coe-action-against-cybercrime>> accessed 31 May 2021.

18 The UN introduced cybersecurity in its agenda after its 1999 Resolution 53/70 on *Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security* and the following 2015 report of the Group of Governmental Experts (UNGGE) on responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. See also the Global Programme on Cybercrime carried out within the framework of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). See the UNODC official website at <<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/cybercrime/global-programme-cybercrime.html>> accessed 31 May 2021.

19 Through the Cybercrime Law project. See all relevant information at the official website <<https://www.cybercrimelaw.net/OECD.html>> accessed 31 May 2021.

20 See the official webpage at <<https://www.osce.org/secretariat/cyber-ict-security>> accessed 31 May 2021. Worth recalling is the Permanent Council Decision No. 1106 of 3 December 2013 establishing the *Initial set of OSCE confidence-building measures to reduce the risks of conflict stemming from the use of information and communication technologies* <<https://www.osce.org/pc/109168>> accessed 31 May 2021.

21 NATO adopted a Policy on Cyber Defence in September 2014. Moreover, through the NATO Industry Cyber Partnership (NICP), NATO and its Allies are working to reinforce their relationships with industry. See all relevant information at the official website <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_78170.htm#> accessed 31 May 2021.

Taking into account, more in particular, the international economic law framework, it is worth recalling the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property²² and the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights of the World Trade Organization (WTO TRIPS)²³ as possible international instruments that can apply in case of economic cyberespionage (Buchan 2018: 143). Actually, even though they do not specifically regulate economic (cyber)espionage, they include some provisions that WTO member states are likely to breach in case they carry on economic (cyber) espionage operations against companies located in the territory of other WTO member states (Buchan 2018: 130). Indeed, according to article 10bis of the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property ‘[...] countries [...] are bound to assure [...] effective protection against unfair competition [...]’, which might also include operations of economic cyberespionage; also article 39.2 of WTO TRIPS provides that ‘[i]n the course of ensuring effective protection against unfair competition as provided in Article 10bis of the Paris Convention [...] Members shall protect undisclosed information [...]’. In this respect, we might recall the *Guidelines and Objectives by the European Community for the Negotiations on Trade-Related Aspects of Substantive Standards of Intellectual Property Rights*, according to which ‘[t]rade secrets and business secrets shall be protected by law at least by providing their proprietor the right to prevent these secrets from becoming available to, or being used by, others in a manner contrary to honest commercial practices’.²⁴ Accordingly, one may argue that the WTO TRIPS and the Paris Agreement can cover instances of economic cyber-espionage; however, there has been no relevant inter-state claim so far under such agreements.

Also free trade agreements (FTAs) can add some elements to the regulatory framework of economic cyber-espionage. We can briefly recall in this respect the recent United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), according to article 20.69 (Protection of Trade Secrets):

[i]n the course of ensuring effective protection against unfair competition as provided in Article 10bis of the Paris Convention, each Party shall ensure that persons have the legal means to prevent trade secrets lawfully in their control from being disclosed to, acquired by, or used by others (including state-owned

22 Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property (as amended on 28 September 1979), entered into force on 3 June 1984 <<https://wipolex.wipo.int/en/treaties/textdetails/12633>> accessed 31 May 2021.

23 Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, Annex 1C of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization, signed on 15 April 1994, <https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/27-trips_01_e.htm> accessed 31 May 2021.

24 Guidelines and Objectives by the European Community for the Negotiations on Trade-Related Aspects of Substantive Standards of Intellectual Property Rights, MTN.GNG/NG11/W/26 (7 July 1988), 10.

enterprises) without their consent in a manner contrary to honest commercial practices.²⁵

The PricewaterhouseCoopers study report prepared for the European Commission in 2018 considered the USMCA as a model in this respect (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2018: 48); we can also recall the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which includes a trade secrets discipline, requiring the availability of criminal procedures and penalties for unauthorised and wilful misappropriation of a trade secret.²⁶ In this respect, some scholars have suggested, more generally, using international trade law and particularly bilateral investment treaties (BITs) ‘to help build out a customary international law of cyber norms designed to protect intellectual property’ (Shackelford *et al.* 2015: 53).

Finally, with reference to inter-state agreements, it is worth recalling the practice of concluding bilateral cooperation commitments in order to refrain from economic cyber-espionage activities. In this regard, we can mention the USA–China Commitment (25 September 2015), according to which

The United States and China agree that neither country’s government will conduct or knowingly support cyber-enabled theft of intellectual property, including trade secrets or other confidential business information, with the intent of providing competitive advantages to companies or commercial sectors [...]. (Kolbasuk McGee 2015)

We can also mention the UK–China Joint Statement of 22 October 2015 (Abott 2015) and the Australia–China Joint Statement of 21 April 2017 (Cowan 2017).

Overall, though the existing international legal framework is rather fragmented, we can infer that the trade-related regulatory framework seems the most suitable to be applied in case of economic cyber-espionage operations. This is also true when considering the European Union (EU) law, as the following paragraph illustrates.

25 United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement, signed on 30 November 2018 and entered into force on 1 July 2020 <<https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/united-states-mexico-canada-agreement/fact-sheets/modernizing>> accessed 31 May 2021.

26 Article 18.78, para 2 of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), between Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam. The CPTPP was signed on 8 March 2018 and entered into force on 30 December 2018. The full text is available at <<https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/not-yet-in-force/tpp/Pages/tpp-text-and-associated-documents>> accessed 31 May 2021.

...at the EU Level...

Also at the European Union (EU) level, while there is a quite robust regulatory framework dealing with cybersecurity,²⁷ there is no specific act addressing the issue of economic (or industrial) cyberespionage. However, the EU has been always aware of the challenges of cybercrime to economic activities: the 2013 Cybersecurity Strategy of the EU made it clear that

[t]he EU economy is already affected by cybercrime activities against the private sector and individuals. Cybercriminals are using ever more sophisticated methods for intruding into information systems, stealing critical data or holding companies to ransom. The increase of economic espionage and state-sponsored activities in cyberspace poses a new category of threats for EU governments and companies.²⁸

In May 2017, the Commission expressly included cybersecurity as one of the three emerging challenges in its Digital Single Market Strategy mid-term review²⁹ and in October 2017, the European Parliament affirmed that '[...] the lines between cybercrime, cyber espionage, cyber warfare, cyber sabotage and cyber terrorism are becoming increasingly blurred; [...] cybercrimes can [...] cover a wide range of offences, including [...] espionage [...]'.³⁰

Most recently, and as part of the intellectual property (IP) 2020 action plan, the Commission announced that it 'will, together with the EUIPO Member States and the business community, develop awareness tools and targeted guidance that will increase the resilience of EU businesses (and SMEs in particular) against cyber theft of trade secrets'.³¹ Moreover, the Commission restated that '[i]n terms of foreign policy [it] will, in cooperation with the High Representative and Member States, stand ready to use the restrictive measures available to

27 E.g. Regulation (EU) 2019/881 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on ENISA (the EU Agency for Cybersecurity) and on information and communications technology cybersecurity certification and repealing Regulation (EU) No 526/2013 (Cybersecurity Act) and the EU NIS Cooperation Group, Cybersecurity of 5G networks. The EU Toolbox of risk mitigating measures (2020), published on 29 January 2020 <<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/cybersecurity-5-g-networks-eu-toolbox-risk-mitigating-measures>> accessed 31 May 2021.

28 European Commission, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Communication on Cybersecurity Strategy of the European Union: An Open, Safe and Secure Cyberspace, JOIN(2013) 1 final (7 February 2013), 3.

29 European Commission, *Communication on the Mid-Term Review on the implementation of the Digital Single Market Strategy A Connected Digital Single Market for All*, COM/2017/0228 final (10 May 2017).

30 European Parliament resolution of 3 October 2017 on the fight against cybercrime (2017/2068(INI)).

31 European Commission, Making the most of the EU's innovative potential – An intellectual property action plan to support the EU's recovery and resilience, COM(2020) 760 (25 November 2020), para. 5 <<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/43845>> accessed 31 May 2021.

counter private and government-sponsored cyber espionage aimed at acquiring cutting-edge European IP assets'.³²

When it comes to the protection of trade secrets, we should recall Directive 2016/943 *on the protection of undisclosed know-how and business information (trade secrets) against their unlawful acquisition, use and disclosure*, which states that '[...] businesses are increasingly exposed to dishonest practices aimed at misappropriating trade secrets, such as theft, unauthorised copying, economic espionage [...] whether from within or from outside of the Union [...]'.³³ The Directive does not refer to cases of economic *cyber*-espionage; however, we might argue that it covers also such instances of 'misappropriation' of trade secrets. In any case, it should be noticed that, such as any EU Directive, it should be translated for the different EU member states; accordingly, it does not offer a homogenous regulation of the issue – indeed, we have 27 different national provisions that have implemented the Directive. Moreover, as the Directive points out:

there are important differences in the Member States' legislation as regards the protection of trade secrets against their unlawful acquisition, use or disclosure by other persons. For example, not all Member States have adopted national definitions of a trade secret or the unlawful acquisition, use or disclosure of a trade secret, therefore knowledge on the scope of protection is not readily accessible and that scope differs across the Member States.³⁴

It follows that:

[t]he differences in the legal protection of trade secrets provided for by the Member States imply that trade secrets do not enjoy an equivalent level of protection throughout the Union, thus leading to fragmentation of the internal market in this area and a weakening of the overall deterrent effect of the relevant rules.³⁵

As regards the international economic law framework, we can recall that the EU and its member states are signatories to the WTO Agreement including the

32 European Commission, Making the most of the EU's innovative potential – An intellectual property action plan to support the EU's recovery and resilience, COM(2020) 760 (25 November 2020), para. 6 <<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/43845>> accessed 31 May 2021. See also the Council Decision (CFSP) 2020/1127 of 30 July 2020 amending Decision (CFSP) 2019/797 *concerning restrictive measures against cyber-attacks threatening the Union or its Member States*.

33 Preamble (4).of the Directive (EU) 2016/943 of 8 June 2016 on the protection of undisclosed know-how and business information (trade secrets) against their unlawful acquisition, use and disclosure.

34 Preamble (6).of the Directive (EU) 2016/943 of 8 June 2016 on the protection of undisclosed know-how and business information (trade secrets) against their unlawful acquisition, use and disclosure.

35 Preamble (8).of the Directive (EU) 2016/943 of 8 June 2016 on the protection of undisclosed know-how and business information (trade secrets) against their unlawful acquisition, use and disclosure.

TRIPS Agreement; therefore, they are also obliged to comply with article 39 of the TRIPS Agreement (Kaan Pehlivan 2019: 98).

Moreover, provisions on trade secrets are starting to be included in international economic agreements with third countries: we can recall the EU and Japan's Economic Partnership Agreement, which entered into force on 1 February 2019 and which includes in its Chapter 14 (Intellectual property) two specific subsections on 'Trade secrets and undisclosed test or other data' (Sub-section 7) and on 'Enforcement of protection against misappropriation of trade secrets' (Sub-section 3). In particular, according to article 14.36, '[e]ach Party shall ensure in its laws and regulations adequate and effective protection of trade secrets in accordance with paragraph 2 of Article 39 of the TRIPS Agreement', while article 14.50 states that '[e]ach Party shall provide for appropriate civil judicial procedures and remedies for a trade secret holder to prevent, and obtain redress for, the acquisition, use or disclosure of a trade secret whenever carried out in a manner contrary to honest commercial practices'.³⁶ We can find similar provisions also in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and UK,³⁷ in the New EU-Mexico Agreement in Principle³⁸ and in the EU's proposals for the EU-Australia FTA³⁹ and for the EU-New Zealand FTA.⁴⁰ Even though such texts do not mention (cyber) espionage operations, we may argue that such provisions might also cover this kind of situation.

Following the trend at the international level, at the EU level the economic legal framework seems the most suitable one (at least, it is the most used by countries) to deal with economic (cyber) espionage.

The following paragraph offers an overview of the situation at the EU national level, with a special focus of the V4 countries and Hungary in particular.

36 Article 14.36(1) and Article 14.50(1) of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. See the EU Commission website for the text of the agreement <<https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1684>> accessed 31 May 2021.

37 See Article IP.34 (Protection of trade secrets) of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one part, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of the other part, OJ L 444 (31 December 2020) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2020.444.01.0014.01.ENG> accessed 31 May 2021.

38 See Article X.48 (scope of protection of trade secrets) of the Modernisation of the Trade part of the EU-Mexico Global Agreement, agreed in principle on 21 April 2018 <<https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1833>> accessed 31 May 2021.

39 See Article X.43 (scope of protection of trade secrets) of the EU proposal for the EU-Australia FTA of 13 June 2018. On 18 June 2018, the EU and Australia officially launched negotiations for an FTA <<https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1865>> accessed 31 May 2021.

40 See article X.43 (scope of protection of trade secrets) of the EU proposal for the EU-New Zealand FTA of 13 June 2018 <<https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-new-zealand-trade-agreement/>> accessed 31 May 2021.

...and at the National Level: the V4 Countries

When it comes to the national level of the V4 countries, it should be recalled that the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary, as EU member states, implement the relevant EU Directives and Regulations described in the previous paragraph (Zachová *et al.* 2018). Moreover, at the international level, all V4 countries are part of the Budapest Convention, the WTO and the major international *fora* discussing cybersecurity issues like NATO, OSCE and the UN (Górka 2018).

When it comes to the national regulatory framework of reference, each V4 country has its own cybersecurity-related regulation: the Czech Republic adopted its National Cyber Security Strategy in 2021⁴¹ and the Cybersecurity Act in 2014;⁴² Hungary adopted the National Cyber Security Strategy in 2013;⁴³ Poland adopted the Cybersecurity Strategy in 2019⁴⁴ and the National Cybersecurity Act in 2018;⁴⁵ and Slovakia adopted its National Cyber Security Strategy in 2021⁴⁶ and the Act on cybersecurity in 2018.⁴⁷

However, none of the four countries has adopted an *ad hoc* regulation on economic cyber-espionage, even though they all envisage provisions on trade secrets misappropriation in their national unfair competition-related laws (European Union Intellectual Property Office 2018: 5–6). In the Czech Republic, the main provisions for the protection of trade secrets from unfair competition can be found in the Labour Code,⁴⁸ the Civil Code⁴⁹ and the Criminal Code;⁵⁰ in

41 National Cyber Security Strategy of the Czech Republic for the period from 2021 to 2025 (18 March 2021) <<https://www.nukib.cz/en/cyber-security/strategy-action-plan>> accessed 31 May 2021.

42 Act No 181/2014 Coll. of 23 July 2014 on Cyber Security and Change of Related Acts <<https://nukib.cz/en/cyber-security/regulation-and-audit/legislation/>> accessed 31 May 2021.

43 Government Decision No. 1139/2013 (21 March) on the National Cyber Security Strategy of Hungary <<https://www.enisa.europa.eu/topics/national-cyber-security-strategies/nccss-map/national-cyber-security-strategies-interactive-map?selected=Hungary>> accessed 31 May 2021.

44 Cybersecurity Strategy of the Republic of Poland for 2019–2024 <<https://www.enisa.europa.eu/topics/national-cyber-security-strategies/nccss-map/national-cyber-security-strategies-interactive-map?selected=Poland>> accessed 31 May 2021.

45 Act on the National Cybersecurity System, 5 July 2018 <<https://www.cybsecurity.org/pl/act-on-the-national-cyber-security-system/>> accessed 31 May 2021.

46 National Cyber Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic 2021–2025 <<https://www.enisa.europa.eu/topics/national-cyber-security-strategies/nccss-map/national-cyber-security-strategies-interactive-map?selected=Slovakia>> accessed 31 May 2021.

47 Act No. 69/2018 Coll on cybersecurity of 30 January 2018 <https://www.nbu.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/legislativa/EN/Act_Cybersecurity.pdf> accessed 31 May 2021.

48 Labour Code No. 262/2006 Coll. <https://www.mpsv.cz/documents/625317/625915/Labour_Code_2012.pdf/a66525f7-0ddf-5af7-4bba-33c7d7a8bfdf> accessed 31 May 2021.

49 Civil Code, Law No 89/2012 of 3 February 2012 <<http://obcanskyzakonik.justice.cz/images/pdf/Civil-Code.pdf>> accessed 31 May 2021.

50 Criminal Code, Law No 40/2009, of 8 January 2009 <<http://www.ejtn.eu/PageFiles/6533/Criminal%20Code%20of%20the%20Czech%20Republic.pdf>> accessed 31 May 2021.

Hungary, the protection of trade secrets is regulated in various legislative acts covering a wide range of fields of law, including the Civil Code, the Competition Act, the Criminal Code, the Labour Code, the Information Act and the Public Procurement Act;⁵¹ in Poland, trade secrets are regulated under several laws, including the Act on Combating Unfair Competition,⁵² the Labour Code,⁵³ the Civil Code⁵⁴ and the Criminal Code;⁵⁵ on the other hand, in Slovakia the main sources for trade secrets protection are the Criminal Code,⁵⁶ the Competition Act⁵⁷ and the Commercial Code.⁵⁸ Overall, at the national level the legal picture is rather fragmented and not homogeneous among the four countries. In the next paragraph we get an insight into the relevant national regulation in Hungary; even though each one of the four V4 countries presents its unique national regulatory framework, the Hungarian case is quite paradigmatic in demonstrating how the four countries tend to treat economic cyber-espionage operations from a regulatory perspective.

Taking a Hungarian Perspective

Hungary was one of the first countries in Central Europe to formulate its national cybersecurity strategy in 2013; nevertheless, it has not regulated economic cyber-espionage in an *ad hoc* document. Indeed, we find several provisions protecting trade secrets in different national regulations: the Hungarian Civil Code⁵⁹ includes a definition and protection of ‘trade secret’;⁶⁰ additional provisions for the protection of trade secrets can be found in the Hungarian Competition Act,⁶¹

51 See the following paragraph.

52 Act on Counteracting Unfair Competition of 16 April 1993, Journal of Laws 2003, No 153, Item 1503 <http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=195378> accessed 31 May 2021.

53 Labour Code of 23 December 1997, Journal of Laws of 1998, No 21, Item 94 <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=&p_isn=49416&p_classification=01.02> accessed 31 May 2021.

54 Civil Code of 23 April 1964, Journal of Laws 1964, No 16, Item 93 <http://www.polishlaw.com.pl/pdf/act01b_new.pdf> accessed 31 May 2021.

55 Criminal Code, Act of 6 June 1997, Journal of Laws No 88, Item 553 <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=&p_isn=43864&p_classification=01.04> accessed 31 May 2021.

56 Criminal Code, Law No 300/2005 of 20 May 2005 <<http://www.legislationline.org/documents/section/criminal-codes/country/4>> accessed 31 May 2021.

57 Slovak Competition Act, Law No 136/2001 of 27 February 2001 <http://www.antimon.gov.sk/data/files/163_act-no-136-2001-on-protection-of-competition-amended-by-387-2011.pdf> accessed 31 May 2021.

58 Commercial Code, Law No 513/1991 of 5 November 1991 <https://is.muni.cz/el/1422/jaro2013/SOC038/um/Obchodny_zakonnik_513_1991_v_anglickom_jazyku.pdf> accessed 31 May 2021.

59 Hungarian Civil Code, Act V of 2013, available at <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/96512/114273/F720272867/Civil_Code.pdf> accessed 31 May 2021.

60 Article 2: 47(1) of the Hungarian Civil Code

61 Hungarian Competition Act, Act LVII of 1996 on the Prohibition of Unfair Market Practices and Unfair Competition <https://www.gvh.hu/pfile/file?path=/en/legal_background/rules_for_the_hungarian_

the Hungarian Criminal Code,⁶² the Hungarian Labour Code,⁶³ the Information Act⁶⁴ and the Public Procurement Act.⁶⁵ Accordingly, there are no specialised courts dealing with trade secrets violations: depending on the circumstances and the type of provisions that come into play, civil courts, or criminal courts, or the Hungarian Competition Authority might be competent (European Union Intellectual Property Office 2018: 210).

Hungary has been reported to be particularly vulnerable to industrial and economic espionage because of its weak security systems (Nasheri 2003: 26). This has led Hungary to cooperate with other countries, especially with the United States: back in October 1998, the United States and Hungary entered a joint initiative with the aim to fight organised crime, including cyber-crime, in Central and Eastern Europe (Nasheri 2003: 27). However, there is not much documented information regarding Hungary-USA agreements or joint public statements on the topic.

Moreover, it is hard to find data and cases of economic cyber-espionage; one of the most notable and well-documented ones seems to be a cyber-espionage operation discovered in 2013 by CrySyS Lab, a Hungarian cyber laboratory, which revealed a near decade-long cyber espionage operation that was targeting several public and private entities, mainly in Eastern European countries – the so-called TeamSpy operation (Lennon 2013). However, there is no information on the legal and/or judicial consequences (at the national, EU or international level) of such an operation. This confirms the fact that when it comes to economic cyber-espionage, one of the main problems is the lack of relevant data on the operations that are discovered and, accordingly, the lack of relevant legal and judicial information, which makes it quite difficult to assess whether the current regulatory framework in force is the most suitable (and efficient) one to deal with this kind of operations.

Nevertheless, Hungary remains a very interesting case study especially with the growing Chinese economic interests in the country. Most recently, news spread that Hungary is ‘considering taking a huge, opaque and disadvantageous Chinese loan to pay for the construction of Fudan University’s new Budapest campus’ (Panyi 2021b), which would make Hungary become ‘a Trojan horse for

market/competition_act/competition-act-documents/jogihatter_tpv_t_hataly_20190101_a & inline=true> accessed 31 May 2021.

62 Hungarian Criminal Code, Act C of 2012 on the Criminal Code <<http://www.legislationline.org/documents/section/criminal-codes/country/25>> accessed 31 May 2021.

63 Hungarian Labour Code, Act I of 2012 <<http://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/2557/Labour%20Code.pdf>> accessed 31 May 2021.

64 Act CXII of 2011 on the Right of Informational Self-Determination and on Freedom of Information <https://www.naih.hu/files/Privacy_Act-CXII-of-2011_EN_201310.pdf> accessed 31 May 2021.

65 Public Procurement Act, Text No 2015 CXLIII <http://ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=102840> accessed 31 May 2021.

Chinese [...] influence' (Panyi 2021b); indeed, it has been reported that 'Chinese [...] spies have been the second-most active in [Hungary] since 2016–17' (Panyi 2021b) with a 'growing number of Chinese citizens and companies [operating] in Hungary for intelligence tasks' (Panyi 2021a).

Accordingly, (cyber)espionage operations are likely to increase in the near future; it would be interesting to follow the regulatory developments in this respect. This is also true when it comes to the other three V4 countries; in this respect, it is also quite difficult to gather official and public data and information on economic cyber-espionage, its regulation and cooperation with other (non)EU countries in this field.

The V4 Group: Which Role for the Sub-Regional Level?

Generally, platforms of discussion can help in harmonising regulations and policies, as in the case of sub-regional groups, that may serve at the same time as a platform of discussion for countries and as a privileged channel for advocating national interests at the (next) regional (and international) level(s). Indeed, in contrast to international organisations, regional and more in particular sub-regional organisations generally consist of states in close proximity to each other, with similar political, social, economic, cultural and historic experiences. Accordingly, this kind of *fora* can be an appropriate context in which to discuss national, regional and international issues; exchanges of best practices, experiences and knowledge might work better within a small(er) group of countries.⁶⁶

Back in 1997, James Crawford, former Judge at the International Court of Justice, wrote:

although the situation of every State or nation may be attributed to its 'place in the world', that 'place' tends first of all to be seen in terms of its immediate neighbours and its own region. Moreover in many cases the things which Governments and officials spend most time on, and which they can do most to affect, tend to be issues relating to neighbours or to the region. Even when the focus is on matters of apparently universal concern, the approach of many Governments is likely to be profoundly affected by regional postures and implication. (Crawford 1997: 101)

While Crawford was referring to regional contexts in general, this description also seems to fit well for the sub-regional level, which becomes an important

⁶⁶ For an emphasis of the role of regional and sub-regional entities in shaping the international agenda, see for example the joint research project carried out by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and the Monterey Institute of International Studies Center for Nonproliferation Studies on the role of (sub-)regional organisations in implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1540, described in the paper by Johan Bergenas (2008).

framework of reference. This can be particularly helpful when it comes to dealing with policies that are not (yet) harmonised, as in the case of economic cyber-espionage.

Europe includes different sub-regional formations, which have begun to emerge among states geographically close to each other and with similar political, social, economic, cultural and historical experiences since the late 1980s (Gebhard 2013: 26). Today, a number of sub-regional groupings of states exists, such as Benelux,⁶⁷ the Nordic Council,⁶⁸ the Central European Initiative⁶⁹ and the Baltic cooperation,⁷⁰ just to name a few (Rudka 1997: 196–197).

Especially in Central and Eastern Europe, almost every country is involved in at least one of sub-regional groupings (Cabada 2018); one of the most significant examples in this respect is the V4 (Gebhard 2013: 26).

The Visegrád group was established as a forum for sub-regional cooperation on 15 February 1991, when the heads of governments of Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic and Slovakia), Hungary and Poland signed the Declaration of Visegrád (Wołek 2013: 88). One of the first aims of the V4 was ‘[...the] full involvement in the European political and economic system [...]’.⁷¹

The V4 is ‘weakly’ institutionalised – the only organisations being the International Visegrád Fund⁷² and the Visegrad Patent Institute⁷³ – and works according to the principle of cooperation through high-level political summits, expert and diplomatic meetings, activities of non-governmental associations in the region, think tanks and research bodies.⁷⁴

The outcomes of the V4 meetings can be political documents including remarks and reflections on EU legislative acts and proposals, joint declarations or other political statements.⁷⁵ Worth recalling are also the joint declarations of the

67 The Benelux Union includes Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg. See the official website at <<https://gouvernement.lu/en/dossiers/2018/benelux.html>> accessed 31 May 2021.

68 It includes 87 members, from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. See the official website at <<https://www.norden.org/en/nordic-council>> accessed 31 May 2021.

69 It is a regional organisation made up of fifteen members: Albania, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. See the official website at <<https://www.cei.int>> accessed 31 May 2021,

70 It includes Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. For more information visit <<https://vm.ee/en/baltic-cooperation>> accessed 31 May 2021.

71 Visegrád declaration, 15 February 1991 <<http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/visegrad-declarations/visegrad-declaration-110412>> accessed 31 May 2021.

72 Established in 2000. See the official website at <<https://www.visegradfund.org>> accessed 31 May 2021.

73 Operating from 2016. See the official website at <<http://www.vpi.int/index.php/en>> accessed 31 May 2021.

74 For information on the work and activities of the V4 group, see the official website at <<http://www.visegradgroup.eu>> accessed 31 May 2021.

75 They all can be accessed (in the English version) at the official website at <<http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements>> accessed 31 May 2021.

ministers of the V4 countries on European Commission communications,⁷⁶ EU proposals for regulations⁷⁷ or on EU Directives.⁷⁸ The V4 has also drafted letters addressed to the European Commission.⁷⁹ The topics addressed during these meetings may range from agriculture, renewable energy, migration, financial and labour issues, to name a few (Strážay 2018).

When it comes to the issue of economic cyber-espionage, it should be noted that to date there has been no significant joint document in this regard issued by the V4; however, we find some programmatic references in a number of documents related to the more general issues of cyber-security and/or cyber-threats. Indeed, cybersecurity has been referred to in V4 Presidency Programs, with a call to strengthen cooperation,⁸⁰ and in the 2011 Bratislava Declaration on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Visegrad Group, according to which:

The Visegrad Group will actively contribute towards international efforts in combating terrorism, human and drug trafficking, illegal migration, extremism and other security threats and challenges, including those in the area of *cybersecurity*, that jeopardise our values and the freedoms of our citizens [...].⁸¹

And, more recently, in the Visegrad Group Joint Declaration on Mutual Cooperation in Digital Projects – adopted on 17 February 2021 at the meeting of the prime ministers of the V4 on the occasion of the 30th anniversary – which underlined ‘the importance of cybersecurity and digital technologies in ensuring the economic growth in the V4 countries’.⁸²

In the field of cybersecurity economic-related issues, it is worth noting the Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Economic Affairs of the Visegrad Group

76 E.g., Joint declaration of the Ministers of agriculture of the Visegrád group and Croatia on the Commission Communication on the future of food and farming, 25 January 2018.

77 E.g., Joint declaration of the Ministers of the interior on the proposal for a Regulation on the European border and coast guard, 16 October 2018.

78 E.g., Joint declaration of the Agricultural Ministers of Visegrád group, Bulgaria and Romania on the renewable energy Directive after 2020, 21 September 2017.

79 E.g., Joint statement and Joint letter to EC prepared during the Summit of 22 June 2012; Joint Letter to High Representative Ashton and Commissioner Füle of 5 March 2013.

80 It is worth recalling the recent 2020/2021 Polish Presidency ‘Back on Track’ <<https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/2020-2021-polish>> accessed 31 May 2021. See also the 2018/2019 Slovak Presidency ‘Dynamic Visegrad for Europe’, the 2017/2018 Hungarian Presidency Program, the 2016/2017 Polish Presidency Program, the 2015/2016 Czech Presidency Program, the 2014/2015 Slovak Presidency Program, the 2013/2014 Hungarian Presidency Program, the 2012/2013 Polish Presidency Program and the 2007/2008 Czech Presidency Presidential Program, all available at <<https://www.visegradgroup.eu/>> accessed 31 May 2021.

81 The Bratislava Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Visegrad Group (15 February 2011).

82 Visegrad Group Joint Declaration on Mutual Cooperation in Digital Projects (17 February 2021) <<https://www.gov.pl/attachment/71bfd2d2-1d0a-4460-8479-8c9caea10fad>> accessed 31 May 2021.

Countries on the Future of Economic Cooperation of 19 April 2018, which included a call on

the importance of arising issues that include cyber security, standardization, free flow of non-personal data, scale of data-usage and emerging 5G communication. All these factors will contribute to the data-economy of the coming digital age. [...] A good and trusted blueprint of cyber-security cooperation at V4+ level should be followed [...].⁸³

It is also worth mentioning the Joint Declaration of Intent of V4 Prime Ministers on Mutual Cooperation in Innovation and Digital Affairs (the so-called ‘Warsaw Declaration’), issued in Warsaw on 28 March 2017, where:

The Visegrad Group agrees to further strengthen its ties by adopting the following Warsaw Declaration on mutual co-operation in research, innovation and digital affairs as follows: [...] to work towards sustainable, efficient, resilient and secure cyber space based, inter alia, on timely and proper implementation of the NIS Directive, allowing the joint internal market for the high-level cyber security and protection of critical information infrastructures and resources [...].⁸⁴

And, in fact, all V4 countries then implemented the NIS Directive within their own regulatory framework. A call on implementing cooperation was also included in the Joint Statement of the V4 Ministers of Defence, issued in Brussels on 4 June 2013:

The V4 countries will tighten their cooperation in countering cyber threats at political and operational level as cyber security becomes extremely vital. Their activities should be closely linked with the NATO Smart Defence Multinational Cyber Capability Development programme as well the EDA-led Cyberdefence Project Team [...].⁸⁵

It is also worth recalling that in June 2020, a V4 document also made reference for the first time to ‘intelligence activities’ as one of the ‘methods’ that have been used to undermine the security of the countries: according to the *Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Group Countries on Their Defence Cooperation*, ‘[...] both state

83 Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Economic Affairs of the Visegrad Group Countries on the Future of Economic Cooperation (19 April 2018).

84 Joint Declaration of Intent of Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group on Mutual Co-operation in Innovation and Digital Affairs – ‘Warsaw Declaration’ adopted at the CEE Innovators Summit in Warsaw on March 28, 2017 (28 March 2017).

85 Joint statement of the V4 ministers of defence (4 June 2013).

and non-state actors increasingly use unconventional and hybrid methods to exploit our vulnerabilities [...] includ[ing], among others, cyber-attacks [...] and increased intelligence activities'.⁸⁶

Cybersecurity has also been discussed during V4+ meetings, as highlighted in the Joint Statement from the Annual Summit of the Visegrad Group Prime Ministers and the Prime Minister of the State of Israel released in Budapest on 19 July 2017, where '[...]he five leaders agreed to explore the possibility of further strengthening joint cooperation in the areas of [...] cyber security',⁸⁷ as well in the Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group, Austria, Croatia and Slovenia issued in Budapest on 10 July 2017, where there was a call to 'take action on issues including [...] cybersecurity as well as digital skills'⁸⁸ and again in the Joint Statement of Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group and the President of the Republic of Korea, released in Prague on 3 December 2015, where '[...]he V4 and the ROK acknowledged the goal to strengthen their cooperation on global issues, including [...] cyber security [...] and agreed to continue close consultations in respective areas'.⁸⁹

Within the V4 region, worth mentioning is the (technical) cooperation in cybersecurity through the Central European Cybersecurity Platform (CECSP), which was established in 2013 and includes representatives of governmental, national and military CSIRT teams along with the representatives of national security authorities and national centres of cybersecurity from Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Austria. The CECSP facilitates the exchange of information and sharing of know-how among the countries on cybersecurity issues.⁹⁰

In this respect, it is very interesting to highlight that the previous 2020/2021 Polish Presidency Programme 'Back on Track', in the section dedicated to the 'Initiatives in the cyber security area' listed, among others, the need for

[c]onsultations with a view of finding topics of mutually beneficial cooperation in cyber security. These consultations will primarily take place through

86 Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Group Countries on Their Defence Cooperation (24 June 2020) <<https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/the-long-term-vision-of>> accessed 31 May 2021.

87 Joint Statement on the Occasion of the Annual Summit of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group and the Prime Minister of the State of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu (19 July 2017).

88 Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group, Austria, Croatia and Slovenia (10 July 2017).

89 Joint Statement on the Occasion of the First Summit of Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group and the President of the Republic of Korea (3 December 2015).

90 See the description of the CECSP at the official website of the National Security Authority of Slovakia at <<https://www.nbu.gov.sk/en/cyber-security/partnership/central-european-platform-for-cybersecurity/index.html>> accessed 31 May 2021.

established channels, especially the Central European Cyber Security Platform, and may include [...] international law applicable to cyberspace operations.⁹¹

Accordingly, the V4 can make use of the already existing technical cooperation within the CECSP in order to also advance on coordination and (possible) harmonisation of the (national, European and international) regulatory framework applicable to cybersecurity-related operations, including economic cyber-espionage ones.

Conclusion

Globalisation and increasing economic interconnections, together with technology developments and the use of cyberspace in economic relations have brought up new challenges in protecting trade secrets (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2018: 22). Cyber security, including cyber-espionage, has become a key component of security strategies of countries. As it has been rightly affirmed, ‘if a nation wants to be a great cyber power, it must elaborate a comprehensive national cyber strategy that will encompass the changes brought out by cyber capabilities and interconnected networks’ (Joubert 2010: 111). Accordingly, states have started to elaborate regulations in order to deal with such a phenomenon. However, the relevant regulatory picture is still rather fragmented. Indeed, cyber threats know no boundaries; accordingly, national-oriented solutions are not sufficient.

The EU has already remarked that

[t]he Commission, the High Representative and the Member States should articulate a coherent EU international cyberspace policy, which will be aimed at increased engagement and stronger relations with key international partners and organisations, as well as with civil society and private sector. [...] To address global challenges in cyberspace, the EU will seek closer cooperation with organisations that are active in this field.⁹²

This is in line with the *Paris call for trust and security in cyberspace* launched by the UNESCO Internet Governance Forum on 12 December 2018 and supported to date by 76 States, 343 organisations and members of civil society and 632 companies and private sector entities at the international level, which called for ‘collaboration among governments, the private sector and civil society to create

91 2020/2021 Polish Presidency ‘Back on Track’ <<https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/presidency-programs/2020-2021-polish>> accessed 31 May 2021.

92 European Commission, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (n 50) 15.

new cybersecurity standards that enable infrastructures and organizations to improve cyber protections'.⁹³

Today, the V4 has become a 'recognised' voice in international fora. Also EU institutions more and more tend to mention the V4 in press releases that report some of their meetings.⁹⁴ The ability to talk with one voice through the V4 platform has been labelled as the 'soft power' of the V4 (Strážay 2011); also in the field of cybersecurity in general, and of economic cyber-espionage in particular, the V4 may use its soft power to advocate sub-regional interests at the EU, as well as at the international level (Wielgos 2019), in order to influence in a positive way future law- and policy-making in the field.

As already stressed in the 2020 *Visegrad Group Joint Statement on the Future of the Eastern Partnership*, '[h]ybrid threats including cyber-attacks need to be addressed in a collaborative way through activities aimed at strengthening resilience'.⁹⁵ Finding a common way to deal with economic cyber-espionage operations at the V4 level, taking advantage of the platform of discussion and collaboration that already exists among the four countries, may provide a first step (and best practice) towards a more European (and international) approach to the issues at stake. In this regard, Hungary can have a key role in this respect since it has taken up the current round of the V4 presidency for 2021/2022: according to the Hungarian Presidency Program 2021/2022, *Recharging Europe*:

the Hungarian Presidency will continue V4 coordination related to [...] cyber issues on the EU agenda. Cooperation between national cyber-security organizations and network security centres aimed at strengthening the resilience of critical infrastructures, especially in the health sector, and detecting and countering risks and attacks from cyberspace are important goals.⁹⁶

93 'Cybersecurity: Paris Call of 12 November 2018 for Trust and Security in Cyberspace' *France Diplomatie – Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs* (12 December 2018), <<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/digital-diplomacy/france-and-cyber-security/article/cybersecurity-paris-call-of-12-november-2018-for-trust-and-security-in>> accessed 31 May 2021.

94 See e.g. the following press releases of the European Commission: 'Future of cohesion policy: Commissioner Hübner to address Visegrád group in Sopot, Poland. European Commission' (*Press release*, 1 July 2009) <https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-09-1067_en.htm> accessed 31 May 2021 and 'Commissioner Hahn in Bratislava in the run-up to the Eastern Partnership 10th Anniversary. European Commission' (*Press release*, 3 May 2019) <https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEX-19-2390_en.htm> accessed 31 May 2021.

95 The Visegrad Group Joint Statement on the Future of the Eastern Partnership; Prague, April 8, 2020 <<https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/the-visegrad-group-joint-200409>> accessed 31 May 2021. See also the Speech given by the Czech Prime Minister in Warsaw on the occasion of the accession of the Visegrad Group countries to NATO (10 March 2019) <<https://www.vlada.cz/en/clenove-vlady/premier/speeches/speech-given-by-the-czech-prime-minister-in-warsaw-on-the-occasion-of-the-accession-of-the-visegrad-group-countries-to-nato-173699>> accessed 31 May 2021.

96 Hungarian Presidency Program 2021/2022, *Recharging Europe* (2021), 12 <<https://v4.mfa.gov.hu/>> accessed 3 September 2021.

As we have seen, economic cyber-espionage raises several points that deserve further research and discussion among all stakeholders, starting from the definition of the phenomenon, the collection of a database of relevant cases at the international level, and an appropriate regulatory framework of reference at any level of regulation. Discussions among stakeholders may well start among neighbour countries, on the appropriate instruments to use in order to address such activities. In this respect, the V4 group can become a privileged platform of discussion to advance in the regulatory harmonisation of the issues at stake.

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Efforts to Disrupt the Authoritarian Equilibrium within the EU. Effects and Counter-effects¹

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Abstract: *The study, leaning on the concept of ‘authoritarian equilibrium’ introduced by R. Daniel Kelemen on the one hand, and new intergovernmentalism as a fresh theoretical approach of the European integration on the other hand, investigates if we can talk about the disruption of the ‘authoritarian equilibrium’ as a consequence of the split up between Fidesz and the EPP, and the adoption of the rule of law conditionality mechanism. In other words, whether we can talk about an initial authoritarian disequilibrium? Or can we rather talk about a converse process due to the mechanisms of new intergovernmentalism resulting in the further stabilisation of authoritarian governments and the ineffectiveness of the EU measures devoted to the protection of rule of law? Using qualitative resource analysis of the relevant secondary literature and the documents and legal acts of the EU and its institutions the paper comes to the conclusion that while we have witnessed efforts to disrupt the partisan and the financial support of the Hungarian governing party, these efforts were neutralised by the mechanisms of new intergovernmentalism and as a consequence we still cannot talk about an initial authoritarian disequilibrium in the EU.*

Keywords: *European Union, authoritarian equilibrium, new intergovernmentalism, rule of law conditionality, Hungary*

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Introduction

Systematic breaches of the rule of law in Hungary since 2010 and in Poland since 2015 have generated a heated rule of law debate among the Member States and the EU institutions, as well as among scholars. Different angles of the rule of law issue have been discussed in the relevant literature, starting from the conceptualisation and definition of the rule of law (Magen 2016), through the grouping and the evaluation of the protecting measures available at the EU level (Sedelmeier 2016; Blauburger – Kelemen 2016; Sargentini – Dimitrovs 2016; Kochenov – Pech, 2016; Oliver – Stefanelli, 2016), to the explanations of the factors supporting the survival of authoritarian regimes within the EU on one hand and undermining the effective use of the EU rule of law tools on the other hand (Kelemen 2017; 2020). The article aims to give a contribution to the last one using a dual theoretical framework, namely the *concept of authoritarian equilibrium* and the *theory of new intergovernmentalism*, to investigate the efficiency of the newest tool, the rule of law conditionality mechanism.

The concept of *authoritarian equilibrium* elaborated by R. Daniel Kelemen traces back the rise and the consolidation of authoritarian member states within the EU to three factors: the partial politicisation of the EU, especially its party politics, the EU funds, and finally migration within the EU. Due to recent events, such as the split between the European People's Party (EPP) and Fidesz, as well as the introduction of the newest rule of law tool, the conditionality mechanism which connects the EU budget and funds with the requirement of respect for the rule of law, the question has arisen whether we can talk about an initial *authoritarian disequilibrium*?

At the same time, we have witnessed certain circumstances in connection with the rule of law conditionality mechanism, both regarding its adoption and the lack of its application, which pose a different possibility, notably the counter-effects of *new intergovernmentalism* which may result in further stabilisation of authoritarian governments and the ineffectiveness of the EU measures devoted to the protection of the rule of law.

My hypothesis is that while there have been changes in the partisan and financial support of governing Fidesz, considered the only real authoritarian ruling power in the EU, these changes haven't resulted in an initial authoritarian disequilibrium, at least for now, because of the counter-effects of the mechanisms of new intergovernmentalism.

The rest of the paper focuses on a detailed exploration of the theoretical background, namely the concept of authoritarian equilibrium and the theory of new intergovernmentalism. The empirical chapters investigate the efforts that have been made to disrupt the authoritarian equilibrium, namely the process of the split between the EPP and Fidesz as well as the adoption of the conditionality mechanism. Regarding the latter, mechanisms of new intergovernmentalism

and their counter-effects to the disruption of the authoritarian equilibrium are examined. The last chapter includes the conclusions.

Theoretical background

R. Daniel Kelemen has elaborated the concept of ‘authoritarian equilibrium’ in connection with the EU based on the findings of comparative politics literature on democratisation which reveal those circumstances and conditions in which authoritarian enclaves may rise and fall within democratic federations. His starting point is, similarly to many others, that the European Union is founded on the values set out in Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU), such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Additionally, guaranteeing rule of law is one of the preconditions for the candidate countries to access the EU prescribed by the Copenhagen EU Summit in 1993. At the same time, despite this stated commitment to democracy and rule of law, as Kelemen phrases, ‘the EU has in recent years shown itself to be a hospitable environment for the emergence of increasingly autocratic member governments’ (Kelemen 2020: 481). In other words, there is ‘an authoritarian equilibrium in which the EU paradoxically supports the survival of authoritarian member governments’ (Kelemen 2017: 214). According to him this authoritarian equilibrium in the EU is due to three factors. Firstly, partial politicisation of the EU and the underdeveloped party politics which on the one hand allow Europarties to defend their authoritarian members for the votes and seats provided by the latter (partisan support), but on the other hand Europarties cannot intervene and directly support the local opposition financially. Secondly, EU funds and the authoritarian governments’ control over them help them stay in power. Thirdly, emigration of deeply disappointed voters to other EU member states serve as a ‘kind of pressure release valve’ resulting in a further decrease in the chances for the opposition. Kelemen concludes that this authoritarian equilibrium played a crucial role in the stabilisation of the power of Viktor Orbán who established the first non-democratic government in the EU, and that there is little indication that this equilibrium will be demolished soon (Kelemen 2020: 483–487).

At the same time, some of the most recent events have posed the question as to whether we can witness the erosion of the authoritarian equilibrium since the split up of Fidesz and EPP has resulted in changes in the partisan support, and the adoption of the rule of law conditionality regulation has possibly paved the way for cutting the financial sources of the Orbán regime. Regarding the third supporting element of the authoritarian equilibrium, namely emigration, we cannot speak about any significant shift so far.

Kelemen himself has mentioned another circumstance which helps to maintain the authoritarian equilibrium, namely the intergovernmental ele-

ments of governance of the European Union, but he hasn't paid special attention to the issue, not handling it as an independent fourth contributing pillar of the authoritarian equilibrium. He claims, drawing a connection among the partial politicisation of the EU and its intergovernmental characteristics as well as national sovereignty, that authoritarian equilibrium is sustained because member states play a much more powerful role in EU decision-making than they do in a fully developed federation, which usually don't use decision-making procedures that require unanimity among the member states, while the EU does on several important issues, including for sanctioning the breaches of the EU values envisaged by Article 7 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU). Additionally, since the EU governance is based on norms of respect, national sovereignty, mutual trust and the assumption that member states take any appropriate measure to ensure fulfilment of the obligations arising out of the treaties or resulting from the acts of the institutions of the Union, as it is set out in Article 4 of the TEU, the EU's authority to intervene in domestic politics of its member states is much more limited than in the case of a fully developed federation (Kelemen 2020: 484–485).

In my view, especially considering the latest developments of the rule of law issue within the EU, certain intergovernmental characteristics of the EU governance, which are highlighted by the theory of new intergovernmentalism, play a crucial role in the rule of law crisis and in the contribution of authoritarian governments besides the three above-mentioned factors identified by Kelemen. Especially, new intergovernmentalism can give an interpretation framework for the rule of law debate and the newest development of the issue.

New intergovernmentalism (NIG) was set out in the 2010s with the aim to give an alternative explanation about the Post-Maastricht era of the European integration which can be characterised as an integrational paradox because while the basic constitutional features of the EU have not changed, EU activity has expanded to an unprecedented degree on certain policy areas such as financial supervision, labour market reforms, migration, asylum and border control, police and judicial cooperation as well as the foreign and security policy. In other words, member states preferred integration without supranationalism, avoiding further significant transfer of competencies to supranational institutions (Bickerton – Hodson – Puetter 2015: 1). Even in those cases when legislative competences have been delegated to supranational actors such as in the area of justice and home affairs, it happened with an important modification of the community method governance, due to the European Council's special oversight power and the Commission's modified right of initiative (Wolff 2015).

Bickerton, Hodson and Puetter have determined a set of hypotheses in connection with the NIG such as that deliberation and consensus have become the guiding norms of the day-to-day decision making at all levels (Bickerton – Hodson – Puetter 2015: 29). Puetter highlights the role of the European Council

in deliberation and consensus-seeking, defining it as a centre of new inter-governmentalism, and emphasising its changing role since the middle of the 1990s. Since then the European Council has been getting involved in detailed policy decisions and formation via initiation and overseeing implementation in the new domains of EU activity. Additionally, the European Council also gives instructions regularly to the European Commission and to the EU Council regarding concrete policy-making and implementation (Puetter 2015: 165–167).

Another claim of the NIG is that supranational institutions such as the European Commission, the Court of Justice and the European Parliament are not hard-wired to seek an ever closer union anymore, but they are rather ‘complicit’ in the ever-growing role of the European Council in the new areas of EU activity (Bickerton – Hodson – Puetter 2015: 31). However, there is no consensus about the ‘complicity’ of the supranational institutions or its origins. While Puetter traces back the ‘complicity’ of the European Commission to the fact that the President of the Commission is the member of the European Council and the High Representative who is one of the Vice-Presidents of the Commission to take part in its work as well (Puetter 2015: 175), Peterson claims that the European Commission has only adjusted to the new political reality of the integration in the Post-Maastricht era, which doesn’t mean that the European Commission is not committed for an ever closer union anymore (Peterson 2015: 186).

Efforts to disrupt the authoritarian equilibrium within the EU

Changes in the partisan politics in the European Parliament

March 2021 meant a turning point in the Fidesz-European People Party saga. On 3 March the political group of the EPP in the European Parliament passed, with an 84-percent majority, the amendment to its rules of procedure that enables the suspension of the whole delegation’s membership and the connecting rights (Hegedűs 2021). As a response, Viktor Orbán announced that he was leaving the EPP group in the European Parliament (EP) immediately, labelling the decision of the EPP group as a ‘clearly hostile move against Fidesz and our voters’ (Orbán 2021). At the same time, leaving the group constituted a breach of Article 3 of the EPP party statutes pinning down that EPP members are obliged to join the EPP group in the EP with their representatives (EPP 2015). Consequently, on 18 March on behalf of Fidesz, Katalin Novák announced leaving the European People Party itself (Novák 2021). With the breakup, the EPP has lost 12 seats² and possible votes in the EP while Fidesz has lost its strong partisan support and shield in the rule of law debate as well as the possibility of a broader field of political manoeuvre as a member of the largest EP party group.

2 György Hölvényi remained the member of the European People’s Party group as member of the Christian Democratic People’s Party.

But what has led to the eventual split up? What kind of circumstances resulted in this outcome after two years of suspension of Fidesz membership? Has the 'political and reputational cost' become too high for the EPP to maintain the alliance with Fidesz?

To be able to get closer to the possible answers to the above-mentioned questions, it is worth starting with the findings of comparative politics literature on democratisation, namely that authoritarian enclaves may exist on the subnational level in democratic federations (Benton 2012; Gervasoni, 2010; Gibson 2005, 2012; Giraudy 2015). Research has revealed what kind of authoritarian enclaves may emerge and what kind of circumstances usually support them or on the contrary undermine their existence. Firstly, the authoritarian enclaves are usually not repressive dictatorships, but rather some kind of hybrid regimes that scholars variously refer to as 'illiberal democracies', 'competitive authoritarianisms' and 'electoral authoritarianisms' in which elections are held and ballots are counted fairly, but incumbents massively outspend challengers and the local media are formally independent but are bought off to bias coverage in favour of the ruling party (Gervasoni 2010: 314).

Basically, two factors support the persistence of authoritarian enclaves within democratic federations. On the one hand, according to party politics, democratic leaders at the federal level may overlook concerns about the authoritarian nature of governance in member states as long as the local authoritarian delivers needed votes to their coalition in the federal legislature (Gibson 2005: 107). On the other hand, fiscal dynamics within multi-level polities may serve as a supportive factor as well since local authoritarian leaders can use federal financial transfers to support and perpetuate their power (Gervasoni 2010: 303).

At the same time, under certain circumstances actors of the federal level may intervene to dislodge subnational authoritarian leaders. One option is when federal parties that oppose the local authoritarian party intervene to support local opposition parties providing resources the opposition needs to break the local authoritarian's grip on power (Gibson 2005: 108). Another scenario is when federal leaders who had supported a local authoritarian withdraw their support if the local autocrat's behaviour becomes so intolerable that it imposes political and reputational costs on the federal leaders (Giraudy 2010: 72).

As the comparative analyses of democratisation show, under certain circumstances political actors of the federal level may act in two different ways to dislodge local authoritarian rulers. In case of the EU a similar process has started, since the EPP, after several years of non-acting, has created such a circumstance which made Fidesz leave the party federation ceasing the strong partisan support in the EP. Additionally, EU-level actors and primary MEPs from party groups opposing the ruling style of the Orbán government and the European Commission paved the way for a new rule of law measure which may

cut the access to the EU transfers in case of breaches of the rule of law by the member states that have financial consequences on the EU budget. Nevertheless, in the case of the EU we can rather speak about some efforts to disrupt the authoritarian equilibrium rather than dislodge the Orbán government. This is due to the fact, as Kelemen points it out, mostly that the European Union is not a real federation and any kind of direct effort to dislodge the Orbán government would trigger the charge that the EU or its institutions intervene in the domestic affairs of a member state (Kelemen 2017; 2018).

Turning back to the issue of the long-standing partisan support provided by the European People's Party, it seems that the political and reputational costs became too high by the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021 for the EPP. If we take a look at the reactions and responses of the EPP to the controversial steps of the Orbán Government and the ruling Fidesz, we can observe that until 2017 the EPP conceived the critiques as political attacks and accusations from the political left. Then, as Kelemen and Pech point out, since 2017 EPP leadership has laid down 'red lines' in several cases such as the Lex Central European University, the repressive ruling of the NGOs or the anti-EU and György Soros campaign, but every time has let the Orbán Government cross these red lines without any consequences. The main explanation of the EPP leadership was based on the hypothesis that keeping Fidesz in the EPP would have a restraining effect on the Orbán regime (Kelemen – Pech 2019). As we know, this assumption lacked any reality. On the contrary, the Hungarian Government continued the illiberal way of governance breaching the rule of law over and over again amongst other infractions with the non-implementation of the European Court of Justice decisions on international protection (Maximov, 2021; Keller-Alánt 2021).

At the same time, by the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021 the continuous breach of the rule of law on behalf of the Fidesz Government, and other dividing issues such as migration, or the future of the EU, as well as the handling of the COVID-crisis caused an irreversible gap between the EPP and Fidesz. Furthermore, along with these substantial topics, other rather personal issues have burdened the Fidesz-EPP relationship as well. In December 2020 due to the scandal and resignation of József Szájer, Fidesz lost its central mediator in the EPP-Fidesz struggle. Right after the Szájer-affair Tamás Deutsch was suspended in the EPP group in the European Parliament because of the Hungarian MEP's comments comparing the group's German leader, Manfred Weber, to the Gestapo. After the meeting to discuss the affair, the EPP issued a statement in which the party group called on all Fidesz MEPs 'to reflect on whether their fundamental political convictions still are compatible with the values and core content of the EPP and to act consistently with these EPP core values or draw the necessary conclusions' (Banks 2020). This statement has basically paved the way for the amendment of the EPP Rules of Procedure regarding the suspension of the whole delegation's membership and the connecting rights.

Efforts to cut the financial source of the authoritarian governments – the birth of the conditionality regulation

As the comparative politics literature on democratisation and the EU-specific concept of the authoritarian equilibrium reveal, besides the partisan support that came from the EPP, EU funds have been providing the other supportive factor of the authoritarian equilibrium within the EU in the case of Hungary. Bozóki and Hegedűs have also identified EU transfers as a contributing element of the ‘only completely developed hybrid regime within the EU’, at least so far (Bozóki – Hegedűs 2018: 1176).

Hungary is one of the biggest net beneficiaries of the EU budget. Twenty five billion euros have been allocated under the European Structural and Investment Funds for Hungary in the 2014–2020 multiannual financial framework (European Commission 2016). At the same time, a significant proportion of the EU transfers is affected by corruption and fraud as it has been emphasised not only by the Hungarian opposition, but by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) or NGOs such as Transparency International for years. According to the OLAF, between 2015 and 2019 2,697 fraudulent and non-fraudulent irregularities were detected, and the Office has recommended to the EU Commission that they recover some 3.93 percent of payments made to Hungary under the bloc’s structural and independent funds and agriculture funds, which is by far the highest in the EU, since in the case of EU-28 this proportion was 0.34 percent (OLAF 2020: 39). Experts from Transparency International Hungary identified the typical methods of fraud and corruption in the use of EU funds such as exercising influence in the process of project selection; positive tender evaluations in exchange for using overpriced services; public procurement tailored to a specific bidder; ‘fine-tuning’ a public procurement invitation in order to restrict the market (Kállay 2015: 5).

As a reaction to the misuse of EU funds the European Commission proposed a new rule of law measure in 2018 known as the rule of law conditionality mechanism to complement the existing tools to protect the rule of law in the EU, such as the infringement procedure, the rule of law framework or the Article 7 procedure of the TEU. The European Commission’s proposal highlights that ‘the very existence of effective judicial review designed to ensure compliance with Union law is the essence of the rule of law and requires independent courts. Maintaining the independence of the courts is essential [...] in particular, for the judicial review of the validity of the measures, contracts or other instruments giving rise to public expenditure or debts, inter alia in the context of public procurement procedures which may also be brought before the courts. There is hence a clear relationship between respect for the rule of law and an efficient implementation of the Union budget in accordance with the principles of sound financial management. Generalised deficiencies in the Member States

as regards the rule of law which affect in particular the proper functioning of public authorities and effective judicial review, can seriously harm the financial interests of the Union' (European Commission 2018: 6–7).

The Commission originally proposed a conditionality mechanism in which if the Commission finds that generalised deficiency as regards the rule of law is established in a Member State, it shall submit a proposal for an implementing act on the appropriate measures to the Council. The decision shall be deemed to have been adopted by the Council, unless it decides, by qualified majority, to reject the Commission proposal (European Commission 2018: 10).

The strength of the proposed procedure was the so-called reversed qualified majority voting in the Council which would have provided the opportunity only to dismiss the measures proposed to be introduced by the Commission. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasising that the Commission didn't intend to involve the European Parliament in the mechanism except for that 'the Commission shall immediately inform the European Parliament of any measures proposed or adopted' (European Commission 2018: 11). Considering that the European Parliament co-decides with the Council over the annual budget of the EU and approves the multiannual financial framework, as well as scrutinises the EU budget spending through the discharge procedure, the ignorance of the EP is salient.

The European Parliament has given a voice to its critique in its first reading legislative resolution in which it has proposed amendments putting the Parliament and the Council on the same footing. According to Amendments 57 and 58 at the same time as the European Commission adopts its decision about the measures in case of generalised deficiency as regards the rule of law is established, 'the Commission shall simultaneously submit to the European Parliament and to the Council a proposal to transfer to a budgetary reserve an amount equivalent to the value of the measures adopted. [...] the European Parliament and the Council shall deliberate upon the transfer proposal within four weeks of its receipt by both institutions. The transfer proposal shall be considered to be approved unless, within the four-week period, the European Parliament, acting by majority of the votes cast, or the Council, acting by qualified majority, amend or reject it' (European Parliament 2019).

As it is known, neither reversed majority voting in the Council, nor the involvement of the European Parliament were realised in the final version of the conditionality regulation which was adopted 16 December 2020 after long-lasting wrestling of the EU institutions and the Member States as is highlighted in the next part of the study.

The role of new intergovernmentalism in the neutralisation of the conditionality regulation

As we could see above, there has been a change in the partisan support of Fidesz and an effort to cut the financial support of those governments which cause generalised deficiencies as regards to the rule of law that have financial consequences. At the same time, we still cannot speak about a breakthrough in the area of protection of the rule of law, since there are several circumstances which aim to neutralise the conditionality mechanism. These circumstances seem to confirm some of the hypotheses of new intergovernmentalism, such as the growing role of deliberation and consensus-seeking and of the European Council in the new regulatory area of the EU, as well as the complicity of those supranational institutions which are devoted to struggling for an ever closer union and for the interests of the EU.

As regards the adoption of the regulation, we can actually talk about the victory of the mechanisms of new intergovernmentalism over the mechanism of 'old' intergovernmentalism, namely the victory of consensus-seeking over hard-bargaining and veto. The Hungarian and Polish governments were hostile to the idea connecting the issue of rule of law to the financial transfers from the very beginning. However, the European Council held between 17 and 21 July 2020 underlined the importance of the protection of the Union's financial interests and the respect for the rule of law. As a result, heads of state and government decided that 'a regime of conditionality to protect the budget and Next Generation EU will be introduced'. At the same time, Member States started to water down the Commission's original proposal according to the testimony of the issued conclusion stating 'the Commission will propose measures in case of breaches for adoption by the Council by qualified majority' (European Council 2020a: 15–16).

On 16 November 2020 the session of the EU Council at the ambassadorial level (COREPER) meant a twist in the process since two Member States, Hungary and Poland, opposed the rule of law conditionality mechanism, threatening to veto the whole financial package (MFF and Next Generation). Threatening with veto is part of hard bargaining and it is a central feature of traditional intergovernmental policy-making. Additionally, harsh communication was coupled with the political veto. Viktor Orbán told the Hungarian public broadcaster Kossuth Radio that the EU saw only pro-migration Member States as adhering to the rule of law, who were ready to 'turn their homelands into countries of immigration'. He added that Hungary will 'resist and we will not accept financial repercussions. Our position is set in stone. I don't want to compromise... it's about finding a solution' (Hungary Today 2020).

In the next few weeks vivid political debate emerged among the member states and the European institutions with the consideration of possible solutions of the political stalemate.

The European Commission was assessing options to circumvent Hungary and Poland's veto of the EU budget and the recovery fund. On one hand, as a transitive solution based on EU law, the Next Generation EU recovery fund could have been made available for Member States in the framework of enhanced cooperation. On the other hand, due to the lack of the new MFF, the Commission could have put forward a new draft budget for 2021 based on the budgetary ceilings of the previous MFF according to Article 312 of the TFEU. This scenario would have been feasible since enhanced cooperation could have been established by a minimum of nine Member States and the budget for 2021 could have been adopted by qualified majority of the EU Council, leaving no prospect of any vetoes. This way the EU could have insisted on the rule of law conditionality mechanism, even if it had been watered down compared to the original proposal of the European Commission, circumventing the Hungarian and Polish veto.

Nevertheless, this solution would have been far from optimal from a financial point of view as each chapter of the budget would have been funded monthly, up to a maximum of one twelfth of its appropriations of the previous year. Additionally, the EU wouldn't have been able to commit to new projects under most of its programmes, such as Cohesion or Horizon, and rebates would not be paid to some of the net contributors to the EU budget. Furthermore, around 25–30 billion euros in Cohesion funds would have been lost even once a new budget for 2021 is adopted under the previous MFF, given that the 2014–2020 budget has lower budgetary ceilings compared to the next seven-year budget (Valero 2020).

At the same time, Germany as the president of the EU Council, and personally Angela Merkel, strove for a compromise among the Member States in the session of the European Council held between 10 and 11 December 2020. The German efforts proved to be successful since a compromise was brokered contained by the European Council Conclusion on 10 and 11 December 2020, resulting in a lift of the Hungarian and Polish Governments' political vetoes. The disputed compromise has meant the victory of deliberation and consensus-seeking as central decision-making mechanisms of the NIG over the hard bargaining and veto threat of 'old' intergovernmentalism. On the basis of the compromise the Council of the EU adopted the regulation on 14 December, while the European Parliament did the same on 16 December 2020.

If we take a closer look at the elements of the compromise, we can find several additional clues of the NIG, especially as regards the central role of the European Council on concrete regulatory issues. The European Council conclusions pin down that a methodology guideline would be developed in connection with the application of the rule of law conditionality regulation by the European Commission 'in close consultation with the Member States'. What's more, the document adds that 'should an action for annulment be introduced with regard

to the Regulation, the guidelines will be finalised after the judgment of the Court of Justice so as to incorporate any relevant elements stemming from such judgment. Until such guidelines are finalised, the Commission will not propose measures under the Regulation.’ In fact, the European Council has prescribed the creation of a non-binding document (guidelines) for the application of a legal act which itself contains provisions in connection with its application. Article 4 of the regulation defines the possible cases of the breach of the rule of law which serve as basis of the application of those measures ruled in Article 5 with the aim to protect the European Union budget. Article 6 defines the procedure of the adoption of the measures, while Article 7 rules the lifting of measures.

Another bizarre momentum is that the regulation came into force on 1 January 2021; at the same time, the European Commission hasn’t started applying it and evaluating the possible breaches of the rule of law that have financial consequences because of the instructions of the European Council regarding the lack of the guidelines and the foreseeable judicial revision of the regulation. The latter is not only a possibility anymore, since the Hungarian and Polish Governments, waiting until the last moment of the deadline, on 11 March 2021 launched a legal challenge against the regulation at the European Court of Justice.

If we turn to the question of ‘complicity’ of the supranational institutions in the dynamics of the NIG, it is worth starting with the European Commission. Although the Commission has put the rule of law mechanism on the political agenda based on its initiative role, and originally made an ambitious proposal guaranteed by the reversed qualified majority rule, some circumstances and subsequent events are pointing in the direction for strengthening the European Council and the intergovernmental governance, this time in the area of the protection of the rule of law.

As we have pointed out above, the European Commission hasn’t devoted any significant role to the European Parliament in the rule of law conditionality mechanism in its original proposal, and despite the efforts of the European Parliament, the adopted regulation has maintained the marginal role of the EP, confining it to the right for being informed (Article 8) or for inviting the European Commission for a structured dialogue on its findings regarding the existence of the conditions for the adoption of measures (Article 6).

As regards the application of the regulation, the European Commission has been following rather the political instructions of the European Council instead of fulfilling its responsibility prescribed by Article 17(1) TEU, ‘the Commission shall ensure the application of the Treaties, and of measures adopted by the institutions pursuant to them’. The Commission, in spite of the numerous calls of the European Parliament to apply the conditionality regulation since it entered into force on 1 January 2021 and is binding in its entirety and directly applicable in all Member States, has not yet started to implement the legal act at the time of writing this paper.

Furthermore, besides the reference to the lack of the guidelines prescribed by the European Council, another argument has appeared in the communication of the Commission aiming to legitimise its non-action. On 25 August 2021 Commission spokesperson Balázs Újvári called the conditionality mechanism an element of ‘last resort’, adding that ‘We will not go ahead until we make sure that in terms of our toolbox this is the right instrument to be used and the work has been ongoing in this regard for a number of months. When all the conditions are met for us to start implementing the regulation we will not hesitate to do so’ (Euronews 2021).

Nevertheless, the European Parliament doesn’t share this view as it can be read in its resolution issued on 8 July 2021 stating: ‘[...] measures under the Regulation are necessary in particular, but not only, in cases where other procedures set out in the Financial Regulation, the Common Provisions Regulation and other sector-specific legislation would not allow the Union budget to be protected more effectively; [...] this does not mean that the Regulation is to be considered as a “last resort”, but rather that the Commission can use a wide range of procedures to protect the Union’s financial interests, including the Regulation, to be chosen on a case-by-case basis and used in parallel if needed, depending on their efficiency and effectiveness.’ The Parliament emphasises too that ‘the Regulation is the only EU legislation linking respect for the rule of law to the EU budget [...] therefore, [...] its unique provisions should be fully applied to ensure complementary protection for the rule of law in addition to EU finances’ (European Parliament 2021c Point 21, 22).

If we take a look at the Political Guidelines of the Leyen-led Commission, we can see a discrepancy between the political manifesto and the reality. The document claims that ‘Our European Union is a Community of Law. [...] Strengthening the rule of law is a shared responsibility for all EU institutions and all Member States. I will ensure that we use our full toolbox at European level. [...] The Commission will always be an independent guardian of the Treaties. Lady Justice is blind – she will defend the rule of law wherever and by whomever it is attacked’ (von der Leyen 2019).

The attitude of the Commission regarding the non-application of the regulation has caused an inter-institutional debate with the European Parliament which may even end at the European Court of Justice as it is unfolded below.

Taking the ‘complicity’ of the European Parliament, we can face a rather different situation. It’s important to emphasise that the European Parliament has been insisting on the new rule of law mechanism and its connection to the EU budgetary issues all the time. It has even threatened veto of the long-term budget for 2021–2027 if the rule of law mechanism isn’t connected to it and to the Next Generation EU recovery fund (Kahn 2020). It’s also the truth that the EP has made efforts to gain a more significant role in the new rule of law mechanism, and when it was opposed by the Council, the EP still supported the

regulation, as it was done in the case of watering-down the original proposal of the European Commission regarding the reversed qualified majority. So the European Parliament has expressed its commitment to the conditionality mechanism several times and after its adoption to the immediate application of it as well, reminding the European Commission and the European Council of their competences and responsibilities.

On 17 December 2020, the EP adopted a resolution in which it recalled ‘that in accordance with Article 15(1) TEU, the European Council shall not exercise legislative functions; considers, therefore, that any political declaration of the European Council cannot be deemed to represent an interpretation of legislation as interpretation is vested with the European Court of Justice’ (European Parliament 2020 Point 5). Additionally, it qualified the content of the European Council conclusions on the regulation as ‘superfluous’, since in the view of the EP ‘the applicability, purpose and scope of the Rule of Law Regulation is clearly defined in the legal text of the said Regulation’ (European Parliament 2020 Point 4).

On 25 March 2021 the European Parliament adopted another resolution in which it recalled ‘that the Commission shall be completely independent, and its members shall neither seek nor take instructions from any Government in accordance with Article 17(3) of the TEU and Article 245 of the TFEU’ (European Parliament 2021 Point 6). In the co-legislator’s point of view since ‘the situation as regards respect for the principles of the rule of law in some Member States warrants immediate consideration’, the European Commission should make ‘full use of its powers of investigation for each case of a potential breach of the principles of the rule of law by a Member State’ (European Parliament 2021 Point 7). Consequently, the Parliament called the European Commission to finalise the guidelines by 1 June 2021 and to start applying the regulation right afterwards. Indeed, it threatened to take the Commission to the European Court of Justice if it fails to fulfil its responsibilities (European Parliament 2021 Point 13 and 14). As regards the judicial review of the regulation, the European Parliament asked the European Court of Justice to follow an expedited procedure, furthermore it recalled that ‘actions brought before the CJEU do not have any suspensory effect according to Article 278 of the TFEU’ (European Parliament 2021 Point 12).

As the Commission didn’t meet the deadline, the European Parliament issued another resolution on 10 June 2021 in which it expressed its regret over the Commission’s failure ‘to activate the procedure laid down in the Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation in the most obvious cases of breaches of the rule of law in the EU’. The Parliament laid down that it immediately started the necessary preparations for potential court proceedings under Article 265 TFEU³ against the Commission (European Parliament 2021b Point).

3 According to Article 265 TFEU ‘Should the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the Commission or the European Central Bank, in infringement of the Treaties, fail to act, the Member

As regards the complicity of the European Parliament in the strengthening of the European Council and the intergovernmental nature of the EU governance, at least in connection with the new conditionality regulation, it cannot be detected. At the same time, it would be crucial, in case of further reluctance of the Commission, that Parliament carry out its threat about the court proceedings under Article 265 TFEU against the Commission, and ensure its full commitment to the regulation.

Conclusion

As we can see above, in accordance with the presumption of comparative politics on democratisation and the concept of authoritarian equilibrium, there have been efforts to disrupt the authoritarian equilibrium which has been helping the Orbán Government to stay in power for more than ten years. On one hand, partisan support of Fidesz has come to an end after several years of a love-hate relationship. Seemingly, by the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021, the political and reputational costs of the alliance with Fidesz became too high for the EPP. As a result of the split up, Fidesz has lost its strong position and space for political manoeuvre as part of the biggest political group in the EP. Although Viktor Orbán didn't waste time, and started almost immediately initial negotiations with Matteo Salvini, leader of the Italian League Nord and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, president of the Polish ruling party PiS on the creation of a brand-new party group in the EP, even if these efforts result in any outcome in the future, it won't substitute that firm partisan support that the EPP provided.

Regarding the effort to cut the financial support of a government which breaches the rule of law, it has a formal result, namely the adoption of the rule of law conditionality resolution. At the same time, due to the watering down of the mechanism and the controversial compromise of the European Council this new mechanism couldn't fulfil the expectations. Furthermore, the compromise has highlighted several elements of the NIG such as the importance of deliberation and consensus, the growing role of the European Council in concrete regulatory issues and the 'complicity' of the supranational institutions, and in the case of the conditionality mechanism, complicity of the European Commission. As a consequence, the efforts to disrupt the financial support of authoritarian regimes within the EU have been neutralised by the mechanisms of new intergovernmentalism so we still cannot talk about an initial authoritarian disequilibrium. One might think that the fact that in July 2021 the Commission didn't accept the recovery plan of Hungary, but rather it decided to prolong the assessment period right after the adoption of the widely contested Hungarian anti-LGBTQ

States and the other institutions of the Union may bring an action before the Court of Justice of the European Union to have the infringement established.'

law may somewhat modulate the findings about the ‘complicity’ of the Commission. Nevertheless, the Commission insists that its appraisal of the recovery plan does not involve the LGBTQ law and that the delay is due to shortcomings by Hungary on anti-corruption and auditing mechanisms and guarantees on the independence of the courts (EURACTIV 2021). At the same time, if the Commission’s arguments are real, it is a big question as to why it has not yet started to apply the regulation, since these deficiencies constitute the conditions for the adoption of measures under the regulation according to Article 4.

In the case of the European Parliament we cannot detect the signs of ‘complicity’, at the same time it would be crucial to keep on its insistence on the immediate application of the conditionality regulation, with all the measures at its disposal, even to start a court procedure under Article 265 TFEU against the Commission.

Without the application of the regulation the European Union may miss another opportunity to draw the red line and not let it be crossed over and over again at least in those areas of the rule of law which have financial consequences.

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To Join or Not to Join? Contextualising the Motives of Organisational Membership in the Czech Republic and East and West Germany¹

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Abstract: *This article investigates sources of motivation for organisational engagement in different sociopolitical contexts. On the grounds of my own qualitative data, this text aims to answer the main research question: 'Why do Czech and German university students get involved in political and civic organisations?' The analysis also shows how the perception and understanding of politics differ according to the types of political motivation. The research draws upon a unique dataset of 60 interviews with university students conducted in former East (Jena) and West Germany (Mannheim, Cologne), and the Czech Republic (Prague, Ostrava and Olomouc). The results identify the notion of influence as a core factor for joining a political group and forming political commitment among the young generation. The article introduces a personal typology of political motivation, which extends existing theories and frames them in the pathways to politics of young Czech and German activists. It distinguishes three main motivations: idealistic, doer and pragmatic with a variety of subtypes. The paper elaborates on classical typologies refraining from membership. These outcomes have practical implications for the recruitment of new party members.*

Keywords: *political motivation, youth participation, university students, Czech-German context, refraining from organisational membership, thematic analysis*

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Introduction

What guides young people to political organisations in different societal contexts is a highly topical issue, especially given the great transformation of political behaviour in recent decades. This shift – typified by decreasing conventional participation and a preference for direct, horizontal and autonomous forms of involvement – is visible especially among people under 30 years of age. They focus on a particular lifestyle or societal issue (such as environmental or human rights protection) while the distinctions between the private and public political sphere blur (Inglehart 1990; Tsekoura 2016; Verba et al. 1995). Nevertheless, instead of fully replacing conventional forms with new activism, young people combine various modes of participation, for example, protest politics, online activism, consumer boycotts and electoral activities (Allaste – Saari 2020; Corrigan-Brown 2012; Zukin et al. 2006).

This text aims to answer the main research question ‘Why do Czech and German university students get involved in political and civic organisations?’ The article investigates the motivations which drive young people to join political groups in old and new democracies, different modes of engagement and political orientations. For this purpose, an original typology of political motivation, which elaborates the work of Michael Bruter and Sarah Harrison (2009) in the Czech-German context, will be introduced. Moreover, the analysis also shows how youth conceptualise the political process and how these perceptions and understanding of politics differ according to the types of political motivation. The article also pays attention to the reasons for avoiding organisational membership.

The Czech Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany represent cases of both old and new democracies. This is particularly visible in the German example because Germany provides a unique experience of a country divided for 40 years into two separate parts differing in character of political regimes and political cultures.² Despite the relatively quick and unproblematic transformation and consolidation of the democratic system, it was difficult to eradicate the communist regime imprinted on the value system of citizens (Inglehart 2006). The Communist heritage still partly prevails in underdeveloped citizenship competencies, political alienation and relying on social networks on the one hand, and in paternalistic attitudes stressing the role of the state on the other (Bernhagen – Marsh 2007; Mansfeldová 2013).

In this respect, high expectations are put on the generation born after the fall of the Iron Curtain and socialised in a democratic political system. These people should have a stronger commitment to democratic values and principles

2 The new German federal states, as part of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), share an experience of a bureaucratic-authoritarian communist regime with Czechoslovakia (Hilmar 2020; Wessels 2009). The former GDR and former Czechoslovakia shared a similar historical context. Both underwent a process of democratic transition which Kitschelt et al. (1999) called an *implosion of the old order*.

than their parents and grandparents (Horowitz 2005). Therefore, the presented article addresses a call from the literature (e.g. Catterberg – Moreno 2006; Horowitz 2005; Howard 2003; Vráblíková – Císař 2014) for research focused on new democrats in new democracies, on people born in the late 1980s or 1990s and growing up in the era of post-communist transformation.

Having been inspired by the research design of cross-national qualitative studies conducted by Allaste and Saari (2020), Hilmar (2020), Tsekoura (2016) and Howard (2003), my aim is not directly to compare two countries, but to contribute towards an understanding of the roots and evolution of political motivation and commitment across different individual, societal and organisational contexts.

The analysis concentrates on a specific and relatively selective group of young people – university students. They are distinct concerning their political knowledge, skills, expectations, priorities, opportunities and participation. For instance, university students are more likely to vote, join a protest event, political or civic group and hold public office than their less-educated peers.

According to the *impressionable year hypothesis*, young people in their twenties are particularly susceptible to changing their value orientation (Krosnick – Alwin 1989). In this regard, the university environment offers many opportunities to profile their political views in gaining political knowledge, discussions with teachers and colleagues, joining various student associations and becoming engaged in university politics (Tanner – Arnett 2009; Zukin et al. 2006).

Theoretical reflections of reasons for organisational membership

In the analysis, I focus on the motivation of youth organisational involvement because it is core in explaining the roots of young people's political commitment (Lichterman 1996; Mannino et al. 2011). Following Cottam et al. (2015) and Batson et al. (2002), I understand motivation to be the driving force of human actions. It is a process which starts, maintains and guides goal-oriented behaviour and governs people's choices among alternative forms of voluntary activity.

Contemporary scholars (e.g. Batson et al. 2002; García-Albacete 2014; Mannino et al. 2011) agreed that motivation for political action is a multidimensional phenomenon. Individuals are driven to political involvement by several incentives at the same time and their motives often overlap, cooperate or are in conflict. Organisational involvement means a mix of material, cognitive and psychological benefits for their members (Ibid.; Clary – Snyder 1999; Eliasoph 1998).

Among the reasons to join a political or civic group are, for instance, attaining collective goals and receiving selective benefits (such as new possibilities, contacts, entertainment and positive emotional rewards). People also become organisational members because of feeling a social pressure to be active, loneliness, an excess of leisure time (Cnaan – Goldberg-Glen 1991) and an engagement for the future and wellbeing of their children (Eliasoph 1998). In Western

industrial democracies, most people get involved in organisations because of a combination of self-interest and ideological affinity. Research in political motivation and organisational recruitment (e.g. Lichterman 1996; Quintelier 2013; Verba et al. 1995) indicates that membership in a political group corresponds with value profiling, the strength of political conviction and political efficacy,³ and the sense of connectedness, as well as having enough resources and interests and being targeted by political mobilisation channels (see Table 1). According to the Civic Voluntarism Model, political participation, including joining a political organisation, is easier for people with higher socioeconomic status because they have more resources (such as time, money, political skills and knowledge) that mitigate the costs for participation (Verba – Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1995). They are also well-integrated in social networks facilitating political and civic engagement (Ibid.; Bernhagen – Marsh 2007) Macro-social contextual factors such as favourable institutional settings, participatory political culture, inclusive political systems and a good level of economic development also support citizens’ involvement (see Table 1). These individual and social preconditions create an environment where people believe that their participation matters (Almond – Verba 1963; Corrigan-Brown 2012; Quintelier 2013).

Table1: Contextual determinants of political participation

<p style="text-align: center;">Individual</p> 	socioeconomic status (education, occupation, income)
	sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity)
	civic orientations and attitudes (ideologies, religiosity, trust, efficacy, political interest)
<p style="text-align: center;">Between individual and societal</p>	social capital (bridging and bonding)
 <p style="text-align: center;">Societal</p>	institutional setting (political regime, length of democracy, political opportunities, openness of political system, electoral system)
	economic development (GDP per capital, redistribution)
	political culture
	catalytic political circumstances (electoral campaigns, demonstrations, revolutions, crisis, wars)

Source: Created by the author based on the cited literature on participation

³ We can further distinguish *internal* and *external* efficacy. The former is related to self-confidence and refers to the citizen's conviction that he/she is able to influence the political process. The latter describes a belief in the responsiveness of institutions to the needs and demands of citizens (Pasek et al. 2008; Pollock 1983). Lukáš Linek (2010: 89) mentions that these two dimensions of political efficacy may, but also may not be related. People can believe in their ability to act politically and at the same time do not trust in the responsiveness of the government and vice versa.

This article reflects Michael Bruter's and Sarah Harrison's (2009) list of political motivations. Bruter and Harrison identified three main motivations for entering a political party: *moral*, *social* and *professional*, in their research on 2919 party members aged between 18 and 25 years from six European countries. What they called *moral motivation*, other researchers labelled as *altruism* (e.g. Batson et al. 2002), *value-based motivation* (Cnaan – Goldberg-Glen 1991) and *political idealism* (Handy et al. 2009). Moreover, Sidney Verba et al. (1995) speak in this regard about *personal citizen's satisfaction* and Paul Lichterman (1996) about *personalized political commitment*.

Morally-driven members stress the ethical purposes (such as supporting an important cause, helping others or finding the meaning of their life) for joining their organisation (Bruter – Harrison 2009). They have broad visions about the world and society, which are sometimes formed by religious beliefs (Handy et al. 2009). Political commitment is an important part of their identity, which is often manifested in their politicised lifestyle (Lichterman 1996).

Furthermore, *morally-driven* people possess radical beliefs and are endangered by disillusionment and burnout more often than other types of organisational members (Ibid.; Nairn 2019). They are more likely to be involved in demonstrations and further unconventional forms of activism. Similarly, they do not avoid direct confrontation with other political subjects and sometimes even with the police. *Morally-driven* members do not often consider their political activities preparation for a future professional career and do not expect material benefits for their engagement (Bruter – Harrison 2009; Lichterman 1996).

Bruter and Harrison (2009) label the next type of young party members as *social-minded* citizens. Organisational involvement means for them the possibility of interacting with like-minded people, take part in discussions, meetings and social events occurring within their organisations, and have some fun. The benefits of their involvement include close friendship ties, community belonging and group affiliation, which is particularly important for young adults (García-Albacete 2014). They are less career-oriented, efficient, disciplined and ideologically driven than their *morally* and *professionally-minded* counterparts (Bruter – Harrison 2009).

The third category of motivation for organisational involvement includes *professional* incentives (Ibid.). In other studies, it is also known as a *utilitarian*, *pragmatic* (Handy et al. 2009) or *egoistic* (Batson et al. 2002) motivation. *Professionally-minded* members see an opportunity to learn skills such as leadership, critical thinking and problem solving in their political activities. They are moderate in their political opinions, focused on reaching a compromise and gaining a good position in their organisation. These people are rather pragmatic in their views and not ideologically driven, but attracted to power and material benefits (Bruter – Harrison 2009). Moreover, *professionally-minded* people want to gain experience and valuable contacts useful for their future careers in professional politics, business or the state administrative sector (Gomez –

Gunderson 2003; Handy et al. 2009). This notion can be particularly useful for university students in their transition from education to the job market (García-Albacete 2014).

Why do people avoid organisational membership?

The motives for political passivity remain another important puzzle in participatory research. Verba et al. (1995) summarised three main reasons why citizens avoid political and civic engagement. Firstly, they ‘cannot participate’ because they have a lack of relevant resources such as time, money and civic skills. In this regard, lack of time was most often mentioned, which almost 40 % of the respondents of their survey stated (Verba et al. 1995).

Secondly, citizens ‘do not want to participate’ because they are not interested in politics and have other priorities. For instance, they want to devote their leisure time to their family or hobbies rather than politics. Furthermore, they have a lack of psychological connection with politics and, therefore, assume that they cannot influence the political process (Eliasoph 1998). To illustrate, Nina Eliasoph mentions in her book *Avoiding Politics* that people associate politics with something ‘big’ and ‘not close to home’, which is alien to their daily routine (Eliasoph 1998: 232).

Among the other reasons for political passivity, the conviction that politics is boring and dirty was mentioned. However, an encouraging finding is that only 3% of their respondents were afraid of potential problems (for instance in their job or family) connected with political engagement (Verba et al. 1995). Nevertheless, in other contexts, these concerns can be a serious obstacle to participation.

Thirdly, citizens do not participate because ‘nobody asked them to’. They feel isolated from social networks and not targeted by political mobilisation. In other words, people avoid political and social involvement because they do not have enough participatory opportunities to convert their interest into political action (Delli Carpini 2000; Verba et al. 1995). According to Delli Carpini (2000), young people are disengaged because they feel alienated from political institutions and processes, as well as not sufficiently motivated by incentives and political opportunities to overcome this alienation.

Social pressure may push people into politics in certain circumstances and vice versa. It can discourage people from activism if they believe that potential engagement would worsen their image among their friends and colleagues. In this respect, Nina Eliasoph (1998: 135) speaks about ‘a risk of making a fool of oneself’ by joining a political organisation. Other reasons neglected by Verba et al. (1995) are the convictions that people do not participate because they are satisfied with the political situation and therefore do not want to change anything, or they live in an individualist culture stressing success over common good commitment (Eliasoph 1998: 253).

Data collection and the analytical process

This article draws upon a unique dataset of 60 semi-structured qualitative interviews with university students. I paid attention mainly to students actively engaged in political or civic organisations: 45 of the participants were organisationally active. An additional 15 interviews with individuals without organisational membership enabled me to get a better understanding of the core group of young people involved in organisations.

I conducted the interviews in six universities in the old and new German federal states and the Czech Republic between 19 June 2014 and 12 April 2016. The age limit of the interviewees was set from 18 to 30 years. This life stage is entitled *provisional adulthood* (Sheehy 2011) and young people finalise their long-term educational, political and professional choices at this time. After graduation, their political attitudes and values remain relatively stable (Gaiser et al. 2010).

The selection of universities could not have achieved a criterion of representativeness because this would have been against the basic postulates of a qualitative approach (Creswell 2013; Rubin – Rubin 2011). Instead, sampling was driven by maximising the degree of variation among socioeconomic and cultural contexts (Allaste – Saari 2020).

Cities which were selected in German federal states represented an East–West distinction. In former West Germany, Cologne, the capital of the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia, and Mannheim in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, were chosen. In former East Germany, Jena, a high-tech centre and the second largest city of the federal state Thuringia, was selected.

In the Czech Republic, economic diversity and the impact of the university were the sampling criteria. Charles University, which is situated in the capital city, Prague, is the largest and most renowned Czech university. The city of Olomouc, where the seat of Palacký University is, has the highest density of university students in Central Europe, while the University of Ostrava, which lies in an industrial region, has a rather regional character and impact.

I found methodological justifications for a number of interviews and sampling procedures in the relevant literature (such as Allaste – Saari 2020; Hochschild 2016; Howard 2003; Lichterman 1996; Quintelier 2013). I aimed to secure a relatively heterogeneous sample of participants according to their (1) organisations (type of organisation, their ideological profiling), and (2) political experiences, as well as (3) sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics (e.g. gender, age and family background).

Driven by the occurrence of expanding political opportunities and the repertoire of the young generation (Verba et al. 1995; Vromen – Collin 2010), I chose groups with different political profiling, level of hierarchy and issue scope. I selected interviewees from *old* political groups such as parties, youth party organisations and trade unions, as well as activists from *new* types of organ-

ised interest groups, for example, ecological, human rights and social justice organisations. Given the fact that pluralisation of involvement is typical for the youth generation (Hustinx et al. 2012; Norris 2002), interviewees engaging in *both* types of organisations were also selected.

The process of approaching the interviewees was similar in both countries. I contacted participants in various ways to reach a wider range of the sample. I approached student umbrella organisations, student coordinators, as well as student political groups, political parties and civic organisations with my request. The *snowball technique* which works like a chain referral where interviewees recommend other people with similar traits of interest was also used.

I used the technique of a semi-structured qualitative interview. Similar conditions for every interview were maintained to ensure consistency. I conducted all the interviews myself. The length of the interviews was between 40–60 minutes. In the Czech Republic, I completed the interviews in Czech, and in Germany, in English. However, no significant self-selection bias occurred due to the German participants' knowledge of English. Regarding the ethics of the research, I informed all participants in detail about the purpose of the interview, and they signed an informed consent form. Moreover, all the interviews were pseudonymised.

Interviews were verbatim transcribed including filler words, silences and hesitations and analysed using applied thematic analysis. This method attends to the identification, analysis and referencing of recurring patterns (themes) in the text and enables the usage of theoretical concepts from literature before and during the analysis (Rubin – Rubin 2011). I conducted data coding and analysis using initial coding and then systematically sorted codes into categories to find repeating patterns, connections and mutual relationships.

At first, I coded every interview separately. The next step was the analysis of codes across all the interviews to discover how the participants understood a particular concept. In order to identify the main themes of the analysis, constant comparing, recontextualising and regrouping of the codes followed. Finally, I connected themes with sub-themes which created a coherent narrative (Guest et al. 2012; King – Horrocks 2010).

The qualitative software Atlas.ti was used for coding and data segmentation. My analysis is based on an interpretative retrospective approach which enables a flexible research design, emphasises life experience and gives space to individual explanations and understandings (Brocki – Wearden 2006; Nairn 2019; Rubin – Rubin 2011). The following limitations stem from its qualitative nature: the analysis relies on individual self-reported data and joint reflections and interpretations on the part of the participants and the researcher (Hilmar 2020; King – Horrocks 2010; Sandberg 2005).

Among duty–hobby–opportunity: a typology of political motivation revisited

Table 2 provides a personal typology of political motivation which distinguished between *idealists*, who emphasised the moral dimension of political action, *doers*, who the resolution of a particular issue of local or national character was crucial for and *pragmatists*, who perceived politics as an hierarchical process of the distribution of power. The notion of *influence* emerged as a central theme that steered the analysis. All participants described it although this word itself was not always used explicitly. A closer look at the nuanced qualitative data shows that perceptions and evaluations of this category varied according to different contextual characteristics.

Table 2: Typology of Political Motivation

Categories of political motivation		Explanation
IDEALISTS	inner-oriented idealists	influence of the need to satisfy self-development and personal growth
	outer-oriented idealists	influenced by the desire to realize abstract ideals on local, national, international levels
	card-carrying members	strong commitment to a particular organization
DOERS	problem-solvers	influenced by the necessity of finding solutions for (abstract, general) problems or situations
	local patriots	influence of a situation in one's own town/village: not motivated by ideology but by the needs of the local community
	common-spirit seekers	seeking fun, investing in community, building friendship and solidarity
PRAGMATISTS	power-seekers	influenced by the desire for power, respect, authority
	young professionals	influenced by career prospects considerations: desirable addition to CV, opportunity to learn new skills, job opportunities inside and beyond the organization

Source: Created by the author

IDEALISTS: 'You believe that you can make a real change...that the world will be a better place.'

The idealistic approach represents a normative dimension of politics with the emphasis being on the influence of ethical principles, as the following quotation illustrates:

I do this because I believe that this is in line with my convictions... as the saying goes: 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.'⁴ When I know something bad is happening somewhere, I try to learn about it so I can change it (Eva, 30, Prague, ecological activist).

In other words, *idealists* are active in politics because of their need for moral fulfilment. They connected their engagement with searching for answers to current philosophical, ethical or psychological questions and dilemmas.

Young people with an idealistic orientation prevailed in my sample in both national contexts, but an explanation for this may lie in the fact that expressing idealistic values may be considered socially desirable. Idealists often focused on ecological issues in my interviews, for example, on environmental protection, animal rights and air pollution. They perceived political engagement in a broader sense as 'the chance to stand up for your rights, help others, change something and influence people' (Elisabeth, 26, Jena, civic sector).

People from conservative backgrounds who expressed idealistic orientations tended to perceive their involvement as a duty, motivated by an obligation to their family, political party or religion. Christian Democrats in the Czech and German context stated in their interviews that their religious faith played an important role in their activism. The church often figured as a connective mechanism to politics in two ways. First, these participants met someone through the church who then recruited them to join political events. Second, religion provided them with a moral compass to distinguish right from wrong, and to help them to overcome ethical dilemmas. For *idealists*, a political activity meant the form of self-realisation. They wanted to 'live politics' as Dominika who worked to support refugees and homeless people explained:

For me, it [politics] is actually some kind of worldview <pause to consider>. Yeah, it's the way I see the world. And my activities are some kind of application of politics, but in practice, not in theory. You know, I am not guided by any specific political programme <smiling>, but I aim to live my politics (Dominika, 25, Olomouc, Catholic activist).

4 This is a quote from Edmund Burke, the 18th-century British philosopher and politician.

The interviewed *idealists* expressed a strong moral commitment to politics. They were willing to sacrifice time, money and energy for their political convictions and the organisations to which they belonged. At the start of their political involvement, they had high expectations and, after experiencing the reality of the political process, these sometimes resulted in disillusionment and disappointment. This was illuminated by the response of a student who had been active in local politics since joining the University of Ostrava. I asked her if she was satisfied with her involvement:

It's hard to say because when you enter this [politics], you are young and believe that everybody is just waiting for someone like you <laughing>. Yeah, you believe that you can make a real change... that the world will be a better place <smiles sadly>. But you slowly find out that it is not like that, this is not like in a fairy tale. Most disillusionment is caused by the people in your party who go out of their way to trip you up... and so you lose your ideals. So, now after ten years, I look at it differently <speaking with resignation> (Linda, 30, Ostrava, far-left party).

However, there is great diversity within the group of idealistic students. Their motives are subtle and diverse, and they express their moral commitment in different ways. For conceptual clarification, I distinguished the following three subtypes of *idealists*.

Firstly, for *inner-oriented idealists*, politics is closely related to individual incentives such as self-development and personal growth that manifest in the aim of becoming a better person or a better citizen. Moreover, it is connected with self-realisation and inner fulfilment. In other words, political activity means, for these interviewees, a space where they can positively influence their behaviour. The previously mentioned interviewee, Dominika, started being active as a volunteer at grammar school and described herself at this time as:

Searching for the meaning of life, clarification of some <pause to consider> profound issues like death and so on. Yeah, it was something like my initiation period... You know, I just tried to find something deeper in my life than just going to school, but maybe I am making myself sound loftier than I actually was <modest smile> (Dominika, 25, Olomouc, Catholic activist).

Politics as self-realisation may also fill the gaps of their identity crises because it empowers them in their struggle with societal pressures or their vulnerabilities and weaknesses. Besides this, the crises of personal values experienced during adolescence are formative in terms of being motivational stimuli. Left-wing participants from Germany repeatedly mentioned in their interviews that to be active meant for them to be critical, which was important for their

self-perception and could serve as a therapeutic outlet for their concerns. This was illustrated by a German activist, Alexander:

I engage in all these initiatives, not only because I want to change the world [but] because I want to know that at least I am trying to do something. I want to make peace with myself because I cannot sit doing anything. Every time I do nothing, I feel some kind of panic <laughing>... So when I am engaged, I think about how perhaps I am changing the world just a little bit... Yeah, so it's also a kind of therapy for me (Alexander, 24, Cologne, Green Party and ecological activist).

The second category, *outer-oriented idealists* aim to realise their abstract ideals and ethical principles on a local, national or international level. Their main motivation is to effect change in their environment, in contrast to their *inner-oriented counterparts*, concerned for the relief of their consciences. *Outer-oriented idealists* tend more towards expressive politics and feel obliged to alter their consumer choices in order to reflect their ethical principles. They often participate in political consumerism in the form of boycotts or, vice versa, buycofts of certain products (such as politically motivated vegetarianism or veganism).

Sebastian, a student of journalism at the University of Cologne, exemplifies this connection between politics and daily routine. He is a member of several ecologically focused NGOs, as well as being very active in the university's communal garden. Sebastian describes himself as a politically motivated vegan. He is also a regular dumpster diver, collecting expired food from large containers at the back of supermarkets. By these means, he aims to reduce his consumption as much as possible because, as he says 'the less I have to buy the happier I am' (Sebastian, 24, Cologne, radical green activist).

Sebastian buys only the equipment for the communal garden and, once a year, several items of second-hand fair-trade clothing. He participates in the free economy by sharing furniture, books and food among people in the neighbourhood. Moreover, he is very interested in climate justice and wants to reduce his carbon footprint by not flying. Overall, Sebastian's life is heavily politicised. He realises the disadvantages of this dedication to his politics. He devotes more than 30 hours per week to his activities and finds it difficult to spend enough time on his studies. Sometimes he is afraid that he lives in a bubble of like-minded politically active friends and feels isolated from 'the normal world'. However, he finds his activities very fulfilling because he lives in accordance with his principles.

A noteworthy difference appeared in my sample concerning political consumerism among *outer-oriented idealists* according to the national context. The Czech idealists I interviewed were not as committed or even radical in their political

consumerism as German idealists. Sometimes their ethical intentions conflicted with their hedonism, as an interviewee from Charles University pointed out:

For instance, the clothing boycott fails because I really like fashion. Of course, I perceive it as an ethical problem, but I can't help myself. It's similar to vegetarianism. I don't agree with mass stockbreeding production and try to buy stuff in farmers' markets, but I really like eating meat (Iva, Prague 24, feminist, left-wing activist).

Although Czech participants often boycotted certain products for political reasons, they did not connect it to all aspects of their life in the way that their German counterparts did. The more cautious and sceptical approach of Czech interviewees can be characterised by a quip by Eva, a vegan and animal rights activist: 'nobody's a saint; everybody has a computer from China' (Eva, 30, Prague, ecological activist).

The third category of idealists, *card-carrying members* expressed the greatest pride in their organisational membership compared to the other categories of idealists. They also devoted extensive time and effort to their party or NGO, especially during electoral campaigns or demonstrations. *Card-carrying members* even sometimes described their political group as a family. This considerable personal attachment to their organisation and its principles was manifested, for instance, in wearing symbols (such as badges, T-shirts) and open proclamations of loyalty as Eliška, a social democrat describes:

I like wearing an orange T-shirt, you know, my party's T-shirt.⁵ I am certainly not ashamed of this and people know that I am politically active. For instance, during the regional election campaign, there were some leftover leaflets and we stuck them on the fence of our house to advertise the party: they were everywhere! <proudly> (Eliška, 26, Ostrava, centre-left party and youth organisation).

DOERS: 'It doesn't matter if the pavement is orange or purple, as long as it gets built.'

The second category of task-oriented young people lies between ethically-driven *idealists* and professionally-motivated *pragmatists*. By comparison, *doers* are the least ideologically-profiled and most emphasise the realisation of practical goals. They focus on the easiest way of getting something done and do not spend much time discussing abstract principles and theoretical problems. The group

5 Orange is the trademark colour of the Czech Social Democratic Party, even though red is traditionally associated with socialism.

of practically-motivated young people in the sample is heterogeneous, but they have one aspect in common: a shared understanding of political influence as a change or improvement in the current situation.

Analysis revealed three subcategories among the *doers*. The first type I termed *problem-solvers*. For them, activism means finding a solution for a particular problem in their sphere of influence. After solving this problem, some of them cease their engagement, some are engaged periodically and others continue long-term and become more ideologically-profiled. A typical *problem-solver*, Pavel, describes his first experience with politics at the age of thirteen:

There was a park near my school... and they [developers] wanted to chop down the trees and replace them with tennis courts and other nonsense. You know that is why I started to be publicly involved (Pavel, 20, Prague, centre-left party, green activist).

Pavel's involvement was facilitated by the Facebook social network where he met other people who disagreed with the local developer's plans and they arranged to meet personally to protest against the proposed development. Even though they were only partially successful (instead of tennis courts, a golf course was built), this compromise motivated Pavel to take part in further activities. Later, he supported or directly joined other groups critically focused on issues with which he disagreed. Gradually, his increased activity cumulated in party membership. Nevertheless, even as a party member, he deals with solving particular problems rather than being concerned with ideological issues.

The second subcategory I labelled *doers: local patriots* who emphasise solving practical issues of a local character. They are active in local politics, which they understood in the sense of being outside party politics. *Local patriots* have a sense of duty in common with conservative and religiously oriented idealists. For them, politics in villages or small towns is 'just about people, not parties. It doesn't matter if the pavement is orange or purple as long as it gets built' (Eliška, 26, Ostrava, centre-left party and youth organisation).

A strong pattern of *local patriotism* was identified in the story of Lukáš. He is a traditionally-minded social democrat who devotes a great amount of free time and energy to building an open-air museum in his hometown. The gratitude expressed by his neighbours, and his feeling of obligation to the local community, motivated Lukáš to continue in his efforts. He does not try to hide his feelings when he describes the generosity he experiences in sourcing the finances for his museum:

Do you know the worst thing? That these entrepreneurs or people who have money never give anything, but retired people do give. These elderly ladies gave me one thousand crowns and said 'boys, you are so skilful, keep up the good

work.' This is so touching, yeah, it's very moving. I feel that we are obliged to give back something to these people with our activities <spoken with sincerity> (Lukáš, 29, Ostrava, centre-left party, local NGO).

The third subcategory of *doers* is *common-spirit seekers*. They share a strong feeling of belonging to their organisations with *idealist: card-carrying members*. Unlike *card-carrying members*, this devotion does not stem primarily from a commitment to organisational principles, but from the social dimensions of activism, including friendship ties, common activities in their political group and the absence of a strong hierarchy. A social democrat, Lenka, experienced all these aspects during her stay at an international socialist summer camp in Malta. She colourfully describes her feelings of pride and solidarity:

I wanted to cry. It was so moving, when, from all over Europe they started to sing Bella Ciao... It was such a strong feeling of belonging, that you are not just a group of five or a hundred [people] like in the Czech Republic, but that you share something with a Swedish guy or an Italian girl. Yeah, it was very international. For instance, there were some people from Israel and Palestine and they shook each other's hands and hugged each other <speaking enthusiastically>. You could feel that you were part of something bigger. It excited me and touched me (Lenka, 26, Olomouc, centre-left party).

PRAGMATISTS: '...ideals sometimes have to be put aside'

Pragmatists enjoy political negotiations and meetings. Although they considered ideological congruence with their organisation important, it was not the most salient feature of their activism. As their priority, *pragmatists* wanted to join a political organisation and searched for a suitable one. In contrast to other groups of politically motivated interviewees, they did not express disillusionment or frustration resulting from their political engagement. This can be attributed to the absence of high expectations at the beginning of their involvement and by the fact that they were aware of negative aspects, as shown below:

Well, of course, there are negotiations and sometimes quite tough ones, but I have never had any illusions about politics, that politics is an association of honest people <smiling>. I have always known that politics is not only about the good stuff, but [also] about getting into the old boy's club, nepotism, bargaining and so on (Marek, 24, Olomouc, centre-right party).

Pragmatists conceptualised politics as a process. This process-oriented approach emphasised rules, control mechanisms and the distribution of power. They define themselves in opposition to *idealists* by labelling their attitudes as

‘realistic’ and ‘rational’, which is illustrated by the words of a member of the Young Conservatives:

Well, I understand politics as being the difference between ideals and reality. You know, ideals are very nice, but when it comes to the rough reality of politics, ideals sometimes have to be put aside <speaking loudly>... It will always be like that ‘real’ politics and not ‘ideal’ politics. (Milan, 24, Prague, centre-right party and youth organisation)

Later, he recalls his experience with ‘real’ politics. At a party congress, he supported a colleague from the same organisation because this man had supported him, although they disagreed on a matter of principle. This political deal was uncomfortable for him, but he perceived it as a necessity because they were both conservatives. He admitted he would find it harder to make that same agreement with communists or social democrats. However, within his organisation ‘it was basically a petty issue so I thought I would just grit my teeth and get on with it’.

My analysis distinguished the following two subcategories of *pragmatists*. The first, *power-seekers*, understood political influence primarily in terms of power. Politics for them meant a practical realisation of power in the sense of controlling people, things and situations. Moreover, they understood political power as ‘the rules of the game’, the goal of which is to ‘divide and conquer’ (Milan, 24, Prague, centre-right party and youth organisation).

Power-seekers also emphasised order and hierarchy. In this respect, they appreciated that their political organisations enabled them to climb the career ladder ‘very fast and very high’ (Elias, 22, Mannheim, centre-right party and youth organisation). In fact, many of them had attained relatively high positions in their organisation. Their political activities were important for them as an opportunity ‘to be important’ and ‘gain respect’, as described by Elias further:

I was thinking I would like to do something interesting or something important... Actually, it [politics] is interesting because of power... if you are in politics you have power. I am a guy who would like to be powerful (Elias, 22, Mannheim, centre-right party and youth organisation).

Power-seekers praised a Machiavellian approach to politics. Although no one I talked to openly mentioned Niccolò Machiavelli, they spoke about ‘the end which justifies the means’. Instead of Machiavelli, the fictional character of the unscrupulous politician Frank Underwood from the HBO series *House of Cards* was mentioned with a considerable level of understanding and admiration:

You know, many psychologists would say that he [Underwood] is a maniac, but in politics, you cannot be successful if... <pause to consider >. Anyway,

it's true that he [Underwood] killed or ordered the killing of loads of people, but he does it for power, not for money. When you have power, you also have certain responsibilities (Šimon, 23, Ostrava, centre-right party).

The second group of *pragmatists* I called *young professionals*. These participants were politically motivated mainly by external incentives such as career opportunities within or beyond their organisations. For them, their engagement meant, above all, a valuable addition to their CV. Among the important features of their involvement, *young professionals* mentioned learning skills such as leadership, cooperation, the art of public speaking and management, which could positively influence their future career prospects. The following quotation from the interview with Jonas illustrates well this approach. He entered the organisation on his cousin's recommendation and has never regretted this step.

I think I am learning a lot about how to lead people, how to hold discussions, how to plan things and [I understand more clearly] my opinions, but I am also learning to listen and acknowledge other people's opinions and to find compromises (Jonas, 20, Mannheim, centre-right youth organisation).

It is also worth pointing out that *young professionals* are not so sharply ideologically driven as, for example, *card-carrying members* or *outer-oriented idealists*. That is why they perceived it as less problematic to cooperate with people from different areas of the political spectrum, even though this cooperation often happens for purely pragmatic reasons. Moreover, they also often maintain friendships with people with different political opinions. To illustrate this ability to get along with everybody, I provide for comparison one pragmatic and one idealistic interview excerpt:

Pragmatist: Cooperation with these organisations [referring to Amnesty International] is terribly important because they will support you then. You know, 'keep your friends close and your enemies closer' <smiling > (Milan, 24, Prague, centre-right party and youth organisation).

Idealist: These people [referring to Young Conservatives] have different values to me. I would find it very difficult to make a friend like that (Pavel, 20, Prague, centre-left party, green activist).

As another motivating factor, *young professionals* stated that their organisations function for them as 'playgrounds', providing 'great training', and 'talent incubators' for adult politics. Interviewees appreciated that in their political groups they could try many things without having great responsibility. The words of a student from Jena prove this claim: 'You get the opportunity to learn loads of things and nobody gets angry at you for making mistakes as they would in a real job' (Albert, 19, Jena, university politics).

In this 'playground', they can learn to overcome shyness, gain self-confidence and improve their image to become the young politicians of the future. *Young professionals* were the most formal of all the interviewees in their speech and appearance. They avoided using expressive words in our conversation, overused English jargon and some of them wore suits to our meetings.

Why do young people refrain from engaging? Reasons for avoiding organisational membership

This section will shed light on the reasons why people avoid joining political groups. It focuses also on interviewees who considered organisational membership and finally decided not to join any political group. Moreover, the motives for leaving a political or civic organisation will also be examined.

Civic Voluntarism Model mentions three main reasons why people are not politically active. They 'cannot' participate because they lack the resources, 'do not want' to get involved due to a lack of interest or 'nobody asked them' (Verba – Nie 1972). My analysis also identified these motives. Nevertheless, further reasons for unwillingness to join political or civic organisations appeared among my communication partners. These motives were subtler, context-sensitive and usually combined several factors.

Some people I talked to were not interested in politics at all or expressed very negative attitudes to politics. It is not surprising that among their main reasons for organisational inactivity, 'lack of political interest', 'disgust with politics in general', 'having other priorities' and particularly the notion that 'politics is a remote issue which they are not able to influence' appeared. These people often come from politically disengaged family backgrounds. Their reasons, which convey fatalism and resignation, are illuminated in the interview excerpts below:

Joining an organisation? That's not for me! <resolutely> On the one hand, I am not interested in it [politics] and on the other, I do not want to be engaged. Yeah, I have other stuff to do and when I see how people [in politics] become so blinkered... you know what I mean, they are incapable of compromise <critically> (Karel, 21, Olomouc, no organisation).

You know, people mostly have no insight into this [politics]. For example, I have no idea how things work in political parties (Věra, 23, Olomouc, no organisation).

These interviews expressed their scepticism particularly towards political parties. However, they saw public initiatives in a more favourable light as organisations able to solve particular problems, mostly of a local character, and to offer something 'which people need and which they understand' (Michal, 23,

Olomouc, no organisation). On the one hand, interviewees connected the civic sector with decentralisation and non-conformity. On the other hand, they perceived politics realised outside political parties as less relevant and 'weaker' compared to what they identified as 'real politics'.

The issue of time appeared as significant in the analysis. It was connected with 'having other priorities than politics' in terms of how to spend leisure time. In this regard, organisationally non-involved informants stated that it was very difficult to combine university studies with part-time jobs, internships, hobbies and on top of everything else to find time for political activities. Others admitted that they had time but did not want to do anything more than studying.

Moreover, a perceived lack of *internal* and *external efficacy* was revealed as a crucial issue in their reluctance to join a political group. In other words, my interviewees felt that they were not able to influence the political process at a local or national level and that the government was not responsive to their demands and needs.

It was repeatedly shown that, among those who perceived politics as something carried out remotely by men in black suits known from their appearances on TV, politics had a very bad reputation. This impression also carried over to regular party members who were considered the 'usual suspects', and in politics just for their personal gain, ideologically blinkered and boxed into following regulations.

In this line of argument, people often consider themselves too young to sit for hours in meetings and fully commit themselves to a particular ideology. They connected party membership with narrow-mindedness and conformity to the official party line at all costs, necessitating the betrayal of your own political opinions. Furthermore, they understood party membership as a life commitment:

...a way of labelling myself to show I really share their beliefs, which is why, although I am interested, I couldn't join the party because I cannot agree with some of their beliefs (Elke, 22, Jena, Catholic organisation).

Some interviewees mentioned that they were interested in one issue taken up by the party, but did not agree with all the parts of the party programme so they would not fit into the party 'box', a feeling expressed by a psychology student at the University of Mannheim:

Let's say I agree with the Green Party on a lot of issues, but there are many more that I totally disagree with. So, I couldn't join a party without feeling bad about supporting things that don't feel right to me (Jens, 26, Mannheim, no organisation).

The quotation above shows that at least some young people reflect very responsibly on questions of party membership. They are interested in politics, follow political events closely online, or less often in traditional media, but for normative reasons they do not want to join organised politics. Some of my communication partners actually investigated joining a political organisation but changed their minds during the recruitment procedure.

One such interviewee is Liam, a 23-year student at the University of Mannheim who feels ‘sympathy for social democrats’ and repeatedly visited SPD meetings with his friend, a party member. Liam, however, was not satisfied with what he saw and after four meetings he decided not to join the party. He disliked not only the people in the party but also the highly formalised, boring and hierarchical party approach. He explains his disappointment:

It was really annoying because there were some... <looking for right words> really nice guys and then some [were] maybe a bit arrogant, or a bit strange. It was also the way they structured the meetings. There was an agenda, so first we went through that point by point. So, if you want to say something, you raise your hand and they write you on a list. But there is no discussion, you can’t respond directly because there are five other people scheduled to talk before you (Liam, 23, Mannheim, no organisation).

This viewpoint appeared repeatedly in the analysis among those respondents who decided to leave their party or cancel their membership. The human element also played a crucial role: interviewees complained of arrogant career-seekers and expressed disillusionment at the exhausting negotiations and political compromises. Another target of criticism was the demand for absolute ideological conformity, as Christoph, a former Green Party member, explains:

I was a little bit idealistic... <pause to consider>. Yeah, I wanted to change stuff and wanted to engage politically based on my ideals. Then I realised that membership in a party does not really mean promoting your ideals but to conform to your party and always promote party opinions with no space for your own opinions <speaking sadly> (Christoph, 22, Cologne, former party member).

A ‘conflict of interests’ was another salient issue that emerged from the analysis. This topic was particularly crucial for interviewees who were considering a career in political science. For instance, future political analysts perceived engagement in party politics as a problem. For the sake of their reputation, they wanted to be considered impartial or independent.

Sometimes they wrestled with a dilemma between their desires for political self-realisation versus the need to take a neutral stance befitting their role as an observer. On the one hand, they considered organisational membership

‘a natural part of life’ (Christoph, 22, Cologne, former party member) and wanted to ‘openly articulate their opinions on public issues’ (Iva, 24, Prague, feminist, left-wing activist). On the other hand, they did not want to be bonded too tightly to any particular ideology. Similarly, future journalists, lawyers and teachers among the interviewees were afraid of a possible ‘conflict of interest’. In this respect, Liam’s testimony is symptomatic:

I work part-time as a journalist. I can’t really combine being a journalist with being active in the political [sphere]... It was a basic choice for me, either you are active in politics, or you work as a journalist (Liam, 23, Mannheim, no organisation).

Besides the fact that he does not intend to join a political party, he also wants to restrict his other political activities, for instance, participation in demonstrations. This cautious approach to public involvement was concisely summarised by a non-politically-active student of psychology ‘I prefer to keep my distance’ (Přemysl, 22, Ostrava, no organisation).

Some Czech interviewees kept their distance from left-wing activism, in particular, because of the risk this posed for job seeking. They feared that if the human resources departments of multinational corporations found out about their participation in anti-globalist or anti-capitalist protests, their chances of being hired would be ruined. For this reason, some interviewees were afraid of being photographed or recorded during demonstrations. For instance, Ondřej, a member of the Czech Social Democratic Party, was worried that his future employers would search for this information about him.

When I look for a job, they can google me and say, ‘well, well, that’s ***⁶ [his surname] and he wants to increase taxes and have progressive taxation and he wants to work for me. I will create a profit and then pay higher taxes because he wants it’ (Ondřej, 26, Prague, centre-left party, activist).

However, German communication partners felt that engagement in conventional politics (particularly with major parties such as SPD or CDU-CSU) could increase their credibility as future employee candidates.

Conclusion

This article explored the motives and sources of organisational involvement in different sociopolitical contexts. Based on qualitative analysis of 60 semi-structured interviews with university students in the old and new German federal states and the Czech Republic, it can be concluded that a precondition of engagement is a belief that citizens are capable of influencing politics, and that their voice should be heard and taken seriously.

6 His surname was deleted for the purpose of anonymisation.

In literature, this conviction is called *internal political efficacy* (Kahne – Westheimer 2006; Pasek et al. 2008; Pollock 1983), which is promoted by exposure to a wide range of motivating stimuli in family and school (Kahne – Westheimer 2006; Prokschová 2020; Quintelier 2013). In both countries, my research identified a perceived sense of *internal efficacy* as central in forming the political commitment and motivation to join a political group.

Of course, my interviewees mostly believed in *external efficacy* (responsiveness of the political system to their demands). However, it was not their main motivational stimulus, but an issue taken for granted. Politics was something familiar to them, which they were interested in and they believed that they could make a difference in.

In contrast, both types of efficacy were among the salient reasons for refraining from organisational membership. In other words, my analysis showed that a belief in the lack of one's own ability to influence the political process, as well as the conviction that the government was unresponsive, was crucial in explaining a reluctance to join a political group.⁷

'Why do Czech and German university students get involved in political and civic organisations?' To answer this principal research question, my analysis distinguished three main types of motivation with a variation of subtypes according to the student perceptions of their own influence. *Idealists* aimed to influence the political process according to abstract ethical principles. For *doers* the understanding of their influence in terms of the practical improvement of the conditions in their neighbourhood was crucial, while *pragmatists* wanted to influence their own situation.

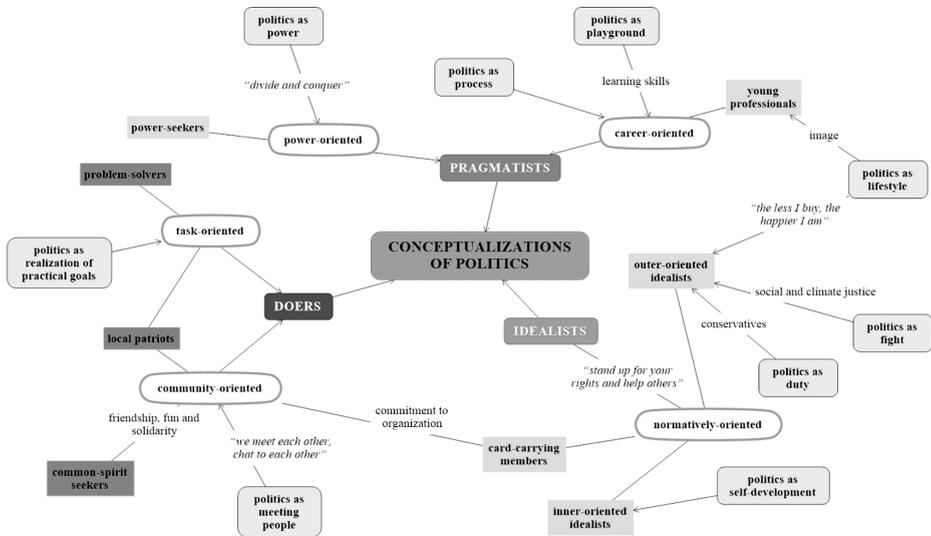
When *idealists*, *doers* and *pragmatists* talk about the same notion, they do not necessarily share the same understanding and the degree of their moral, ideological and career commitment varies sharply amongst duty-hobby-opportunity. Differences among types of motivation are, for instance, illuminated by the understanding of the concept of power. For *pragmatists* it is salient to have power in the outer sense, to control people, situations and things. They connect power with the pressure to assert one's own will. In contrast, *idealists* understand the power in the inner sense as not being powerless. In other words, they perceive power as the ability to resist pressure from their environment. They do not want to impose power on others but use it for their good feeling and conscience.

⁷ In this respect, my findings are slightly in contradiction with the results of Pollock (1983: 407), who claims that a low level of *external efficacy* does not mean refraining from participation. To be more specific, people who believe that the political system is not responsive to their needs do not enter traditional political parties but can be active through unconventional modes of engagement. In contrast, for my interviewees with a low sense of *external efficacy*, politics was something distant and uninteresting, which was carried out by men in black suits. They voted in the elections even though they were not convinced that it would make any difference, and they were certainly not willing to spend their time and effort on unconventional types of participation.

Nevertheless, the reasons for activism are not entirely clear-cut. In accordance with the results of other studies (e.g. Batson et al. 2002; Clary – Snyder 1999; Mannino et al. 2011), my research also indicated the occurrence of mixed motives for political action. Mixed motives appeared particularly among actors who were engaged in more than one type of political activity, for instance, those who were active in political parties as well as in civil society.

Figure 1 summarises the main findings by highlighting the differences in the conceptualisation of politics among *idealists*, *doers* and *pragmatists* and their subtypes. It shows that *idealists* and *doers* find self-fulfilment either primarily through helping others or in their self-realisation. In contrast, *pragmatists* understand their involvement particularly as a unique opportunity to learn skills, which will facilitate their future careers.

Figure 1: Different conceptualisations of politics according to political motivation



Source: Created by the author

Figure 1 also depicts how perceptions of politics partly overlap in certain cases. For instance, *idealists: card-carrying members* and *doers: common spirit seekers* share an emphasis on the social dimension of their political activities. However, they differ in the nature of these social ties. For *idealists: card-carrying members*, commitment to their organisation is crucial and they are ideologically driven, while the *doers: common spirit seekers* prioritise the community aspect.

The analysis revealed the following differences in the political motivation and perception of the political process according to the national contexts. Firstly, interviewed Czech participants were more cautious and sceptical about their political consumerism than their German counterparts. In this respect, Czech interviewees pointed out the necessity of a systematic change in global capitalism, without which they perceived political consumerism realised on an individual level as ineffective.

Secondly, interviews with pragmatically motivated young people from both countries showed that in the German context, political involvement was perceived as something prestigious. German *pragmatists* believed that their organisational involvement sent a signal to a potential employer that they were good and responsible citizens. The perspective of Czech interviewees was quite different. They did not consider that membership in a political group brought them an advantage in the job market. Some Czech communication partners were even discouraged from politics by their family and friends who saw their engagement as harmful for their reputation, moral integrity or future career prospects.

The main explanation for Czech political alienation, mistrust and dissatisfaction was attributed in the literature to the ideological emptiness of Czech political and specifically party life. In this respect, there was an important shift from a prevailing enthusiasm after the fall of communism in 1989, to disillusionment being manifested in lower party membership and voter turnout, which was referred to as the *post-honeymoon effect* (Císař 2008; Lebeda – Vlachová 2006; Linek et al. 2017). This was characterised by vague and shallow political programmes, an orientation to immediate profit instead of coherent and long-term strategies (Brunclík – Kubát 2014: 176) and by leaning towards oligarchisation, personalisation of politics and populism (Cabada 2016). The weakness and instability of political parties resulted in a decline of confidence in political institutions and lower voter turnout (Cabada – Tomšič 2016; Linek 2010).

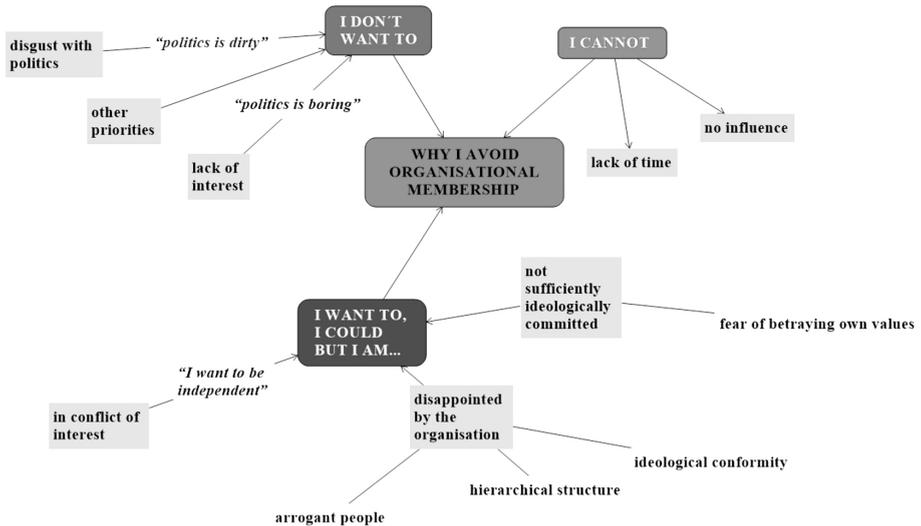
Furthermore, the analysis showed the following reasons for avoiding organisational membership (see Figure 2). It is not surprising that lack of political interest and willingness to sacrifice one's own time and energy are among the main reasons for not joining political or civic groups. The analysis, however, revealed several subtler motives that go beyond the *Civic Voluntarism Model*.

First, interviewees feared the ideological commitment required by organisational and especially party membership. They felt they had insufficient ideological congruence with certain political issues, and as a result were afraid of betraying their own principles. The second factor concerned budding political analysts, journalists and teachers who feared conflicts of interest and thus preferred to be 'ideologically impartial' by maintaining a distance from politics. The third significant reason was disillusionment with routine organisational practices. This was typical for interviewees who wanted to join political or civic

groups but changed their minds, as well as for those who left their organisation. In particular, they criticised the hierarchical structure of their former organisation, tiring negotiations, arrogant attitudes among other members and the demand for rigid ideological conformity (see Figure 2).

These results indicate that even young people who were highly interested in politics and had the resources to engage avoided organisational membership. The riddle of organisational inactivity was more complicated than was expected.

Figure 2: Reasons for avoiding organisational membership



Source: Created by the author

Based on my research findings, I offer the following recommendations for the recruiting process in political parties. Parties should be aware of the fact that different types of political motivation need different incentives to motivate people to join political groups. To address potential newcomers, political parties should emphasise social incentives (such as organisational events, creating new friendships and social ties across generations, a programme of mentorship). Given the mixed motivation, the efficient way is also a creative combination of different recruiting strategies and different types of incentives. Parties should improve their inner and outer communication, be less formal, more inclusive and take care of the priorities of different target groups. Moreover, they should decrease hierarchy and appropriately use social networks to recruit and inform.

The presented insights offer theoretical starting points for future studies using different data collection methods. For instance, participant observation would be valuable for a comprehensive elaboration of the organisational recruit-

ment process. Further research should also explore the mechanisms promoting *internal political efficacy* during political socialisation. The last proposed line of research is to describe the role of image in politics in connection with political profiling. This issue also focuses on examining which political orientation and behaviour, and under what circumstances, is seen to be desirable, cool or popular for young people. My analytical findings indicate that these streams of research have great potential to stimulate organisational involvement.

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Diligent or just smart students? Small governmental parties' approach to the European Semester in Poland

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Abstract: *All governments in Poland formed after the introduction of the European Semester were coalitional ones. All these governments contained junior coalition partners representing all party families. Irrespective of their affiliation, all these junior parties adopted policies that appeared to comply with the European Semester. Hence, junior coalition parties might be recognised as very diligent European students, even if two out of three represented quite extreme views and were undeniably more Eurosceptic than their respective senior partners. However, it can be argued that their strategy was mixed: even if these two more Eurosceptic parties might be regarded as being so in their rhetoric, they accepted all recommendations from the European Semester, except for the farmers' insurance privileges reduction. The salience of their approach to this latter issue was seen even after a few years in government, making these parties clearly different from their senior coalition partners.*

Keywords: *European Semester; Euroscepticism; junior coalition parties; Poland;*

Introduction

The European Semester was introduced in 2011 as a yearly cycle of economic and fiscal policy coordination among the EU member states. Its purpose is to ensure convergent economic development within the European community. It does not mean that member states lost autonomy in defining their respective economic policies (Maatsch 2017a: 692; Rasmussen 2018: 341). Despite this autonomy, the decision-making structure of the European Semester remains beyond individual member states' control and consecutive stages of the process

cannot be reviewed (Kreiling 2018: 325). It is worth noting that the European Semester has been politicised by the involvement of national parliaments (Maatsch 2017b: 208). Consequently, political parties' attitudes to the European Semester – and particularly to Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) – has become quite essential. Here, I refer primarily to governmental parties responsible for implementing national economic policy.

Considering that governmental parties are leading actors in European Semester-related debates, greater attention should be paid to the determinants of their stance vis-à-vis the recommendations provided to the respective country by the Council of the European Union. Political parties' dilemmas in this respect might be regarded as overlapping with those discussed previously in the context of European anti-crisis measures: domestic voters' preferences, party positions on redistribution or party position on European integration (Maatsch 2016: 651).

However, it is worth emphasising that the analysis of political parties' approaches to the European Semester cannot be abstracted from the governmental framework in which they operate. The literature on government formation underlies the inevitability of coalition bargaining in the majority of parliamentary systems. As shown by Cheibub et al. (2004: 574), 56.8 % of majority-governments formed in parliamentary democracies after World War II comprised a coalition of parties. The abundance of research on coalition formation is, therefore, hardly surprising, given the fact that so many research problems related to coalition formation have been identified. However, in these studies, one aspect seems to be overarching, i.e., portfolio allocations (Budge – Keman 1993). This issue has been analysed in the context of political payoffs (Browne – Franklin 1973; Evans 2020) with a special emphasis on policy salience (Bäck et al. 2011), portfolio salience (Warwick – Druckman 2006), the credibility of coalition partners' promises (Laver – Shepsle 1990) or voters' perception of portfolio allocation (Lin et al., 2017). The diverse range of problems analysed in these studies was interrogated using both quantitative and qualitative methods. It might also be added that these analyses have explored parties' attempts to implement *office-seeking* and *policy-seeking* strategies. However, the latter dimension has also been studied by scholars concentrating more on party policies (see, for instance: Budge – Laver 1992).

My initial premise is that the bond between *policy-seeking* and *office-seeking* strategies can be regarded as indissoluble. Hence, while analysing junior coalition partners' approaches to the European Semester, I will take into account political parties' *a priori* power, the results of bargaining processes (i.e., portfolio allocation), party histories (i.e., their previous experiences at parliamentary and governmental levels), the ideological profile of analysed parties and their coalition partners (*formateurs*), their attitude to the European Union and, finally, their stance as expressed in political debates on the European Semester. The latter issue would be considered as the dependant variable and former ones as independent variables.

All these problems seem to be important as the mechanism of coalition formation, and patterns of cooperation/participation in government were established long before the European Semester was introduced. It means that the social and political context in which these parties were born and evolved seems to play a significant role. Therefore, in referring to parties' attitudes to the EU, my working assumption is that their perception of its economic coordination structures can be interpreted as a kind of 'loyalty test', confirming (or not) their commitment to the idea of European integration and its implementation.

In this article, I focus on junior coalition partners in Polish governments since the early 2000s. Doing so affords me the unique opportunity to follow the evolution of political parties in terms of their approach to the European Union prior to and after the accession of the respective member state. Specifically, the article focuses on three parties, the Polish Peasant Party (PSL), United Poland (SP) and Jarosław Gowin's Poland Together, (since 2015 as Poland Together–United Right; PRZP), which has since 2018 been rebadged as Jarosław Gowin's Agreement party (PJG).

The PSL belonged to the Eurosceptic camp before Poland entered the EU. Then, its leaders highlighted the issue of securing Polish interests in the EU but also failed to restrain themselves from criticising their coalition partner (the Democratic Left Alliance – SLD), responsible for conducting pre-accession negotiations. The PSL's Euroscepticism can be explained by the fact that its status as the main representative of Poland's rural inhabitants was challenged by another party, Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland (SRP). SRP portrayed the EU mainly as a threat to Poland, thereby managing to capture the votes of a considerable portion of the electorate that had formerly supported the PSL. Therefore, the PSL's Euroscepticism could be regarded as a response to SRP's electoral strategy. It is worth mentioning that the PSL as a junior coalition partner occupied a pivotal position in several governments both before and after Poland's EU accession, cooperating twice with the SLD (1993–1997 and 2001–2005) and twice with Civic Platform or PO (2007–2011 and 2011–2015). For its part, United Poland (SP) was established after a split within Law and Justice (PiS) in 2011 following the expulsion of several politicians who ventured to express their criticisms of the party leadership.

These two parties are quite different in many respects, but two aspects seem particularly relevant. First, in *organisational terms*, it should be emphasised that United Poland ran in the 2015 electoral race on a combined electoral committee with Law and Justice, its future senior coalition partner. Moreover, technically it meant that the deputies proposed by SP were elected from the PiS list. This fact had significant implications for SP's party finances since state subsidies are guaranteed only to parties formally competing in elections. From this perspective, PSL's status was completely different, as it is fully autonomous in all dimensions.

However, it would appear that the most salient difference between PSL and SP is related to their respective approaches to the European Union. They represent opposing attitudes to European integration, but their coalition partners in government also occupied converse positions. Furthermore, in the whole decade after the European Semester was introduced, none of the European states experienced such a radical change concerning its government's European policy. PO – which formed a government with the PSL until 2015 – was one of the most ardent protagonists of European integration among European governmental parties, according to the '2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey'. In contrast, PiS was the strongest opponent if we do not consider the British Conservatives and two parties that participated in prematurely terminated governments, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the Northern League in Italy (LN).

Regarding the similarities between these junior coalition partners, one stands out as highly salient – they have exhibited a far more Eurosceptic attitude than their respective coalition partners. However, one clarification should be made in this context. The stance of SP and the PSL cannot be compared since the latter party demonstrated its Euroscepticism only before Poland's accession to the EU and actually sought favourable terms in pre-accession negotiations for farmers, whose interests they represent (Szczerbiak 2008: 237, 238). One might see this as astonishing, given the vast majority of Polish society supports Poland's EU membership (88 % in November/December 2020 according to CBOS) and are even in favour of the conditionality mechanism and want to make payment of EU funds conditional on adherence to the rule of law (46 % vs 36 % against in November/December 2020 according to CBOS). Moreover, 78 % of Poles in a Eurobarometer survey declared themselves proponents of general measures to reduce the public deficit and debt in Poland (67 % on average across the EU 27). Simultaneously, 57 % of Polish respondents admitted that this was *not a current priority* (58 % for the EU 27). It means that despite the COVID-19 crisis, Polish voters appear more committed to the idea of thriftiness than other Europeans (Standard Eurobarometer, 2020, pp. 207–209).

The third junior coalition partner that formed a government twice with PiS and SP was Jarosław Gowin's Poland Together–United Right or PRZP (since June 2018 re-registered as the Agreement party). The party was formed in 2013 by Jarosław Gowin, a former PO politician and minister of justice in the PO government (2011–2013). The party is, in many respects, an ideological extension of the PO. This is well illustrated by the stance of PO and PRZP on economic issues. However, the approach of PRZP to the EU differs from the position taken by PO. Nevertheless, within that coalition, PRZP seemed to be the most pro-European but at the same time showed little interest in European affairs. One of the few cases in which Gowin expressed a view on European affairs concerned the 'conditionality' mechanism linking EU budget funds with respect for the rule of law. Thanks to his approach, the radical voice of SP was

muted, and, in the end, the European budget in December 2020 was not vetoed by the Polish prime minister.

The above-mentioned opinions of Poles can be regarded as crucial for political parties forming governments since they are not only principals (accountor) who might pose questions to government members (Woźniakowski et al. 2021: 97) but also agents (accountee), being asked for reports on their actions by voters (Müller, 2000, p. 311). Only when we consider this dual role of political parties can we understand why they vacillate between loyalty to coalition partner(s), voters and fiscal and monetary principles imposed by the European Union.

Research Methods

As was mentioned in the introduction, this paper aims to answer the question of whether participation in government affects political parties' approach to the European Semester. One of the parties under study here (SP) might be called Eurosceptic, which means that it comprises Europhiles who support the general idea of European integration and EU-pessimists who are pessimistic about the development of the EU, as this notion is understood by Kopecký and Mudde (2002: 301–302). Commenting on conclusions drawn from previous research (see Mattilla – Raunio 2006: 6) that political parties are more supportive of the EU than voters, one may argue that SP adopts a 'defiant' strategy, given its leaders are aware of how many Poles stand behind Poland's EU membership. With this in mind, I claim that what we see is a radicalisation in the approaches of junior coalition partners on this question in Poland. The longer the PSL was in coalition, the more pro-European it became, and the longer PiS was in coalition, the more Eurosceptic a position it took.

In this paper, I will utilise four editions of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2010, 2014, 2017, 2019). I will focus on four variables:

- EU_SALIENCE = relative salience of European integration in the party's public stance (CHES 2010, CHES 2014, CHES 2017, CHES 2019), 0 stands for European Integration is of no importance, and 10 for European Integration is of great importance,
- EU_BENEFIT = position of the party leadership on whether COUNTRY has benefited (CHES 2010, CHES 2014), 1 stands for benefited, 2 = Neither benefited nor lost, 3 = Not benefited,
- EU_BUDGETS = position of the party leadership on EU authority over member states' economic and budgetary policies (CHES 2014, CHES 2017, CHES 2019), 1 stands for strongly opposes and 7 for strongly favours.

Unfortunately, these data are not complete in relation to this research. It means that SP and PRZP were not analysed separately in CHES 2017 and CHES 2019; data exist only for Law and Justice. However, there are data for SP from CHES 2014. According to these data, SP was more extreme than PiS in its stance against

the EU, and certainly, this difference was not only maintained but also intensified over time. Regarding PRZP, I would say they did not change their stance.

As previous studies have shown, European matters are, in most cases, the subject of debates in parliamentary committees instead of being discussed during plenary parliamentary sessions (Raunio 2009: 320). As much is true also in the Polish case, in which the European Semester was jointly debated in the parliamentary committees on European Union Affairs as well as Economics and Public Finance (5/06/2014, 23/04/2015, 27/05/2015, 13/04/2016, 9/06/2016, 21/04/2017, 7/06/2017, 11/04/2018, 14/06/2018, 11/04/2019, 18/07/2019) and by the European Union Affairs Committee (22/07/2020, 9/12/2020). I will discuss minutes from these debates in the next part of this paper but will consider only those in which PRZP or SP members participated.

Junior coalition parties in Poland: facilitators or inhibitors of the European Semester

Coalitions, actors and the attitude to the European Union

In this part of my paper, I will focus on the role of junior coalition partners in the implementation of the European Semester. Before analysing the collected data, it is useful to refer to the relative weight of the junior coalition party, a concept borrowed from Nicole Bolleyer, who used it in the context of small-party analysis. While operationalising this term, she differentiated between the pre-formation and governing coalition contexts (2007: 122). During the first stage, when the coalition is being negotiated, a party's political weight depends on the number of coalition alternatives, the certainty the coalition will form a government, the demonstrability of each actor's bargaining power and the predictability of the formation process. After a coalition is formed, parties' individual weights might stem from the costs of potential alternative alliances, the gains that resulted from the coalition forming and the *modus operandi* of the coalition in government.

Despite the easy delineation of the borders between the pre-formation and coalition phases in party life, in practice, they are mutually interdependent. This means that, for instance, the gains of the junior coalition party, understood as the number of government posts allocated, are a result of its weight during the formation stage. Moreover, the leverage of a political party during the bargaining process is also a consequence of its efficiency in satisfying the expectations of the electorate previously, also as a junior coalition partner. Detailed data describing both contexts are displayed in table 1 and explained below.

Table 1 (below) describes both senior and junior coalition parties. I have incorporated the former as well since it would not be possible to understand the weight, political strategies and stance of the junior coalition party in the absence of the whole. In other words, the interpretation of these data is impos-

sible unless their relative significance can be observed. This approach is also reflected in the content of other tables in my paper.

Table 1: Junior coalition parties at formation and coalition stages in Poland 2007–2019

Political Party	PSL	PSL	SP	SP	PRZP	PRZP
Party family	Agrarian	Agrarian	Right-wing	Right-wing	Conservative	Conservative
LRECON	3.47	3.47	3.37	3.37	6.67	6.67
Election Date	2007-10-19	2011-10-09	2015-10-25	2019-10-13	2015-10-25	2019-10-13
Investiture date	2007-11-16	2011-11-18	2015-11-16	2019-11-15	2015-11-16	2019-11-15
Seat share	6.74	6.09	1.96	3.91	1.7	3.91
ENPP	2.9	3	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.8
BPI	0.1667	0.0909	0.023256	0.038983	0.023256	0.038983
GPP	15.79	15	8.33	8.67	8.33	8.67
Ministries controlled by the party	Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	Ministry of Justice, Minister without portfolio	Ministry of Justice, Minister without portfolio	Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Digitization (recommended by the party)	Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Development
Coalition partner family	con	con	con	con	con	con
Senior coalition partner	PO	PO	PiS	PiS	PiS	PiS
Type of coalition	minimum winning	minimum winning	minimum winning	minimum winning	minimum winning	minimum winning
Reason for government termination	elections	voluntary resignation of the prime minister	voluntary resignation of the prime minister	incumbent	voluntary resignation of the prime minister	incumbent
Coalition partner LRECON	6.29	6.29	3.05	3.05	3.05	3.05

Source: Author's analysis based on www.parl.gov.eu, <https://whogoverns.eu>; BPI calculated with the help of a computer algorithm for voting power analysis: <https://homepages.warwick.ac.uk/~ecaae/>, LRECON based on CHES 2014.

LRECON – political parties' stance on economic issues (left – right)

BPI – Banzhaf Power Index (answering in how many minimal winning coalitions a given party can be regarded as a critical partner, which means being essential to forming a winning coalition)

ENPP – effective number of parliamentary parties

GPP – government positions' percentage

Regarding the formation stage, both parties were certain they would be invited to the coalition. From the very beginning, PiS considered SP (a coalition partner during parliamentary elections) as a prospective member of its governing coalition. Cooperation between PO and the PSL might be regarded as only a little bit less certain. From both a mathematical point of view but also because of previous cooperation in regional assemblies after the 2006 local elections, the two were expected to form a coalition government (Banaś – Zieliński, 2015, 89). Theoretically, PO could have set up a coalition with SLD. However, this party was the main successor of the former communist party and isolated by other political actors (Sula, 2008, p. 324), which was definitely problematic for PO in 2007 since it has conservative (and anti-communist) members in its ranks. Additionally, the image of the SLD was sullied by corruption scandals between 2001 and 2005, the most famous being the so-called ‘Rywin’s gate’ affair (Grabowska 2017: 263). Therefore, it can be argued that there was no alternative to a PO–PSL government. However, nominally other alliances could be established. All these potential coalitions can be identified with parliamentary party representation data between 2007 and 2020, as displayed in table 2.

Table 2: Results of parliamentary elections 2007-2011

	Election results (seat shares)			
	2007	2011	2015	2019
PiS	36.1	34.1	47.6	43.3
SP	–	–	1.9	3.9
Porozumienie (in 2015 as PRJG)	–	–	1.7	3.9
PO	45.4	45	30	29.1
SLD (in 2007 as LiD)	11.5	5.9	–	10.6
PSL	6.7	6.1	3.5	6.5
No	–	–	6.1	–
Kukiz’15	–	–	9.1	–
Ruch Palikota	–	8.7	–	–
Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość	–	–	–	2.4
German minority	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2

Source: pkw.gov.pl, parl.gov.org and author’s calculation

The political context I have depicted above can make the data presented in table 1 more understandable and the disproportionality between seat shares and coalition payoffs fully justifiable. It is worth mentioning that the percentage of

portfolios allocated in all cases was at least twice that of seat shares in the parliament, with the lowest proportional difference in the case of the PSL in 2007. The comparison between Banzhaf power index data and portfolios allocation does not allow me to draw such unequivocal conclusions. Transforming BPI values into percentages, it can be seen that the *a priori* power of PSL in 2007 (16.67 %) was bigger than the relative number of positions in government that this party controlled (15.79). In the remaining cases, values of BPI are lower than coalition payoffs, and the results also indicate that the mathematical *a priori* weight of parties is higher than the number of parliamentary seats, except for SP in the 2019 parliamentary elections (3.91 % of seat shares vs 3.9 % of BPI).

Hence, while referring to the criteria proposed by Bolleyer, it can be argued that junior coalition partners could feel comfortable in terms of the likelihood of becoming a coalition partner since alternative scenarios were less probable due to animosity between parliamentary groups. Furthermore, it can be said that the coalition formation process was quite predictable and coalition potential of all partners apparent since apart from the case of 2007 elections, it should be remembered that a pre-electoral coalition between PO and PSL was set in 2011 (Antoszewski – Koziarska 2019: 355) and in the 2015 and 2019 elections, SP politicians were elected from the list of its future coalition partner. As a result, junior partners were regarded as irreplaceable during the coalition phase and were assumed to be satisfied with portfolio allocation. The only aspect not determined at this stage was the character of inter-party cooperation within the future coalition. As it turned out, junior partners being aware of their weight meant they could efficiently promote their stance in the process of coalitional decision-making.

The early cooperation between PO and the PSL nicely illustrates the influence of junior partners and their ability to frustrate the senior partners' agenda. For many years, the PSL's political strategy was based on maintaining clientelist links with its supporters (Sula 2004: 389–390) and protecting the *status quo* in the Polish insurance system, which meant maintaining farmers' privileges. Here, farmers were required to contribute much less to the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund than 'ordinary' workers to the mainline Social Insurance Institution for the same benefits (Sula 2008: 318). The PSL successfully frustrated PO attempts to dismantle the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund. This distinct difference between PO and PSL (more broadly interpreted as the PSL's commitment to promoting farmers' interests) is reflected in the LRECON values presented in table 1.

Facing the problem of junior coalition parties' stances towards the European Semester, I assumed that it might be operationalised as the party leadership's approach to EU authority over member states' economic and budgetary policies, as it is presented in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. This question was dedicated to party leadership. In this context, it is worth mentioning that, according to

Table 3: Polish governmental parties stance to European issues 2010 – 2019.

Political Party	2010				2014			
	EU POSITION	EU SALIENCE	EU BENEFIT	EU BUDGETS	EU POSITION	EU SALIENCE	EU BENEFIT	EU BUDGETS
PSL	5.13	3.07	1.33		5.47	6.18	1.06	4.12
SP	-	-	-		3	5.23	2.07	2.07
PO	6.6	3.73	1		6.53	8.41	1	5.23
PiS	2.93	3.2	2.07		3.82	5.68	1.59	2.35
PRJG	-	-	-	-	4	6.23	1.625	2.69

the CHES studies, Polish political parties were not very much divided about European integration. However, it appeared there was a gap between political parties' position and their leaders to the EU authority over member states' economic and budgetary policies in general. As much was found in CHES reports and the results of analysis of parliamentary commission' minutes. The latter revealed that politicians tended to be less critical about the recommendations detailed for Poland than they were determined to fight for symbolic economic independence. There might be two possible interpretations of it. Firstly, politicians might neglect the power of the European Semester. Secondly, they are more technocratic in respect to economic issues. Further comparative research might shed new light on it.

Before commenting on attitudes toward the European Semester, I would like to outline political leaders' perceptions of European integration. I recognise this issue as a prerequisite for further approval of European Union policies. It appeared to be particularly important in the case of SP, which in 2020 challenged the EU's authority to examine its member states' compliance with the rule of law. As I mentioned before, the crisis was overcome since the SP opinion was marginalised within the governing coalition. However, it should be remembered that SP was responsible for entangling the Polish government in the struggle with European institutions after its flagship judicial reform was introduced after 2015. As a result, judicial independence in Poland attenuated.

While interpreting data displayed in table 3, it can be found that the PSL attitude to the European Union evolved and became more enthusiastic in all

2017				2019			
EU POSITION	EU SALIENCE	EU BENEFIT	EU BUDGETS	EU POSITION	EU SALIENCE	EU BENEFIT	EU BUDGETS
5.81	6		3.89	5.14	6.05		3.62
-	-		-	-	-		-
6.81	8.76		5.10	6.67	8.76		5.12
3.1	6.28		2	2.95	6.14		2.11
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: CHES 2010, CHES 2014, CHES 2017, CHES 2019

dimensions. It is worth reiterating that before EU accession and joining the government, this party occupied moderately Eurosceptic positions and was still less pro-European than its partners afterwards. Hence, it is highly likely that sharing responsibility for government policies is a factor that affected this party's further evolution in a pro-European direction. Consequently, it turned out that after going back to the opposition ranks, the PSL became a little bit less pro-European, especially if EU authority over economic and budgetary policies is considered. There are two possible explanations for it. Firstly, national policy responsibility meant the PSL became (temporarily) more dedicated to commitments and alliances formed at the elite level. Secondly, as PiS set the tone for political discourse (i.e., making it more anti-European) and sought to woo PSL voters, the PSL responded, in turn modifying its previous approach.

As I mentioned, data collected within CHES 2017 and CHES 2019 research did not recognise SP and PRZP autonomy. Therefore, I can only extrapolate the information on these two from their activity, political choices and data collected for PiS. Given this lack of data, I can point to the SP initiative to seize political control over the judiciary, which pushed the Polish government toward conflict with the European institutions. The interpretation of SP's motivation can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the conflict was a side-effect of domestic policy objectives—namely, establishing executive control over the judiciary. On the other hand, being Eurosceptic, the SP might have been seeking to undermine the EU's position in Poland, for which domestic reforms might be considered a tool. Regardless of the SP's intention, the Polish government

was politically marginalised within the EU because of the conflict over rule of law concerns.

The SP's anti-EU stance is well-reflected in the data presented in table 3. This political grouping has been the most Eurosceptic party participating in coalition formation in Poland after 2010. It refers to all dimensions that might be used to illustrate a stance toward the European Union. Unfortunately, there are no data for SP in 2017 and 2019. However, I contend that using PiS data as a reference point for SP should not be seen as malpractice. Given that the programmatic evolution of PiS and SP went in the same direction and in parallel and led to the strengthening of both parties' Eurosceptic attitudes, it can be said that SP retained its status as the most reluctant grouping to cooperate within the EU.

The analysis of the minutes from parliamentary committees

The analysis of minutes from joint debates of the European Union Affairs Committee, Economic Committee and Public Finance Committee will enable us to acquire knowledge on political parties' approach to the European Semester. In general, a committee is a forum for discussing opinions, which means that debates might reveal a difference between coalition partners if represented in these committees.

The earliest publicly-available minutes are from the three committees' joint debates (European Union Affairs Committee, Economic Committee and Public Finance Committee) on 5 June 2014. The meeting was chaired by Agnieszka Pomaska, a PO parliamentarian and the head of the European Union Affairs Committee. The PSL, the junior coalition partner, was represented by Ilona Antoniszyn-Klik, Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Economy. However, it is worth mentioning that political party affiliation was not a criterion for taking part in committee work. The PSL representative was present because she was the head of the relevant ministry, which the PSL happened to control.

The meeting was attended by Janusz Lewandowski, the European Commissioner for Budget and Administration, appointed as a commissioner by the PO-PSL government in 2009. Antoniszyn-Klik criticised the European Commission for providing the committee with only one day to comment on the Council's recommendations. The short timescales made the whole process non-transparent—it was impossible to discuss the recommendations with social partners and communicate and explain them to the public. The PSL politician also condemned the recommendation that the KRUS be incorporated into the ZUS, claiming that the former is based on the principle of solidarity and not on income level. The conflict between senior and junior coalition partners appeared during discussions on 27 May 2015. Again, the Council's recommendation was related to the KRUS and was supported by PO politicians and opposed by PSL deputies.

Representatives of junior coalition partners in the next term of the parliament did not attend all parliamentary committee meetings dedicated to the European Semester. The difference between both parties (i.e., SP and PRZP) were mirrored in positions that they adopted during debates on the European Semester. It is worth mentioning that none of the politicians from SP participating in committee meetings was a government member. In contrast, attendees representing PRZP in committee debates on the European Semester were delegates of the government. The first meeting attended by the Undersecretary in the Ministry of Development, Jadwiga Emilewicz from PRZP, was held on 13 April 2016. She emphasised that the government's goals were congruent with the long-term goals of the European Commission. Besides, she highlighted the necessity of 'inclusive economic growth' and the gradual approach to the KRUS.

The next meeting during which SP and PRZP deputies presented their view on the European Semester was held on 7 June 2017. They both expressed their doubts about the Commission concerns regarding the *rule of law*. However, while discrediting this issue, PRZP's deputy underlined the importance of economic growth, and an SP parliamentarian (Tadeusz Cymański) stressed the social benefits stemming from over 500 programmes addressing families with children. The same strategy (emphasis on social benefits) an SP deputy adopted during the meeting on 11 April 2019, when he did not refer to any of the economic recommendations at all. A gradual approach to the KRUS issue was also underlined by Undersecretary at the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Technology on 14 June 2018. Besides, he interpreted the recommendations of the EU as 'friendly advice'.

The rule of law problem was discussed during the meeting on 18 July 2019 and 9 December 2020. However, during the 2019 meeting undersecretary at the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Technology (member of P) pointed out the lack of recommendations related to the rule of law since they were removed from the draft prepared by the European Commission; the MP from SP portrayed Poland as a democratic country that organised elections and claimed that there was no freedom in the state unless social problems were solved and the governing coalition made a quantum leap in this respect. The last meeting was organised only by the European Union Affairs Committee. I mentioned already that the principles of the rule of law were discussed in December 2020. However, there were no MPs from junior coalition partners, and the only member of P was the secretary who represented the Ministry of Economic Development, Labour and Technology. She was focused on presenting the government stance to the Directive of the European Parliament and the Council on adequate minimum wages in the European Union and confirmed the government would promote at the EU level the solution giving members states the autonomy in shaping the minimum level wage. However, this was not a debate on the European Semes-

ter organised regularly each year. The one dedicated to the European Semester was held on 22 July 2020, but none of the P or SP MPs attended this meeting.

In conclusion, it is worth highlighting that PRZP and SP parliamentarians participated in only eight out of thirteen meetings I analysed. Interestingly, the European Union Affairs Committee was the sole parliamentary committee addressing the European Semester. It is hard to predict if the parliamentary majority decided to replace the previous procedure that also involved the Economic Committee and Public Finance Committee working together with the European Union Affairs Committee. We might reason that it was not incidental—this change was introduced and justified at the parliamentary term commencing in Autumn of 2019, right after the latest elections. Furthermore, we can assume the debate has been put on the back-burner since the European Union Affairs Committee's chair was assigned to an opposition MP for the first time.

Discussion

In this paper, I have dealt with the junior coalition partners' stance on the European Semester in Poland. Operationalisation of this problem required a combination of political parties' views on the state's economic policy and their stance toward the European Union since the European Semester was perceived by some politicians (PRZP and SP) as interfering in a policy domain ideally coordinated exclusively at the national level. This approach was demonstrated in 2017 after the European Council underlined the importance of the rule of law and judicial independence in the context of willingness to increase the investment rate. Therefore, the attitude to the European Semester might be interpreted as a part of the state's foreign policy. This approach was employed in previous studies dedicated to analysing junior coalition party views on European integration in the UK (Oppermann – Brummer 2014: 566). In their article, the authors elaborated on types of coalition arrangements for foreign policy. The effect of junior partners that did not control the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on foreign policy was labelled '*corrective and moderating*'. These categories suit very well the status of Polish junior coalition partners' influence on the government position to the European Semester or even this is an overstatement.

It seems that the European Semester was recognised by all junior coalition partners as 'friendly advice', as one PRZP politician called it. It is worth emphasising that such advice was always overlooked by the junior partner when it was not in line with the party's view. The best illustration of it would be PSL discord over the recommendation to reform the system of insurances. Regarding other disagreements between coalition partners related to the EU, it is worth mentioning SP pressure on Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki not to approve the EU budget in December 2020. SP's leader started blackmailing the PM, claiming his party was ready to leave the governmental coalition. Finally, they

brokered a compromise, and the coalition survived. However, SP essentially undertook 'rogue behaviour', a term used by Greene (2019, p. 801) to describe the use of devolved ministerial authority by a junior party to take a decision without collective cabinet agreement. In this case, the 'rogue' behaviour was the junior partner announcing its position to force the PM's hand during a press conference. These 2020 tensions indicate the shift in the status of PiS as a senior partner from the 2005–2007 coalition government. Back then, the party, led by Jarosław Kaczyński, managed to deprive its coalition partners of any influence on European policy (Taggart – Szczerbiak 2013: 29).

These results need to be interpreted with caution since I dealt only with the case of Poland within a limited time frame. Furthermore, the context was quite exceptional also because PiS and its political camp managed to form quite a programmatically coherent government for the first time since 1989. Thus, further studies on junior coalition partners attitude to the European Semester in other countries is needed.

Conclusions

There is some evidence that the European Semester was seen as a mandatory administrative procedure comprised of several formal steps. Thus it did not lead to serious conflicts between coalition partners. This kind of depoliticisation saw approval for the mechanism grow over time, even though each junior party opposed or neglected selected recommendations of the European Council depending on the salience of particular issues in their programme. PSL's strategy of blocking insurance reform and SP and PRZP overlooking rule of law concerns might illustrate the former approach. While representing the ministry responsible for partial coordination of the European Semester in Poland, junior parties' representatives managed to weaponise Council recommendations by underscoring how they overlapped with the government goals. It can be said that regardless of their ideology, junior coalition partners could defend their positions when needed, and detailed recommendations were less controversial for them than the authority of the EU over the national budget, except in the case of the PSL's stance on insurance reform.

As it was suggested in the beginning of the paper, I recognised junior coalition partners in Poland as parties that combined the strategies of *policy-* and *office-seeking*. However, it can be argued that PSL while in government was the only junior coalition partner who succeeded in opposing revolutionary reform of the insurance system, whereas SP in a critical moment was forced to follow the instruction of the prime minister, which meant it could be recognised as more *office-seeking*. Considering this classification, we may say that similarly to PSL, PRZP contrive to combine *office* and *policy-seeking* strategy.

The conclusion that could well be drawn is that, in the Polish case, the negative approach to European integration was not translated into a matching attitude vis-à-vis the European Semester. Then, the question that might be addressed is whether the European Semester can be considered as a mechanism that does not imply significant consequences or whether right-wing populists employ this technocratic approach in respect of economic issues only. The problem seems to be even more significant in light of the EU recovery plan, designed as a response to post-COVID-19 challenges.

It can be assumed that further studies might shed some light on junior coalition parties' strategies towards the European Semester and its role in putting more emphasis on economic integration and coordination within the EU. Besides, data collected within the CHES project offer the possibility of making comparisons that can modify the conclusions drawn while studying the Polish case.

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REVIEW ESSAY

Democracy revisited? Prospects of (liberal) democracy (not only) in the East-Central Europe¹

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Abstract: *Scholarly debate about the prospects of democracy have undergone a fundamental change in the last three decades. While the period of the 1990s might be distinguished by extensive optimism, in the 2000s we can observe a distinct change towards a more restrained perception. Furthermore, the last decade might be evaluated as pessimistic in the social sciences on the grounds of economic recession after 2008 as well other crisis in an economic, societal and political senses. The rather distinctive terms used for the expression of doubts about the pro-democratic development and consolidation, such as 'semi-consolidated', 'new' or 'young' democracy, or de-democratisation, were replaced with more dramatic expressions such as illiberal democracy, democratic backsliding, hybrid, regime, soft dictatorship and 'the light that failed', as Krastev described the recent image of East-Central Europe in an almost dystopic manner. While in the 1990s the Slovak version of democratura – Mečiarism – was perceived as the exception, in the late 2010s populist neo-illiberal regimes became the dominant shape of regimes in (East)Central Europe. This review essay presents three recent analyses of the democratic backsliding and state capture (not only) in East-Central Europe and frames this presentation into the more extensive literature review.*

Key Words: *democracy; populism; illiberal democracy; democratic backsliding; state capture; clientelist party; East-Central Europe*

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On 8 and 9 October 2021, the coalition of two electoral alliances (Spolu/Together created by three liberal-conservative parties and PirSTAN formed by the Pirate Party and the Mayors and Independent Candidates movement) succeeded in the Czech parliamentary elections and rather surprisingly defeated the incumbent Prime Minister and political entrepreneur Andrej Babiš. Furthermore, the two left-wing parties that supported PM Babiš and his business-firm party ANO 2011, the Social Democrats and Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, did not exceed the 5 per cent electoral threshold. The departure of A. Babiš to the opposition and adieu of the radical Communist Party that left the parliament after 100 years arouses a strong wave of optimism among (some) political scientists as well as political commentators in the West as well as in anti-populist circles in East-Central Europe (ECE). The coordinated work of both 'anti-Babiš' alliances was presented as the example for the Hungarian as well as Polish opposition and generally as (another) sign of populism weakening after the defeat of US President Donald Trump.

Indeed, the optimism might quickly turn over, should it be after the spring parliamentary elections in Hungary where the unified opposition from radical right to radical left will try to defeat the role-model of national-conservative populism Viktor Orbán. Or with the next presidential elections in Czechia, organised no later than in the beginning of 2023, where Andrej Babiš will appear as the favourite. Actually, the populist Bulgarian President Rumen Radev, building his popularity on anti-corruption, anti-Western and pro-Russian stances, obtained a two-thirds majority in the direct election in late November 2021. All this shows that the celebrative addresses are understandable regarding politicians, but rather premature.

In this review essay I will assess three important and interesting contributions to the debate about the quality of democracy, democracy backsliding and related topics. Firstly, the book *Democracy Against Liberalism. Its Rise and Fall* written by Aviezer Tucker, a recognised political scientist and philosopher teaching at Harvard University that spent and spends long research stays in ECE, primarily Czechia. Such insights into ECE's politics as well as into the recent US affairs, but above all his excellent orientation in the philosophical debates on democracy present a proper starting point for his newest book (Tucker 2020). As the second book for the review essay I have chosen the work of Hungarian political scientist Attila Ágh *Declining Democracy in East-Central Europe. The Divide in the EU and the Emerging Hard Populism*. Ágh is among the most prominent ECE political scientists, his reflection of the ECE as the 'zone of big transformation' became one of the symbols of new comparative politics of the region. In his timely book (Ágh 2019) he resents the de-democratisation and democratic backsliding in (some) ECE nations after 2008. Last but not least, I present the recent book of Czech political scientist Michal Klíma entitled *Informal Politics in Post-Communist Europe, Political Parties, Clientelism*

and State Capture. This case study is embedded within the broader theoretical framework presenting the specific topology of post-Communist political actors and creation of a specific type of political regimes – in Ágh’s (2019: 41) words the ‘politico-neoliberal hybrid’.

The three books present different perspectives (global insight, focus on ECE within the European architecture and a case study embedded in the theoretical debate about political partisanship and party models). But it’s also important what they have in common – namely the analytical quality resting in excellent knowledge as well as the rather positive tendency building up the routes from the problematic situation towards the stabilisation of democratic regimes (not only) in ECE.

Tucker focuses on the recent wave of illiberalism, presenting the term ‘populist neo-illiberalism’ as the key word for the analysis. As he stresses we face the ‘onset of populist-driven neo-illiberalism that gradually deconstructs institutional checks and balances that has taken place in a dazzlingly broad scope of countries of entirely different histories and political cultures. It started in weakly liberal post-totalitarian democracies when populist illiberals won democratic elections in Hungary and Poland’ (Tucker 2020: 2). Other visible and discussed examples are Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, Jair Bolsonaro and Austrian right-wing parties.

As the main axiom for his argument he stresses that ‘liberalism and democracy are quite independent’ (Tucker 2020: 4) and that historically democracy was only in minor cases supplemented by liberalism (‘most democracies have not been liberal’ /Tucker 2020: 6/). As examples of liberal authoritarian regimes, he later presents the Austro-Hungarian Empire after 1848, and from recent regimes Singapore,² South Korea and Taiwan – both lastly mentioned with the tendency towards liberalism (Tucker 2020: 21).

He stresses the existence of ‘three *discrete* and *continuous* rather than *binary* political dimensions that stretch between opposing poles’: democracy and authoritarianism; liberalism and absolutism (illiberalism); and technocracy and populism. In his opinion, this *bikini* concept presents a more efficient tool for the classification of political regimes than the unidimensional and Manichean mechanism democracy vs. non-democracy. The specific combinations of the three mentioned dimensions form regimes in modalities that might be analysed with greater precision (Tucker 2020: 5).

Analysing the difference between liberalism and absolutism, Tucker (2020:7) notes: ‘Liberalism can co-exist with democratic, authoritarian, and other re-

2 In another place in the book, he falsifies the comparison between the illiberal regimes in Singapore and Hungary, stressing that Singapore as prosperous technocratic liberal authoritarianism cannot be equated with populist neo-illiberal democracy in Hungary, as V. Orbán suggests. ‘Singapore is rich and attracts immigrants, Hungary is the opposite. It is among the five poorest members of the EU... and its skilled and young workers try to move to more liberal countries’ (Tucker 2020: 34–35).

gimes, but not with totalitarianism that can accept no institutional or legal limits. In modern societies, liberalism is manifest in the rule of law enforced by independent branches of government, such as the judiciary... *Absolutism* is the opposite of liberalism. It eschews checks and balances on the scope, size, or power of the government. Absolutism can be authoritarian as well as democratic.' As typical examples of liberal/independent institutions, institutional religion, free and independent media, education system and a central bank are mentioned at the national level, and the network of international treaties implementing the World Bank, International Monetary Fund or the European Union (cf. Söderbaum – Spandler – Pacciardi 2021). The populist politicians tend to dismantle and control such institutions. Furthermore, they prefer unmediated personalised relationships with unorganised and unstructured followers. Here the (post)modern electronic and social media (Ágh talks about the 'invasion of the "fake media" industry' /Ágh 2019: 200/) present key instruments in the hands of the followers of ancient demagogues, dictators and tribunes of the plebs (Tucker 2020: 7–8).

'Neo-illiberal democracy attempts to gradually bring about the *evisceration*, or *deconsolidation* if not *deconstruction* of liberal institutions.... The "drama" of neo-illiberal democracy consists of permanent war between the democratically elected illiberal executive and the liberal institutions designed to curb it powers, the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, the Central Bank, independent mass media, civil society, and non-governmental organizations' (Tucker 2020: 46). Such destructive activities against the liberal institutions were further strengthened during the coronavirus pandemic; Tucker (2020: 31–33) specifically depicts the attack on the independence of the judiciary in the case of Israel and Prime Minister Netanyahu, as well as the absolute dominance of executive power in Hungary. 'Democratically elected neo-illiberal governments conduct a war of attrition, not a blitz... Since the changes are piecemeal, each one may seem small, innocuous, and insignificant. Their meaning becomes obvious when put together' (Tucker 2020: 46–47). In this sense, Ágh (2019: 184), comparing the democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland, talks about the 'masterplan' of hard populism for demolishing the democratic order. 'The similarities between Poland and Hungary are striking in two respects. First, they have applied the same masterplan to demolish liberal democracy through an authoritarian drift by the tyranny of the majority... The basic target of the illiberal turn is to blur the boundaries between the executive and judiciary powers' (Ágh 2019: 222).

Liberalism as ideology and political praxis was not embedded in ECE where we can observe the transitions without liberal institutions and civil society. 'Very fast transitions from apparent liberal democracy to neo-illiberalism indicate that the liberal roots had not sunk deep into the democratic soil before the neo-illiberal whirlwind swept them away' (Tucker 2020: 89). Here the author stresses again the role of independent liberal institutions that must not

succumb to the current political majorities, but must develop independently. Furthermore, he stresses that the liberal institutions cannot be constructed by elections (Tucker 2020: 90). As other authors also stress, the socialisation role of the EU was not fulfilled in the case of liberal institutions: ‘External Europeanization has only scratched the surface in the ECE region’ and since the 2000s we can observe the return or development of ‘Potemkin democracies’ (Ágh 2019: 33–34). The impact of Europeanisation was also definitely weakened by informal politics and old-new networks (Ágh 2019: 35).

Reflecting the tradition of ancient Greek philosophy and the moralist ‘school’ in the 19th century Tucker presents the tripartite division of motivations (dimensions of ‘soul’) between *passions*, *interests* and *reason* and stresses the absolutism–passions nexus: ‘Liberal institutions... act as that trusted friend, to constrain political passions. *Neo–illiberalism* lifts such constraints to permit the politics of passions, populism’ (Tucker 2020: 12). As populists must promise immediate gratification they are often self-destructive, above all in macro-economics, as the example of Venezuela clearly portrays. Indeed ‘moderate levels of populism can be sustainable’ (Tucker 2020: 15).

Tucker criticises the usual anti-elitist concept of populism as too narrow, not being able to reflect apparent plutocrats such as Berlusconi, Babiš and Trump (Tucker 2020: 9). In his perspective, technocracy is the opposite political pole to populism. Indeed, such a general notion is not supplemented by the ‘exceptions’ from this ‘rule’. If we consider for example Czechia and the public performance of President M. Zeman and Prime Minister A. Babiš, the populist politics is combined with the idealisation of the rule of experts (not partisans, but professionals). Similarly, Polish Prime Minister M. Morawiecki is often reflected as a technocrat. Indeed, I fully agree with the conclusion that ‘technocrats are just as corruptible as everybody else’ (Tucker 2020: 17). The same conclusion might also be found by Ágh (2019: 201) declaring that the ‘ECE political classes have organized a serving intelligentsia in their clientele as loyal experts within the government sector and around’.

Following the concept of the ‘tyranny of the majority’ introduced by Alexis de Tocqueville, and more generally the criticism against the un-civic democracy,³ Tucker brings the argument against the plebiscite democracy. ‘The first universal free and fair elections in human history, still limited by gender to males but, for the first time, not limited to a class by property prerequisites, or to members of particular ethnic groups, took place in France in 1848. The result was the election of Louis Napoleon as president of the Second Republic. Within half a year he abolished the democracy and the freedom of press... These results of the first universal male suffrage led the liberal Mill and Tocqueville to have second thoughts about extending the franchise to the poor’ (Tucker 2020:

3 ‘An educated citizenship is the “infrastructure” of democracy’ (Tucker 2020: 76).

42–43). As Klíma (2020: 161) stresses the direct democracy tools presented as a potential remedy by the populist politicians include the dangerous potential for even greater polarisation of societies. ‘A problem emerges if *direct democracy is placed in opposition to representative democracy*, or if direct democracy poses as *the highest form of democracy...* Populists, Machiavellians and preachers of political correctness may hold up referenda as the highest democratic mechanism in order to express the will of the people. However, within the conditions of a polarised atmosphere, it may constitute a detonator within the framework of representative democracy’ (Klíma 2020: 161–164). In Tucker’s perspective, plebiscites ‘oversimplify complex issues and appeal to the raw passions of the voters’ (Tucker 2020: 151). This also happened in the case of Brexit when ‘the decision to hold a neo-illiberal democratic plebiscite that would bypass the ancient British institutions and norms was prime minister David Cameron’s “gambler’s ruin”’ (Tucker 2020: 151).

As important ‘new’ tool for the populist neo-illiberals Tucker suggests new media and ‘unmediated politics’: ‘New information technologies, mostly social media, dismantled the barriers to direct communications from leader to followers. Social media reconstructed the ancient public square in cyber space, thereby weakening the power of the press to constrain politics’ (Tucker 2020: 58). Furthermore, ‘the populist media gives narrative form to the passions, most notably fear’ (Tucker 2020: 61). As the author stresses elsewhere in the book: ‘Populism is a political reflection of existential fear’ (Tucker 2020: 159). Among the characteristics of populist neo-illiberals is the ‘telegraphic language’ (‘ungrammatical sentences came to convey anti-elitist authenticity and honesty’ /Tucker 2020: 63/, instrumentalised lie (‘Blatant populist lying demonstrates the strong passions that generate credibility among those who trust their passions more than their senses and reason’ /Tucker 2020: 67/ and ‘return’ from logos to myth (‘Historically, before television, the narratives that contained impossible contradictions were *myths*. In the modern world we rationalize our myths’ /Tucker 2020: 69/).

In Tuckers view, many democracies oscillate between liberal democracy and democratic absolutism – or illiberal democracy – that suffer from the absence of robust liberal institutions. In this ‘winner takes all’ system we observe the continuous changes of law based on the current majority. Furthermore, the temporary majority can also change ‘the rules of democratic elections to impose the perpetual role of a minority’ (Tucker 2020: 21). This oscillation is even more visible regarding the new democracies in ECE, as far as post-Communist states inherited the absence of rule of law and checks and balances, as well as a weak civil society. ‘The post-Communist transplanting of liberal democracy appeared deceptively easy because it encountered no resistance, but it has no liberal social foundations either’ (Tucker 2020: 22). As Cianetti, Dawson, Hanley et al (2019) presume, such a situation produced ‘relatively stable but low-quality-democracy’.

One of the key problems seems to be a weak democratic civic society controlling the elite. 'The cases under consideration (ECE nations – noted by L.C.) seem to have failed to produce democracies in which citizens truly inhabit formal democratic institutions' (Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 4–5). Similarly, Ágh (2019: 17) stresses that 'formal democratization from above has not become genuine democratization from below, such as would be necessary for the ECE population in creating the proper socio-economic conditions of participatory society as a base for mass political participation in the sustainable democratic polity' (Ágh 2019: 17).

Despite the dramatic growth in strength of populist neo-illiberal actors, Tucker rejects the equalisation of the contemporary wave of illiberalism with the 1930s ('current illiberal democracies have no militias and no employed risk loving and not just taking military veterans to man them' /Tucker 2020: 31/). Post WWI democracies were created 'without functioning liberal institutions and liberal-democratic majorities. The majorities did not respect the rights of minorities, and the minorities did not accept the verdicts of the majorities.... The war brutalized a generation of young people from peasant and working backgrounds and then gave them the right to vote... the populist passions associated with ethno-nationalism, and self-destructive economic policies led to the populist self-destruction of all the post-imperial democracies, except for Finland and Czechoslovakia' (Tucker 2020: 44). Today, the situation is different. 'Young men in economic trouble today rely on their parents more than on peers; it is not common for children to form militias with their parents, though some indeed join fringe right-wing groups, especially in Europe' (Tucker 2020: 133).

Observing the situation in some of the Western Balkans countries, with the recent development in Bosnia, one can have serious doubts about this rather positive position. Similarly, I would evaluate Tucker's presumption that the antipathy towards migrants in ECE is not related to xenophobia. When he notes that 'in Poland and the Czech Republic, non-Russian Slavs from other countries are not foreign' (Tucker 2020: 84), he does not reflect the very strong cultural prejudice, for example, against the so-called 'U-s' (Ukrainians) in Czech society. Generally, I share the opinion presented by Klíma (2020: 152, 158–161) that the 'migrant cleavage' after 2015 generated within the politics of fear used by the populist neo-illiberal presents a new and strong mobilisation tool: 'By its explosive nature it generated an atmosphere of mass alarm and thereby hurled into the political arena an emotional wave of patriotism, nationalism and xenophobia'. Securitisation related with the 'tribal atavistic reaction to perceptions of insecurity' (Tucker 2020: 132) produced a new negative quality envisaged in the nativist onset, not only in ECE.

On the other hand, I fully go along with his notion about the economic illiberalism observable in the region. To quote the author: 'Fidesz and PiS in Hungary and Poland reacted against the free market ideology of the transition

away from Communism with subsidies and government patronage' (Tucker 2020: 88). Especially in Hungary we can observe the creation of a new economic oligarchy with a national(ist) background and the 'hybrid regime' in the form of 'some kind of authoritarianism or autarchy' (Ágh 2019: 180). As the Czech historian Jan Křen (2019: 95–96) noted, in Western Europe the democratic politics was developed continually from the market economy, i.e. the economic liberalism was also continually transformed into the political liberalism. In post-Communist Europe, the process was diverse, the democracy has had to create the market. When we assume that ECE's democracy is in backslide, logically also the market was not created properly, i.e. as liberal. One of the characteristics of such economic illiberalism is also the weak entrepreneurial ecosystem and the legacy – and new form – of 'systemic use of informal rules undermining democratic institutions and rule of law' (Dimitrova in Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 16).

Dimitrova reflects here the 'emergence of predatory rent seeking elites' asking if these are 'post-Communist', 'new' or 'mixed', including the new generations of 'post-Communist' elites. Generally, we can observe all possible combinations in ECE – while A. Babiš or R. Fico present the elites with the roots before the transition, V. Orbán surely presents a different case. While Tucker (2020: 90) assumes that 'the new political elites that ruled post-Communist countries for the first post-revolutionary twenty years were mostly technocratic, recruited from the professional classes. When populists were elected to replace technocrats, they began fighting the liberalizing institutions'. In my opinion the reality was and is much more complex and supports the evaluation made by Klíma (2020: 11–12) that the new predatory and informal nomenklatura was born from the communist legacy but also subsequently from the wild post-communist privatisation. It 'permeated into all the pores of the political sphere, the economy and social life in general'.

The economic dimension of de-democratisation presents then only one of the segments of the 'masterplan' or grand strategy 'from state capture to backsliding' in five phases or steps presented by Dimitrova (in Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 26–27): 1) attack on the independence of constitutional courts, high judicial councils, professional civil services; media; 2) changes in formal institutions – the emergence of a new 'middle' class dependent on state jobs distributed by party patronage; 3) attack against the civil society – legal limits on NGO registration and operation, attack and new regulations on the universities and research institutions; 4) strengthening the voter's loyalty with vote buying or (economic) intimidation; 5) beliefs and citizen trust in democracy are undermined, which brings an important part of society into passivity or to the support of authoritarian measures. Here Hanley and Vachudova (in Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 37) stress the interconnectedness of Hungarian Fidesz and Polish Law and Justice parties with the civil society.

If we return to Tucker's book, we have to stress his assumption that the prominent social group prone to the populist and neo-illiberal solutions is the lower middle class. 'Populist neo-illiberal democracy is the manifestation of the *inevitable* revolt of the lower middle classes' (Tucker 2020: 129) but not of 'those who suffer most economically. The poorest of the poor have a strong interest in supporting and expanding the welfare state, not in dismantling its liberal institutions' (Tucker 2020: 136). The strengthening of populism is then related to the high – and unfulfilled – expectations of the (lower) middle class. Let us make here the comparison with one of Ágh's main presumptions regarding the disillusion from democracy in ECE. Ágh (2019: 14) notes the revolution of 'high expectations' when the ECE populations in the 1990s 'expected a Western welfare state overnight'.

Here we can observe the visible paradox linked with the unprecedented economic growth in ECE after 1989. On the other hand, such growth was not distributed 'equally' and important analyses stress the creation of two visible economic (but also cultural/value) components. Ágh (2019:140) concludes here that the 'Central European region has produced well-developed "European" cities and an "Asian" backward countryside, being two worlds apart with different worldviews' (Ágh 2019: 140). The post 1989-transition divided ECE into two subregions, 'the *West of the East* and the *East of the East*, with their basically different and diverging histories. These rich and poor, or Europeanized and de-Europeanized, sub-regions had their long prehistory, but they have been reborn in radically new form since the transformation and post-accession crises, and seriously hit also by the global crisis.... The "West of the East" has produced some kind of Western development with a relative catching up, while the "East of the East" has declined absolutely with its waning competitiveness, high unemployment and worsening standard of living' (Ágh 2019: 53–55). Maybe such an evaluation is too dramatic and exaggerated; on the other hand, in the electoral results we can also observe the continual strengthening of this cleavage or 'relevant political distinctions between globalists and nativists, between supporters of open and closed societies, or between people from "nowhere" and people from "somewhere"' (Tucker 2020: 200). We have in mind the situation of two different worlds within one country, the 'electoral map of Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, completely "partitioned" between the East and West' (Ágh 2019: 56).

Nevertheless, the reasons for the deepening polarisation and de-democratisation are much more complex, including important cultural factors concentrated in the axiological cleavage between the 'liberals' and 'neo-illiberals'. As also Tucker stresses: 'All the countries where neo-illiberals won democratic elections... were theoretically too rich to have had such challenges to democracy.... Obviously, there is no rational economic reason for Norwegian or Danish populist neo-illiberalism. Some suggest welfare anxiety, fear of competition over welfare transfers with poor immigrants' (Tucker 2020: 137). In the tradi-

tion of great cycles in economy, politics or societal development, he observes the recent anti-democratic wave as the set of partial cases integrated into the general phenomenon of democratic backsliding. He stresses the snow-ball effect of populist neo-illiberalism that awoke the 'passionate archaic demons' and 'atavistic mechanism' in the form of a 'vicious cycle of economic decline, breakdown of trade and mobility, economic and political hostilities, possesses the body politics, spreads, and infects the whole world' (Tucker 2020: 131).

As the first impulse for this wave Tucker observes the development in Hungary after 2010 and above all the matter of fact that the EU-leaders missed the opportunity 'to isolate neo-illiberalism once it emerged, pre-empt its contagion, and put pressure to reverse it... Orbán's illiberalism was protected on the EU level by the ideologically proximate Bavarian Christian Democrats' (Tucker 2020: 148–149). Let us specify that Bavarian CSU is Christian-Social, but especially that also other important members of the European People's Party did not respond to the deviation from the (Christian) democratic standards by Fidesz properly and in good time. Nevertheless, the general argument presented by Tucker is correct. Ágh (2019: 219) reflects the passivity of the EU-institution as the 'Juncker paradox' when 'the autocratic and populist elites have been encouraged by the lack of EU reactions to open violations of the EU rules and values'.

Next to Orbán's dismantling of the liberal institutions of Hungary, the British plebiscite on Brexit and Trump's presidential victory present 'three pivotal events' for Tucker (2020: 147). Similarly, Klíma (2020: 5) considers the negative development trajectories and patterns, supplying also the strengthened position of 'two authoritarian powers, Russia and China', in international relations. Ágh (2019, 2021) labels such a situation with the term 'New World Order' produced by a triple (global) crisis. As continued segments of this triple crisis he presents the transition crisis in the 1990s, post-accession crisis in 2000s and global crisis in the 2010s (Ágh 2019: 15).

Thinking about the historical cycles, Tucker logically presents the expected development regarding the fall of populism based on the author, 'populism, by its very nature, is self-destructive. Neo-illiberal politicians elected by populist must play a delicate game to survive' (Tucker 2020: 155). One of the important instruments for survival is the 'tailor-made' distributions of finances: 'For example, the populist in East Europe "bought" constituencies with public funds. The Polish government instituted generous child benefits, while the Czech populist increased the salaries of teachers by 15 percent' (Tucker 2020: 112). Observing the poor economic performance of – for example – the Czech government led by A. Babiš and the tremendous growth of public debt, we can confirm this assumption. Indeed, the neo-illiberal populist regime must not be necessarily replaced by a liberal democratic one!

On the other hand, we must not forget about other types of populist performance strengthening and protecting their position. Along with economic, Tucker

also presents the ‘militaristic’ populist self-destruction (Tucker 2020: 112). On one hand he stresses the repeatedly weak or almost non-existent ideological framework of contemporary populist illiberalism (‘Contemporary populism does not really have a philosophy of history, or even an ideology, because the closest thing it has to an ideology in anti-intellectualism’ /Tucker 2020: 116/). On the other hand, he also – maybe not as insistently as other scholars – stresses the cultural factors, primarily the history politics and culture wars (‘Post-totalitarian societies in Central and Eastern Europe failed to come to terms with their past.... The results are not just the recurrence of repressed and then forgotten populist and illiberal ideologies, movements, policies, and disasters, but also the repetition of tactical mistakes by those who oppose illiberalism but did not learn its history’ /Tucker 2020: 74/). Later he discusses the specific popular types of nostalgia – for example the *Social democratic* ‘to the golden thirty years that followed the Second World War in Europe’ and specifically for ECE the *Mythical* unspecific nostalgia of populist neo-illiberals to some good and great old days. For him ‘this nostalgia is too vacuous to argue against’ (Tucker 2020: 157).

In my opinion, here he does not reflect the situation in the regions accurately. Namely, the mythicisation of the ‘golden age’ and the discourse of national history as the ‘glorious past that never was’ (Ágh 2019: 142) related to the traditional victim and loser-nation syndrome was reinforced in ECE and also plays a very important role in the assertiveness of leading ECE’s populist neo-illiberals. Let us commemorate the ‘legendary’ meeting of V. Orbán and J. Kaczyński in Krynica on 6 September 2016 where ‘they pledged to wage a “cultural counter-revolution” against a “declining West” that allegedly wanted to “eliminate historical identities”’ (Ágh 2019: 211). Furthermore, these European ‘pariahs’ are continually developing their position of trend-setters and role-models – let us stress the cooperation between V. Orbán and M. Salvini. The newest and apparently very ambitious project of the uniting nativist and anti-liberal streams in Europe is the *Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe* presented at the beginning of July 2021. The first place on the list of 16 signatories belongs to J. Kaczyński, while V. Orbán is listed fourth. The Declaration is the essence of the so-called culture counter-revolution and the struggle for ‘Christian’ Europe.

Ágh (2019: 141) reflects this development as ‘fundamental reinterpretation of Europeanness in a conservative-Christian way’ and construction of a polarised Orwellian world where ‘we, Central Europeans represent genuine Europeanness against the declining West’ and ‘the honest new domestic elites protect the European population against external and internal enemies instead of the impotent and parasitic Brussels elite’ (Ágh 2019: 146).

On the other hand, in this sense Tucker is fully correct when he presents the populist leader as the ‘tribune of the plebs’ attacking the political correctness. ‘When a populist politician deliberately and nonchalantly breaks all the codes

of upper-middle-class politeness, he demonstrates to the excluded lower classes that he is on their side, while burning bridges to the elite by performing speech acts that would forever exclude the populist from the polite society' (Tucker 2020: 145). Orbán became the symbol of breaching such codes at the European level, followed recently by a growing group of other European politicians.

Let us present also the remedies Tucker offers for the struggle against the populist neo-illiberalism. As the first – and for me the most problematic – he mentions the Universal Basic Income. Considering myself liberal I cannot accept this tool as 'liberal'. Similarly, I have serious doubts about the attempts to fight against the disinformation and fake news by the legal regulation of social media. Using the metaphor from Ancient Greece, the main question for me is who is going to control the controllers? Furthermore, how and who will decide on the assumed unacceptability of contents? Or to use the opposite logic, who will decide on what is 'true'?

On the other hand, I fully agree with Tucker's emphasis on education, including the historical education: 'Knowledge of history, especially of the nasty parts, is a kind of political inoculation.... Civil mass education must include history, and not just that of the glories of the nation and its grievances against its neighbors, but histories of human folly that should not be repeated' (Tucker 2020: 167). Being rather idealistic, he further presents the idea of 'sentimental education based on Aristotelian rhetoric, philosophy, psychology, and history' that 'may train its students to deal with their passions' (Tucker 2020: 167). Such an idealistic approach is summarised in the notion that education plays the decisive role in the new liberal restoration that 'will need to reimagine this dream of secular, social, and cultural salvation through education' (Tucker 2020: 187).

Among other remedies Tucker mixes such disparate tools as more intensive lustrations and inclusion of the patriots in democratic exile, unlimited geographic mobility ('Free trade without free movement and labor mobility generates disequilibria' /Tucker 2020: 190/)⁴, or more economic and social cohesion in the EU (convergence of salaries etc.). Let us mention in advance that the cohesive and social Europe (European Social Union) presents the main remedy in Ágh's reviewed book (Ágh 2019: 252). Tucker also promotes the proportional electoral systems and 'even better... the *alternative vote*' (Tucker 2020: 196–197). Finally, he returns to the liberal foundations stressing the preference for a small and cooperative state as one of the liberal priorities: 'Liberalism in any real sense wants governments to be small, efficient, and well constrained by independent institutions and civil society' (Tucker 2020: 200). I fully agree with such an inference, but must point out that some of above-mentioned remedies are in conflict with this general expectation.

4 Specifically, he focuses on retirees and the unemployed asking for their unlimited mobility without losing the benefits limited now on the national/domestic area including security (Tucker 2020: 187–190).

Tucker concludes his analysis with the notion that ‘defeating Trump in the 2020 presidential elections... will marginalize neo-illiberals everywhere and generate liberal recognition. A successful liberal presidency will restore the soft power of liberalism and neo-illiberal democracies will implode as the Soviet Empire did’ (Tucker 2020: 203). Indeed, the performance of the Biden administration during the first year in power indicates dramatic problems regarding the “successful performance.’

Let us conclude with the presentation of Ágh’s book focusing on democratic backsliding in ECE (2019). Ágh (2019: 2–4) assumes that the ‘ECE democracy finally collapsed in the 2010s’ and observes the ‘victory of (semi-)authoritarian regime or façade democracies’. Such a situation was caused by a set of reasons reflected as a polycrisis – rollback in Europeanisation, de-Europeanisation and de-democratisation, failure of the catching-up process, socio-economic decline, new core-periphery divide (Ágh 2019: 2–3).

In Europe-wide perspective, the ECE – and above all Central Europe – is historical periphery, dependent on the development in the West and East and mobbing historically in cycles of Westernisation and Easternisation – a state of permanent semi-modernisation (Ágh 2019: 6). He understands the in-between position of Central Europe from the Western perspective – as the periphery of the West. ‘Unlike Eastern Europe, it belonged to the West European civilization accepting Western Christianity and by going through the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment and also the 19th- and 20th-century economic, social, political and cultural transformations in its own particular, controversial and belated way, but with the strong feeling of being part of “Europe”’ (Ágh 2019: 11).

For Ágh, Western elites and media do not understand ECE’s history. ‘Westerners are often surprised by the claims for national sovereignty by the ECE populations, not realizing how young these states are, especially Slovakia and Slovenia’ (Ágh 2019: 7). Furthermore, they do not understand how the national awakening was grounded in the region, i.e. often without visible interconnection with the Enlightenment ideas. So, in the 19th century, ‘the rural and church actors had an important role in the ethnic revival of the autochthonous minorities in the early nation-building processes’ (Ágh 2019: 8). This was also one of the reasons why the return of nativism and populist neo-illiberalism seems to be much easier than in the European West.

Ágh (2019: 4) points to the clear strategy of ECE nations’ elite in the post-accession and more in the post-accession crisis of the 2000s and even more during the global crisis in the 2010s ‘to build up a nativist identity politics by blaming “Brussels” for all the problems in their own countries’. The catching-up process is presented as unsuccessful as far as the old EU member states did not accept the new members as fully equal. The ECE nations became European, but within another Europe than was expected. ‘Basically, the cultural identity in ECE – a firm commitment of ECE populations to being proud European citizens,

which is reflected in history as an attachment to European values – has been in contrast to an alienation from Europe in terms of several EU policies because of the relative failure of the catching-up process within the EU’ (Ágh 2019: 22). Within the concept of differentiated integration, ECE became the ‘Periphery-2’ next to the older ‘Periphery-1 (South)’. The EU-spatial framework also includes two cores – Core-1: West-Continental and Core-2: Nordic EU and ‘the ECE region has become the direct semi-periphery of Core-1’ (Ágh 2019: 44–46). To the negative stances towards the EU/West in the ECE the fact that the region was ‘seriously hit by the global crisis, more seriously than the South’ (Ágh 2019: 116) also has to be figured in. Last but not least, after 2015 the creation of the New World Order led to the desecuritisation of ECE (Ágh 2019: 98).

All this produced a new round of sovereignty-based conflict that ‘has been the long-standing basic frame of ECE political communication, with regular offensives against “enemies”, culminating in a hate campaign during the refugee crisis. In this recent stage the historical trajectory of populism from above with its basically cultural and nativist profile, identity politics gets the upper hand. Paternalistic elite populism has introduced an economic nationalism discourse with a strong anti-EU rhetoric’ (Ágh 2019: 121). Such conclusions are fully in scope with other recent observations (cf. Söderbaum – Spandler – Pacciardi 2021). All this leads to the very paradoxical situation where ‘the ECE governments demand assistance from the EU but refuse to comply with European rules and values’ (Ágh 2019: 206).

As regards the development of domestic politics in (some) ECE countries, Ágh proposes the term ‘politico-neoliberal hybrid’ labelling the de-democratised nations such as Hungary and Poland. This hybrid was created in two phases. ‘In the first, state-managed neoliberalism, it was a rising combination of the traditional strong, overwhelming state with the new crony capitalism and dependent development.... The second stage has created a much more mature form of state-coordinated neoliberalism, represented by the autocratic politico-business elites, producing extreme forms of hard populism from above or velvet dictatorships with a democratic façade’ (Ágh 2019: 41). An important component of these populist neo-illiberal regimes with growing importance presents the history politics and culture war against liberalism, globalisation, Communism and post-Communism foreigners, migrants etc. ‘The new populist regimes have pushed all social and political conflicts into the cultural realm of identity crisis, elevating them from social reality to a mythical meta-level of true patriots and amoral traitors, in the fashionable dual terms of Carl Schmitt.... National-socialist populism has offered certain “ideological drugs” as a fake recompense to the population for the failure of the high expectations’ (Ágh 2019: 162–163).

As a political scientist, Ágh devotes specific attention to the political parties as the key actors of transition, but also the post-transition period. He assumes

that ‘the ECE parties are not yet ready for multi-actor and multilevel democracy... and were much more politically and ideologically than policy oriented’ (Ágh 2019: 80–81). He stresses that the ECEs ‘sofa’ parties did not grow up from visible social groups: ‘ECE political parties without social embeddedness or genuine roots in civil society have penetrated all “private” segments for their fine-tuning in governance’ (Ágh 2019: 86). As regards party populism, he stresses the paradox of parties created in the top-down mode, but successfully playing the role of the representatives of ‘the people’: ‘Paradoxically, in the construct of rising hard populism from above, the new mainstream ECE parties proved to be elitist and populist at the same time’ (Ágh 2019: 152). In this sense, Klíma (2020: xvii) stresses the birth of a new ‘set of political parties – predominantly elite-dominated protest parties’.

Specifically, Ágh focuses on the party transformation and creation of second party system(s) in the region in the last decade. Here he introduces a new term ‘Golem parties’ describing the parties that ‘created efficient country-size corruption networks based on public procurement and EU transfers. The key issue is that the Golem parties have penetrated to all social sectors through their informal networks, including politics, the economy, civil society and the media’ (Ágh 2019: 170). These Golem parties implemented the masterplans(s) described earlier and removed the checks and balances, continued backsliding from the governance to government, aggressive majority pushes the legislative power ‘working under direct pressure of governments’, continuous takeover in judicial power, ‘above all appropriating the Constitutional Court; restrictions on the NGOs and increasing colonization of civil society’ (Ágh 2019: 178–180).

Ágh denies the idea that the ECE democracies reached the state of consolidated democracy. In his opinion, this was a mistaken position reflecting the transformation only on the surface. In Ágh’s opinion the evaluations of ECE democracies relied on inappropriate and misleading data including the self-presentation of the leading political actors: ‘The ECE political class has acted as special type of “comprador class” in the neoliberal hybrid; therefore fake reports and hybrid theories with an amalgam of neoliberalism and nationalism have been characteristic of the self-portrayal of the ECE national political systems and governments in the 2010s’ (Ágh 2019: 201). He summarised that already ‘in the early 2010s it became clear that consolidation had not been reached by the new democracies, and as a result the ECE democracy literature switched to the term of “deconsolidation”’ (Ágh 2019: 199). Here he follows the logic of Cianetti, Dawson and Hanley (2019: 5) stressing that backsliding ‘assumes a prior period of successful democratisation’.

Within the European framework, Ágh put forward as one of the decisive factors for the negative development (not only) in ECE and strengthening populist neo-illiberalism the crisis of the welfare state: ‘The transition from a welfare to a well-being universe has taken place in the last few decades in most developed

countries' (Ágh 2019: 234). We can observe here the nostalgia reflected also in Tucker's book and named *Social Democratic*. Regarding ECE, Ágh specifically stresses the 'lost decade for human progress' after 2008 (Ágh 2019: 246) and even more the visible and in some national cases dramatic departure of even millions to the West. In consensus with I. Krastev (2019) he notes that 'the deepest de-Europeanization process is the growing distance, both absolute and relative, between East and West in civilization terms, when talented and ambitious people leave the ECE region to become individually genuine European citizens' (Ágh 2019: 246).

Despite the negative evaluation of recent development, similarly to Tucker Ágh also remains positive and offers remedies against populism and illiberalism. He hopes for a democracy renewal based in grass-root level activities and generation exchange: 'First, enhanced socio-political cohesion through the personal links between East and West of the millions of Easterners living in the West, who can initiate and support fundamental changes in the east; second, the historical learning process of the ECE populations with the entry of a new, democratically socialized generation; and, third, the internal tensions within the socio-economic, political and cultural system of authoritarian populism and its increasing external confrontations with EU institutions' (Ágh 2019: 258). He believes that 'people have recognized that "the emperor is naked"' and 'the inner crisis of the authoritarian system has generated mass resistance against the ruling hard populist parties among the ECE populations' (Ágh 2019: 259). The awakening of dissatisfied civil society might be observed in the grassroots movements that 'have appeared in the eruption of popular anger at mass demonstrations and in social media, so in some ways it is a return to the period of "movements" in the 1990s' (ibid).

While Tucker and Ágh discuss the prospects of democracy at the global level, Klíma focuses in his book primarily on the case study – Czechia. Nevertheless, in his book we can also observe an effort to propose more general results in two different areas – the regional (ECE, but also EU/West), and the party development and its reflection in political science and political theory. The key term for his analysis is the 'state capture', i.e. the process of weakening the checks and balances mechanisms as well as limiting pluralism in political and economic competition. In his interpretation, both these negative mechanisms are interconnected under the umbrella of clientelism as 'a form of post-communist social organisation that evolves in a state-centred manner' (Klíma 2020: 18).

In the first part of his book, Klíma presents the recent debate about the new party model(s), such as media parties, business-firm parties, entrepreneurial parties, brokerage parties, or exploitative parties (Klíma 2020: 23). Indeed, as he stresses it is not necessary that the process of dismantling and state capture, and/or democratic backsliding must be linked to this new party model. In that sense, his notion on recent development in Hungary and Poland ('In contem-

porary Poland and Hungary, a dismantling of the fundamental pillars of liberal democracy is taking place under the reign of single-party governments' /Klíma 2020: 7/) commemorates Ágh's previously discussed term 'Golem party'.

Searching for the similarities among the ideologically, but also in size, very different political parties in ECE Klíma presents the concept of the 'clientelist parties' that he later analyses in the example of Czechia. More generally, Klíma assumes that: 1) On a national level, a new social cleavage was determined in the form of the... conflict line between non-transparent clientelist networks and outraged civil society; 2) On the level of the party system, such a socio-political cleavage was manifested as a sharp division between the 'old' established clientelised parties and the 'new' protest subjects with an anti-clientelist and anti-corruption appeal (Klíma 2020: 103).

Such new subjects might represent a real alternative, but also the continuation and even strengthening of the negative potential in party politics. As the example of the latter, the 'extraordinary "oligarchical" entrepreneurial project of the *Movement ANO 2011*, established by Andrej Babiš', is presented, the project that 'can potentially establish a *larger stage of clientelism in the sense of oligarchisation of the entire political system, i.e. the state capture in its pure version*' (Klíma 2020: 120–121). Such an opinion might be confronted with the results presented by Cianetti, Dawson and Hanley (2019: 7, 9). The authors present the terms anti-establishment parties and 'anti-corruption parties' describing a small influential group of oligarchical billionaires; such operationalisation perfectly meets the main profile of Babiš's entrepreneurial project. On the other hand, they also stress that Czech democracy did not erode with having Babiš in power, but earlier: 'Interpenetration of corrupt informal business interests and traditional parties had already degraded Czech democracy into a hybrid regime long before the rise of the billionaire Babiš' (Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 8). Indeed, such interpretation is current also in Klíma's work. Let us look at Dimitrova's comment (in Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 23) that the EU-funds paradoxically helped to protect the existing business-political network in ECE. Hungary is presented as the most visible example, but we should not forget how the 'management' of the financial sources from EU-funds transformed the big Czech parties ODS and ČSSD into the 'federations of the cohesion regions' where the regional bosses became extremely strong and the party leaders either weak or the 'boss of the bosses'.

As regards the state-capture in Czechia, in his opinion 'the main role was played by *captor firms* representing a small set of new large corporations and powerful state or semi-state enterprises' (Klíma 2020: 21). He is stressing the specific party capture from below and from above, further analysing both segments. As regards the from below party capture, he punctually analyses how the almost memberless parties might be seized by small groups of 'clients'. The party capture from below is than an 'incremental process of party privatisation

by non-transparent small and medium-sized companies'. One of the key strategies is the 'recruitment of fake or paid party members', i.e. the phenomenon of so-called 'whalers' who recruit the 'dead souls' or 'paid members' (Klíma 2020: 31–38). Such a reality then produces the situation of divided loyalties between their own party and the particular non-transparent business presented in the phenomenon of 'political businessman', 'regional and national bosses and oligarchs', 'grey eminences, pimps or political puppet masters' or 'godfathers' (Klíma 2020: 14–17; 50–52). What is important is the hidden continuity of at least some part of this clientelist network with the pre-1989 situation and important actors of the grey economy system in Communist Czechoslovakia – the parasitic matrix of black marketeers, former secret police members, snitchers, communist nomenklatura cadres, staying close to the edges of organised crime (Klíma 2020: 49).

As regards the party capture or '*Informal party colonisation "from above"*', it 'was conducted discretely by director-generals and direct owners of the largest companies'. The pro-business parties or party factions were created cooperating with approximately ten big companies/businessman. As a result we can observe the '*progressive cartelisation* in individual sectors of economy' that 'occurred as a consequence of the conclusion of the 1998–2002 "Opposition Agreement", which in reality was rather a cartel between the ODS and ČSSD' (Klíma 2020: 63–66). Exactly this 'hidden silent great coalition' as Klíma labelled the cooperation of two catch-all parties after 1998, fully started the process of state capture, as previously detected by Cianetti, Dawson and Hanley.

Klíma reflects the earthquake elections in 2010 through the prism of new 'anti-corruption' parties. Specifically, he focuses on the 'security and surveillance potential' related with the new party Public Affairs led by the owner of the biggest private security firm in the land Vít Bárta (firm ABL). Among the tools used by the party we can find spying on politicians, illegal monitoring phone calls of influential figures, leaks of information, etc. (Klíma 2020: 96–98). Furthermore, Public Affairs also became the first 'media party' in Czechia, when the known journalist Radek John was selected by Bárta as the party chair.

Indeed, the Public Affairs party collapsed shortly after its electoral success in 2010 and short attendance in the coalition government. From a more general point of view, the experience with its success and failure became an important impulse for the new, more successful and stable business-firm project of A. Babiš – the movement ANO 2011 – the party of managers with tiny-membership and strong personal and organisational overlaps with the Agrofert Holding owned by A. Babiš. Babiš's holding also includes an important and influential media section. 'Furthermore, in the media sphere Babiš has attempted to extend his influence also to public television' (Klíma 2020: 139–144).

Klíma concludes labelling Babiš as a 'new political predator' (Klíma 2020: 139). As Hanley and Vachudova (in Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 44–47)

contribute, Babiš introduced an oligarchic version of politics seeing 'little or no role for direct citizen input into either policymaking or broader democratic governance. What Babiš brings to Czech politics is a kind of "anti-politics" that celebrates the concentration of power in the hands of businesspeople, "experts" or managers.... Babiš characterises democracy as a struggle between elites'. Babiš moved Czech politics towards a 'populist democracy' rooted in 'populist ideology'. 'ANO's rise is not underpinned by a grandiose illiberal nationalism and typically seeks to co-opt opponents from a position of strength' (ibid: 34–39).

Let us confront these general comments on ANO 2011 with the interesting and analytically profound chapter focusing on the oligarchisation of Czech politics (Balík et al 2019: 268–285).⁵ The book was also published in English two years earlier (Balík et al 2017), but in the Czech version the 'decisive' period of state capture after the ANO 2011 win in the parliamentary elections in October 2017 and under the Prime Minister Babiš is also looked at. The authors stress that the English version was written between 2014 and 2016, when Andrej Babiš and his ANO 2011 party first joined the government coalition as the second largest party after the 2013 parliamentary elections. Indeed, the Czech edition also reviews the development after October 2017, when not only did ANO 2011 win in the parliamentary elections, but the second largest party had more than two times fewer votes than the new and only big party in Czechia. The mentioned chapter analyses the oligarchisation tendencies and legacies in/ from the 1990s, but especially the acceleration of monopolisation tendencies after 2013. Special attention is devoted to the media market, where only a few owners might be found, and almost all of them interconnected with politics. Furthermore, the analysis shows the direct financial penetration of businessman into the political parties. Naturally, up to now the peak is the ANO 2011 party, being often labelled an entrepreneurial party or directly as the political vehicle of A. Babiš' business activities. Nevertheless, the strong interconnection of political parties and businessmen or business groups became the endemic feature of Czech politics, including next to the parties the traditionally strong 'Prague castle' (President and the actors surrounding him). Last but not least, the analysis also includes the policy level, i.e. it depicts the most important policies where the business activities overlap with politics or even worse – determine the politics (agriculture and food production,⁶ forestry, health care, power industry and finances.

5 The book was also published in English two years earlier (Balík et al 2017), but in the Czech version the 'decisive' period of state capture after the ANO 2011 win in the parliamentary elections in October 2017 and under the Prime Minister Babiš is also reflected.

6 Let us add that since the beginning of his political engagement A. Babiš, the biggest Czech businessman in this sector, stresses the necessity of food autarky and the COVID19 pandemic in Spring 2020 again strengthened his emphasis on the issue.

When we read the report about the rapid oligarchisation of the Czech economy and strengthening the business-politics nexus, the relatively positive picture of Czechia in comparison with Hungary or Poland (as presented by Hanley and Vachudova) befalls. Maybe the contemporary Czech politics dominated by the duopoly of A. Babiš and M. Zeman is not developing the ‘nationalised monopolies’ controlled by the ruling party, as we can observe in Hungary, but the political competition seems to be limited or even determined by the business competition or agreements about the share of the market. Here we fully agree with Klíma (2020: 109) saying that ‘the Czech Republic manifests accompanying features of insufficient democracy... only a minimal framework for democracy in ensured’.

Conclusion

As emphasised by Hanley and Vachudova (in Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 34, the ‘narrative of progress in the region (ECE – quoted by L.C.) is dead’. Hungary and Poland are among the early-starters of democratisation and in the group of Central European nations declared as (semi)consolidated democracies at the eve of millennium. The success story of ECE as a democratised, Europeanised and socialised region was intensified with the EU-access of ten post-Communist countries in 2004/2007. Nevertheless, such an ‘optimistic picture of democratisation in ECE needs revising.... The new dynamics of democratic backsliding are best illustrated by the one-time democratic front-runners Hungary and Poland’ (Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 2).

While the emerging paradigm of ‘democratic backsliding’ ‘has focused disproportionately on the two most dramatic cases: Hungary and Poland and on the symptoms – executive aggrandisement and illiberal nationalism – that are most characteristic of the trajectories of those states’ (Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 1), further analysis – should it be case studies or comparisons – showed the ‘regional’ aspect where the consolidated democracy might be regarded as the exception rather than the rule. This sceptical portrayal is the most important characteristics shared by all three authors and their reviewed books.

Poland and Hungary must not be equalised with the East-Central European regions, but the Polish and Hungarian cases also determine the way we think about the region and the problematic tendencies within ECE. The result is that ‘the debate on democratic backsliding has revolved around the scenario of an illiberal populist party winning an absolute parliamentary majority and embarking on a conservative-nationalist project’ (Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 3). Nevertheless, the studies included in the book (Czechia by S. Hanley an, M.A.Vachudova; Estonia and Latvia by L. Cianetti; the chapter analysing the elite-citizen interactions in ECE by A.L.Dimitrova) showed that ‘in CEE systemic threats to democracy have come less from electorally dominant illiberal parties

capturing society and the state, than illiberal interest in society and predatory elites capturing mainstream parties.... The entrenchment of private interests in the state and in party politics may represent an alternative route to backsliding in states such as the Czech Republic and Slovenia with fragmented party systems and/or where a strong socially conservative right is weak or absent' (Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 7).

This picture of democratic backsliding in ECE brought the authors to the distinction between two (ideal) types of backsliding regimes: 1) network-type dominant coalition, consisting of businessmen and politicians formally belonging to different parties (Bulgaria, Romania); 2) ideological party-type dominant coalition consisting of politicians from one political party in power and associated businessmen (Hungary, Poland) (Dimitrova in Cianetti – Dawson – Hanley 2019: 22). Czechia has to be included in the first group, as well as Slovakia, while Slovenia and Croatia are still balancing between both types.

When we mentioned the electoral result from the 2021 parliamentary elections in Czechia as a prospective change in the country's politics development, the most important sign of success of the 'anti-Babiš' coalition would be the renewal of checks and balances and independent liberal institutions, as well as the matter of fact that the new government will not continue within the clientelist networks that existed before 2013. Such a transformation was also promised in Slovakia when R. Fico was forced by civic protests to leave the office of the prime minister; but the recent development does not evince visible differences in the quality of governance. Not only because of this fact, we can expect the discussions about the 'regional disposition' for illiberal democracies or even 'soft authoritarian' regimes in ECE also in the next years.

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GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE publishes original, peer-reviewed manuscripts that provide scientific essays focusing on issues in comparative politics, policy analysis, international relations and other sub-disciplines of political science, as well as original theoretical or conceptual analyses. All essays must contribute to a broad understanding of the region of Central Europe.

Manuscripts should be submitted in electronic version via e-mail to ladislav.cabada@mup.cz, preferably in Word format. Tables and schemas should be sent in separate document while in text you sign where to put it

Presentation of the paper

Each issue the *Politics in Central Europe* focuses on one main topic or theme. This theme is indicated in advance, at the latest in the previous issue. Besides essays focused on the current issue, essays with other themes are welcomed too.

Essays should be written in English (preferably British English).

Essays should not normally exceed 12,000 words in length.

When submitting the essay, please also attach:

- an abstract of 150–200 words, in English, stating precisely the topic under consideration, the method of argument used in addressing the topic, and the conclusions reached
- a list of up to six keywords suitable for indexing and abstracting purposes
- a brief biographical note about each author, including previous and current institutional affiliation
- a full postal and e-mail address, as well as telephone and fax numbers of the author. If the manuscript is co-authored, then please provide the requested information about the second author.

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In order to ensure anonymity during the peer-review process, the name(s), title(s), and full affiliation(s) of the author(s) should only appear on a separate cover sheet, together with her/his preferred mailing address, e-mail address, telephone and fax numbers.

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Below are some guidelines for in-text citations, notes, and references, which authors may find useful when preparing manuscripts for submission.

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Authors are urged to write as concisely as possible, but not at the expense of clarity. Descriptive or explanatory passages, necessary for information but which tend to break up the flow of text, should appear in footnotes. For footnotes please use Arabic numbers. Footnotes should be placed on the same page as the text reference, with the same number in the essay.

Dates should be in the form of 1 November 2005; 1994–1998; or the 1990s.

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In the text, refer to the author(s) name(s) (without initials, unless there are two authors with the same name) and year of publication. Unpublished data and personal communications (interviews etc.) should include initials and year. Publications which have not yet appeared are given a probable year of publication and should be checked at the proofing stage on an author query sheet. For example:

Since Bull (1977) has shown that. This is in results attained later (Buzan – Jones – Little 1993: 117). As contemporary research shows (Wendt 1992), are states the.

Publications by the same author(s) in the same year should be identified with a, b, c (2005a, 2005 b) closed up to the year and separated by commas. Publications in references that include different authors should be separated by a semicolon: (Miller 1994a: 32, 1994 b; Gordon 1976). If the year of first publication by a particular author is important, use the form: (e.g. Bull 1977/2002: 34). If there are two authors of a publication, separate the names by ‘-’ (not ‘and’ or ‘&’). If there are more than two authors, put the name of the first author followed by ‘*et al.*’, or write all names separated with ‘-’ (four authors maximum).

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List of References

References are placed in alphabetical order of authors. Examples of correct forms of references for alphabetical style:

BOOKS:

Single author books:

Diehl, Paul F. (1994): *International Peacekeeping. With a new epilogue on Somalia, Bosnia, and Cambodia*, The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Two or more authors:

Degnbol-Martinussen, John – Engberg-Pedersen, Poul (1999): *Aid. Understanding International Development Cooperation*, Zed Books, Mellempfolkeligt Samvirke, Danish Association for International Cooperation, Copenhagen.

EDITED VOLUMES:

Rittberger, Volker, ed. (1993): *Regime Theory and International Relations*, Clarendon Press.

CHAPTERS FROM MONOGRAPHS:

George, Alexander L. (2004): Coercive Diplomacy, in Art, Robert J. – Waltz, Kenneth N., eds., *The Use of Force. Military Power and International Politics*. Sixth Edition, 70–76, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

JOURNAL ARTICLES:

Printed journals:

Haas, Ernst B. (1961): International Integration. The European and the Universal Process. *International Organization* 15 (4): 5–54.

Online editions of journals:

Judt, Tony (2002c): Its Own Worst enemy, *The New York Review of Books*: available at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/15632> (15 August 2002).

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES:

Printed editions:

Excerpts From the Pentagon's Plan: Prevent the Re-Emergence of a New Rival (1992) *The New York Times* (9 March).

Online editions:

Cooper, Robert (2002): Why We Still Need Empires, *The Guardian Unlimited* (7 April): available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4388915,00.html> (2 November 2003).

RESEARCH REPORTS AND PAPERS FROM CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS:

Waisová, Šárka (2005): Czech Security Policy – Between Atlanticism and Europeanization, Bratislava: Ministry of Defence, Working Paper No. 05/2.

Illustrations and tables

Supply tables, figures and plates on separate sheets at the end of the article, with their position within the text clearly indicated on the page where they are introduced. Provide typed captions for figures and plates (including sources and acknowledgements) on a separate sheet. Electronic versions should be saved in separate files with the main body of text and should be saved preferably in Jpeg format.

Authors are asked to present tables with the minimum use of horizontal rules (usually three are sufficient) and to avoid vertical rules except in matrices. It is important to provide clear copies of figures (not photocopies or faxes) which can be reproduced by the printer and do not require redrawing. Photographs should be preferably black and white gloss prints with a wide tonal range.

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POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE encourages authors to submit either of two types of reviews: a book review or a review essay.

When submitting a book review, authors should abide by the following requirements:

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- If the reviewed book is the result of a particular event (a conference, workshop, etc.), then this should be mentioned in the introductory part of the review
- Review authors should describe the topic of the book under consideration, but not at the expense of providing an evaluation of the book and its potential contribution to the relevant field of research. In other words, the review should provide a balance between description and critical evaluation. The potential audience of the reviewed work should also be identified
- An exact page reference should be provided for all direct quotations used in reviewing the book.

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- While a review essay should primarily deal with the contents of the book(s) under review, *Politics in Central Europe* encourages authors to use the reviewed material as a springboard for their own ideas and thoughts on the subject.

