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Sports Diplomacy Research in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia. Emerging Field of Study?

JIŘÍ ZÁKRAVSKÝ, MICHAŁ MARCIN KOBIERECKI
AND IVAN ŠTULAJTER

Abstract: *Sport is a complex phenomenon that academics across many social sciences are focusing on. The interest in sports has been observable for a long time by historians, anthropologists and sociologists. Scientists in the field of international relations are no exception. A typical way sport is studied in international relations is by paying attention to sports diplomacy. The study of sports diplomacy has become a pretty popular part of the research since the second decade of the 21st century and it is possible to observe the dominance of the authors from the American and British universities in sports diplomacy research. Based on the Web of Science dataset, at first sight, the study of sports diplomacy is not seen as a popular field of research in the Central European countries. On the other hand, this statistical measure does not describe a complex situation of what the sports diplomacy research looks like, how it is formed or how it reflects the thinking of the politicians on national public/sports diplomacy. Thus, the article aims to map sports diplomacy research in the Central European states, specifically in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia.*

Keywords: *sports diplomacy, sport, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia*

Introduction

Sport is one of the most favourite leisure time activities globally; people around the planet decide to spend hours and hours playing sports or watching them. Sport has a huge potential to influence everyday life. Values, such as an emphasis on fair play or friendship, are supported through sport (for instance,

see Mortimer et al 2021), healthy lifestyle is an integral part of the sporting culture (for instance, see Thorlindsson – Vilhjalmsson – Valgeirsson 1990). Sports stars have become influencers with the ability to acquaint their fans with social and political problems and challenges (for instance, see Schmidt – Frederick – Pegoraro – Spencer 2019). Furthermore, sport is often seen as one of the possible components of development strategies (for instance, see Beacom 2007). Sport is, therefore, a complex phenomenon that academics across many social sciences are focusing on. The interest in sports has thus been observable for a long time by historians, anthropologists and sociologists. Scientists in the field of international relations are no exception.

A typical way sport is studied in international relations is focusing on sports diplomacy, which could be described as using '…sports people and sporting events to engage, inform, and create a favourable image amongst foreign publics and organisations to shape their perceptions in a way that is more conducive to achieving a government's foreign policy goals' (Murray 2012: 581). Thus, the main sports diplomacy goal coincides with primary aims of soft power that is, according to Joseph Nye (2005: x), 'the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced.' A majority of academics interested in sports diplomacy see it as a part of the soft power strategy of the international system actors led by states. For instance, based on the *Web of Science* database (n. d.), authors of the ten most-cited articles about sports diplomacy published since 2000 reflected sports diplomacy as an element of soft power (for instance, see Grix – Houlihan 2012, Manzenreiter 2010, Merkel 2008) or nation branding (for instance, see L'Etang – Falkheimerb – Lugoa 2007).

However, there is another way to think about sports diplomacy. For instance, it is possible to perceive sports diplomacy as the activities of international sports organisations, without which the organising of international sports events could not take place (Murray – Pigman 2014: 1099). In connection with sports diplomacy, it is now also referred to as 'sports anti-diplomacy' (Murray 2018: 201–247), 'negative sports diplomacy' (Keech 2001: 72) or a 'deviant form of sports diplomacy' (Zákravský 2016: 19). All of these terms describe the use of boycotts of major sporting events as a tool of foreign policy, but also the abuse of sport as a space for visibility for terrorist groups, representatives of undemocratic regimes, etc.

The study of sports diplomacy has become a pretty popular part of the research since the second decade of the 21st century. From 2000 to 2020, 165 articles related to sports diplomacy were published in journals indexed in the database *Web of Science*. Between 2000 and 2010, only eleven articles were published, compared to between 2011 and 2020, in which 154 *Web of Science* articles on sports diplomacy were published, most of them – 33 – in 2019 (Web of Science

n.d.). Furthermore, the editors of prestigious academic journals reflected the emerging interest in sports diplomacy study and dedicated their special issue to this topic. For instance, a special issue of *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* called *Sports Diplomacy* was published in 2013 (Murray 2013), *Diplomacy & Statecraft* prepared an issue named *Diplomacy and Sport* three years later (Rofe – Dichter 2016) and, in 2019, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* compiled the *Special Issue on Sports Diplomacy* (Pamment 2019). These special issues of academic journals are proof of interest in the study of sport in the international context or sports diplomacy research.

The vast majority of the aforementioned sports diplomacy articles – 149 – were published in English. Nevertheless, this trend is observed in science in general; English could be described as 'the lingua franca of international publishing' (O'Neil 2018). Furthermore, sports diplomacy research is dominated by the West. A majority of the scientific articles indexed in the *Web of Science* database were published by academics working at Western universities. According to the *Web of Science* database, between 2000 and 2020, 36 sports diplomacy articles were published by authors at the universities in the United States of America, 35 by scholars from the British universities and 11 by academics affiliated with the Australian universities. The People's Republic of China is the only non-Western country with more than ten articles, and the local scholars published 11 sports diplomacy articles (Web of Science n.d.). It is possible to observe the dominance of the authors from the American and British universities in sports diplomacy research.

Based on the *Web of Science* dataset, at first sight, the study of sports diplomacy is not seen as a popular field of research in the Central European countries. If Central Europe is seen only as the Visegrád Group, four articles were published by Hungarian and Polish academics, two by Czech scholars and no article by authors associated with Slovakian universities or research centres. In a more comprehensive view, it is possible to include countries such as Austria, Slovenia and Croatia in Central Europe (for instance, see Hloušek 2007: 34). Nevertheless, the number of articles dealing with sports diplomacy is similar to previous cases, as two have been published at Austrian universities, one in Croatia and none in Slovenia (Web of Science n.d.). Based on this criterion – the number of scientific articles included in the *Web of Science* database – it is evident that sports diplomacy is not such a popular topic of social science research in Central Europe compared to Western countries. On the other hand, this statistical measure does not describe the complex situation of what the sports diplomacy research looks like, how it is formed, what kinds of articles and books focused on sports diplomacy were published or how it reflects the thinking of the politicians on national public/sports diplomacy.

Thus, the article aims to map sports diplomacy research in the Central European states, specifically in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia. Poland is the country in

which, according to data published by the *Web of Science* database, the most sports diplomacy articles in the region appear. On the other hand, Slovakia is a country in which, according to the above-mentioned indicator, research on sports diplomacy is underrepresented. Czechia, if it focuses on published articles in the *Web of Science* database, is the country in which publications on sports diplomacy can be found; however, there are fewer of them than in Poland and Hungary. Thus, the selected countries represent the cases where in the context of the above-mentioned indicator it is possible to talk about a relatively high interest in sports diplomacy (Poland), medium interest (Czechia) and minimal interest (Slovakia).

The article is focused primarily on publishing activities related to sports diplomacy in specific countries, the organisation of conferences and workshops on sports diplomacy, study programmes or the universities where sports diplomacy research takes place. Furthermore, the article deals with the position of the central government and national sports organisations on sports diplomacy and institutional support for studying and practising sports diplomacy. The following part is dedicated to sports diplomacy in Poland. Afterwards, the article deals with the situation in Czechia. The third part focuses on the current position of sports diplomacy in Slovakia.

The authors of the article are academics who focus on sports diplomacy in their research; they are insiders in this field of study. They could be described as promotors of sports diplomacy research at their home universities. The following information in the article is based on the data from the national libraries, research institutions and universities supported by the experience of their own authors, who work as assistants or associate professors at the universities, with sports diplomacy research and practice in their home countries. The article, which is designed as desk research, therefore consists of three specific case studies that map the situation associated with sports diplomacy research in the aforementioned states. It was decided that the cases examined would not be compared; it would be problematic to choose comparative criteria in the context of this topic and their subsequent setting could lead to the oversight of specific aspects that affect the form of sports diplomacy research and study in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia. Thus, the specific case studies are based on three views from three different authors, one each from Poland, Czechia and Slovakia.

Sports Diplomacy Research in Poland

Sports diplomacy studies, or more generally the interest in sports diplomacy in Poland should be assessed as being in the phase of emergence. In reviewing its development, we should first recall the symposium 'Sport and Diplomacy' dedicated to the interconnection between sports movement and diplomacy, organised by the Polish Olympic Committee in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Sport and Tourism in Warsaw in October

2014. The symposium gathered athletes, politicians, sports administrators, civil servants and experts from Poland and several other countries. Among the presentations, particular attention was dedicated to the use of sports events in promoting states internationally. The discussion which proceeded the presentations led to conclusions that the standing of sports diplomacy in Poland should be edhanced (Wilanowicz 2014). This event marked probably the first more formalised approach to deal with the issue of sports diplomacy in Poland, although at this stage it was not directly about scientific research. Rather, the goal of the symposium was to initiate dialogue on the issue and to foster making use of the sports events organised in Poland.

The aforementioned symposium has had several implications. Most directly, it was concluded with formulation of 'Conclusions and Recommendations' appreciating the role of sports diplomacy and recent Polish successes in hosting international sports events and calling for coordination of the diplomacy pursued by the state and by sports organisations, boosting the cooperation with Polish emigrant organisations and engagement in debates concerning the development of world sport (Polski Komitet Olimpijski n.d.). The second direct implication was the publication of the proceedings of the symposium in 2015, a collection of papers presented by respective speakers (Polski Komitet Olimpijski 2015), which appears to be the first Polish monographic publication dedicated entirely to the topic of sports diplomacy.

The year 2014 also marked the increase of recognition of sports diplomacy by the Polish government, which as mentioned contributed to the organisation of the symposium. But the role of sport in improving the reputation of Poland had already been acknowledged earlier. For example, then-Prime Minister Donald Tusk in his expose to the Polish parliament in 2007 spoke about the upcoming UEFA EURO 2012 co-hosted by Poland, describing it as a critical element of the strategy of promoting Poland (Tusk 2007). Still, more formal and direct references to sports diplomacy appeared later. For instance, sports diplomacy has been referred to in two reports issued by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In *Nowe Wymiary Dyplomacji* [New Dimensions of Diplomacy] report for 2013–2014, a separate sub-chapter was dedicated to sports diplomacy within the chapter on the areas of activity of public diplomacy (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP n.d. a). Sports diplomacy, jointly with tourist diplomacy, was also acknowledged by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its report on public diplomacy in 2015–2016 (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP n.d. b). Nowadays sport is considered as a regular public diplomacy tool by the Polish government. For example in the open contest 'Public Diplomacy 2021' recently published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sports clubs can apply for funds for the realisation of such public tasks as strengthening the positive Polish image abroad (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP 2021). On the other hand, Poland still lacks a sports diplomacy strategy such as Australia's *Sports Diplomacy 2030*.

The research on sports diplomacy in Poland has had a relatively short history and emerged from more established fields of research: politics of sport and public diplomacy. In the first instance, Poland has a relatively long tradition of research concerning the politics of sport, pursued in particular by sports science scholars. In the first place, we should mention Grzegorz Młodzikowski's *Polityka i sport* [Politics and sport], a monograph published in 1979, which dealt with the interconnections between sport and politics and which strongly referred to international sport. Though already undertaken then, the issue of politics of sport developed more rapidly in Poland in the 21st Century, with many valuable works of research being published, including several monographs such as *Sport w Polsce na tle rzeczywistości politycznej lat 1944–1958* [Sport in Poland in the context of political reality between 1944 and 1958] by Piotr Godlewski (2006), *Sport wyczynowy w polityce państwa 1944–1989* [Competitive sport in state's policy 1944–1989], *Wyścig Pokoju w dokumentach władz partyjnych i państwowych 1948–1980* [The Peace Race in the documents of party and state authorities 1948–1980] by Artur Pasko (2012; 2009), *Sport w cieniu polityki* [Sport in the shade of politics] by Dariusz Wojtaszyn (2011) and *Polityka sportowa Związku Radzieckiego i Federacji Rosyjskiej* [Sports policy of the Soviet Union and Russian Federation] by Artur Podleśny (2019). Many of them had in principle a domestic perspective, but some were more internationally-oriented, for example, *Sport w służbie polityki* [Sport in the service of politics] by Jakub Ferenc (2008), *Sportowa Wojna Światowa* [Sports world war] by Michał Kobierecki (2017) and *Bojkot igrzysk olimpijskich jako instrument polityki międzynarodowej w latach 1976–1988* [Boycott of the Olympic Games as an instrument of international politics between 1976 and 1988] by Michał Słoniewski (2016). If sports and international relations is considered, we should also mention the collective work *Sport w stosunkach międzynarodowych* [Sport in international relations] edited by Andrzej Polus (2009), probably the first Polish scientific publication dedicated entirely to this aspect. These publications, of course, cannot be considered directly as part of the sports diplomacy state of the art in Poland, but many of them did refer to the issues considered in sports diplomacy studies, such as using sport for winning international prestige and to shape interstate relations, or sports boycotts (sometimes considered as negative sports diplomacy or sports anti-diplomacy).

The emergence of sports diplomacy studies in Poland at least to some extent should be associated with a widening of the field of diplomatic studies, particularly in the context of public diplomacy, as sports diplomacy was beginning to be recognised as its useful tool, as in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports cited above. Beata Ociepka (2013), one of the most renowned public diplomacy scholars in Poland, stated that sport plays an important role in public diplomacy since it may be used to build an international position of a state. The approach to sports diplomacy from the perspective of public diplomacy has been presented by Michał Kobierecki (2018a), author of *Dyplomacja sportowa. Sport w*

działaniach dyplomatycznych państw i aktorów niepaństwowych [Sports diplomacy. Sport in diplomatic activities of states and non-state actors] (Updated book also published in English by Lexington Books/Rowman and Littlefield in 2020). His tripartite theoretical framework to sports diplomacy apart from the use of sport to shape interstate relations and to promote the desired image of a state internationally also included the diplomacy of international sports governing bodies which engage in more traditional forms of diplomacy, but they were in principle considered as external stakeholders of states' public diplomacy.

Apart from Kobierecki's *Dyplomacja sportowa*, recent books dedicated to sports diplomacy published by Polish authors include *MKOl i FIFA jako aktorzy stosunków międzynarodowych* [The IOC and FIFA as actors of international relations] by Artur Miazek (2019). The book quite explicitly refers to the concept of sports diplomacy and focuses on the two most important international sports bodies, the IOC and FIFA, as diplomatic actors.

Though not many books dedicated to sports diplomacy have been published by Polish authors so far, the state of the art has been developing rapidly through the publication of articles in scientific journals. The list of authors who have undertaken the issue is long and include Michał Kobierecki (2018b; 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2020, etc.), Dariusz Wojtaszyn (2018), Lucyna Słupek (2014), Anna Kobierecka (2018), Marta Studenna-Skrukwa (2018), Grzegorz Skrukwa (2018) and Szymon Pietrzykowski (2017), just to mention a few. Many sports diplomacy papers have been published in a themed issue of *Przegląd Zachodni* journal dedicated to sport and politics in 2018, revealing that sports diplomacy has been gaining considerable attention among Polish scholars interested in the politics of sport.

In recent years sports diplomacy has also often been undertaken as an area of research in preparation for bachelor's and master's theses at Polish universities. The co-author of this article is also aware of at least one, Ph.D. dissertation under preparation which deals with the issue of sports diplomacy. Sports diplomacy is taught at some Polish universities, although rather in a form of elective courses or within more general courses dedicated to public diplomacy or diplomacy within political science faculties. The perspective for sports diplomacy studies in Poland should therefore be assumed as promising, most importantly because sport has been gaining recognition as a legitimate research subject of political science.

Sports Diplomacy Research in Czechia

Currently, interest in sports diplomacy by scholars as well as politicians is emerging in Czechia. Nevertheless, research focusing on the relationship between sport and politics in the Czech environment is not an unknown area of interest. Thus, many studies deal with the national gymnastic mass movement

in the Czech Lands especially with the Sokol movement (for instance, see Krejčí 2002, Libichová 2015, Strachová 2018, Strachová – Vostrý 2018, Uhlíř – Waic 2001, Waic 2013 and 2016, Waldauf 2007, 2010a and 2010b), their German rival in the Sudetenland (for instance, see Burian 2012 and 2014, Waic 2014b) and the Czechoslovakian communist Spartakiads (for instance, see Roubal 2003, 2006a, 2006b and 2016). The second widespread topic relates to the Czechoslovakian communist regime and sport that had to coexist with the undemocratic rule (for instance, see Kalous – Kolář 2015, Kolář 2014, Numerato 2010, Waic 2014a). Thus, in Czechia, various historians and sociologists concentrated on study of sport as a political tool.

The research of sports diplomacy in the Czech Republic itself follows up on works that dealt with public diplomacy (for instance, see Peterková 2006, 2008, Tomalová 2008, Novotný 2011, Cabada – Waisová 2012; Waisová – Cabada 2016); after all, in some studies, the use of sport to strengthen the image of the state in the international environment was perceived as part of public diplomacy and did not mention sports diplomacy at all (for instance, see Zákravský 2014). Additionally, the international interest in the way politicians used sport as a part of the foreign policy or soft power strategy influenced Czech academic society as well; international publications reflected that sports diplomacy showed that studying sport could be seen as an important part of international relations research. Furthermore, the attention in studying sports diplomacy was connected with the activity of the Czech government.

In the second decade of the 21st century, Czech politicians definitively realised that sports diplomacy could be a vital part of the Czech self-presentation abroad. A major step that confirmed the Czech government's interest in using the tools of sports diplomacy was the signing of a Memorandum of Mutual Cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (MFA), represented by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Lubomír Zaorálek, and the Czech Olympic Committee (COC) in November 2015. The COC was represented by President Jiří Kejval, who spoke about the importance and practicality of this cooperation, because 'sport create[d] 70 per cent of positive outcomes about the Czech Republic abroad' (Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí ČR 2015b). A few months later, in May 2016, similar cooperation was formalised by the signature of a memorandum between the Football Association of the Czech Republic and MFA (Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí ČR 2016). The activities resulting from these memoranda were ideally meant to lead to a positive perception of the Czech Republic in the international environment, which is, after all, the goal for which sport should be used in the context of Czech public diplomacy according to the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy Concept (Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí ČR 2015a: 10). Afterwards, sports diplomacy research became a more important issue for Czech scholars. Proof of this was, for example, the organisation of a conference by the COC and MFA dedicated to sports diplomacy in 2019,

in which academics from the University of Economics and Business in Prague also participated (Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí ČR 2019), or a series of webinars SPORTDIP in 2021 organised by the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington and the COC in which Czech experts as well as experts from several other countries also participated (Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington D.C. 2021).

However, the central output of cooperation between academics, sports organisations and the Czech government was creating a one-year study program *Sportovní diplomacie* [Sports Diplomacy], in 2017. The COC is a key actor supporting the existence of the study program together with the MFA and National Sports Agency. The leading academic partner is a Department of International and Diplomatic Studies, Faculty of International Relations at the University of Economics and Business in Prague (see below); however, foreign universities, such as the Russian International Olympic University or the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, participate as well. The study program *Sportovní diplomacie* is '… the first comprehensive professional-educational program focused on sports diplomacy in the Czech Republic' (Fakulta mezinárodních vztahů VŠE 2021) and, according to Jana Peterková and Eliška Tomalová (2018: 32), 'this program aims to strengthen the readiness of representatives of Czech sports associations, especially athletes after the end of their active career, to hold positions in international sports institutions. The aim is to strengthen the Czech presence and influence in such institutions, defend Czech interests more effectively, promote Czech sports and thus contribute to the positive perception of the Czech Republic abroad.' Thus, famous Czech athletes were among the first students; for instance, one of the best road and track racing para cyclists in history Jiří Ježek, snowboarder and Olympic champion Eva Samková or former basketball player and Czech representative Ilona Burgrová (who is co-author of the article in the special issue *Politics in Central Europe*; see Kočí – Dubský – Burgrová 2021)

In the Czech Republic, it is possible to distinguish two academic institutions where research related to issues of sports diplomacy are part of the systematic research. First, the Department of International and Diplomatic Studies, Faculty of International Relations at the University of Economics and Business in Prague and, second, the Department of Politics and International Relations, Faculty of Arts at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen.

As mentioned above, the Department of International and Diplomatic Studies at the University of Economics and Business in Prague is the principal academic partner participating in the, MPA (Master of Public Administration) program *Sportovní diplomacie*. The study program includes, for example, courses focusing on the history of the Olympic movement, sports organisation and finance or sports law, which are taught and guaranteed by the members of the Department of International and Diplomatic Studies such as Štěpánka Zemanová, Radka

Druláková, Jana Peterková and Zuzana Trávníčková. A coordinator of the study program is Kateřina Kočí, who organised (originally together with her colleague Jana Peterková) the workshop *Veřejná prezentace projektů programu Sportovní diplomacie* [Public Presentation of Projects at the Sports Diplomacy program] in 2018 and 2019.

Another member of the Department, Zdeněk Dubský (2018), is author of a study called *Sportovní diplomacie jako součást zahraniční politiky státu* [Sports Diplomacy as the Part of Foreign Policy of State] focusing on theoretical understanding of sports diplomacy. This contribution is probably the most visible scientific article regarding sports diplomacy published by the professors working at the University of Economics and Business in Prague. Furthermore, he and his colleagues participated in the workshops and conferences relating to sports diplomacy and to the role of sport in international relations, organised by the COC or by the Department of Politics and International Relations, the University of West Bohemia.

At the Department of Politics and International Relations, sports diplomacy is seen as a subcategory of public diplomacy as well as soft power strategy. The use of the term 'sports diplomacy' in this context is reflected in the sports diplomacy research and during the teaching process. A prominent figure in this research at the University of West Bohemia is Jiří Zákravský, who is author of probably the first scientific article in the Czech Republic relating to the introduction of how to think/study sports diplomacy called *Sport a mezinárodní vztahy. Sportovní diplomacie jako součást zahraniční politiky* [Sport and International Relations. Sports Diplomacy as a Part of Foreign Policy] (Zákravský 2016). Furthermore, in his research, he focused on how sport is used as a political tool by the Basque nationalists, emphasising sports diplomacy. The book *Baskové v ofsajdu. Sport jako nástroj politiky nestátních národů. Případová studie fotbalu v Baskicku* [Basques Offside. Sport as a Political Tool of the Stateless Nations. Case Study of football in Basque Country] is one of a few examples, in which he presented sports diplomacy as one of the instruments used by the Basque nationalists to fulfil their political goals (Zákravský 2017). The members of the department published several other articles related to sports diplomacy. Noteworthy examples include an article about Soviet ice-hockey as a foreign policy instrument during the Cold War (Leichtová – Zákravský 2021) published in the prestigious journal *Sport in society* in 2021 (however, it was accepted for publication and availabe from February 2020), or an article called *Sportovní diplomacie KLDR: Únik z izolace?* [Sports Diplomacy of DPRK: Escape from Isolation?] based primarily on Kateřina Vargová's research about the way the political leaders of North Korea thought about sport in the context of their foreign policy (Vargová – Zákravský 2017), which was written for her master's thesis.

The last information in the previous paragraph showed that the students are interested in sports diplomacy and how politicians instrumentalise sport

as a political instrument. Their interest led the Department of Politics and International Relations to present sports diplomacy in several public events. A few days long summer school *Sport a politika v současném světě* [Sport and Politics in the Current World] took place in Pilsen in August 2019, where sports diplomacy was discussed with the participants from several universities. The lectures at the summer school were Czech and Slovak experts who focus on sport as a social phenomenon (see Katedra politologie a mezinárodních vztahů FF ZČU 2019). However, in 2020 and 2021, the summer school was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, in 2020, the online workshop *Sport a mezinárodní vztahy* [Sport and International Relations] was held, and the experts from the Czech, Slovak and British universities, as well as students who were interested in it, met in the virtual classroom (see Katedra politologie a mezinárodních vztahů FF ZČU 2020).

Both workplaces produce bachelor's and master's theses focusing on sports diplomacy; the interest in this relatively new subject on the part of students of international relations is evident. The topic of sports diplomacy is part of the curriculum at Czech universities; however, these are not primarily separate courses but partial lectures and seminars that deal with the issue. However, people interested in sports diplomacy can participate in the study program *Sportovní diplomacie* organised by the University of Economics and Business in Prague in cooperation with the COC supported by the MFA and the National Sports Agency. To sum up, even in the Czech Republic, the topic of sports diplomacy is still evolving. It is seen as an integral segment of research in the field of international relations.

Sports Diplomacy Research in Slovakia

The leading authority in the field of sports diplomacy in Slovakia is the Slovak Olympic and Sports Committee (SOSC). However, the dynamic academic research of sports diplomacy in the first two decades of the 21st century is the result of a creative initiative of associates at the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations (FPSIR) at Matej Bel University (MBU) in Banská Bystrica, who identified the prospective direction of pedagogical and scientific research with the aims to develop this field of study, as well as to strengthen the reputation of the university at national and international levels. Both the SOSC and FPSIR have been closely cooperating for over 12 years. Academic activities in sports diplomacy at the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy MBU naturally resulted in signing *The Agreement on Cooperation* between the SOSC and MBU in the year 2017. This agreement enables MBU students and pedagogical stuff to participate in internships and events organised by SOSC (seminars, sporting events, conferences) and it supports students' research activities in the process of writing their final theses. Reciprocally, SOSC associates

are invited to participate in various scientific events organised by MBU. Adding to that, new opportunities for cooperation between SOSC and MBU are created in interdisciplinary national and international research projects.

FPSIR at MBU was the first academic workplace in Slovakia that introduced the subject *Sportovní diplomacie* [Sports Diplomacy] and included it in the master's study program *Mezinárodní vztahy* [International Relations]. The new subject as well as research activities related to this field of study met with a positive response from both students and cooperating institutions (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, The Slovak Olympic and Sports Committee, as well as national sports federations). The research activities and pedagogical process related to teaching the new subject (Sports Diplomacy) was supported by publishing scientific monographs (Terem – Štulajter – Štulajter 2019), university textbooks (Štulajter – Barteková – Štulajter 2013; Štulajter – Barteková – Terem 2018), scientific studies and articles (Terem, 2018, Štulajter, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2018). Furthermore, a cooperation with renowned experts from the external environment has been established and research based on interdisciplinary approaches has been gradually developing.

FPSIR at MBU regularly organises a series of conferences entitled *Významné športové udalosti z pohľadu športovej diplomacie* [Significant Sports Events from the Sports Diplomacy Perspective]. Conferences are organised every two years and the first one took place in 2012. The aim of these conferences is to highlight the potential of sport in Slovakia, to develop a professional debate on sports diplomacy, to discuss the issues of soft power of the state in relation to sport and sporting events as well as to explore mutual interconnectedness of sport, diplomacy and politics. Since 2012, in relation to these events, the volumes of scientific papers entitled *Významné športové udalosti z pohľadu športovej diplomacie* [Significant Sports Events from the Sports Diplomacy Perspective] have been published at FPSIR at MBU and focused on the systematisation of the sports diplomacy knowledge base, the analysis and evaluation of specific case studies dealing with initiatives in the field of sports diplomacy, the evaluation of Slovakia's activities in international and European sports federations, raising awareness of the importance of sport in society, its impact on national as well as international politics and the role of sports diplomacy in foreign policy.

Within a scientific project VEGA (1/0949/17) entitled *The concept of soft power in the context of the transforming international environment and the potential of its use for national strategies of small states*, a university textbook *Význam a úlohy športovej diplomacie* [The Importance and Tasks of Sports Diplomacy] written by Ivan Štulajter, Danka Barteková and Peter Terem was published in 2018. The textbook is based on both theoretical and empirical bases and points to specific dimensions of the perception of sport as a tool of soft power. The interconnectedness between international sport and diplomacy is well known in the

theory and practice of diplomacy, but it is relatively underestimated. The above authors provide an inspiring look at the two categories into which international sport and diplomacy converge, as defined by Stuart Murray and Geoffrey Allen Pigman (2014). The first category is international sport, consciously used by governments as a tool of diplomacy. The second category is international sport as diplomacy and concerns diplomatic representation, communication and negotiations between non-state actors, which take place as a result of the ongoing international sporting competition.

Within the framework of the Slovak and Czech cooperation in the sphere of sports diplomacy, a significant example of the international cooperation is the active participation of Ivan Štulajter and Peter Terem from the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy (FPSIR MBU) who taught in the aforementioned study program *Sportovní diplomacie* in the 2018/19 academic year. For more information about the study programme, see the section *Sports Diplomacy Research in Czechia*.

As far as current activities of The Slovak Olympic and Sports Committee, SOSC is actively involved as a partner in Erasmus+ projects underway under the leadership of WWTP (Sustainability) and EOC EU Office (Strategic Sports Management). Due to its active approach to events in the international environment and its involvement in international projects, the SOSC is a recognised partner. The development of sports diplomacy in Slovakia is closely related to the growing interest of the SOSC in the participation and membership of its representatives in international sports structures.[1] Following EU diplomacy (Zints – Parrish, 2019), the Slovak activities in this field strengthen the role of sport and its fundamental values of freedom, democracy, justice, respect for the rule of law and the protection of human rights. It also relates to implementing new approaches to sport as an effective diplomatic tool with huge potential for developing dialogue and building partnerships, with a significant impact on building a cohesive society with benefits in the fields of education, economy, culture and health.

With regard to the fact that Banská Bystrica will be the venue for the organisation of the European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF 2022), the initiative group of MBU researchers has prepared a project proposal entitled *EYOF organization and urban and regional development*. The project has an ambition to serve the needs of the organising committee of EYOF, the Municipality of Banská Bystrica and the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region. The presented project reflects the need to set up processes and activities so that in the preparation and organisation of an international sporting event there are positive externali-

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1   The respected position of the SOSC is indicated by the membership of its representatives in various international Olympic committees and commissions: Jozef Liba – the European Olympic Committee (EOC), Danka Barteková – IOC athletes commission, Jana Daubnerová – EOC athletes commission, Ivana Motolíková – EOC Olympic Education commission, Petra Gantnerová – ENGSO EU Advisory Committee.

ties and synergies, from which the city and region will benefit not only during the organisation of the sporting event, but also after the event. The aim of the project is therefore to comprehensively analyse and evaluate the impact of the organisation of an international sporting event on the development of the city and region, apply research results in all phases of preparation and implementation of EYOF and include them in strategic plans and documents.

To conclude, sports diplomacy in Slovakia is developing dynamically in the academic as well as external environment. At the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations in Banská Bystrica, sports diplomacy is offered to bachelor's and master's degree students as an optional academic subject for students studying international relations. The majority of these students choose topics from sports diplomacy for their final bachelor's and master's theses. As far as the doctoral study programme is concerned, the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy has had two successful, Ph.D. graduates who focused their dissertation theses on sports diplomacy. In the field of research, sports diplomacy is an integral part of project tasks carried out by the faculty's academic associates who publish their scientific monographs and articles both at home and abroad. Other Slovak universities gradually follow the model provided by MBU in Banská Bystrica and offer sports diplomacy within their study programmes (Comenius University in Bratislava); however, in Slovakia sports diplomacy as an accredited study programme has not yet been introduced.

Conclusion and Discussion

In Poland, Czechia and Slovakia, increasing interest in sports diplomacy is connected with the enthusiasm of a few researchers who started to think about sport as a foreign policy instrument as well as with recognising the importance of sport by government officials and its use as an appropriate tool that can lead to the creation of a state's reputation in the international system. In this environment, the first scientific articles and books focusing in particular on the general introduction to sports diplomacy were published by Polish, Czech and Slovak scholars. Equally, the initial conferences, workshops and summer schools were organised at Central European universities. Furthermore, an academic sphere started to cooperate with the central governments and national sports organisations headed by the local Olympic Committees that began to focus on a more sophisticated way of using sport for the international presentation of the countries.

The topic of sports diplomacy is also reflected in the study of international relations at Polish, Czech and Slovak universities. Based on the data from the universities, students are interested in the topic of sports diplomacy as well, which can be illustrated by a more significant number of final theses devoted to it. Thus,

sports diplomacy research in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia could be described as an emerging field of study on the background of international relations.

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Another way in which sports diplomacy research can gain further attention in the Central European region is to publish a special issue of a prestigious scientific journal in the field of political science and international relations. The special issue of *Politics in Central Europe* is the first issue of a scientific journal dedicated to sports diplomacy published in Poland, Czechia or Slovakia. The issue aims to present various studies and aspects connected more or less with sports diplomacy research.

Thus, in the example of the diplomatic relationship between Spain and Kosovo, Fernando Gutiérrez-Chico and Iñigo González-Fuente (2021) showed that sport could be an important tool for defining one actor in the international system vis-à-vis another. Kosovar politicians have used sports diplomacy for the diplomatic recognition of their country, but Spanish officials who do not recognise Kosovo's independence also present their view of Kosovo through sport. Then, Kateřina Kočí, Zbyněk Dubský and Ilona Burgrová (2021) thought about the relationship between equal opportunities, gender and sports diplomacy in the background of Czech basketball. In his study, Danyel Reiche (2021) emphasised the eligibility criteria in rugby, and, in this context, it is possible to talk about 'national representation without citizenship'. At first glance, this may be a topic that is not significantly related to sports diplomacy, but the opposite is true. If the national team is successful, it will ideally lead to the attention of the media and sports fans, and this success can be achieved not a priori by members of the nation but 'only' by members of the national team. Awareness of this state or its prestige is ideally subsequently increased, thanks to success at sporting events. Another study was prepared by Arnošt Svoboda and Simona Šafaříková (2021). They introduced sport as an essential part of development activities and focused on sport for development in general. It is development aid that is perceived as one of the instruments of soft power (Colin 2020), which should ideally, among other things, lead to an improvement in the reputation of the state that provides it.

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The Performativity of State Non-Recognition in Sports: The Case of Spain over Kosovo

FERNANDO GUTIÉRREZ-CHICO AND IÑIGO GONZÁLEZ-FUENTE

Abstract: *This article focuses on the use of sport by the Spanish Government to perform its non-recognition of Kosovo's statehood. Our main goal is to analyse the practices and narratives through which Spain's public authorities have carried out this policy in the sporting arena. Likewise, we set two specific objectives: to examine the administrative measures adopted by the Spanish government when a Kosovan team has participated in an event hosted in Spain; and to describe the policies and discourses regarding the display of Kosovo's national symbols in these competitions. The study is based on a qualitative approach of five major tournaments that have taken place (or due to) in Spain between 2018 and 2019. The documentation has been mainly gathered through desk-research. The three major data sources have been media press releases, Spanish Government's communiqués and sporting federation's statements. We underline that the policies adopted by the Spanish authorities respond to a systematic strategy to give no room for a potential understanding of Kosovo as a sovereign state. Likewise, we highlight that Madrid's attitude towards the Balkan country must be understood keeping in mind its own internal politics, specifically the nationalist claims from Catalonia and the Basque Country.*

Keywords: *Sports diplomacy, Non-Recognition, Statehood, Performativity, Kosovo, Spain*

Introduction

On 7 December 2020, all 55 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)-affiliated national teams from the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) knew their opponents to qualify for the next 2022 World Cup

due in Qatar. Kosovo, included in the last pot, was one of them. Initially tied in group A, the Balkan side had to be relocated. The reason was the presence of Serbia, thus matching one of the pairs considered as prohibited clashes. For political reasons, the European Federation had set a series of nations that could not be drawn into the same group. That was the case of Kosovo versus Serbia. The former declared its independence from the latter in 2008. Ever since then, Belgrade has not recognised the statehood of its neighbour, considering it as an actual province of its territory.[1]

With all the above in mind, Kosovo was switched to group B where Sweden, Greece and Georgia were waiting together with Spain. From that moment on, the coverage of the event by the Iberian country's media changed from a sporting perspective to a political one. This was so because Madrid, like Belgrade, does not recognise Kosovo's statehood either. So many questions arose in the diplomatic field that it overshadowed the footballing subject itself. Such was the situation that the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Arancha González Laya, had to intervene. The major concerns had to do with the very possibility of the Balkan side playing on Spanish soil, the display of symbols (mainly the use of the flag, anthem and emblems) and the issuing of visas to the Kosovo delegation.

The rationale behind these worries was the precedents regarding the attitude of the Spanish administration every time it hosted a sporting championship with Kosovan participation. The systematic series of setbacks imposed by the former led the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to speak out. It actually warned against the awarding of international competitions to Spain. In addition, this diplomatic row has become a recent core topic in the Spanish Congress of Deputies. In the last three legislatures, up to a third (5 out of 14) of the official questions aimed at the Government in relation with Kosovo were about sport.[2] Specifically, these dealt with the measures taken by the authorities to allow or not the presence of the Balkan delegation as well as to respect or not the display of its national symbols. These figures allow us to anticipate that sport has served (and serves) as a major vehicle for the diplomatic relations between Spain and Kosovo in terms of state non-recognition.

Much has been written about the use of sport for political goals. In fact, much has been written about the use of sport by Kosovo in order to seek and achieve international recognition for its statehood (Brentin – Tregoures 2016; Giulianotti – Collison – Darnell – Howe 2016; Gauthier 2018; Pulleiro 2020; McGuinnes 2021). Supplementary, there is a wide scholarship regarding the subsequent

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1   Other prohibited clashes for UEFA are: Kosovo vs. Bosnia and Herzegovina; Kosovo vs. Russia; Russia vs. Ukraine; Armenia vs. Azerbaijan; and Spain vs. Gibraltar (UEFA, 2020).

2   These legislatures have been: XII (07/2016 – 05/2019); XIII (05/2019 – 12/2019); and IV (12/2019 – Currently). These periods have had different ruling parties: the initial right-wing Partido Popular (People's Party) from 07/2016 to 06/2018; the successive left-wing Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Socialist Party) from 06/2018 to 12/2019; and the current left-wing coalition Socialist Party-Podemos from 12/2019 onwards.

Serbian protests and its court actions (Vila – Demjaha 2019). On the contrary, there is a gap in relation to the research on the non-recognition of Kosovo's state in the sporting arena. That is, therefore, where we set our scope. We look at how the Spanish Government has taken its political stand in this issue to the stadia.

The main objective of our article is to analyse the practices and narratives through which the Spanish public authorities have performed (and perform) its non-recognition of Kosovo's statehood in the sporting arena. Aligned with this, we set up two specific objectives. On the one hand, to study the administrative measures adopted by the Spanish Government every time a Kosovan team or player has participated in a sporting activity hosted in Spain. On the other hand, to describe the policies and discourses used by the Spanish public authorities regarding the display of Kosovo's national symbols in international competitions undertaken in Spain.

This article is divided into five main parts. The first one focuses on the methodology used for this research. After this, we set up a social-historical context of the relations between Spain, Serbia and Kosovo. It pays attention to the change of the Spanish foreign policies after Kosovo's independence from Serbia in 2008. The third section provides a theoretical framework. It presents an understanding of 'performativity' as applied to sports representation following Butler (1990/2007), Hobsbawm (1992) or Aquino (2017), among others. It also introduces some key ideas regarding sports diplomacy and counter-(para)diplomacy, the employment of sport by Kosovan authorities to seek and achieve international recognition and the symbolism attached to these policies. Following this, we proceed with the research findings and its discussion. We split them up into two main blocks. The first one looks at the administrative clashes between the Spanish authorities and the Kosovan delegations as for the recognition of Kosovo's passports and the issuing of the corresponding visas. The second one pays attention to the dispute over the display of Kosovo's national symbols during the tournaments held in Spain. Finally, we end with a series of conclusions. We underline that the policies adopted by the Spanish authorities respond to a systematic strategy to give no room for a potential understanding of Kosovo as a sovereign state. Likewise, we highlight that Madrid's attitude towards the Balkan country must be understood keeping in mind its own internal politics, specifically the nationalist claims from Catalonia and the Basque Country.

Methodology

This paper examines the administrative and symbolic struggles through which the Spanish public authorities have performed its non-recognition of Kosovo's statehood in the sporting arena. To do so, we analyse some specific events that have taken place (or due to) in Spain. The selected competitions are the 2018 Mediterranean Games (Tarragona/Catalonia); the 2018 European Junior and

U23 Weightlifting Championships (initially due in the North-western region of Galicia); the 2018 World Karate Championships (Madrid); the 2019 UEFA U17 European Championship qualifiers (initially due in the Region of Valencia); and the 2019 Men's Junior World Handball Championship (Galicia). There is also the individual case of the basketball player Justin Doellman, whose potential use of the Kosovar passport in the Spanish league opened a diplomatic row.

The study is based on a qualitative approach. The documentation has been mainly gathered through desk-research. We have collected an overall of 26 files. Following the content analysis guidelines described by Skalski, Neuendorf and Cajigas (2017), the major data sources have relied on three big categories: a) a wide range of Spanish and international media press releases (16 files), b) the Spanish Government's communiqués and parliamentary requests (6 files) and c) sporting federations' statements and posts (4 files).

During these competitions, different agents acted and reacted to diplomatic measures on and off the stadium. Thus, the information employed for this article corresponds with the Spanish public authorities, political parties and high representatives of the different sporting federations and the National Olympic Committee; Kosovan delegations and the National Olympic Committee; and international sporting bodies, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC). This way, it has been possible to closely study the narratives and practices of the Spanish administration regarding the non-recognition of the Balkan country in the sporting arena. Once the information was collected, we worked on a classification with these topics (structured in a matrix – see Table 1): event; date and place; organising/involved agents; context; performing event; and elements (symbols).

Table 1: Spanish administration measures on Kosovo's sporting participations

Event	Date and Place	Agents involved	Elements (Symbols)
Mediterranean Games	22 June – 1 July 2018 – Tarragona (Catalonia). Initially due to 2017	– ICMG – COE – Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Tarragona's City Hall – Catalonian Government	– Visa – Kosovo's flag
European Junior and U23 Weightlifting Championships	Initially due 20–27 October 2018 in Galicia	– IWF – CSD – Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Ministry of Sports – Spanish Weightlifting Federation	– Visa
Men's Junior World Handball Championship	16–28 July 2019 in Galicia	– IHF – RFEB – CSD – Ministry of Foreign Affairs – COE	– Visa – Kosovo's anthem and flag

Event	Date and Place	Agents involved	Elements (Symbols)
World Karate Championships	6–11 November 2018 in Madrid	– WKF – RFEK – Ministry of Foreign Affairs – CSD – COE – COI – Spanish Presidency	– Visa – Kosovo's anthem and flag – Kosovo's name
UEFA U17 European Championship qualifiers	Initially due 20–26 March 2019 in the Region of Valencia	– UEFA – RFEF – CSD – Ministry of Foreign Affairs	– Kosovo's anthem and flag
Doellman case	Mid 2016 – Barcelona	– FC Barcelona – CSD – ACB – RFEB – Ministry of Foreign Affairs	– Kosovo Passport

Source: Own elaboration

Social-historical context

The connections between Spain and the Western Balkans date back to long ago. In the context of this research, it is interesting to underline that sport has been one of the main elements of this bond. On the one hand, the matches between their respective male national teams in football, basketball and handball have had a large following within their corresponding populations through the media (Maura 2013: 183; Ferrero-Turrión 2020a: 13). On the other hand, there have been many and relevant Balkan professional players and coaches that have joined the major Spanish sporting competitions: Pedja Mijatovic and Radomir Antić (football), Aleksandar Đorđević and Željko Obradović (basketball) or Veselin Vujović and Branislav Pokrajac (handball), to name a few.

After the break-up of the former Yugoslavia in 1992, the Spanish foreign policy towards the Western Balkans was shaped by the guidelines of the international institutions (EU, UN, NATO). However, a new point of inflection happened on 17 February 2008 when the territory of Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence from Serbia. That was the beginning[3] of a conflict that lasts until today and that pits the Kosovan Government against the Serbian minority living in the territory as well as against Serbia itself, which claims the sovereignty of that province. From the Spanish perspective, this unilateral independence declaration brought a series of actions by the Government of Spain related to

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3 We point out here specifically the beginning of conflictual context associated with the declaration of independence of Kosovo. Of course, a larger contextualisation cannot ignore the ethnic cleansing policy undertaken by the Serbian government in Kosovo in 1999 (Díez Romero 2013: 602).

the non-recognition of Kosovo as an independent country. This decision was announced quickly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Specifically, one day later, on 18 February 2008. It is quite likely that the promptness of the Spanish response should be contextualised regarding the call for general elections in Spain due three weeks later, on 9 March 2008. Likewise, it is noteworthy that the Minister responsible for the almost immediate Spanish reaction, the social-democrat Miguel Ángel Moratinos, has a relevant political-diplomatic background linked to Serbia. Actually, he obtained the distinction of Honorary Citizen of Belgrade in 2009. Since then, Spain started a gradual but relatively fast withdrawal of most of its military and civic troops in Kosovo, which came to an end in October 2010 and March 2011, respectively. This way, Spain broke up its traditional alignment with the international community, which mostly recognised Kosovo, and opted for unilateral channels matching, in this case, with four more EU countries (Slovakia, Cyprus, Greece and Romania) and other states with important interests in the area like Russia, China, India, Brazil or South Africa.

Spain's official version of non-recognition of Kosovo, delivered by the social--democrat led government, addressed that the unilateral declaration of independence 'was a serious violation of the 1244 UN Security Council resolution and the territorial integrity of Serbia' (Vila – Demjaha 2019: 74). However, when the International Court of Justice decided in 2010 that Kosovo's declaration of independence was in accordance with international law, and the successive Spanish governments (with different ruling ideologies and parties) held their alignment with Serbia, it turned out to be obvious that there were and still are powerful reasons for such a political decision.

Following this line, some scholars (Borgen 2010; Díez Romero 2013; Ferrero – Turrión 2020b; Maura 2013; Vila – Demjaha 2019) interpret this non--recognition looking at Spain's Home Policies. Particularly, the rise of pro--independence claims in Catalonia for the last decade and, to a larger extent, the existing territorial debate within Spain about the historical nationalities of the Basque Country and Catalonia. These count on major political parties, with a wide representation in their corresponding councils, whose demands are oriented towards achieving an independent and sovereign state for their lands. Thus, in an interview with a Kosovan newspaper in 2009, Miguel Ángel Moratinos highlighted that the Spanish non-recognition of Kosovo responded to 'principles related to Spain's Basque and Catalonia autonomous communities'. Three years later, it was the by-then Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy who justified Spain's stand by underlining 'internal factors' (Ferrero – Turrión 2020b: 9). In fact, researchers like Vila and Demjaha (2019: 79–85) understand that the Spanish position of not recognising Kosovo 'gave the Catalan separatists a window of opportunity to create a (faulty) parallelism between the two cases'. In fact, when the Catalan Regional Council (*Parlament de Catalunya*) declared

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independence unilaterally on 27 October 2017, the international community, including Kosovo, declined to recognise Catalonia.

This situation of non-recognition has led to specific actions by the successive governments of Spain for the last decade. In practical terms, the most controversial decisions have gone from rejecting any diplomatic relation with Kosovan authorities (including the opening of an office in the capital, Pristina) to not recognise the Kosovan passport. This is somehow striking since, for instance, 'Kosovo's citizens can enter Serbia with a simple ID or Russia following a visa application' (Vila – Demjaha 2019: 80). Actually, the more present the Catalan pro-independence debate is in Spain Home Affairs, the more radical the stand of the different governments of Spain become regarding the recognition of Kosovo (Ferrero-Turrión 2020b: 9). Symbolically, the Executive branch led by Mariano Rajoy did not attend the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia in May 2018. Besides, and related to this investigation, it started voting against the incorporation of Kosovo to international organisations like UNESCO or FIFA. Anyway, the IOC had already recognised Kosovo back in 2014, so its athletes began to participate in different sporting competitions after that. Furthermore, in November 2018, during the aforementioned World Karate Championships in Madrid, the Spanish Government banned the display of Kosovo's flag, anthem and emblems. This fact, together with a bunch of similar ones, inspire the reflections of the present article.

Theoretical framework

We consider the theory of performativity as a relevant framework to develop our analysis of how the Spanish Government performs its non-recognition of the Kosovar State through sport. This concept owes its settlement to the work of Butler (1990/2007) and her studies on gender. According to her, there is no sexed subject that learns gender roles. On the contrary, the person constitutes him/herself through performance. Given that gender implies a series of behaviours and actions, Butler points out that these have to be redefined whilst building up some others socially authorised. This way, one can be what s/he wants in any situation. Consequently, the body becomes performative by creating a sense of reality through transformation. The sum of these actions would hold a potential change in social and power relations. As she underlined, gender is 'the stylized repetition of acts' over time (Ibid.: 192).

In our particular case study, we follow Aquino's (2017) understanding of this theory. She understands that the 'national body' is represented through sporting actors. 'The nation is no longer being something fixed or abstract: it is enacted through the calling-up of athletes to play for the national team, the way those athletes present themselves, the media responses to those presentations, and those athletes' performances on the pitch' (Ibid.: 124). Previously, Hobsbawm (1992) had already done a similar approach by highlighting the efficacy of sports

as a means in the construction of the national feeling. According to him, these disciplines have the capacity of shaping (players, managers, fans, symbols, etc.) something as abstract as the nation. Therefore, he underlines that 'the imagined community of millions of beings seems more real under the form of a team of eleven people whose names we know' (Ibid.: 152–153).

It is within this context how scholarship has theorised about some of the social aspects of sport. More specifically – although not only – about its role as a reflective arena in which to represent all those issues (social, political, religious, etc.) happening in its surrounding environment (Giulianotti 1999; Pulleiro 2015). As for the political stand, we may encounter a wide range of examples through recent history such as the Argentina-England quarter-finals match at the 1986 football World Cup, with the 1982 Falkland/Malvinas War in the background; or the chess games between the US player Bobby Fischer and his Soviet counterpart Boris Spassky at the climax of the Cold War.

This symbolic understanding of the sporting arena allows us to explain our case study and to better discuss the measures taken by the Spanish Government regarding Kosovo's participation in international competitions. Since its independence from Serbia in 2008, Kosovo has turned to sports in order to seek international recognition for its statehood (Brentin – Tregoures 2016; Giulianotti – Collison – Darnell – Howe 2016; Gauthier 2018; Pulleiro 2020; McGuinnes 2021). The reason for this, following authors like Brentin and Tregoures (2016), Gaulthier (2018) or McGuinnes (2021), has been that Kosovo's attempts to find such recognition through traditional means have failed. It has been due, partly, to the opposition of Serbia and all those countries, like Spain, with potential breakaway territories.

This particular strategy responds to the so-called 'sports diplomacy'. As Lin, Lee and Nai (2008: 26) state, 'very often the objective of sports diplomacy is simply to seek acknowledgement of their existence within the international system'. This is due to the global impact and the potentiality of representation of the different sporting disciplines in a common and shared arena (Murray – Pigman 2014). Indeed, it is this symbolism that makes sport work as a 'catalysing motor' (Brentin – Tregoures 2016: 362) for international recognition purposes. This is why scholarship has pointed out the relevance of this scenario for newly established or unconsolidated territories whose statehood and/or recognition goes under strong contestation (Houlihan – Zheng 2015; Giulianotti – Collison – Darnell – Howe 2016). This seems to be the case of Kosovo. However, we agree with Brentin and Tregoures (2016) that sport does not substitute classic international diplomatic procedures, but rather supplement them. Therefore, Kosovo's efforts via 'the sport's door' (Ibid.: 361) pursue an ultimate and clear goal, which is to enter the UN.

Whether closer or not to full membership in the UN, Kosovo's efforts to obtain international recognition through sporting means have already had

relevant effects. Arguably, the biggest achievement in this aspect took place on 9 December 2014. On that day the IOC recognised Kosovo's National Olympic Committee (NOC). Consequently, apart from entering this worldwide organisation, it meant the recognition of Kosovo as an independent competitor. In other words, its athletes could participate, from then on, in international events representing Kosovo. Let us not forget that, until then, these sportsmen and sportswomen had to play under the umbrella of other countries, mainly Serbia and Albania.

In addition, according to Brentin and Tregoures (2016), the IOC's decision brought two other significant consequences. On the one hand, it endorsed a global understanding of Kosovo as a state recognised by the international community, with potential effects in the political arena. On the other hand, it opened the door for further membership throughout the different sporting federations, thus broadening Kosovo's acceptance in the worldwide stage. In fact, the latter had been in place before 2014. Some international bodies had already accepted Kosovo's national federations in sports such as table tennis (2003), weightlifting (2008), archery (2011) or judo (2012) (McGuinnes 2021). Notwithstanding, the wider waterfall of sporting recognitions – both in number (quantity) and social transcendence (qualitative) – came after the IOC's move. Thus, Kosovo's national federations were also included in tennis (2015), cycling (2015), basketball (2015), athletics (2015) or volleyball (2016), among others (Brentin – Tregoures 2016; McGuinnes 2021). Another milestone in this recognition process came through football, given its dominant role in the sport scenario. In May 2016, Kosovo's Football Federation was admitted firstly to the UEFA, and later on that same month to the FIFA. Therefore, this inclusion allowed Kosovo to access the qualifying rounds for the successive Euro and World Cups, thus widening its international exposure.

The memberships listed above also involved a meaningful relevance in symbolic terms. According to the Olympic Charter (IOC 2020), the national federations have to be politically independent from their state governments. This means that in international sporting events the sides actually do not represent their states, but their national federations or National Olympic Committees (NOC). Nonetheless, as Gaulthier (2018: 231) states, 'sporting federations often use their state's flag in their logos, and the state's anthem plays at events'. This leads to an eternal-like discussion since these sporting federations do not always correspond with an actual state. This state-or-nation puzzle responds to certain ambiguity when defining a country. As Gaulthier (2018: 237) points out, up until 1996 the IOC defined country as 'any country, state, territory or part of a territory which the IOC in its absolute discretion considers as the area of a recognised NOC'. However, as of that year, the IOC reviewed the definition to be 'an independent state recognised by the international community' (Ibid.: 237–238). In other words, as Pulleiro (2020: 4) highlights, the IOC 'delegates

the recognition of NOCs mainly to the UN, and at the same time, the recognition of NOCs is limited to those states that emerge from secession processes supported by the international community'.

Notwithstanding, this favourable performativity of sports diplomacy may also encounter its opposite in terms of blocking practices and measures. In this sense, we consider the concept of 'counter-diplomacy' as a very relevant framework. As Barston (1988/2006: 4) states, 'for some the purpose of "counter--diplomacy" is the use of diplomacy to evade or frustrate political solutions or international rules. Counter-diplomacy seeks the continuation or extension of a conflict'. This, from the understanding of the Spanish administration about Kosovo's status, can extend to the newly coined 'counter-paradiplomacy'. It refers to the reaction exercised by a parent state against a paradiplomacy[4] perceived as opposing to its own interests (Castán Pinos – Sacramento, 2019).

Counter-(para)diplomacy can specifically aim at preventing certain territories from gaining international recognition as a state. As Ker-Lindsay (2020) underlines, this counter-recognition evolves over time and the different strategies must integrate a wider plan considering the conflict as a whole. Sport has been used as part of these policies. One of the most studied cases has been the row between China and Taiwan. In the 1950s, the former tried to expel the latter from the Olympic movement. This was so since Beijing considered Taipei as part of its sovereignty, thus not recognising its statehood. As Pulleiro (2020) explains, although this goal initially failed, it only worked as of the 1970s once the correlation of power was favourable to China (given its new status as a nuclear power). From then on, the IOC assumed the new Chinese political reality and changed Taiwan's sporting status following the One-China policy (Ibid. 2020), which implied a non-recognition of Taipei's statehood. This was officially addressed in the so-called Nagoya Resolution.

We can also observe this when it comes to competitions hosted by countries who do not recognise Kosovo's statehood. As Giulianotti, Collison, Darnell and Howe (2016) mention, the Russian hosts of the 2016 European Judo championships refused to recognise the Kosovar status of the female winner, Majlinda Kelmendi. The International Judo Federation (IJF) had to intervene in order to find a solution, which ended up in raising both the Russian and the Kosovar flags together at the medal ceremony. Other examples are the prohibition of displaying Kosovo's flag at any venue during the 2018 Football World Cup hosted in Russia (although Kosovo did not participate), or being prevented from including Kosovo and Serbia in the same qualifying group.

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4 The term 'paradiplomacy' (derived from parallel diplomacy) aims at the international engagement of sub-state governmental actors (Aldecoa – Keating, 1999). In this case, Spain would not be the parent state (that would be Serbia). However, given its non-recognition of Kosovo, the latter is still seen as a sub-state.

These setbacks have also found its reflection in the administrative scenario. Thus, sporting events include not only the performances on the field, but also press coverage and the relocation of athletes to the host country. In this sense, some states have found a balance to allow Kosovar sportspeople to enter the country without major restrictions while keeping their non-recognition of the Kosovar state. Such is the case of Brazil and the celebration of the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, which saw the athletes of the Balkan country travelling to the South American nation with their Kosovar passports. The agreement, on this occasion, was the expedition of temporary visas by the Brazilian authorities (Brentin – Tregoures 2016). On the contrary, some other administrations have made things tougher and have made their statehood viewpoint prevail. This was the case, as Giulianotti, Collison, Darnell and Howe (2016) compile, of a handball tournament hosted by Ukraine. That time, some Kosovar journalists complained about the impossibility to obtain a visa to enter the country and broadcast the matches of their national team.

Spain, whose administration does not recognise Kosovo's statehood, has also starred in some of the most echoing administrative and symbolic clashes in the sporting arena regarding the participation of the Balkan country. Hence, our work aims at analysing the practices and narratives how this non-recognition has been performed in a series of sporting events hosted on Spanish soil.

No visa, no symbols, no state

Based on our analysis, we present the following results divided into two main aspects. The first one focuses on the legal and administrative clashes between the Spanish State (and its diverse institutions) and the different Kosovar sporting delegations. It goes from rejecting the entry of athletes with Kosovar passports – as these are not recognised – to a series of agreements whereby these sportspeople are authorised to enter the Spanish territory through a particular visa called *hoja aparte* (sheet aside). The second one looks at the symbolic dispute regarding the display and use of Kosovo's emblems (flag, anthem, name, etc.) on Spanish soil. This shows the efforts and strategies employed by both sides to highlight and impose their political aims.

However, the Spanish performativity of non-recognition of Kosovo's statehood through sports starts with a series of clashes that go beyond bureaucracy and symbolism. It has to do with the initial attempts of the Spanish state to ban the very participation of Kosovo in international events hosted throughout the Iberian country. One of the main examples of this position took place along the preparations for the 2018 Mediterranean Games.[5]

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5   The 18th edition of the Mediterranean Games was supposed to happen in 2017. However, they had to be postponed due to funding problems and the political turmoil in Catalonia.

In October 2011, the International Committee of the Mediterranean Games (ICMG) chose Tarragona (Spain) as host city. Let us not forget that Tarragona is located in the region of Catalonia, where nationalist aspirations are high and whose Regional Council voted and declared its unilateral independence from Spain in October 2017. By the time of the election, Kosovo's Olympic Committee had not yet been approved and accepted by the IOC. This incorporation happened in 2014. Consequently, this movement changed the Spanish expectations since the Balkan country would be able to participate in the aforementioned event from then on. As for that moment, the Spanish diplomacy sought to avoid Kosovo's presence in Tarragona. In this sense, a first meeting held in mid-2015 voted against the participation of this newly recognised NOC. However, its eligibility for the event became a reality in October that year when the ICMG admitted it following pressure from the IOC and the European Olympic Committee (Mackay 2016).

As long as the celebration of the 2018 Mediterranean Games was approaching, this political tug-of-war was increasing. Another milestone occurred in March 2017. At that time, the Spanish Olympic Committee (COE) proceeded to change its statutes. This caught the attention of both the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Sports High Council (CSD) as it made clear that Kosovo could participate in the event. As Alejandro Blanco, COE's Chief, declared to the media, 'Kosovo participates because it has been recognised by the IOC and the Association of National Olympic Committees. The Mediterranean Games is a competition among Olympic Committees, not countries (…). We do not recognise Kosovo. It is the Olympic Committee. We are obliged to follow its decisions; (…) we depend on them. The IOC approves our statutes. But we never go against the Spanish Law' (Cifuentes 2017). In this aspect, Brownell (2008) underlines that the legal right to determine the invited participants lies on the IOC, rather than the host city. Hence, and according to the Olympic Charter, the IOC approves the list of NOCs competing in the event and the host city must comply with it, under punishment should the town act contrarily. In fact, as Brownell adds, the current regulation counts on the Nagoya Resolution[6], which serves as a precedent to dictate what the role of the host city is in terms of inviting participants. This sort of challenge between the COE and the Spanish authorities ended up in the Congress, where the party Ciudadanos (Citizens) officially registered seven questions regarding the potential participation of Kosovo (Maura – Del Campo 2017). At that point, the government's response defined this possibility as 'hypothetical' and added that in case it happened 'it

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6   The so-called Nagoya Resolution was the agreement adopted in 1979 between the Republic of China (China-Taipei in Olympic terms) and the People's Republic of China (PRC), whereby the latter returned to the Olympics. This consensus designated the symbolism under which the Republic of China would participate in future competitions (Brownell 2008).

would not mean an implicit recognition of that territory by the Kingdom of Spain' (Congress of Deputies 2018).

Administrative clashes

In May 2016, the European Commission advocated a visa liberalisation for Kosovo. Should this suggestion have succeeded, it would have meant that citizens with Kosovar passports could enter the Schengen Area for short stays with no administrative restrictions (Giulianotti – Collison – Darnell – Howe 2016). To this day, this issue has not become a reality and still remains uncertain. However, it shows the willingness of the EU to carry on with the strengthening of relations with the Balkan country, thus providing a boost for its recognition as a state (Ibid. 2016). These sorts of administrative questions have not gone unseen by the Spanish authorities, whose strategies when dealing with Kosovar athletes have brought diplomatic and sporting consequences on and off the field.

Until that situation is resolved, Kosovar sportspeople need a visa to undertake tournaments on Spanish soil. Nonetheless, this bureaucratic step has become a big deal for both competitors and authorities. One of the first episodes took place in the prelude of the aforementioned Mediterranean Games. Once clear that the Balkan delegation could participate, it was time to proceed with the travelling paperwork. Spain does not recognise Kosovo as a state, therefore it does not award any validity to the passports or any other documents issued by the Balkan country[7]. Barely four months before the start of the event, the Spanish-born Deputy Director of the IOC, Pere Miró, stated in an interview with a Catalonian local radio that Spain was not issuing the requested visas. That information came after both the organisers of the Games and Kosovo's NOC warned the IOC about the Spanish government's attitude (Ràdio Associació de Catalunya 2018). Likewise, Miró also underlined that his organisation had sent a letter, some time before, to the Spanish Minister of Sports, with no response whatsoever (Ibid. 2018).

The counterattack from the Spanish authorities did not take long. Diplomatic sources spoke with several media outlets to express their willingness to issue the visas. However, they emphasised their 'surprise' about Miró's words since Schengen rules dictate that this paperwork 'must be requested three months before entering the territory', a timeline that had not yet occurred (Saumell 2018). This allusion to Schengen refers to the Regulation number 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas. In its second chapter regarding the application procedure, Article 9 points out the practical modalities for lodging an application. It states that these

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7 At this point, we shall remember that many Kosovar athletes count on double nationality (Kosovar plus another one). This is due to their ethnic background or for refugee/political asylum reasons motivated by the Balkan War and its successive conflict in Kosovo. Consequently, these participants may have used an alternative passport to enter and play in Spain.

'shall be lodged no more than three months before the start of the intended visit. Holders of a multiple-entry visa may lodge the application before the expiry of the visa valid for a period of at least six months' (The European Parliament and the Council 2009).[8] The solution eventually adopted by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the issuing of the visas under the formula *hoja aparte* (sheet aside), with a validity for only as long as the Games took place. Additionally, it included an explicit clarification whereby it was highlighted that this administrative mechanism would not mean the recognition of Kosovo as a state.

This dispute over the visas has also brought some penalties to Spain. Parallel to the preparations for the Mediterranean Games, the Iberian country was getting ready to welcome another major international sports event: the 2018 European Junior and U23 Weightlifting Championships. Two years earlier, La Coruña (Galicia) had been chosen as host city by the European Weightlifting Federation (EWF). The tournament was due to happen in October 2018. However, six months before (April), the EWF sent an email to its Spanish counterpart informing them about their loss of hosting rights, which would move to Poland (Lambea 2018). The reason was the reluctance of the Spanish government to give visas to the Kosovar participants.

Prior to this decision, EWF's President, Antonio Urso, had sent a letter to both the Spanish Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Sports. In it, the federation sought some guarantees that the Balkan athletes would be allowed to take part in the tournament. The lack of response from the Spanish authorities, after the three weeks' time conceded, pushed the European institution to move forward and ban Spain from its organisation (Oliver 2018). For its part, the Spanish administration justified the nonresponse by stating that it made no sense ever since they had made it clear back in 2016 that no Kosovar nor Gibraltarian weightlifter would be accepted.

One of the alternatives exposed by the EWF was to try and find a decision similar to that of the Mediterranean Games. However, the Spanish government declined to do so. In this sense, CSD underlined to the press that the situation was not the same. According to this entity, the Mediterranean Games' organising committee depended on the IOC, so an exemption was possible. On the contrary, given the fact that the organising committee of the weightlifting championship depended on the Spanish authorities, these would have the final word as for who could participate (Nieto 2018). By highlighting so, CSD was referring to Title 2, Article 8 of the Spanish Law of Sport, which compiles the competences of this institution. In its point 'i', it states that CSD will 'authorise or deny, prior agreement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the celebration on Spanish soil of

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8   This regulation was modified on 2 February 2020. As of then, the new legislation adopted has been the Regulation number 155/2019 of the European Parliament and of the Council. Among its changes, it widens the lodging period, which can be up to six months before the start of the intended visit.

official international sporting competitions, as well as the participation of Span-
ish national sides in international competitions' (Government of Spain 2018a).
In fact, the utilisation of this very legislation pushed the Spanish squad not to
take part in the 2017 European U15 & U17 Weightlifting Championships. CSD
incited the Spanish Federation to stay aside because Pristina, Kosovo's capital,
was the host city.

Another chapter in this particular administrative row also took place by the
end of 2018. Between 6–11 November, Madrid hosted the World Karate Cham-
pionships after the Peruvian Karate Federation renounced the corresponding
rights. One of the competing delegations was Kosovo. One of the many clashes
with the Spanish organising committee had to do with the visas used by the
Kosovar athletes. The Deputy Director of the IOC, in an interview with the Span-
ish press, accused the Iberian authorities of not providing the corresponding
documents to the Kosovar athletes to participate in the tournament (EFE Agency
2018). According to Miró, this was the cause motivating that these sportspeople
had to enter Spain with visas issued by the French government (which recog-
nises the Balkan country statehood, and so its passport), as it actually happened.
The Spanish Government's reply came almost immediately. The Foreign Affairs
Minister rejected this information. In a public statement published by his Min-
istry, Josep Borrell underlined that 'no visa could be denied since no lodging has
been received in the competent consular office, that of the Embassy of Spain in
Skopje, by any Kosovar sportspeople' (Government of Spain 2018a). Likewise,
one day later the Minister also announced the Ministry's intentions to formally
report to the IOC after Miró's accusations. According to the statement, those
affirmations 'lack foundation (…) and have caused a deep discomfort to the
Spanish Government' (Government of Spain 2018b).

Following Hobsbawm (1992) and Aquino's (2017) understanding of athletes
as performers of the nation, we observe the role of the Kosovar sportspeople –
in this controversy – as embodying the Balkan state by holding this specific
passport. Therefore, the policies taken by the Spanish government as for the
visas represent a performance of non-recognition. This has had effects on an
individual basis too. In the summer of 2016, the US-born basketball player
Justin Doellman became naturalised as Kosovar. This movement allowed him
to play for the Balkan national side in continental and international tourna-
ments. Likewise, his by-then team, Barcelona, saw itself favoured as Doellman
would stop counting as a non-EU player. Far from reality, in the middle of this
process CSD spoke out to warn about no validity whatsoever should Barcelona
claim the player as Kosovar. CSDs' Director in 2016, Miguel Cardenal, declared
to the local press that 'that passport [Kosovo's] in Spain has no validity because
it is from a country that is not a country because it is not recognised by Spain,
therefore neither this player nor any other could obtain a [sporting] license
linked to a nationality that Spain does not recognise' (Herrero 2016).

Symbolic ban

According to Elgenius (2011: 397), national symbols act as 'shortcuts to the group they represent'. In the same line, Gilboa and Bodner (2009: 460) stress that they serve as an 'identification of states'. Among these, the authors underline three main elements: the flag, the anthem and the emblem. To this list we shall add another variable: the name. Thus, we agree with Raento and Watson (2000) that a strategy of power is executed by challenging the existing names as well as by naming and renaming. A clear example of this was the aforementioned diplomatic row between China and Taiwan regarding the terms under which both would compete in the Olympic Games. This strategy of power has also happened with regards to the participation of Kosovar athletes in international sporting competitions taking place in Spain. The Spanish policy of Kosovo's statehood non-recognition has been performed in the symbolic field too. This has gone from banning the display of the national flag in venues and parades to forbidding the use of the country's name in tournaments.

One of the first major occasions to observe this was the 2018 Mediterranean Games hosted in Tarragona. Apart from the aforementioned issue with the visas, the utilisation of certain symbols created a new diplomatic row between both nations. This edition meant Kosovo's debut in this event. However, when observing both the opening and closing ceremonies this is not so clear. The reason for these doubts lies in the way the Balkan delegation was introduced in the Olympic Stadium. Contrary to the other 25 competing nations, which were presented with their country name, Kosovo was named after its NOC. Thus, following Raento and Watson (2000), the act of not showing Kosovo's name is a challenge aimed at denying its existence – a performance to prove how Spain does not recognise this particular state.

These parades also witnessed another symbolic controversy. The flag-bearers could not carry Kosovo's national flag as did the rest of the participating countries. Instead, they had to hold the NOC's, which includes a miniature version of the national flag above the Olympic Rings.[9] The Balkan delegation reported that this limitation was imposed by the Spanish Government at the very last minute. In an interview with the press, Besim Hasani, president of Kosovo's NOC, declared that 'it was not part of the agreement. […] Somehow we were forced to do it' (Barker 2018). The agreement Hasani refers to has to do with the ceremony carried out the day before. As tradition dictates, every delegation is welcomed in the Olympic Village by raising their respective flags, which remain on top for as long as the Games last. This time was no exception and every participating country did so. As Kosovo's NOC official Twitter account posted, '#Kosovo flag

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9   Interestingly, the flag-bearer in the Opening Ceremony, Herolind Nishevci, did not wave the emblem, as it normally happens in these sorts of rituals. He was escorted by two members who emphatically swung the national flag.

raised for the first time in Mediterranean Village of @Tarragona2018. We are ready to write history! #1DayToGO' (Kosovo Olympic Committee 2018). This tweet also included three pictures where Kosovo's flag appears on top of the pole together with the rest of the national emblems. Likewise, this polemic over the insignia also had its reflection in the official web of the Mediterranean Games. In the tab dedicated to the competing countries, every nation is portrayed with its state flag, but Kosovo. The latter is framed with the letters 'KOS' in white over a blue background (see Picture 1). Once again, we observe in this depiction a performance of non-recognition by avoiding the employment of the Kosovo flag. During the Games, Kosovo won four medals, three of which were gold. This meant that the corresponding prize ceremony had to face one more encounter with Kosovo's flag and anthem. This time, opposed to the previously explained, these emblems were displayed with no objection. Consequently, Catalonia witnessed the playing of an anthem whose state (Kosovo) is not recognised by the Spanish authorities.

Picture 1: Depiction of Kosovo without national flag

Source: Oficina dels Jocs Mediterranis Tarragona 2018 (2018).

The 2018 World Karate Championships hosted in Madrid represented another example of this strategy of power over the symbols between Spain and Kosovo. The latter was one of the competing nations, although this would be hard to affirm when looking at the official records. Based on the aforementioned competencies of the CSD, the Balkan delegation was banned from performing under the name of its country. Instead, the Kosovar karateka had to act under the World Karate Federation one. Thus, every time an athlete of this nation was involved in a practice, the scoreboard depicted him/her with the acronym WKF5. A similar prohibition went for the clothing. Kosovar participants were

wearing tracksuits with the letters KKF, standing for Kosovo Karate Federation, since the name of the country could not be displayed either. We observe in this measure one more challenging act to deny the existence (non-recognition) of Kosovo as a state by the Spanish authorities (this time through the mandate of the CSD). This illustration proves the national symbolism attached to the sporting clothing (Juventeny 2019) and its social-cultural meaning. This was not the only emblem banned during the Championships. As with the Mediterranean Games, Kosovo's national flag was also prohibited. In fact, the limitations were stricter since it was not allowed at any moment. Consequently, the Kosovar karateka were represented with the WKF one. This had a responsive attitude by the Balkan team. Its participants, as performers of the Kosovar state, boycotted the opening ceremony by not showing up as a protest for the forbiddance.

This diplomatic tug of war extended beyond the end of the tournament. This umpteenth dispute together with the issuing of the visas (explained above) prompted several interventions from different organisations. One of the first institutions to speak out was the very World Karate Federation. Its Spain-born President, Antonio Espinós, told the media that 'for future events, we have to seriously consider the possibility of not coming to Spain because we cannot easily accept that the rights of one of our full members is refused' (Morgan 2018a). Stricter was the IOC, which threatened a potential blocking of international competitions in Spain. Its Spanish-born Deputy Director, Pere Miró, also used the media to warn the Iberian country. He stated that 'if the Spanish Government is not in the conditions to guarantee access not only to Kosovo but to every athlete to compete, we should warn all the International Federations that, until this is solved, they should not hold international competitions here [Spain]. […] We cannot suspend a country and we cannot say they cannot organise events there, but we are totally ready to say that and this is what we will say now. International Federations, please, before awarding any competition, make sure you have all the guarantees that all athletes will be welcome in Spain' (Morgan 2018b). In this line, COE's President, Alejandro Blanco, pointed out that

> what the IOC and the International Federations recognise are the Olympic Committees and the National Federations that register in the international organisations. That is it. When you register, you have to respect the Olympic Charter and the statutes of the federations. Otherwise, do not get registered. […] Kosovo's federations and its committee are recognised by every international federation and by the IOC. Its athletes participate in every competition throughout the world. Except in Spain (Ojeda 2018).

Internal politics also got involved in this affair. The pro-independence nationalist-led Catalonian Government added some more pressure on the Spanish authorities by exhorting them to respect the international sporting agreements. Thus,

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the spokesperson of the *Govern* (Catalonian Government), Elsa Artadi, urged Pedro Sánchez (Spanish Prime Minister) 'to respect the Olympic Charter (…) not to risk international sporting competitions in Spain' (El Periódico de Catalunya 2018). We observe this appeal from Catalonia's institutions aligned with what Zabalo and Odriozola (2017) consider to be a new discourse on regional nationalism. For these scholars, these political parties have switched from revolutionary ideas and praxis (ethnic and cultural difference, mainly) to highlight the concept of democracy. Thus, the new proposals try to reach a balance between collective and individual rights. Therefore, the aforementioned claim becomes a challenge (from Catalonia to Spain in this case) to show who is more democratic (as a support to its pro-independence aspirations).

All these declarations happened, actually, during the promotional week of Spain Global Sports, an initiative aimed at consolidating the Iberian country as a solid venue for international sporting competitions. At the presentation event, another Spain-born member of the IOC, Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr., insisted on the necessity to respect Kosovo's national symbols if Spain opted to host future competitions. He stressed that 'we respect the right of any sovereign country to recognise the country it wants to recognise. That is not our business. What we like, and include in the Olympic Charter, is the defence of those athletes. If they cannot compete under their national flag, they should under their NOC's or their federation's' (ABC 2018).

A few days later, more accurately on 14 November 2018, IOC and COE published a joint statement. In it, both institutions express their satisfaction with the new measures adopted by the Spanish Government. It refers to the communiqué sent from the Spanish Government to COE's President, Alejandro Blanco, in which it agrees to respect Kosovo as a participating nation in sporting competitions held in Spain. Based on the IOC-COE's communiqué,

> through this decision (…) the Spanish Government will provide the Kosovan sports delegations competing in Spain with the relevant visa and will authorise them to use their own national symbols, anthem and flag, in accordance with Olympic protocol. This will ensure that the athletes of Kosovo can participate under the same conditions as all the other athletes from the 206 National Olympic Committees recognised by the IOC (IOC 2018).

Immediately after, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs published another statement amending some of the information quoted by the IOC-COE. It stressed that

> there has been no change in the Spanish stance. Spain has allowed and eased the participation of Kosovan athletes in those competitions, issuing the visa when lodged, always in accordance with the Olympic Charter and allowing the

use of its symbols, flag and anthem based on Olympic protocol. In the future, it will keep doing it, regardless of its political stance of non-recognising the independence of Kosovo (Government of Spain 2018b).

Contrary to these words, COE's President pointed out that this agreement did represent a change in Madrid's position. Alejandro Blanco underlined that 'we respect any political stance of the government regarding Kosovo, but sportingly it is a great advance. Despite what [the Ministry of] Foreign Affairs says, they [Kosovan athletes] have never been allowed to compete in Spain under their flag and in the new agreements it is clear that now they can' (Cruz – Díaz – Guerra 2018). In this sense, we observe another strategy of power, this time over the utilised narrative, whereby the Spanish authorities give no space for a potential understanding of Kosovo as a legal state. Consequently, any aspect related with the Balkan country on the sporting arena is systematically calculated.

Despite this apparent consensus, a new dispute came out not long after. This time football was the rowing sport. The national sides of Spain and Kosovo were drafted into the same group for the UEFA U17 European Championship qualifiers. The Iberian country had the hosting rights, due between 20–26 March 2019, and so the towns of Benidorm and Alcoy (Region of Valencia, Eastern Spain) were chosen as venues. However, the last week of February 2019 UEFA decided to withdraw such a status and moved the corresponding matches to a neutral scenario: its training camps in Nyon (Switzerland). The reason was the Spanish government's refusal to display Kosovo's flag and anthem during the games. This setback from Madrid seemed to go against the respect of the Kosovan national symbols promised a few months earlier.

Between the agreement obtained with the IOC and this new episode, the Spanish Parliament discussed the sporting affairs affecting Kosovo's participation. Thus, the Catalonian nationalist political party Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català (European Catalonian Democratic Party) officially requested information about the potential damages, to both the Spanish international sport and the Olympic sport, of not recognising the Republic of Kosovo (Xuclà i Costa 2018). In its reply, the central government reiterated its 'willingness to allow the participation of Kosovan athletes in those international competitions taking place in Spain under the auspices of the IOC' (Congress of Deputies 2019). However, this did not clarify one aspect that turned out to be decisive to understanding UEFA's decision. As explained above, Madrid would make exceptions in those tournaments whose organising committee depended on the IOC. On the contrary, when the preparations depended on the Spanish authorities, in other words the CSD, this would set a series of prerequisites, amid which are the ban on Kosovan symbols. Consequently, the latter were the conditions that the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) sent to its European counterpart regarding the framework within which this qualifying round would happen, prompting UEFA's move.

In addition, following the IOC's threat to stop awarding international tournaments to Spain unless Kosovan symbols and rights were guaranteed, UEFA stepped further. By the time these matches were played in Switzerland, its Executive Committee held an ordinary meeting in Baku (Azerbaijan). Among its approved measures, it agreed on a new policy regarding countries not recognising Kosovo. In this sense, UEFA pointed out that those 'teams which cannot host Kosovo clubs or national teams on their territory[10] may request to organise their home match on neutral ground. However, they will have to accept to play away matches in Kosovo' (UEFA 2019).

Picture 2: Banner warning the non-recognition of Kosovo's statehood

Source: IHF Men's Junior U21 (2019)

No matter what the agreements or policies say, every time Kosovo (either as individual athletes or as a team) has had to participate in sporting competitions hosted in Spain, the diplomatic controversy shows up again. A few months after the football dispute, a new episode took place. The cities of Vigo and Pontevedra (Galicia) served as venues for the 2019 Men's Junior World Handball Championship, from 16 to 28 July. The Balkan side was the last one to get qualified. This meant that the tournament's organising committee – the Spanish Handball Federation (RFEB) and the International Handball Federation (IHF) – had to negotiate with the Spanish authorities the way Kosovo would participate.

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10 This measure does not apply to countries where an exclusion has been decided by the UEFA Executive Committee on security reasons, such as Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Initially, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had set up a series of conditions to limit the exhibition of Kosovan symbols. Once again, the display of the flag and the play of the anthem were not allowed. In fact, during the draw for the group stage, Kosovo was depicted with the IHF's logo rather than its national banner as was the case of the other sides. After noticing it, the IHF threatened to withdraw the hosting rights for the 2021 Women's World Handball Championship due to take place in Catalonia and the Region of Valencia as well as an economic penalty. With that warning surrounding a new fiasco to the country's aspirations to become an international sporting hub, several administrations started some talks. Apart from the Ministry and the RFEB, CSD and COE also got involved. On 9 July, in other words just seven days before the tournament's kick off, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was notified that Kosovo could participate in equal conditions to the rest of competitors. This implied the waving of the Balkan flag in the court and its anthem performed before every game.

Eventually, the championship went ahead with no restriction. However, there was an aspect that did not go unnoticed to the organisers. Back to the CSD's conditions explained above, this institution orders every federation, national and international alike, to show a warning message in the corresponding websites. Thus, the official site of this event published the following post: 'The participation of the territory of Kosovo in this event does not imply the recognition of its unilateral declaration of independence, or any change of the stand of Spain in that regard' (see Picture 2). Once again, we observe a systematic calculation from Madrid to give no room for any potential recognition of Kosovo as a state.

Conclusion

The acceptance of Kosovo into the different sporting international federations – mainly epitomised with its full membership within the IOC as of 2014 – has opened a new scenario for its diplomatic relations with Spain. The potential participation of Kosovo in tournaments held in the Iberian country has pushed the Spanish Government to consider sport as a field of intervention for its political stand on Pristina. Thus, the practices and narratives employed by the Spanish public authorities regarding the presence of Kosovan athletes on its soil are not in vain. These are aligned with and form part of a broader policy of non-recognition of the Balkan territory as a state.

Madrid has set up a systematic strategy to give no room for a potential understanding of Kosovo as sovereign. It is in this sense how we comprehend its strict approach when dealing with administrative affairs. Athletes are considered as performers of the Kosovan state by carrying this specific passport (which Spain does not recognise either). Consequently, the corresponding documentation to enter the country is sealed in a sheet aside. Although this

formula is not only used with this particular country, it aims at placing Kosovo in a different scale, that of the exceptionality. Besides, every accusation of no collaboration or wrongdoing (such as not issuing the visas for the 2018 World Karate Championships in Madrid) has been quickly denied by arguing a rigid interpretation of the law.

The same goes for the symbolic clashes. Understood as a representation of the state, the potential display of Kosovo's national flag, anthem and emblems is perceived as a concession in sovereign terms. Hence, we read the initial measures adopted as pretending to downgrade any such status whatsoever. Here too, the Spanish authorities have implemented a strict use of the rules by referring to the Balkan nation as Kosovo Olympic Committee (in fact NOCs and federations are the ones participating in the tournaments), or reminding them that the Olympic Charter states the utilisation of any flag, not necessarily the national one. As we can see, this is not the case with the rest of the competitors, thus reinforcing Spain's strategy of power.

The international pressure applied by sporting governing bodies (IOC, federations, etc.) on the Spanish authorities – mainly the threats to stop awarding events to Spain – has eased certain policies against Kosovar teams. Notwithstanding, the Iberian government has come out with new deliberated actions (such as the obligation to include banners on tournaments' websites stressing its non-recognition of Kosovo's statehood) looking at minimising, if not erasing, any sign of political change on the topic.

Supplementary, we highlight that Madrid's attitude towards the Balkan country must be understood as part of a dialectic relation between its foreign policies (membership of the EU and the bilateral relationships with Serbia) and its internal ones. The latter refers, specifically, to the nationalist claims from Catalonia and the Basque Country. The studied events have taken place in a period where these demands have been on the rise, particularly in Catalonia. Let us not forget that Catalonia's Regional Council declared its unilateral independence from Spain in October 2017. As Zákravský (2018) points out, sport has played a relevant role in these challenges. The effort to officialise their national teams has been a constant among the nationalist parties of both territories. Actually, the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (Basque Nationalist Party) included this issue in 2018 as part of its support to the current coalition ruling the Spanish government. Therefore, any concession given to Kosovo could be used by these peripheral movements to intensify their requests. The performativity of non-recognition of Kosovo as a state in and around the stadium proves wrong that traditional assumption that sport and politics should not mix (Houlihan – Zheng 2015). The practices and discourses utilised by the Spanish public authorities in this regard show that sport and politics are intertwined given their social nature. Therefore, although not mandatorily reciprocal, they are far from being independent terrains.

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Sports Diplomacy and Gender: Equal Opportunities for Women in Czech Basketball

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Abstract: *The article focuses on the role of equal opportunities and gender in the sports environment, examining their impacts on the creation and functioning of sports diplomacy. Subsequently, in the form of a case study it first concentrates on the Czech sports environment and women's representation in international and national sports federations. In the final part, it examines the basketball environment and analyses its individual structures. Women are not sufficiently represented as coaches, referees or officials. Several main challenges are mentioned: the perception of sport as a predominantly male phenomenon, the overall society setting fixed on traditional perceptions of the role of women and men in the Czech Republic, a small number of suitable female sports models, the time-consuming character of the activities, gender stereotypes at work, the absence of suitable conditions for reconciling family and work life and the low self-confidence of female candidates. The article concludes that the Czech sports environment (including basketball) is markedly masculine, and women face a number of barriers, which in practice are reflected in the Czech Republic's representation in international sport organisations and the way in which sports diplomacy is used as a foreign policy tool.*

Key words: *equal opportunities, sport, sports diplomacy, soft power, basketball*

Introduction

The importance of the growing participation of women as leaders is stressed in many different fields of study, including corporate governance (e.g. Kanter 1977), politics (e.g. Dahlrup, 2006) diplomacy (e.g. Aggestam and Towns, 2019) and sport. In sport, the relationship between gender diversity and sport

governance has been studied in detail in several articles and case studies. While Adriaanse (2015) studied gender diversity in sport governance globally and examined the gender ratio on boards of National Sport Organisations in 45 countries, others focused on the issue of underrepresentation of women on sport boards in a concrete country or sport movement, such as Australia (e.g. McKay 1992, 1997; Sibson 2010), Canada (Shaw – Slack 2002; Inglis 1997), Germany (Pfister – Radtke 2009), the Netherlands (e.g. Claringbould – Knoppers 2008, 2012), New Zealand (Shaw 2006; Cameron 1996), Norway (Fasting 2000; Hovden, 2010; Skirstad 2009), the UK (e.g. Shaw – Penney 2003; Shaw – Hoeber 2003) and the USA (Burton et al. 2011; Schull et al. 2013). These studies unpack the question of gender diversity on boards of sport organisations and present findings on how gender relations are created in sport organisations. Some authors explain the dominance of men in sport governance by language, practices and policy within the context of the sport organisation which favour masculinities over femininities (Shaw – Slack 2002). Hence, sport remains a male-dominated sector and progress in gender equality in this area is rather slow and only a few steps have been taken to improve diversity in the structures of sports federations (Talbot 2001, Scraton – Flintoff 2013). The others point out that such a situation is associated with the phenomenon of the glass ceiling (e.g. Hovden 2010) or with the four dimensions of gender relations, i.e. production, power, emotion and symbolism (e.g. Adriaanse 2015).

The article thus situates its research within the topic of gender diversity in sport governance, but it goes beyond and relates the issue in question with sports diplomacy, a concept which has been unpacked only recently. Therefore, its relationship with gender remains relatively under-theorised, and in the strategies of states and national sports federations rather neglected. The central argument of the study is not only to support the idea of fostering women's representation in sports governance, but also to show its impact on the sports diplomacy of a state or a sports organisation. The empirical part further explores the topic in one of the countries of the CEE region, where attention to gender issues in general is deemed insufficient (EIGE 2020). Hence, the analysis on gender and sport in the Czech Republic (CR) may contribute to the researched field, where so far mainly gender-friendly countries (e.g. Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Norway or Germany) have been scrutinised.

Two goals are identified in the study. First, based on the analysis of the relationship between gender and sports diplomacy, it identifies the main challenges which are part of academic as well as non-academic discussions. It allows us later to set an approach for the evaluation of sports diplomacy and gender at the national level. Furthermore, it enables us to examine the state of gender implementation in sports diplomacy in the CR, and especially in the basketball segment as the second goal. The research is focused on answering two questions: (1) How important is the question of solving underrepresentation for

the implementation of gender in sports diplomacy? (2) What specific problems can be encountered in the case of basketball in the CR with regard to the active involvement of women in sports diplomacy?

The case study therefore examines representation in national and international sport organisations in the CR. It specifically focuses on the Czech basketball environment and its individual structures, as it is the national federation with the second largest number of female members among team sports in the CR (CSU Sportovní kluby). Moreover, it is the only Czech women's team sport to participate in the summer Olympic Games since 1988 (concretely in 2004, 2008 and 2012).

The structure of the study is as follows. The article introduces first the theoretical framework by applying the liberal feminist approach while discussing gender diversity in sport governance. It also relates the problem of under-representation of women in these sport organisations to Kanter's concept of gender dynamics (1977) and grasps the phenomenon of the glass ceiling. This is followed by unpacking the concept of sports diplomacy and its relation to gender diversity. The empirical section then evaluates underrepresentation and analyses the gender ratio of Czech representatives in national and international sports associations. Finally, with data collected from semi-structured interviews, it unpacks the level of gender diversity in the basketball environment and discusses major barriers to women in reaching top positions, such as officials, coaches and referees, which represents a potential loss for the performance of sport associations in the diplomatic arena.

Gender, sport and diplomacy

Gender and sport from theoretical point of view

As the gender roles of men and women have started to change in society, sport as a male dominated system, which constantly reconstructs hegemonic masculinity through symbolic presentation, has been the focus of gender research since the 1980s (Chinorum et al. 2014, Everhart and Pemberton 2007). Sport is about male privileges and thus serves as one of the significant places for the confirmation of masculinity (Messner 2007). The perception of the masculine nature of sport can be identified mainly in three categories. The first category includes contact team sports with a visible degree of aggression (soccer, hockey, rugby, handball); the second category contains sports based on muscles (e.g. weightlifting) and finally, the third category includes sports directly related to 'pain and blood' (e.g. boxing; martial arts) (Meier 2005).

Various theoretical backgrounds can be used when discussing gender in relation to sport. Scraton and Flintoff (2013: 96) investigate different theoretical explanations of sports feminisms, claiming that gender relations are not static

in their nature but may change over time and that different positions can even overlap. The article, however, draws on liberal feminism as its main focus is the representation of women and their presence in sports diplomacy.

Liberalists generally call for justice among genders and consider the distribution of benefits and burdens to be unfair, partly due to societal notions of gender differences deriving from the history of patriarchal traditions and institutions (Baehr 2013). Their approach lies on the assumption that all social activity is the result of certain restrictions and coercion. In other words, they believe that 'female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that blocks women's entrance to and success in the so-called public world' (Tong 1997: 12). Thus, they have been concerned with visible sources of gender discrimination, such as gendered job markets and inequitable wage scales, and with getting women into positions of authority in professions, government and cultural institutions – especially through anti-discrimination legislation and affirmative action. This understanding has put pressure on institutions to establish a complex set of internal mechanisms, rules and controls ensuring equal gender opportunities.

In this regard, in the sports arena, liberalism examines the equality of access and opportunity, different socialisation practices and discrimination (Scraton and Flintoff 2013). In other words, sport, the same as politics or diplomacy[1] represents an area of human activity which needs to be accessible for women. Liberal feminists focus on discriminatory practices which prevent women from having equal access to sporting opportunities, including facilities and resources (Whalen 2017, Crosset 1995 in Scranton – Flintoff 2013). Therefore, among other issues, they also unpack the question of the representation of women in decision-making positions in sport and in higher coaching and leadership posts (Knoppers 1994 in Scranton and Flintoff 2013). The primary focus is on coaches, referees or representatives in numerous local as well as national or international sports associations and federations.

The liberal approach certainly serves as a starting point to document the real distributive inequalities between men's and women's sport or to highlight the significance of role models (Scranton and Flintoff 2013). The approach remains of utmost importance, especially when we relate the topic to the formation and implementation of findings on gender dynamics, which is linked to underrepresentation challenges and to critical mass theory. Problems for women arise because they are often located in dead-end jobs at the bottom of the organisation or appear as 'tokens' at the top (Adriaanse 2015: 151).

This study examines underrepresentation repercussions with the help of Kanter's concept of gender dynamics, gender ratios and critical mass (1977/1993),

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1   The issue of women's representation in top positions is currently also addressed more in politics and diplomacy, e.g. Dahlrup 2006, Aggestam – Towns 2019, Niklasson 2020.

which points out that relative numbers of a dominant and minority group are significant for affecting behaviour in organisations. The theory proposes that when an organisational minority (e.g. women) reaches a certain threshold or critical mass, it can influence or 'tilt' the culture of the organisation. Kanter (1977) suggested that this threshold was approximately one third of the group.

Therefore, the analysis of the Czech case (which includes quantitative as well as qualitative data) intends to examine composition in sport governance by investigating gender ratios on the boards of the main Czech and especially basketball associations, as they are the peak national bodies for a particular sport and it is at this level that important decisions are made which affect hundreds of thousands of physically active men and women, and those who want to be active, from grass-roots to the elite level. In providing a service to the general population, these publicly funded organisations are expected to adhere to ethical governance principles such as board representation of all stakeholders, including women. Moreover, they also strengthen the relevant actors in the arena of sports diplomacy.

Sports diplomacy in the foreign policy and its connection with gender

Recognition of efficiency in achieving the foreign policy goals of states and the belief that a mostly positive approach to the role of sport, sportspeople and sport organisations in international relations have contributed to the growing popularity of sports diplomacy (Nauright 2013; Trunkos – Heere 2017). The importance of sports diplomacy for foreign policy is then accepted in the contemporary world (Jackson – Haigh 2008; Black – Peacock 2013; Jennings 2013; Merkel 2016; Dubský 2018; Murray 2018; Lee 2020)[2]. Sport is seen as a powerful means for disseminating information internationally, strengthening reputation and developing relationships (Sanders 2016). According to Murray, sport 'can transform layers and networks into positive diplomatic relationships and, more importantly, offer an alternate channel for entrenched relations to move beyond the status quo' (Murray 2012: 588) and sports diplomacy can then be considered as one of the 'soft power' tools of the state (Melissen 2005; Grix – Brannagan 2016; Abdi – Talebpour – Fullerton et al 2019). As a respective part of public diplomacy (Özsarı et al. 2018), sports diplomacy plays an important role in communication, which is focused on achieving positive ideas about a country and aims at heightening the image and attractiveness of

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2   However, negative connotations regarding the connection between sport and foreign relations are also discussed (Redeker 2008; Defrance – Chamot 2008; Jackson 2013). Sport and diplomacy in this view represent two completely different cultures – sport, unlike diplomacy, does not know consensus; in a sports match, the 'winner takes all' rule applies (Defrance – Chamot 2008: 395). Sports diplomacy is thus just an 'empty voice' (Redeker 2008).

a country (Štulajter – Barteková – Štulajter 2013; Knott – Fyall – Jones 2015; Kobierecki – Strożek 2017).

When considering gender issues, it is important that sports diplomacy in practice does not exclusively consist of organising sports competitions and sending sportspeople to participate in them, it also has other means. A specific part of sports diplomacy is communication between sports bodies/associations/organisations at the national and international level (Allison – Tomlinson 2017). These can be considered as new actors in diplomacy who are able to significantly affect states or to make governments influence or change their policies (Kobierecki 2019); tools such as lobbying, public relations and nation branding can be used for this (Novotný 2011). A significant starting point is the fact that sports diplomacy is carried out primarily by non-state actors but is linked to the official diplomacy of the state (Rofe 2016; Rofe 2018).

Representation in international sport organisations and associations plays a specific role and sports people in this role become sports diplomats and ambassadors (cf. Goldberg 2000; Murray 2012; Rofe 2016; Rofe 2018). The representation of state citizens in international sports institutions both raises the profile of the state and can enable the promotion of state policy goals, of course especially in sports, but also in the wider political context, as sport organisations are linked to politics and are a contemporary part of international politics (Goldberg 2000; Næss 2018).

As already argued in the previous subchapter, representation in international or national sport organisations should also be studied through the perspective of gender diversity, this time, however, in the context of sports diplomacy. In this regard, two basic levels were examined. The first level concerns the self--representation of women in national and international organisations and associations. The argument for increasing the representation of women in decision-making positions in sport is then based on a mixture of democratic/ethical and commercial principles (Adriaanse 2015). It is therefore a combination of the assumption that women represent the stakeholders that should be involved and at the same time that their inclusion increases the range of talents available for selection in leadership positions (Adriaanse – Claringbould 2014). The second level concerns the involvement of gender as an important topic and an aspect of the implementation of sports diplomacy in other (especially developing) countries. At both levels, the problem of women's underrepresentation, the consequences of this phenomenon and, at the same time, ways to remedy can be observed. The issue may also be grasped from a different perspective (as suggested by Ryan and Dickson 2018: 343) in which 'the gender leadership problem is not the underrepresentation of women, but the dominant presence of groups of men and valued forms of masculinities'.

In any way, it can be emphasised that greater gender diversity in the structures of sport organisations presents new opportunities for sports diplomacy

in the form of spreading new values and practices or of enhancing the organisations' performance. The involvement of women in management positions can help bring in new perspectives and ideas and can also help to improve overall governance, as it was pointed out in Australian (Sibson 2010), Norwegian (Fasting 2000) or Dutch (Claringbould – Knoppers 2008) case studies. Hence, it increases the visibility and influence of a state in different areas which can strengthen the actor and its soft power. Women might also be able to offer a different style and format of leadership that could help change the organisational culture (EIGE n.d.) as well as the commercial context (Desvaux et al. 2010).

As for the international perspective of sports diplomacy, values such as social engagement and equality also have the potential to bring specific issues to the fore, especially in the context of developing programmes. Furthermore, greater involvement of women in sports diplomacy can help create new role models for young girls (European Commission 2014). Gender equity, however, is not a goal in itself. The solution to underrepresentation has implications in a broader context in two directions. On the one hand, it continuously reduces the vision of sport as a masculine phenomenon, and on the other hand, the issue of gender in sport is becoming an important topic and a playground for activities to strengthen visibility and influence. The interplay between sports diplomacy and gender thus creates additional potential for strengthening the actor (in our case, the state) and its soft power.

Methodology

When evaluating the reflection of gender issues in sports diplomacy according to the liberal approach, it seems essential to analyse and interpret underrepresentation within sports associations and organisations, especially at the international level. The advantage is to work with hard numerical data.

However, this can only determine the situation and allow comparison. Hence, it seems appropriate to combine it with analysis of the causes of the condition. In our case, it is possible to rely on a qualitative analysis and interpret strategic documents and analyse data gathered from semi-structured interviews with relevant respondents.

In the first phase, the study contains an analysis of strategic documents on gender in sports diplomacy, adopted by federations in which the CR participates as a member. The analysis is further outlined in the context of states that have already implemented gender issues in their sports diplomacy strategies.

In the second phase, the study evaluates underrepresentation and analyses the gender ratio of Czech female representatives in international sports associations or federations, based on data provided by the Czech Olympic Committee and a report prepared by Fasting (2019), issued by the Council of Europe. It puts the numbers into the European perspective and analyses them in more

detail in the basketball environment which, according to the study of Fasting (2019), is a sport where most federations use both measures to ensure equality and gender mainstreaming strategies.

In the third phase, the qualitative part of the research, which unpacks the level of gender diversity in the basketball environment, includes eight semi-structured interviews with three male and five female respondents (four employees of the Czech Basketball Federation, three referees and one coach) providing insight into personal experiences and work-related behaviour. The interviews were conducted from January 2019 to January 2021 by Ilona Burgrová who is well acquainted with the basketball environment. Questions were designed based on theoretical expectations and existing literature. A 'comprehensive interview' approach (Kaufmann 2010) was adopted. This qualitative data collection technique is based on conducting semi-structured interviews where the researcher has the opportunity to go beyond the 'surface' proclamations of the respondent and to examine his/her deeper thoughts and attitudes.

Participants were asked to comment on the nature of their work, on the challenges they face as well as on their perception of gender equality and possible gender differences. The semi-structured interviews with female coaches, referees and officials reveal the barriers that women in the CR face while engaging in management and professional positions in sport (and concretely in basketball). These findings will be put into the context of the theoretical debate and of the practical achievements of various actors (including states and international and national sport organisations) in the field of sports diplomacy.

Sports diplomacy and gender in the CR

Gender for sports diplomacy: strategies at the national and international level

Currently, there are international organisations and several states that already include gender issues among their strategies and activities related to sports diplomacy. Among them is the International Labour Organization (ILO), which highlights the role and/or achievements of women in a particular field of work, including sport, by portraying former athletes, coaches, administrators or journalists at special exhibitions or international film festivals or by supporting organisations that have made a significant contribution to the development of women's sports in their countries (ILO 2006).

At the EU level, the European Commission (EC) expressed its commitment, in the Women's Charter (European Commission 2010) and in the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men, to address and eliminate the gender gap in decision-making (European Commission). In the EU Strategic Actions on gender Equality in Sport (2014–2020), gender issues are defined with respect

to individual professions within the sports environment and show sport organisations the best practices (European Commission 2014). Also, the objective 2020 is set, which includes a minimum of 40 % of women on executive boards and committees of national sport governing bodies and 30 % in international sports, a minimum of 40 % of women in the management of professional sport administrations and governmental sport bodies. The objective serves as a target for national and international plans for strategic action. Moreover, the EIGE as an institution of the European Union published a document entitled Gender in Sport which identifies the way to change the position of women in society, focusing on gender diversity in decision-making processes and gender mainstreaming (EIGE 2015).

Apart from the EU, the Council of Europe represents another institution that develops joint projects with the EU and the sports movement, including the topic of gender equality. One such project was 'ALL IN: Towards gender balance in sport' (it ended in 2019). In addition to a survey in each participating country (whose results will be discussed more in the following section of the article) this project focused on creating a guide for sport organisations on how to achieve positive changes in their structures through gender mainstreaming.

Strategic documents adopted by major sports associations and organisations are also relevant. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) considers gender equality not only as a fundamental human right, but also as one of the basic principles of the Olympic Charter (2019). The IOC stressed that gender inequality is not only a missed opportunity within sport itself, but the uniformity caused by it can act as a risk factor in decision-making (Advancing Women in Leadership Roles Forum in Europe Vilnius, 2017). Hence, the representation of men and women in leadership and decision-making positions is a necessary condition for exploring the full potential of the sports movement. The IOC also noted that there is still a lack of positive personal role models for women in sport. Indeed, women's self-confidence is one of the factors which discourages women from applying for higher positions. As part of the administration, it encourages the IOC to identify strategic mechanisms for more women on executive boards and in administration, as well as to adopt electoral procedures to guarantee the diversity of members (IOC 2018). Furthermore, the position of women in sports structures has long been debated in European and international conferences. Every four years, the International Working Group (IWG) on Women & Sport organises a conference in which representatives from many countries and organisations discuss topics related to women in sport. Other organisations are also active, e.g. Women's Sports International, the European Women and Sport network and the International Association for Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women.[3]

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3   In the Women's Sports International, there is a Czech representative who was repeatedly elected its vice-president.

Apart from these organisations, few countries also tackle the issue of gender in their strategies of sports diplomacy. Canada, Great Britain and Australia seem to be the frontrunners. On the website of Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity, the association deals with areas of women's physical activity in all its forms (including mentoring programmes for coaches as well as programmes for women who want to apply for leadership positions in sports administrations or support for minorities). It also seeks to help sport organisations ensure that their environment and activities are gender balanced. The British organisation Women in Sport has been working since 1984 to ensure that women and men have equal opportunities in society. This organisation has also prepared a document to help sports associations better involve women in their activities and structures. Mentoring and female role models across all sports levels are integrated as important activities (Women in sport 2015). The same attention to women is paid in the strategy for sports diplomacy in Australia. It does not only stress the underrepresentation of women in sporting clubs and sport organisations, but it also mentions the reason why it is necessary to change the situation. From the sports diplomacy perspective, it helps to build Australia's reputation on the global stage as a gender-friendly country, it builds trust among different communities and generates links with trade and development. Importantly, it focuses on developing youth (especially young women and girls) as emerging leaders, building leadership capacity within sport and more broadly across the Indo-Pacific region (Australian Women in Sport Advisory Group 2019: 5).

Interestingly, similar attention to the representation of women in decision-making positions in sport organisations is not paid in the sports strategies of other countries which are considered frontrunners in sports diplomacy, i.e. Wales[4] or Spain. Here, gender issues and the activity of women are viewed only as part of the development goal to be achieved on the international scene, especially in connection to less developed countries and regions (e.g. Africa is explicitly mentioned). Contrary to Canada or Britain, the internal elements of participation in decision-making seem to be rather neglected.

It is not until recently that sports diplomacy has become more widely used in the Czech environment. Within this agenda, it is the National Sports Agency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Czech Olympic Committee that play key roles in the field of Czech sports diplomacy. The international agenda and global topics are mainly devoted to the section related to Agenda 2020, prepared by the International Olympic Committee. Here, the COC is committed to 'promoting the principles of the strategic plan of the International Olympic Committee for the Development of the Olympic Movement' (IOC 2018). The activity of representatives of the Czech sports environment within the International Olympic

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4   Although Wales is a constituent country of Britain, it has its own sports diplomacy strategy.

Committee has increased over the last five years.[5] Overall, however, there are only two representatives in the IOC, but no Czech female representative, nor representation in the COC's secretariat. This situation does not correspond to the results of Czech athletes in an international comparison. Underrepresentation (of both sexes) at the international level can thus be considered as a fundamental weakness of our sporting diplomatic engagement.

With regard to gender diversity, specific goals which focus directly on the sports environment were defined in the Government Strategy for Gender Equality in the Czech Republic 2014 –2020 (Office of the Government 2014). This strategy not only identifies low support for women's and girls' sports activities, but also aims to achieve balanced participation of both sexes and the application of gender mainstreaming in decision-making processes[6].

Furthermore, the Commission for Equal Opportunities in Sport was established within the structures of the Czech Olympic Committee as an advisory body for equal opportunities of women and men in sport. Unfortunately, despite all the activities, the commission has neither the staff nor the financial capacity to help raise the issue of women in sport to a level that this question certainly deserves (respondent 9).

Sports diplomacy in the CR and gender: the problem of underrepresentation

Before we unpack the situation of underrepresentation in the Czech sports environment, a closer insight into Czech society is necessary to understand the context. The first women's sports association, the Czech Ladies Club, was established in the CR as early as 1865, which was almost 20 years before similar associations began to be established in Western Europe (Fasting – Knorre 2005). However, in the aftermath of the 20th century, women's empowerment became a necessity rather than a long-accepted change. During the communist regime, women's equality became part of political doctrine. From 1948 to 1989, both women and men had to be employed and thus to contribute to the development

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5   In February 2018, the chairman of the Czech Olympic Committee, Jiří Kejval, was elected a member of the IOC. Moreover, in 2019, he was appointed head of the IOC Marketing Commission and became Chairman of the Board of IOC Television and Marketing Services, which is responsible for the development and implementation of the IOC's marketing strategy and broadcasting rights for the Olympic Games. Also, Roman Kumpošt, current vice-president of the COC, was appointed member of the IOC Communication Commission.

6   Moreover, other government action plans on gender equality and sport were later published, i.e. the Action Plan for the Balanced Representation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Positions 2016–2018 (Office of the Government 2016) and the Action Plan for the Concept of Support for Sport 2016–2025 (MSMT 2016). Both specifically mention that another problematic point in promoting a balanced proportion of women and men in decision-making in public administration and public institutions is the low activity or nonactivity of the state in certain areas of public life which concerns sports and non-profit sectors.

of socialism. However, the distribution of household responsibilities remained unchanged, which affected the role of women in sport organisations. After the end of the communist era, the question of equal opportunities became more important, especially in relation to EU enlargement.

The issue of underrepresentation in sports diplomacy in the CR must be generally placed in the context of the position of gender in society, as Czech society seems to be rather conservative and less progressive. Although the Czech institutional setting has made steps forward in the gender equality area, the recent score of the country remains lower than the EU average (56.2 points in 2020). It places the country almost at the bottom of the echelon (EIGE 2020). Especially the share of women in decision-making bodies is very low in the political, economic/business and social sectors. These data are of great importance, as they show that women's representation on the boards of political (including diplomatic), economic and social institutions represents one of the major challenges for Czech society. It includes sporting organisations, where the share of female members of the highest decision-making bodies of national Olympic sport organisations is 7.4 % (EIGE 2020). Moreover, the numbers show that in the CR, only 6.7 % of the decision-making positions are held by women while 93.3 % are held by men in the ten most funded sports (EIGE 2020). At the same time, the study of Fasting (2019) shows that the Czech sports federation are not active in implementing measures to improve women's participation in decision-making positions.

Looking closely at the share of women in top positions in the national sports federations of 19 European states which participated in the ALL IN project, 8 % of presidents are female (3 in total), 9 % of of vice-presidents are female (5 in total) and 14 % of board members are female (44 in total) (Fasting 2019). Unfortunately, the results have not improved significantly from 2015, when Adriaanse (2015: 154–156) presented her findings. The situation is not different for the Czech female representatives on the international scene. Their involvement in international sports federations, such as the International Handball Federation or the International Biathlon Union, is very low. Table 1 shows that there are two male representatives who have recently become presidents of international sports federations, but there are no women. There are 9 vice-presidents, but no female vice-president. Finally, there are 3 female officials (out of 14) who are currently members of the board, concretely in the World Minigolf Sport Federation and the Union Cycliste Internationale (see in Table 1).

The situation of female coaches is similar. It is estimated that female coaches represent only 20–30 % of the total number of coaches in the EU (European Commission, 2014). According to research from 2005, only 11 % of professional coaches in the CR are female and 73 % of the top sportswomen are still trained by men (Fasting – Knorre, 2005). The situation has improved only recently. In 2019, 33 % of female professional coaches were employed by sports federa-

Table 1: Top positions of the international sports federations – the Czech representatives

	President	Vice-president	Board
Association of Summer Olympic International Federations			
International Weightlifting Federation	×	Petr Krol	
Union Cycliste Internationale	×	×	Kateřina Nash
International Handball Federation	×	×	František Táborský
International Judo Federation	×	×	Vladimír Bárta
Association of International Olympic Winter Sports Federations			
International Biathlon Union	×	Jiří Hamza	×
International Ice Hockey Federation	×	×	Petr Bříza
International Ski Federation	×	Roman Kumpošt	×
Alliance of Independent Recognised members of Sport			
International Casting sport Federation	×	×	Josef Doležal – secretary general
World Minigolf Sport Federation	×	×	Karolína Jandová – Chair Medical & Anti-doping Committee
ARSF			
F.I.P.J.P. (Fédération Internationale de Pétenque et Jeu Provencal)	×	×	Karel Dohnal
International Chess Federation	×	×	Petr Pisk
International Floorball Federation	×	Filip Šuman	×
World Karate Federation	×	×	Jiří Boček
Federation Internationale de Motocyclisme	×	×	Jan Šťovíček
International Federation of Muaythai Amateur	×	×	Petr Ottich
International Orienteering Federation	×	×	Dušan Vystavěl
European sports federations			
European Athletics	×	Libor Varhaník	×
FIBA Europe			Michal Konečný

	President	Vice-president	Board
European Karate Federation	×	Jiří Boček	×
European Squash Federation	×	Pavel Sládeček	×
European Softball Federation	Gabriel Waage	×	×
Tennis Europe	Ivo Kaderka	×	×
European Canoe Federation	×	Jaroslav Pollert	×
European Gymnastics	×	×	Vladimír Zeman
European Handball Federation	×	×	Liběna Šrámková
Confederation of European Baseball		Petr Ditrich	

Source: Data in the table provided by the Czech Olympic Committee, September 2020.

tions (Fasting 2019). In terms of team sports, women train 29 % of female athletes, 59 % of female athletes are trained by men and 12 % remain without a coach. Female coaches mostly work with women and children at the regional and local level, mainly in sports with a higher participation of women (dance, figure skating, gymnastics, horseback riding, etc.) (EIGE, n.d). Female coaches, therefore, focus on the part of the population and at a level which is outside the main interest of the media and which may be perceived by society as less prestigious and lower paid.

These findings only confirm that, in most areas, Czech sports organisations fail to achieve a critical mass of women's presence, as it was presented by Kanter (1977) and later concluded in other studies (Konrad et al. 2008, Torchia et al. 2011). The consequence is the loss of potential which may be manifested by enhancing the organisation's performance, including negotiations on the international scene (enriched by new perspectives and ideas), which are the corner stones of sports diplomacy. The persistence of such a pattern relates to the central argument of the liberal feminist approach, stressing the existing barriers between men and women in the public arena (including the sports environment) and pointing to the metaphor of a glass ceiling (Connell 2006).

One of the possible explanations may be the fact that the national sports federations, apart from a few institutions (such as the COC), do not implement measures or strategies to promote gender equality (e.g. mentoring programmes as in the case of Great Britain or Australia [Sibson 2010, Shaw 2006]), even though they are introduced at the international level, be it by international organisations (the ILO, the EU, the CoE or the IOC) or by international sports federations. Recently, to improve gender equality, some European sports federations have taken active steps and measures to increase the number of women in decision-making positions within their organisation. By 2015, gender quotas for the highest authorities had been introduced by nine of the 28 European

confederations. Unfortunately, progressive action at the supranational level does not always reach national federations and local organisations. Basketball could serve as an example of a sports environment where international and national organisations do not sometimes pursue the same level of progress in promoting gender diversity in key positions, such as officials, coaches or referees. Therefore, it is the Czech basketball environment which will serve to identify the concrete challenges and barriers to women reaching leadership roles, be it an official, professional coach or referee. Indeed, in all these capacities, underrepresentation impacts the organisation's performance, including its efficiency in diplomatic activities.

Gender as an issue in the Czech Basketball Federation

The issue of women's participation in basketball is among one of the three main priorities of the International Basketball Federation's (FIBA) strategy in the period between 2019 and 2023. Its aim is to increase gender diversity, not only in FIBA structures but also within national federations (FIBA 2019). The European Basketball Federation (FIBA Europe, which represents 50 national federations) also sets several measures. It requires having at least two women and two men in decision-making positions in its statutes (EIGE n.d.). Currently, two women have seats out of nine elected positions (FIBA. n.d.) in the FIBA Europe Executive Committee and three female representatives are members of the FIBA Europe Board (FIBA, Executive Committee, Board). FIBA also established a competition commission, Women in Basketball. In addition to this, in 2019, a female representative was for the first time elected to the position of director of a regional section of FIBA (FIBA Americas).

While the FIBA implements various tools to raise the participation of women, this is not the case of national federations. The study of Fasting (2019) confirms these findings. The survey showed that in the European states which sent the questionnaires, in the basketball environment, only 3 % of presidents are female, 15 % of vice-presidents and 20 % of members of the board in the national basketball federations are female. Interestingly also, although it is a sport where most federations use equality measures (27 %) and gender mainstreaming strategies (47 %), the implementation of measures to increase women's participation in decision-making positions is below the average: currently 53 % of basketball federations in respective countries have taken steps to increase the number of women in decision-making positions. The same percentage of federations have also introduced measures to increase the number of coaches (Fasting 2019). Therefore, an analysis of the local level is necessary to examine the current state of play and to identify the major challenges and obstacles which hinder progress and lead to the underrepresentation of women in these positions.

Officials and gender problems

The Czech Basketball Federation (CBF) has 22 680 registered members in 243 different entities (CSU, Sportovní kluby 2020). The CBF does not currently have a woman in the highest body of its organisation, which is the CBF Committee (CBF 2020). Regarding the CBF General Meeting, there were four women elected out of 14 positions (CFB, General meeting). All four posts were placed in the Mandate Commission. In other bodies of the CBF, women are represented only rarely. The only exception is the CBF Arbitration Commission, where women occupied four out of six positions (CBF, commission).

The figures show that women are underrepresented within the structures of the CBF and do not participate at all at the international level (even at the Women's Committee there is a Czech male representative (CBF 2020). An interview with a CBF employee (respondent 1) highlighted the fact that the CBF approaches the gender issue without significant activity. 'Gender is viewed neutrally, decisions in this area are considered as personal choices and no guidelines or manual are required. We (the organisation) cannot interfere in these matters with local associations and clubs which are independent entities and thus the CBF has neither the right nor the strength to do so' (respondent 1).

The absence of discussion was also confirmed by respondent 4 (also a former basketball player): 'women often hold the positions of economist, accountant, administrative and marketing staff. They do not appear in top managerial positions as officials. This is partly due to the time-consuming and demanding combination of personal and professional life in these positions. A significant factor, however, is also the masculine environment, which still predominates among officials, and it is very difficult for a woman to make her way through it'. Respondent 4 further stated that when she came to the federation, she perceived a great willingness to change the structure of the CBF and to define individual structures, including the sports methodological section and commissions. She was also able to identify places and topics which were considered marginal by her colleagues.

Despite the low number of women in decision-making positions in the CBF, the organisation takes a part in some FIBA projects focusing on increasing the number of women in the association. These projects include Her World Her Rules (HWHR), whose aim is to attract young girls to playing basketball, and to prevent the drop out of the girls who are already playing basketball. The programme also gives an opportunity to former or current players to serve as role models. Another FIBA project is Time Out, which is an educational programme for former and current players who would like to stay active within basketball structures on the level of management and decisive positions. The CBF directly chooses the candidates who participate in this project. Respondent 1 stated that in the current year 20/21 there are two male candidates undertaking this

programme. One of these candidates had already been replaced by another male participant due to the lack of sufficient fluency in English. Yet, according to respondent 1, the CBF could not find any women who would be suitable for the programme and do not have any obligations such as having young children. This statement only uncovers the real barriers for female applicants which are embedded in the institutional culture and gender stereotypes remaining in the organisation. Letting one of the former female international basketball players run the programme HWHR, as it is the case in Spain, could increase the visibility of the programme and it could also create good work experience for the player.

Referees and gender problems

A similar situation occurs in the Czech Association of Basketball Referees (CABR). In the CABR, there were 21 women and 163 men in the referee profession in 2020 (respondent 2). Despite this large disparity, according to data provided by the CABR (respondent 2), it is the highest number of women in the last six seasons. In the same year, the average age of Czech female referees was 24.4 years, which is the second lowest average age overall in the given data. These figures suggest that there may be a gradual recruitment of new young adepts for the profession. However, it can also indicate the departure of experienced senior referees. So far, there has only been one woman in the highest category. No other woman in this category has replaced her since the end of her career. Interestingly, there is also one woman who participates in the international FIBA competitions at the highest level. Yet she has not yet qualified for the highest referee category in the Czech basketball environment. The inability to officiate the hardest basketball matches within the CR may be a disadvantage for her, compared to other international referees who are able to do so in their countries. These female referees gain more valuable experience on a consistent basis. The existence of a glass ceiling and the virtual impossibility of further career advancement was also claimed by respondent 8, and it led her to seriously question her further career in this occupation. Nevertheless, according to the information obtained from CABR staff (respondent 2): 'there is no generally applicable barrier to the advancement of women into the highest category or their inclusion in the play-offs'. Such a response confirms the neutral stance and potential unwillingness of the CABR to act in these matters. This behaviour corresponds with practices identified by Shaw (2006) or Hovden (2006) in studies on New Zealand or Norwegian sports organisations, respectively. Both authors point out that to view the organisation as homogenous and gender neutral only preserves gender suppression and reproduces the male dominance in the environment.

Furthermore, a former female referee (respondent 3) mentioned several other obstacles that women in this profession have to face. Being a woman

in a male environment was one of them. 'Some of my male colleagues had a hard time accepting that a woman could be more successful than they were. I was then met with contempt from colleagues, coaches and players at a time when I was the only woman in the highest men's basketball league in the CR' (respondent 3). She also mentioned the long journey that the profession entails: 'Basketball referee is not a full-time professional job, the referee has to take time off from his/her job in order to travel and participate in basketball matches that are played during the week. In this respect, to combine this role with a family life is extremely difficult. It is an example of the three shifts that a woman who wants to pursue a career as a referee and a working mother must undergo' (respondent 3). According to respondent 3, the professionalisation of the occupation may be helpful. If she worked as a referee as her only job, she would be greatly relieved and could devote herself fully to it. Respondent 3 also admits that some of the barriers were personal. As a result of the environment in which she participated, she began to lose internal motivation and such uncertainty prevented her from further personal development. As Shaw (2006) suggests, such reasoning is another product of maintaining the gender-neutral position of the organisation. In the words of Adriaanse (2015: 151): 'the existing gender order was understood as a women problem, a result of women's individual choices, priorities and competences, a problem beyond the responsibility of the organisation'. On the other hand, as Hovden (2008) stresses, such an existing gender order represents socially constructed power relations that could be challenged and changed when the gender dynamic changes and the critical mass is achieved. These women would no longer be taken as tokens and symbolic representatives for their category, but as a bigger group in which they could form alliances and influence the culture of the organisation.

Finally, it should be added that the aggressive behaviour of fans, coaches and players towards referees in general has multiplied. According to respondent 7, a man is naturally afforded more respect than a woman. Respondent 8 stated that due to the lower number of female referees, people may pay closer attention to them. Therefore, their mistakes are more visible, and this can escalate in more verbal attacks on female referees than on their male counterparts (which again confirms Kanter's theoretical suggestions of women as tokens). The results of a survey of Czech sportswomen show that 32 % of them do not want to become referees due to the lack of respect (Fasting – Knorre 2005). It is also interesting that while there is a greater interest in the profession of referee among individual athletes (28 %), the number of female athletes from team sports has dropped to 19 % (Fasting – Knorre 2005). To increase respect, the methodological department of the CBF, in cooperation with the CABR, decided to establish 'respect meetings', in which the referees meet with the players' representatives and coaches before the match to ensure mutual respect for both professions.

Moreover, as part of the training, one female referee is regularly sent to official FIBA training seminars, and for seven years now one referee has been participating in a camp in Slovenian Postojna, which is intended only for women. An interview with a former female referee, respondent 3, showed that her professional inspiration was another female referee and the fact that in the club they no longer counted on her as a player. Respondent 7 stated that she came up with the idea of becoming a referee after seeing a flier, but she was later accompanied by her teammate at the time to give each other more support. As we could see from these two cases, the support of other women, role models and some sort of mentoring might be very helpful when deciding on a career as a referee.

Coaches and gender problems

Probably the largest percentage of female athletes who remain in basketball structures after their active career try to become coaches. There is also a certain number of female athletes who, along with their careers, are also involved in coaching activities (Fasting – Knorre 2005). This demonstrates that women are interested in coaching but may face some barriers which prevent them from fully pursuing this path. It is also interesting that some of the referee respondents also stated that they had tried to coach prior to pursuing a career as a referee.

According to the statistics of the Czech sports union, there are currently 840 male basketball coaches and 291 female coaches. Yet the data do not show whether all these coaches are currently assigned to any team or not (CSU, Sportovní kluby 2020).

In the past, the first woman coaching the highest women's league in the CR (now ZBL) was Světlana Bartošová, in the 1979/80 season. Since then, only a few women have been able to break the glass ceiling and hold the position of a coach or an assistant coach for an extended period of time. Currently, there are four women holding the positions of head coaches, and two women are assistant coaches in the women's basketball league. There are no women in these positions in the men's highest league (NBL). The only woman who ever coached in the NBL was Veronika Wiednerová, in 2010/11. She was officially a head coach, but in reality, she had the role of an assistant.

Currently, the CBF directly employs two women as head coaches in their 10 girls' Sports Centres (respondent 4). Even in all the national teams, the situation is not much different. The majority of the head coaches are men. The only exception is the women's team U20, where there is a woman in the position of head coach. Moreover, there is only one female assistant coach in all national teams across the categories, and she is involved with the senior women's national team (CBF, representation). An interview with a professional coach (respondent 5) only confirmed how demanding coaching is for women who want

to perform at the highest level and at the same time have a family. In addition to the job they do, women are in charge of the household and children, and they do not have time for sports. This is especially striking for young coaches, for whom coaching is often only a poorly financially rewarded activity or even an unpaid hobby. Respondent 5 describes the coaching profession as 'a closed male company, which is difficult to enter, and therefore it is sometimes better to find your own path'. She also sees women in the coaching profession as often far more capable and hardworking than men, but due to little support from the environment and criteria that often suit men better, they do not engage in coaching for a long time. Furthermore, respondent 6 also indicates that the position of a female coach in local clubs is often associated with duties other than just training and coaching the matches. Apart from the time demanding schedule, which also includes weekends and late hours, it was also pointed out that coaching at a higher level is also linked with difficulties in the form of possible relocation. There are not many well-paid and prestigious coaching positions in the CR. Coaches who have ambitions and would like to train in top positions must therefore be prepared to move. This is certainly just as unpleasant for men as for women and their families. However, it is much harder for a woman to persuade her partner to take such an important step when there are only a few female coaches who have succeeded.

Unfortunately, these obstacles have often had a negative effect on their family life. The advice that respondent 5 would give to others who want to become professional coaches in future is, in the current social situation: 'Not to get married and not to have a family'. The coaches who tried to combine their personal and professional life at the highest level are often referred to as careerists and encounter negative reactions from their close environment. Such an approach then discourages other female coaches from pursuing this career.

The coaching association (CABT) also does not specifically target women. Only a few female coaches act as lecturers at national coaching seminars. Recently, the association has also focused on seminars with international participation and, as respondent 6 confirmed, over the past six years only one foreign female lecturer has participated. A possible increased number of foreign female lecturers could not only help to motivate young Czech coaches to further develop in their profession but also show them that female coaches are as capable and successful as their male colleagues. Moreover, according to respondent 4, the presence of women as coaches, lecturers and members of administration (management) teams is an important motivating and inspiring factor for young females. The more often young players encounter the fact that a woman may also be in various roles in sport, the more natural it may be for them to apply for such positions if they are interested.

The role models approach thus seems to be one of the core activities in fostering women's presence in sport governance. Similar actions are, as mentioned

above, introduced in the plans of international organisations or countries which implement gender into their sport diplomatic agenda, including Australia, New Zealand or Great Britain. 'The importance of role models for women in sports is undeniable. In fact, one could assert that it is a virtuous circle. The more women take positive, leading roles as athletes, trainers, journalists and decision-makers, the more women will see that gender inequalities can be overcome – not only in sports but in all professions' (ILO 2006). It also confirms the critical mass theory, which shows that women maintaining a minority in the organisation are highly visible and are perceived as symbolic representatives who have the opportunity to inspire other women if they are motivated and supported by the association (Hovden 2010). This is often seen by liberal feminists as a starting point which fosters women's presence and leads to changes in the organisation's culture. Only then do gender-based differences become less important and women are perceived as individuals with their own skills and perspectives (Adriaanse 2015: 152). Under such circumstances, the organisation may profit from the potential that gender diversity offers, i.e. the unique skills, knowledge and experience of women, and a different voice to debates and decision-making. All of these may contribute to enhancing the external performance of the sport organisation, its negotiations with others in the international arena or to the improvement of its image towards the public in foreign countries.

Conclusion

Gender and sport are addressed simultaneously in the academic discussion. While there are various avenues to study the interrelation between concepts of gender and sports diplomacy, this article is in line with the liberal approach, centred around the issue of representation. Representation in international sport organisations plays a specific role, not only its quantity but also its quality. The involvement of women in management positions can help bring in new perspectives and ideas, and a different style and format of leadership that could help change the organisational culture. Furthermore, greater involvement of women in sport can help create new role models for young girls.

Beyond that, sportspeople in this role become sports diplomats and ambassadors who help raise the profile of the state (and their activity is therefore an important tool of public diplomacy) and can thus enable the promotion of state policy goals in sports, or even in wider international policy. Strengthening the number of women at various levels is not an end in the context of sports diplomacy; within the organisation, overall governance can be improved. Hence, it increases the visibility and influence of a state in different areas which can strengthen the actor and its soft power. In addition, the sending state presents itself as modern, democratic, open and able to reflect trends in the international community.

In such a theoretical background, the analysis of gender and sports diplomacy in the CR confirmed several interesting findings. The issue of underrepresentation in sports diplomacy in the CR must be generally put in the context of the struggling position of gender in society. More importantly, however, underrepresentation represents a consequence of the inactivity and possible unwillingness of the Czech sports federations to tackle gender issues and implement measures within their institutions, contrary to many international sports federations. This discontinuity in actions between international and national levels seems to be the crucial problem. Progressive action at the supranational level paradoxically does not always reach national federations and local organisations. The need to increase the representation of the Czech national team is confirmed. It is, in fact, often perceived as a basic task of sports diplomacy, unfortunately, without tackling the potential of the female element for state representation and cultural change. The issue of addressing underrepresentation for the implementation of gender in sports diplomacy is considered as a goal in itself, but there is no justification for what this will allow.

Basketball could serve as an example of a sports environment where international and national organisations do not sometimes pursue the same level of progress in promoting gender diversity in key positions, such as officials, coaches or referees. The CBF defines basketball as an open, exciting, smart, common, progressive, responsible, fresh and dynamic sport. In the context of the prevailing understanding of sports diplomacy in the Czech sports environment, the CBF states in its materials that strategic goals are to increase the number of players, coaches, officials, referees and commissioners, and to increase the quality of federation management at all levels (CBF 2020). However, the very benefit of fulfilling these goals is completely absent, and without any connection to the gender diversity issue.

Although women's basketball is one of the most successful women's team sports in the CR, the sport is perceived predominantly as a male phenomenon. Women participating in managerial positions in this sport still face several major challenges, such as the lack of suitable female sports models, the time-consuming character of the activities, the absence of suitable conditions for reconciling family and work life or the lower self-confidence of female representatives. This is partly in line with the findings of Whalen (2017: 5), who points out that the major barriers that affect a woman's ability to make a career or to move her way up in the sports industry are networking, the absence of female role models, family and work obligations, the existence of a glass ceiling or the tendency of many women to have lower ambitions than men, and women's decisions to leave higher positions voluntarily. It also complements the analyses from other countries, such as the Netherlands or Germany, where similar challenges were identified in the past (Pfister and Radtke 2009; Claringbould – Knoppers 2008, 2012). Awareness of the potential benefits of ad-

dressing gender imbalances for sports diplomacy is completely overshadowed by these issues. At the same time, these obstacles are so fundamental that without them, the active involvement of women in sports diplomacy cannot be considered at all. It is only after some of these barriers are acknowledged and possibly removed by the national sports federations that these federations may make better connections with their international counterparts and thus fully unfold their potential as actors in sports diplomacy.

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List of interviews

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Respondent 2, Czech Association of Basketball Referees, staff, male, Prague 4. 1. 2019; 7. 1. 2021; 17. 1. 2021.

Respondent 3, referee, female, Karviná, 9. 8. 2019 / Prague, 28. 1. 2021.

Respondent 4, Czech Basketball Federation staff, female, Prague, 26. 8. 2019

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Respondent 6, Coach, female, Hradec Králové, 23. 8. 2019.

Respondent 7, Czech Basketball Federation staff, male, Prague, 6. 1. 2021.

Respondent 8, referee, Prague, 28. 1. 2021.

Respondent 9, member of the Commission for Equal Opportunities, the Czech Olympic Committee, Prague.

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Sport for Development in International Relations

ARNOŠT SVOBODA AND SIMONA ŠAFAŘÍKOVÁ

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Abstract: *This article introduces the concept of sport for development and peace both as a theoretical notion and a part of the political-economical practice. Together with a brief definition and a historical overview, the main goal is to present the sport and development in the context of international relations, a network of stakeholders, practical implementation within major projects and its progressive inclusion into the development documents and strategies. Specifically, the article highlights the adoption of the concept by two major institutions, the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee as formal umbrella organisations. Furthermore, the role of the sport for development within the UN's agenda of Sustainable Development Goals is elaborated. Since the topic is a frequent object of academic research and critical analysis, the article concludes with an outline of the commonly mentioned contested topics and critical debates which permeate both academic production and activities of international state and non-governmental organisations.*

Keywords: *sport for development, sustainable development goals, United Nations*

Introduction

A concept sometimes referred to as sport for development, sport for development and peace, sport for good or sport for social change, has become popular in the last 25 years. Despite many academic endeavours, it remains a contested field with interesting debates where sport and international development agenda overlap. In this paper, our goal is to introduce the sport for development and peace as a multifaceted concept with a long history where, possibly under different labels, the sport was gaining significance not only as a popular leisure activity but also as an easily accessible tool for dealing with numerous

difficult issues and areas in the societies. At the same time, the popularity of sport and its incorporation into the development field attracted the attention of international organisations.

First, we will briefly elaborate on the definition of sport for development and peace concept. Then, we will give an overview of the process of incorporation into the agenda of international organisations and activities of various actors and describe the concept's place in major development documents. Specifically, the link between sport for development and the United Nations' articulation of sustainable development goals will be discussed. Finally, we will mention several critical remarks on sport for development as they are discussed in recent academic literature.

Sport for Development – conceptual framework

The very basic concept of sport for development (SFD) or sport for development and peace (SDP) has already been defined by several authors but none of the definitions have reached a final academic consensus. All the definitions talk about the fact that sport might also bring about positive results in the non-sportive domain which is the core of the sport for development initiatives. Millington and Kidd (2019: 13) define 'sport for good' as a 'sport initiated, organized and played for social purpose'. Lyras and Welty Peachey (2011: 311) define sport for development as 'the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialisation of children, youths and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and conflict resolution'. Guilianotti (2011: 208) conceptualises 'sport for development as a socio-cultural tool to reduce social tensions and promote reconciliation and reconstruction, notably in post-conflict contexts'. All these definitions say that sport might be used for different non-sporting objectives. Those range from conflict resolution, gender equity, disease prevention, social values learning, tackling poverty, fighting racism to combating violence, drug abuse or disaster response (Coalter 2010; Giulianotti 2011; Kidd 2008).

On the theoretical level and as an integrated concept, initiatives under the label of sport for development are a relatively new phenomenon proliferating in the last three decades. Yet, using sport as a tool for social, economic, political or moral goals dates back to previous centuries (Darnell et al. 2019). Amongst other instances, it was used in antiquity in ancient Greece during the Olympic Games. The Olympic truce was a symbol of peace and in this period of history, the wars were stopped during the organisation of the antic Olympic Games. Also, sport and physical activities were connected to personal and social transformation at that time (Millington – Kidd 2019). According to Giulianotti, sport also played a role in colonial dominance from the eighteenth century onward. By

contrast, as of the mid-twentieth century, sport often stood in the centre of the post-colonial struggles of developing countries striving for independence from the former colonial powers. Additionally, the United Nations (UN) included it in the reconstruction process in Europe after the Second World War and, as we will describe later, it played a role during the Cold War. From the mid-1990s, a specific sport for development agenda has proliferated under various actors: transnational corporations, governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and new social movements (Giulianotti 2011).

Furthermore, various high-profile politicians publicly supported SDP, such as Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary-General: 'It has an almost unmatched role to play in promoting understanding, healing wounds, mobilising support for social causes, and breaking down barriers' (Kofi Annan Foundation 2010), or South African political leader, Nelson Mandela:

> Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than the government in breaking down racial barriers (in Busbee 2013).

Slowly, sport for development has become part of foreign relations policies of the Global North countries within the so-called development cooperation agenda and, subsequently, it also appeared to be institutionalised within the international development agenda. In the late 1990s, it was regarded as a new engine for development, different from the previous orthodox development policies of the 1970s and 1980s that were considered to have failed (Levermore 2008; Millington – Kidd 2019). Sport was perceived as a non-political field that is not associated with corruption in the international development sector. The new millennium saw a huge increase in the number of sport for development initiatives, projects, programs and collaborations. In general, many of the involved actors currently operate in cooperation and, thus, might form alliances that would be hardly thinkable outside the SDP discourse. Yet, only sometimes are such relationships balanced; they range from truly collaborative activities to projects dominantly led by state officials or by powerful international non-state donors (Levermore – Beacom 2009; Lindsey et al. 2020). As a complex result of the above-mentioned processes, and in the context of the neoliberal order, the popularity of programmes using sport as a development tool rose. The positive contribution of sport to opening ways to improve an individual's life has been widely acknowledged, especially in connection with social capital and community development (Darnell et al. 2019).

From a broader perspective, sport for development can be regarded as a tool usable by many actors, in different contexts and for different purposes. Even

though not traditionally recognised as a part of the SDP agenda, capitalising on sport by states or political regimes presents another example of how sports events enter the field of international politics. Besides well-known occurrences such as boycotts of the Olympic Games in Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984, there is a long tradition of utilising sport for enhancing the international image or status of a specific country. This is sometimes referred to as *soft power* as opposed to hard power involving military or economic capacities (Nye 2004). Mostly it is linked to the hosting of sport mega-events or, as in the case of Cuba, sending athletes or coaches to developing countries (Darnell – Huish 2015; Darnell et al. 2019). Apart from highlighting a nation's culture, politics, credibility and potential for agency outwards, the soft power can also bolster national identity (Grix – Lee 2013). Since sport is generally publicly perceived as a positive and unproblematic value, even its presentation under a specific national flag most likely reinforces the nation's international capital.

Institutionalisation of SFD: international relations and development documents

The beginning of the process of institutionalisation dates back to 1978. The International Charter of Physical Education and Sport (UNESCO 2015) is widely regarded as an initial document for the institutional connection between sport and development. Most notably, the document mentions sport as an important agent in learning values of fair play, equality, commitment, courage, teamwork or respect for rules and laws. Simultaneously, sport is acclaimed there as a fundamental right for all. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly 1989) recognises that children worldwide should have the right 'to rest and leisure and to engage in play and recreational activities' (UNICEF 1989, art. 31). This should be guaranteed by each state. In 2006, another important international document that mentions sport as a vital tool was adopted by the UN. It was the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Its article 30 (5 a, b, c, d, e) focuses on sport saying that state parties shall promote sporting activities and ensure that people with disabilities have access to sporting opportunities. As depicted by the aforementioned documents, the UN has been the main motor behind the advancing inclusion of sport and physical activities into international development documents and on its agenda. On the other hand, Darnell et al. (2019) and Levermore (2009) argue that one of the reasons for the rising institutionalisation of SDP is its compatibility with basic neoliberal theses such as better employment, bolstering life skills, improving infrastructure, extensive trade and international investments or effective governance.

Regarding the inclusion of SDP into formal institutions, the ground-breaking year was 2001 when the United Nations Office for Sport and Development and

Peace (UNOSDP) was established. Hence, the UN became a leading actor in the coordination of SDP initiatives. At the same time, a link between sport and development gets a firmer position in UN policy documents. The international community is called to acknowledge and support the role of sport as a means to achieve not only the formal development goals (Millennium Development Goals and, subsequently, Sustainable Development Goals), but also a general set of development and peace-oriented aims (UN General Assembly 2003). The SDP agenda was further supported by a high-level conference in Swiss Magglingen in 2003 (co-organised by UNOSDP), where sport and development organisations formally met for the first time including governments' representatives, sports federations, UN offices and corporate and civil sector representatives (Darnell et al. 2019). In 2005, the conference was held for the second time (ICSSPE 2005) but, more importantly, the UN declared 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education. Amongst its aims, there was also the support of sport for all and enhancing the role of sport in reaching the development goals as well as mainstreaming sport into governmental development policies (United Nations 2006). With the foundation of UNOSDP, a special United Nations Inter-agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace was created in the same year to advance the knowledge in the area of sport for development, to review current SDP initiatives and to prepare recommendations for the SDP field. Its report *Sport for Development and Peace: Towards Achieving the Millennium Development Goals* can be seen as the first document connecting sport with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agenda. In 2014, Ban Ki-moon, the then UN Secretary-General, declared 6 April as the International Day of SDP to highlight and celebrate sports' development potential (Harrison – Boehmer 2019).

As Darnell et al. (2019) further mention, one of the longest-standing players in the SDP field is the Commonwealth group of nations, namely for its activist approach to utilising sport for affecting specific topics on the international scene. Employing the symbolic significance of sport, the Commonwealth reflected on the politics of apartheid in South Africa with pressure on sporting isolation of the country up to 1991. Another important step in forming the international SDP movement was the establishment of the Commonwealth Committee on Cooperation through Sport in 1991. Later on, it was succeeded by the Commonwealth Advisory Body on Sport in 2004 bringing together different governments and organisations. SDP, as a proclaimed policy, was included in Commonwealth official documents in 2013 (e.g. Kay – Dudfield 2013). Darnell et al. (2019) summed up by saying that the strong position of sport in the Commonwealth group of nations is preceded by its important role in the former British empire and the colonial past. All the more, the Commonwealth Secretariat was the main organiser of the report entitled *Sport for Development and Peace and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* that connects sport with selected Sustainable Development Goals (SDG, see later).

Following the parallels in underscoring social and cultural benefits of sport between the UN and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), it was only a question of time when the IOC became more active in the SDP field. The link to 'sport for good' is even clearer here compared to the UN or other organisations because of the primary focus of the IOC and its use of symbols such as the Olympic truce (IOC 2015) or the Olympic rings (IOC 2019). Furthermore, specific initiatives, such as the OlympAfrica Foundation founded in 1989 (Sport en Commun n.d.), led to the establishment of the IOC as one of the key players in the SDP field working in a close relationship with the UN. Finally, when the UN announced the closure of UNOSDP in 2017 (Guilianotti 2019; sportanddev. org 2017), the IOC was widely recognised as an umbrella organisation for international SDP activities. The operations of the Commission for Public Affairs and Social Development through Sport follow up with the general scope of work of the former UNOSDP (IOC 2020). As Darnell et al. (2019) observe, several critical remarks have emerged in the last years pointing out the IOC's primary focus on the high-performance sport, the lack of experience in non-sporting sectors, reinforcing the status-quo of the powerful Global North or under-resourced national Olympic committees from Global South countries being urged to follow the development agenda without appropriate funding or experience. Handing over the responsibilities for SDP to the IOC left a vacuum within the UN sector (Giulianotti 2019). Currently, mentions of SDP on the UN main website, including the information that has been gathered within the last 20 years about the field, are rather scattered. Most of the materials have been integrated into the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/sport-development-peace.html). Moreover, the UN presents sport as a potent instrument on how to cope with various post-Covid-19 issues related to specific SDGs (United Nations 2020).

Other actors active in SDP

The SDP sector is a very complex field working with a variety of different stakeholders coming from areas of development, peace, sport and many others (Giulianotti 2019). These actors are interrelated on different levels including private, governmental, intergovernmental, non-governmental subjects, various social movements and campaign groups or even individuals with a high level of symbolic capital operating on a local, national, regional or international level (Giulianotti et al. 2016). Historically, the main responsible body was the UNOSDP on the international level substituted by the IOC from 2017 onwards (as described above). Still, several other UN agencies continue to use sport as a tool in their everyday operations (e.g. UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO).

There are many SDP non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working directly in the field on the grass-roots level and are there in touch with the final

beneficiaries. The SDP projects organised by these NGOs may be based on local participants' needs or, especially when there are other actors involved helping with financing, promotion or coordination, may follow the motives and interests of the involved stakeholders. According to Suzuki (2019), there were 948 SDP organisations registered at the sportanddev.org platform in 2018. This platform is the main communication channel in the area of SDP. The number of SDP organisations started to flower in the 1990s and had its peak in 2008. Currently, the majority of NGOs have their place of origin in Africa (33 %), but the European NGOs implement their activities in a higher number of countries. Suzuki (2019) also describes that there is a general pattern of international geopolitics in SDP NGOs visible between the place of origin and delivery, confirming the North-South relations. European NGOs operate very often in Africa and Asia, while North American ones are in Latin America. However, the South-South and North-North settings also become significant, confirming that there are endogenous practices developed in SDP.

Also, the development banks (as multilateral organisations) have started to harness sport as a tool in their activities. Among them, we can name the Inter--American Development Bank (IDB) that is active mainly in Latin America and the Caribbean. It started with SDP projects in 2004 and focuses on the topics of youth development, youth and wellness, social inclusion and violence prevention. The IDB implements the SDP projects in cooperation with different stakeholders such as AusAID, Save the Children, Nike Foundation, Microsoft, the NBA and many others (IDB 2020; Jaitman – Scartascini 2017).

Several Global North countries have a long history of using sport within their international development cooperation strategies entering in cooperation with different stakeholders in donor and recipient countries. The longest known cooperation in this field was established between Norway (NORAD – Norwegian Agency for Development) and Tanzania in 1984. At that period, Tanzania was the largest recipient of Norwegian development aid. This assistance was mainly guided by the top-down approach where the Norwegian government, through the Norwegian Confederation of Sports, offered different programs and the Tanzanian government could either accept it or not. Mass sport policy was supported in Tanzania and both used and new equipment was shipped from Norway (Straume – Steen-Johnsen 2010). In the development literature, this top-down approach has been already criticised and, actually, the donor-recipient relationships have been changing in the last 30 years. In 2005, Norway even accepted a special strategy called 'Strategy for Norway's culture and sports cooperation with countries in the South'. This one took into account the then existing MDGs and emphasised closer cooperation with local partners (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2005). Since the 1990s, sport has been already harnessed by even more Global North governments, e.g. Netherlands, Canada (CIDA – Canadian International Development Agency), Australia (AusAid – Australian Aid), Ger-

many (GIZ – German Agency for International Cooperation) and Switzerland (SDC – Swiss Development Cooperation). For instance, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports the *Sportfordevelopment.nl Programme* using sport in eight priority countries (e.g. Kenya, Mozambique, Palestinian territories) in close cooperation with the Royal Dutch Football Federation (KNVB), International Sports Alliance (ISA) and Right to Play (RTP). Through CIDA, the Canadian policymakers have been leaders in introducing sport into international development agendas, mainly within the UN system, in the Commonwealth and also in the Francophonie. CIDA started to support the Commonwealth Sport Development Program through NGOs known as Commonwealth Games Canada and Right to Play. Therefore, Canadian sport development cooperation reached, e.g. the Middle East, francophone Africa and the Americas. The official support of SDP by the Canadian government was stopped in 2011. Since then, more focus was given to the national use of sport (Kidd 2013). The German government (GIZ agency) also uses sport as a tool for broader social changes within German development cooperation. GIZ implements a regional program called Sport for Development in Africa (S4DA) and other bilateral SDP projects are carried out in, e.g. Indonesia, Colombia, Morocco and Tunisia. Another interesting example of the use of sport in the international development agenda comes from Cuba. Huish (2011) analysed the Cuban perspective of the use of sport within international cooperation. Despite Cuba being part of the Global South, it is very active in sending its sport coaches (and also doctors) to other developing countries to help build community-based sport programs and lead elite performance training. It also offers free scholarships to study sport and physical education in Cuba's leading sport institute on the condition that they go back to their home country after graduation. In this case, Huish (2011) explains this Cuban policy as a way to achieve further recognition, to build partnerships and to use its soft power, e.g. in lobbying for further support of international economic negotiations. On the other side, there are governments of the Global South countries that have also started to put sport into their official development documents. Among such examples, there is the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRPS) of, e.g. Mozambique, Mali, Malawi and Lesotho.

Until today, Central and Eastern European countries have not been harnessing sport in development cooperation as much as the governments of Western Europe and North America. As Havran, Szabó and Máté (2021) remark, the situation in former Eastern Bloc countries has been affected by the decades of communist regime when sport had no autonomy, the civil society did not exist and a major part of the support was given to elite sports. As a result, the non--government sector and autonomous sporting organisation were heavily underdeveloped at the beginning of the 1990s. Šafaříková and Svoboda (2021) mention the case of the Czech Republic where the development of non-governmental subjects has often been opposed even by Czech politicians disapproving of the

very concept of civil society. Therefore, the tradition in this geographical area is much shorter. The first SDP project that has been supported through the Czech Official Development Assistance (ODA) since 2006 is called 'Football for Development' (FFD). FFD is organised by the Czech NGO INEX-SDA that entered into cooperation with the Kenyan SDP MYSA (one of the oldest NGOs in this field) in 2005. This project uses football to raise awareness about global development issues in the Czech Republic. Members and youth from MYSA came to the Czech Republic to share their experience from Kenya through the organisation of different football tournaments connected to other participatory discussions and artistic events (Šafaříková 2012). Since then, activities with social and cultural overlaps have become an integral part of programmes operated by INEX-SDA. Moreover, even activities often subsumed into the corporate social responsibility category have entered the sporting field, such as various foundations or charities in ice hockey, basketball or football (Kunz 2020).

Other important actors in this area are currently the transnational corporations (TNCs) that are mainly supporting SDP programs and projects through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies (Levermore 2019) defined as 'the commitment of businesses to sustainable economic development… to improve quality of life' (World Bank 2003 in Levermore 2019). These TNCs can be divided into two types: a) non-sporting companies and b) sporting companies. In the sport for development area, CSR very often takes the form of philanthropy which means that the business financially supports different SDP initiatives. FIFA created the Football for Hope program that works with different NGOs using football as a tool for further development in a range of educational and empowerment initiatives. Nike, through its CSR philanthropic programme, supports, e.g. women empowerment projects in refugee camps in Eastern Africa. Several famous football clubs have their foundations that are also active in the SDP area (e.g. FC Barcelona, Manchester United). Among the non-sporting businesses, there are, e.g. Ferrero, Huawei, Lenovo, Microsoft, Bayer and BP. All the above-mentioned companies' CSR strategies should contribute to social good. However, there have also been criticisms raised about such approaches: Such CSR support is often only short term (Chen et al. 2008) and it aims at helping to offset the negative media image a company might have created (Babiak et al. 2012). In a similar vein, concepts of blue- and greenwashing critically depict efforts of companies to enhance their CSR image by presenting their activities in a distorted way. This may be done by highlighting their environmental-friendly operations which, actually, do not exist (greenwashing; Gatti et al. 2019) or by associating themselves with UN development goals and benefitting from the symbolic value of the UN brand (bluewashing; Berliner – Prakash 2015).

Recently, Giulianotti et al. (2016) highlight the growing importance of new social movements and campaign groups who often form alliances (such as Sport and Rights Alliance) and become an organised and highly visible actor

in the SDP field (including Play the Game, Transparency International, Football Supporters Europe, Human Rights Watch, etc.). Amongst the reasons for the current activities of the newly emerged actors are the critique of the lack of democracy in sport governance or some controversial hosting of sporting mega-events, support for present global social issues such as refugee crises or a new entry of some NGOs to the SDP field and their collaboration with several established stakeholders (such as Swiss Terre des Hommes).

From the above written, it is visible that SDP is a very diverse area with many different stakeholders that bring into this field their own interests and experience which can create a lot of good but also many controversies.

Leading role of UN: Development goals agenda (MDG and SDG)

As of the 1980s, human rights issues were proliferating within the development policy. Although its legal force was limited, the UN Declaration on the Right to Development was adopted in 1986 (UN General Assembly 1986). Darnell et al. (2019) observe that amongst the notable issues were the move from individual rights to group rights and the combination of economic growth, democratic governance and fair distribution of income and wealth. In the next years, the UN focused on highlighting human development including the construction of the Human Development Index. Hence, the importance of the status of people's capabilities in assessing a country's level of development that usually depends on economic factors was only emphasised even further. Darnell et al. (2019) summarize that all these activities led to the creation and adoption of a specific agenda calling attention to the link between development and human rights, the Millennium Development Goals, announced by the UN Millennium Declaration (UN General Assembly) in 2000.

The MDG consists of eight goals that spotlight the international cooperation between member states in the following areas: poverty reduction, achievable primary education, gender equality promotion, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating diseases such as HIV/AIDS or malaria, enhancing environmental sustainability and building global partnerships for development. Each goal incorporates several specific targets and detailed indicators presenting exact data from the concerned areas. Neither the MDGs nor the Millennium Declaration mention sports explicitly but set up a road to 'softer' goals where sports could fit in as one of the potential tools to achieve such goals. In 2003, the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace prepared a report called *Sport for Development and Peace: Towards Achieving the Millennium Development* that specifically connected each of the MDGs to sport and physical activity. By contrast, MDGs were also targeted by critics emphasising the lack of empirical data or missing specific procedures on how to involve the international community (Darnell et al. 2019). Some authors also

accentuated the different cultural and economic context and, thus, the need to focus on local settings of sports as a vehicle for change (Pawlowski et al. 2018).

After 15 years of implementation and observation of results of the MDGs agenda, an updated direction was announced in 2015. A broader set of goals, Sustainable Development Goals, was adopted as a part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN General Assembly 2015). The document now contains seventeen goals covering a broader scope of objectives including economic, social and environmental issues and governance, this time with a clearly expressed expectation that all governments will attempt to reach the goals adapted to their context. Contrary to MDGs, the SDGs agenda aims not only at developing countries but at all the governments, civil society and business actors. Also, a resolution of the UN General Assembly briefly mentions the potential of sport to foster 'tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives' (UNDP 2015: 10/35). It is for the first that sport is recognised as 'an important enabler of sustainable development' (UNDP 2015: 10/35) within the global development agenda (Dudfield 2019).

To examine possible goals where sport might play a substantial role, several expert discussions took place. Amongst others, the following goals were identified as especially cost-efficient by the Commonwealth Advisory Body of Sport in the document entitled *Sport for Development and Peace and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*: promoting health and well-being (Goal 3), inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning (Goal 4), gender equality and women's empowerment (Goal 5), sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all (Goal 8), inclusive and safe human settlements (Goal 11) and inclusive societies with access to justice and effective institutions for all (Goal 16). Throughout additional discussions, Goal 17 (strengthening of global partnerships for development) was added as a cross-sectional theme (Dudfield et al. 2015).

In addition to attempts to include SDG into the current SDP mainstream, several papers also emerged critically analysing the link between SDGs and sport in the context of development (Lindsey et al. 2020; Lindsey – Darby 2019). Amongst the questioned topics is the coherence of policies promoting SDGs in connection to SDP. The interrelated links between goals further complicate clearly and comprehensively established policy of how to reach these goals. Still, in contrast to MDGs, SDGs promote policies coordinated at the national level and, therefore, are able to reflect on the local needs. Here, such policy meets the current critical stream in the SDP discourse warning against the dominance of top-down approach to SDP initiatives when local projects are unilaterally designed by foreign powerful donors (Black 2017; Nols et al. 2019). Lindsey and Darby (2019) note that while the sustainable development policies linked

with sports need to maintain the general coherency, also practical feasibility, gathering the evidence and analysis of local contact must be accentuated.

Contested issues in international SDP

Taking into account the last fifteen years, the sport for development field arouses a number of critiques concerning locations where SDP initiatives take place and, at the same time, locations where donors and initiators reside. Furthermore, the lack of data confirming the results of SDP interventions is criticised as well as its missing a comprehensive, systematic theoretical framework that could seize the SDP and build an explanatory and understanding model around its activities. Also, the post-colonial heritage is often mentioned as having an impact on today's setting of the SDP field and the positions of stakeholders in it. In the following section, we will briefly delineate the topics just mentioned.

Unequal distribution of SDP activities around the world

Concerning the general picture of SDP topics in academic journals, one of the most extensive reviews was done by Schulenkorf, Sherry and Rowe in 2016. The authors conducted an integrated literature review using a detailed set of keywords and inclusion criteria. According to the authors, their findings further affirm a substantial contrast between local and international practitioners within SDP programmes. Precisely, 50 % of the persons active in practical or research activities in the SDP field are 'international experts', people coming from countries foreign to the country where a project is carried out (Schulenkorf et al. 2016).

Correspondingly, the total majority (92 %) of academics publishing papers or books about SDP topics reside in countries of the Global North (North America, Europe and Australia). By contrast, over 20 % of studies were placed in the Global South countries and more than 50 % of all the SDP projects are also implemented there. As Schulenkorf et al. (2016) warn, the vast number of projects or topics linked to the SDP in the Global South countries remain without the attention of mainstream research and academic institutions from high-income countries.

Fragmentation of theoretical frameworks

As Schulenkorf et al. (2016) propose in their integrative review, the SDP field is built on various theoretical sources which are, however, not SDP-specific and are rather borrowed from other disciplines. Amongst other remarks, the authors come up with an interesting observation. Offering the concept of 'so-

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cial capital' as an example, they criticise it as being sometimes 'a last resort' for authors who cannot create a more comprehensive theoretical anchor for their studies. In other words, the concept is too wide and non-transferable between social contexts but, still, it is uncritically used by many SDP authors. Certainly, one of the reasons can be an underdeveloped theory able to frame SDP studies. Nonetheless, the same authors mention several concepts or theories which they found as being commonly used in their review: role models in SDP programmes, participatory approaches, safe spaces in the developing community or sustainable activities transferring experience to local communities (Schulenkorf et al. 2016).

Proponents of the last-mentioned conception, Lyras and Peachey (2011), made a huge effort to construct an SDP theory that is robust and, simultaneously, specific to the SDP field. Such a theory should contain the following components: impact assessment, organisation of activities, sport disciplines with strong development potential, education and cultural enrichment. Summarising the recent development of the SDP field, Giulianotti et al. (2019) bring up several other key points which should be incorporated into new theories tailored to SDP's needs: critical stance, reflexivity of human agency and social transformation, co-creation of development programmes together with local actors and collaboration between critical theory and pragmatic research. Last but not less important, we argue that critical notes suggesting that the above--mentioned ambiguities can be an outcome of the lack of clarity and organisation of the SDP field itself should be considered (see Whitley 2019).

A priori positive effects of sport

One of the critically remarked characteristics of sport is the supposed positive, beneficial effect it might have on its target groups. Such thoughts follow a positivist and functionalist discourse where sports activities are assigned with an uncritical status concerning their impacts and potential to instigate any change. But, as Darnell (2012) notes, this discourse is not a fact but, rather, a subject of interpretation that is reductive in its nature. Coakley (2011) adds that the neoliberal representations of sports programmes which undoubtedly lead to personality development, dominant values acquisition and civic engagement are supported by mainstream global media with origins in the Global North, Euro-American culture.

Darnell (2012) concludes that without reflecting on situated conditions and local context, there is no possibility to generalise the potential of sport for meeting development or other goals. In other words, the positive effects of SDP are not essential but have to be measured and evaluated accordingly to the current settings.

Need for evaluation

As we just remarked, there exists a strong call for systematic and regular evaluation of the coherence between SDP projects' intended and real achievements. Several authors note that many of the current evaluative procedures of SDP projects might be designed to search for the supporting evidence only and, therefore, lacking clearly elaborated objectives or missing local staff taking part in the evaluation (Giulianotti et al. 2019). While such criticising debates are held mostly in academia, Bardocz-Bencsik and Doczi (2019) mention that one of the reasons for the inadequate evaluation may be the crucial importance of continuous access to grants and subsidies for the practitioners in the field.

To sum up, as Giulianotti et al. (2019) remind, a general approach to the evaluation process has to be shaped with a strong reflection on the sport as a broad context for the developmental goals and not as a clearly defined independent variable with a causal effect on the participants. A so-called 'realist evaluation' incorporates context information and theories guiding employed mechanisms and evidence-based outcomes. In this vein, a specific measure is valid in a specific context and for specific beneficiaries. Especially, active interventions of donors should be prevented in favour of local practitioners (Levermore – Beacom 2012). Nicholls, Gilda and Sethna (2011) argue that the research and evaluation should take into consideration more local voices directly from the field.

Hegemony and post-colonialism

The last presented stream of criticism is rather multifaceted, ideology-driven and extensively benefits from the conceptualisation of global power relations. As regards this paper, we reduce the criticism to the hegemony theory (Darnell 2012) and postcolonialism (Darnell – Hayhurst 2012). The hegemony theory is based on the ideas of Antonio Gramsci illustrating ways the dominant ideology gains ground in practical, day-to-day life. In parallel, the development role of sport is constructed and negotiated through interactions of actors from this fields of sport, culture, politics, media or education. In the last twenty years, the traditional hegemony concept has been broadened with the post-hegemony approach. Following the postmodernist turn, its proponents suggest that the very possibility of detecting the process of domination and consent is almost unreachable because of the unstable and fluid nature of current power and ideologies. Yet, even the traditional essence of sports which is often reproduced within the class structure where the dominant groups secure their status quo should not be overlooked while reflecting on the current complexities of culture (Darnell 2012).

The postcolonial theory rests on the cultural geography background. As of the 1970s, various voices could have been heard highlighting the cultural heritage of

the colonial past. Saavedra (2019) delineates how the colonial heritage strongly affects the current configuration of power, resources or privileges irrespective of the development level of a country. Actually, several approaches underline also the agency of the formerly colonised nations. While adopting numerous strategies to cope with or resist the imported dominant sports, an indigenous nation builds a hybrid form of the sporting discipline (Bhabha 1994) and, thus, appropriates it to the local cultural, social and political context (Fletcher 2011). Currently, various outcomes of the transformation of post-colonial sport can be identified, e.g. promoting indigenous activities into modern sports (lacrosse) or evolving a specific style within the dominant sport, such as Brazilian soccer (Bale – Cronin 2003). However, Darnell et al. (2019) conclude that the newly independent post-colonial countries still feel the necessity of stepping in the existing dominant sporting structures (major international organisations) to fully participate in the development of the modern sport.

Conclusion

In this paper, we wanted to introduce the Sport for Development and Peace not only as a theoretical concept but also as a topical and vivid field of practices. On the one hand, SDP projects are locally operated throughout the world aiming at various health, social exclusion, conflict, education or gender-related topics at the community level. On the other hand, they are highly acknowledged by international organisations and agencies as a tool for performing various development goals. Especially the inclusion into, first, the United Nations and, later, the Olympic Movement was probably the most visible turn in the SDP field's acquisition of global relevance.

Consequently, we approach SDP not only as a set of specific projects and initiatives but, in the broadest sense and accordance with the current academic SDP production, as a general conception of sport as a tool used for political, cultural, diplomatic or economic reasons. At the same time, we advocate the critical debate questioning the potential of utilisation of sport and its declared benefits present in many SDP programmes. As a central point of such an approach, a comprehensive evaluative analysis of intended goals, employed methods and final outcomes of SDP practices should be incorporated as an inherent part of SDP strategies and programmes on international, regional or local levels. Even the growing body of academic studies in the last fifteen years supports the essential significance of empirical work and evaluation outcomes for further planning in the SDP field.

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National Representation without Citizenship: the Special Case of Rugby

DANYEL REICHE

Abstract: *This article is a case study of one of the few sports, rugby, that does not link national representation exclusively to citizenship. It discusses who may represent a country in major events and under which conditions. It analyses the consequences of the rules on different stakeholders; and discusses why the residency rule in particular is subject to much controversy. The author has conducted case studies of the 2019 rugby union and 2017 rugby league men's World Cups. Academic literature, international newspapers, and rugby-specific websites were reviewed. Other than secondary sources, the researcher also collected primary data through interviews. The interviewees included representatives of Rugby League International Federation and World Rugby. This research reveals that national representation without citizenship is widespread in both codes of rugby. It has also shown that the effects of the eligibility criteria go beyond simplistic rich/poor and center/periphery models. This article argues that the rational for the eligibility criteria is the limited global spread of rugby league and rugby union. Without those lenient rules it would be difficult to organize international competitions.*

Keywords: *citizenship; eligibility criteria; rugby league; rugby union; residence; sports governance.*

Introduction

This article argues that contemporary practices used for defining the eligibility criteria to represent a country in rugby are a product of the history of the game and date back to the late 19th century. The rational for maintaining the same eligibility criteria throughout the years has shifted from a shared British imperial identity to the objective of globalizing the game. However, the main

pillars of the rules have remained stable over a period of more than 100 years with only minor adjustments being made.

Rugby union is one of the most popular team sports in the world, particularly in Commonwealth countries. According to World Rugby, the men's Rugby World Cup 2019 in Japan was the most watched rugby event ever. The global cumulative viewing figures for the tournament grew from 679 million in 2015 to 851 million in 2019. The final between England and South Africa was the most-watched sports event of 2019 in the UK (World Rugby 2019). This championship is not only remembered because of the final with a win by the South African team, but also for controversy over citizenship of the players. A topic that caused heated debates among rugby fans was the fact that almost one in four players (23 %) at the World Cup did not hold a passport from the country they represented. Not only did second-tier rugby union countries rely on athletes with foreign passports, notably even one of the teams in the finals, England, was represented by a significant proportion of players (around 20 %) without English citizenship (see table 2).

There are two forms (or as rugby fans call them, 'codes') of rugby: rugby union, which is globally far more popular, and rugby league, which has its strongholds in the north of England and two Australian states, Queensland and New South Wales. Rugby league developed in the late nineteenth century in Northern England as 'part of the symbolism of northern working-class history and identity'. The game separated in 1895 from rugby union due to a dispute over amateurism, which was advocated for by the upper-class rugby union community, versus professionalism (Collins 2012: 119). Over time, league and union developed into distinctive versions of the sport with rugby league teams comprised of fewer players (13 instead of 15) who played by slightly different rules. Before 1995, rugby union was not played as a professional sport as opposed to rugby league which had achieved this characteristic of paying its players a 100 years earlier. In spite of these differences there are also similarities between both versions of rugby such as the eligibility criteria for national representation in international sporting events. Non-citizenship holders can represent countries based on either ancestry or residence. Notably, at the 2017 rugby league men's World Cup in Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea there were national teams which consisted wholly of players who lacked citizenship of the countries they represented at the tournament. Most of these players were in fact Australians, making the World Cup a pseudo-competition between Australian 'A' and 'B' teams in the view of some commentators (Gorman 2017).

Sporting events where entire teams can be comprised of athletes from different countries have become renowned. Examples include national leagues, multinational club competitions such as the UEFA Champions League (soccer), or the cycling race Tour de France, in which a diverse group of individuals of several nationalities form a team that is sponsored by and named after corpo-

rations. When it comes to more traditional international sporting events such diversity, however, is not the norm. This does not mean that there are only 'pure' national teams. Sport-specific naturalisations have been on the rise especially in the Middle East (Reiche – Tinaz 2018). There are also dual nationals on many national teams. What these naturalised or dual/multi-national athletes have in common is that they are often labelled as 'mercenaries' (Bohland 2017). However, these athletes typically need to fulfil the formal requirement set forth by international sports governing bodies that they must hold citizenship of the country they represent at the tournament.

Rugby league and rugby union, on the contrary, belong to a small group of sports that allow athletes to represent a country of which they are not citizens. There are only few sports that have similar rules to rugby league and rugby union: According to a review conducted by the author of the article of all the sports included in the current Olympic as well as the current Commonwealth Games programs, cricket and squash have a residence requirement of three years for an athlete to represent a country. In netball and bowls, the threshold is even lower and athletes qualify for national representation by residing in a country for a period of 24 months prior to the start of the relevant international event (International Cricket Council 2018: 5; International Netball Federation 2016: 5; World Bowls 2018: 4; World Squash Federation 2019: 15). Interestingly, of the aforementioned games with distinct rules for national representation, rugby is the only sport listed in the Olympics. Other sports are only included in the Commonwealth Games program. This is, however, a recent turn of events as rugby only returned in 2016 to the Olympic program after being absent from the Games for 92 years.

Literature review

Academic literature on citizenship, nationality and migration issues in sport has mainly dealt with sport labor migration (see, for example, Bale – Maguir 2013; Schroeder – Janssen 2012). There is extensive discussion on the motivations for players to move from one country to another, including both economic and non-economic reasons (in the latter regard particularly having the opportunity to represent a country in international sports). There is a broad body of academic literature discussing how the internationalization of sports affects national identities and to what extent sporting immigrants assimilate into their new country (Cronin – Mayall 1998; Dolon – Connolly 2016; Johnes 2000; Maguire – Tuck 1998; Poli 2007). Recently, the interest of academic literature has shifted from sociological towards legal and political aspects of sport labor migration by discussing the eligibility criteria in international sport (Exner 2019; Reiche 2019), the legal framework for dual nationals in international sporting events (Bohland 2017; Jansen et al. 2018; Spiro 2016) and the role that naturalisation

of foreign athletes play at the Olympic Games (Horowitz – McDaniel 2015; Jansen – Engbersen 2017; Jansen et al. 2018; Reiche – Tinaz 2018).

Some books and articles on migrant athletes in both codes of rugby relate to this work as well. Collins (2009), in *A Social History of English Rugby Union,* refers to early discussions on eligibility criteria in rugby union's world governing body and presents several examples of nationality transfers and dual representation of countries in international competitions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Harris (2010), in his book *Rugby Union and Globalization,* looks at player migration since the sport became professional in 1995 and at what he calls 'passports of convenience', referring to players who represent nations other than their countries of birth. Overton et al. (2013) in their article 'Pass the passport' provide data on foreign athletes in national squads at the 2011 rugby union men's World Cup. Grainger et al. (2014) discuss the one-country-for-life rule in rugby union and its implications, particularly for athletes from the Pacific Islands.

Most journal articles look at specific 'player-sending' countries, such as the Pacific Islands, or particular 'player-receiving' nation-states, like Japan, and at how the eligibility criteria have affected these states. Most work has been conducted on rugby union, reflecting the larger popularity of this code of rugby. Horton (2012) looks at the role of Pacific Islanders in global rugby union while Kanemasu and Molnar (2012) as well as Guinness and Besnier (2016) specifically focus on players emigrating from Fiji and their experiences in their new home nations. Grainger (2006) discusses the role of Samoan players in New Zealand and how they transcend national identity in their new home country. Pienaar and Koch (2012) explore the motives of South African players to migrate to other countries. Sakata (2004) investigates the influence of foreign athletes on the development of the Japanese national team and Japanese clubs. Chiba and Jackson (2006) focus specifically on the immigration of players from New Zealand to Japan.

While most academic articles are on rugby union, there are also two papers on rugby league. Lakisa et al. (2014) discuss the influence of Pacific Islanders on Australian rugby league, and Reiche (2019) discusses the role of Australians of Lebanese heritage in the Lebanese national rugby league men's team at the 2017 rugby league World Cup.

Methodology

This article is a case study of one of the few sports that does not link national representation exclusively to citizenship. It discusses who may represent a country in major events and under which conditions. This research will explore the historical roots of rugby league's and rugby union's eligibility criteria, compare them, and discuss recent modifications such as the one-country-for-life rule in

rugby union. The author has researched as case studies the 2019 rugby union and 2017 rugby league men's World Cups, examining the extent and conditions under which athletes without citizenship represented participating countries. The motives of World Rugby and the Rugby League International Federation (RLIF) for maintaining the eligibility criteria are discussed, and the consequences for different stakeholders such as governments, international and national federations, players, and fans are presented. As a final step of the research, the paper discusses why the residency rule in particular is subject to controversy.

Academic literature, international newspapers, and rugby-specific websites were reviewed. Many articles on foreign athletes on national teams were published around major events, such as the 2019 rugby union and the 2017 rugby league World Cups and the times during which World Rugby (rugby union) and Rugby League International Federation (RLIF) reviewed their eligibility criteria. Instances include the one-country-for-life rule introduced in 2000 and the 2017 decision to extend the residence requirement from three to five years for players in rugby union.

Other than secondary sources, the researcher also collected primary data through six interviews, all of which were conducted in 2018, 2019, and 2020. Most sources were interviewed on more than one occasion. The researcher interviewed a leading historian on both codes of rugby, a scholar who authored a book on the globalisation of rugby union, the Global Operations Manager of the Rugby League International Federation, a former press officer of World Rugby who also helped the author access the archive of the organisation to review the first meeting notes of the International Rugby Board (formed in 1886) dealing with discussions on eligibility criteria, the secretary general of the German rugby union federation, and a French player on the Lebanese rugby union national team.

The main purpose of the interviews was to learn the respondents' knowledge and views on the historical development and rationale of the eligibility criteria in both codes of rugby as well as to understand the consequences for different stakeholders. The chosen format of asking a series of open-ended questions allowed for more fluid interactions between the researcher and respondent and provided a multi-perspective understanding of the topic by not limiting respondents to a fixed set of answers (Bryman 2012: 470).

Eligibility criteria in both codes of rugby in comparison

As in other sports, citizenship qualifies players in both codes of rugby to represent a country. However, in rugby union and rugby league, unlike other sports, citizenship is not the sole criterion that enables participation within a national team. There are two other options: proof of ancestry (defined as citizenship of parents or grandparents) or proof of residence. The latter is defined by World

Rugby as a 'sporting naturalisation procedure, based on a geographical/presence test' (World Rugby 2016: 163). These eligibility criteria apply to both male and female players.

Table 1 presents a comparative overview of the eligibility criteria in both codes of rugby. It shows that the residence requirement was previously set at three years in both codes before rugby league decided in 2016 to increase this period to five years. Rugby union finally did the same in 2017 by announcing that a residency requirement of 60 months will take effect from December 31, 2020. Considering the exceptional circumstances posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, World Rugby decided in August 2020 to postpone the introduction of the five years residence rule by one year to December 31, 2021 (World Rugby 2020). This means that players who switch national allegiance must skip at least one World Cup as the event is held every four years in both codes of rugby. Both codes of rugby have different definitions of what residence means. In rugby union a physical presence of at least 10 months per year in a country is required. Rugby league rules are a little bit more lenient in that they set a minimum requirement of 210 days, or approximately seven months per year.

Both codes of rugby have not imposed any restrictions on naturalised players. In soccer, naturalised players need to live at least five years in their new home countries after their eighteenth birthday before FIFA accepts players' naturalisations. This strict rule was slightly modified in 2020: 'The new wording of FIFA's regulations means that as well as living somewhere for five years after the age of 18, players who started living in a country before the age of 10 can be eligible after living there for three years, and those who started living there after the age of 10 can be eligible after five years' (Price 2020). Rules in basketball are even more strict i.e., the number of naturalised players on a national team is limited to only one athlete that can have obtained nationality after the age of 15. An unlimited number of players can be naturalised in rugby league and rugby union and they can start playing for a national team on the same day that they receive their new passport (RLIF 2016).

While eligibility criteria in rugby league and rugby union are quite similar, apart from the aforementioned stricter rule on physical presence for fulfilling the residence criteria in rugby union, one major difference between the codes concerns the rules for switching national allegiances. Since January 2000, players have to commit for life to a national team in rugby union. Once they have played even a single match for a 15-a-side or rugby sevens senior national team, they can no longer represent another country. This means, for example, that an Australian player with roots in the Pacific Islands who at the age of 18 was nominated only once to play for the Wallabies, but was never nominated again, cannot play later in life for Samoa or Tonga, even if (s)he has moved back to the islands and fulfilled the residence or ancestry criterion for World Rugby eligibility. Before the year 2000, nationality transfers were possible after

a waiting period of 36 months since the last representation of another country. According to World Rugby, 'the one Union only rule is designed to maintain the integrity of the international Game' (World Rugby 2016: 159). To sum up, rugby union is lenient in defining nationality, but quite strict when it comes to maintaining loyalty to a country. In contrast, rugby league's rules are lenient when it comes to loyalty. Nationality transfers are only restricted within the narrowly defined group of Tier 1 countries which includes only Australia, England, and New Zealand. The RLIF rules state, 'A Player is entitled to move between a Tier 1 and a Tier 2 or Tier 3 Nation freely save that a Player may not change their National Team during any RLIF Global Event' (RLIF 2016).

Rugby rules in the Olympic differ significantly from the rules for rugby in world championships and other international tournaments. The 15-a-side version of rugby union was only included for men's teams in the Olympic program in the early editions of the Games in 1900, 1908, 1920, and 1924. In 2016, rugby union returned to the Olympic stage in its seven-a-side version with both men's and women's competitions. For Olympic competitions, World Rugby, like other international federations, has to respect the rules of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The IOC eligibility criteria differ from the World Rugby rules by strictly requiring citizenship for national representation, but allowing nationality transfers. The Olympic Charter states that 'any competitor in the Olympic Games must be a national of the country of the NOC which is entering such competitor' (IOC 2018: 60). Regarding switching national allegiance, the IOC charter states that:

> A competitor who has represented one country in the Olympic Games, in continental or regional games or in world or regional championships recognised by the relevant IF, and who has changed his nationality or acquired a new nationality, may participate in the Olympic Games to represent his new country provided that at least three years have passed since the competitor last represented his former country. This period may be reduced or even cancelled, with the agreement of the NOC and IF concerned, by the IOC Executive Board, which takes into account the circumstances of each case (IOC 2018: 80).

World Rugby decided to apply 'solely in respect of the Rio Olympic Games 2016, a stand down period of at least 18 months,' but wants to apply the IOC recommended stand down period of three years in future Olympic Games (World Rugby 2016: 55).

One effect of the difference in eligibility criteria of World Rugby and IOC was explained to the author in an interview with a French player who moved to Lebanon in 2015 and was nominated for the Lebanese rugby union 15's team for the first time in 2018: 'The coach already told me [he did] not [...] select me for the national rugby sevens side because they did not want to waste time

with me since I could not play in the Olympics.' Unlike rugby union, rugby league is not included in the Olympic program and remains unrecognised by the International Olympic Committee. In January 2018 RLIF was granted Observer Status by GAISF (Global Association of International Sports Federations – formerly SportAccord), a first success in the struggle for international recognition.

What both rugby league and rugby union rules do not prohibit is the occasion of one player representing the same or different countries in different codes. Frano Botica and Sonny Bill Williams, for example, represented New Zealand both in rugby league and rugby union. Lesley Vainikolo represented New Zealand in rugby league before playing for the English national rugby union team. An article in *The New York Times* highlighted the case of Cooper Vuna, another player who represented two different countries in rugby league and rugby union. Vuna was born in New Zealand to a father who was a Tongan rugby union national player. Cooper Vuna was selected for New Zealand's pre-

Table 1: Eligibility criteria in both codes of rugby in comparison

Criteria	Rugby union	Rugby league
Citizenship	Yes	Yes
Citizenship of parents	Yes	Yes
Citizenship of grandparents	Yes	Yes
Residence	Yes (3 years, 5 years starting December 31, 2021)	Yes (5 years)
Minimum requirements for residence	Physical presence of at least 10 months	A minimum of 210 days in the preceding 12 months
Change of national teams	One-country-for-life rule for all countries	Possible; one-country-for-life rule only within group of Tier 1 countries
Restrictions for naturalised players	No, unless they already represent one country	No
Change of codes and countries possible	Yes	Yes
Olympic Games	Included in Olympic program (rugby sevens). Different from World Rugby competitions, citizenship is required and nationality transfers are possible after a stand-down period of 18 months (2016 Olympics) and accordingly 3 years (future Olympics)	Not included in Olympic program

Sources: IOC 2018; RLIF 2016; World Rugby 2016; World Rugby 2020

liminary squad for the 2008 Rugby League World Cup, but when he was not nominated for the tournament, he switched allegiance and played for Tonga at the 2008 world championship. After the tournament, he changed from rugby league to rugby union and started to play for an Australian club as well as the Australian national rugby union team. However, he was only nominated twice in 2012. Prior to the 2016 Summer Olympics, he benefitted from the relatively flexible IOC rules for nationality transfers (compared to those of World Rugby) and played in qualification matches for the rugby sevens national team from Tonga (Wigmore 2016).

Results

Both the 2019 rugby union men's World Cup, hosted by Japan from September 20 to November 2, 2019, and the 2017 rugby league men's World Cup, hosted by Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea between October 27 and December 2, 2017, relied heavily on players without. Almost one out of four players at the 2019 rugby union World Cup represented a country without holding its citizenship. As table 2 shows, 144 out of 620 players (23 %) did not hold such citizenship – 42 % (60) of them could play based on the residence criteria and 58 % based on some form of ancestry (68 based on their parents' and 16 based on their grandparents' citizenship).

Argentina, Namibia, and Uruguay participated as the only countries with a foreigner-free squad while Tonga, Samoa, Japan and Scotland had between 15 and 19 of their players without citizenship. Interestingly, rugby union powerhouses like Australia (12) also had a high number of foreigners on their teams (see table 2).

When looking in detail at these countries, it is obvious that economically stronger countries with professional rugby union leagues, such as Australia and Japan, mainly benefitted from the residency rule while less developed countries with a lack of domestic employment opportunities and large diasporas, such as Samoa and Tonga, benefitted mostly from the parents' ancestry rule. The significance of the grandparents' ancestry rule is minor, only having some importance for Scotland which had seven players as part of its team that fulfilled the ancestry rule for eligibility of participation.

Although for the 2017 rugby league World Cup there is less accurate data available compared to the 2019 rugby union World Cup, clear trends can be identified based on the researcher's interview with a RLIF representative. According to the interviewed RLIF global operations officer, the federation has a player but not a team-based database: 'We have every player's eligibility on file, but we do not have a document that logs how many players in each 23-man squad were born abroad. We would have to check every player manually.' Rugby league is at least as reliant on foreign players as rugby union, but, according

Table 2: Players without citizenship at 2019 Rugby union World Cup by eligibility criteria

Country	Number of players without national passport/total number of players	Grandparents	Parents	Residence
Tonga	19	0	19	0
Samoa	18	1	17	0
Japan	16	0	1	15
Scotland	15	7	6	2
USA	13	2	5	6
Australia	12	0	0	12
Italy	8	2	3	3
Wales	8	1	4	3
Ireland	7	1	3	3
England	6	1	1	4
France	5	0	0	5
Canada	5	1	2	2
Fiji	4	0	4	0
New Zealand	4	0	0	4
Russia	2	0	2	0
South Africa	1	0	0	1
Georgia	1	0	1	0
Namibia	0	0	0	0
Argentina	0	0	0	0
Uruguay	0	0	0	0
Total	**144/620**	**16**	**68**	**60**

Source: Author's calculations based on Americas Rugby News 2019

to the RLIF representative, there are certainly differences in the application of the eligibility criteria:

> As someone who has been involved in a lot of eligibility checks over the last few years, parentage is definitely more common in rugby league than residency due to the fact that there are fewer established professional clubs. So fewer places for top players to reside to meet the residency rule. You are on safe ground to say that rugby league is opposite to rugby union with the vast majority of players qualifying through the parent/grandparent rule, not residency.

There are (semi-)professional rugby league clubs in Australia, England, France, Papua New Guinea, and New Zealand: 'I doubt there is any non-Papuan professional playing and living in Papua New Guinea, so that reduces the number of countries where residency rule matters to just four nations.' According to the RLIF officer, a clear trend in the 2017 rugby league World Cup was that the rugby league powerhouses hardly relied on players without citizenship while second tier countries relied heavily on players without citizenship. Those players were mainly selected on the basis of their ancestry. He gave examples of the following four (out of 14 in the 2017 rugby league World Cup participating) national teams: 'France had one resident player and 22 French-born; England 22 English-born players and one player with ancestry claim. Lebanon and Italy had 23 players who qualified via ancestry rule.' 22 out of the 23 Lebanese players were living in Australia, which led some people to dub them as the Australian B team (Gorman 2017).

Reasons for eligibility criteria in both codes of rugby

History matters to understand the roots of the eligibility criteria in rugby league and rugby union. A certain path dependency has established 'a historical pattern where previous events set into motion self-reinforcing feedback mechanisms which considerably change the likelihood of subsequent events or outcomes' (Bengtsson 2012: 161). The trajectory of the current eligibility criteria in both codes of rugby dates back to the beginning of the game and the first international matches in the late nineteenth century; this particular history seems to keep decision-makers in both codes of rugby disinclined to change the rules.

According to the World Rugby archive, the international governing body of rugby union – at that time named the International Rugby Football Board – discussed eligibility criteria for national representation at a meeting as early as July 1892, only six years after the Board's establishment in 1886. The issue of JH Marsh, a centre with the Swindon club, was discussed. The Scottish Union wrote to the RFU to complain that Marsh, having already played for

Scotland (in 1889), was then selected and played for England (in 1892). Because there was no rule to prohibit this, the IRFB asked the Unions to consider the adoption of a qualifying rule, 'birth qualification being in the opinion of the Board the most desirable.' Furthermore, the Board discussed the case of Colonials (players from NZ, Australia, and SA), who were residents in the UK. In their case, 'qualification should be by residence' (IRFB 1892). The Board also noted that 'no man should play for two countries,' although this was never enforced, and plenty of examples are known of players who played for more than one country.

'Interchangeable national identities had been a feature of the international game almost since its inception,' writes Collins in *A Social History of English Rugby Union* (Collins 2009: 163). The international rugby union federation 'refused to take any steps towards defining international qualifications,' and no action was taken to control the movement of players until the 1980s (Collins 2009: 164). The only exception was the 1898 ruling that no player could play for two home nations. The term 'Home Nations' herein refers to England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (before partition in 1920, it referred to the whole of Ireland). According to Collins (2009: 164), 'it was the English who reaped the most benefit from overseas players'. The main reason for the attractiveness of England for foreigners were its universities, particularly the oldest and most prestigious universities in the country, Oxford and Cambridge.

The first rugby union World Cup was not held until 1987, while the first rugby league World Cup took place in 1954. The annual varsity match between the rugby union teams from Oxford and Cambridge universities has long been one of the highlights of global rugby union, and their inclusion in the game played at Rugby Football Union's home ground Twickenham stadium in London has always been one of the greatest honors in rugby union (Markovits – Rensmann 2010: 287). This event still enjoys popularity in the professional age of rugby union. For example, the 2018 game drew an attendance of 21,893 fans. Oxford won the men's game, which has been played since 1882, and Cambridge won the women's game, which celebrated its 30th anniversary of inclusion in the event (The Varsity Game website).

Another reason for the eligibility criteria in both codes of rugby is that the two sports have never entirely gone global, unlike soccer and basketball. For Harris (2010: xiv), it is 'rugby's biggest challenge, to develop a truly global presence.' In *Gaming the World: How Sports are Reshaping Global Politics and Culture*, Markovits and Rensmann write that 'both rugby codes became the legacy of Britain's political power by occupying the sports spaces of countries that were directly governed by Britain as its colonies' (Markovits – Rensmann 2010: 63). Harris (2010: 18) notes, 'that English is the language spoken most widely in seven of the eight core nations in the game, with France being the exception to the norm in this regard, powerfully illustrates the roots of the game.' For

Markovits and Rensmann (2010: 66), there are 'few notable exceptions like France, Argentina and in more recent times Italy, Romania, Russia, and Japan' as non-English speaking nations who compete in rugby tournaments. While rugby is, according to Markovits and Rensmann, soccer's 'closest relative', soccer became the more popular game in most countries due to its simplicity. The United States and Canada fall into the group of countries that did not adopt soccer as their primary hegemonic sport, but they 'transformed extant British games into North American sports that then blossomed into their own sports culture: rounders into baseball; rugby football into American (and Canadian) football; field hockey into ice hockey; and netball into basketball' (Markovits – Rensmann 2010: 75).

This limited global spread and the desire to grow certainly explain why rugby league and rugby union are so lenient in their eligibility criteria. Without lax rules a country such as Lebanon would not be able to qualify for a rugby league World Cup, as it did twice in 2000 and 2017 (Reiche 2019). While there are 20 participating countries at the rugby union World Cup, there are 14 participating countries in the rugby league World Cup. Without the lax eligibility criteria, the events would be dominated by a few countries and a larger performance gap between participating countries would exist.

When interviewed for this work, the former press officer from World Rugby also emphasized that rugby union was an amateur sport until 1995: 'The comparable lax eligibility criteria were based on the concept of amateur rugby, a sport played by young men, and later on women, for sheer enjoyment. The idea was to allow the players to play where they stay.' He gave, amongst others, the example of Daniel Carroll who won the rugby union gold medal in 1908 when he played for the Australian team. After moving to the United States to pursue a degree at Stanford University, he started to play for the US national team and represented them at the 1920 Summer Olympic Games.

Apart from the long tradition of amateurism in rugby union, the presence of foreign students in England at Cambridge and Oxford (but also in Scotland at the University of Edinburgh); the mobility of players from England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland within the home nations; the limited global spread of rugby league and rugby union; and a shared British imperial identity are key explanations for the invention of the residency rule.

Looking back at the history of rugby league and rugby union helps to understand the reasons for the residency rule, however, the reasons behind the addition of the parent/grandparent rule remain unclear. When interviewed for this research, a leading rugby historian who has published extensively on the history of both codes said, 'I suspect that it derives from the British Imperial idea that emigrants and colonists who lived outside of Britain were still British, despite not having been born in Britain. It was not until the 1960s that people in Australia and New Zealand stopped referring to Britain as "Home."'

Discussion

The architecture of international sports is, much like global politics, a system of nation-states. Nation-States define the precise character of citizenship which consequently affects the national sporting federations and selection of their athletes. 'Nation-states are the arbiters in determining who gets in and who does not' (Kivisto 2018: 425). A general power shift occurs, from the government to the national sporting federations, when an athlete, without citizenship, is allowed to compete for a country. The eligibility rules in World Rugby and RLIF allow national rugby league and rugby union federations some form of self-determination. Proof of residency along with ancestry rules in rugby league and rugby union reveal that issues of belonging have become a domain not exclusive to the nation-state only.

The inclusion of foreign passport holders into national teams can be linked to ideas of world citizenship and cosmopolitanism, defined by Kivisto as the 'idea of citizenship that moves beyond the nation state' (Kivisto 2018: 415). Markovits and Rensmann define cosmopolitanism as 'respect for strangers and the universal recognition of individuals independent of their cultural or racial background, citizenship, and heritage' (Markovits – Rensmann 2010: 2). Hence, despite different passports, all players in a tournament are interconnected by their mutual participation in and passion for the same game. However, even with the lenient rules in both codes of rugby, there are still boundaries drawn between insiders and outsiders, based on the membership rules (eligibility criteria) of the international federations. As Spiro points out in his discussion of the term global citizenship, 'there will always be distinct communities of state or nonstate definition dividing humanity into sometimes competitive subgroups' (Spiro 2020: 153).

Discussions on the consequences, both good and bad, regarding the eligibility criteria in both codes of rugby on players and national federations depend on whose perspective is considered – that of the player abroad or that of the receiving nation. For some players, the lenient eligibility criteria provide more opportunities to play at the international level. This applies, for example, to rugby league players in Australia who have foreign ancestry, or rugby union players from the Pacific Islands who play abroad and have the option to qualify via residence for other national teams.

When Lebanon qualified for the first time for the rugby league World Cup in 2000, the sport did not yet exist in Lebanon. Later, rugby league gradually developed, and in 2018 there were approximately 1,000 players in the country, around 0.13 % of the global player pool. More than 60 % of rugby league players worldwide, around 500,000 out of 800,000, practice the sport in Australia, most in the provinces of Queensland and New South Wales (Reiche 2019). A closer look at Lebanon's squad at the 2017 rugby league World Cup confirms that a vast majority of the Lebanese players were not 'good enough'

for the Australian national team. Apart from a few stars from the Australian National Rugby League (NRL), 'most of the squad are part-time players,' playing in lower-tier leagues (Woods 2017). Without Lebanese ancestry, these players would never have had the opportunity to play on a national team and to participate in the World Cup. Thus, presenting a case of the benefits players receive from the lax eligibility criteria. Regarding New Zealand rugby union players competing for other countries, Harris (2010: 75) also notes that 'in many cases, it could be argued that they would never have achieved international honours in their home nation.'

In rugby union, there is a growing presence of Pacific Islanders at the international level. According to Horton (2012), Pacific Islanders from the three major rugby-playing islands – Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga – have become the most prevalent ethnic group of rugby sports migrants globally, a process that is mainly socio-economically driven. One of the main purposes of migration for these players is to be able to remit money back home. From the perspective of professional leagues, in developed countries the rationale to recruit Pacific Islanders is that these players are comparatively inexpensive and equally talented. In contrast to rugby league players from Australia who qualify by ancestry to play for Lebanon, Pacific Islanders often qualify by residence after moving to professional clubs in countries such as France and Japan or to colleges in the United States.

The Pacific Islands rugby union federations are negatively affected by the eligibility criteria in rugby union. While the residency rule is certainly to their disadvantage, for players moving to economically stronger countries with professional leagues and college scholarships, the ancestry rule benefits them. There are many examples of expatriate Pacific Islanders in Australia and New Zealand looking for a country to represent (Overton et al 2011). According to their data, New Zealand outnumbered all other countries as the birthplace of 68 players at the 2011 World Cup, many of whom played for Samoa, Tonga, and Japan. The authors conclude that there is a 'complex geography that extends well beyond the rhetoric of simple player poaching and a rich/poor divide' (Overton et al. 2011: 100). Harris (2010: 84) made a similar observation about the 2007 rugby union World Cup: 'Despite the widespread criticism of their so-called pillaging of the South Sea Islands to strengthen their national team, there were more athletes born in New Zealand playing in the 2007 World Cup than there were from any other country.'

According to Harris (2010: 110):

Recruiting players born outside the country became a key feature of rugby in the professional era. While this had always happened in the amateur game with the advent of professionalism this became a more strategic initiative on the part of many unions and also reflected the increasing internationalisation of the sport within and between certain nations.

An article on Fijian rugby labor migration published in 2013 estimated that at the time there were around 450 elite players from Fiji involved in foreign competitions (Kanemasu – Molnar 2013). For the authors, there is a counter-hegemonic potential of sport labor migration that gives players from the Fijis the dual opportunity to challenge marginalisation and to promote their home country on international fronts. For Kanemasu and Molnar there is a 'symbolic dimension of rugby migration as a medium to challenge the dominant Western discourse that defines Fiji and the other Pacific Islands as the ultimate "periphery" – small, remote, poorly resourced and dependent on Western largess for survival' (Kanemasu – Molnar 2013: 731).

While the aforementioned examples of players demonstrate how they benefit from the eligibility criteria in both codes of rugby, some domestic players are however disadvantaged by the rules when it comes to opportunities to represent their countries at the international level. Sakata (2004) investigated the influence of foreign players on Japanese rugby. Starting in 1985, the Japanese Rugby Union Federation (JRFU) began selecting foreign players for the national team, with the positive outcome of qualifying for every World Cup since 1987. However, the author of the article concluded that the strengthening of the national team with the use of foreign players came at the expense of developing young domestic players. 'Imported players have come to dominate key positions such as number eight and center, a trend often called "positional stacking". This deprives home-grown talent of opportunities and is therefore detrimental to the overall development of the national team' (Sakata 2004: 125). For Harris (2010: 108), 'notions of "sameness" become increasingly visible as migrant workers take their skills from country to country.'

The lenient eligibility criteria in both codes of rugby also change dynamics inside the teams. Within the Lebanese rugby league national team, English rather than Arabic is the working language, and the website of the federation is in English only (Reiche 2019). The team language in both codes has become English, and this applies not only to developing countries. Within the German rugby union team, for example, English and not German is the working language, as the author learned in conversation with the general director of the German rugby union, who said that this would be problematic for one German player who does not speak English.

In some countries, the diverse composition of the national teams is critiqued harshly. One example is France. At the rugby union World Cup in 2011 France was a 'largely self-sufficient country' with only two out of 31 players from abroad (Overton et al., 2011: 99). The team composition significantly changed over the following years, however, and at the 2015 rugby union World Cup 10 out of 31 French players did not have a French passport (Americas Rugby News 2015).

National federations ultimately decide the selection of players. Though they must respect the rules of the international federations, they have the final say

when it comes to the rules' application. The rugby historian who was interviewed for this work emphasized that some countries are ignoring the reality of player mobility and globalisation: 'England just nominates players that play in England and not in neighboring France, for example. Southern hemisphere national teams do not nominate players from northern hemisphere clubs.'

The French rugby union federation announced the following in December 2016: 'From now on players who are not French nationals can no longer play for France. It's that simple. One will have to be in possession of a French passport to be considered for selection' (World Rugby 2016). The newly elected president of the French rugby union federation, Laporte, claimed the reason for the new policy is what he described as 'a political decision' and expressed his worries about the effect of the residency rule on other countries and the sport in general: 'One must not impoverish the Fijians, Georgians, Samoans, and Tongans; otherwise, we impoverish the standard of international rugby.' However, the magazine *World Rugby* commented that the decision 'is likely to please the majority of French rugby fans': 'The French would prefer their own countrymen to be wearing the blue jersey.' The new policy, which will not apply to those foreigners already selected to play for France, would require players to demonstrate a much deeper commitment to their new home country: 'To apply for French citizenship one needs to have lived in France for five continuous years and demonstrate a competency in the language and a knowledge of the culture' (World Rugby 2016).

The vice chairman of World Rugby, Augustin Pichot, stimulated a broad debate in November 2018 when he tweeted the percentages of foreign players in international friendlies. Pichot is from Argentina, and his home country was at the bottom of the list with zero percent non-national players. In a press interview Pichot said, 'Is the international game under threat? I think it is. Look at the balance sheets of some nations and you can see exactly where we stand' (Brooke 2018). In *The Sydney Morning Herald,* Robinson criticised Pichot's list in that it did not recognise that many Argentinian players have been trained by foreign systems. Furthermore, she argued that 'notions of nationality and identity are hard to pin down' as 'identity was something different for everyone':

The issue looks different from every angle, not least from a country like Australia, where almost 30 per cent of the resident population was born overseas. The Wallabies' 23 that beat New Zealand in the Indigenous jersey last year reflected that statistic (34 per cent), including that intolerable 'Plastic Aussie' Stephen Moore (born in Saudi Arabia). Should a Test nation stack its team full of three-year imports? No. Should Pichot get his facts right and frame the issue in a manner befitting his influential role in the global game? Absolutely (Robinson 2018).

There was also a critical debate about foreign players on national teams around the 2017 rugby league World Cup. Gorman commented in an article in *The Guardian*:

> Opinion is divided between those who believe these rules turn the tournament into a gimmick, and those who believe they are essential to grow the game internationally. Many of the nations that have qualified for this year's tournament are filled with Australians (Gorman 2017).

Collins presented a more positive view in a commentary for the website *Conversation*:

> The RLIF decision reflected the fluidity of national identity today. As immigration and movement across national boundaries increases, national and regional identities become changeable and multi-layered... The 2017 World Cup and its diaspora national sides may well point the way to a new model for international representative sport in the twenty-first century. (Collins 2017)

Table 3 summarizes the consequences of allowing non-citizens to play in national teams for governments, fans, players, national and international federations.

Table 3: Consequences of allowing non-citizens to play in national teams on different stakeholders

Stakeholder	Consequences
Governments	• Less control on who represents country
Fans	• Issues around identification discussed
Players	• More options for some players at international level • Fewer opportunities for home-grown talents ('positional stacking') • English becoming working language of national teams • No Olympic eligibility (rugby union) • Integrity publicly questioned
National Federations	• Final decision about application of different eligibility criteria • Larger pool of players for national teams • Risk of losing nationals to other countries • More diverse composition of teams • Integrity publicly questioned
International Federations	• Easier to spread the game beyond its traditional hubs • Inconsistency of rules with Olympic eligibility (rugby union) • More complicated to check players' eligibility • Integrity publicly questioned

Conclusion

This article has shown that the main pillars of contemporary eligibility criteria in both codes of rugby, particularly the controversially discussed residency rule, are rooted in the history of the game and go back to the late 19th century when first matches between countries took place. However, the rational for keeping the rules are different from the reasons for their introduction. While the original idea was to give exchange students from Commonwealth countries at English universities and migrants within the home nations (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) the opportunity to play where they stay, both showcasing a shared British imperial identity at that time, today's rational is different. Both the residence and the heritage rule are followed to maximize the limited global spread of rugby league and rugby union. Without these lenient rules it would be difficult to organize international competitions. This particularly applies to rugby league with its Australian hub, but also to the more globalized game of rugby union that is, although being readmitted to the Olympics since 2016 with its shortened version of rugby sevens, especially struggling to grow on the most populous continent, Asia.

This research has also shown that the effects of the eligibility criteria go beyond simplistic rich/poor and center/periphery models. This relates to the fact that there are two options by which a player can represent a country for which s(he) has no passport: ancestry, which especially benefits poor or war-torn countries with large diasporas, and residence, which primarily benefits developed countries with strong professional leagues.

While one could argue that the potential of sports to unite populations and strengthen national pride is hurt by diverse teams consisting of non-national players, a counter argument would be that the selection of the best available players regardless of passport is a showcase of meritocracy that also takes the increased mobility of people in globalised times into consideration. This practice might also contribute to increased understanding between nationals and foreign residents who have, for example, a different skin color or religion. The fact that they are all represented by the same national team might help subdue an 'us vs. them' mentality, prevalent in many countries.

In some people's perceptions, there may always be a hierarchy of 'real' above 'fake' national representatives. As long as nationality matters in international sport, these debates will continue. However, there is no longer anything like a 'pure' national team. As Nederven Pieterse writes in his book on globalization: "In a historical sense we are all migrants because our ancestors have all travelled the places where we have come from. States that impose border controls may go way back in time but their spread dates only from the nineteenth century and their covering the globe is more recent still" (Nederveen Pieterse 2015: 36). This sentiment is reflected in both codes of rugby. Most countries rely either on

immigrants or their diasporas for talent. And even in the case that all players of a national team are born in the country they represent, they may have (grand) parents from elsewhere or may have benefitted from playing in stronger leagues abroad, making them also products of globalisation.

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Different Class Citizens: Understanding the Relationship between Socio-economic Inequality and Voting Abstention[1]

TAMARA EHS AND MARTINA ZANDONELLA

Abstract: *In most established democracies the turnout gap along class lines has increased substantially since the 1980s. Political participation has become a question of resources: income, property, formal education, secure employment and overall social status determine citizens' engagement in political decision-making. Using a mixed methods approach, our case-study shows that this also applies to Vienna – an overall rich city with a long tradition of social reform policies, often credited with the highest quality of life in the world. Although Vienna still has a relatively high turnout by international standards, political participation is very unevenly distributed once socio--economic resources are taken into account. Thereby and throughout life, class shapes people's experiences with and as part of democracy. These experiences in turn have long-term effects on their trust in the political system and on their political self-efficacy. Our findings first and foremost contribute to the ongoing debate on democracy's social imbalance and show that its consequences already apply on the regional level. The study additionally highlights the usefulness of mixed methods approaches when we aim at a better understanding of the class-based turnout gap.*

Keywords: *voter turnout, social inequality, participation, mixed methods design*

Introduction

The idea of democracy is based on equality of participation in decision-making. According to the democratic ideal, social status must be irrelevant when it comes to political participation. But in fact, a vast range of research has documented the uneven distribution of political participation along class lines. Furthermore, this turnout gap has increased substantially since the 1980s – in many established democracies and often parallel to the rise of socio-economic inequality. Class impacts political participation (Armingeon – Schädel 2015; Barthels 2008; Schäfer et al. 2020) as well as party preference formation, both for voters (Kitschelt – Rehm 2014; Engler – Weisstanner 2020) and legislators (Carnes 2013). The growing, class-based participation gap is accompanied by distortions of political issue setting and decision-making, as democracies have become less responsive to the political concerns of the less affluent (Schäfer – Schwander 2019). As wealthier citizens go to the polls more often and vote for political parties that continue to secure their relatively privileged position, their political concerns are eventually disproportionately represented in the democratic institutions. On the other hand, less affluent citizens more often abstain from voting and therefore do not have the same chances of having their needs implemented in the political process (Carnes 2013; Peters – Ensink 2015; Elsässer 2018).

One might object that, regarding universal suffrage, voting abstention is voluntary. However, this overlooks that although the decision for or against voting is made by the individual, they do not act independently of their relative position in society (Schäfer 2015). Here, the resource-theoretical approach of participation research meets the theory of relative power differences: Socio--economic inequality translates into political inequality because it discourages already disadvantaged groups from getting involved. And as political decisions in favour of those who participate oftentimes reinforce socio-economic inequality, the already disadvantaged are kept even further away from the polls (Epp – Borghetto 2020; Gingrich – Häusermann 2015). The 'social question' therefore is crucial for the understanding of democracy's crises, currently displayed by a widening, class-based participation gap and a turn to populist as well as radical right-wing political parties. Regarding the latter, populists and the radical right became attractive for the distressed middle classes because they channel their perceived threat of decline and claim to restore their dignity. The upper classes support populists and the radical right – not only through voting, but much more efficiently through funding – to secure their wealth and power (Gidron – Hall, 2017; Kurer – Palier 2019; Burgoon et al 2019; Engler – Weisstanner 2020). The lower classes, on the other hand, hardly find any connections with the party system and more and more abstain from voting (Rovny – Rovny 2017). Consequently, no effect of populist parties on voter turnout has been found so

far (Schwander et al 2020). This supply-side gap (Hillen – Steiner 2020) again adds to the mechanisms that exclude the political positions of the lower classes from parliaments and governments (Rosset – Stecker 2019).

Obviously, distributional issues at various levels are at stake, but they no longer reach political decision-makers at a rate commensurate with rising inequality: In recent decades, economic inequalities between countries have indeed narrowed, but those within countries have widened. In poorer countries, the middle classes have been the main beneficiaries of strong economic growth. In richer countries, the trend has been different: The lower classes and the middle classes have seen their incomes stagnate or fall, while income and wealth of the upper classes has increased considerably (Alvaredo et al. 2017; Lakner – Milanovic 2016). The class-based participation gap therefore not only concerns democracies with traditionally higher economic inequality, like the USA or the UK (Dalton 2017), it increasingly affects European democracies with stronger redistribution policies and welfare states, such as Austria. Currently, these developments are further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The links between socio-economic inequality and political participation have been documented by numerous studies and seem well established. Our research contributes in two, so far underrepresented aspects. First, it serves as an in-depth case study for democracies with still relatively strong redistribution policies and welfare states. Second, it highlights important processes which tie socio-economic resources to political participation. We chose Vienna for our case study because we wanted to provide robust data for an already ongoing debate about the social imbalance of democracy during the run-up to the 2020 regional election. Beyond that, we wanted to contribute to already existing research by further advancing the understanding of the relationships between socio-economic resources and voting abstention.

Although Vienna holds the world's highest quality of living (Mercer 2019) and despite its hundred-year-old tradition of social reform policies (most notably in the field of social housing), considerable socio-economic inequalities exist and are reflected in voter turnout. Voting was never compulsory in Vienna's regional elections, but until the 1980s turnout always reached well above 70 %, frequently close to 80 %. With the deregulation of the labour market, the rise in unemployment, the dismantling of the welfare state and increasing economic inequality, voter turnout started to fall below the two-thirds mark – and it fell unevenly across Vienna's 23 districts. Since the 1990s those districts with lower income, higher unemployment and higher poverty rates have the lowest turnout, whereas turnout is particularly high in the upper middle class and upper class districts. In the 2020 regional election, for example, the highest turnout reached 76 % in one of the wealthiest districts. The lowest turnout, on the other hand, reached 59 % in one of the districts with the least socio--economic resources. This imbalance is reinforced by the fact that in Vienna

every second blue collar worker is not entitled to vote because he or she lacks Austrian citizenship. Additionally, the socio-economically better-off not only participate more frequently in elections, the same is true for all other instruments of democracy, like citizens' initiatives or party donations. Wealthier citizens therefore accumulate political capital through a lot of different and, considering party donations, powerful channels. Thus, Vienna is approaching the international trend of a 'two-thirds democracy' (Merkel – Petring 2011), in which the third with the least socio-economic resources increasingly refrains from political participation and is ultimately not represented within the political spectrum. The same is true for Austria as a whole: 83 % of the upper third (classified along socio-economic resources) participated in the 2019 National Council election, but only 59 % of the lower third (Zandonella 2019).

Method and data

To gain more information about Vienna's participation gap, its socio-economic foundations, and about different processes at work on the group – as well as on the individual – level, we decided on a mixed methods approach. This allowed us to not only include quantitative and qualitative components into our research, but also to connect and combine these components with each other. We worked with an explanatory sequential mixed method design (Creswell – Plano Clark 2006; Ivankova et al. 2006), generating structural data on a small-scale regional level (phase 1), conducting a representative survey (phase 2) and conducting biographical interviews (phase 3).

In the first phase of the study, we generated a dataset on the structural level. Starting from the already known association between socio-economic resources and turnout on the district level, we aimed for a smaller scale unit. As the districts are not only diverse between but also within each other, we assumed that the participation gap might be underestimated by looking at the districts alone. With the data available we finally intersected census districts and electoral districts to create a small-scale unit dataset, suitable for studying our research question and hypothesis. Census districts are subdivisions of each municipality and one of the smallest geographical reference units. Vienna is subdivided into 1,343 census districts and for each of these, various indicators of socio-economic inequality are available (number and share of women, age groups, citizenships, birth countries, formal education groups, unemployed and economic sectors, as well as the average annual net income of employees and pensioners). As census districts offer no information about voter turnout or election results, we had to incorporate electoral districts. Electoral districts are the smallest administrative unit enshrined in electoral law. They are designed to facilitate the electoral process, and are therefore divided according to the expected number of voters per hour. For the most recent National Council election (2019), Vienna

was divided into 1,447 electoral districts. For each electoral district, turnout and election results for votes casted at polling stations are available. To assign the absentee votes, the absentee ballots were allocated proportionally to the electoral districts using the statistical procedures of SORA's absentee ballot forecast. As census and electoral districts can coincide, but do not have to, we generated a dataset based on census districts, including the mentioned indicators of socio-economic inequality as the most accurate information available for voter turnout. Using the geographic information system QGIS, the mean coordinate of each electoral district was specified and then integrated into the map of Vienna, already divided into census districts. For each census district, the mean turnout of those election districts, whose geographical centres lie within the census district, was calculated. The final dataset is based on census districts and includes the above-mentioned indicators of socio-economic inequality as well as the information on turnout. The data was analysed using the Spatial Durbin Error Model, a spatial econometrics variation of linear regression. This statistical procedure allows us to account for spatial autocorrelation, which might occur between small-scale neighbouring areas like census districts and distorts conventional regression coefficients (Elhorst 2010).

For the second phase of the study, we left the structural level and turned to the individual. Expanding our research scope, we now added data on people's attitudes and experiences related to democracy. Based on the findings of phase 1, we conducted a representative survey among 981 Viennese aged 16 and over, with 16 being the age at which one is entitled to vote in Austria since the electoral reform in 2007. (It's noteworthy that the city of Vienna had been a pioneer, having lowered the voting age to 16 already in 2002. This is therefore the fourth election since lowering the voting age). Telephone and web interviews were combined to reach all population groups. The sampling procedure was twofold. We first stratified along three socio-economic clusters, which were identified during the first phase of the study. Within each cluster, respondents were then selected randomly. Post-stratification weighting ensured a Viennese-representative sample. We developed a standardised questionnaire for the survey, including attitudes towards democracy, perceived responsiveness of the political system in Austria, political participation and socio-economic resources. Data analysis focused on the relationships between socio-economic resources, experiences, attitudes and non-voting, and was primarily conducted via logistic and linear regression as well as path models.

The third phase of the study aimed at a more comprehensive understanding of the indirect effects of socio-economic resources on non-voting, which were identified during phase two. To gather in-depth information about people's experiences with and as part of the democratic system, we conduct biographical interviews. These focused on political socialisation as well as on experiences with democratic institutions and political participation in various contexts.

We selected our interviewees from the survey respondents, mainly choosing from census districts belonging to the cluster with the least socio-economic resources (theoretical sampling; Corbin – Strauss 2014). Due to the pandemic all interviews were conducted by telephone, and all followed the same interviewer's guide. We developed this guide to ensure thematic comparability across all interviews. Data analysis focused on how structural conditions and individual actions interact and followed a content analytical framework.

Results

Analyses on the structural level confirmed first of all that the participation gap widens considering small-scale units: While voter turnout in the 2019 National Council election differed by up to 15 percentage points between Vienna's 23 main districts, the difference between the census districts is up to 28 percentage points. Subsequently, spatial linear regression analysis shows that socio-economic resources are directly linked to turnout – the fewer resources accumulated in a census district, the fewer of its residents went to the polls. Relevant are both economic and cultural capital: Low average income and a high unemployment rate decrease turnout as well as a high share of residents with compulsory school-leaving certificate and a high share of residents working in jobs with low occupational prestige. The extent of their effects on turnout are considerable: If, for example, the unemployment rate in an average census district increases by one percentage point, voter turnout decreases by 0.5 percentage points. If, on the other hand, the average annual income in this district increases by 1,000 euros, voter turnout rises by one percentage point (keeping all other predictors equal).

In Vienna, too, socio-economic resources accumulate regionally. Cluster analysis, calculated with the significant indicators from the regression analysis above, points to three broad groups of census districts. Each of these groups is characterised by specific socio-economic conditions and corresponding electoral participation. Within the upper cluster, many economic resources, high social status and a high turnout come together. A particularly large number of academics reside in this cluster, in addition to high occupational prestige and high average income. The unemployment rate is low, while turnout came out well above the average. The census districts of this upper cluster are home to about 20 percent of Vienna's eligible voters.

Within the middle cluster we find – according to its name – socio-economic resources as well as turnout in line with Vienna's average. Slightly more than 40 percent of Vienna's eligible voters reside in these census districts. Within the lower cluster, few economic resources and low social status meet equally low turnout. More than one third of Vienna's eligible voters live in these neighbourhoods, characterised by low-status employment, a high unemployment

Table 1: Spatial Durbin Error Regression Model on voter turnout

	direct		indirect (Lag)		total	
	β	p	θ	p	B	p
Proportion of women	–0,089	0,17	–0,024	0,82	–0,113	0,35
Proportion of pensioners	0,017	0,47	0,083	0,09	0,100	0,11
Proportion Austrian citizens	0,006	0,77	0,001	0,97	0,007	0,87
Proportion Turkisch citizens	0,252	0,08	0,157	0,53	0,409	0,15
Proportion citizens of former Yugoslavia	0,123	0,12	0,203	0,16	0,326	0,11
Proportion university graduates	0,178	**0,00**	0,032	0,17	**0,210**	**0,00**
Proportion comuplsory school	–0,373	**0,00**	–0,181	0,05	**–0,554**	**0,00**
Unemployment rate	–0,346	**0,00**	–0,119	0,24	**–0,465**	**0,00**
Annual net income	0,001	**0,00**	0,000	0,08	**0,001**	**0,00**
constant					98,925	0,00
pseudo R2= 0,74						

Reported are linear regression coefficients (direct, indirect and total effects)
Coefficients in bold indicate significant effects (p<0,05)

rate and low average income. A particularly large number of residents work in occupations labelled as system-relevant throughout the pandemic: cleaning staff, nursing staff and caregivers, delivery staff, construction workers or grocery store employees. Their work is poorly paid, little valued and their working conditions are poor (Schoenherr – Zandonella 2020). Not surprisingly at this point, turnout in the lower cluster came out far below Vienna's average. In addition, significantly fewer residents of the lower cluster are eligible to vote because of

Table 2: Three socio-economic clusters

cluster	proportion of elegible voters	average annual net income*	unemployment rate	proportion comupulsory school	proportion universtiy graduates	proportion lower occupational prestige	proportion non-Austrian citizens	turnout (2019 National Council election)
upper	20%	30 778	6%	13%	38%	30%	23%	81%
middle	43%	24 139	10%	21%	22%	44%	25%	72%
lower	37%	18 541	18%	35%	12%	59%	38%	64%

*   income tax liable income (employees and pensioners) in Euro

foreign citizenships. Taking together the low turnout and the high rate of non--eligibles in the lower cluster, only 40 percent of its residents are represented within the institutions of representative democracy. Thus, political inequality based on socio-economic resources further increases in these neighbourhoods by excluding foreign citizens from the right to vote.

Leaving the structural level and turning to the results of our representative survey, we first of all can conclude that structural socio-economic inequality, subsumed in the clusters presented, reflects itself in the perceptions of the respondents who live in those areas. While most residents of the lower cluster assign themselves to the lower and working classes, the vast majority of the residents of the upper cluster view themselves as part of the upper middle and upper classes. This subjective social positioning is closely linked to socio--economic resources on the one hand, and to social recognition on the other. Concerning the latter, about half of the employees living within the lower cluster state that their work is not valued by society (comparted to 16 percent of employees within the upper cluster). As already mentioned, many of them work in low paid jobs with poor working conditions like cleaning, caregiving, delivery or retail. Logistic regression analysis indicates that this lack of social recognition, together with fewer socio-economic resources, strongly affects individual electoral participation: Low financial means in the form of income and property, unemployment, lower levels of formal education and a subjectively lower position within society go hand in hand with a lower propensity to vote in the then upcoming regional elections. The combined impact of these effects is illustrated by the following examples. Academics with incomes in the top-third, who additionally own property or other considerable financial reserves, and who place themselves within the upper ranks of society, have a 98 percent chance of voting in the upcoming election. Unemployed skilled workers, on the other hand, without financial reserves but still average income and who identify as working class, have a 51 percent chance of voting. If their unemployment lasts and income gradually falls below the poverty line, their chance of participating in an upcoming election drops further to a mere 30 percent.

This link between socio-economic resources, social recognition and voting is mediated by trust in the political system and its perceived responsiveness: For nearly two-thirds of the residents in the lower cluster, the political system in Austria does not work well (the same applies to one-fifth of the residents in the upper cluster). To make matters worse, the majority of people with low financial resources (64 percent) and the majority of those who identify as working class (74 percent) report that politicians treat them like second-class citizens. Many then lack confidence in the effectiveness of political participation – 60 percent of people with low financial resources and 66 % of those who identify as working class are convinced to have no influence on any kind of political decision-making, because their voices are not heard or do not count.

Table 3: Logistic Regression Model on planned participation in the upcoming election

	B	p	Exp(B)
women	0,239	0,13	1,270
age 60plus	0,098	0,65	1,103
migrational background	**–1,010**	0,03	0,364
citizenship	**–1,374**	0,00	0,253
formal education	**0,754**	0,00	2,125
household income	**0,723**	0,00	2,061
property	**0,403**	0,03	1,496
unemployment	**–1,048**	0,00	0,351
subjective class position	**0,385**	0,00	1,470
constant	0,959	0,00	2,609

Reported are logit coefficients
Coefficients in bold indicate significant effects (p<0,05)

Following on from this, the qualitative interviews we conducted during the final phase of our study provide insight into the conditions under which trust in the political system and political efficacy emerge. While both are strongly based on the experiences people have with and as part of the democratic system, these experiences highly depend on one's socio-economic situation. Tracing the meso- and micro-level of Verba et al.'s (1995) Civic Voluntarism Model, we took a closer look at the political socialisation of our interviewees.

At the beginning of each electoral biography, there are significant others who convey the importance, usefulness or simply self-evidence to vote. Thereby, democracy-learning has at least three aspects: On the cognitive level, knowledge is passed on; on the emotional level, voting is established as the deep-felt core of democracy; and on the behavioural level, the act of voting is rehearsed by repeatedly accompanying adults to the polling station. In terms of institutions, school plays an important role in political socialisation. At school, however, existing inequalities are perpetuated rather than compensated for. Civic and citizenship education reached our interviewees coming from well-off families directly. They not only learned (about) democracy, but also experienced themselves as an effective part of it early on at school. On the other hand, interviewees with poor or working class backgrounds felt hardly addressed by civic and citizenship education. School in fact instilled in them that democracy is something in which they are not meant to be a part:[2]

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2 The following quotes from our interviews were translated from German to English by the authors.

'At school, the lowering of voting age was discussed and there was also talk about upcoming elections. But I always thought that this was not about me, that I was not included. […] My parents couldn't afford tutoring, so I didn't graduate in the end.'

What school had not provided for our poor and working class interviewees was repeatedly made up for at work. Democracy at the workplace therefore is not only important for political socialisation in general (Geurkink et al. 2020; Jian – Jeffres 2008; Carter 2006), it is specifically relevant for people with less socio-economic resources, as it oftentimes enables their first positive experiences with democracy and participation:

'Our instructor at work talked to us apprentices about the elections: what each party means for us as workers. I liked that and felt that politics has something to do with my life.'

'It was only during my apprenticeship that I learned, through conversations with colleagues, how Austrian politics work. Who stands for what and what democracy actually is.'

'Before my first national or regional election, I had already participated in works council elections.'

The older our survey respondents and our interviewees were, the more likely they belonged to a political camp or had family ties to a political party that obliged them to vote. This adds to recent studies showing that the 'start-up costs of voting' have risen along social status lines (Schäfer et al. 2020). While there had always been a certain difference in the probability of first-time voting related to individual or parental resources (Plutzer 2002), most Western European democracies could reduce this gap through the strong presence of Labour or Social Democratic Parties attached to the class cleavage. This changed throughout the 1990s, as these parties shifted their focus and policies ('third way'). We now witness an increasing and class-based participation gap among first-time voters – even in Vienna, where the voting age was already lowered to 16 in 2002, coming into effect for the 2005-election (Wagner et al. 2012). More than ever, (non-)voting is a 'social act' (Bhatti/Hansen 2012):

'There was no political education at school. What I know about politics, I know from my family and later through the Arbeiter-Zeitung.' [n.b.:"Workers' Newspaper" was the daily of the Social Democratic Party, published from 1889 till 1991]

'Everyone around me voted for the Social Democrats. So I did that, too. I never thought about voting for anyone else.'

'I am 78 years old and have always voted for the Social Democrats – without any doubt, because I grew up in a socialist household.'

'As a Social Democrat, you vote: Count heads, don't bash heads! I fight at the ballot box.'

On the other hand, our non-voting interviewees with low socio-economic resources expressed extremely low levels of trust in state institutions, politics, political parties and in the effectiveness of their own vote. This lack of trust is the result of multiple, partly lifelong experiences of exclusion. The political system has so far denied them participation in economic security, social recognition and in shaping their own living conditions. Within this context, especially strong negative impacts arise from degrading and humiliating experiences with welfare institutions and authorities. All of this leads to the conclusion that political participation is fake because the existing system, its representatives and their supporters are not interested in any kind of change:

'I can't do much with politics. When I was a child, my family had to disclose everything to the job center, the youth welfare, the social welfare – answering the most intimate questions, adults treated like little kids. To this day I am afraid of state authorities.'

'I've been to the polls once or twice so far, but I don't see the point. Nothing changes for me. I will not take part in the Vienna election; elections have nothing to do with me and my life – for me, life always remains the same struggle.'

'I've thought about going to the polling station with my kids. But I don't want to teach them that voting changes anything. That is an illusion.'

'I would vote again – if someone came along and convinced me that my participation actually made sense.'

Discussion

Our study provides useful indications for researching and understanding the crises of democracy, especially when it comes to the relation between socio--economic inequality and political participation already at the regional level. There are potential limitations: The study was designed as an in-depth case study, referencing Austria's capital. Even though its basic assumptions and main results confirm findings from other country or cross-country-studies, further research is needed to examine whether its results are generalisable in more detail. We are therefore planning further studies of other Austrian regional

elections as well as a comparison of municipal elections in Central Europe and invite readers researching Central European cities to contact us for research collaboration.

The key message of our study is: Socio-economic resources determine people's experiences within the political system; these experiences shape their trust in democracy and their political efficacy, and eventually determine their political participation. Thereby, regional socio-economic inequality is strongly reflected in the perceptions and living conditions of the residents and does leave its mark on their attitudes towards the political system and their political participation. Within this context, the resulting sense of injustice might be a source from which political participation emerges. However, this does not apply to the residents in the cluster with the least socio-economic resources, as they lack a prerequisite for turning their sense of injustice into political action: the conviction that political participation actually can make a difference. This conviction, or the lack of it, is based on the totality of experiences people make within the democratic system. The nature of these experiences, in turn, is shaped by their socio-economic situation. For people with fewer resources, this first of all means being constantly denied participation in financial security and social recognition: Their jobs are poorly paid, their working conditions are hard and appreciation for their work is low. Although the pandemic brought attention to the system-relevance of many of these jobs, this so far has changed nothing for the people doing them. Maldistribution and misrecognition – the two kinds of obstacles to participatory parity Nancy Fraser (2007) identified – clash in the lower classes. For people with fewer socio-economic resources democracy more often than not means lifelong financial struggle and exposure to access discrimination, degradation and contempt. Particularly harmful for the trust in democracy and for political participation are humiliating experiences within state institutions. Here, the affective aspects of class inequality (Skeggs 1997) and their role in class formation become most obvious. Hence, our study also adds insights into how maldistribution and misrecognition create different class citizens.

Alas, the right to vote is not only to be understood formally: It is not sufficient for the democratic claim that people are endowed with equal participation rights. Rather, the preconditions for participation must also be equally distributed. This first and foremost means socio-economic resources, respectively their redistribution. Based on that, all sorts of social grievances (Castel 2009) must be considered. As those arise primarily from lack of recognition in a downwardly mobile society (Nachtwey 2016), they are not only central for voting abstention, but also for the formation of party preferences.

In Vienna, too, the class gap translates into a turnout gap – on the individual as well as on the structural level. As wealthier citizens and wealthier neighbourhoods become disproportionally represented in parliaments, policies preferring

their concerns follow (Elsässer 2018). This, in turn, fosters already existing experiences of not being represented and of political powerlessness among the lower classes. Within this context, abstention from voting might in fact appear as a rational choice.

Finally, from a methodological point of view, the mixed methods design proofed useful for gaining a broader and deeper understanding of the relationships between socio-economic inequality and voting abstention. Within that approach, the introduction of geographic information systems into electoral research not only allowed the spatial localisation and analysis of socio-economic inequality and turnout, but the visualisation of these inequalities also turned out to be broadly accessible and lead to lasting impressions among politicians, civil servants, trade unionists and journalists, which whom we have so far discussed the main results and implications of this study. Studies like these therefore also contribute to an evidence-based public debate on the social imbalance of democracy.

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Facing Disinformation: Narratives and Manipulative Techniques Deployed in the Czech Republic[1]

MILOŠ GREGOR AND PETRA MLEJNKOVÁ

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Abstract: *Disinformation represents a pressing issue in the context of security and politics in the region (not only) of Central and Eastern Europe. With the conflict in Ukraine, European virtual space was flooded with online media offering alternative explanations concerning the situation in that country. So-called alternative media developed into trusted sources of information for part of society. Therefore, this paper analyzes in--depth the techniques of manipulation they use; in other words, the aim of the paper is to deconstruct their power over peoples' hearts and minds. Through the case of the Czech Republic, we demonstrate modernized manipulation of public opinion based on a selective choice of topics and stories combined with properly chosen manipulative techniques controlling emotions and relativity.*

Keywords: *disinformation, online media, manipulative techniques, narrative analysis, Czech Republic.*

Introduction

Information is the lifeblood of any society. Thanks to the current technological revolution, which is based on the interconnection of information, communication, and mass media technologies, we have increased access to information while at the same time reduced space and time constraints. In the twenty-first

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century, a century of easily accessible internet, social media, and online influencers, the weaponization of information has reached an unexpected and unprecedented level. Technological developments in communication have brought about amazing opportunities for the centuries-old techniques of manipulation and deception.

We know quite a lot about what disinformation looks like, to what purposes it serves and what kind of threat it represents for modern democracies and their societies. From the research of Nazi and communist propaganda, we have learnt dozens of different manipulative techniques propagators might use (Pratkins and Arons 2001; Shabo 2008; Bernays 2004). On the other hand, we know far less about how these manipulative techniques are used specifically in the context of the disinformation strategies defining current disinformation campaigns and the efforts of hostile actors (often operating in online space). Thus, this paper analyzes narratives and manipulative techniques deployed in the Czech Republic by disinformation online media outlets, that is, online media outlets providing readers with unsubstantiated, misleading information, and conspiratorial content. Based on a Czech case study, the paper contributes to uncovering the workings of the weaponization of information through an analysis of how manipulative techniques are instrumentalized. The analysis was conducted on a sample of 2,364 articles produced in March 2016 by four media outlets providing space for disinformation.

Disinformation Strategies – How Audiences Are Manipulated

With the development of virtual space, we are witnessing a trend in the diversification of information sources. Media outlets are no longer alone. As internet users, we have multiple possibilities from where to get information. And even among media outlets the landscape has changed. It is not just serious media or tabloid (yellow) media anymore; new actors with new roles have entered the virtual space. One such new actor category is *disinformation media*, providing manipulated or entirely fake news, selling so-called alternative facts or real truth. Disinformation includes a broad scale of false, fake, inaccurate, or misleading information; thus, three characteristics must be fulfilled to speak about disinformation properly (Fallis 2015; Gregor and Mlejnková 2021). Disinformation is still meant as information; true or false, it is information. Second, disinformation is misleading information, which means it creates false beliefs. And thirdly, disinformation is intentionally misleading, intentionally providing manipulated content, and therefore intentionally creating false beliefs.

Leaving aside the motivations behind the dissemination of manipulative content, disinformation media outlets do not differ in disinformation strategies. They exploit existing vulnerabilities, both on the level of information itself and on the level of target audience. As regards information itself, it is about

manipulating the content, the flow, and also timing. In the case of the target audience, here we think about cognitive vulnerabilities being exploited. With the advent of the internet, it is difficult to work with explicit lies which can be easily verified. However, it does not exclude lies. Lies are produced in order to confuse a target audience and to create an atmosphere of uncertainty in terms of feeding the feeling that "everybody lies" and that "the truth is not relevant anymore" because "nothing is as it seems." The information space is flooded with conflictual information, alternative stories (false or true), relevant and irrelevant information. The audience is overwhelmed by the incredible volume of information, which is difficult to navigate. Shenk (1997) talks about a "data smog," in which useful information becomes hard to find and thus might lead some individuals to apathy, resigning the search for any information.

Another strategy is built on relativization. The post-truth era (Higgins 2016; Mair 2017; Bufacchi 2020) has brought about the diminishing importance of verifiable facts. The truth is no longer essential and has been superseded by a new (alternative) reality. It empowers people to choose a reality where evidence-based facts are less important than one's existing beliefs and prejudices. The post-truth era is typified by relativization. The line between objectively recognizable facts and the presentation of one's opinion has been blurred.

As mentioned above, disinformation exploits a target audience's vulnerabilities, which are usually coded in cognitive vulnerabilities connected with our beliefs, experiences, opinions, and attitudes. Another effective strategy is therefore to mix the truth with manipulative content and using manipulative techniques directed at emotions. Emotions represent a crucial part of human existence, and they play an important factor in cognitive processes and information processing (Damasio 2010). Emotions in particular lead to feelings of threat or instability, increasing the impact of information because the need for personal safety belongs among basic personal needs. Fear belongs among the most common emotions exploited by manipulators (Baines et al. 2020). Fear usually goes hand in hand with blaming and labelling, manipulative techniques related to calling the enemy responsible for problems, responsible for the feeling of fear and uncertainty. The role of the enemy has a special place in manipulation because this category in manipulative narratives moves responsibility for individual or group failures away from "Us" and transfers it onto "Them" (enemies). This has in some way a calming effect via a false consciousness of not being responsible for our own faults – there is an external actor negatively affecting our well-being. Moreover, the creation of external blameworthy groups plays a vital role in enabling unification against the threat and thus contributing to group identification and identity (O'Shaughnessy 2004). In certain situations, when it is important to underscore how evil an enemy is so as to intensify the threat and push a planned mobilization against an enemy, manipulators go even farther, demonizing the enemy – a more intense version of labelling.

Last but not least, cognitive vulnerabilities might also be deceived through use of visual information – images or videos that tell a story by themselves or accompanying textual information. The research on information processing (Blanco et al. 2010) states that text and image may be perceived differently. Visual information is easier to remember than textual. Individuals exhibit greater recall of visual information. Visual information may therefore be more effective because visual aspects enhance the sensatory experience and encourage decision-making.

Research Design

As mentioned above, disinformation strategies usually used by disinformation media outlets are clearly identified. Little is known, however, how specific manipulative techniques are used. That is the question we aim to answer in this article. Going a step beyond a content analysis of disinformation media outlets, we apply a combined quantitative and qualitative approach in order to understand what manipulative techniques these media outlets use when referring to selected topics and what the tools are that help them elicit the desired emotions. We believe that knowledge of individual manipulative techniques can help us to better understand why pro-Kremlin (and other) narratives are popular and why people believe them. Afterward, this understanding can serve as the backbone in forming a defense against manipulation and disinformation.

Sources

Based on this reasoning, we have analyzed the disinformation media outlets from which a large proportion of (dis)information derives – or is shared – in the Czech Republic. The analysis was carried out on news articles from March 2016 published on the websites Parlamentní listy (parlamentnilisty.cz), AC24 (ac24.cz), Svět kolem nás (svetkolemnas.info), and Sputnik (cz.sputniknews.com). Website selection is based on SimilarWeb's readability measurement. All classified websites were among the top ten most read Czech online news websites in January 2016 (Table 1). Every media outlet included in our study has over one million article reads per month. Parlamentní listy even placed fourth as the most read online media source. All four of the selected media outlets provide media space for manipulating, disinformation, or conspiratorial content, including pro-Kremlin, biased perspectives on political events. The period of March 2016 was selected due to the fact that the media reported on several internationally relevant issues at this time; nevertheless, bias could be caused at any time in the amount of information – as might have happened, for example, in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1: The most read disinformation websites in the Czech Republic in January 2016 (over one million article reads per month).

Name	Number of article reads in January 2016
Parlamentní listy	5,985,937
AC24	1,525,904
Sputnik CZ	1,212,893
Svět kolem nás	1,089,343

Source: SimilarWeb.

Parlamentní listy (PL) began operations in 2008 (Brodcová 2016), and their main (but not exclusive) focus is on domestic politics. Thanks to its name (translated in English as Parliamentary letters), it has sometimes been perceived as the official website of the Czech parliament. A significant portion of PL content consists of copied and rewritten articles from other Czech or foreign media. The owner is Our Media, a. s., which operates about three dozen Czech news media outlets and belongs to the media magnate Michal Voráček and the billionaire and Czech senator Ivo Valenta. The articles are written by authors whose names are public.

AC24 was established in 2011 and focuses on international events. According to the investigative website neovlivni.cz, the site often offers news from Ukraine featuring the point of view of rebel separatists (Neovlivní.cz 2015). The website belongs to a Czech citizen Ondřej Geršl.

Sputnik was formed in 2014 after the transformation of the Voice of Russia radio service through a merger with the RIA Novosti news agency. The News Agency and Radio Sputnik (Sputnik n.d.), as it is officially called, is tasked with disseminating the official Russian view of events in Russia and across the world to other countries. Unlike other media outlets included in this analysis, Sputnik is an official state channel.

Svět kolem nás began operations in the summer of 2013. The motto of the portal is 'controversial reality'; the editorial staff is completely anonymous, and the sources of financing and the media owner are unknown. The owner of the domain, however, is the abovementioned Ondřej Geršl. The portal often works with conspiracy theories, which is declared in many article titles (Brodcová 2016).

Manipulative Techniques Deployed

Data from these four media outlets were tested as to whether and to what extent manipulative propaganda techniques are present. We analyzed the manipulative techniques of propaganda and persuasion as defined by Anthony Pratkins and Ellion Arons (2001), Magedah E. Shabo (2008), and Edward Bernays (2004).

Based on these works, we have included blaming, fabrication, labeling, appeal to fear, author's opinion, relativization, demonization, manipulative video, and manipulative picture.

The appeal to fear benefits from the fact that emotions are the backbone of propaganda. Thus, fear belongs amongst the most common emotions exploited by propagandists. We can identify several basic fears frequently present in propaganda: the fear of rejection, powerlessness, and, most significantly, the fear of death (Shabo 2008). The appeal to fear employs audiences' worry of the unknown or uses the bad experiences of audiences with the target group or principles. These fears are one of the most powerful motivations behind people's behavior and attitudes.

The author's opinion is a specific category of manipulative technique. It's not manipulative per se. In the opinion sections of the media, the author's opinion is expected and usual; however, news should mediate events and issues and should present facts only, so it should not contain the author's opinion. In this vein, we have cleared data from the opinion section so our dataset contains just news, and therefore, we can consider the presence of the author's opinion to be manipulative.

Blaming as a manipulative technique pinpoints the enemy responsible for the event or situation. Propagandists often oversimplify complex problems by pointing out a single cause or a single enemy who can be blamed for it (even if not responsible at all). For everything from unemployment to natural disasters, blaming the enemy can help the propagandist achieve his or her agenda (Shabo 2008).

Demonization as a manipulative technique is used to dehumanize the opponent. It usually employs similar tools to labelling – though, in a more straightforward way. The aim is to picture the opponent as an enemy not just with a different point of view but also as not even human.

Fabrications are false information presented as true statements (Syed 2012). They usually take the form of misleading or completely false information presented as verified.

Labelling (or name-calling) is the use of negative words to disparage an enemy or an opposing view. Labelling can take many different forms depending on the circumstances, but they all, rather than making a legitimate argument, attack the opposition on a personal level. It often appeals to the audience's preconceptions and prejudices (Domatob 1985; Shabo 2008).

Manipulative video and pictures represent one of the most obvious manipulative techniques here. In the context of analysis, we consider video or picture manipulative if it shifts audiences' perception of the article, or if it presents a collage or somehow modified media.

Relativization serves to weaken either the opponent's merits or damage a specific actor. It's usually used to calm down emotions when (from the propa-

gandist's point of view) something terribly wrong is happening. It explicitly contains criticism of the opponent and/or trivialization of the problem. In our research we distinguished the relativization technique between the relativization of Russian behavior versus the relativization of Western behavior. Since the analyzed media outlets were usually labelled as pro-Kremlin or at least giving space to pro-Kremlin voices, we expected the relativization of Russian misbehavior and the relativization of positive Western efforts.

The analysis itself, however, had two levels. In the first step, using an inductive content analysis, we identified the topics written about by the media outlets. In a frequency analysis, we also tracked references to individual politicians and how the media framed them (very positive, positive, neutral, negative, very negative). This content analysis helped us identify topics and articles that subsequently followed the use of manipulative techniques – the second level of analysis. Besides the occurrence of each manipulative technique, using framing and sentiment analyses, we observed the emotional bias of the articles (categories of positive, neutral, and negative in the case of framing and categories of fear, hatred, compassion, and indignation in the case of sentiment). We also analyzed whether selected media outlets take the side of Russia and/or criticize the West. For our purposes, the West is represented by the United States, NATO, and the European Union. Due to the geopolitical position of the Czech Republic, Czech disinformation media outlets are the usual suspects for the obvious promotion of Russia as a geopolitical alternative to the West and therefore are often labelled as pro-Russian or pro-Kremlin. The articles were retrieved from the media outlets using a script. Subsequent coding was performed by three coders who were trained in the meaning and recognition of the individual variables; an intercoder reliability test followed.

Dataset

The examined media outlets published 2,660 articles in March 2016. After the exclusion of opinion pieces, 2,364 texts could be recognized as news articles. The representation of each media outlet was expectably unequal – the largest representation was held by Parlamentní listy (53 %), the most read media outlet among those analyzed. A third (36 %) of the articles came from Sputnik, 7 % from AC24, and just 4 % from Svět kolem nás. While the articles on the latter--mentioned media outlet made up the smallest part of the analyzed sample, it did have the greatest number of articles devoted to conspiracy theories (such as 9/11 and others).

The most frequent manipulative techniques in the dataset were blaming (40 %) and fabrication (34 %). Quite often there was labelling (18 %) and appeal to fear (10 %). On the contrary, manipulative images or videos were rarely present; in both cases, these were found in only 1 % of articles. An interesting

case is demonization, which appeared only 3 % of the texts (Chart 1). However, considering how strong and brutal a technique it is, the seventy news articles containing demonization deserve our attention. In further sections, we go into more detail about the context of specific topics in order to explain how the manipulative techniques were used.

Chart 1: Presence of manipulative techniques (in % of articles).
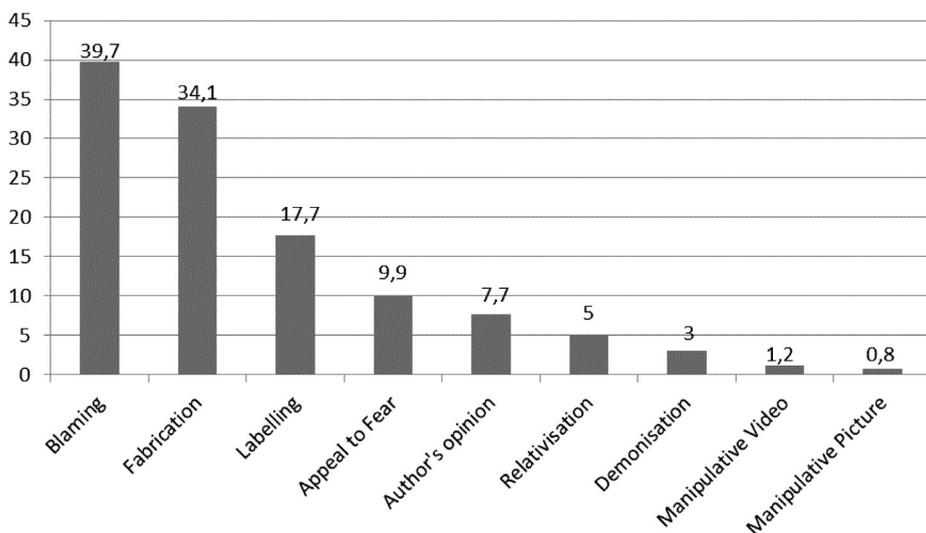
Source: Authors.

Among the most frequently covered topics were three issues connected with abroad: the conflict in Ukraine, the war in Syria, and the European migration crisis. The following part of the paper presents their background, their framing by the four media outlets, and examples of narrative and manipulative techniques deployed in the articles.

Results

The Conflict in Ukraine

The triggers of the current Russia-Ukraine problem reach far into the past. Nevertheless, the current stage can be traced to 21 November 2013 when the Ukrainian government announced that it had canceled negotiations and preparations for signing an association agreement with the European Union. In response to this decision, tens of thousands of protesters stood in the streets of various Ukrainian cities insisting that the country take a pro-European direction. On 29 November, a third Eastern Partnership summit was held in Vilnius, Lithuania,

which was originally scheduled for the signing of the association agreement. Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych refused to sign the agreement, however. This prompted further protests in Ukraine, which had seen an increase in the extensive opposition to the president and his regime. Kiev's Independence Square, popularly known as Maidan, became the center and symbol of this resistance. Riots and later calls for revolution gained support mostly in the Western and central parts of Ukraine. In mid-December, when Yanukovych met Russian President Vladimir Putin and concluded an agreement on Russian support worth $ 15 billion and a gas price cut of a third, the European Union suspended negotiations with Ukraine.

In January 2014, demonstrations in Maidan took a more dramatic turn, which resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Mykola Azarov's government. The protests, however, did not diminish. The Crimean Peninsula also experienced a crisis and, subsequently, unilaterally declared itself the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions followed suit and proclaimed their own people's republics. Due to legal issues, neither the Ukrainian government nor the West have accepted these statehoods. Russia, on the other hand, has become the main supporter and promoter of all these regions.

Way to Blur the Conflict

The events in Ukraine also affected situations and developments in other countries. Particularly in Central and Eastern Europe and other post-communist countries, new online media outlets began to emerge and have paid special attention to the events in Ukraine. Unlike the previously established news channels, however, they have brought guaranteed, truthful, undistorted information that the mainstream media has concealed from citizens – at least this is how they might present themselves. For example, Sputnik states that "they are talking about what others are silent about" (Sputnik n.d.). It became apparent that they were more involved in the Ukrainian conflict and partisan to Russia as early as 2014. They did provide different information and a different point of view than that of the mainstream media. While CNN, BBC, and other world-renowned agencies and media reported on the demonstrations of pro-Western Ukrainian demonstrators in Maidan, the so-called alternative media outlets provided information describing all events in Ukraine as a conflict provoked and controlled by fascist groups. While the events in Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk were framed by the mainstream media as illegal and with poorly concealed Russian support, the alternative media saw them as the rightful independent and free choice of local residents. Furthermore, the downing of a Malaysia Airlines' Boeing 777 (Flight MH17) stimulated higher activity. Without being clear on what exactly happened, the alternative media devised a number of contradictory scenarios just a few hours after the tragedy.

When considering the analyzed media outlets, reports of the conflict in Ukraine were, in March 2016, less emotionally tinged (11.3 %) than those on other topics. Representations of fear, hatred, and indignation were uniformly distributed. The lesser emotiveness of this topic might be due to the long duration of the conflict; hence, the topic is no longer particularly interesting to the media. Thus, having fewer articles on this topic in comparison with, for example, the war in Syria is understandable. However, the topic is not uninteresting to pro-Kremlin media outlets, and we see increased evidence of this in particular techniques of manipulation. The conflict in Ukraine has been relativized not just by the incidence of relativization proper, but also by the significantly lower-than-average use of other techniques, thanks to which this topic (alongside the war in Syria; see below) arouses much less emotion than others. In short, we can say that the narrative was describing the conflict as nothing new, nothing exceptional, and nothing worthy of international attention. From these media outlets, readers may get the impression that there are many conflicts like this one all around the world and that the Ukrainian case is just one of media exposure.

Table 2: Manipulative techniques as regards the Ukrainian conflict.

Manipulative technique	Incidence in topic (%)	Total incidence (%)	Deviation from total
Blaming	34.8	39.7	– 4.9 pp
Fabrication	18.3	34.1	– 15.8 pp
Labelling	14.8	17.7	– 2.9 pp
Appeal to fear	5.2	9.9	– 4.7 pp
Author's opinion in news	3.5	7.7	– 4.2 pp
Relativization	8.7	5.0	+ 3.7 pp
Demonization	5.2	3.0	+ 2.2 pp
Manipulative video	0.9	1.2	– 0.3 pp
Manipulative picture	0.0	0.8	– 0.8 pp

Source: Authors.

Among the articles dedicated to the conflict in Ukraine, we can identify several characteristic ways that media outlets refer to it. Sputnik especially often uses statements by former Ukrainian politicians who have ties to Russia. However, these ties are never mentioned in the articles; politicians are always introduced only as current or former representatives of Ukraine. Thus, readers may have the impression that the situation in Ukraine is not clear or that a large part of the Ukrainian elite support Russia, for example, consider this statement by

former Prime Minister Mykola Azarov: "The Kiev ministry of lies has become entangled. If Donbass was subsidized, the department would have to be profitable for Ukraine. But, if Donbass did feed the whole Ukraine, then Donbass should agree to continue feeding it" (Sputnik 26 March 2016). Usually only the "Russian side" was allowed to comment, and, without any explanation of the context, Ukraine was blamed for all that was bad: "'The initiative of the Ukrainian leadership to disrupt diplomatic relations with Russia is bordering on madness,' Russian spokesman Dmitry Peskov said" (Sputnik 31 March 2016a).

In another article, Sputnik worked with the statement of Ukrainian oligarch Dmytro Firtash, who was previously suspected of corruption and arrested. In the past, Firtash did business in the gas industry selling gas purchased from Russia to Western Europe. According to the FBI, he had close ties to Russian mafia boss Semion Mogilevich (Walker 2016). Sputnik cites passages from a Bloomberg interview with Firtash, who describes the then Ukrainian government as incompetent and politically bankrupt. The events in Ukraine are supposedly merely a project driven by the United States, events which are also unsuccessful. According to the text, the US has turned Ukraine into a battlefield and brought it to ruin (Sputnik 30 March 2016a). In this article, we find blaming, relativization, and fabulation.

Another common way of reporting on Ukraine is to highlight the high level of corruption in the country as its biggest problem. As evidence, Sputnik used an alleged report by unspecified British economists. The article refers only to the Russian RIA Novosti, which also writes only abstractly about "British experts," with no names or affiliations. These articles never mention that there is a conflict in Ukraine that would bother the country. The only one responsible for the adverse development of the economy is Petro Poroshenko: "The President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko is one of the causes of the high level of corruption in Ukraine. This conclusion was reached by UK experts on international trade issues who prepared a report for the UK Government" (Sputnik 31 March 2016b).

If the European Union or the United States are mentioned, they are framed as incompetent political powers. For example, Sputnik framed the US as a country that could stop the war in Ukraine but did not: "If the US wants to stop the war in Ukraine tomorrow, the bloody massacre there will be over," Sputnik quotes Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko (Sputnik 30 March 2016b). There was no mention of Russia or its role in the conflict, however.

Not many articles provided the opinion of Czech politicians. The only exceptions were found in Parlamentní listy. However, these were mostly politicians presenting long-standing arguments in favor of Russia. Parliament Member Jaroslav Foldyna (then of the Czech Social Democratic Party and today a far-right populist in the Freedom and Direct Democracy party) made statements, for example, regarding the case of the Ukrainian pilot Nadiya Savchenko, quoting ProtiProud – another media outlet spreading conspiracy theories and pro-

-Kremlin narratives. The article is titled "The Murdering Monster. MP Foldyna Offers a Quite Different Point of View to Pilot Savchenko" (Parlamentní listy 20 March 2016). However, this title had been changed a few days after publication, and the original title was quite different, reading: "Ukrainian Murdering and Torturing Monster in Court: Prime Minister Sobotka Flames Out with the Savchenko Card in Brussels. New Round of Anti-Russian Hysteria? Bloody Nadezhda Needs an Exorcist Rather Than a Lawyer." Another notable point of the article is the fact Bohuslav Sobotka was from the same party as Jaroslav Foldyna at that time. Savchenko was also a common topic for AC24. This media outlet, for example, frames her as a pilot of the Aidar Battalion responsible for burning civilians in Odessa in the spring of 2014 (AC24 12 March 2016).

The War in Syria

Another significant stimulus that triggered greater activity among these media outlets was the war in Syria and Russia's engagement in it. Russia has been openly engaged in the war since September 2015 when Syrian President Bashar al-Assad asked Vladimir Putin for Russia's participation. Immediately after the request, Russia launched air strikes in Syria. These strikes intensified after 31 October 2015 when an airplane flying to St. Petersburg was downed in Egypt. Daesh claimed responsibility for the act. For Russian supporters, this was a clear signal for increased activity. On 18 December, over forty people died in air strikes in the northern city of Idlib. According to Reuters, Russian aircraft were probably responsible for the attack. This argument is supported by the fact that the Russian Air Force and the Syrian Army had been conducting on an offensive operation against the rebels in Idlib since the beginning of December (Reuters 20 December 2015).

However, this was not the only incident – thousands of people have died in Russian air raids. The secretary general of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, said that the Russian air strikes in Syria were focused mainly on opposition groups, not Daesh militants as Russia claimed, and undermined efforts for a peaceful solution (BBC News 5 February 2016).

Russia is Not Worse Than the United States

In these cases, the analyzed media outlets have used slightly different tactics and narratives than in the case of the Ukrainian conflict: The attack victims and Russian engagement in Syria were not questioned or doubted; reported Russian misconduct and American failures or mistakes were immediately offered to readers. This was regardless of whether the American lapse was supposed or true, whether it was in Syria or Iraq, or even whether it was a recent event or several decades old.

Reports of the conflict in Syria were much less emotionally charged than those of other topics (4.6 %). If present, the prevailing emotion tended to be indignation. In terms of emotional appeals and the presence of manipulation techniques, the conflict in Syria was presented very similarly to that in Ukraine. On the AC24 website, manipulative relativization appeared as commonly as in one out of every five articles. The website that focused particularly on the conflict in Syria during the period monitored was Sputnik, which published 150 articles (versus 53 for the other websites combined). The reporting on Sputnik was also less emotionally tinged (less than 3 %). With the exception of relativization, the tendency to use manipulative techniques was less prevalent on Sputnik than on the other websites.

Table 3: Manipulative techniques within the topic of the war in Syria.

Manipulative technique	Incidence in topic (%)	Total incidence (%)	Deviation from total
Blaming	23.6	39.7	– 16.1 pp
Fabrication	24.6	34.1	– 9.5 pp
Labelling	10.8	17.7	– 6.9 pp
Appeal to fear	0.5	9.9	– 9.4 pp
Author's opinion in news	4.9	7.7	– 2.8 pp
Relativization	12.3	5.0	+ 7.3 pp
Demonization	1.0	3.0	– 2.0 pp
Manipulative video	1.5	1.2	+ 0.3 pp
Manipulative picture	0.0	0.8	– 0.8 pp

Source: Authors.

The Syrian conflict is often portrayed as a result of the inability of the United States, and the partial improvement of the situation is attributed to the successes of the Assad regime and Russia: "The Tiger Forces of the Syrian Army with their allies, under the air support of the Russian Aerospace Defense Forces, are heading towards Palmyra. Syrian forces yesterday, after a cruel battle with Islamic State terrorists and their allies, have gained full control over the western slopes of Jabal Al-Tar" (AC24 24 March 2016). If America is mentioned, it is usually done with a negative framing, either in connection with civilian casualties or the alleged sponsorship of terrorists: "Although there is an agreement between Russia and the United States negotiated, many point out that Washington is among the main sponsors of terrorist struggles against the Syrian governmental forces" (ibid).

On AC24, Russia is almost exclusively referred to as a country that helps Syria make progress after incompetent US engagement. At the end of many

articles, AC24 often states that Washington, DC is one of the main sponsors of terrorists fighting against the Syrian government.

Parlamentní listy's greatest manipulation lies not in what its authors say, but in its selection of so-called experts who comment on issues. These experts make it possible for us to read things like this: "The civilized world tolerated the emergence of the Islamic State's radical ideology, supported by its allies, such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia" (Parlamentní listy 8 March 2016a). Similarly, this media outlet frames US engagement in Syria as embarrassing and aggravating, while Russia is trying to mediate peace and consensus: "Moscow supports anything the Syrians will agree on" (Parlamentní listy 8 March 2016b). This is contrasted with the US plan to divide Syria into three areas controlled by Assad, the Kurds, and Daesh along with Al Qaeda.

Migration Crisis

Judging by the number of published articles, the third and strongest focus for analyzed media outlets was the migration crisis in Europe. It had several sub-causes that originated in the regions from which the migrants came to Europe. For the purposes of this text, we can simplify the two main reasons and regions of origin: migrants from Africa decided to come to Europe due to long-term deplorable conditions on the continent, especially in selected countries, and migrants from the Middle East came to Europe mainly due to war conflicts, with the worst being the war in Syria. Approximately one-third of incoming migrants to Europe in 2015 were Syrians fleeing the war (Connor 2016). Representatives of European countries and the European Union have long been unable to respond adequately to the situation or to agree on a common approach to the solution. Moreover, even in mid-2019, they had yet to find a common approach.

To contextualize the data we analyzed, the situation in the Czech Republic as regards the migration of asylum seekers and refugees was as follows: The Czech Republic received 1,525 applications for international protection in 2015, a 31.9 % increase compared to the previous year. Applicants were mostly from Ukraine (694 applications), Syria (134), Cuba (128), and Vietnam (81). 71 applicants received asylum. 399 applicants did not fulfil the conditions necessary for obtaining asylum; nevertheless, they received another form of international protection. The Czech Republic stopped 8,563 individuals who entered the country illegally (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic 2016). In 2016 the total number of applications for international protection decreased to 1,478 (507 from Ukraine, 158 from Iraq, 78 from Syria, 68 from China). 148 applicants received asylum, and another form of international protection was granted to 302. In terms of illegal migration, 5,261 individuals were stopped attempting to enter the Czech Republic (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic 2017).

Divide and Rule

The first strategy used by news portals was intended to raise fear and hatred of migrants among Europeans. They tried to achieve this through fictitious or at least distorted reporting on the attacks and crimes committed by immigrants. Fear of the unknown was also fomented in some countries; mainly in homogenous countries with no or little experience with diversity, such as the Central European post-communist countries (e.g., the Czech Republic). The second strategy was to decrease the popularity and credibility of the European Union among its citizens. The EU was portrayed as a club of incompetent politicians uninterested in the citizenry of their own countries and who deliberately oppress citizens at the expense of migrants. This was strongly contrasted with the framing of Vladimir Putin as a leader who would not have caused similar developments in Russia.

The combination of these two strategies resulted in a part of society being a priori negatively orientated towards any possible solution to the migration crisis, and confidence in the European Union decreased in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. After having had two years of experience with migrants in their countries (either directly, as in Hungary, or mediated, as in the Czech Republic), the EU came to be perceived as a hindrance.

Compared to other topics, articles dealing with the migration crisis more often contained appeals to fear. While in all outlets examined, appeals to fear appeared in one out of ten articles, in those dealing with the migration crisis, they were present in one out of every four. This significant difference also reflects the emotional biases of the texts: More than with other topics, reporting concerning the migration crisis was found to be emotionally tinged (32 %). The emotions most frequently expressed included fear (present in 53 % of emotionally tinged reporting of the topic), hatred (20 %), and indignation (19 %). On the Svět kolem nás website, all of the coverage of the migration crisis included negative emotions; this is in contrast with Sputnik, where fear or indignation appeared in only 12 % of news items.

The dominant framing in the articles dedicated to the migration crisis portrays the European Union's approach as a failure of EU leaders. As side-by-side narratives, there are several cases of violence demonstrating Islam's incompatibility with European culture and Russian assurances that it will not allow such a catastrophe within its territory.

One example of this narrative is an article from Svět kolem nás "Danish Imam Admits to Muslim Agenda – Goal Is to Conquer Europe" (Svět kolem nás 15 March 2016). The article implies that migration from Arab countries to Europe is a centrally-managed (cultural and political) invasion. The common denominators of such articles are the demonization of Muslims and Islam, an attempt to bipolarize the world, and a push to awaken fear among readers. These

Table 4: Manipulative techniques within the topic of the migration crisis.

Manipulative technique	Incidence in topic (%)	Total incidence (%)	Deviation from total
Blaming	34.8	39.7	– 4.9 pp
Fabrication	18.3	34.1	– 15.8 pp
Labelling	14.8	17.7	– 2.9 pp
Appeal to fear	5.2	9.9	– 4.7 pp
Author's opinion in news	3.5	7.7	– 4.2 pp
Relativization	8.7	5.0	+ 3.7 pp
Demonization	5.2	3.0	+ 2.2 pp
Manipulative video	0.9	1.2	– 0.3 pp
Manipulative picture	0.0	0.8	– 0.8 pp

Source: Authors.

articles often repeat alleged calls from European Muslims to their counterparts in other parts of the world to come to Europe; they certainly do not seek to integrate into the majority society, and, conversely, they must lead a holy war against Christianity.

Sputnik often quotes Vladimir Putin and his comments on migration in Europe. According to Putin, "Russia cannot make the mistake with migrants as the EU did" (Sputnik 15 March 2016). Putin is portrayed as a protector of the Russian state whose powers and method of government can be embraced by the Russians for not being as naïve as the European Union – Russia has no problems with migrants from the Middle East thanks to him.

These media outlets often work with examples of violent migrant behavior, real or not, which occur mainly in Germany and Sweden. Parlamentní listy published an article about how Australian journalists in Sweden were almost hit by a car driven by migrants, who subsequently attacked them (Parlamentní listy 27 March 2016). The article refers to the mainstream media; however, it does not provide the context of the event. So, thanks to reporting almost exclusively focused on violent acts, readers get the feeling that violence is a common, day-to--day practice throughout the European Union. Sweden is depicted as a country on the verge of collapse in this particular article.

Articles describing difficult situations of cultural conflict with Muslims in Europe are also quite common. Russians are often portrayed as victims or heroes, either as ordinary citizens who are the targets of Muslim attacks in Europe or as defending members of other groups against Muslim attacks. One Svět kolem nás article from 16 March 2016 describes, for example, the horror of a Russian female driver who found three migrants in her car. When called,

the police urged the woman to take them wherever they wished. The situation was resolved by the driver's family members, who dealt with the migrants on their own. The article thus refers not only to the strength and heroism of the Russians, but also to the inability of German (Western) authorities to deal with migrants.

Meanwhile, articles based on comments from US public figures framing the migration crisis, its causes, and consequences are also not rare. For example, in the article "It's an Epidemic of Rapes. Wake up, Call Voices from the US," Parlamentní listy offers a translation of the text by Christine Niles, who is presented as an American commentator (Parlamentní listy 30 March 2016). There is no explanation as to why the personal blog should be representative or why this point of view is presented. The article only gives the impression that this is a common opinion in the United States, and it is our fault that we in the European Union do not want to hear it.

To Side with Russia?

Russia, Russian leaders, or Russian politics appeared in almost a third of the articles (30 %). The biggest share in articles concerning Russia was in Sputnik where it appeared in a majority of its articles (57 %); on the contrary, in Parlamentní listy, Russia was in only 12 % of the articles. Russia was mentioned most often in texts devoted to the wars in Syria and Ukraine. Russia was also mentioned in articles dealing with domestic politics in the Czech Republic, specifically in 58 cases.

In two out of three cases, Russia was framed as neutral (64 %). In 14 % of the articles, Russia was a good example to be followed, while in 9 % of the articles Russia was criticized. In a tenth of the articles, Russia was described as a victim – this particularly concerned the media image of Russia in Western countries, with Russia's positions presented as hostile to the top political leaders of the West. This tendency was most obvious in articles in which Russia was compared to the US. In such cases, one out of every five articles framed Russia as a victim. In the analysis, when compared to the US, Russia was represented positively 33 % of the time; in the remaining cases, the framing was neutral.

If we had focused only on the frequency of references to Russia and its framing, the analyzed articles of the selected media outlets would probably not be perceived as somehow exceptionally pro-Kremlin. Only in 4 % of all news articles was Russia framed as a positive example worthy of following or as a hero. Moreover, in Parlamentní listy, Russia was framed neutrally in 55 % of the cases and in 30 % of the articles Russia was framed negatively. Sputnik, on the other hand, criticized Russia in only 4 % of the articles mentioning it.

Vladimir Putin was mentioned in 7 % of the articles, which made him the most frequently mentioned foreign politician overall; only the president of the

Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman (10 % of the articles) and Andrej Babiš (9 %), chairman of the ANO movement and then minister of finance, appeared more often in the analyzed articles. Putin was mentioned more frequently than German Chancellor Angela Merkel (4 %) or Chinese President Xi Jinping (4 %), who made an official visit to the Czech Republic at that time. Even then Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka was mentioned less often (4 %). If we compare whether the politicians were mentioned with a negative (–1), neutral (0), or positive (+1) framing, we find that media outlets were rather critical of politicians: Each of the ten most frequently mentioned politicians was mentioned more often negatively than positively. Xi Jinping (–0.12) and Vladimir Putin (–0.15) reached the best overall score. Politicians with the most negative framing were then US President Barack Obama (–0.33) and Angela Merkel (–0.34).

Conclusion

One can admit that the Czech Republic has had a quite recent and rich experience with propaganda (during the Cold War), so the level of resilience should be high. With this article, however, we try to show that today's propaganda and disinformation campaigns are rather different from what the world experienced during the modern history of the twentieth century in relation to the World Wars and the Cold War. All these conflicts were rich in propaganda and manipulation of public opinion, but due to technological developments, the techniques of manipulation have also changed and modernized. The manipulation of public opinion is more sophisticated. First of all, based on the analyzed data, we can see that the usage of propagandistic pictures and movies in disinformation media outlets is minimal. Images seeking to deliver a clear message that is obviously manipulated (propagandistic) are rare. Instead of leaflets with pictures and movies, it is written text or, more precisely, words and stories (narratives) that are used for these purposes. Attempts to convey emotions and a biased view of the world rely more on manipulative techniques such as blaming, fabrication, labelling, and relativization. Of course, this ratio could be influenced by the analyzed medium.

The disinformation campaigns in the Czech Republic do not necessarily need to lie to the audience. As Scot MacDonald notes, a great propagandist does not tell lies. Instead, he tells the truth, or selects a truth that serves his purposes and tells it in such way that the recipient does not think he is receiving any propaganda (MacDonald 2007). It is about choosing a narrative from the selected topics and stories and combining it with carefully chosen manipulative techniques. This could be seen as regards the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. Data shows that the importance of the topic and Russian activities in both countries were relativized in order to persuade readers that nothing serious was happening there. In the case of Syria, the relativization of Russian activity was done by

putting it in obvious and false counterbalance to US activities somewhere else and at a different time.

Moreover, techniques used to manipulate emotions controlled which stories the public paid attention to and what they considered important. Blaming, labelling, and appeals to fear worked well. This was seen in the case of the topic of migration, which was repeatedly framed as a failure of Western politicians and organizations, and the manipulative technique of appeal to fear was used frequently. This also correlates with high levels of negative emotional framing in the articles observed. Articles worked mostly with fear, hatred, and indignation. On the other hand, the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine were connected with lower levels of emotional framing, which confirms our argument about the relativization of Russian activities in conflicts.

Last but not least, Czech disinformation media outlets are considered the usual suspects as it pertains to the obvious promotion of Russia as a geopolitical alternative. Our research concludes that, in the case of the most read disinformation media outlets in the Czech Republic, this is not true. This manipulation was more sophisticated than obviously serving Russia as the only partner and alternative to the West. In our findings, Russia was mentioned in about a third of the news articles, but mostly in a neutral manner. Articles portraying Russia positively and negatively were about equal in number. In general, disinformation campaigns are more about redirecting blame onto others and lowering the level of trust in governments, elites, and established media within the general public. Such a conclusion explains the reality of 2016 where the analyzed media outlets were automatically, without deeper analysis, labelled as pro-Kremlin by mainstream media, analysts, and politicians. It would deserve comparison with another period to test whether the media outlets have developed their strategies in this context. Further analysis might also discover new findings as to how disinformation media use manipulative techniques, or new techniques altogether, in relation to selected topics in order to establish specific narratives and framings. However, it is clear that such an analysis will be done in the context of other topics since media shift their priming according to what is actual. Another question is the reflection of the articles from the disinformation media outlets on social media. So far as we know, social media became a frequent source of information for the general public, and its reflection of disinformation narratives and manipulative techniques can obtain even larger attention and audience via viral spreading on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other platforms.

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Reflections on the Independent Mass Media of Post-Soviet Countries and Political Competitiveness

NATALIIA STEBLYNA AND JAROSLAV DVORAK

Abstract. *The aim of this paper is to analyse political activity in the mass media discourses of states with more democratic and more authoritative regimes respectively, so as to show a clear difference in the context of a formal analysis of mass media content. The current study examines political news on qualitative online media portals in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. Thirty years ago, these states began their independent transition from a closed system to openness/democracy. However, at today's transition point, only Lithuania is considered a democratic country. In different periods Ukraine has been considered an example of competitive authoritarianism, while Belarus deviated towards complete authoritarianism and dictatorship. All political news items between 2005–2020 (for delfi.lt – since 2007) were collected with the help of the Python program. To measure the indicators, several Python programs were designed. The results of the research confirmed that the intensity of political activity differs in the mass media discourses of states with more democratic (Lithuania, Ukraine) and more authoritative (Belarus) regimes. Furthermore, a clear difference was shown in terms of five indicators, average indicators and the dynamics thereof.*

Keywords: *Mass media, competitive authoritarianism, liberal democracy, political news, post-Soviet*

Introduction

Typically, the media is the initiator of political news, which ensures the accountability of political actors to citizens in a democratic society. As Bielinis (2010) points out, the media has already become a kind of guarantor of efficiency, so it is

here that the interest groups that seek to influence politics are formed and operate. Therefore, the provision of political news, especially negative, has become an object of policy-making, which results in dependence on the information presented in the media. In turn, negative news in the field of economic policy also has a positive effect, as it affects the country's internal economic efficiency (Van Dalen – Svensson-Kalogeropoulos – Albaek – De Vreese 2018: 90).

The media, as creators of political news, often rely on confidential sources of information, values, attitudes, editorial / ownership positions and so on. Naturally, the abovementioned circumstances bring different modes and perceptions of truth to the content of political news. Independent journalistic research is often equated with monitoring the political field, ensuring the accountability of politicians, but at the same time ensuring the legitimacy of the media as a political actor.

Media research is very similar to scientific research in that it produces a specific form of knowledge. It has been observed that it is the type of knowledge that is oriented to society in order to inform, expand cognition and defend the public interest, based on professional ethical standards of journalism (Grisold – Preston 2020: 1). Science, of course, is perceived as a neutral and objective activity. The political system gives the impression that research provides facts, not politically influenced opinions. But unlike scientific knowledge that spreads beyond the political arena, the media operate in a political system, so the news it provides is not impartial. On the other hand, one school of thought holds that the more news is consumed, the better the evaluation skills of the population (Van Dalen – Svensson – Kalogeropoulos – Albaek – De Vreese 2018: 149). Usually, the purpose of such news does not allow for a new approach to emerge and largely supports an existing opinion. This is why some scholars believe that the issue of professionalisation of journalism needs to be revisited (Slavtcheva – Petkova 2016: 69).

It is no longer surprising that in liberal democracies, the existence of an independent media is presented as an unconditional necessity and advantage. However, it is important to critically assess whether the freedom to disseminate political news is fundamentally different from the political news being developed in authoritarian and hybrid regimes and whether it is always worthy of attention. To discover these transitive states of the regimes, three neighbouring post-Soviet countries with different types of political regimes, situated between authoritative Russia – which still interferes in affairs of the state, whether directly or indirectly – and democratic Europe were studied: Belarus as 'the last dictatorship' in Europe; Ukraine as an example of 'competitive authoritarianism' with a certain level of political pluralism (Minakov 2018) or as a state with formal democratic institutions and authoritative values (Haponenko 2018: 8); and Lithuania as a 'young liberal democracy' with freedom of speech, equality, rule of law and human rights. According Burkšienė et al, (2020) 'young democracies are a project

structure that means the research object constantly changes: some elements disappear, while new ones appear.' Researchers (Ramonaitė 2020: 490–491; Raunio – Sedelius 2020: 51; Khoma – Kokoriev 2021: 50–53) disagree on exactly where the country is located in this context. Some say that it has already achieved liberal democracy, while others say that it has not yet done so. However, some researchers noted that some EU member states are characterised by 'illiberal democracy', as they ignore parliamentary debates, and violate the rule of law (Buzogány 2017: 1309; Popov 2019: 449; Khoma – Kokoriev 2021: 39). In such a democracy, an organised community turns into an underdeveloped corporate form – a clan. The illiberal structure suppresses civil society and the media by seeing them as key competitors (Šerpetis 2016: 71). After Lithuania's accession to the EU, it managed to reduce the dominance of clan / oligarchic structures, especially as one former president regularly mentioned the fight against such structures in his annual reports (Dvorak 2012: 305–306). The aim of this paper is to analyse political activity in the mass media discourses of states with more democratic and more authoritative regimes respectively and to show a clear difference between the discourses (average indicators and dynamics) through a formal analysis of mass media content (political news). The study focuses on political actors (politicians or institutes), since they are the core elements of news production and the percentage of mentions is respectively similar among popular political figures (balance indicator); political emotions and negativity, because political actors use emotions in the competitive struggle for power and in order to draw the attention of the public towards their political messages; and quotes for mass media generation (intertextuality indicator), because attractive slogans and soundbites are important for more open political struggle. Though the research is based on political news between 2005–2020 collected from three news portals in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine which specialise in qualitative political news, the results contribute to the pool of studies that reflect the differences and similarities of political life in more and less democratic states respectively.

Mass Media Beyond Competitive Authoritarianism and Liberal Democracy

Over 30 years of independent development, most of the regimes in the former Soviet Union have tended to fall into one or more of the following categories: 1) competitive authoritarianism; 2) dictatorship; 3) liberal democracy or they have become hybrid versions of these systems.[1] In post-communist societies, this means that some political systems have not moved from a closed system to a more open one. Levitsky and Way (2002) believe that this is not a transition to

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1   For the contemporary debate about the hybrid regimes cf. for example (Procházka – Cabada 2020).

democracy but rather a special state of the regime, which may be described as *competitive authoritarianism*. The transition to competitive authoritarianism is said to be driven by the following reasons: a) the economic crisis, albeit it has been noted that this only partially explains the trend; (b) the vast revenue generated by the state from the export of mineral resources; c) strong state interventionism, whereby states not only interfere in economic steering but suppress civil society, opposition, criticism and so on (Levitsky – Loxton 2013: 109). However, it was generally agreed at the beginning that the transition would develop in a targeted manner and evolve into the democratisation of state-society relations.

Accordingly, we determined that in the case of authoritarian regimes, the media is state-owned and heavily censored. The government exercises control over major TV channels and radio stations. It has been shown (Cho – Lee – Song 2017: 145–146) that strict control over the media helps to ensure better support for the authoritarian regime, even if their ratings are low at first. Alternative or independent media is banned or eliminated. In competitive authoritarianism, on the other hand, alternative media is legitimate and influential. However, in such a regime, autocrats spread media control and censorship in informal ways (Way 2004: 145). In liberal democracies, the media monitors the political system and informs voters of political abuses and so on. Most often, the main problem in a democracy arises from the monopolisation of the media and the concentration of political power, which can grow profits or influence policy-making (Pickard 2020: 708).

The model of competitive authoritarianism singled out by Levitsky and Way (2002) emphasises that, in general, the regime seeks to suppress independent media. In some countries, this can even be done in order to reform the media sector by making it more independent, but with the opposite result, as has been the case in Serbia (Castaldo 2020: 1631). According to Castaldo (2020), in the case of competitive authoritarianism, the discretion to decide which media to allocate state subsidies and / or state advertising orders to plays an important role, which is especially critical when an economic crisis begins in the country. This leads to greater political dependence and influence on the regime, which is especially important in the context of competitive authoritarianism, where disloyal media can be suppressed. It is true that in such circumstances the media becomes useless to the audience as a source of information, as it no longer performs the functions of monitoring, stimulating debate, presenting opinions and arguments (Yıldırım – Baruh – Çarkoğlu 2020: 18). It should be noted that dictators are opposed to completely free media, because even partially free media can have a huge impact on overthrowing a *dictatorship* (Egorov – Guriev – Sonin 2009: 646–647). However, there are well-known examples (Serbia, Kyrgyzstan) where dictators have tolerated media freedom, explaining that the media helps to ensure the accountability of the bureaucracy in such ways (Egorov – Guriev – Sonin 2009: 646–647). Dictators need to constantly look for ways to weaken the

professional bureaucracy of a potential competitor. This is necessary because a dictatorship usually creates an hierarchical system of power, known in the case of Belarus as a *vertikal* (Kasmach 2015: 124). In a dictatorship, an apolitical mood prevails among the vast majority of the population, influenced by state--run media and ideology (Kasmach 2015: 124).

In contrast, Way (2004) explains that, despite persistent depression and repression, the media remains a source of opposition. Opposition journalists offer alternative, independent counter-discourses to the state media that convey the government's position. Particularly influential journalists may be viewed by authoritarian leaders as personal enemies as they seek to spread knowledge that violates the foundations of the regime and mobilises the public to take group action (Repnikova 2018: 42–43). Paradoxically, the media news of competing authoritarianism may be attractive to some individuals in a liberal democracy because it offers what is not available elsewhere (e.g. fake news).

In a *liberal democracy*, the media is seen as a guarantor of credibility. This is manifested through the audience's understanding that the media is objective and can be trusted (Ejaz 2020: 346). Media news is used selectively because there are differences in political beliefs and ideologies among the population. This is especially evident in the case of digital news (Dahlgren – Shehata – Strömbäck 2019: 160; Hanitzsch – Hanusch – Ramaprasad – De Beer 2019: 16–17). However, Pečiulis et al. (2012) discovered that the paradoxes mentioned above in the case of competitive authoritarianism also occur in a liberal democracy, as professionally prepared information from public relations agencies penetrates the media. Trendy, non-journalistic information undermines trust in the media.

Indeed, citizens are heavily dependent on information on political matters (Ejaz 2020: 334; Van Dalen – Svensson – Kalogeropoulos – Albaek – De Vreese 2018: 148). The political systems of liberal democracy are highly vulnerable because of their openness. As a result, infrequently competing media outlets are becoming sources of disinformation and a threat to the existing open society. This excludes citizens from political participation and acts as a hindrance rather than an incentive, distorts information flows, undermines trust in governance structures and important projects of national importance, and deepens opportunism and mistrust in public sector activities (Šerpetis 2006: 71; Matonytė 2010: 62). In turn, the emerging new unpredictable hybrid media variants are alternative media versions of various interests, contradictions, and conflicts (Holt – Ustad Figenschou – Frischlich 2019: 633).

The mass media in Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine

The current chapter of the article shows mass media development perspectives in the countries under investigation and characterises the news portals which were chosen for the analysis.

Mass media in Lithuania. In Lithuania, the news is mainly received by the population through two media channels, namely television and online media portals (Balčytienė – Juraitė 2020: 7). Among the most influential media in Lithuania are state television and *radio (LRT),* the private online media portal *Delfi.lt,* the visual content creator and campaign organiser *Laisvės.TV*, the online media portal *15 min* and the TV channels *LNK* and *TV3*. According to Pečiulis et al. (2012) and Balčytienė et al. (2020), media content is mostly influenced by the position of their owners and main shareholders (especially in the regions) and the financial contribution of the media clients, as it affects the quality, diversity and pluralism of their coverage. In the context of Lithuanian political journalism, conflict-like reports dominate – that is, scandalous news. Previous research (Soroka 2006: 381–382) on economic news in the media confirms that bad news is consumed much faster. Research in Lithuania has shown that, for news journalists, the activities of the legislature do not seem relevant to society (Bajorinaitė et al 2019: 92–93). In 2017, four companies dominated the Internet provision market in Lithuania, which once occupied 76.8 percent of the market (Balčytienė – Juraitė 2020: 7). In 2019, the number of Internet news users in Lithuania was one of the largest in the EU, reaching 91 percent of the overall population (European Commission 2020). According to the World Press Freedom Indices published in 2021, Lithuania was ranked 28th of 180 countries.

Mass media in Belarus. Belarus is dominated by state-owned media, especially TV, through which a large number of the country's population receives news. The constitution of an independent Belarus guarantees that every citizen is guaranteed the opportunity to freely express their opinions, views and expression. However, criticising the president is considered a crime (Dvorak 2020: 159–160). Alexander Lukashenko, both during his legitimate presidency and later, has suppressed freedom of speech and the press and applied a strict legal regime that made it difficult for the independent media to operate (Szostek, 2018: 312). In 2021, Belarus was ranked 158th of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index by the nongovernmental organisation Reporters Without Borders. The regional media in Belarus is facing the challenge of choosing a way forward. Some media outlets are now fully operational online (websites, social networks), but small town media still appear in the form of traditional print media (Hradziushka – Bykov – Bakhvalova 2020: 87–90). In Belarus, the main Internet service provider is the state-owned company *Beltelecom*. The Internet monopoly controls international data and blocks online media portals that spread anti-regime information. According to Freedom House, the Belarusian KGB monitors online communications and uses a *trojan horse* virus to steal passwords from such portals (Dvorak 2020: 160–161). The main Internet users are located in Minsk, the capital of Belarus. They are mostly involved in Russian-speaking social networks, but it is likely that recent events after the

August 2020 presidential elections began to reverse this trend as attempts were made to use *twiplomacy*[2] to draw attention to the authoritarian regime's use of violence against protesters. Following the start of protests after the presidential election, the Belarusian authorities detained media correspondents from various countries and began to withdraw the accreditations of foreign journalists. Belarusian citizen journalists working in the independent media were detained, followed by legal proceedings.

Mass media in Ukraine. Ukraine has a wide range of media sources, from traditional print media to online media. Some newspapers are published in the Ukrainian and Russian languages. After the annexation of Crimea, the national media held anti-Russian positions. The Ukrainian authorities have banned a number of pro-Russian TV channels and social networks. According to the findings of Orlova and Taradai (2016), Ukrainian journalists consider themselves the main source of important information or viewpoints in the formation of public opinion in social networks such as Facebook. Social networks and TV news are the main news sources for Ukrainians (62 % and 52 % respectively), and TV consumption has been decreasing. Trust in the media is highest for national and regional mass media (both 48 %), while trust in TV has declined (from 49 % in 2019 to 41 % in 2020) (Internews Ukraine 2020). Oligarchs predominantly control Ukrainian mass media, especially TV channels. Public television, which broadcasts journalistic investigations of all top Ukrainian politicians (presidents in particular), is the only exception. Professional media organisations observe some violations of professional standards because of owners' influence on TV news content ('jeansa' or covered advertisement placement) (Detector Media 2021). Popular online mass media is more independent: there are approximately 10 national online media organisations which have earned high marks for compliance with professional standards (see IMI 2020a). Regional mass media experiences different forms of pressure from politicians, local authorities and local oligarchs; 15.2 % of texts violate professional standards ('jeansa', non-properly marked advertisements). However, there are some examples of qualitative journalism, predominantly in cities (see IDPO for print and online regional mass media monitoring) (IPDO 2021). A non-transparent system of media ownership and 'jeansa' content undermine Ukrainian society's trust in both media and political institutions (Taranenko 2011: 124), and prevent society from obtaining objective and qualitative information (Sadivnychyj – Sushkova 2016: 24). In 2021, Ukraine's World Press Freedom Index ranked 97th out of 180 countries.

Thus, having compared the mass media environment of the post-Soviet countries, we see that, despite different obstacles, Lithuania and Ukraine do

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2   The term coined in 2011 to describe the volume of use the social media website Twitter by state leaders, diplomats, and heads of INGOs

have independent mass media, especially among online national outlets with high levels of pluralism and compliance with professional standards. In Belarus there are a few independent online mass media organisations; however, they work under significant pressure, and may be blocked, journalists may be jailed, and so on. However, in this situation, it is possible to differentiate qualitative mass media sources and compare them in order to describe the peculiarities of political discourses in the states.

As such, for this research, three online mass media outlets were chosen.

Several criteria were formulated for media outlets:

- independent, as opposed to state-owned;
- qualitative (hard news prevails);
- not tabloid news policy;
- available online, with a news archive from 2005, which is technically suitable for parsing;
- mass audience (as opposed to being for subscribers only);
- located in the country;
- with a local Ukrainian, Belarussian or Russian version;
- specialising in politics and society;
- nationwide, as opposed to local.

According to the criteria, three sites were selected. The Russian version of *delfi. lt* represents Lithuania's mass media discourse. It was founded in 2007, and according to Similarweb data, the site is ranked fourth in the national rating of popular outlets with 37 million total visits per month. It also has an impressive average visit duration of about 10 minutes, and a respectively low bounce level of 37.8 %. The site is owned by Estonian Ekspress Grupp. Delfi news portals function in three more countries: Latvia, Estonia and Ukraine. In the past, the content of Delfi was multifunctional, combining online news, entertainment, e-shopping and e-dating and e-mail possibilities (Balčytienė – Harro – Loit 2009: 523). According to Similarweb data, the site ranks first in the 'media' category with 30.5 million total visits per month.

In Ukraine *Ukrayins'ka pravda (pravda.com.ua)*, founded in 2000 by independent journalists Heorhii Gongadze and Olena Prytula, was chosen for the research. This outlet has been publishing resonant journalistic investigations about all Ukrainian presidents since Kuchma, with high marks for professional standards. The Ukrainian NGO Institute for Mass Information claims that 96 % of the site's journalistic texts do not violate such standards (IMI 2020). Olena Prytula is the owner of the portal. According to Similarweb data, the site is ranked 31st most popular in Ukraine (and third in the 'media' category). For Ukraine, the news aggregator ukr.net is ranked first (albeit excluded from our analysis) and censor.net, with more entertaining content and some preference

towards crime news, is second (and was also excluded). Ukrains'ka pravda registers 35 million total visits per month.

For Belarus, because of its specifics – media restrictions, and a lack of data pertaining to mass media – a list of the most popular independent and reliable online mass media was tested (see also (IMI 2020b). However, all but one site from the list failed to meet the research's criteria – Nasha Niva (nn.by).

Other outlets were excluded for the following reasons:

- tut.by – because it has a more tabloid news-based policy;
- Belapan's content is available only to subscribers (other readers may view the headlines only);
- onliner.by is popular as well, but does not specialise in politics (technologies, automobiles, real estate, people and forums are the main rubrics);
- euroradio has an archive from 2007 and is ranked 115th in the category;
- gazetaby.com (salidarnasts) – tabloid news-based policy, archive from 2009;
- citydog.by – local news cite, founded only in 2012
- reform.by – founded in 2016;
- KyKy.org – founded in 2010, and lifestyle topics rather prevail;
- The Village.by – local news site, archive from 2017;
- Belsat – broadcasts from Poland.

Nasha Niva (nn.by) was first founded as a newspaper in 1906 and revived in 1991. The site was founded in 1997, and the paper version was closed in 2018. Nasha Niva is owned by the private company NNbaj. It has been blocked several times by the Lukashenko regime, including during the 2020 protests. According to Similarweb, it is ranked 35th with 4.8 million visitors per month. As far as exploring the most popular sites was not the research objective, this site was used for this case. Additionally, other comparative observations on Ukrainian and Belarussian mass media (Pravda.com.ua and Belapan.by were studied) have shown almost the same numbers within the proposed indicators for the Ukrainian news outlet – the more active presence of constant political actors (Steblyna 2020c).

Hypothesis

The intensity of political activity differs in mass media discourses of states with more democratic and more authoritative regimes respectively; thus, it is possible to show a clear difference (average indicators and dynamics) by means of a formal analysis of mass media content (political news).

In particular it is supposed that in terms of independent online mass media:

H1 – in democratic states, attention to prominent political actors (politicians or institutes) is more balanced and the percentage of mentions overall is similar among popular political figures (balance indicator);

H2 – in democratic states, political emotions and negativity are much more vividly expressed in news, because political actors use emotions in the competitive struggle for power and in order to draw public attention to their political messages (emotionality and negativity indicators);

H3 – in democratic states, a forum of ideas is constantly functioning, politicians express their opinions freely, and these opinions are actively represented in political news in the form of direct and indirect quotes (direct and indirect intertextuality indicators).

Thus, we expect to see larger indicators and more stable dynamics in Lithuanian political news; relatively large indicators and a more unstable picture in Ukrainian news (with some transformations because of the more authoritative regime of Yanukovych in 2010–2014, as well as Russian aggression); and low indicators and stable dynamics in Belarussian independent journalism, with a certain level of activity in recent years (due to the protests in 2020).

Materials and methodology

All political news between 2005–2020 (for delfi.lt – since 2007) was collected with the help of Python software (requests and bs4 modules) from the sites. To measure the indicators, several Python programs were designed.

For the balance indicator, vocabularies of prominent political actors (politicians and institutions) were composed. Both dictionaries and, in some cases, regular expressions were used to measure the indicator (Rad[aoui]\w?, Verkh\ w+ Rad.\w? – for Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada). Every mention was counted, and the rating of mentions was created (total number of mentions per year). The balance indicator was obtained from the ratio of total mentions of the most popular political actor to that of the second most popular political actor.

For emotionality, negativism and indirect intertextuality, verb vocabularies were composed:

- state verbs, such as 'want', 'promise', 'demand' etc. – for emotionality;
- negative verbs, such as 'forbid', 'disinform', negative particles and negative prefixes – for negativity;
- verbs with communicative intention, such as 'claim', 'respond', 'say' – for indirect intertextuality.

The indicators were obtained from the ratio of verbs to the total amount of news.

For direct intertextuality, punctuation marks and proper nouns were used, for instance:

The regular expression '[A-Z]/:.*?/n' for headlines such as 'Vytautas Landsbergis: red empire of lies started crumbling in Lithuania'; the regular expression '/n.*? [- –]/s[A-Z]/n' for headlines such as 'NATO concerned about Russia's military build-up in Black Sea region, Crimea – Stoltenberg'; and the regular

expression '[«""][a-z]\w+.*?[»""]' for headlines such as 'Occupied Crimea and parts of Donbas turn into 'territory of lawlessness'. The indicator was obtained from the ratio of headlines found to the total amount of news.

Findings

Balance

Average balance indicators confirm the previous thesis pertaining to attention paid to prominent political actors (politicians or institutes) being broadly similar in more democratic states, with the largest number in Lithuanian online media (0.84), a somewhat average number in Ukrainian online media (0.66) and the smallest in Belarussian online media (0.42). However, the dynamics of the indicators should also be taken into account (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Balance indicator
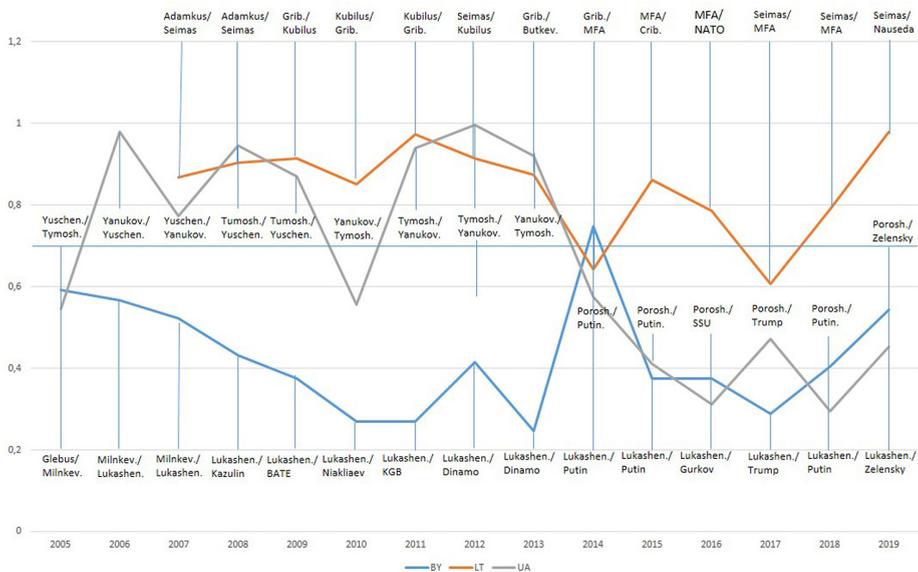
There is an evident change in the dynamics of all media from 2013 (Lithuania, Ukraine) and from 2014 (Belarus). In Lithuania the indicators are higher and more stable; presidents, the prime minister and Parliament are the most popular figures, and so internal politics is the main focus. In the period 2014–2018 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was constantly mentioned, so Russian aggression and permanent Russian conflict with the West was more significant. This led to a decline in the indicators and the high volatility thereof. However, there

is further evidence, as *delfi.lt* prepared a Russian-language version (as well as Lithuanian and English-language versions) with funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Valentinavičius 2016: 58). It was also funded by the European Parliament project *MyEP* News and *Grynas* from the EU and the Ministry of the Environment (Valentinavičius 2016: 58). Only in 2019 did the situation change because of the presidential election. It is also remarkable that the legislative organ is constantly visible in delfi.lt news and all the figures/institutions are domestic ones (with NATO as the only exception; however, as far as Lithuania is part of NATO, this may be interpreted as a reaction towards constant Russian provocations). Thus, on Lithuanian sites the domestic actors construct the political discussion. Furthermore, it is possible to see through a more balanced representation of politicians and institutions.

For Ukrainian sites before 2013 the indicators were sometimes higher than in Lithuania; however, the volatility of the indicators is evident. This means that political discourse of the hybrid Ukrainian regime, as presented on pravda.com. ua, is characterised by constant rivalry between political personalities. However, political consensus is not the aim of the rivalry. This is just a 'clans' struggle' (Minakov 2018), where 'one clan tries to establish its own vertical power, while the others undermine it in cooperation with wider social groups'. Before 2014, political institutions (parties, NGOs, ministries etc.) were not particularly popular; this is also a feature of Ukrainian discourse, with weak legislative, executive organs. However, it is important to mention that oppositionists (Yanukovych and Tymoshenko during Yushchenko's presidential term; Tymoshenko during Yanukovych's term) are sometimes in first place in this context. The situation has changed dramatically since 2014. Foreign political figures (such as Putin and Trump) are mostly in second place, and in such a context the Ukrainian leader is shown as the only one who deals with Russian aggression (oppositionists did not compete with him for attention), while other domestic voices failed to make themselves heard. Of course, there was constant breaking news from the so-called 'ATO/JFO zone', but for pravda.com.ua both weak institutions and rivalry among the elites caused a decline in the amount of attention paid to internal affairs in the times of crisis. As such, domestic figures were supplanted from political discourse; their appearance was episodic and accompanied by scandal (with the Security Service the only exception). Remarkably, even the presidential election in 2019 did not lead to a sufficient increase in the indicators (towards 2005–2013 levels).

In Belarus, there were relatively high indicators on nn.by between 2005–2008 with oppositionists in first and second place. In 2005 the Belarussian writer Glebus was in first place, because Nasha Niva did not differentiate political news and feature pieces at that time. Furthermore, all figures opposed to the regime (not only politicians, but artists and writers as well) were included. Afterwards the popularity of the oppositionists continued to decline, and in 2009 a soccer

club (BATE) was more popular. Because of the presidential election and political protests in 2010, Vladimir Nekliaev rose as high as second place; however, Lukashenko' s domination was significant. The suppression of the protests led to the popularity of the Belarussian KGB, and afterwards a soccer club was again found in second place. This means that before 2014 there was weak political interaction in authoritarian Belarus; political figures did spread some political messages, but their activity did not resonate in society and was not covered by nn.by. Of course, the independent media looked for alternative views, but because of constant political repressions and the failure of the oppositionists to reach a mass audience, the attention paid to internal politics and opposition activity constantly decreased. After 2014, the increase of the indicators is explained by a pivotal change in the discourse: foreign political actors (Putin, Trump, Zelensky) have become more popular. The only exception was in 2016, when the boxer Gurkov was ranked second. This means that for some time Lukashenko succeeded firstly with his image as a moderator of Ukrainian-Russian relations, and secondly with the usage of images of Russia and Putin as a possible threat to state security. As such, low levels of attention paid to opposition figures, the presence of non-political actors in the news (such as soccer clubs and sportsmen) and a high level of attention paid towards international events are the features of the nn.by coverage of political interactions in the authoritarian Belarussian regime. Additionally, knowing about modern protest activity in Belarus since August 2020, the greater attention paid to Lukashenko may be a possible reason for closer observation of Lukashenko's internal actions and repressive politics as well.

However, there is evidence of Russian influence for all the news sites, albeit with different outcomes. In Lithuanian mass media the change of popular political actors with periods of dominance by political institutions and the high volatility of the indicator are visible. As such, institutions are used to solve possible security issues, and interrelations between personalities are less in demand. For the Ukrainian site, it was not institutions but rather political leaders who were subject to most coverage, and for some time Poroshenko's personal rivalry with Putin was used to shape the political discourse. In Belarus one may see a similar approach, whereby Russo-Ukrainian and some possible Russian aggressive actions are used to distract attention; thus Lukashenko and international leaders dominate the news on nn.by as well.

Thus, H1 is confirmed, with more balanced attention and more similar percentage figures for popular political figures in Lithuania; less balanced and less similar in Ukraine, especially after 2014; and low indicators for Belarus. However, the dynamics are additionally significant and should be taken into account as well, especially in times of military aggression.

Emotionality and negativity

Here Ukraine leads, and the dynamics of the indicators are similar (there is a positive correlation between balance and emotionality at 0.796, and balance and emotionality 0.689 for Ukraine). Neither Belarus nor Lithuania exhibit such similarity (no correlation: for Lithuania, balance and emotionality 0.207, balance and negativity 0.12; for Belarus, balance and emotionality –0.222, balance and negativity –0.112 (see Fig. 2, 3)).

This leads us to the observation that authoritative regimes such as Belarus are not characterised by high emotionality and negativism and there is no connection between periods of more and less balanced coverage on nn.by. However, the more democratic Lithuania and Ukraine do have emotionality and negativity in political news on sites from both countries, but for Ukraine it is a connection between more intense/weak interactions between political actors and higher/lower emotionality and negativism. By contrast, for Lithuania – with more stable indicators – there is no connection. As such, it may be supposed that high and unstable emotionality and negativity with a correlation with the balance indicator mark more unstable transitive regimes with significant rivalry among the political elites (Ukraine). In the case of more consolidative democratic regimes such as Lithuania, high balance indicators do not depend on high emotionality and negativism of political articulations.

Additionally, there is a positive correlation for emotionality and negativity indicators for all discourses (0.951 – Belarus, 0.815 – Lithuania, 0.732 – Ukraine). Thus, there is a connection between emotions and negativity, used for attracting attention to political competition: higher numbers for radical competition with constant appeals to different social groups to interfere and to delegitimise current ruling elites; and average numbers for the mass media of more consolidated democracies and low numbers for authoritarian states.

In terms of the dynamics on the Ukrainian news site, Yushchenko's presidency is the period with the highest emotionality and negativity. At that time, approaches to create a political coalition failed, which influenced the media coverage: it was a period of constant tensions between Yushchenko, Tymoshenko and Yanukovych as the representatives of three most influential political parties. After 2008, when Ukrainian mass media claimed Yushchenko's 'political death', indicators decreased and remained lower during the authoritarian Yanukovych's presidency with a loyal government and parliament. Yet if between 2010–2013 emotionality slowly decreased, negativity grew. This may be interpreted as a reflection of social anger and Ukrainian intolerance for the geopolitical turn towards Russia (see also some observations about Ukrainian society's moods before the revolution (Kushnir 2020: 77). Afterwards, in the Poroshenko era, when internal politics was not popular compared to the Russo--Ukrainian war and Russia's campaign against the West, there were low and

stable indicators on pravda.com.ua. Here the international agenda displaced internal political rivalry.

On the Lithuanian site the situation is calmer, comparable to that of Ukraine; thus, political events and tensions did not lead to high indicators. We may observe some growth in both indicators until 2009 and high numbers until 2013, but afterwards there was a period of stability. We suppose that this was influenced by the following factors: a) electoral cycles; (b) the ongoing global financial crisis and the bankruptcies of several banks; and c) the Lithuanian presidency of the European Union.

- *Electoral cycles.* In 2011 and 2012, elections of municipal councils and the Seimas (Parliament) were held. Naturally, election campaigns feature large arrays of messages in which politicians and candidates seek to show their best qualities, although quite often candidates receive scandalous messages without fully disclosing information about their past (e.g. criminal record).

- *The ongoing global financial crisis and the bankruptcies of several banks.* At the end of 2011, the operations of one of the largest retail banks in Lithuania were suspended. The event sparked a great deal of political debate, as one of the bank's main shareholders was a Russian citizen. The suspension of the bank was accompanied by an information leak scandal as some politicians withdrew deposits before the bank was suspended. The start of 2013 was also accompanied by the suspension of another bank. The main shareholder of that bank was a businessman of Russian origin, the founder of a small populist party, and the owner of the Žalgiris basketball club.

- *The Lithuanian presidency of the European Union.* Lithuania held the presidency of the European Union for the first time in the second half of 2013; therefore, preparations for this important challenge took place in the first half of the year. At the end of 2012, in preparation for the EU presidency and the approval of the new Government, President Dalia Grybauskaitė began testing the English language skills of future ministerial candidates.

Thus, on the Lithuanian site the situation was calmer; however, here we also see some changes of indicators due to political events. Additionally, since 2013–2014 there has been some degree of stabilisation. This is somewhat surprising, because, as Laurėnas (2017) points out, since the annexation of Crimea the relations between the state and society in Lithuania have been significantly affected by the topic of war being developed in the media (Laurėnas 2017: 227). In 2019, the presidential elections led to an increase in the indicators.

As for the Belarusian site, the constant growth of the indicators is observed. Low indicators of emotionality and negativism are observed before 2008 and at the same time – high indicators of balance. Thus, the activity of oppositionists did not lead to real political interrelations (with emotionality and negativism,

used in order to attract attention towards different political figures). Here we may additionally observe the increase of the indicators before and after the 2010 protests. The decrease in 2012 may be interpreted as a consequence of Lukashenko's suppression of his opponents (high levels of emotionality because of the protests and the activity of Niakliaev as the opposition presidential candidate in 2010, growth in levels of emotionality because of court hearings and KGB activity in 2011, and some decrease in 2012). Since 2013 the numbers have been growing, as has Lukashenko's presence in the news. Thus, closer attention paid to the president may cause emotions and negative growth.

As a result, hypothesis H2 has been partly confirmed. Ukrainian and Lithuanian politics do produce higher levels of emotions and negativity than Belarusian politics, but there is a difference between a more unstable Ukraine with frequent political crises and the calmer situation in Lithuania. There is no connection between a more democratic society and politics and high emotions and negativity. In our case, high emotionality means political instability.

Fig. 2: Emotionality
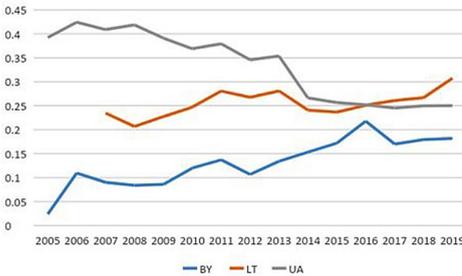
Fig. 3: Negativity
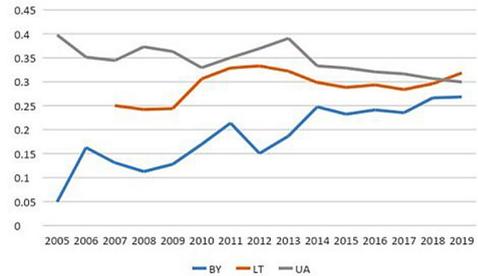
Direct and indirect intertextuality

When it comes to direct intertextuality, there is a clear difference between the mass media of each country. However, 2014 was again a turning point for Lithuanian and Ukrainian media. For the news sites, the numbers increased until 2014, before declining from that point onwards (more dramatically in the case of Lithuania). Indirect intertextuality is more popular for Ukrainian mass media than for Lithuanian media. In Belarus, the indicators have been increasing; however, they are still lower than in Ukraine and Lithuania.

In terms of the dynamics, for the Lithuanian site there is evidence of a constantly active 'forum of ideas' functioning, whereby prominent political figures generate direct quotes and mass media use these quotes in news production. Comparing this situation with a balance indicator, we may suppose that the change in mentions of leading political actors is reflected here as well. Political

personalities produced more direct quotes until 2014. As such, political tensions, caused by the elections and economic crises, may have influenced the situation as well. Afterwards the numbers declined before a certain amount of growth in 2019. However, every third news item still contains a quote, which is the largest result among all the discourses. High and growing numbers of indirect quotes are also observed, and 2011–2013 were characterised by increases in the indicator. Afterwards, the situation was unstable. However, compared to Ukraine until 2013, indirect quotes were not so popular, albeit their level is also respectively high when compared to Belarus.

In Ukraine the forum of ideas was also active at the beginning of the observation period. Indirect quotes, rather than direct ones, were popular on pravda.com.ua. Therefore, the consistent presence of political actors did not lead to the generation of direct quotes. However, the Ukrainian political crisis in 2007 and 2008 may have led to high levels of indirect quotes. During the Yanukovych presidency, we may observe certain levels of stabilisation for direct intertextuality, and a decrease in the indirect equivalent. As such, having conducted a comparison of the dynamics of indicators with negativity, it may be concluded that such a situation reflects a certain tension in society, where political crises led to the production of emotions and negativity, but political discussion was not shaped by direct communication between the political leaders. After 2014 the direct intertextuality stabilised, while indirect intertextuality declined, followed by a period of growth. However, a vivid difference between two periods (2005–2013 and 2014–2019) may be observed. The first period was defined by high levels of competitiveness, emotionality, negativity and indirect quotes; the latter indicator may explain the more closed, non-transparent tradition of Ukrainian politics compared with Lithuanian politics. By contrast, the second period led to a decline in the amount of attention paid to internal affairs and the high numbers of direct quotes in 2014–2016 may be explained additionally by the presence of international leaders in Ukrainian political news. Thus, here Ukrainian domestic politicians are unable to compete with them. Furthermore, the prevalence of the international agenda changes the direct intertextuality indicator, but Ukrainian politics remains the same.

For Belarussian mass media, both indicators are small; however, the dynamics should be taken into account. Here we have growth with high volatility, especially for indirect intertextuality, which is accompanied by the growth of other indicators (emotionality and negativism). If on the Ukrainian site pravda.com.ua the majority of the indicators declined and stabilised, because of Russian aggression and the prevalence of the international agenda, on the Belarussian site we may observe a high number of direct quotes between 2014–2016. This may be explained by Lukashenko's role as a 'peacemaker' in the Russo-Ukrainian war, as well as by internal affairs (in 2016 there was an increase in both indicators – parliamentary elections, state pension age change, the arrests of local

businessmen, etc.). In total, these factors may have led to the rise of the indicator of indirect intertextuality numbers, comparable with the Ukrainian and Lithuanian ones in 2016. However, the weakness of the 'forum of ideas' was significant – and numbers declined again in 2017–2019. In Belarus the forum has been developing throughout the observation period, and there were certain events which brought about its growth. However, the political system failed to stimulate its constant activity, as in Ukraine and Lithuania.

Fig. 4: Direct intertextuality
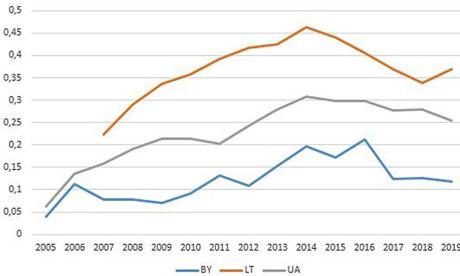
Fig. 5: Indirect intertextuality
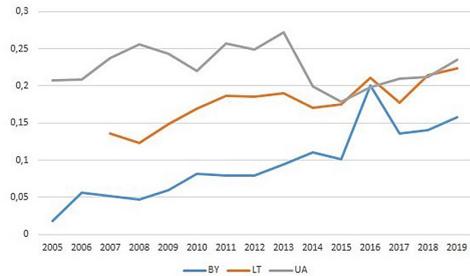
As such, hypothesis H3 has been partly confirmed. Democratic Lithuanian politics has a more active 'forum of ideas' with high numbers of direct quotes, comparable to the active Ukrainian forum and less active Belarussian one respectively. However, when it comes to indirect quotes, Ukrainian politics is the leader.

Conclusions and discussion

In this research it was supposed that independent mass media outlets reflect political life differently in more and less democratic states respectively. Of course, the mass media should follow professional standards (seek and report truth, offer alternative voices etc.) and some market rules (use emotions, expressive quotes, etc.) to sell their news, but the political climate does influence political discourse. Thus, there should be a way to differentiate political news with a formal analysis of voices represented, characteristics of political activity, and so on.

It was possible to observe that the intensity of political activity differs in the mass media discourses of states with more democratic (Lithuania, Ukraine) and more authoritative (Belarus) regimes. Furthermore, a clear difference was shown across five indicators, average indicators and dynamics.

In particular, it was confirmed that for the Lithuanian site *delfi.lt* attention to prominent political actors is more balanced and the percentage of mentions of popular political figures are respectively similar. However, after 2014 political institutions were mentioned more often, and balance indicators became more

unstable. Additionally, domestic figures, not foreign ones, shape political discussions for the site. In Ukraine, on pravda.com.ua, the average indicator was smaller, and high volatility was observed, especially before 2013. In that period domestic politicians (rather than institutions) were popular. Afterwards, foreign politicians competed for attention, and the indicator declined. In Belarus, on nn.by, there was a significant imbalance between political actors (as a rule, Lukashenko was dominant). From 2014 foreign political actors were among the most popular, as in Ukraine.

All in all, the balance indicator dynamics provide some observations for further research: higher levels of attention paid to both political institutions and political actors is important for more democratic political discourse. Such a scenario was observed for the Lithuanian site *delfi.lt* before 2014. In Ukraine, on pravda. com.ua, the high popularity of political personalities led to the high volatility of indicators. One more point here in the context of further discoveries: the popularity of domestic political actors is important for democracy as well; the presence of international actors leads to a decreased level of interest in domestic politics and the interactions of domestic political figures are not represented properly.

Of course, this observation was made based on Ukrainian and Belarussian material, when the states were faced (whether directly or indirectly) with Russian aggression. However, it may be supposed that Russian aggression was not good for Ukrainian democracy (the state received EU and US support, but its institutions remained weak and unstable, and such aggression failed to pull society and political actors together). In the case of Belarus, it helped Lukashenko to divert attention from political problems in the country.

As for emotions and negativity, the hypothesis was partly confirmed. More unstable and chaotic Ukrainian political discourse, such as that represented on pravda.com.ua, disclosed a more emotional and negative political climate. Lithuanian politics, as reflected in the content of *delfi.lt*, was calmer. However, emotions and negativity are important to democracy, and political interactions should produce these components. This means that political actors use emotions and negativity in political competition, and with these components their messages become salient in independent mass media, as in the cases of delfi.lt and pravda.com.ua. Thus, emotionality and negativity were not high in Belarus on nn.by, as the presence of political actors is limited, so there is no constant political dialogue with opposite sides participating in the discussions.

However, in the case of political emotions and negativity, the dynamics are also important. For instance, a calmer period in Ukraine (since 2014) did not mean that the political situation had been stabilised. Again, the dominance of foreign actors on pravda.com.ua may make the domestic political dialogue more episodic and fragmented, as in this case. As such, it is important to differentiate emotions and negativity in more and less democratic states with and without the presence of foreign actors.

In terms of the functioning of the 'forum of ideas', the hypothesis was partly confirmed. Direct quotes were more popular in a more democratic and stable Lithuania. This means that with the help of delfi.lt, politicians participate in open political dialogue and generate direct quotes, which are suitable for independent mass media. In Ukraine, for pravda.com.ua, direct quotes were also popular, but the Lithuanian site delfi.lt has a larger average indicator. In Belarus, for nn.by the forum was not active, with some increase at the end of the observation period. However, in Ukraine indirect intertextuality on pravda.com.ua was more popular than on the Lithuanian site delfi.lt.

Additionally, it was also demonstrated that the dynamics of the indicators depend on some significant political events, and after 2014 (with Russian aggression as the possible cause) all the indicators in the countries have showed different dynamics. Therefore, the formal analysis used in the research may show some further changes in the indicators in 2020 and beyond (because of COVID-19, for instance, political activity declined in Ukraine (Steblyna 2020a: 105); and of course protests in Belarus showed some changes in the representation of political actors (Steblyna 2020b: 306)).

Limitations

The observations for the research were made only on the basis of three mass media outlets; as such, additional material will of course be helpful. We suppose that a country's regime predetermines several peculiarities of political discourse: balance, emotionality, negativity, and intertextuality levels. The indicators should be similar for other independent qualitative mass media. However, this assumption must be checked. For instance, some mass media may have their own guidelines, and a computer program with existing vocabularies and regular expressions would not be able to calculate some data.

Of course, there is an intention to extrapolate the results to other countries with similar regimes; however, in order to do so, more news outlets and more countries should be added. The connection between a political regime, political discourse and political culture and traditions is additionally important.

The situation in Belarus should be taken into account as well: the volatility of the indicators may be caused by the regime's actions towards certain news outlets (in this case Nasha Niva). Therefore, of course, comparative analysis of other independent news sites should confirm or refute the assumption about volatility being the characteristic feature of the political discourse in the state.

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The Ideological Recomposition of Political Elites in Serbia since 2012

LAURENT TOURNOIS

Abstract: *This article argues that the ideological recomposition that has followed Aleksandar Vučić's first tenure in 2012 has blurred the lines between the various political ideologies Serbia has been associated with over the past 30 years, from nationalism to conservatism, populism, hybridity and, ultimately, authoritarianism. Using discursive analysis, the political strategy and narrative schemes examined therein illustrate the inherent tensions of 'conservatism' as practiced by Serbia's political elite. This article also develops a minimal explanation of the results and consequences of the political developments that have taken place from 2012 to 2020. It highlights the dynamic discursive construction/deconstruction of the ruling party's ideology which has not been considered in existing scholarly studies on the categorisation of contemporary Serbia's political regimes. Finally, by investigating the symbolic and emotional dimensions of the ideological recomposition ongoing in Serbia (i.e. the cultural trauma that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia, heteronomy and ontological (in)security), this article contributes to the literature on growing political changes occurring in post-communist societies.*

Keywords: *conservatism; nationalism; ideological recomposition; democratization; Serbia; Aleksandar Vučić*

Since the late 1990s and during the 2000s, it has become clear that the success of conservative parties was not an electoral accident in post-communist countries. Moreover, during the 2010s, academics and political experts increasingly insisted on the rise of nationalism. For their part, the political elites in power in Serbia since 2012, under the leadership of Aleksandar Vučić[1] and his party

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1   In this paper, the terms 'Aleksandar Vučić', 'ruling party', 'political elite', 'ruling elite', 'government' and 'political establishment' are considered synonymous.

the *Srpska Napredna Stranka* or Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), affirmed their desire to transform the country and bring it closer to European Union (EU) standards, particularly on the issue of LGBT rights, democracy and Kosovo. In a context of weak political competition in the sense of Roemer (see Roemer 2001),[2] the ideological recomposition that followed, however, blurred the lines between the various ideologies that have marked the historical course of the country since the end of the Yugoslav experience.

In this paper, I first examine how the dominant party (SNS) literally 'machines' conservative ideas into its political offer (for example, the (denial of) LGBT, Roma and migrants' rights, which are (were?) usually the 'business' of conservative/far-right movements, have gradually become an integral part of the country's EU integration process), whether it concerns speeches geared towards its supporters, to non-party voters or to EU officials and other international actors. In other words, I seek to improve the understanding of the strategies implemented by the ruling party since 2012, that is to say, in 'what ways' and under what conditions. For example, it is about questioning the strategy aiming at 'demobilizing' or 'demonizing' the internal challengers (Gagnon 2004) in resolving the various challenges Serbia faces, such as the Kosovo issue and the country's EU integration process, which has not (yet) received massive support from the population as evidenced by the results of the June 2020 parliamentary elections.

To do so, I use 'discursive analysis' or an 'interpretive approach to public action' (see for example, Yanow, 2007) applied to the policy implemented by the government of Aleksandar Vučić since 2012. Assuming that politics are about processes that entail 'persuasion' and 'haggling' (Miller 1991), media play a key role in carrying the language of the political elite (Chilton 2004). In the first round, I screened newspaper articles from Politika (close to the ruling party) and Danas (in opposition to the ruling party)[3] spanning from 2006 to 2021. Articles were selected on the basis of several keywords which combined Aleksandar Vučić and LGBT, migrants, Kosovo and opposition. Then, in the second round, the body of material was extended to pieces published by nine online newspapers including Deutsche Welle (DW), Al Jazeera Balkans, BalkanInsight, Beta, AP News, Slobodna Evropa, N1, Nova Ekonomija and Blic. Finally, sources from Istinomer, an online fact-checking portal, as well as TV news and broadcasted interviews (on YouTube) were added[4].

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2   The initial assumption underlying the political competition model proposed by Roemer (2001) is that political parties play no role. Among the characteristics of political competition in developing countries that La Ferrara and Bates (2001) detailed, two seem interesting to me because they potentially reflect the situation in Serbia: weak democratic institutions and 'personalist' policies, i.e. based on leader's charisma.

3   It should be noted that a large number of articles published by Danas are adapted from articles already published in foreign media (BBC News in Serbian, Al Jazeera).

4   Discursive analysis was based on a broad body of material that was formed for the sake of a larger research project which also explores the resistance to Europeanisation (in Serbia) and practices and effects of political competition in the Balkans.

In line with an interpretivist posture, my field work uses an ethnographic method as well. Following the contention of Wedeen (2010), an ethnographic method serves to establish causal explanations and thus can help ground the political strategy(ies) of the Serbian ruling party from 2012 to 2020 and to what extent it pervades the micro-level. It entails an immersive approach, that is to say participant observation and informal interviews[5], into the everyday lives of the inhabitants of Serbia, whether in Belgrade the capital city or in smaller towns. In addition, while a political scientist standing outside the ruling regime, I was involved with the (almost) continuously changing Serbian political landscape with the aim of being 'totally open to the setting and subjects of their/my study' (Gorman – Clayton, 1997: 38). It means regularly attending and taking personal notes during and after political meetings and protests. On the other hand, the research methods I use are designed to more scientifically analyse the political strategy of the ruling party but 'without any ambition to transform it'.

Accordingly, I explore the explanatory factors of the almost constant process of ideological recomposition of the ruling party and partisan systems through three structuring angles: the cultural trauma that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia, heteronomy and ontological (in)security. In this regard, I argue that the reorganisation of the local political space is guided in part by a feeling of 'ontological insecurity' which is rooted in the 'cultural trauma' following the bombings of Belgrade/Yugoslavia in 1999 (see Racz 2009). The idea is also to debate the prevailing view that the needs for security and certainty organically lead to a broad right-wing ideology (see Malka et al., 2014) in an 'ideologically constrained country in transition'. To the best of my knowledge, these symbolic and emotional geographies have not yet been considered in existing studies on contemporary Serbia.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. I first address the categorisation issue from both a theoretical and practical standpoint with an emphasis on the most recent advances in the relevant scholarly literature in various post--communist settings. Next, the research context is briefly presented with a particular focus on the backdrop of Aleksandar Vučić's political career aiming to theoretically ground it. I also draw on the argument developed by Komel (2019) that political impetuses resist rationalisation, which renders them difficult to examine critically, to suggest that psychological processes/emotions have to be taken into account, principally in tackling certain aspects of state's foreign policy. Then, the discussion is broken into four significant periods which aims to provide a sequenced understanding of the ideological recomposition of the political elite along with internal and external events during the 2012–2020

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5   Given the public's sensitivity to topics such as nationalism, party voting and, broadly speaking, a widespread feeling of being 'secretly watched' by government entities, a phenomenon Svenonius and Bjorklund (2018) named 'ontological insecurity', interviews were conducted in an informal manner.

timeframe. The analysis challenges the prevailing view and underlines the necessity to go beyond a fixed classification in analysing the political strategy of the ruling party. Finally, I speculate on the possible consequences of the current government's discourse (swing). The narrative scheme put in place has consisted of using right-wing extremism and the conservative ideas it carries as a political instrument (in other words, a 'scarecrow') in a comparative perspective directed towards the EU and other international players. This shift, which has left a vacant space, is also a double-edged sword: the so-called 'traditional' opposition has almost completely disappeared from the landscape, leaving political space in Serbia to parties from ethnic minorities (Hungarians, Bosnians, Albanians, Croats) and to current government satellites.

A problem of categorisation

Categorising political regimes after the fall of the Berlin Wall has been challenging for political analysts and scholars alike. Backed by a set of 141 countries spanning from 1950 to 1990, Alvarez et al. (1996) proposed classifying political regimes as democracies and dictatorships or authoritarian regimes. Covering a wider period (1800–2016), Anckar and Fredriksson (2019) went further and decomposed democracies (republics and monarchies) and autocracies (absolute monarchy, military rule, party-based rule, personalist rule and oligarchy) into several categories and sub-categories.

With regard to post-communist countries specifically, over the past decade, scholars have underlined various trends, from global patterns of an updated version of 'competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky – Way 2010; Bieber 2018a) to 'situational nationalism' in Montenegro (Jenne – Bieber 2014), 'illiberalism/illiberal democracy' in Hungary (Kürti 2020) and Poland (Karolewski 2020), 'conservatism' in Slovakia (Sekerák 2019) and, broadly speaking, 'de--democratization' (Szymański – Ufel 2018; Procházka – Cabada 2020). The common denominator of these regimes is democratic backsliding which is rooted in the failure of reformist governments in forming independent and democratic institutions since the beginning of the 2000s.

Retrospectively, political conservatism, populism, right-wing extremism and/or nationalism are themes with which the political landscape of Serbia is often associated. The politics of Serbian government since Aleksandar Vučić's first tenure as prime minister in 2012 could be viewed through multiple lenses. Zulianello (2020) categorised his party, the SNS, as 'right-wing/national--conservative' within populist parties. I aim to show that the SNS pushed or blurred the boundaries between the various classifications thanks to, for instance, the number of development projects and reforms his government implemented from 2012 to 2019 in order to redesign Serbia's national project. For instance, the legal improvements and discourses about LGBT/minorities

and migrants' rights, depict him as 'cosmopolitan', 'embracing diversity and welcoming immigration', 'often turning those topics into litmus tests for moral respectability' (Haidt 2016: 47), thus 'erasing' ethnonationalist associations to Serbia, leaving racism to right-wing movements. Furthermore, this study intends to illustrate that, after the country's democratic experience in the 2000s, it has evolved towards a form of illiberal or hybrid democracy, reminding us of what the American diplomat Richard Holbrooke said in 1996: 'Democratically elected regimes, often ones that have been reelected or reaffirmed through referenda, are routinely ignoring constitutional limits on their power and depriving their citizens of basic rights and freedoms' (Zakaria 1997: 22).

Although or because populism is such a popular phenomenon, scholars have regularly emphasised its contested nature during the past 50 years (e.g. Gellner – Ionescu 1969; Mudde – Kaltwasser 2013). In order to capture its very nature, Moffitt and Tormey (2014: 387) have proposed conceptualising populism as a 'political style' that is 'the repertoires of performance that are used to create political relations'. As such, it may act as a header to various political styles such as authoritarianism. Specifically, populist politics concentrate power struggles and emotional contexts as well as to (for) whom and against whom they are addressed and include fundamental existential parameters such as 'ontological security' (Steele – Homolar, 2019). On the one hand, applying this line of reasoning to Serbia under the SNS rule means that 'modern' Serbs oppose those who reject change. On the other hand, as I will show, the political strategy and supporting state narratives are truly 'boundary-making' with respect to Serbian opposition from moderates to extremes but are not with regard to xenophobic-based exclusion. Moreover, I argue that the emotionally charged processes here in place are related to both an individual's 'security as being' and 'security of survival' (see Giddens 1991).

Scholars have highlighted that today's nationalism significantly differs from its predecessors. In the Western world, it has evolved towards a more defensive position, from the belief in an ancestral cultural superiority of one's own nation to egalitarianism, justice and the right to have different arguments (Milisavljević 2019). It is this updated nationalist stance that has allowed a certain normalisation of the ruling party in the Serbian political landscape.

Mapping out the features of (political) conservatism as practiced by Serbia's ruling party is a challenging task given the ambivalent and/or contradictory nature of certain decisions taken during a period of changing narratives regarding 'open immigration' and smoothing of 'identity politics'. As a political ideology, I adhere to the view of Allen (1981) for whom conservatism can't be defined mainly in terms of a straightforward attitude towards change. Indeed, it is widely accepted among scholars that 'conservatives have been willing to accommodate and even promote some forms of change, if only to strengthen the overall framework of society' (Allen 1981: 583). When scrutinising the politics

of Aleksandar Vučić since 2012, I highlight their contradictions which illustrate the view of Alexander (2013: 596): 'It is against change; and yet it accepts change. It is against ideology; and yet it is an ideology. It is against reaction; and yet it involves reaction. It advocates no ideals; and yet it advocates ideals. It is secular; but it is religious. It is in favor of tradition; but there is nothing in it which prevents it from eventually abandoning any tradition'.

Kapidžić (2020: 2) provides a highly pragmatic approach to illiberal politics as the 'sets of policies that extend an electoral advantage for governing parties with the aim to remain in power indefinitely'. As such, it converges with conservatism. Following this line of reasoning, and through the governing practices that consist in engaging 'targeted restrictive actions against political opponents' (particularly in the media sphere), I call to attention the growing intensity of illiberal politics and authoritarian trajectory of Serbia and its consequences in terms of democracy.

When it comes to the Kosovo[6] and, broadly speaking, territoriality issues, the politics conducted by Aleksandar Vučić could be characterised as 'populist' according to the definition outlined by Fukuyama (2018: 1): it is a policy that is 'popular in the short term but unsustainable in the long run'; such policy aims to please a 'certain ethnic or racial group' and/or at least recall nationalist sentiments within certain segments of the population; it emphasises the 'cult of personality' Aleksandar Vučić has developed around himself in order to 'develop an immediate relationship with the "people"' he claims to represent. Moreover, as the narratives revolving around the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue may show, states may not intend to avoid dilemmatic dispute because even risky routines offer ontological security (Mitzen 2006). 'Regional stability' will progressively appear as one of the major outcomes of such security-seeking foreign policy. The underlying issue then would be how long a rational stance could be maintained over an emotional conflict.

While scholars seem to agree to categorise the Serbian political regime as a 'hybrid', they also emphasise its continuous evolution towards a 'more radical version of electoral authoritarianism' (Pavlović 2020). However, Serbian reality challenges the theoretical argument that hybrid regimes facilitate popular dissent by providing significant institutional resources to opposition parties to organise and confront the regime in power, as well as grievances that strongly stimulate popular distrust (Vladisavljević 2016). The latter stance implicitly neglects the structural weaknesses of the opposition and underestimates the negative effects of the strategy of 'destabilizing' internal challengers. Thus, at least in the short run, such politics may simply strengthen the interests and capacities of Serbia's political establishment at the expense of opposition forces. Contrary to what happened in Serbia under Slobodan Milošević's rule, which

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6   Understood as the 'recognition or not' of the independence of the former Serbian province.

experienced a massive opposition protest campaign in 2000, they are able to prevent any regime change.

Given the preceding debate, I endorse the view of Kapidžić (2020) about the limitations of a fixed regime classification and, hence, I adopt a 'back-and-forth' perspective to dynamically look into the gradual evolution of the governing practices of the ruling party that dominated the political life of Serbia from 2012 to 2020. Accordingly, I 'keep the door open' in examining the sets of strategies and discursive practices implemented by Aleksandar Vučic's ruling elite. That is to finally suggest that the ideological background of Aleksandar Vučić's politics is a blend. By 'conservative resistance', I mean resistance to the return of ethnonationalist tendencies and, broadly speaking, facing the consequences of the legacies of the dislocation of Yugoslavia, with all the contradictions that it implies.

Aleksandar Vučić both a product of a context and an influencing factor

As a foreword, Aleksandar Vučić has recently felt into the spotlight of academic research as part of those local figures that 'have been shaped by the era [1990s], only to shape coming eras, as they continued to rise to new heights in the decades to come' (Jovanović 2019: 61).

Aleksandar Vučić entered into politics during the break-down of Yugoslavia. Indeed, he joined the *Srpska Radikalna Stranka* (SRS, Serbian Radical Party) in 1993. Then, he was elected as member of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia with an almost student status but as a 'radical'. Two years later, he became SRS general secretary. During this period of less than two years, three consecutive parliamentary elections in multiparty Serbia took place. Above all, *Socijalistička partija Srbije* (SPS) or the Socialist Party of Serbia split from the SRS in the summer of 1993 after that Slobodan Milošević's party had abandoned its harsh national policy, which had until then been advocated by the SPS (Kojić 2020). One may assume that this experience left an important mark and was able to condition his attitude not only towards his coalition partners but also on the necessary cohesion on key themes and, finally, on the use of elections as a mechanism of (re)construction of legitimacy.

When the SRS formed a government coalition (notably with the SPS) on 24 March 1998 in the midst of the Kosovo crisis, Aleksandar Vučić was elected minister of information. During his ministerial tenure, he signed the Public Information Law, and is remembered for his draconian media punishments, which led to the shutdown of foreign and local newsrooms opposed to the government. Today, when accused of interfering with the work of the media, he replies that 'it is easier to attribute this to him when there are no other arguments against him'[7].

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7 https://www.istinomer.rs/akter/aleksandar-Vučic/.

The situation in Serbia in 2012 offered the SNS fertile ground, bringing together disappointed voters, transition losers, a declining standard of living after the improvement observed at the end of the 2000s and a slow European integration among other complaints. In addition, the political landscape that emerged in Serbia after the 2007/2008 elections was characterised by a high degree of citizens' distrust in politics and a low perception of the state of democracy, which has fostered the emergence of new actors likely to ride the populist wave (Stojiljković – Spasojević 2018). Thus, thanks to a weakly institutionalised party system and an unconsolidated democracy, Serbia held/holds the structural conditions for highly influential leaders to be able to significantly (re)shape the society and its politics (Spasojević 2020). Interestingly, the SNS roadmap will gradually draw inspiration from the program of the *Demokratska Stranka* (DS) or Democratic Party which lost the 2012 elections, namely a pro-European approach, the strengthening of democratic standards, the stability of the exchange rate, food price control and macroeconomic balance (Orlović 2011).

Attitudes towards Serbian opposition occupy a particular place in the political strategy of Aleksandar Vučić, alongside Slobodan Milošević's systematic destruction of alternative centers of power. The book written by Eric Gordy *Culture of power in Serbia: Nationalism and the destruction of alternatives* in 2010 could have been his bedside book. This is to suggest the adoption of a more constructivist stance which would allow it to be seen as a 'framing' strategy, directed particularly towards Serbian extremist groups (see Valtner 2021). Moreover, while the political landscape between 2008 and 2012 showed relative political stability, the ideological recomposition, which constitutes the other pillar of its policy, consisted of an intentional contraction of the ideological space and a 'cartelization' of the party structure (Spasojević 2019).

Moreover, one may assume that he learned from the political career of Vojislav Kostunica. Firstly, the latter is the portrait of the kind of opponent he should fear as he is 'the man who overthrew Milošević' (see Budding 2002). He also enjoys the flattering reputation of being 'the opposition's only uncorrupted tenor'[8]. Secondly, while a democrat, his nationalist rhetoric (he was opposed to the extradition of Slobodan Milošević to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia) contributed to the deterioration of the country's already fragile economy with the local currency losing six percent of its value in early 2008 (Barlovac 2010).

The elements presented so far lead me to propose that the 'theory of state collapse' may constitute the original backdrop of Aleksandar Vučić's politics as he witnessed the dissolution of both Yugoslavia (1992) and the Federal Republic

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8   Lawyer and political scientist, born in 1944 in the small village of Kostunica, in Šumadja, Vojislav Kostunica can also boast of a prominent political coherence, marked with the seal of moderate nationalism (Dérens – Samary 2000).

of Yugoslavia also known as 'Serbia and Montenegro' (2006). Therefore, it is possible to hypothesise that a number of psychological processes are at work here at both the state and individual levels. In order to benefit from first-hand feedback, I asked several individuals that lived through the bombing of Belgrade, whether hiding in the basements, singing in one of the city's squares or silently protesting on a Belgrade bridge 'Why do you vote for him [Aleksandar Vučić]?'[9] One of them, K. (a Belgradian woman aged 82), replied: 'It doesn't matter for whom, just they (NATO) don't bomb us (again)'. Such verbatim illustrates the prevailing theoretical view that ontological security is rooted in the existentialist literature on anxiety (see Gustafsson – Krickel-Choi 2020). Almost two decades later, such deeply embedded sentiments fuel populist politics. In addition, given that the disintegration process of Yugoslavia awakened the 'dehumanization syndrome', the latter in turn could generate not only a feeling of autophobia but would also have been accompanied by a denial of identity and nationality (see Komel, 2019). Then, the end goal would be to limit communal tensions rooted in rival historical memories (for example, between Serbia and Croatia), to avoid the factionalisation of political loyalty and subsequent massive mobilisation (see Arfi 1998). Following this line of reasoning, the biggest issue for the ruling party would be to maintain the internal sovereignty of the State which would be legitimised by its foreign policy and/or subsidised by international donors (state narratives supporting economic reforms have been, for a long time, oriented towards the International Monetary Fund/IMF). Nonetheless, adverse geopolitical tensions (Kosovo) and/or deteriorating economic conditions (any crisis like the one intertwined with the health crisis resulting from COVID-19 in 2020) can create legitimacy dilemmas for the political establishment, and ultimately lead to the collapse of state authority.

In the Serbian collective imagination, Kosovo is a central subject, with a high emotional charge (it should be noted that this calls for regular evaluation and does not affect all segments of the population with the same intensity) and may be perceived as a 'lost territory'. Such a loss has certainly caused cultural trauma and has generated policies based on feelings of insecurity (Korsten 2019). That is to suggest that the history and myths surrounding Kosovo, as well as recent events and the game played by external actors, have influenced the construction, reconstruction and evolution of identity narratives by the ruling elite not anymore along ethnic criteria/lines but around 'regional stability' and related 'feelings of insecurity'. As such, 'international (in)security' is not entirely materially given, it is above all socially constructed according to Ejdus (2016).

Thus, one may agree with Patalakh (2018), for whom the foreign policy of the ruling party is founded on realism and emotions, and thus treat the coun-

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9   Moreover, from 2015 to 2020, I regularly asked this question to a wide variety of people. The dominant response I got from the older ones (those over 65) was 'There's nobody else…'.

try's EU accession process in terms of 'pragmatic maximization of utility' and apprehending its relations with foreign powers such as Russia on an identity line. Such an attitude is particularly reflected in the regular use of historical analogies concerning Russia and more recently China, as well as the memory of the 'traumas' experienced in the 1990s and 2000s, knowing that Aleksandar Vučić has personal memories of these events (more precisely with regard to Kosovo and the NATO bombing campaign in 1999). It is useful to recall what he said in 2005. While a member of the SRS, he said that Serbian President Boris Tadić's proposal to resolve the issue of Kosovo and Metohija is different from his government's plan, which is now a proposal to grant conditional independence to the province (division into two entities), and that it is a 'dangerous proposal' (Kurir 2005). All this to argue that Serbia's foreign policy under the SNS has evolved at the discretion of the statements and concrete actions of its ruling elite, but that it is above all its equivocal character that challenges.

Ultimately, the true face of his foreign policy revolves around the 'free will vs. determinism' debate. In other words, to what extent does the behaviour of the party in power result from the action of external forces over which it has no control, or is it able to decide for itself to act or to behave in a certain way? On the one hand, it looks to be rooted in Yugoslavia's non-aligned posture also known as the 'Third way' between East and West. In 2020, one of Aleksandar Vučić's statements seemed to corroborate this position: 'Russian President Vladimir Putin understands Serbia's problems very well', and he (speaking of Aleksandar Vučić) told everyone that he is 'neither Russian, nor American, nor German, but only a Serb who works for Serbia' (Srbija Danas 2020). On the other hand, an alternative reading of the previous statement might echo one of the fundamental historical characteristics of Serbia's past, which is that, for many centuries, Serbs have not been the masters in their own house (Cox 2002). To summarise, I suggest considering the foreign policy of the ruling elite through the prism of heteronomy[10] with reference to the *pretstava*, namely the image that the country is eager to portray to foreigners, which occupies a very important place in the local culture, whether at political or individual levels. The ruling elites must therefore find a balance between pragmatism (vis-à-vis the EU and the international community) and popular resentment, resulting in a difficult balance to achieve (Tournois 2021).

With emphasis on the evolving narratives of the ruling party, four periods emerge which symbolise qualitative changes with regard to minority rights (LGBT, migrants), Kosovo and the state of democracy in Serbia. They are discussed in the following sections.

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10 The underlying assumption is that Serbia lost its autonomy after the break-up of Yugoslavia and, as such, has lost moral agency given the atrocities Serbs were accused of. Consequently, heteronomy is here understood as the ontological dependence to act morally on the relationship between oneself and other agents, that is to say that an agent does not act independently of external constraints (Meade 2017).

2012–2014: The nationalist legacy

The parliamentary and presidential elections, which were held in Serbia in May 2012, resulted in a change of government. Since the overthrow of Slobodan Milosević in 2000, Serbia has been ruled by coalitions gathered around the two main democratic parties and their leaders, from Zoran Đinđić to Vojislav Koštunica and finally Boris Tadić. Their respective parties share a common ideological framework as they were formed in the early 1990s in opposition to the regime of Slobodan Milošević and the remnants of the communist apparatus (Simić 2013).

Serbia, unlike other post-communist countries and in particular the former Yugoslav republics which already joined the EU, was under scrutiny by foreign observers and EU officials. Expectations were high as the country did not appear to be affected by the wave of democratic, institutional and foreign policy changes that had unfolded at that time across Eastern Europe. The new ruling elite also had to contend with the legacy of previous governments on unresolved issues such as minority rights, Kosovo, and EU and NATO membership.

In June 2012, Tomislav Nikolić, a former radical, won the elections under the SNS banner and, from the start, held an ambiguous position. Barely elected, the Serbian president made several nationalist outings such as 'the project of a Greater Serbia is his unrealized dream' and that today if he respects the internationally recognised borders of the Republic of Croatia, he believes that the Croats do not have to return to Vukovar 'because it was a Serbian town'[11] (Martens 2012). On the sidelines of the verbal escalation that followed with the heads of foreign governments, Serbian nationalism then emerged as being written in stone in the country's history. This will lead Subotić (2012) to note bitterly that, twenty years after the start of the Yugoslav crisis, the countries of the region seem to be stuck in accounts of the past which are contradictory and irreconcilable.

Seen from today, it looks like a last nationalist standstill, but at that time several countries in the Balkan region share the same characteristic with regard to the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Indeed, as Swimelar (2020: 2) points out, nationalism has been one of the national constraints to the advancement of LGBT rights, particularly in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia where 'identities and multiple narratives – European, multi-ethnic, ethno-nationalist and religious' collide.

However, after two years in the prime minister's chair, it was relatively clear that Serbia had entered a dead end. An almost complete break with the (ethno--nationalist) past was deemed necessary as an implicit requirement in order to

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11 The latter point was the subject of controversy, with Tomislav Nikolić saying he did not say 'Vukovar was a Serbian town' (https://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/politika/nikolic-nisam-rekao-da-je-vukovar-sprski--grad_321763.html).

restore the country's credibility on the international stage. Aleksandar Vučić probably understood that the SNS had to adapt to new circumstances and, to do so, it had to reduce the influence of the old parties that were still active on the Serbian political scene. In contrast to Slobodan Milošević in the 90s, Aleksandar Vučić has implemented an 'ethnic under-bidding' strategy, namely that he has depicted himself as the only moderate force competent to resolve the political crisis, while demonising the more radical groups by qualifying them as 'extremists' (Vujačić 2007). Generally speaking, opposition parties and their leaders have been stamped as 'those stuck in the past' helping Aleksandar Vučić to gradually consolidate the ruling party's regime.

It is known that symbolic events often mark the path of political parties, and Serbia is no exception. On 28 September 2014, downtown Belgrade hosted its first Gay Pride since 2010, under high police protection and closely scrutinised by the EU, which made it a human rights test for the new pollical establishment. As prime minister, Aleksandar Vučić warned that 'anyone who tries to provoke incidents will be punished particularly severely'. Members of his cabinet announced their participation, including Minister for European Integration Jadranka Joksimović, and Tanja Miscević, chief negotiator for EU membership, as well as Minister of Culture Ivan Tasovac, thus offering public support for the Gay Pride's organisation staff and participants for the first time since 2010. From then on, and in parallel with what happened after the fall of Slobodan Milošević, financial support will only come to the extent that the IMF and the EU, as main donors, remain satisfied with the pace of internal reforms and cooperation with major international institutions.

2014–2017: Setting an (EU-driven) agenda

The year 2014 was characterised by a lack of visible progress on several key issues related to the EU accession process, which again called Serbian citizens to the polls. After the victory, Aleksandar Vučić portrayed himself as a 'reformer' and pushed for increasing the opening of chapters as part of his EU-driven politics (in the sense of 'conditionality' and less in that of 'Europeanization'). He then declared: 'You cannot rule in Serbia and do anything without a bottom line... We have tough reforms ahead of us, after all we've done... If people want to listen to good stories, all right, let them vote for another' (Analitika 2014). His narratives hence emphasised a form of (mostly internal) 'Realpolitik' based on the possible, neglecting abstract agendas and value judgments, and whose sole objective is efficiency. The dark side of this political strategy is that it leaves out 'doctrinal, principled or moral considerations'. In fact, it echoed a drastic change that took place at the beginning of the 2000s, when the indirect choice based on loyalty to the party, to an ideology (socialism) or even to the nation switched to real facts and rational criteria (Mihailović 2001). The corollary of this trans-

formation has led the ruling party, as part of its implicit new national project, to 'denationalize' Serbian citizens and/from their grounding, to influence the perception of survival (minimum standards) by focusing and communicating regularly on average salary increases in Serbia compared to other countries in and outside the Balkan region, and ultimately to 'buy' or even 'force' commitment to electoral participation.

This victory, associated with a weak legitimacy resulting from the ballot box, leads to underline certain characteristics of the political system in place, namely the low proportionality which testifies to an 'immutable institution', a 'closed' list of candidates and a relatively low electoral threshold (Jovanović 2014). Either way, EU officials have given the ruling party an *a priori* satisfecit, while setting its political/reform agenda for the years to come. Catherine Ashton, the EU's representative for foreign affairs, was the first official to congratulate Serbian citizens on the parliamentary elections. At the same time, the European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy recalled one of the priority expectations of Brussels vis-à-vis the new government in Belgrade: 'Former First Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić got an excellent result. It has been an important part of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. We hope that these negotiations will continue, which he himself has made clear' (Maksimović 2014). As the same story repeated in 2016 (and again after each further voting, the climax being 2020) following another round of elections, journalist Aleksandar Apostolovski named it 'the Vučić phenomenon': while he received 60,000 new votes, at the same time he lost 27 seats in parliament 'because almost all opposition parties skipped the census, so he did not feel the benefits of scattered votes' (Apostolovski 2016).

One of his first major political initiatives materialised in the form of a 'charm offensive' during the promotion of the newly established Serbia-Germany Forum. This maneuver, which notably concerned the growth of economic exchanges between the two countries, left two impressions: a 'tireless reformer' and a 'regional conciliator'. To politicians, businessmen and journalists alike, he appeared more as an 'ambitious reformer of European caliber than a former nationalist'. As a result, he benefited from the complacency of German journalists as no one asked him about his past during the interviews. It was also a highly symbolic turning point in the sense that he repeatedly referred to the reforms initiated by Zoran Djindjić and which, according to him, stagnated for an entire decade (Rujević 2014). Since Ruzica Djindjić, the widow of the slain prime minister and a friend of Germany, was seated at the same table, this was an implicit way of showing repentance and asking for forgiveness. Such behaviour is an integral part of the 'halo effect' tactics Aleksandar Vučić has regularly implemented with a variety (but selectively) leaders such as Vladimir Putin, in an attempt to present himself as an independent politician to internal as well as foreign audiences.

The support his government has received from EU officials and heads of state of EU countries should not mask the disappointing human rights state in Serbia. Green MEP Volker Beck expressed a negative opinion of the situation of minorities (and in particular the Roma) in Serbia. As part of the attributes of a modern nation, 'Gay Pride must become a normal thing' at least on the activists' side (Rabrenović 2015). Elsewhere, the 2015 report by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia highlighted the 'refusal of the Serbian elite to face the consequences of Milošević's policies' and the insufficient 'liberal democratic traditions' that exist in Serbia throughout state and civil society levels. Interestingly, the ruling party (SNS) is not included in the traditionally conservative bloc – comprising political parties (Democratic Party of Serbia, Dveri, Serbian People's Party), intellectual circles, the Serbian Orthodox Church, universities, tycoons and the media (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2016). This view has been one of the driving forces behind the demobilisation of internal opponents and the marginalisation of far-right groups.

Regarding its foreign policy, the decision of the Serbian authorities to embark on a process of normalisation with Kosovo has left observers wary. Rather than a 'Europeanization' process, with foreign experts arguing for placing the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue under the auspices of the EU, the policy shift that took place looked more like bilateral talks based on common interests (pragmatism) and political opportunism rather than 'absorption, adaptation, convergence or identity construction' within the EU-Serbia-Kosovo triangle, which Economides and Ker-Lindsay (2015) theoretically qualify as rational policy and instrumental 'pre-accession Europeanisation' rather than as a process of 'adaptive normative Europeanisation'. Aleksandar Vučić's (updated) position must be put in perspective with his previous statements regarding the territorial integrity of Kosovo. In 2012, he declared that there was a misunderstanding with the EU and that 'Serbia is/was ready to continue the dialogue with Pristina, and that the territorial integrity of Kosovo, mentioned in the enlargement strategy of the EU, means/meant that there is/was no partition of Kosovo' (Danas 2012).[12] In 2015, he declared in the television news that 'it is only together that we can ensure the preservation of the state and national interests, as well as economic prosperity' (Dnevnik 2015).[13]

The break with the last ethno-nationalist vestiges had therefore not yet been finalised. It will come (in part) with the departure of Tomislav Nikolić, a symbolic manner for Aleksandar Vučić to 'kill the father' and, someway, to show his willingness to harmonise his potential with the demands of the time, in new international circumstances.

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12 Istinomer (2018): 'Vučić o Kosovu, nekad i sad', Istinomer (28 August): available at: https://www.istinomer. rs/amnezija/Vučic-o-kosovu-nekad-i-sad/.

13 Istinomer (2018): 'Vučić o Kosovu, nekad i sad', Istinomer (28 August): available at: https://www.istinomer. rs/amnezija/Vučic-o-kosovu-nekad-i-sad/.

2017–2020: Reforms and regional stability backed by a continuous decline in democracy

The most important period in Serbia under the leadership of Aleksandar Vučić was probably 2017–2020. The policy changes that have arisen have been legitimised by stigmatising the Serbian opposition (progressives and modernists vs. 'those stuck in the past'). This made it possible, at a lower cost, to forget the past (or liabilities) of the actors in power and to build a new image closer to the expectations of the international community and more particularly of the EU.

Following the end of the five-year term of Tomislav Nikolić (31 June 2017), newly elected President Aleksandar Vučić put the 'modernization' of Serbia at the forefront of his political agenda. Designating the 'openly gay' Ana Brnabić as Serbia's first female prime minister on 15 June 2017, sent a strong signal to foreign observers, political analysts and EU officials. In her induction speech, she bluntly summed up the country stakes: 'The time before us will show how brave we are to move boundaries', she said. 'Now is the moment to make a step forward and take our society, country and economy into the 21st century' (Gec 2017). This appointment caused a shock wave both within the coalition which governs Serbia, as well as in the conservative/nationalist opposition as among the deputies of the political formation of the Serbian president and within the Orthodox Church (Curovic 2017). The media were the bearers of the 'new order' to be established in Serbia. For instance, the ruling party condemned the explicit hate speech of the Dveri Movement towards the LGBT community. 'Those who falsely advocate for greater family rights by attacking citizens who may have different sexual orientations than them, are showing a naked policy of hatred and intolerance by Bosko Obradovic' the SNS said in a statement (Tanjug, 2017a). Nominating her as the new head of Serbia's government was logically, not to say rationally, imbued with pragmatism: 'I don't care, it's her right, I'm interested in her result. She is a woman who has done a lot for all of us', said the president answering a question about Minister Ana Brnabić's sexual orientation. The LGBT community described the move as a 'historic moment for Serbia' (G.K. 2016).

Her appointment was also aimed at lifting the remnants of ethno-nationalist tendencies linked to the old ethnic divisions between Serbs and Croats. Filip David, the Serbian writer of Jewish origin, warned against rising nationalist tensions between the two countries (see Vurušić 2017). Ana Brnabić is from Stara Baška on the island of Krk in Croatia. Her ('unexpected') nomination was reported by the popular Croatian daily JutarnjiLIST using irony, turns of phrase, figures of speech and implicit references to the conflict between Serbia and Croatia during the dissolution of Yugoslavia: 'She bathed with friends and childhood friends on the Počešna beach not far from the house where she found peace. Until, as in the Partybreakers' "1000 years" song, the cell phone rang

and "a call that changes everything" reached Stara Baška. And the invitation came from the prime minister, but not the Croatian, but the Serbian, Aleksandar Vučić' (Jurković 2017). Curiously, Aleksandar Vučić's decision came only a day after Leo Varadkar, 38, was officially elected prime minister of Ireland, becoming the first openly gay man to hold the post (AFP 2017).

Although it would have been more appropriate to see this decision as a way to move Serbia away from 'intolerance' and 'hatred speeches' rather than a radical change in the course of its history, there has been much criticism, which is, in a way, inevitable. As Berliner Tageszeitung argued, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić supports Gay Pride but only because the EU insists on respect for human rights in the accession negotiations (Roscic 2017). For their part, some LGBT activists consider his appointment as a purely facade commitment and accuse the Serbian president of wanting to 'buy' exemplary behaviour on the issue of homosexual rights, among other things to distance himself from the politics of Russian President Vladimir Putin (Chenouard – Millotte 2017). Compared to Bosnia, it was as a result of strong external pressure that the rights and visibility of LGBT people rose, which in turn led to stronger activism and change; the holding of the first Gay Pride festival appeared to reveal that ethno-nationalist challenges may diminish as (legal) norms relating to LGBT rights are strengthened (Swimelar 2020). Regardless of where the criticism came from, it was a tactical move towards EU standards and the scope of which extended beyond LGBT rights.

The debate on the migrant crisis has provided the ruling party with yet another opportunity to assert its position and move further away from the past. Over the past two decades, the countries of the Danube region have experienced a very significant decline in their population, which could hamper rapprochement with EU member states. World Bank projections suggest that if the Western Balkans maintain an average growth rate of around 3 %, it may take six decades for the region to economically converge with EU member states (Bonomi – Reljić 2017). Moreover, given the prevailing feeling among the population of the Western Balkans that nothing will change, Serbian citizens, as well as their alter egos from other former Yugoslav republics are increasingly willing to emigrate to Western countries in search of a better life and better employment opportunities (Vračić 2018). This is particularly the case of qualified young Serbs as evidenced by the global ranking of countries with the highest 'brain drain'[14]. Radonjić and Bobić (2021) argue that the (massive) emigration of highly skilled individuals considerably weakens local democracy and social cohesion in Serbia. The main conclusion to be drawn from this situation is that

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14 According to the Global Competitiveness Report released by the World Economic Forum in February 2020, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, North Macedonia and Serbia are among the top-ranked countries with the biggest brain-drain in the world (European Western Balkans 2020).

migratory flows and the prolongation of the working life of the active workforce can compensate for this demographic fall (Savić – Dakić 2016).

These observations combined with external pressures led to the unexpected stance taken by Aleksandar Vučić on the migrants' crisis. Responding to citizens' questions on Instagram, the president of Serbia recalled the country's low fertility rate and said salvation is undoubtedly in bringing people to the region, regardless of their nationality, 'so that we may we survive as a nation and as a country' (Beta 2019). On the one hand, these narratives are part of the president's multi-target comparative strategy on 'ethnic underbidding', whether aimed at foreign observers or opposition politicians in Serbia, and in particular the far right which seeks to 'frighten Serbs with migrants'. To criticism from sovereignists and far-right groups concerning Germany and its Chancellor Angela Merkel, whom they consider to be the instigator of such a policy, Aleksandar Vučić replied: 'I do not have the kind of fear of migrants that anyone else in our country has for reasons unknown to me. Some have done the right thing, which is why Angela Merkel is one of the greatest leaders in modern Europe', as reported by srbin.info (2018), a far-right internet portal. This statement could paint a new model for Serbia as a country providing low-skilled labor for large foreign companies that 'will enslave us economically. Instead of solving the core problem with measures to boost birth rates, as well as boosting domestic economic growth, Vučić turns to his mentor from Germany, which needs a cheap workforce in the Balkans to wind cables in their factories, and undoubtedly continues its policy of banking globalization and the whole of the Balkans' according to Dosta je bilo (2019, 2020). The latter, whose name means 'Enough!', is a sovereignist party and has used the debate on the migrant crisis as a springboard for its political leader Saša Radulović, former minister of the economy, to stand in the next elections to Belgrade (Radulović – Prelec 2016). His plans were virtually 'nipped in the bud'. Above all, the issue of migrants has not mobilised much of the opposition, thus revealing a far from unified front. In the end, the ruling party most certainly blurred the lines and opened the door to more conservative positions from the right to the far right whose rhetoric revolved around 'colonization', 'disappearance of Serbia', 'sovereignty' and opposition to globalisation.

On the other hand, his statements may implicitly resonate as a form of resignation from the economic backlog, despite the government's self-righteous speeches about the country's economic development. They thus reflect the structural weaknesses of the internal policy implemented since 2012 with the aim of establishing economic, legal and social conditions similar to those of EU member states.

Aleksandar Vučić's entry into the debate on the migrant crisis (while he may have definitely turned the ethno-nationalist page, at least rhetorically) as well as the appointment of Ana Brnabić have tacitly brought to the fore the old

rhetoric of arguing that Serbia is not master of its own destiny. This is one of Serbia's most powerful cultural peculiarities when it comes to politics. First of all, if they have helped to marginalise the nationalist right (Dveri) and far-right (Naši), these decisions have also stigmatised (not necessarily negatively from the point of view of the population) their recurring narratives which consist of designating 'who backs who'. For example, while his coalition partners reacted in unison, the conservative opposition party accused the new head of state of succumbing to pressure and influence from Washington, and that Brnabić was not at all his choice, but a decision imposed on him by the West (Al Jazeera 2017). The leader of the Dveri, Boško Obradović, said her selection was 'the result and continuation of the policy of the colonial position of our country, continuation of subsidizing foreign companies, sale of economic and natural resources, "leasing of our workers"' (Tanjug 2017b).

Then, under the leadership of Ana Brnabić, what was implicit in 2014/2015 became the recurring theme underlying the relations between Serbia and Kosovo; that is to say, 'whether the presidents of the two countries – Aleksandar Vučić and Hashim Thaci – were conducting secret negotiations on the division of Kosovo' (Karabeg 2018). Such two-sided talks would de facto exclude Federica Mogherini, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs. As reported in various media, the partition of Kosovo did not receive the support of the EU and Germany (Trivić 2018) because this option could cause instability in other countries in the Balkan region, while this option seemed to please Russia (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2018). In short, Ivica Dačić, the head of Serbian diplomacy, probably best summarised the situation: 'We are brought to the point that today the story of the EU cannot be no bait for anyone because it is not about the near future. What can they offer us if we agree with Priština [the capital city of Kosovo]? Entry into the EU? Well, it [EU] can't, there is no EU enlargement. If the EU wanted, all this would take much shorter'[15] (Tanjug 2019).

The point here is that it gives substance to the Serbian government's new foreign policy doctrine on the entire Balkan region which is 'regional stability'. 'Vučić, with the full support of the Serbian government, is trying to find a solution to the decades-long problem in order to ensure long-term peace and stability in Kosovo and Metohija, mainly for Serbian citizens', said Ana Brnabić (Beta 2018)[16]. The backlash from the shift from 'reforms' to 'stability' led local experts, politicians and foreign analysts to qualify the political system set up by Aleksandar Vučić as a 'stabilocracy', that is to say 'stability before democracy': 'Vučić enjoys the support of Brussels and Chancellor Angela Merkel, despite the

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15 During that interview, he also replied to those who argue that he is a 'Russian man': 'They are fools. I am neither a Russian nor an American man. I only work for Serbia. But I am in a position that whenever we have a problem, I can rely on my brother Sergei Lavrov' (Tanjug 2019).

16 This declaration alone deserves a full-fledged analysis because it refers specifically to 'Kosovo and Metochia' which implies a Serbian province and not an independent state.

fact that media freedom and the rule of law in Serbia have been receiving poor marks in European Commission reports for years, not to mention democratic culture and political communication... Vučić is allowed to develop an autocratic regime as long as he does his regional homework...' (Roščić 2017). Kapidžić (2020) added that the democratic decline in Serbia as well as in other countries of the Western Balkans and in the former Yugoslav republics is based on common causes stemming from the weak institutions and practices of governance inherited from the past which preserve executive dominance, favouritism and informality. In a way, this observation foreshadowed the shift that occurred in 2020 during/or thanks to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2020 Onward: towards growing authoritarianism

The year 2020, under the pandemic gaze, was as important as 2017, reflecting a kind of 'headlong rush', and during which it became relatively clear that 'Vučić is using the coronavirus to strengthen his influence' (Beta 2020). The impression left by this very particular year, as a conclusion of the period that began in 2012, is that the political establishment was finally looking for a political identification and motives which in turn generated momentum and established requirements.

Daily television performances began with the 6:00 p. m. briefing where local medical experts (grouped together as a 'crisis team' or *krizni štab*) gave regular updates, apologising for not being used to talk to media while acknowledging that they (journalists) are deemed necessary, to finally announce the arrival of specialists from China who have come to share their experience and knowledge on how to fight COVID-19. The rhetoric of viewing journalists as 'the enemies of the state' seems to not only be the prerogative of President Donald Trump's political communication but a worldwide communication pattern for populist leaders across the globe (Kulić 2020). Moreover, the president presenting himself as 'the savior of the nation', updated some sort of hegemonic project. Furthermore, stamping the Serbs who returned from abroad as 'immigrants', held the characteristics of an illiberal method that violates the autonomy and dignity of the person (Glasius 2018). These discursive practices may reverse the course of history and revive the backward principle of the governing role of the (Communist) Party, when party organs and those of the state were inseparable.

The pandemic somewhat appears as the epitome of an episode that started in 2012 when the SNS came to power. Many observers prefer to remember the very first words of Aleksandar Vučić as Serbia's prime minister during a party meeting held on 21 October 2013: 'We do not hide that our objective is and I will say it openly in front of you this Evening for the first time, our goal is for Serbia to become a full member of the European Union by 2020, and we will accomplish this task. And you know, unlike the others, when we say we're going to do our

job, then that's for sure'.[17] Two years later, his declaration in Bratislava about EU membership ('Serbia is a full member of the EU until 2020!') was commented upon very positively: 'We deserve to enter the EU. We have done a lot, and we will do a lot more. We trust Prime Minister Vučić, because he does what he promises and proves what he has proven many times!' (Fonet 2015). Following the June 2020 parliamentary elections, it was expected that the European Commission reports on Serbia and Montenegro would not be positive. They weren't. Moreover, the health crisis was the backdrop for a verbal escalation, particularly between the government and the EU, in reality reflecting the true state of the country in terms of the rule of law, (weak) media freedom and human rights violations (see Stojanović 2020). One of the Serbian president's declarations probably went unnoticed in 2017 although it summarises state's ideological recomposition with an implicit reference to the Kosovo issue: 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics means something very important – that China preserves its independence, its foreign policy and sovereign state', he said (Beta 2017)[18].

Thus, the Serbian political elite, through a set of top-down narratives, has (re)constructed, at least implicitly, the imagined East ideologically, politically, economically and socially, thus bringing back to the political and public arenas old categorisations and associated stereotypes. The popular German daily newspaper DW recently put the appointment of Ana Brnabić back on the front of the stage. The title of the article 'Ana Brnabić: A female leader who is unlikely to change history', contrasted with some of the positive headlines in the foreign press, published after she was nominated as prime minister of Serbia in 2017. The narrative style used left no doubt about how wide the gap is between expectations ('nothing like a typical Balkan politician', 'change', 'the Conservative Balkan nation') and reality ('just another team player in Aleksandar Vučić's well-trained squad with no actual power', 'same mindset as her close ally, Aleksandar Vučić') (Kljajic 2021).

Does it signal a return to nationalist behaviours? 'Virulent nationalism', that which 'rejects the status quo and seeks to reaffirm the will of a community imagined in a political or cultural space' (Bieber 2018b: 2) is (still) the prerogative of several groups of right-wing extremists since the start of the new millennium (see Jovanović 2018). Given the qualitative and quantitative makeup of the opposition in the Serbian parliament, the current political regime could hardly be called 'competitive authoritarianism', the very one that dominated the Western Balkan countries throughout the 1990s (see Bieber 2018a). Under the pretext of fighting the pandemic, the political elite has actually aligned the Serbian national project with authoritarian Chinese nationalism (Tournois 2021). The fight

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17 See https://www.istinomer.rs/izjava/nisam-rekao-da-cemo-sigurno-u-eu-do-2020/.

18 He also pointed out that China always makes decisions independently and in accordance with international law, which may tacitly refer to the bombing of Serbia as a sovereign state in 1999 and the self-determined independence of Kosovo in 2008.

against the pandemic has also shaped a new form of 'exclusionary nationalism' (Bieber 2020) which has materialised in prejudice against certain groups of Serbian citizens. It recalls a historical lesson that could be drawn from the case of Yugoslavia, namely that the national question in itself is a phenomenon which arises in particular circumstances and that 'nationalist sentiment' is generally motivated by political considerations (see Vladisavljević 2007).

A necessary perspective

As a preamble to the conclusion and before delineating future research directions, I aim to briefly put the findings into a comparative perspective articulated around opposition parties in Serbia.

One of the pillars of the regime's 'ideological recomposition' lies in the strategy of 'demonizing' the opposition and its supporters, treating it practically as a 'systemic error', a 'necessary evil' that must be tolerated in the name of European integration (Štavljanin 2019). The end of 2019 witnessed an 'old-new' component added to this strategy that is victimisation. While the opposition 'draws a difference between themselves and a decent Serbia that wants to talk about roads, salaries, pensions, work', Aleksandar Vučić stressed that its leaders use a similar methodology as in the past in the magazine Identitet[19], which had the front page 'Djindjić on the target of a lone sniper' (Politika 2019). The low turnout in the 2020 legislative elections would nevertheless suggest that the recurring negative campaign against opponents could have negatively influenced individuals' perceptions of political effectiveness, confidence in the regime and the community's general attitude (Lau – Sigelman – Rovner 2007). On the other hand, some analysts are more critical of the Serbian opposition itself because 1) it ultimately differs little from the ruling elite in terms of the content of their program, albeit general[20], and 2) its achievements are recorded in the biography of its leaders who regularly 'rebrand' themselves as the saying goes: 'old faces in a new wrapper' (*stara lica u novom pakovanju*). While opposition party politics were partly responsible for the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević's regime in October 2000 (see Bieber 2003), in its current 'form' it failed to seriously threaten the governments that followed one another after 2012, but it also paved the way for the election and re-election of Aleksandar Vučić. As it presents itself today in Serbia (and, by extension, in the Balkans in general), political competition deserves a closer examination and in particular its influence (or not) on the attitudes of public opinion *vis-à-vis* the political establishment but also concerning more specific themes such as national identity, the state of democracy, etc.

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19 'Identitet' means 'Identity'. It is the journal of the Montenegrin diaspora.

20 Interestingly, while Serbian opposition use the term 'so-called Kosovo', state narratives mention 'Kosovo and Metohija' (Beta 2018), both players de facto do not recognise the independence of the (former) Serbian province.

The corollary of this strategy is control of the media combined with a gradual and increasing censorship of (almost) any negative commentary on the decisions of Aleksandar Vučić. For example, between 1 December 2020 and 31 January 2021, 'the Serbian president was positively represented up to 82.6 percent of the time on TV channels that use the national broadcast frequency, and at the same time he has never been presented in a negative context', according to the Bureau of Social Research (BIRODI) (Nova.rs 2021). Even Slobodan Milošević, who had won the elections for the Serbian Federal Presidency and then for the Federal Presidency of Yugoslavia, while harassing opposition movements, had never established a 'full-fledged dictatorship' (McFaul 2005). In Republika Srpska (a Serbian enclave in Bosnia and Herzegovina), thanks to the international community, journalists stressed that there was no lynching and targeting of political dissidents, as is the case in Serbia (Direktno 2020). In short, the complete occupation of media and political spaces by the ruling elite, supported by a structurally weak and divided opposition, has not only prevented democratic development but has also regressed Vučić's/Serbia's regime type to competitive authoritarianism (Castaldo 2020). As a result, the government ultimately alienated both EU and Serbian citizens given the low turnout in parliamentary elections, the lack of credible alternatives to the ruling party and suspicions of fraud.

Conclusion

Forced democratisation without the necessary institutional structures might best sum up Serbia's trajectory over the past two decades. It has to be traced back to the very early post-Milošević days when expectations were very high about the creation of the preconditions for the transformation from authoritarian order to democratic order. Indeed, Sekelj (2001: 95) highlighted that the government that followed gradually abandoned the very process of structural transformation of the system and 'instead it followed the rules of the game of the system that it inherited, it placed its own people in important offices and put the state, media and institutions under its control'. This argument reverberates the blunt comments about Serbia made by former German diplomat Gudrun Steinacker.[21] To a certain extent, Aleksandar Vučić's political style both borrows from and opposes the German conservatism of Greiffenhagen (1979) with the starting postulate that particular institutional structures (authoritarian institutions as opposed to democratic institutions) predetermine the political and social life. From 2017 to 2020, there would be the idea of an 'organic' conception of state and society with some form of loyalty. The year 2020 has come to contradict these principles and illustrate a firm 'absolutist' drift and the replacement of

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21 See https://www.dw.com/sr/balkanom-vladaju-kleptokrate-uz-blagoslov-eu/a-54315153.

the old institutions (at this stage, the map of political parties elected to the Serbian parliament in June 2020) by 'a rational structure designed for the benefit and effective functioning of a new artificial political machine' (Greiffenhagen 1979: 611) which ultimately contradicts the national project to rebuild Serbian society along modern lines. Actually, in a constant dialectic between being and acting, the post-communist state that has been shaped during this period combines autocratic, (domestically) fractious and personalistic ideals as defined by Grzymala-Busse and Luong (2002).

The preceding discussion questions the perspective to be adopted in order to provide a more in-depth analysis of the political situation in Serbia and thus opens the door to additional investigations. The starting point is to consider that placing excessive hopes in the leaders and political parties of a country and neglecting the crucial role of a 'truly autonomous' civil society can be a source of great frustrations, as de Souza (2020) has pointed out, taking the example of post-Mandela South Africa. Citizens' protests that have taken place across Serbia under the slogan 'One in five million' support this argument. They showed that many Serbs were unhappy with the situation, but/and what started out as a 'walk with a purpose' made up of ordinary people died out as the opposition gradually joined the march until it finally took the lead[22]. The massive demonstrations which then took place in several cities in June 2020 during the legislative elections, exhibited that heterogeneous groups of individuals interacted, sometimes brutally, with various and occasionally opposing demands, calling into question the (non-)existence of a collective identity and illustrate the 'ambiguities inherent in the relationship between the singularity of a personal identity and the multiplicity of social identities that can be carried by a person' (Calhoun 1991: 59). This suggests that the 'new national project' initiated by Aleksandar Vučić since his first term in office has confused and fragmented Serbian society (or *drustvo*). Therefore, investigating how identity convergence and divergence intertwine and affect the trajectory of protest movements (e.g. Stoecker 1995) in contemporary Serbia, may provide additional insights into the shaping of collective action compared to the 1990s–2000s period.

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22 I have been watching them every weekend during the Winter period. Whenever it was snowing or cold, these protests released a positive energy that was not politically articulated. It vanished when it started to be instrumentalized and turned into a sort of electoral fair.

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POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE welcomes reviews of recently published books (i.e. those published in the year in which the current issue of *Politics in Central Europe* was published or in the previous year). Authors should submit reviews of works relating to political science and other social sciences with the themes focused on (East) Central European issues.

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:
- A book review should not exceed 1,500 words
- State clearly the name of the author(s), the title of the book (the subtitle, if any, should also be included), the place of publication, the publishing house, the year of publication and the number of pages.
- 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.

Contributors of review essays should meet the following requirements:
- A review essay should not exceed 6,000 words. It should also comply with all of the above requirements for book reviews
- Authors may either review several books related to a common topic, or provide a review essay of a single book considered to provide an exceptional contribution to the knowledge in a given field of research
- 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.