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The Orbán regime as the 'perfect autocracy': The emergence of the 'zombie democracy' in Hungary

ATTILA ÁGH

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Abstract: *All ECE countries have covered the same historical trajectory of 'the third--generation autocracy', but Hungary has been reaching its 'perfection', since the two--thirds, constitutional supermajority in the Hungarian case has allowed for the Orbán regime to complete this 'reverse wave' in all fields of society and turning it into a zombie democracy. The conceptual frame of this paper is that the decline of democracy and the turn to autocratisation can be presented in ECE in the three big stages of the Easy Dream, Chaotic Democracy and Neoliberal Autocracy in the three corresponding decades. The paper concentrates on the third stage in its three shorter periods taking 3–4 years as the De-Democratisation, Autocratisation and De-Europeanisation. The Hungarian case has been presented in this paper in a comparative ECE view as its worst-case scenario that also sheds light on the parallel developments in the fellow ECE countries.*

Key words: ***autocratisation and De-Europeanisation, zombie democracy and zombie EU membership in Hungary***

Introduction

As the point of departure this paper offers a historical overview of the autocratisation in a comparative ECE view in the last thirty years, indicating the contours of this backsliding from a basically weak and chaotic democracy to a modernised autocracy. In this historical process there has been a change of focus in the democracy studies in general and in the ECE states in particular, from the democratisation to the autocratisation as the ruling paradigm. With

the emerging autocratisation the change of paradigms between the democracy studies and the 'autocracy studies' has also been completed. In the third stage of the ECE developments by the early 2020s the systemic features of the new autocracies have been summarised in a new concept of the third-generation autocracies, focusing on the new ECE autocracies in their increasing confrontation with the EU mainstream (see V-Dem, 2021, Lührmann, 2021, Merkel and Lührmann, 2021).[1]

In the great outlines, after the first two decades there was a general feeling of deception in ECE, and the scientific perception of the crisis led to the recognition of the common ECE failures in the Europeanisation and Democratisation process by discussing the naïve hopes in the first stage and the resentment in the second stage in the chaotic early democracies. The ECE developments were discussed more and more in the 'crisis studies', while the new turn to autocratisation was described and systematised in the 2010s. As it will be presented in a comparative ECE framework in the Hungarian case, the ECE development began in the nineties in the *Easy Dream* stage with the expectation to 'Return to Europe' in a quick process, but its failure was felt already in the second stage of the *Chaotic Democracy*, especially during the global financial crisis in the 2000s. The ECE failure in the catching-up process in the EU with the increasing social polarisation produced the sharp turn in the early 2010s to the stage of the *Neoliberal Autocracy* that will be analysed in its three shorter periods. The first period of the *De-Democratisation* was 'destructive', since the constitutional foundations of democracy were attacked in ECE, and actually ruined in the Hungarian case. In the second period there was a rise of elected autocracies around the mid-2010s as *Autocratisation* with a 'constructive' process of laying the foundation of a new polity through the oligarchisation based on the politico-business networks in the formal and informal institutions. The shaky consolidation of these new autocracies since the late 2010s has deepened the Core-Periphery Divide that has produced an open confrontation of the ECE countries with the EU in the third period of *De-Europeanisation*. However, as this paper tries to argue in the Conclusion, the ongoing triple global crisis has provoked a creative crisis in the EU history with radical changes in the EU. This new turn in the EU has given a good opportunity for the *new systemic change* in ECE to the sustainable democracies in the 2020s.

1 The theory of the third-generation autocracy in ECE, described in three stages and three periods, has been elaborated in my 'parallel' paper *Third wave of autocracy in East-Central Europe* (in the *Journal of Comparative Politics*, 2022), see also my recent books (Ágh, 2019a,2021) and papers (Ágh, 2016, 2019b, 2020a, b). The current 'decline of democracy' literature, see for instance Bayer and Wanat (2021), Berman (2021), Coman and Volintiru (2021), Ghodsee and Orenstein (2021), Higgins (2021), Kochenov and Dimitrovs (2021), Lovec et al. (2021), Maurice (2021), Sabatini and Berg (2021), Scheiring (2020) and Waldner and Lust (2018) cannot be discussed here in detail, but they have been taken into consideration in this paper.

In this regional approach, this paper points out in a comparative framework that Hungary has been the classical or model negative case in this controversial transformation process of autocratisation. The Orbán regime has completed the state capture in these three periods, and it has performed the political capture of all social fields in several steps as a 'stealthy putsch', so the Hungarian case offers itself for the deeper analysis of the autocratisation. The special analysis of Hungary – 'the country I know best' – as a *zombie democracy* provides a concept of the comparative autocratisation in the Eastern periphery of the EU. This concept – by continuously comparing it with the fellow ECE countries – gives the hope of provoking a discussion on this topic. Finally, this reconceptualisation leads to the conclusion about the ongoing radical reforms of the EU in the recent management of the triple global crisis, which not only offers, but in fact necessitates the *redemocratisation* in ECE. [2]

The Hungarian blind alley to the perfect autocratisation in the 2010s

This paper argues that Hungary has been the worst-case scenario in ECE with the crazy ride to autocratisation, and turning away from the road to Europeanisation and Democratisation through the above mentioned three periods. The Orbán regime has been conquering the full power not by one attack, as in the traditional case of power change, but in a long process of 'coup d'état', while maintaining the democratic façade for the regime. It has occupied the power positions in several domains one after another, and finally it has reached the 'perfect' autocracy by completely ruining all democratic mechanisms, the checks and balances system in the legal, social and cultural fields. The three consecutive elections in the 2010s have produced a parliamentary, constitution-making *supermajority* for the Orbán regime to finish this *stealthy putsch*, in which the consecutive elections have also been the major turning points in these three periods of autocratisation. This supermajority has facilitated the full 'society capture' by completing the stages of the state/economy/culture capture. At the same time this has also been a continuous process of institution-building through these critical turning points, which have opened step by step a new field of action to occupy the next vital territory of society.[3]

In the main outlines, this new systemic change of the autocratisation began with the landslide electoral victory of Fidesz in 2010 because in the late 2000s –

2 This short summary only introduces the main concepts and terms widely discussed in the parallel paper mentioned above, which is actually the first part of the longer paper, and this paper can be considered as the second part.

3 Hungary has been qualified by many experts as the worst-case scenario in ECE (see Ágh, 2016). This paper adds that the long process of a stealthy putsch has been completed in the early 2020s by the full social capture in the recent 'cultural war'. The term zombie democracy has appeared for the complete decline of democracy, see *The Economist* (2013) and, recently, Roth (2021)

due to the socio-economic crisis – there was a deep fatigue and a shocking deception in the Hungarian population. It resulted in the collapse of the chaotic and weak democracy by the political tsunami of the neopopulist Fidesz winning 52.73 % of votes and 68.13 % of parliamentary seats Since then, the Orbán governments have concocted a manipulative electoral legislation to craft a constitutional majority repeatedly through 'democratic' elections. The general background of this process has been the parliamentary supermajority, through which everything has become 'legal', since Fidesz could make all kinds of legislations in a very short time – including a series of the Constitution's amendments – in order to turn all violations of democracy to 'legal'. As a start, the Orbán regime introduced a new Constitution in the traditionalist-nativist style, called Basic Law. It was not mentioned by Fidesz in the 2010 election campaign, and was not followed by any popular discussion and plebiscite in order to confirm it and to give legitimacy to it. There has been, however, so far nine amendments of this Basic Law that has always been changed according to the given political situation. The electoral system has also been changed several times, and the social and financial preconditions for the fair electoral campaign in a free media have been removed. These elections have remained *free* at the very formal level, but basically less and less *fair*, due to both the distortion of electoral law and to the dominant media capacity of the Orbán regime to influence the voters.[4]

The masterminded legislation for the unfair, manipulated elections started by the incoming Orbán government, abusing its two-thirds majority, and changing the rules of elections very often, even right before the 2014 parliamentary elections. As the evaluation of these manipulative, unfair elections, Scheppele has noted that "Orbán's constitutional majority – which will allow him to govern without constraint – was made possible only by a series of legal changes unbecoming a proper democracy… Remove any one of them and the two-thirds crumbles." And she continued with a warning: "The European Union imagines itself as a club of democracies, but now must face the reality of a Potemkin democracy in its midst. The EU is now going into its own parliamentary elections, after which it will have to decide whether Hungary still qualifies to be a member of the club" (Scheppele, 2014: 17, see also 2015).[5]

This façade or Potemkin democracy leading to the perfect autocracy with an almighty legislative and executive power gives the specificity of the Hungarian case. The Big Reverse Wave began in 2010, and these three consecutive elections (2010, 2014 and 2018) – won with the two-thirds majority by Fidesz –

4 On the Hungarian developments see for instance Buzogány and Varga (2019), CIVICO Europa (2020), Coakley (2021), CoE (2020b, 2021a), Csehi (2019, 2021), Csehi and Zgut (2020), Glied (2020) and Scheiring (2020). There are many joint analyses about Hungary and Poland, see Cianetti et al. (2018), Csehi and Zgut (2020), Cianetti et al. (2018), Theuns (2020) and Varga and Buzogány (2020).

5 The unfair, manipulated elections have been described by Scheppele (2014 and 2015), see also the very critical OSCE (2014) and Council of Europe (CoE, 2020a, b and 2021a, b) Reports.

give the three periods of the Orbán regime, reaching its 'perfection' in the early 2020s. In the first case, at the 2010 elections, the mass discontent with the failed Europeanisation and with the pernicious social polarisation ruined the former chaotic democracy. Hungary – with Poland – was the trendsetter in ECE in the late eighties, therefore the expectation for Europeanisation and Democratisation after the systemic change in 1989 as a convergence dream was very high in Hungary. Consequently, the deception was also very high, the highest among the new member states, resulting in the collapse of the chaotic democracy at the 2010 elections. This popular discontent already came to the surface in 2006 with the mass demonstrations against the government, and it was deepening year by year, mostly due to the global fiscal crisis starting in 2008. Finally, the new wave of discontent led to this collapse of the weak democracy in the 2010 elections. Altogether, there has been a process of the new systemic change in three big steps from the *political* through the *socio-economic* to the *cultural* capture to complete this new systemic change by the quasi-full *social capture*.

From the point of view of the big social subsystems, these three periods – De-Democratisation, Autocratisation and De-Europeanisation – have followed the logic of a masterplan by capturing the political power in the related fields. This cumulative process of the extended state capture or the consecutive state/economy/culture capture has not been a 'spontaneous' process at all, since the political capture in the *first* period gave the legal means of *De-Democratisation* for the new political elite. By changing the free and fair elections to the unfair elections in a basically pre-programed fake system was fatally damaging the democracy. It was a conscious process with a masterplan, conquering the basics of political power in both the formal and informal institutions in the first four years. In the *second* four years – in the *Autocratisation* period of the system building – the second electoral victory allowed for the autocratic elite to occupy all chief positions in the economy and society by 'privatising' them. This oligarchisation took place within the pyramid of politically arranged redistribution across the whole society as a systematic catch of the socio-economic control. It started earlier at the state and/or the central government level to prepare the next step of the social transformation/polarisation according to the logic of this power pyramid based on the politico-business networks. Finally, the Orbán regime has managed in the *third* period to complete the process of social capture in the cultural life, which has also meant a fierce attack on the EU, on the European rules and values in the recent *De-Europeanisation* period. The Orbán regime has engaged in the 'cultural war' – usually called Kulturkampf – for the quasi-full control of the media and by occupying the universities and other cultural/scientific institutions in order to control the minds of citizens through the education/socialisation in the cultural/academic scenery and in media/communication systems.

All in all, for the more detailed overview of the historical itinerary, the Orbán government in the *first* 'destructive' period made a complete overhaul of the legal-political system for the rule of the hegemonic party. Basically, the Orbán government fundamentally weakened the checks and balances system, and replaced the heads of all constitutional institutions – Constitutional Court (AB), State Audit Office (ÁSZ), Chief Prosecutor's Office (FH) and National Tax Office (NAV) – with loyal Fidesz party soldiers. The main political weapon of this overextending 'state party' as Golem party was the legal instrumentalism of the state machinery, using the legal rules for direct political purposes, since the two-thirds majority was in fact a constitutional-making majority, and therefore all the anti-democratic actions of the Orbán government were strictly made 'legal'. This process of converting all former democratic rules through the majoritarian 'democratic' legal mechanisms into non-democratic rules in the first period can be termed democracy capture, since it meant turning the basic democratic institutions into a mere façade or simply to a 'fig-leaf'. Thus, the Fidesz-Golem reregulated the entire Hungarian legal system in this constitutional coup d'état by abusing the parliamentary supermajority for the hostile takeover of the leading positions in the constitutional institutions. This systemic change in the polity – laying the foundations of the autocratic regime in the institutions – also included the programme for the takeover of the media rule through a new repressive law, right at the beginning of this process of de-democratisation by turning to a new system termed officially as 'illiberal democracy' (Orbán, 2014).

The deviation from EU norms and from the EU mainstream development was already evident in the first period, still with some efforts to pay lip service to the EU about democracy and EU values. The EU often mentioned 'the red line' in the rule of law violations, but it proved to be empty rhetoric already in the early 2010s. Actually, crossing this red line by drastically violating the rule of law has been tolerated for more than one decade within the EU. The first indication of the serious violation of rule of law by the Orbán regime was documented in the Tavares Report in 2013, voted by the EP with a large majority, but leading no sanctions. After the Tavares Report many observers noted, "As for Hungary, how much tolerance should Europe show towards the wayward behaviour of one of its members with respect to democratic norms and human rights?" (Tsoukalis, 2014: 58). In the same way, the international ranking institutions recognised this start of the new systemic change in Hungary: 'Events in Hungary in 2010 demonstrated that the positive trajectory of democratic development cannot be taken for granted, within the new member states in particular. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party used the two-thirds parliamentary majority it won in April 2010 elections to push through a number of measures that were viewed as clear challenges to the country's system of democratic accountability' (FH, 2011: 7, see also later FH, 2021a, b). This statement leads back to the Hungarian

worst-case scenario, since the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) later issued another strong statement that 'Some negative trends have recently worsened. Hungary is perhaps the prime example among the EU's new member states in the region. Since winning a two-thirds parliamentary majority in the 2010 elections, the centre-right Fidesz party has systematically taken over the country's previously independent institutions' (EIU, 2015: 22–23).

In the s*econd* 'constructive' period between 2014 and 2018, right after the 2014 elections, Orbán made an often-quoted official announcement on the 'illiberal democracy' that meant a programme of the full autocratisation by the extension of the power grab from politics to the economy and society. While in the first period the emphasis was on the big formal institutions in the emerging centralised autocratic system, in the second period – based on these almighty formal institutions – the emphasis was shifted to the informal socio-economic and civil institutions. It enabled them to conquer the economic power, and through it also the social power by building the big socio-political dependency pyramid among the population controlled by the politico-economic elite. The oligarchisation brought in a radical change in economy and society based on *systemic* corruption regulated by the political elite. It means politically organised procurements by turning the EU's resources and the state funds to the friendly oligarchs as the mechanism of the institutionalised corruption through closed channels, but all actions were formally legalised. This economic capture had a direct extension to society through this redistribution pyramid, building an extensive social network. Hence, in this period the emphasis was on controlling the whole population through a socio-economic dependency system. It proceeded as stretching out the political capture to the institutions on the other fields, including the government managed owner-changes in the media, by creating the *parallel* state with the drastic intervention of the market's workings, too. There was a wave of (re)nationalisation of many enterprises, and vice versa, giving them to the friendly oligarchs through the (re)privatisation of these state assets. With this interdependence this joint socio-economic and political dependency system produced a new meaning for both the nationalisation and privatisation, since in fact the state was *privatised* by the political elite and the huge properties of friendly oligarchs actually were '*statised*', that is state controlled by the central political elite, by the small group of leaders around Orbán.

This *parallel* state – sometimes also called *background* state – introduced a strange mixture of the public and private, a modern form of the party state in the neoliberal autocracy built on the systematic and hierarchical political favouritism for those who are politically connected to Fidesz through the formal or informal party membership. In the second period, however, the *deep* state was also built by removing all kinds of the genuine self-governance, although keeping their democratic façade, but actually conquering and emptying them.

This process concerned first of all the lower levels of public administration from power by drastic centralisation of the county and local self-governments. Also, all kinds of interest organisations were marginalised and disempowered, especially the trade unions. This direct control of public/civil and private/interest organisations was masterminded, then executed by the formal legislation, furthermore it was supported by the economic restrictions and personal intimidations against the outsiders. Hence all of them worked through the channels of personal dependencies in the centralised network of political dependencies. With the decline of professionalisation, the parallel state caused poor governance at the national level due to the overwhelming political interests in all state decisions/actions of the party nomenclature. Still the deep state was more painful for the citizens at the local level because the legal security was missing in this model of neoliberal autarky with the 'strong power above – anarchy below' in the power pyramid. This anarchy was increased by the serious attacks on civil society, stigmatising the most active organisations as foreign agents. At the level of the NGOs versus QUANGOs, there was also a big effort to marginalise the genuine institutions versus the fake ones that presented the democratic façade for the government controlled civil society. It was a shadow oligarchisation at the civil society level in the closed political patronage system, controlled by the big government and super-ministries with many state secretaries and government commissioners under strict personal dependence, actually in a one-man rule, both formal and informal.

Altogether, this declining democracy as 'populism from above' tended in the *second* period towards a new kind of authoritarian rule, and Hungary indeed became an elected autocracy after the fake elections in 2014. The reasons for the new electoral victory were clear, since the supermajority was preprogramed in the new electoral law with huge preferences for the big party in many ways, including gerrymandering. There was just one round of elections in the new electoral system in order to avoid the alliances of opposition in the second round. Instead of the dominance of proportional results on the party lists, there were more places for MPs from the individual districts. Thus, a huge contrast was produced at the 2014 and 2018 elections between the electoral support of Fidesz and the size of its parliamentary majority. In 2014 the Orbán regime received only 44.87 % of votes that gave 66.83 % of seats, and in 2018 49.27 % also giving 66.83 % of seats, in both cases the safe supermajority. It means that taking the participation in the elections into account (60.09 % and 70.22 %), in 2014 somewhat less than one third of the population and in 2018 slightly more than one third of the population gave a supermajority to Fidesz in this electoral system. Still afterwards, the Orbán regime referred all the time to representing the large majority of Hungarians. All these formal events were combined with the pressure of the personal dependence in the new power pyramid for the population, above all in the countryside, and reported under the

quasi-monopoly of media by the government. Already no popular resistance was possible in the formal-legal system because the checks and balances system was destroyed on the top. The central constitutional institutions were conquered and fully packed with Fidesz appointees, usually for 9 or 12 years in office – including the National Electoral Board with a wide range of competences – in order to monopolise these institutions for the long run.

In many publications the term of hybrid regime has become accepted for these Potemkin democracies with a double face, that is for the polities with an institutional/constitutional democratic façade, but actually with a tough autocratic system behind. With some reservations the 'hybridisation' term may even be applied to the first government cycle between 2010 and 2014, since the Orbán regime had the full capacity of the voluntaristic legislation for the 'de--democratisation' already in this first period. In the vast international literature Bozóki and Hegedűs have focused on the Hungarian case and they have pointed out (2018: 1173,1175) that the declining democracies 'can be best described along a continuum' between 'liberal democracies and totalitarian regimes'. Moreover, they have emphasised that the 'unique features' of the Orbán regime have made it into 'a new subcategory of hybrid regimes', which have to be analysed in comparison with Poland. Indeed, the autocratic feature of the Orbán regime has been dominant from the very beginning, with the well decorated democratic façade and the increasing democracy capture from the top, but after the first fake elections in 2014 it clearly deserves more the title of elected autocracy. The second period meant a new phase in emptying the democracy and the extension of government power to all layers of political administration, since it produced a new quality in the disempowerment of citizens. However, to take this second step the Orbán regime needed a fake legitimation, provided by the constant reference to the danger of the mass invasion of migrants, in order to create a new enemy and to launch a mass mobilisation against it. During the second period the refugee crisis gave the opportunity for it, and the bugaboo of migrants was the chosen enemy of the Orbán regime to fight against. In 2015 the Orbán regime introduced the emergency situation, which has regularly been renewed and it is still valid.

The hysterical campaign against the migrants dominated in the government--controlled media, marginalised all other problems in the public mind and it served also as the first occasion to confront publicly the EU. The Fidesz propaganda machinery coined the slogan of 'the freedom fight against the EU colonisation' and mobilised a series of mass demonstrations against the EU, allegedly because of the EU's intention to force its migration policy upon Hungary. This mass mobilisation for the anti-EU demonstrations was organised by Fidesz through the Civic Unity Forum (CÖF) financed by the Orbán government, as the fist of Fidesz to rule the streets by mass demonstrations and in order to show 'the popular will'. The refugee crisis was the main media legitimacy device of the

Orbán regime with an enemy picture to turn attention away from the increasing autocratisation, which already indicated the shift of emphasis in the political system from hard to soft power.

The media capture was the main road for the de-democratisation and autocratisation by soft power. The colonisation of media began immediately after the entry of the Orbán government in 2010 with a new media law, as a move to soft power, parallel with the radical actions in hard power, by passing the new Constitution and transforming the basic institutions. In the first period the incoming Orbán regime used the *formal* political power of government turning public media to party media. They established a new forum of state control about the media in general by creating a powerful Media Council consisting of well-disciplined Fidesz actors. In addition, the effort to create a new dominant narrative goes back to the late 2000s when Fidesz established a system of pseudo-scientific institutions – like the House of Terror – as factories for the politics of historical memory in the turn to the traditionalist-nativist narrative for reinventing-rewriting history. In the early 2010s the capture of public media was combined with launching Fidesz-prone websites producing content for their political messages. The establishment of the cultural and ideology lie factories for the traditionalist-nativist narrative has been based on the specific historical 'Hungarian identity'.

In the second period to conquer the remaining media or to supress it, and establishing also new media centres by – seemingly – independent media actors the Orbán regime switched more and more to the use of its increasing *informal* economic power of the market. It has controlled the media not only legally, but also financially by direct subsidies and huge government payments for advertisements as well as from the friendly oligarchs to support these fake media actors. Népszabadság, the independent daily, was killed by 'market' methods, since the new owner purchased it and closed it down in October 2016. In this period the reference to the 'market' was just the democratic façade in conquering the media. The role of the market was just a constant argument against criticism when the control by the friendly oligarchs was extended to new media outlets. The coronation of this tendency of creating a quasi-monopoly in the Hungarian media was the establishment of Central European Press and Media Foundation (KESMA) uniting about five hundred media outlets across the country. It came officially only on 11 September 2018, after the next electoral victory of Fidesz, but it had already been prepared step by step in the second period. Paradoxically, the establishment of KESMA was a bad joke about the 'market', since this move uncovered that the 'private' was in fact 'public' when the true Fidesz oligarchs offered their media firms *for free* to create a huge media mogul in this centralised media realm, serving as the quasi-monopolistic media actor.

Actually, KESMA indicated the entry to the third period with the quasi-monopoly of the Orbán regime in the Hungarian media. It has only allowed

for some independent media organs at the national level, but not in the most popular media outlets or at the local level. After the closing of Népszabadság, the Orbán regime in fact banned the most popular oppositional radio station (Klubrádió) too. On the government side a complete ministry has been organised as the Prime Ministerial Cabinet, called by the people 'Propaganda Ministry' that may be better called the central fake news factory or even the lie factory. This institution has regularly produced sophisticated and systematised lies by presenting an alternative/fictive world by verbal magic issued from the lie factories for the mobilisation of Fidesz believers, first of all in the countryside. The media story already indicates that in the same way as both the 'public' (state) and 'private' (civil) have lost their (former) meaning and they have been turned into a strange autocratic mixture, the same political process has taken place both in the formal and informal institutions. The formal institutions are supposed to be stable and long-lasting that can be changed only by a serious legal procedure, while the informal institutions are allegedly easily changeable. However, in the Hungarian neoliberal autocracy all things are upside down, since the big formal institutions are almost 'liquid', easily and quickly changeable by the parliamentary supermajority, absolutely legally, while the basic informal institutions, first of all the ruling politico-business networks, are stable and resilient. Actually, the same strange autocratic mixture – which has been overviewed above in the case of public--private economic sectors – also appears in the cultural sector. The big public cultural institutions have been 'privatised' and ruled with an 'easy go round' sequence between the Fidesz party leaders, under the direct personal/private command of Orbán himself.

The conquer of media and the cultural sector has produced a strange mixture of public and private, with constant transition between the two realms. The state institutions have created their private dependencies, since the EU resources in this kleptocracy have also become 'privatised' through the closed system of public procurement. So are the access processes to the state funds at all levels, like to the top positions in many cultural organisations. Almost everything which looks public turns out to be private and vice versa. What remains outside this realm of the neoliberal concoction may be declared public by a swift political decision in order to make it part of this huge private world, but it has been working 'public' in its new context of political dependency from the party headquarters. The magic term of 'the national interest' can transform everything legally into state property – with an exceptional, special procedure – for completing the 'public' control of the autocratic state, and it appears 'on the next day' as the private property of the Fidesz oligarchs at a cheap price. Anyway, the third period completed the shift to the soft power of the cultural sector as the main means of the political rule in the emerging 'perfect' autocratic regime that deserves the name of zombie democracy.

The 'internal Easternisation' and the emergence of zombie democracy

The zombie democracy has been the endgame of the Orbán regime home and abroad as the internal Easternisation of Hungary. The Hungarian historical memory is haunted by the symbolism of a ferry moving between East and West in the changing stages of Easternisation and Westernisation. It seems so that after the decades of Westernisation a new turn to Easternisation began in the early 2010s, this time not by foreign occupation but by some kind of internal Easternisation generating a zombie democracy. Looking at the consecutive periods of autocratisation more closely, these three periods discussed above can also be seen as the state capture at macro-, meso- and micro-levels, namely first in the central government, second in the intermediary institutions and third in civil society, with its widening implications in the social, cultural and human dimensions. To track down the development, these three consecutive periods give the key for the systematisation of the democracy decline and the emerging zombie democracy in the ECE scholarship through these periods of De-Democratisation, Autocratisation and De-Europeanisation.

The divergence of Hungary from the democratic mainstream has been crucial during the Orbán regime because this long-term supermajority has offered the opportunity for the voluntaristic legislation in the *formal* institutions, and cumulating enough political power for the institution-building in the *informal* institutions and in the networks across all other social fields. This double process has culminated in the third period and it can be described in general as conquering the monopolistic positions in the formal state institutions – representing the zombie democracy par excellence – on one side, and building the informal power centres as the general foundation and/or the background of the zombie democracy on the other side. In the recent period it has meant extending the direct formal control of the government to all layers of public administration and reaching a complete *state capture* as the 'deep state' vertically by 'governing' even in small settlements as well as conquering/creating the big economic, social and scientific/cultural institutions informally, called the 'parallel state'. This total invasion of government as social capture has also produced direct government control in those institutions, which are supposedly independent and representing the interests of the given field in the public life of a democratic country. This extension of the political power from the central state to all sectors has mostly been disturbing the everyday life of the Hungarian citizens.

The third consecutive electoral victory of the Orbán regime in 2018 was indeed a deep turning point in all respects as an all-out war of the government with everybody about everything for full control. Therefore, the Orbán regime in the *third* period of autocratisation has focused on the cultural war. The media drogue has been the main weapon of Fidesz control over the popular mind, but

in this period all other cultural and scientific fields have experienced the fierce attack for conquering them in order to widen and diversify this control. It has been characterised by an open traditionalist-nativist, anti-EU ideology giving the cultural frame to the official narrative of the freedom fight against 'Brussels'. The third period has been the peak of the Orbán regime, and at the same time it has also presented the decay of this regime by its 'hybris', by the overextension in all fields. In the strange mixture of the new Orwellian ideological factory – as e.g. combining the pagan and Christian traditions in the Fidesz ideological campaigns – this complete social capture in Hungary after the 2018 elections has been managed by a tough state control in its largest meaning through the aggressive 'privatisation' of the cultural sector (see the comparative ECE analysis in Hesová, 2021).

After dismembering the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) and depriving it from its research institutes, the next step has been the colonisation of universities by 'privatisation' and pushing them into a direct politically dependent situation. Most state-run universities – except the biggest ones, as yet – have been 'privatised' in the legal form of 'private foundations with public functions' with all of their properties. Fidesz political leaders are exclusively in the decision-making positions of the curatorium in these 'private' universities. By this move, those employed in the research institutes and at the universities have lost their status of public employees, so they can lose their job any time 'if the market demands', actually, if they are not disciplined enough for loyal behaviour in the Orbán regime. They have also organised the National University of Public Service (NKE) – in the common parlance the 'janissary' university – with many privileges for the elite socialisation of the praetorian guard or the professional serving intelligentsia, and have established a huge training factory in order to produce ideological foot soldiers under the – otherwise very prestigious – name of Mathias Corvinus College. The MCC has recently been given big properties across the country and a huge budget, unimaginable for the poorly financed universities. Moreover, and among others, the Orbán regime has concocted its own 'Academy of the Arts' (MMA) to please their supporters in the various fields of the arts. [6]

Altogether, when in this cultural war 'formal' institutions have turned into 'informal', public into private and vice versa, it has taken place parallel with the drastically decreasing transparency in all fields, not only in the government sector, but also in the workings of these new government controlled informal institutions, including the 'private' cultural/scientific enterprises. The trans-

6 It is well-known that the Orbán government has pushed out the Central European University and it has prepared the establishment of the Chinese Fudan University in Hungary. Both cases have been very controversial, but there is no space here to discuss them in detail. This is the same case with the fake scientific research institutions serving the government and fabricating some kind of seemingly scientific background to the official ideology, like many other Quangos at different levels.

parency for the public control has disappeared in both the 'privatised' formal institutions as the universities and in the 'statised' informal institutions as the Quangos. There have been more and more obstacles to get information about political decisions, since access to the politicians and to the public institutions has been bordering on the absurd in this 'perfectly' closed world of governmental politics and policy. Moreover, the Orbán regime has used all legal and many illegal means to intimidate the still surviving independent media actors, and has tried to disturb them by direct/indirect state actions in order to force them to accept limitations, the compromises for 'decent' behaviour. This effort for full control has reached its peak in the recent Pegasus 'spy' scandal. It has concerned both opposition politicians and independent journalists, to put some of the 'dangerous' people under surveillance of the security services through the close observance of their mobiles.

For this overextended state with a huge control mechanism a big waterhead has been needed in the central government, numbering three times more top leaders than in the former governments. This formal/informal government has also contained high numbers around the government as (prime-)ministerial commissioners, who have been charged with the control of this combination of formal and informal, public and private institutions, and provided the surveillance over the 'money pump' of the redistribution to feed the political pyramid. This all-embracing control mechanism, including also the informal institutions, has become manifest by the new and new voluntaristic legal regulations and by the appointments of the Fidesz actors to rule these colonised social fields. They have been instructed and coordinated by Rogán's large Prime Ministerial Cabinet, as the 'Propaganda Ministry' with hundreds of various leading officials. Altogether, due to the cumulative effect, this new 'party state' has been completed in the final period of autocratisation by the 'cultural capture', the extension to the remaining social fields, with the systemic change in culture and ideology. The main ideological products of the cultural war have been conceived in the politics of historical memory, producing controversial messages bordering on the sheer absurd. Not only by declaring Christianity as fundamental to Hungarian national identity, but mixing it with the idealisation of the mythical Hungarian pagan prehistory to a chaotic concept of the singularity of the 'Hungarianness' in Europe. In the politics of historical memory, everything has been rewritten about the contemporary history, and in the official presentation of the last thirty years Orbán has been elevated to a national hero personally performing the systemic change.

The Orbán regime completed the Reverse Wave after the 2018 elections by the institutionalisation of autocratisation in the 'cultural capture' that has raised a big opposition inside, and open conflict with the EU as De-Europeanisation outside. These two parallel, domestic and international processes have unleashed the endgame of the perfect autocracy in the Orbán regime. Since the

late 2010s big cracks have appeared in the Orbán regime, and the economic, social and political ruptures have deepened more and more in this 'perfect' autocracy. The autocratisation provoked an increasingly popular resistance and the success of the opposition parties' union on one side and the weakening of the 'perfect' autocracy on the other, became evident by the two – EP and municipal – elections. In the late 2010s for the first time all opposition parties were able to form an electoral alliance, and in both elections the EU was in the centre of the electoral campaign. Although Fidesz won the EP elections on 26 May 2019 by a large majority against the parties of democratic opposition with 13 versus 8 seats, still it meant some kind of turning point in the history of Hungarian parties. It was a good socialisation for the democratic opposition how to campaign together for the EU integration and in the spirit of the EU rules and values. Just to the contrary, the open confrontation of Fidesz with the EU was visible both internationally and domestically in the EP elections. As a result, in the municipal elections the democratic opposition parties on 13 October 2019 already won 'urban Hungary' – the majority of cities, including Budapest – but not yet the countryside, 'rural' Hungary, which was still under the direct and strict political and ideological control of the Orbán regime. Above all, since the municipal elections the democratic parties at local level have governed a large part of Hungary, the most developed cities and regions, and these city governments have collected a lot of experience in the democratic coalition politics.

As to the conflict with the EU, the drastic violations of rule of law at the political, social and cultural levels has produced 'the Easternisation of politics', called sometimes Putinisation (see e.g. Gotev, 2021). In some rampant anti-democratic legislations of the Orbán regime they have just copied the Putin model, sometimes word by word. It has finally led to a full confrontation with the EU, to the open De-Europeanisation. This Easternisation has to be investigated in the open conflict and confrontation with the EU, termed by the Orbán regime as the 'freedom fight against Brussels'. Since the aggressive anti-EU campaign in the 2019 EP elections the Orbán regime has moved from its 'mimicry' to an open anti-EU position, from a defensive attitude to offensive behaviour against the EU. Beyond the 'state-owned' lie factories in Rogán's Propaganda Ministry the newly organised parallel state has also been more and more mobilised in the offensive against the EU. This mobilisation among others includes also the Christian Churches – since the Orbán regime has claimed to be defending 'Christian Europe' – and the business organisations as the playing field of the friendly oligarchs. [7]

7 The Eucharistic World Congress in September 2021 in Budapest was a big attempt to use the Catholic Church for legitimising the Orbán regime. In the parallel state, actually, the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MKI) has also been completely controlled by the Orbán regime. The Consultation Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (VKKF) has been convened very rarely and it has not played any significant role in the conflict management between the government and the business life.

In the external dimension there has been an increasing conflict with the EU on two issues: in the rule of law violations (see the whole story in Scheppele, Kelemen and Morijn, 2021) and in the diversion from the EU in the foreign policy line (see Varga and Buzogány, 2020). *First*, the Orbán regime has been the 'poster boy' or the most ill-famed actor, although the profiles of the other ECE states in these conflicts about the rule of law violations have been rather similar, just in the internal dimension the national idiosyncrasies have played a more important role. In the deepening conflict between the EU and Hungary the crucial event was the Sargentini Report (2018), since critical efforts of the EP majority produced a long list of the democracy deficit in Hungary that can be applied, by the way, almost directly to all other ECE countries. This Report was passed on 12 September 2018 in the EP with a large majority (448 votes versus 197) in the Article 7 mechanism. The Sargentini Report is emblematic of the worsening relationships between the EU and the Orbán regime, indicating the real turning point as the entry to the third period of the open confrontation, and since then there have been many other EU documents condemning the rule of law violations of the Orbán regime. However, in this deepening conflict with the EU the biggest event was the Polish and Hungarian veto threat during the preparation of the basic EU document for the management of the triple crisis. It was concluded in the December compromise, masterminded by Merkel just before the end of the German Council Presidency in late 2020. For sure, there will be a hard debate about this December Compromise for a long time, emphasising either its positive side that it has saved the crisis management in that given historical moment, or its negative side that it has given a free pass or lee way – at least for some time – to the access of the new recovery fund for those ECE regimes as the horrible actors in the violations of the EU rules and values.

The EU resources have been extremely important for the Orbán regime, since the brutal expropriation of the EU funds by the Hungarian government through the systemic corruption has been a vital necessity to feed the 'money pump' in the power pyramid for the support of the regime. Therefore, even in this process of turning against the EU, the Orbán regime has produced a double game: it has developed a special pro-EU empty rhetoric on one side, but on the other side Orbán's propaganda factory has performed a fierce populist-nativist propaganda war against the EU with personal attacks on its main opponents in the EU. This move has led to the effort of the marginalisation of the Orbán regime in the EU, first by the exclusion of Fidesz party from the European Peoples Party faction in the EP, followed by its deepening confrontation with the majority of MEPs on the issue of the rule of law violations.[8]

8 I have described this process in my book in details (Ágh, 2021a: 113–147, 183–187). Just for the illustration of the Fidesz style: Orbán has insinuated that Brussels has been similar to Hitler's headquarters (the Wolf's Lair). Szilárd Demeter, the Ministerial Commissioner of culture has written an article in a domestic newspaper that has created internationally resonance, since in the article he referred to George Soros

This behaviour of the Orbán regime – parallel with that of the Polish government – has produced a split in the EU's decision-making mechanism in the delicate historical moment of the implementation of the recovery funds in the next EU budget (MFF). Obviously, the Council and the Commission have had more a conciliatory approach with a conflict-avoidance in this rule of law issue that has raised increasing concern in the EP, but also in many Western governments and, first of all, among the large majority of the EU citizens. In the early 2020s this EU-wide conflict can also be widely described even in the strict legal terms of the official documents issued from the institutional triangle of the Council, Commission and Parliament. However, this situation can be briefly summarised in the turn of the EP against the Commission, threatening it with taking this negligence to the European Court of Justice for the marginalising the rule of law violations in Hungary and Poland. This is still an open history in the fall of 2021 (see Bayer, 2021, Hungarian Spectrum, 2021 and Reuters, 2020a, b).[9]

As to the second issue, the foreign policy line, it has to be emphasised above all that the Orbán regime in close cooperation with the Polish government has tried to organise – in their parlance – the 'sovereigntists' versus the 'unionists', the new member states versus the old ones, as well as the neopopulist parties versus the 'federalists' within the EP. This effort was clear already in 2019 when the Orbán regime provoked an anti-EU electoral campaign with the other neopopulist/extremist parties in the EP elections, both domestically and internationally, in an effort to reset the proportions of party factions in EP, but this effort failed (Buzogány and Varga, 2019). Beyond the EU scenery, however, the Orbán regime has been rather successful in organising intensive contacts with other autocratic regimes around the world, mainly with Russia and Turkey, and recently more and more with China. This 'Eastern Opening' was announced by Orbán after the entry of his new government on 5 September 2010. The Orbán regime took the first steps in this new foreign policy toward Russia, but afterwards China came to the fore. The Eastern Opening has attracted a large followship in ECE, better to say, in other ECE countries the same perverse tendencies have also emerged, and they have reinforced each other.

as the 'liberal Führer', who is turning Europe into a gas chamber' where Hungarians are the 'new Jews'. Additionally, the Fidesz-founder, Tamás Deutsch, the leader of the Fidesz faction in the EP, has compared the critical stance of Manfred Weber, the EPP faction leader towards Fidesz to that of the Gestapo.

9 There is no space the follow the itinerary of this political and legal debate (see Scheppele et al, 2021), it is enough to indicate here the increasing tension in the EU because of the aggressive behaviour of the Hungarian and Polish governments and the conciliatory approach of the Merkel government (Financial Times, 2021a, b). The Orbán government turned to the European Court of Justice, but in the summer of 2021 the ECJ confirmed the EP decisions. This legal decision has become the indication of the total confrontation of the Orbán regime with the EU. One of the most characteristic moves of the aggressive autocracy was Orbán's strange political message to the EU in the Magyar Közlöny (Hungarian Official Journal) on 2 August 2021 (Issue 146, p. 6811) as the Decision of the Hungarian Government refusing the Commission's Report on the Rule of Law situation in Hungary (EC, 2021).

The Eastern Opening claims to be pragmatic, and advertised as trade-oriented, but in fact it has been a politically-engaged ideological weapon. In the last decade this trade policy has also been used for inviting investments from the countries outside the EU, and it has been declared successful according to the government reports. In fact, its economic role has been minimal for Hungary and it has basically served as a façade for the political opening to the other autocratic regimes outside the EU. Although Hungary has relied strongly on the Russian supply of gas and oil, the Orbán regime – unlike the other energy importing EU countries – counterproductively extended this contact to other fields, first of all to the ill-famed case of the Paks-2 nuclear station, which would be both unnecessary and too costly for Hungary, and serves only to strengthen the political relationship with Russia. Thus, since the 2010 elections the Orbán government has not only established and maintained a strong relationship with Russia and the Putin regime, but it has often followed, even copied, its autocratic measures against the opposition and civil society.

Nowadays in the trade opening the often-mentioned case is China, but its economic importance has been exaggerated. While the Hungarian export has been increasing to the EU and presently stands at 77.3 percent, in the case of China it is only at 1.7 percent. Yet, following the line of its opposition to the EU sanctions, the Orbán regime has turned toward China. In the early 2020s the issues of the planned Belgrade-Budapest railway for the sake of Chinese 'connectivity' and that of the establishment of the Hungarian branch of the Chinese Fudan University have been among the biggest political confrontations within Hungary, and these moves have also sent a strong political message to the EU. The international press often claims that Hungary has been the Trojan horse of Russia and China, since the Orbán government has regularly vetoed the EU decisions condemning these countries (Ji, 2020, Kalkhof, 2021, Kapitonenko, 2021 and Karásková, 2021). Otherwise, the Eastern opening has not only been an active foreign policy line for the Orbán regime, but also an ideological construct, bordering on the absurdity, because Orbán himself has declared that Hungarians are among the Turkish nations, and he has regularly attended their summit meetings, developing intensive relations not only with Turkey, but also e.g. with Azerbaijan (see the whole story recently in Mészáros, 2021).

Thus, the 'Hungarian disease' is particularly important because this is the model case of autocratisation and this disease has also infected the neighbouring countries, and it has turned to a common ECE disease. This pandemic of autocratisation has been spreading, the Orbán regime has been active in supporting this 'Putinisation' tendency not only among the new member states, and seeking partnership with them, but it has infected the Western Balkans too, above all in Serbia (Gotev, 2021). In this geopolitical turn of the Orbán regime to the West Balkan region it has also been characteristic that Olivér Várhelyi, the Hungarian Commissioner, has been so much in the favour of Serbia's president Aleksandar

Vučić that he has undermined the EU credibility in the region (Gricourt, 2021: 1). Actually, as the Brdo Declaration of the EU (Council, 2021 on 6 October 2021) indicates, the EU has recently arrived at a historical impasse in the WB region, since neither the EU, nor this region are able and ready for the enlargement, therefore the EU has shifted toward the partnership and securitisation. Whereas Orbán in this precarious situation looks for allies in the West Balkans to make troubles for the EU, some experts have elaborated an alternative strategy for the 'staged accession', meaning the accession process in several steps planned for a longer period (Emerson et al., 2021).

All in all, in the last years Hungary has turned out to be a 'perfect autocracy', confronting the EU with a political leadership that has lost any long-term rationality or self-control, and behaving as a loose cannon in the EU also in the extremely critical period of the covid crisis. The emergence of this 'perfect autocracy', advertised as illiberal democracy, has been based on the repeated two-thirds majority in the consecutive fake elections in 2014 and 2018. It has produced deep violations of the rules and values of the EU and regular confrontations with the EU foreign policy by regularly threatening with a Hungarian veto. Finally, in the recent period of *zombie democracy* by completing the new autocratic polity, the Orbán regime has resulted in an open conflict with the EU, declaring war on 'Brussels'. In this situation of the general De-Europeanisation in ECE, no wonder that some eminent Western politicians and experts have demanded to expel Hungary – and Poland – from the EU (see e. g. Acemoglu, 2021 and Müller, 2021), since Hungary has developed in fact a *zombie membership* in the EU, while the overwhelming majority of Hungarian citizens (89 %) are pro-EU and supporting the EU membership (Medián, 2021).

Conclusion: The project of 'Re-unite EUrope' and the redemocratisation in ECE

In the early 2020s the development of the EU has arrived at a crossroads, and the cumulated problems may be overviewed through the three basic issues that have to be arranged in the recent global crisis management. First, since the early 2010s in the controversial EU developments some disintegration tendencies have also appeared and strengthened. This trend has been indicated in the EU scholarship as *Fragmented Europe*, and the strategic programme of the *'Re-unite EUrope'* has been designed against it. After the failed global crisis management in the early 2010s, the EU has to now face the main task to overcome this disintegration process in Fragmented Europe in order to 're-unite' the EU. All problems in ECE have to be taken into consideration in this context of the recent EU global crisis management for the EU integration at a higher level. Second, this deepening Core-Periphery Divide in the Fragmented Europe is not a marginal, but a vital issue for the entire EU, since without solving this Divide,

the EU cannot accomplish its 'Re-uniting' strategy. These favourable external conditions, the prosperous Next Generation EU recovery programme, offer a big historical opportunity for the ECE countries, and at the same time they have to face the hard necessity to perform a new systemic change. Third, the key words for the ECE internal development are the re-entry, social citizenship, redemocratisation. This great challenge as a new systemic change means that the ECE countries have to re-enter the EU in a new form of social citizenship that presupposes completing the process of redemocratisation. This second historical test for them is nowadays much more difficult than the first one, with the systemic change in the euphoric years on the nineties. The ECE states have to overcome the autocratisation to reach a much higher level of Europeanisation by creating the internal conditions for the sustainable democracy and the effective EU membership. This special crisis management of ECE countries has been high on the agenda in the early 2020s, but it will be a long, painful and complex process.[10]

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Serious about Integration or Political Posturing? Political Elites and their Impact on Half-hearted Europeanisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina[1]

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Abstract: *This paper deals with the sluggish Europeanisation efforts of the current political elites of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A typical explanation for the lack of progress would be the complex structure of consociational democracy of the specific Bosnian confederation. The authors, however, claim that the structural obstacles could have been bypassed given the real will of political elites of all three nations to cooperate. The authors examine the role of the structure of the peculiar political system in comparison with the influence of the agency of Bosnian elites on the integration process. The empirical analysis focuses on the situation after the general elections in 2018. The authors discuss the contrast between the official declarations of consistent support for a European future with the real political performance of the various Bosnian party elites. These elites often misuse the institutional settings of the political system to block reforms. They also prefer the politics of obstruction to cement their leading positions within their constituent nations. More than a quarter century after the Dayton Peace Treaty and adoption of the Constitution, the lack of genuine intrinsic motivation to pursue Europeanisation has remained the main reason for the reluctant rapprochement of Bosnia to the European Union.*

Keywords: ***Bosnia and Herzegovina; Europeanisation; Political Elites; Political Culture; Integration Process, Consociational Democracy***

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Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH or Bosnia in the following text) officially applied for EU membership in February 2016, but the origins of their relationship go back much earlier – to the late 1990s. Despite the long-term political cooperation and significant financial aid from the European Union, substantial progress towards membership is lacking. Compared with its neighbours in the region, BiH is lagging behind significantly in the integration process. In 2019 an Opinion on Bosnia's application was adopted by the European Commission (EC). The document identified 14 key priorities the country needed to address to be recommended for opening accession negotiations. While the EU fulfilled its part of the deal, it is up to the country's political elites to respond to this challenge. Simultaneously, the most powerful political parties agreed on a pro-EU direction which they also declared in their programmes and approved agendas for the 2018 state elections (SDA 2019; SNSD 2020; HDZ BiH 2016; DF 2013). The experts we interviewed reported nothing like Euroscepticism in Bosnia, but the generally accepted consensus across the political spectrum on the country's European future.

The renaissance of Europeanisation, as a topic in BiH's academic and media discourse, relates to the membership application and the requirements resulting from the EC's Opinion. Although the current literature commonly refers to the key political elites lacking the will to reform and failing to achieve consensus, a more in-depth analysis of Bosnia's actual performance in the integration process is absent. Even though it would not be right to ignore the external effects of the integration process dynamics, local political elites continue to be the critical players in determining the country's direction and at the same time the cornerstone of the required reforms. It is desirable to look closer at the steps they have taken towards, or more likely away from, the prospect of EU membership. Using the concept of Europeanisation, this paper aims to explain how the Bosnian elites affect the EU integration process dynamics, considering the current political system's limitations and benefits.

Our analysis investigates the current political elites whose term in office originated from the election in October 2018 and the following nominations. We consider the length of their mandate to date as sufficient to analyse their performance and actions taken to deliver the required results. The paper searches for answers to the four following questions: Does the political system's current setting hinder the Europeanisation process? How do the Bosnian political elites operate within the system regarding the dynamics of the accession process? Are the current elites able to push through the necessary reforms? Do they try to challenge the system sufficiently and modify it so that it complies with the requirements of the accession process? To answer these questions, the paper relies on evidence gathered through semi-structured interviews with academics,

representatives of the international community, the EU's Delegation in Bosnia, surveys and numerous research papers.

The structure of the paper is as follows: first, the necessary theoretical background is explained in order to delimit the role of agency and domestic actors in the process of the Europeanisation of BiH. We present our source of information afterwards. Further, we sketch out the structure of the political system of BiH to understand the institutional settings of the agents and the specific political culture of Bosnian political elites so that we may contextualise our research in the long-term trends of political attitudes and behaviours of the elite. Empirical analysis of the situation after the 2018 elections constitutes the core of the paper, followed by a discussion and concluding remarks.

Structure, agency and the Europeanisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Literature review and theory

There is a vast critical literature regarding the political arrangement set by the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia, known as the Dayton Peace Accords (Keil 2016; Kapidžić 2020; Piacentini 2019; Arnautović 2019; Belloni – Ramović 2019; Hulsey 2010). Many authors have turned their attention to the EU as a normative and transformative power, and to the EU enlargement process in the Western Balkans region (Čepo 2019; Pejanović 2017; Blagovcanin 2016) covering *inter alia* the Bosnian case. In the papers on Bosnia specifically, there is, however, a clear trend. Critical yet optimistic visions of Bosnia being attracted by the EU slowly but decisively (Tzifakis 2012) have been replaced with much bleaker visions of contested states struggling with the rule of law, an inappropriate constitutional framework and problems with the assurance of equal citizenship rights (Džankić – Keil 2018).

As we saw, many authors blame the peculiar and complex structure of the Bosnian political system for the lack of progress in reform and Europeanisation. On the other hand, human beings including politicians are rational actors who pursue their goals within societal, economic and political structures (Wendt 1987). This means that the structure cannot explain everything, and we have to pay the same attention to the role of agency: individual and collective actors, in our case, politicians and political parties (Dowding 2008; Friedman – Starr 1997). To capture the behaviour and motives of BiH actors, we use the concept of Europeanisation as modified to include specificities of the process of the EU enlargement vis-à-vis the Balkan countries.

Transformation of structure, adaptation in order to achieve a 'goodness to fit', triggered by the adaptation pressure of the EU institutions – this has been a 'baseline model' (Exadaktylos – Radaelli 2015) of Europeanisation studies. The entire idea of 'transformative power' (Grabbe 2006) and of the logic of appropriateness driven by the EU's demand to comply (Schimmelfennig – Sedelmeyer

2005) focused more on the institutional adaptation than on the active approach of the agents. This made sense in the context of the 2004/7 EU enlargement, with its clear reward and functioning conditionality.

The context of the potential enlargement of the EU to take in the countries of the Western Balkans has been very different. There are two factors limiting the EU's transformative power. First, as the substantial literature shows (Bieber 2011; Börzel – Grimm 2018; Džihić – Wieser 2008), the belated processes of state-building were related to the necessity to stabilise and consolidate the area after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Stability was simply more important than Europeanisation as compliance with EU settings. The second factor has been a certain remoteness of the 'carrot' – no vision of EU membership. The combination of 'enlargement fatigue' and 'stabilitocracy' (Čermák 2019; Vučković 2021: 5) limits the adaptational pressure of the EU (Börzel 2016; Mendelski 2015; Mendelski 2016). As Petrovic (2019) argues, the inconsistency of the EU approach is one of the main factors hampering the enlargement process. The problems with Europeanisation can be, however, attributed largely to a lack of reforms in the Western Balkan countries (Elbasani – Šabić 2018; Vučković – Đorđević 2019). Since there is literature discussing the particular effects of the 'balkanised Europeanisation' on the increasing state capture (Richter – Wunsch 2020; Vachudova 2018) and the setting of illiberal patterns of governance (Stojarová 2020), in our study we will focus on the role of domestic actors and institutions as (at least potential) promoters of further Europeanisation and on examining their disappointing performance in this field.

Returning to Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier's (2005: 8) models of Europeanisation of domestic actors, the above said demonstrate limits on external incentives and the social learning model. Therefore, we will analyse the BiH political actors to find the elements of the lesson-drawing model of Europeanisation. In practical terms, this model implies mainly the identification of the domestic actors with the EU, in political discourse, and tangible policy steps taken or advocated (Sedelmeier 2011: 13 and 16). Our analysis will unravel to what extent the identification with the EU in words and deeds happens in the current BiH politics.

Sources for analysis of Bosnian post-2018 politics

In order to answer the questions, we will analyse the post-2018 process of political development in Bosnia in the context of long-term trends and developments. The analysis is of the published primary and secondary sources. We will work with the documents and statements issued by the political parties to demonstrate the discrepancy between the highly pro-integration rhetoric and the lack of any real policy measures leading to enhanced Europeanisation. To complete the picture, we conducted interviews with local experts and stakeholders.

All interviews were conducted in Sarajevo in February 2020. The people interviewed included local academicians from the University of Sarajevo (Kapidžić 2020; Dautović 2020; Džananović 2020) and foreign stakeholders from the European Union's delegation and diplomatic representations of the member states based in Sarajevo (Respondents A, B, C, D 2020), whose names and work positions we are not able to reveal due to the requirements of the institutions they represent. The interviews are used only as an additional resource given their number and the unequal representation of all parties involved, namely the domestic political actors. However, they offer valuable insights into the practical problems associated with the power-sharing system and the actual political performance of domestic elites.

The Bosnian political system as a structure constraining, yet not excluding, Europeanisation

The signing of the Dayton Peace Treaty (DPA) in 1995 ended the civil war in BiH but also established one of the world's most complex political systems. The highly decentralised federal system based on the ethnic principle seemed to be the only solution for preserving the country's territorial integrity. The Constitution's final version divided the country into the autonomous district of Brčko and two political units, or entities: Republika Srbska (RS) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH); both are controlled by three constituent peoples: Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks. The ethnical division dominates not only the political setup and functioning, but all spheres of public life. Belonging to a constituent nation is closely and inextricably linked with religion. The BiH political system is based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination. The equality of the three nations is the fundamental basis of the Constitution. Ethnic power-sharing is reflected in each central institution, specifically in the three-member revolving Presidency, a two-chambered Parliament, the Council of Ministers, the Constitutional Court and the Central Bank.

Keil (2020) argues that such an imposed union in the Bosnian case unfavourably affects the political institutions' ability to act and is the reason for the political standoffs and constant disputes among the elites representing different constituent peoples. Since establishing the 'union' was neither voluntary nor approved by local elites, its imposition has become a focus of the contestation of the state, and the subject of constant challenges and undermining. The result of the union being imposed by external actors is a barely functioning state of peoples who do not identify with it and do not respect the diversity, nor the existence of such a state. It does not fit Todd's definition (2020) of constructive unionism or Franck's understanding (1968), supporting his argument that a federation's ability to avoid disintegration relies on leaders who must themselves feel federal.

Regarding the cumbersome process of drafting and passing legislative revisions, the system has remained virtually unchanged for the last 25 years and has mostly been ineffective in terms of flexibility and ability to adopt necessary reforms. Even though, in the past, we witnessed several amendments within the centralisation of crucial policies which helped to make the rigid power-sharing system looser, it is important to say that the revisions were mainly enforced by the external overseer – the Office of the High Representative. Nevertheless, most political and economic powers are concentrated in the hands of the entities (RS and the FBiH). Also, in practice, the dominant part of the central institutions' income depends on contributions from the entities (Keil 2013; Kapidžić 2019)

Bosnia used to be an example of a theoretically perfect or classic consociation following the key principles of consociationalism enshrined in the Constitution (Merdzanovic 2017; Keil 2016). They include a grand coalition based on a strict ethnic quota, two quasi-autonomous political units and a complex system of veto players – these players from each national group have the right to block in the central Parliament. Merdzanovic (2017) argues that establishing a consociational governing model within a heavily divided country and hoping that it would work is not enough; Fraenkel (2020) called it an externally imposed experiment. It is important to underline that the international community was from the very beginning aware of the fact that consociationalism produces deadlocks, and the country may have trouble with overcoming these obstacles on its own. Based on evidence, these assumptions led to distinctly international intervention, mostly in the first decade after signing the DPA. Merdzanovic (2017) identifies the Bosnian consociational system as a vicious circle where international intervention is necessary to overcome deadlocks, but at the same time aggravates other problems such as domestic dependency and the incapability of local elites to take political ownership.

Moreover, the local elites are not interested in seeking compromises since their government positions depend on keeping the ethnonational cleavage important, rather than on their actual policy and political performance. Although the consociational model guarantees that the constituent peoples are directly and equally represented in political institutions, it is necessary to emphasise that *de facto* it excludes other nationalities such as Roma or Jews from political life. The European Union requires the removal of discriminatory laws to enable progress in the European integration process (Piacentini, 2019).

Since the Council of Ministers is often ineffective and lacks consensus, the major decisions are taken by the Presidency, and executive power resides in the Parliament rather than in the Council of Ministers. To pass a bill, it is necessary to acquire the support of the majority, which must include at least one-third of the votes from the territory of each entity, specifically the Republika Srpska and the Federation in the House of Representatives. The Decision-making process in the House of Peoples should be preceded by meeting the quorum, which consists

of at least three out of five representatives of each constituent nation. Any bill may be blocked if it is seen as a possible violation of vital national interests. The agenda of the Council of Ministers is often blocked by entity vetoes, mostly from the House of Representatives. Moreover, the principle of 'vital interest' as enshrined in the Constitution, which allows the veto to be used, is vaguely defined and often serves as a political bargaining tool (Fraenkel 2020).

The complexity of the system brings many veto-actors to the decision-making process. Due to the absence of a unified Bosnian-Herzegovinian identity, political actors primarily represent their own constituent nation's interests. The EU has repeatedly pointed out the dysfunction of the BiH political system and the need for it to be reformed. Recommendations for reform were included for the first time in 2009 in the EC's BiH report. To defrost the blocked political system caused by the (in)activity of local elites, the Commission recommended defining vital interests more precisely. A key milestone in the relationship between the European Union and Bosnia was the enactment of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement on 1 June 2015, seven years after it was signed. The political leaders took advantage of this event and in 2016 officially applied for membership (Pejanović 2017; DEI 2019).

Following the final submission of the questionnaire on 29 May 2019, the European Commission adopted an extensive Analytical Report and Opinion on Bosnia's application for membership, proposing a comprehensive reform plan. The Opinion identifies 14 key priorities that the country must meet to be recommended for opening accession negotiations. Although the EU expressed its worries about the country's potential progress under such a political system, it has explicitly said that the current system does not conflict with accession conditions (European Commission 2019; Čepo 2019). Therefore, we cannot expect more immense adaptation pressure leading to external incentives for the further Europeanisation triggered by the EU institutions and policies. This was confirmed during the interviews with foreign stakeholders, considering that the political arrangement itself is not a problem as long as it meets democratic criteria and the necessary reforms can be adopted within it. Despite the above, the Constitution defines necessary procedures for its reform and offers ample legal opportunities to revise the system from the ground up. All that is missing in the country is the will of the elites to seek compromise and agreement (Respondents A, B, C 2020).

The political culture of the elites as a persistent, primary problem

Despite our focus on the activities of 'current' political elites after the general elections in 2018, the parties' current configuration in the state institutions has been unchanged for a number of decades. Most of today's elites emerged after the break-up of the single-party system during the 90s or were formed after the

BiH declared independence. This period was affected by the absence of a well-established rule of law and a legal vacuum. It allowed the emerging political elites to accumulate vast assets through direct budgetary transfers, black-market trading and the illegal privatisation of state property (Blagovcanin 2016).

Besides the specific form of corruption, the phenomenon of political clientelism based on ethnic criteria is extensively present in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Political representatives offer goods, economic resources, jobs and protection to the members of a specific nation in exchange for political support and votes through this mock patronage system. By abusing institutional and economic capacities, ethno-nationalist political leaders can easily gain the support of a specific constituent nation. Given the extensive practices of political clientelism in BiH, civic alternatives find it challenging to succeed in such a political system. The party system's development proves that even if a slight change occurs, it is usually not in favour of those who call for moderation and the politics of compromise (Piacentini 2019).

For the political elites, a loss of power would imply a threat to their own political existence, including the possibility of criminal prosecution (Hulsey – Keil 2021; Respondents C, D 2020). The blocking of institutions, boycotts and similar signals often serve merely as a façade, behind which the material interests of the incumbent elites are hiding. Besides strengthening ethnic nationalism, a destructive side effect of the political crises and the accompanying rhetoric is that they distract attention away from the fundamental problems in society including low living standards, poverty, high unemployment rate and environmental damage (European Western Balkans 2020).

Ethno-nationalist political parties dominate in all the state institutions. The strongest parties, the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), are directly related to the long history of patronage politics, corruption scandals, nepotism and the systematic violation of media freedom. As Bosnian politics has gradually lost its potential for change, the election turnout has decreased over the years. It appears that most of the people who regularly come to the ballot box do so for the strategic reason that it will help them keep their job or enjoy other benefits offered by the ruling party (Belloni – Ramović 2019). All this affects relations with the EU.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's foreign policy orientation towards the European Union has developed slowly yet steadily, in ebbs and flows. Throughout this time, the country's foreign policy direction has been accompanied by domestic ethnic fissures and a complex institutional structure. But the EU too has for many years lacked a coherent and unified strategy to build relations with BiH (Pejanović 2017), even though after the 2003 Thessaloniki summit the interest of the EU definitively shifted, from post-war stabilisation to the economic and political integration of the region (Blagovcanin 2016).

In February 2016, the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina officially applied for EU membership, exploiting a shift made possible by the coming into effect of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement seven years after being signed, thus breaking a stalemate. Despite this, the country continued to suffer from many deficiencies in public administration, a vague distribution of powers and a lack of effective mechanisms of coordination (Čepo 2019).

Even before issuing the Opinion on the country's readiness to join the EU, the Commission prepared a preliminary report, serving to monitor progress in fundamental areas including the rule of law and human rights, public administration reform and economic development. The EC report makes it clear that BiH not only suffered from a lack of political will in adopting action plans and broader strategies, but also failed substantially in implementing the measures adopted. The report repeatedly draws attention to a persistent chasm between the political will declared and the concrete results achieved, which are mostly absent. Bosnia and Herzegovina exhibited substantial shortcomings in virtually all of the key areas covered by accession negotiations (European Commission 2018). Over the past two decades in pursuing its enlargement policy, the EU has strengthened conditionality and brought the adherence to the rule of law principles to the forefront (EU Delegation 2019b).

Complications in adopting the essential reforms to achieve progress in the integration process are due to the number of actors holding a veto as well as failures in the approach taken by the political elites and in the Bosnian political culture as such. Even the preparation of the questionnaire itself proved to be a Sisyphean labour – it took nearly two years to develop it while including political actors from all levels of governance; in other countries of the region the task took a few months (Respondent C 2020). But more than by the size of the team, the process was impacted by the fact that the members were political party nominees and not independent experts, causing work inefficiencies and prolonging the process (Čepo 2019). Once the questionnaire was finally submitted on 29 May 2019, the Commission adopted an Opinion on BiH's application for EU membership, in which it proposed a comprehensive reform plan. Of the political criteria, the Opinion emphasises the need to improve the election framework and the functioning of justice, and to strengthen the fight against corruption and organised crime including money laundering and terrorism. Bosnia and Herzegovina should also improve its border management and its migration and asylum systems. Progress must likewise be achieved in public administration reform. The document also appeals to BiH to establish a parliamentary committee for EU affairs[2] and to develop a National Programme for the Adoption of the *acquis communautaire* (NPAA) (European Commission 2019b).[3]

2 The operating rules of the committee were adopted in mid-2020 (European Commission, 2020b).

3 Bosnia and Herzegovina started the work on developing its integration programme in autumn 2020.

There are two phenomena present in the relationship between BiH and the EU that substantially influence the integration process. The first is a general, declaratory consensus across the constituent peoples and the political entities on support for full BiH membership in the EU structures (Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018). The second phenomenon – which does not influence just the integration process, but also Bosnia's foreign and domestic policy – is the country's inability to set aside the incessant rivalries between the constituent peoples and their representatives and adopt such top-level decisions that do not have to reflect the ethnic divisions at any cost (Sadowski 2008); this while the country's official foreign-policy strategy acknowledges the necessity of involving all administrative levels in consideration of their constitutional powers, as required by such a complex process.

The strongest political parties in their election manifestos have likewise set full membership of the European Union as a foreign policy priority (Čepo 2019). In their programmes these parties are agreed on a pro-European direction for Bosnia and Herzegovina; yet only some of them propose specific measures to accelerate the integration programme and increase its efficiency. Most of the parties declare their readiness to comply with the Commission's recommendations, and to make use of the potential provided by the Constitution to make progress with the integration process, by implementing the recommended reforms of the judiciary and of the Constitution itself (SDA 2019; SNSD 2020; HDZ BiH 2016; DF 2013). Interestingly, there is virtually no Euroscepticism in BiH. All political parties describe themselves as pro-European, and any Eurosceptic rhetoric could hamper their position in party competition. Yet experts admit that membership of the EU or obtaining membership candidate status is only a declared priority of political parties and elites, and actually occupies a very low place in their order of priorities (Respondents A, B, C 2020; Kapidžić 2020 and Džananović – interviews 2020). Čepo (2019) sees a problem in the incessant presence of a normative conflict, between efforts to maintain the *status quo* as set by the Dayton Agreement Constitution and the integration into a supranational Union that could significantly threaten the positions enjoyed by the political elites who derive their prosperity from the post-conflict configuration that continues to apply today. The topic of European integration thus becomes overshadowed by nationalist and populist rhetoric, which is always mainly directed at protecting the interests of the constituent peoples.

Parties' electoral campaigns have a significant effect on the integration process, mainly because state and local elections alternate in a two-year cycle, which means that the country finds itself in a nearly continuous campaign. This slows down the dynamism of integration considerably; the integration process is not an attractive electoral issue, and the elites and voters alike tend to overlook the topics linked with it before elections (Respondent B 2020). As the completed questionnaire was submitted to the president of the European Commission in

2018 and there were some supplementary questions the following year, there was a renaissance of sorts within the public debate for the topic of BiH obtaining candidate status. Yet candidate status does not fulfil the strategic ambition of full membership; Bosnian politicians exploit this topic, because they see an opportunity to score political points by bringing 'good news', but the respondents actually have interpreted the membership application as merely a strategic move on the part of former BiH Presidency members (Respondents A, B 2020).

Respondents agreed that the transactional approach of the Bosnian elites towards the integration process is wrong. According to them, being a part of the EU has become a meaningless slogan that the local political elites use from time to time but only to score political points (Respondent A, B, 2020). Dautović (2020) said that the EU is an elite club, and if Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to move forward to EU membership or candidate status, it must start meeting the requirements. The current European Union is not able to give anything for granted since BiH participates in SAP voluntarily.

The gradual strengthening of the relationships between the local leading political parties and partially authoritarian but influential foreign players such as China, Turkey or Russia might also be problematic. The rise of influence of these state actors not only in Bosnia but across the whole Western Balkan region can be explained by the weakening position of the EU and thus filling the vacuum left by its power withdrawal.

Chinese – Bosnian relations are based mainly on Chinese business interests, which are focused on facilitating its access to European markets by developing numerous infrastructure projects and expanding business opportunities for Chinese companies, including the support of the export. While there has not been any proven incorporation into political activities so far, China does not face any crucial obstacles to further strengthening its influence in the country. Unlike the EU's conditionality, its termless loans of enormous size and investments make China a likeable and recognised partner. Its projects, however, often lack transparency, and the actual long-term consequences are unclear, mainly given the degree of impact on the future dependence and indebtedness of Bosnia (Chrzová 2019).

Turkey has become a traditional external actor positioning itself as the protector of Muslim communities in the Western Balkan region. Within the years, it has managed to build tight connections with the SDA and above-standard relationships with many political representatives of BiH, especially the party leader Bakir Izetbegović. While Turkey officially supports the Eurointegration of BiH, it also applies its neo-Ottoman foreign policy by providing political support and funds for Bosniak leadership. Likewise, Russian presence, Turkey's engagement is accompanied by various business, religious and cultural activities (Rašidagić – Hesova 2020). The Kremlin's influence in the country is predominantly based on its close relations with RS and Serbian nationalists.

Russian representatives directly support Dodik's SNSD while the ties with the other constituent peoples stay cold. Russia's engagement in BiH's politics is evident since it has also affected the election processes and results in the last decade. Russia also manages to exert its influence through the Orthodox church, to which most Serbs profess by positioning itself as the protector of Orthodox values and traditions. Russia also plays a crucial role in the oil and gas industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Chrzová 2019).

On the other hand, the EU has lately faced several internal crises, which have admittedly disturbed the trust in the Europeanisation process as the only option for the Western Balkans, and has undoubtedly opened the door for other external actors to exercise their influence in this strategically positioned region. The one to mention is the unprecedented withdrawal of a member state from the European Union structure. Long-lasting and not sufficiently successful negotiations affected the dynamics of EU policies and blocked the capacities of the institutions for a considerable time. Many authors claim the latest developments within the EU could result in a long-term stalemate in enlargement policy. This, for a long time, has been considered one of the most successful policies of the EU (Bieber 2019; Lopandić, 2017).

The more complex the integration process becomes, the more it reflects the overall fatigue and crisis within enlargement policy.[4] The double veto over the opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia has largely shaken the perception of the EU by Western Balkan countries and their vision of future membership, and weakened the credibility of the whole integration process (Bieber 2019; Fouéré 2019). Failure to fulfil promises has provided an excellent alibi to those who have sought to maintain the status quo for a long time; vice-versa, it has disadvantaged those who want to fight the growing nationalism in the countries (Džananović – interview 2020). Under such circumstances, not even financial compensation would be sufficient to motivate candidate states to develop further.

The analysis shows that there was an evident lack of internally driven Europeanisation among the BiH political actors. Manifestos and campaigns before the 2018 parliamentary elections showed a passive approach of Bosnian political parties: pro-integration rhetoric remained on the surface, EC recommendation remained the prevailing frame of promised reforms and, in general, the BiH actors showed a lack of any of their own initiative to proceed with the deeper Europeanisation of BiH politics and policies.

4 Statements by President Macron had a particularly negative effect. Besides creating disillusion among Western Balkan countries about their potential EU accession, Macron triggered a diplomatic conflict with Bosnia and Herzegovina. In his statement he described BiH as a ticking time bomb. The statements of the French president outraged the public in Bosnia and disrupted diplomatic relations (Politico 2019). Evidently, the political elites of BiH are not the only actors who complicate and hinder the process of the country's Europeanisation. However, the role of the international community is a topic for another article.

Current political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their impact on the integration process

In the October 2018 elections, the traditional parties (SDA, HDZ, SNSD), reaffirming their strong support, secured the most seats in the House of Representatives. Despite the success of multi-ethnic and non-ethnic parties such as the Social Democratic Party of BiH, Our Party and the Democratic Front, currently represented in the House of Representatives, the Bosnian party system continues to be dominated by ethno-nationalist parties. Because of the legal setting of the state administration, the three strongest parties, each representing one of the constituent peoples, are able to control almost all economic resources and distribute them to their loyal supporters (Kapidžić 2020 – interview).

The results of the presidency elections did not bring any surprises either, since only political veterans were elected: the former president of the Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik from SNSD, Šefik Džaferović as the Bosnian candidate from the SDA and Željko Komšić from the DF representing Croats. The recent elections confirmed the trend of a strong ethnic cleavage within the Bosnian party system. Despite the slight strengthening of multi-ethnic parties, their actual representation in state institutions remains marginal. However, it is crucial not to overlook the trend reflected by the 2016 regional elections and later confirmed by the national elections of 2018, which indicates an increase in the number of citizens who call for a non-nationalist alternative (Kapidžić 2019; Hulsey – Keil 2021).

Immediately after the 2018 elections, the incumbent three-member Presidency of BiH together went on a first official visit to Brussels. This meeting took place in January 2019, i.e. before the completed questionnaire was submitted. During the meeting, the Croat and the Bosniak in the Presidency expressed hope that BiH would soon obtain candidate status. All three members of the Presidency pledged to continue their journey towards a 'European future'. This idyll, presented by the Presidency to the EU leadership in Brussels, was seen as a sign of unity, willingness to cooperate and a good signal for progress in the integration process, and for the country meeting its commitments. However, the reality of politics in Bosnia became manifest almost immediately after the meeting (European Western Balkans 2019; EEAS 2019).

Bosnia and Herzegovina was without a regular government from October 2018 to December 2019. It took 14 months from the elections until the three most powerful parties representing Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs respectively agreed on who would be prime minister and then the other members of the Council of Ministers, which was crucial for any move forward. In 2019, the Parliament was practically dysfunctional. After protracted negotiations, the controversial politician Zoran Tegeltija of the SNSD party was chosen as prime minister. Together with Tegeltija's appointment, the Presidency adopted a new

Reform Programme that allegedly defines BiH's future relations with NATO and the EU; however, the exact content of the document remains unknown to the public to this day (October 2021). Thus, we can only proceed on the basis of varying interpretations made by the representatives of the three main nationalist parties (Balkan Insight 2019).

The political system was frozen for more than a year by the inability on the part of the political parties to agree on a government coalition. The question of NATO membership was one of the main problems during the negotiations.[5] While the Bosniaks and Croats insisted on a reform plan being produced necessary for accession to NATO, Dodik was only willing to discuss targets required for EU accession. The question of BiH's future orientation not only caused the freeze during the negotiations about the new government, but also caused further escalation of tensions among the constituent peoples (Euronews 2019).

The formation of a government was expected to allow the planned reforms to continue and to unlock many of the EU-funded projects blocked in Parliament. It was also crucial for progress in BiH's integration into the EU, as noted repeatedly by the European Commission, among others (European Commission 2019c). Furthermore, a functional government was needed to implement the necessary social and economic reforms (Respondents A, C 2020). Yet immediately after the stalemate was resolved, a new crisis appeared. Tensions among the political elites arose when the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina ruled as invalid a law, adopted in Republika Srbska, on agricultural land previously owned by Yugoslavia.[6] Protesting the Court's decision, Serbian representatives in February 2020 unilaterally suspended their participation in state institutions' decision-making and hence also debilitated the work of state authorities. They indicated that they would continue to be inactive until an act was adopted suspending the three international judges at the Constitutional Court from office. No such act has been adopted to date. Both the SNSD and HDZ have long found the presence of foreign judges at the Constitutional Court problematic. Here the EU admitted that they could be suspended as part of the implementation of the judiciary reform. However, foreign stakeholders argue that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not ready for the suspension of the judges from abroad, as they oversee at least a minimal standard of independence of this institution. They also say that such an act should only be adopted on the premise that comprehensive reform of the judiciary be carried out (Balkan Insight 2020; Respondents B, C 2020).

5 In 2010, BiH pledged to implement a Membership Action Plan, a precondition of accession to NATO. In 2018, NATO greenlighted BiH's membership. Headed by Milorad Dodik, the SNSD as the strongest party of Bosnian Serbs has long rejected NATO membership, however. While officially arguing in favour of neutrality, this may be caused by SNSD's pro-Russian policy.

6 Republika Srpska unilaterally declared the land in question its property, and the Constitutional Court ruled this unconstitutional. Furthermore, the Court decided that Bosnia and Herzegovina and not Republika Srpska is the owner of the land (Balkan Insight, 2020)

Along with the protest of the Serbian representatives came Milorad Dodik's threat to call a referendum on the status of Republika Srpska and its potential independence. This was not the first time. While some observers and politicians considered Dodik's repeatedly deployed slogan 'Goodbye BiH, welcome RS-exit' as a means of exercising pressure on his political opponents and the international community, others saw it as a political campaign for the local elections, held in October 2020.[7] Dodik certainly needed to improve his image with the electorate, having recently compromised on the formation of the Council of Ministers. It might simply have been an attempt on his part to draw attention to himself as the patron of the Serbian Orthodox community (OBCT 2020).

Republika Srpska representatives boycotted the central institutions from February 2020, and they suggested to respondents that the reform of the Constitutional Court was not the only change necessary. Dautović (2020; and Respondent D 2020) said in an interview that the current system needed a comprehensive overhaul. The issues in the country cannot be resolved by taking one problem out of the 'Dayton package' without paying attention to others. Bosnia and Herzegovina today clearly needs broader and deeper reform of its political system as such. The Commission's Opinion and Analytical Report are also concerned about the make-up of the Constitutional Court, but these documents note the shortcomings linked with the election of the domestic judges. The Commission has expressed concern about the election of six constitutional judges in an exceptionally politicised procedure, and the possible repercussions of this on the independence and professional quality of the institution (European Commission 2019).

By dragging out the systemic crisis, the nationalist parties have been able to forestall a resolution to the biggest problems, namely, reform of the judiciary and improvements in the quality of the rule of law, demanded by the EU with an ever-greater vehemence. The situations as they arose only confirmed to the international community that the original structures must be maintained as they were set up, and that the international community must keep its grasp on the mechanisms available, should a more serious crisis appear in the country

7 The results of the 2020 local elections were surprising and could herald a new political paradigm in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially if the trend is confirmed in the 2022 elections. The traditional nationalist parties SDA and SNSD were significantly weakened. SDA lost most of its seats, largely in the Sarajevo Canton and its municipalities, and a new political group, 'Četvorka' – a coalition of four political parties pledging an anti-corruption programme and working towards the prosperity of citizens, can be considered the winner of the elections. The election of Srđan Mandić of Our Party (*Naša stranka*), the mayor of Sarajevo, who identifies as a Serb, provides clear evidence of national identity gradually losing its relevance, at least in the larger cities. Likewise, the office of the mayor in Banja Luka, traditionally an SNSD stronghold, was won by an opposition candidate of the Party of Democratic Progress (*Partija demokratskog progresa*). This fundamental change in the electorate's preferences is probably linked with the civic protests in 2017 and 2018 following the murder of David Dragičević. SNSD also lost positions in Republika Srpska's second economic centre, Bijeljina (NDI 2020).

(European Western Balkans 2020). The dispute between the domestic leaders was transferred to the level of European institutions during a meeting between the chairman of the Presidency of BiH Željko Komšić and the president of the European Council Charles Michel in mid-February 2020. The working meeting took place before the May summit in Zagreb attended by other Western Balkans leaders. This was the first meeting of the region's leaders since the renewal of EU political representation in 2019. Before the planned meeting took place, Milorad Dodik sent an official letter to the European Council president claiming that anything Komšić said was not and could not be considered the official BiH position, as Komšić was not authorised to speak on behalf of the country. This was inconsistent with the setup of the revolving Presidency, where the chairman does represent the country abroad (DPA 1995; *Sarajevo Times* 2020; N1 2020).

With the Covid-19 pandemic, the attention of Bosnian leaders turned to managing the crisis, as in other countries. Attempting to unify the top leadership in an effort to save lives, Dodik decided to abandon his boycott of institutions and collaborate with his political opponents on stopping the Covid-19 outbreak (FENA 2020). But in foreign policy another controversial matter soon appeared. This was the visit by the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov. While Dodik was happy to meet Lavrov, the other two members of the Presidency boycotted the meeting. This was because Lavrov said that the Dayton Peace Agreement must be preserved in its current form – a view opposed by both the other two Presidency members and Western partners, who have long talked about revising the Agreement. Likewise controversial were Dodik's unilateral proclamations at the joint meeting to the effect that BiH was not planning to accede to NATO. Among other things, Lavrov's visit caused a diplomatic conflict between Ukraine and BiH when the official gift was presented to the Russian minister. This was an Orthodox icon from the Luhansk Oblast, which had probably been stolen (Daily Sabah 2020; Radio Free Europe 2020).

Such crises and unconstructive disputes among the country's political leaders do not cast a good light on Bosnia and Herzegovina, which does not appear a credible and trustworthy partner. This problem has been highlighted by the Commission in its annual report on the country, which mentions nearly all of the situations discussed above. On the other hand, the Commission admits that work has started on some of the 14 priorities it set for BiH as of key importance in its Opinion. The Commission also noted the problems in dealing with the pandemic, stemming from the complexity of the political system. This situation required a high degree of coordination between the various levels of governance, which proved ineffective. The central authorities were unable to develop a unified strategic plan for fighting the pandemic, and the resolution of the crisis remained in the hands of the lower administrative units (European Commission 2020b).

Assessing the scope and motives of Europeanisation, we can conclude that we did not find any substantial change. Within all of the limits, the external pressure of the international community has remained the only source of (weak) adaptation pressure. Domestic actors consumed political energy in nationalistic struggles and activities without any signs of internally driven changes of their political commitments to more profound Europeanisation.

Conclusions

Does the Bosnian political system's current setting hinder the Europeanisation process? We find the multi-layered and complex political system of Bosnia to be a not insignificant obstacle to potential accession. While it indeed suffers from many shortcomings and affects the speed and flexibility of political action and the adoption of reform, the institutions are stable and could be used in an effective way if there were cooperation among the plural Bosnian political elites. Whereas procedural mechanisms for amending and passing laws exist and are guaranteed by the Constitution, they also contain instruments that would allow the Constitution to be changed. The Dayton Peace Agreement itself envisaged further adjustments to the Constitution according to the country's needs and presupposed more fundamental reforms. The respondents confirmed that the DPA contains all indispensable instruments to redraw the system, particularly given that the agreement was designed as a temporary solution to end the armed conflict. According to Keil (2016), the problem is not the system itself but its rigid and strict application, which offers too little room for informal agreements between elites. Also, the European Commission states in the Opinion that, although the Dayton system was not designed perfectly, the Constitution itself is far from the only and insurmountable obstacle to the progress of the integration process. The EC explicitly stated that the current political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina was compatible with the accession criteria of the EU. However, it admits that several tough reforms of its institutions are needed to enable and simplify cooperation among the political actors in order to implement and subsequently enforce the acquis (European Commission 2019c).

How do the Bosnian political elites operate within the system regarding the dynamics of the accession process? Are the current elites able to push through the reforms required by the European Union? In our findings, the political elites constitute the biggest obstacle in the process of integration, being neither able nor willing to cooperate to reach a compromise among the constituent peoples and their representatives at various levels of governance. Besides that, the quite frequent use of veto as a 'normal' political strategy – a veto power established by the Constitution to protect constituent peoples' vital interests – complicates the whole progress. The pretended patronage of the highest political representatives over their nation serves as the perfect alibi to avoid reform, which would

restrict the elites' power or threaten their personal and economic interests. The system works well, especially for the nationalist parties and their leaders, often noted by authoritarian tendencies while exercising their political power. The current system helps them constantly strengthen their positions even without honest dealing with the problems the country faces since they tend to blame the system's dysfunctionality for their own (in)activity.

This paper argues that the *status quo* is beneficial for the political elites and that they have no interest in significant changes to the system which are partly required by the European Union. Despite the constantly declared support of local elites for EU accession, they have shown a negligible will to surrender their own advantages which they present in the guise of 'national interest'. This is proved not only by their political actions but also by their behaviour and speeches domestically. Čepo (2019) argues that meeting the EU requirements would make the legal system work and improve the quality of the rule of law, which is ruled out by the current impunity of the ruling elites. Today's political elites could quickly lose their access to power by gradual transformation towards the Union's standards. Therefore, such minimal progress in recent years is a clear sign of the elites' reluctance to seek the consensus needed to implement reforms and a lack of political will to prioritise issues related to the integration process.

Do they try to challenge the system and modify it according to the requirement of the accession process? We agree with Sasso (2020), who says that BiH wasted a year in 2019, when it had a chance to make progress in European integration. Though some progress was made centrally in the second half of 2020, in the near future not much can be expected, not least because of the complicated pandemic situation. The approach taken by BiH political elites towards the process of EU integration has remained unchanged for several years. We could even argue that their post-election activities put a total freeze on the process. Such political crises do not improve the image of BiH as a relevant and reliable partner for the EU. In our interviews the foreign stakeholders agreed that, by regularly providing technical and financial assistance and issuing critical documents – the Commission's Opinion and Analytical Report – the EU authorities have completed their task. The ball is now in the domestic political elites' court. But rather than using every opportunity to achieve consensus and coordinate the lower levels of governance, the Bosnian political elites today seek to bend the political system, aiming to maintain the *status quo*, and they do so in such a way that might not only freeze the political system, but even cause the country to regress.

Returning to the conceptual debate on Europeanisation, our research confirmed assumptions of shallow Europeanisation and the negative impact of 'stabilitocracy' concerns of the EU and international community in general. Therefore, neither external incentives nor social learning models worked to-

wards the progress of depth and intensity of Europeanisation. Given the intact institutional framework of the DPA and specific consociational Bosnian polity, only the internally driven change of the BiH political actors could have been the mechanism pushing Europeanisation forward. As our findings clearly showed, the BiH political actors remain intact by such impulses so far. Europeanisation does not seem to be the functioning explanatory framework of the current Bosnian politics.

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Constructing the Discourse on the Eurozone Crisis in the Czech Republic: Presidents Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman Compared[1]

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Abstract: *The article investigates the discourse of two Czech presidents, Václav Klaus (2003–2013) and Miloš Zeman (2013–incumbent), vis-à-vis the salient issue of the Eurozone crisis. Having adopted the general orientation of the discourse historical approach to discourse analysis, and working with a corpus of data on Klaus' and Zeman's public utterances on the Eurozone crisis in the 2010–2018 period, the central research question that the article addresses is: How was the Eurozone crisis discursively constructed in the presidential rhetoric of Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman? Building on the crisis literature, the article answers the question by exploring the presidential discourse within three persuasive narratives of the crisis causes, resolution and consequences.*

Key words: ***Eurozone crisis, Czech Republic, President, Václav Klaus, Miloš Zeman, discourse analysis***

Introduction

The article investigates the discourse of two Czech presidents, Václav Klaus (2003–2013) and Miloš Zeman (2013–incumbent), vis-à-vis the salient issue of the Eurozone crisis (Eurocrisis). Having adopted the general orientation of the discourse historical approach to discourse analysis, and working with a corpus of data on Klaus' and Zeman's public utterances on the Eurozone crisis in the 2010–2018 period, the central research question that the article

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aims to answer is: How was the Eurozone crisis discursively constructed in the presidential rhetoric of Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman? In particular, we are interested in where the blame for the crisis was laid, as this 'underpins the public's trust and confidence in domestic and European Union institutions' (Capelos – Exadaktylos 2017: 73).

To begin, let us outline the four-fold rationale behind this research endeavour and elucidate why we deal with 1) the Eurocrisis, 2) political discourse, 3) the Czech Republic and 4) presidents. Starting with the first one, the Eurozone crisis, also known as the European debt crisis, was the multi-year debt crisis taking place in the European Union which broke out in March 2010 and peaked in 2012. Having 'significantly shaped the fortunes of many Europeans' (Hänska et al. n.d.), the crisis shook up not only the Eurozone, but the entire European Union (EU), having created a space of concern and uncertainty that affected every single EU member state. The crisis 'pushed the boundaries of political conflict, it triggered the most intensive period of decision-making so far' (Puetter 2021: 880). Even today, EU member states still 'struggle to answer the fundamental question of what happened and what steps need to be taken to prevent another crisis' (Müller – Porcaro – von Nordheim 2018: 2). As Müller, Porcaro and von Nordheim (2018: 2) convincingly argue, 'Disagreement about the causes and potential remedies appears to be the major obstacle to creating a more stable and crisis-proof set-up.' In addition, the Eurocrisis 'opened up the EU policy making process to wide-spread debate over the form that both EU policy and institutional development should take' (FitzGibbon 2013 in Bijsmans 2021; similarly also Borriello – Crespy 2015), with the current ongoing debate about the reform of Eurozone macroeconomic governance serving as a case in point (see, for instance, Puetter 2021 on this). Besides, there is a widespread belief that the 'fragilities and imbalances that primed the monetary union for this crisis are still present' (Baldwin – Giavazzi 2015: 18).

Why do we pay attention to discourse? As the existent scholarship demonstrates, policy-making discourses may 'play a powerful causal role in determining the trajectory of policy change and, as such, should be treated as objects of enquiry in their own right' (Hay – Smith 2005: 135). The Eurocrisis did trigger 'an array of constructions and representations of a financial/socio-political crisis in the European Union and global politics, media and everyday talk' (Wodak – Angouri 2014: 417) and the role of discourse in its management has attracted significant attention amongst scholars, because public discourse 'largely shapes how a crisis is perceived, experienced and subjectively interpreted' (von Scheve – Zink – Ismer 2016: 648). The examination of political elite discourse on the Eurozone crisis thus provides invaluable insights into how key policy makers responded to the crisis as such. In addition, they also entail important pointers to the actors' perspectives on the future of the EU integration as well as to the level of Euroscepticism (Bijsmans 2021).

What makes the Czech Republic a compelling subject of interest? Studying EU crisis discourse in the Czech Republic is particularly interesting, for at least three reasons. Firstly, it is one of the most Eurosceptic countries in the EU (Eurobarometer 2021), with a strong tradition of party-based Euroscepticism (Havlík – Hloušek – Kaniok, 2017; Kaniok – Havlík, 2016). Secondly, the debate on the crisis of the Eurozone is a fascinating research matter in a country that still contemplates whether or not to adopt the euro. Even though the Czech Republic is bound to join the Eurozone in the future and is economically well positioned to do so, the issue has been postponed indefinitely. The incoming government headed by Petr Fiala has already made clear that it will not adopt the euro during its four-year term (Reuters 2021; cf. Pechova 2012). Thirdly, the European sovereign debt crisis triggered different problems in each country (Müller – Porcaro – von Nordheim 2018: 1) and that is why it is important to provide contextualised, country-specific analyses in each of the member states, including non-Eurozone members. Besides, as research on the Eurocrisis discourse often focuses on the larger EU member states (especially France, Germany and the United Kingdom), we opt for a different perspective, namely that of a small member state and a non-Eurozone country at that.

Why is it worthwhile to study the presidential elite discourse in the parliamentary political system? Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman, both former prime ministers who later became presidents, have long belonged to the most prominent figures in Czech politics. Although the Czech presidency is a largely ceremonial position and the executive powers of the Czech president, who is elected by a direct vote for five years, are limited, the president is still a formal head of state who plays a key role in the formation of new governments and the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces (Antoš 2011; Brunclík – Kubát 2016; Brunnerová – Just – Charvát 2018; Kysela 2015). He also has ratification powers and therefore the ability to impact the adoption of EU treaties, he represents the country abroad and can be influential on foreign policy if possessing leverage over domestic politics (Cadier 2013). Yet, to phrase it in the words of Gregor and Macková (2015: 405), 'the greatest power inherent in the office of president lies in the power of rhetoric, in the president's capacity to influence the other elements of power and public opinion, thus propelling public discourse.' Indeed, representing the highest level of office, the presidents are key opinion-forming actors, co-shaping the public sphere and playing a crucial role in the complex process of narrative-building and the national political debate, including on the EU (and the euro adoption). In other words, acting as agenda and/or tone setters, the presidency provides a significant 'platform from which to influence Czech political debates' (Shotter 2018). And even though the trust of Czech citizens in the president has been on steady decline lately (Hospodářské noviny 2020), it is still very high.

By providing a linguistically informed analysis of Klaus' and Zeman's Eurocrisis discourse, the study contributes to two distinct strands of literature. Firstly, it adds to the extant academic literature on the Eurocrisis discourse. So far, it is especially the media discourse that has been studied in this context (Bijsmans 2021; Capelos – Exadaktylos 2017; Kaiser – Kleinen-von Königslöw 2017; Kutter 2014; Müller – Picard 2015; Porcaro – von Nordheim 2018; Touri – Rogers 2013). Less scholarly attention has been paid to the discourse of key actors across member states and EU institutions (Borriello – Crespy, 2015; Papadimitriou, Pegasiou – Zartaloudis 2019; Schmidt 2014). Yet, 'our knowledge of the discursive evolution of the EU's bail-out crisis management over the past eight years remains rather fragmented' (Papadimitriou – Pegasiou – Zartaloudis 2019: 436). As this is the first study on the Czech political Eurocrisis discourse, it represents the missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle, empirically mapping the crisis discourses across EU member states. Secondly, with the Czech (presidential) discourse vis-à-vis the Eurocrisis remaining an uncovered phenomenon in the literature on the Czech discourse on the EU, the study seeks to make an empirical contribution to a body of research seeking to document Czech discourse(s) vis-à-vis the EU (Braun, 2008; Kim, 2020; Naxera – Stulík 2021; Novotna, 2007; Rakušanová, 2007), and the discourses of the two presidents in particular (for Klaus, see, for instance, Gregor – Macková 2015; Hloušek – Kaniok 2014 and partly also Pechova 2012; for Zeman, see, for instance, Naxera – Krčál 2018; Naxera – Krčál 2019). It is especially in Zeman's case that almost no analysis on his EU discourse as such has yet been undertaken.

Following this introductory part, the article continues with four further sections. To contextualise the topic, the first part provides a brief exposition and general reflection on the two presidents' approach to the EU. The second section deals with the theoretical background of the study, presents the data and outlines the methodological approach. The subsequent part is devoted to the nuanced empirical analysis, looking at how the presidents communicated and shared their perceptions of, and cognitions on, the Eurocrisis. Scrutinising the presidential discourse within the three narratives of crisis causes, resolution and consequences as well as the related linguistic features, we develop our arguments and substantiate them with specific illustrations of the presidents' statements. Finally, the short conclusion summarises the major findings.

Presidential Eurocrisis discourse in context

First of all, let us situate briefly the Eurocrisis discourse of the two presidents into the wider context of their approaches to the EU. Václav Klaus, who served as the first prime minister of the newly independent Czech Republic from 1993 to 1998 and as its second president (2003–2013), represented 'a strong and increasingly overbearing President who has striven to gradually expand his

scope of power' (Pechova 2012: 794). Still commenting extensively on both domestic and foreign policy issues, he is widely known as 'one of the EU's most vocal critics' (Gregor – Macková 2015: 410). Indeed, he has long boasted strong Eurosceptic credentials, notoriously waging 'his most ferocious battle… against European integration' (Cadier 2013; similarly also Pechova 2012), with an increasing sense of urgency in his criticism of the EU as his time in office progressed (Gregor – Macková 2015). As Hanley (2008: 191) succinctly sums up, his Euroscepticism is based on 'an "Anglo-Saxon" neo-liberal economic critique of the EU as an inefficient, over-regulated and "socialist" structure dominated by self-seeking bureaucratic elites… a moralistic "Central European" critique of the EU's self-interest and bad faith in the enlargement process and in its relations with East and Central Europe; and a "national" critique of the EU as a threat to Czech national sovereignty and identity, both through its existing policies and in its plans for further political integration' (cf. Havlík – Mocek 2017; Hloušek – Kaniok 2014).

In 2013, Zeman became the first directly elected president in Czech history (Brunnerová – Just – Charvát 2018). As a prime minister in the 1998–2002 period, he used to be a supporter of the European integration. Having proclaimed himself a Eurofederalist, he brought the Czech Republic into the EU, kept close relations with Western European social democratic parties and showed support towards deepening European integration (Cadier 2013; Kocker 2016; Ruzicka 2018). As a populist president (Naxera – Krčál 2018), however, Zeman has become openly Eurosceptic and distinctly pro-Russia, engaging often in a war of words with the EU (Shotter 2018), with his relentless attacks against the EU's quota plans serving as a case in point. His second victory in the Czech presidential election in 2018 was widely interpreted not only as a setback for Western liberalism (Ruzicka 2018) but also as 'another milepost in the shift in central European attitudes towards the EU' (Shotter 2018). Additionally, he has been also known for open calls for an EU in/out referendum and simultaneous assertions that he would campaign in favour of the Czech Republic remaining in the Union, with this strategy enabling him to 'dance at two weddings at once – attract Eurosceptic voters… while not losing too many mainstream voters' (Kocker 2016).

Theory, data and methodology

The general theoretical approach to the analysis has been informed by the theory of social constructivism which emphasises the role of language, speech and argument (Finnemore – Sikkink 2001). Social constructivist approaches are 'crucial for an understanding of Member States' European policy and the future development of European governance' (Diez 2001: 6). According to this perspective, discourse is constitutive of politics, meaning that politics is

socially constructed through discourse, since wider social and contexts affect and constitute discourse and vice versa (De Cilla – Reisigl – Wodak, 1999: 157; also Krzyżanowski – Wodak, 2008; Reisigl – Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2011). Crises (and here specifically the Eurozone crisis) are thus viewed as a complex phenomenon that is both discursively constituted and socially produced.

With a reference to Schmidt's (2008; 2013; 2014) distinction between coordinative and communicative discourse, this article deals with the latter one which is defined as occurring in

the political sphere and consisting of 'the individuals and groups involved in the presentation, deliberation, and legitimation of political ideas to the general public' (Schmidt 2008: 310). Our overall approach is essentially actor-oriented, working at the individual level of analysis.

Regarding the data collection, we compiled a corpus of data on public utterances by Klaus and Zeman on the crisis of the Eurozone in the period between 2010–2012 (Klaus) and 2013–2018 (Zeman). As detailed in Tables 1 and 2, these are usually in the form of speeches, media interviews, blog posts and essays. All of the materials were collected from Klaus' and Zeman's official websites which serve as extensive repositories of their texts, speeches and interviews (www.klaus.cz and www.vk.hrad.cz in the case of Klaus and www.zemanmilos.cz in the case of Zeman). In line with Reisigl and Wodak's (2001) understanding of discourse, the data corpus includes both the written and the spoken. In order to ensure the balance between breadth and depth of the analysis, the data corpus comprises 15 public pronouncements for each president, i.e. 30 in total. In all of the pronouncements, the presidents referred to, or evaluated, the Eurozone crisis. We analysed all the texts in their original versions, with our fluency in Czech allowing us to work on original data. All translations from Czech to English are the authors'. The timeframe of our analysis stretches from 2010 to 2012 in the case of Klaus (i.e. from the outbreak of the crisis until the end of his tenure – he stepped down in early March 2013 but made no speech on the Eurocrisis in 2013) and from 2013 to 2018 in the case of Zeman (i.e. from taking up office in 2013 until 2018 when he last addressed the Eurocrisis issue substantively).

To explore how the crisis of the Eurozone featured in the presidential discourse, the article adopts the discourse historical approach to critical discourse studies (Krzyżanowski – Wodak, 2008; Reisigl – Wodak, 2001). More specifically, using Krzyżanowksi's (2010) analytical operationalisation, the attention in this inquiry is paid to: 1) thematic analysis of the presidential Eurocrisis discourse and 2) the related linguistic features. The first step functions as an initial examination of the data and zeroes in on the easily detectable dominant narratives that characterise the given discourse (Krzyzanowski 2010: 81–83). The second level of the analysis focuses on the employed rhetoric and linguistic devices (Krzyzanowski 2010: 83–89). We find the two-level analysis especially

Table 1: Data corpus on Václav Klaus

Date	Title	Format	Reference
10. 5. 2010	Interview of the President of the Republic for Týden magazine on the elections to the Chamber of Deputies and the problems of the Eurozone	Media interview	Klaus 2010a
8. 7. 2010	Hard times for liberals: an essay on Gerhard Schwarz's sixtieth birthday	Essay	Klaus 2010b
9. 12. 2010	Future of Europe?	Blog post	Klaus 2010c
26. 11. 2011	Interview of the President of the Republic for Lidové noviny on the European integration without illusions	Media interview	Klaus 2011a
12. 12. 2011	Remarks on the President's address at the pre-Christmas EURO Business Breakfast	Speech	Klaus 2011b
18. 12. 2011	Interview of the President of the Republic in the TV Prima discussion programme – Partie	Media interview	Klaus 2011c
18. 1. 2012	On today's European problem in Saudi Arabia	Blog post	Klaus 2012a
10. 4. 2012	Žofín Forum 2012: radical change must take place in our country and in Europe	Speech	Klaus 2012b
5. 7. 2012	Speech by the President of the Republic during his state visit to Malaysia	Speech	Klaus 2012c
28. 9. 2012	Speech by the President of the Republic at the National St. Wenceslas Pilgrimage	Speech	Klaus 2012d
11. 10. 2012	Speech by the President at the state dinner on the occasion of his visit to the Republic of Poland	Speech	Klaus 2012e
13. 11. 2012	Speech by the President at the state dinner on the occasion of his visit to the Republic of Austria	Speech	Klaus 2012f
10. 12. 2012	President's address at the Euro Business Breakfast	Speech	Klaus 2012g
14. 12. 2012	Speech by the President of the Republic at the state dinner on the occasion of his visit to Hungary	Speech	Klaus 2012h
31. 12. 2012	Chapter on the financial crisis from the forthcoming book by the President of the Republic: We, Europe and the World	Blog post	Klaus 2012i

Source: the authors.

Table 2: Data corpus on Miloš Zeman

Date	Title	Format	Reference
25. 4. 2013	Interview of the President of the Republic for the daily newspaper Právo	Media interview	Zeman 2013a
20. 5. 2013	Speech by the President of the Republic at the Žofín Forum	Speech	Zeman 2013b
27. 6. 2013	Speech by the President of the Republic at Humboldt University in Berlin	Speech	Zeman 2013c
18. 2. 2014	Address by the President of the Republic at the 6th Session of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic	Speech	Zeman 2014a
26. 3. 2014	Greece should leave the euro, I am a fan of creative destruction	Media interview	Zeman 2014b
11. 4. 2014	Speech by the President of the Republic at the conference 'The Czech Republic through the eyes of Europe, Europe through the eyes of the Czech Republic'	Conference contribution	Zeman 2014c
3. 1. 2015	Interview of the President of the Republic for the daily newspaper Právo	Media interview	Zeman 2015a
13. 3. 2015	Interview of the President of the Republic for Haló noviny	Media interview	Zeman 2015b
14. 3. 2015	Interview of the President of the Republic for Haló noviny – part two	Media interview	Zeman 2015c
28. 5. 2015	Euro – emotions and reality	Blog post	Zeman 2015d
30. 8. 2015	Interview of the President of the Republic for the Press Club Frekvence 1	Media interview	Zeman 2015e
6. 3. 2016	Interview of the President of the Republic for TV Prima Partie	Media interview	Zeman 2016a
23. 5. 2016	Interview of the President of the Republic for Rossiyskaya Gazeta	Media interview	Zeman 2016b
17. 12. 2017	President's interview with Israel HaYom: 'Israel and its heroism are an example and encouragement for us'	Media interview	Zeman 2017
18. 10. 2018	Interview of the President of the Republic for the TV Barrandov programme 'Week with the President'	Media interview	Zeman 2018

Source: the authors.

suitable, as it generates insights into various discursive dimensions addressing both form (style) and content (proposition).

The article builds on the crisis literature that demonstrates that crisis response involves the existence of three persuasive narratives of the crisis causes, resolution and consequences (Hay 1999; Natorski 2020). The definition of a narrative that this article aligns itself with follows that of Kreuter, Green, Cappella, Slater et al. (2007: 222) as 'a representation of connected events and characters that has an identifiable structure, is bounded in space and time, and contains implicit or explicit messages about the topic being addressed'. In a political context, narratives enable societies to formulate political priorities and influence 'the way a society views itself and forms its policy priorities' (Müller – Porcaro – von Nordheim 2018: 3). The importance of narratives in governance owes much to their ability to 'make problems amenable to human action via public decisions (or non-decisions)' (Baldoli – Radaelli 2019: 6). In what follows, we systematically scrutinise the presidential discourse within the three narratives of the crisis causes, resolution and consequences, using concrete textual examples from the presidents' statements to exemplify the given phenomena.

Results and discussion

Thematic analysis

To compare and contrast how Klaus and Zeman discursively expressed themselves on the Eurocrisis, the following three sections scrutinise the three narratives identified by the crisis literature (Hay 1999; Natorski 2020) as predominant in the crisis discourse, namely 1) the narrative of the crisis causes; 2) the narrative of the crisis resolution; 3) the narrative of the crisis consequences.

Narrative of the crisis causes

A key line of the Czech presidential Eurocrisis discourse centred around attributions of crisis responsibility. In general, this narrative is essential, because 'In the world of policymaking, narratives are incredibly important since if we c agree on what happened – or more precisely, on what were the most important things that happened – then we cannot agree on how to remedy the situation' (Baldwin – Giavazzi 2015: 18). Employment of this narrative was more evident in Klaus' discourse than Zeman's, but both presidents presented their arguments here as backed up by the presumedly common knowledge. It was within this narrative that the discursive strategy of blaming was most extensively applied.

Zeman's line of argumentation centred here on the repeated assertion that the Eurocrisis was not caused by the common currency, with this overarching scheme reproduced in various arguments (albeit often expressed in a somewhat

patronising manner), such as 'Only an economic illiterate believes that the crisis in Greece or Cyprus was caused by the euro' (Zeman 2013a) or 'The Greek crisis has nothing to do with the euro, this is an amateurish opinion' (Zeman 2015b; cf. Zeman 2015d). Instead, he attributed the causes of the Eurocrisis to 'low investments in the European economy, including in Germany' (Zeman 2013c). Apart from that – and in a marked contrast to Klaus – Zeman did not engage much in the debate on the crisis causes.

Contrariwise, Klaus used different clusters of arguments to assign blame for the crisis to the adoption of the single currency, foregrounding the introduction of the euro as 'the most important single moment' that 'led to the economic disaster' (Klaus 2012a). The effort to identify the common currency as the main culprit was advanced by other arguments on the deficiencies of the EU's economic architecture, such as 'If Greece didn't have the euro and had the drachma, it would have devalued it long ago and there would be no crisis at all' (Klaus 2010a; very similarly also Klaus 2012e; Klaus 2012f), with Klaus severely criticising the fact that 'The political decision to create this monetary arrangement was made without taking sufficient account of existent or non-existent economic conditions' (Klaus 2012f). Unlike Zeman, Klaus elaborated more extensively on the issue of crisis causes, viewing them as multi-level and multi-dimensional. In his view, these included – apart from the introduction of the single currency – a single exchange rate, a single interest rate for countries with very different economic parameters, long-term loss of the EU's international competitiveness and unsustainability of the current European economic and social model (Klaus 2012a; Klaus 2012f). As is commonplace for Klaus (see, especially Gregor – Macková 2015 on this), his discourse was replete with references to axioms of economic liberalism.

Further invoked in the analysed corpus were responsibility attributions vis-à-vis Greece, with both presidents portraying the country as an unpredictable and irresponsible actor (cf. Capelos – Exadaktylos 2017; Kutter 2014; Papadimitriou – Pegasiou – Zartaloudis 2019; Touri and Rogers 2013). Klaus, however, did not consider Greece the ultimate culprit, avowing that it was 'too cheap' to narrow the crisis down to Greece and placing its problems into the context of wider Eurozone deficiencies (as in 'If the problem did not arise from Greece, it would have arisen from something else' [Klaus 2011a]). In a comparison with Klaus, Zeman promoted national discourse on the origins of the crisis (cf. Picard 2015), which is well demonstrated by the following quote: 'The fact that Greece and Cyprus were living above their means was not caused by the euro, but by the economic policies of their governments' (Zeman 2013a). By attributing Greece's financial problems predominantly to domestic factors – for the most part in a sense of the pathologies of the Greek political and economic system such the country's overdebtedness, corruption, fiscal irresponsibility and general economic mismanagement – he reinforced the position of Greece as the

main culprit of the crisis (prominent especially in Zeman 2016a). Correspondingly, Zeman backgrounded the idea that Greece's Eurozone membership was a mistake, hinting at the catastrophic collapse of the country's credibility (as in 'Greece got there [into the Eurozone] by fraud, by statistical fraud' [Zeman 2016a]; cf. Papadimitriou – Pegasiou – Zartaloudis 2019).

As is clear from above, Klaus, in sharp contrast to Zeman, characteristically adopted a wider perspective and commented more broadly on the European situational context, thus employing 'a more Europeanised narrative' (Papadimitriou – Pegasiou – Zartaloudis 2019: 435) of the Eurocrisis causes. Indeed, he intimately connected the causes of the crisis to his critique of the drivers towards ever closer union and deeper integration, often couched in European superstate terms, and the deficiencies of the Eurozone's economic governance. Most of his blame was attributed here to the 'unnecessarily accelerated and in any case premature unification steps' which were introduced by the Maastricht and Lisbon Treaties (for instance, Klaus 2010b; Klaus 2012a) and which brought a too-high level of risks and costs for all types of member states, rich and poor, big and small (Klaus 2010b). It was various of the EU's dysfunctionalities where much of Klaus' blame assignment was directed. Such communicative behaviour is well in line with Klaus' long-term critical attitude towards the current direction of the EU (Gregor – Macková 2015).

Further afield, detectable within Klaus' rhetoric was the tendency to take the issue of crisis causes to a higher level of abstractness, to what he denoted as a 'civilizational-cultural sphere', assigning blame to 'comfortable living under the illusion that no serious problems can arise, whatever we do in the economic and social sphere' (Klaus 2012i; similarly also Klaus 2011b).

Narrative of the crisis resolution

In both cases, the narrative of the crisis resolution was driven by arguments on 1) solutions adopted at the EU level and 2) alternative remedies to the crisis. Starting with the first one, the targeted hostility towards the solutions adopted at the EU level was notable in the discourse of both presidents. Framing a polarised picture within this topic area, both Klaus and Zeman employed a lot of criticism to convey the message that these attempts to solve the crisis were misguided and actually detrimental for the EU and its member states. Constructing the opposition to the EU by means of the othering concept (cf. Malmborg – Stråth 2002 and Spiering 2015 on this), both were very critical of the EU institutions and representatives for not being willing and/or able to put the right remedies in place and contain the crisis.

Importantly, Zeman applied a tougher othering language than Klaus in his discursive interactions within this narrative, having often modified the adopted solutions by the strong evaluative adjective 'non-sensical' (Zeman 2013b, 2018). In this vein, he iteratively criticised chiefly the 'quantitative easing, sometimes

also referred to as liquidity supply' which was 'essentially nothing more than plain and simple money printing, or uncovered inflationary issuance' (Zeman 2013b). Correspondingly, the European Stability Mechanism was in his perspective irrational, distorted and non-sensical, as evidenced by the following quoted passage: 'The European Commission has created this nonsensical system called the European Stability Mechanism, which means that when a Member State goes bankrupt, you give it not just an interest-free loan, that is the least of it, but you give it a de facto non-repayable loan. Well, and I said, why should Czech taxpayers have to pay Greek debts?' (Zeman 2018). As is clear from this, in order to create the sense of a collective identity through reference to a shared concern, Zeman nationalised his Eurocrisis discourse by referencing it explicitly to the Czech context.

By way of comparison, Klaus' rhetoric typically hinged on the opposition against the solutions of building various protective walls, centralising European decision-making and federalising the EU (Klaus 2012h). He was eager to convey the message that these were unnecessary meddling in the domestic affairs and an infringement of national sovereignties, as they entailed 'stripping ourselves of our own sovereignty and handing the decision-making over to Brussels' (Klaus 2012h). Constantly emphasising that the 'crisis is not and cannot be solved this way' (Klaus 2012h), neither of these 'methods of curing the crisis' had brought any viable solutions (Klaus 2012g).

Related to this point, both presidents also systematically discredited the EU for not solving the crisis at all. In Zeman's view, all the adopted solutions were nothing more than just mere postponement of the problem(s): 'We are rolling the Greek problem like a boulder in front of us. We are not solving it, we are just postponing it' (Zeman 2014b). Likewise, in Klaus' view, the EU was not dealing with the crisis solutions, with the president habitually expressing negative effects, delegitimising the Union as a careless, lazy and generally idle actor, and excluding the delicate inter-institutional and intergovernmental negotiations that were taking place from his discursive interactions (as in 'But what to do with today's Greece, today's Portugal and other countries? That was never discussed in Brussels' [Klaus 2011c]). Emblematic of Klaus' discursive handling of the crisis were also the arguments that the solutions implemented at the EU level did not work properly (thereby admitting that the EU was trying in fact to solve the crisis, after all), because the highest level of EU administration 'refuse to accept the crisis as such and truthfully describe its causes' (Klaus 2012g). He, for instance, denigrated the EU summits as thoroughly incompetent, as instantiated by the following quote: '… the belief in palliative medicine and in shamanic methods of incantation. This is what the European Union summits are all about' (Klaus 2012g).

Alongside this, a common theme for both presidents was that of praise for certain countries and their (re)presentation as role models in terms of dealing

with the Eurozone crisis. While for Zeman, it was the Scandinavian countries (Zeman 2014), for Klaus it was the Czech Republic and Poland, due to their ability to retain their national currencies (Klaus 2012e; similarly also Klaus 2012c). In Klaus' case, the choice of this particular manoeuvre was primarily motivated by the effort to illustrate the adverse implications of euro adoption (Hloušek – Kaniok 2014; Pechova 2012).

Secondly, the Czech presidential discursive posture vis-á-vis the Eurozone crisis pivoted around the topic of alternative remedy suggestions. Unlike Klaus, Zeman offered a quick, clear-cut solution that, in his view, would stimulate growth: 'The solution that I have been long proposing… is to overcome the crisis through investment, not consumption' (Zeman 2015e). When it comes to proposals for specific solutions, Zeman took a punitive stance towards Greece, foregrounding the conditionality issue and openly calling for the country's ejection from the Eurozone: 'If Greece does not want to comply with the terms of the bailout plan, the simplest solution is to leave the Eurozone – not the European Union – reintroduce the drachma, devalue it and pay off its debts in a devalued currency' (Zeman 2015c; very similarly also Zeman 2016a).

Out of the two, it was Klaus who was more prolific in terms of putting forward alternative policy directions. According to his discursive logic, there were no simple solutions to the Eurozone debt problem (especially notable in Klaus 2012a). Klaus often reiterated that the long-term economic solutions that he proposed depended on accelerating economic growth in Europe but admitted that sources of such acceleration were very hard to find (Klaus 2012a; Klaus 2012h). Klaus also went a step further than Zeman in tying up the proposed solutions to broader alternative conceptions of EU policies or/and the European integration – mainly in a sense of calling for less EU involvement(s), as evidenced, for instance, by his continual references to the abolishment of the common currency in the aftermath of the crisis: 'I do not believe it makes sense to try to maintain at all costs institutions that have demonstrably failed and led to the crisis – such as the single currency' (Klaus 2012e). Sometimes, Klaus talked at a higher level of abstractness, seeing the 'return to politics' as the only solution to the Eurocrisis (Klaus 2011a).

Narrative of the crisis consequences

Zeman's discursive handling of the Eurozone crisis was characterised by the positive construal of the crisis consequences. Principally, he fostered the image of the crisis as 'an impetus for useful reforms [of the EU] but also for a deeper and previously unthinkable integration' (Zeman 2014c), characterising the crisis 'not only [as] a condition' but also as 'an opportunity and a challenge' (Zeman 2014b). Portraying the post-crisis future in a positive way, he repetitively professed his belief that the EU would come out of the Eurocrisis strengthened, as demonstrated by the following excerpts: 'Out of each [crisis],

the EU has come out stronger and I believe that it will become stronger also under the leadership of J. C. Juncker, who is known to be a Eurofederalist' (Zeman 2015a); 'The EU has already gone through many crises and has managed to deal with all of them' (Zeman 2017) or 'the EU has overcome every crisis in its history so far, and, what is more, it has come out stronger out of each' (Zeman 2014c).

This contrasts with Klaus' construal of the Eurocrisis consequences which was replete with instances of negative assessment of the post-crisis future. Because of the EU's inability to provide effective solutions (and other deficiencies of the Eurozone's economic governance), the EU was slipping into an ever-worse crisis: 'Because of this, Europe is sinking deeper and deeper into an economic, political and social crisis precipitated by a flawed and, moreover, immodest and unbending social-engineering integration experiment' (Klaus 2012d). Klaus built this narrative for the most part around the criticism of the existing ideas for a fiscal union: 'The European fiscal, redistributive or transfer union is a dead end. It is not a tunnel at the end of which I can see hopeful lights… I think someone is after their position, their hegemony, their interests' (Klaus 2011a; similarly also Klaus 2012d). It follows that Klaus' discursive patterning towards the crisis was pervaded by a sense of gloom, anxiety-arousal and a generalised loss of hope, with the president adamant in laying out grim, bleak future scenarios and expressing his fears over the danger of financial contagion and Europe-wide recession, as exemplified by the following passage: 'Euro debt crisis á la Greece or Ireland will affect other countries, too' (Klaus 2010c).

Just like in Zeman's case, also in Klaus' perspective, the Eurozone crisis should become an impulse to rethink the EU integration project but, unlike Zeman, solely in a sense of less integration ('Rather than another integration impulse, the Greek debt crisis could become a trigger mechanism for reassessment of the existing integration ambitions' [Klaus 2010b]). At the same time, what figured prominently in his political messaging was the conviction that there would be no policy lessons learned from the Eurocrisis experience whatsoever, because he did not 'believe that this crisis and its consequences will become a lesson. Rather, everything will remain the same' (Klaus 2012i).

Related linguistic features

In the following, let us have a brief look at some key linguistic features by means of which the two presidents made sense of the European debt crisis. The Eurocrisis discourse of both was interspersed by extensive credit-claiming and positive self-presentation manoeuvres which they used for advancing their own profiles. Both rhetorically positioned themselves as Heroes, yet each for different reasons. Zeman repeatedly cast himself as a Hero because he was

proposing solutions that politicians did not want to hear (using often his favourite 'investments do not have a voting right' soundbite in this context [for instance, Zeman 2013b]). Adding to this was Zeman's instrumental strategy to promote the Eurocrisis discourse as a presidential topic – an exceptionally suitable theme for the president and even more so for the one who got elected in the historically first direct election: '… this exactly is a presidential issue. The president, and even more so the president elected directly by the citizens for five years, does not have to take into account the current moods and mood swings of individual political parties' (Zeman 2013b).

Contrastingly, Klaus cast himself as extremely knowledgeable, priding himself on having known that the crisis would come for a very long time, as in 'I have to say that some of us have criticized this project since the very beginning of the 1990s' (Klaus 2012a). As a result, the Eurocrisis-related developments did not come as a surprise to him. Indeed, more than Zeman, Klaus used the argumentative strategy of parading his own qualities, often evoking the 'rescue narrative' frame and casting himself within that frame as a potential Helper (who comes to rescue by providing the advice, if unsolicited). At the same time, he conveyed the feelings of being disgraced for not being listened to (as in 'Some of us have been warning for years about the risks of the current direction of the European integration, but our concerns have been ignored' [Klaus 2012f] or 'As an economist, I was convinced for two decades that the project called the euro had to end in the way it is ending now. It was simply inevitable that it would come to this. It is a pity that no one listened' [Klaus 2011c]).

Relatedly, what could be further observed was the absence of doubt in Klaus' Eurocrisis discourse. In communicative terms, he conveyed a strong sense of self-confidence and employed no hedging techniques to tone down his claims (cf. Buckledee 2019). Instead, it was various expressions of certainty, such as 'it is obvious' or 'I must insist that', which became ritual elements of his discourse, sitting well with his long-lasting tendency to promote his own opinions on the EU assertively (Gregor – Macková 2015). Zeman, by contrast, occasionally admitted an error in judgement in the Eurocrisis context, as in: '… you wanted to hear an example of misjudgement, so here you go. I expected the European Union, and specifically the Eurozone, to behave rationally and push Greece out of the Eurozone. And I was wrong, Greece is still in the Eurozone' (Zeman 2015e). This stands in sharp contrast to Klaus for whom assertions along the lines of 'There is nothing to change about that [his opinions]. It still holds true' (Klaus 2012b) were more typical.

In tandem with this, both presidents used their Eurocrisis discourse for the purpose of dichotomous messaging that purposefully pitted them against the political establishment/traditional politicians (despite already being in politics for a very long time and being the very embodiment of the said political establishment). Both strategically invoked this polarisation, promoting

themselves as non-standard (hence authentic, truthful and honest) politicians and constructing themselves in direct opposition to the political elite. It was especially Zeman who often spoke out against 'standard politicians' whom he portrayed as 'enjoying promises' to imply that they, unlike himself, were untrustworthy (for instance, Zeman 2013c). Statements to that effect were made also by Klaus, as exemplified by his claims that politicians were lying to the people and attempting to obscure the 'true causes' of the crisis (for instance, Klaus 2012b; Klaus 2012f). Apart from that, Klaus identified himself as someone who, unlike the said politicians, and in fact as the only one, called everything by its right name. For instance, while others labelled the current problems imprecisely as 'democratic deficit', he called them accurately as 'post-democracy' (Klaus 2012a).

Finally, Klaus, to a greater extent than Zeman, foregrounded more normatively engaging arguments in the Eurocrisis context in order to give an appearance of moral superiority. His explicit work with normative categories of right and wrong is instantiated in the following excerpt: 'If that were to happen, it would certainly be a good thing' (Klaus 2010b). Zeman, on the other hand, used a more emotional language, claiming, for instance, to be 'very, very cruel' when presenting his views on the crisis causes (Zeman 2013c).

Conclusion

The article has focused on the discursive mediation of the Eurocrisis in political discourse in the Czech Republic. Albeit exploratory in nature, the study is significant because it illuminated how the two Czech presidents, as influential public figures at the highest echelons of power, acted through language to shape other people's attitudes towards the European debt crisis and the EU as such. The interpretivist account of the presidential discourse suggests that both of them focused mainly on the Eurocrisis causes (Klaus to a larger extent than Zeman) and its controllability and future preventability (in a sense of measures that could be taken to forfeit similar events in the future).

Zeman highlighted what amounted to predominantly national discourses on the origins of the crisis, while Klaus employed a more Europeanised narrative of the crisis causes, typically foregrounding a wider perspective and commenting more broadly on the European situational context. For him, the Eurocrisis was symptomatic of wider structural weaknesses in the design of the EU and the Eurozone. At the same time, Klaus viewed the European debt crisis not just as economic/financial but also socio-political, too (cf. Schmidt 2014), with the notion of broken values particularly strong in his Eurocrisis-related rhetoric. He, more than Zeman, also identified the crisis not only as a Eurozone problem but as a problem that concerned the EU more broadly (cf. Touri – Rogers 2013).

The narrative of the crisis resolution was in both cases driven by arguments criticising the solutions adopted at the EU level, with both presidents constructing the opposition to the EU by means of the othering concept. Expressing negative effects and conveying an image of the EU as the non-liked Other, their criticism amounted especially to condemnation of the existing policies (yet, in each case, from a different perspective). While doing so, both presidents engaged in negative other-presentation, attaching various negative attributions to the EU, for the most part in a sense of being ineffective, idle and incompetent. Yet, it was Zeman who applied a stronger othering language in this context. Zeman also took a more punitive stance towards Greece, foregrounding the conditionality issue and openly calling for the country's ejection from the Eurozone. In addition, the proposed solutions were accompanied by presentation of alternative remedy suggestions and different policy options and, especially in Klaus' case, alternative conceptions of EU policies and the European integration more broadly. While Zeman offered what he considered quick, clear-cut solutions, according to Klaus' discursive logic, there were no simple solutions to the Eurozone debt problem.

Regarding the narrative of the crisis consequences, Zeman's discursive handling of the Eurozone crisis was characterised by the positive portrayal of the crisis consequences in a sense that the EU would come out of the European debt crisis strengthened and more resilient. Klaus' construal of the Eurocrisis consequences was, by contrast, dotted with instances of negative assessment of the post-crisis future.

Finally, let us situate the findings into the broader context and look at what constituted the parameters of the Eurocrisis for each president and what attributes they ascribed to it. Both Klaus and Zeman engaged extensively in describing the nature of the crisis, differing markedly, however, in the crisis--related aspects that they emphasised in their rhetoric. For Klaus, the crisis was an unprecedented phenomenon, unlike any other crisis since the 1930s: 'the crisis – in its depth undoubtedly different from all the crises since the 1930s' (Klaus 2012i). It was particularly its 'unexpected severity and depth' (Klaus 2012i) that differentiated it from previous crises. The European debt crisis, in his view, was the most visible crisis of all the crises facing the EU (notable, for instance, in Klaus 2011b). Unlike Zeman, Klaus accentuated the disruptiveness of the crisis, casting it as 'a derailment of the existing course of things which has and will have long-term consequences' (Klaus 2012i; similarly also Klaus 2012g).

By contrast, omnipresent in Zeman's discourse was the notion of the EU having already been through many crises, thus implying that the crisis was commonplace in the EU and that it, in effect, acted as a normative assertion about the status quo (cf. Lawrence 2014). The following quoted passages illustrates this discursive positioning well: 'I do not know of any situation where

the EU was not facing a deeper or shallower crisis. I recently read the memoirs of Jean Monnet, one of the EU founders, who in his book listed about twenty such crises' (Zeman 2015a); 'The European Union has already been through many crises' (Zeman 2017). Having said that, Zeman was remarkably inconsistent in this respect, as he simultaneously claimed (albeit only occasionally) that the EU was not used to crises and as such the Eurocrisis was not anything special: 'The trouble is that the EU is not used to crises and it is unable to react quickly to them' (Zeman 2016b).

What is more, typical for Klaus, rather than Zeman, in his crisis construal were references to the prevalence of the Eurocrisis, with him portraying it as only a visible tip of the iceberg of a much deeper and longer-lasting European crisis (Klaus 2012a). Unlike Zeman, Klaus routinely engaged in the debate on the broader meaning of the Eurozone crisis, viewing it as having spilled over into a wider political, societal and cultural crisis (Klaus 2011b). Notably, Klaus systematically foregrounded the image of the Eurocrisis as a political crisis and a crisis of values, as in 'An economic crisis, a political crisis, but also a crisis of human perspectives, prospects and hopes. To reduce it to the debt crisis of some European countries or to the crisis of the common European currency concept is to misunderstand the depth and breadth of today's European problem' (Klaus 2012a). Crucially, a key tenet of Klaus' reasoning here was the assertion that the EU representatives were complacently in denial (and thus inherently incompetent), not comprehending that there was a crisis going on (for instance, Klaus 2012g).

Viewed in its entirety, the Eurocrisis discourse of both presidents was interspersed by extensive credit-claiming manoeuvres, with both of them discursively positioning themselves as Heroes. Both also used their Eurocrisis discourse for the purpose of dichotomous messaging that pitted them against the political establishment/traditional politicians. Seen in a comparative lens, Klaus' discursive posture vis-á-vis the Eurozone crisis was more abstract, more assertive and activist and contained more normatively engaging arguments.

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From Deliberation to Pure Mobilisation? The Case of National Consultations in Hungary

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Abstract: *National or supranational consultations on general policy questions are unusual phenomena. Nevertheless, they seem to play an important role in the political life of the community either because they might be considered as rudimentary forms of deliberative practices or because they are important strategic tools in the hands of political actors. Given this salience of consultations from both normative-deliberative and descriptive-strategic perspectives, it is surprising that academic analyses of national consultations are scarce. This paper tries to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on one of the most well-known examples of nation-wide consultations, the series of national consultations in Hungary. It aims to present why national consultations gradually lost their deliberative character and how they have been transformed into a strategic instrument for mobilising supporters.*

Keywords: ***deliberative democracy; direct democracy; populism; legitimacy; national consultation***

Introduction

Consultations can be designed as a tool for discussion and collaboration between elected officials and voters. Although it has been one of the most important instruments of the Fidesz party for gaining and staying in power, until now relatively little attention has been paid to analysing the nature of the series of national consultations the party initiated. The relative absence of academic investigations on consultations as a specific form of deliberative or participatory practices seems to be especially striking, since sending out a questionnaire

and organising public events/discussions at the national level on the topics presented on the questionnaire became quite frequent actions organised by the Fidesz party, both in opposition and in government. Since 2005, ten national consultations have been organised by the party, and from 2010 onwards Hungarians have received, almost every year, a questionnaire asking their opinions on various predefined topics without further assistance, balanced information materials or trained moderators of the discussions.

This paper contends that, implemented in this way, national consultations should be assessed as a transitory phenomenon between deliberative practices and plebiscitary referendums strategically used for party interests. Deliberation on political issues aims to listen to and consider all positions and arguments on how public interest should be best defined, and how an acceptable solution to political problems might be found. As presented below, some important instruments for listening to and considering public opinion genuinely have been applied during the series of national consultations in Hungary since 2005. Consequently, consultations might and should be evaluated from the perspective of the best practices and theories of deliberative democracy. On the other hand, since millions of citizens cast their 'votes' by sending back answers to multiple-choice or simple yes-or-no questions, the national consultations also resembled advisory referendums where people are given the chance to express their views on predefined questions without binding the hands of the decision makers too tightly. Since consultations are in this sense Janus-faced phenomena, they ought to be analysed from two perspectives: from the normative perspective of deliberative democracy and from the descriptive perspective of direct democracy.

This paper argues that national consultations have served two functions in the politics of the Fidesz party led by the current prime minister Viktor Orbán: in opposition it was a means for the party to improve its poor embeddedness in Hungarian society by sending signals that Fidesz is different from other Hungarian parties that do not listen to the voice of the people. Its significance was two-fold, since the first national consultation organised in 2005 served not only this strategic aim but can also be interpreted as an attempt to establish deliberative practices in Hungary – which had been almost completely absent before. Even in its imperfect form, the 2005 national consultation might also be regarded as a new experiment in deliberative democracy. After 2010, national consultations still preserved this dual character as they combined more controversial questions with more simplistic ones exclusively serving the strategic interests of the governing party. From 2015 at the latest, however, the consultations completely lost their (anyway imperfect) deliberative character and have been used purely as a plebiscitary instrument to reinvigorate the party's position and mobilise its own supporters.

This paper first provides an overview of recent literature dealing with national consultations in Hungary by highlighting the ways in which our interpretation

differs from previous analyses, as well as briefly explaining the rationale for its case selection. Second, we present the political context of national consultations as far as other consultative and deliberative practices are concerned. Third, we delineate the interpretive framework which will help to better understand this topic. Fourth, the paper briefly describes the process of how national consultations evolved from a tool to reinvigorate activism and awaken the deliberative attitudes of Hungarian citizens into a governmental campaign 'machine'.

Case selection and literature overview

While advisory public consultations on a local level or at the pre-legislative phase on specific policy issues are not rare in Europe, national or supranational consultations on general policy questions are more of an exception. In Belgium, a country with a wide landscape of the promotion of deliberative and participatory tools only one popular consultation has been organised at the national level (that of 12 March 1950 for or against the return of King Leopold III) and the principle of popular consultation at the local and regional levels got incorporated into Belgian law at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries (Gaudin, 2018). The French *Grand Débat National* initiated by the French president (Thillaye 2019; Courant 2019; Ehs – Mokre 2020) or the *Consultation on the Future of Europe* organised by the European Commission (EC 2018) are the most prominent recent examples of such top-down involvement of citizens in policy making processes in Europe.[1] The Swiss *Vernehmlassungsverfahren* is an institutionalised form of consultation in the law-making process. It came into being along with the development of the direct democratic instruments, and was instrumental in transforming the majoritarian democracy into a consensus democracy. While certainly rather sporadic occurrences, when they are conducted such consultations seem to play a very important role in the political life of the community either because they might be considered as rudimentary forms of deliberative practices or because they are important strategic tools in the hands of political actors. Given this salience of consultations from both normative-deliberative and descriptive-strategic perspectives, it is even more surprising that scientific analyses of consultations at the national level are woefully scarce. This paper attempts to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on one of the most well-known examples of nation-wide consultations, the national consultations in Hungary.

While there is an abundance of political science literature on the post-2010 Hungarian political system focusing on populism or regime classification (e.g. Ágh 2016; Batory 2015; Bozóki 2015a, 2015b; Bogaards 2018; Buzogány 2018;

1 Most recently the French president Emmanuel Macron launched a national consultation on police reform (France24 2021). Some signs of prior consultation on national levels might be traceable in Latin America as well – see: Wright and Tomaselli 2019. On referendum in authoritarian regimes: Collin 2019.

Csillag – Szelényi 2015; Enyedi 2015, 2016a; Greskovits 2015; Kornai 2015), these accounts have usually not concerned themselves with giving an in-depth analysis of the series of national consultations, or they focused from the specific perspective of plebiscitary leader democracy (Körösényi et al. 2020). Admittedly, some articles have been published which dealt with consultation processes in Hungary tangentially or at least partially (Gessler 2017; Csehi 2018; Bocskor 2018). Applying a descriptive framework based on a synthesis of previous literature on participatory instruments and focusing on the question of what happens if a populist actor uses participatory methods, Batory and Svensson (2019) explained the paradoxical effects of the practice of national consultation on participation. In a recent article which aimed to build a bridge between the very different literatures on direct democracy and illiberal populism, van Eeden (2019: 710) explained how referendums evolved in Hungary into a perfect catalyst for populists making the country 'the vanguard of contemporary post--democratic processes' and analysed referendums initiated by the Fidesz party within the theoretical framework of post-democracy. Both papers approach the phenomenon of national consultations and referendums from the perspective of participatory or direct democracy, and, consequently, broaden the interpretative horizon in a significant way. They, nevertheless, either neglect the deliberative dimension (van Eeden 2019), or do not see differences among the consultations and evaluate them as all having the same characteristics (Batory – Svensson 2019). By contrast, this paper argues that, from the perspective of normative deliberative democratic theory, we can discern some kind of evolution (to be more precise some kind of regression) in the short history of national consultations in Hungary, while, at the same time, all consultations have distinctive strategic features as well. This is why we suggest that another analytical framework, of a partly normative and partly descriptive character, might throw up new insights into the evolution of a series of consultations organised at the national level, answering how the practice of national consultations turned from a more or less deliberative practice into a strategic instrument for mobilising supporters in political struggles.

In terms of case selection, Hungary is an influential case (Seawritght-Gerring 2008) from Central Eastern Europe where parties lack stable connections with local associations (Gherghina 2014: 40). The analysis will focus on three consultations (2005, 2011 and 2015) because they had policy implications either on the constitutional level (2011 and 2015) or they led to a nation-wide referendum (in 2008 and 2016). Furthermore, the 2005 national consultation will be examined as this exercise was organised by Fidesz when it was in opposition, and can be contrasted with the other two consultations organised by the party in government after 2010.

Political context of deliberative and participatory practices

A function of an instrument cannot be determined without the overall context of the political system. While we do not want to delve into the details of earlier and most recent developments of the Hungarian political system in general, it is, nevertheless, indispensable to outline the main context and developments of social consultations and civic engagement in the policy-making process. To put it another way, analysis of the series of national consultations should be embedded into the most relevant deliberative and participatory practices of Hungarian politics. There have been two different avenues for the citizenry to get involved in political decision-making processes in the Hungarian context, but the political elite (with some exceptions) had always been well-equipped to push back these involvements to the extent they can live with.

Consultations with social partners, stakeholders and NGOs are traditionally essential parts of the legislative processes in liberal democracies. The relevant Hungarian legal regulations, adopted and revised continuously after the democratic transformation process in 1990, have also given the social actors a say in the legislative process. Nevertheless, the practice of these social consultations differed markedly from the ideal as prescribed in the legal regulations. No government since 1990 has been interested in 'endless' deliberations with social partners, consequently each one tried to evade these obligations by selecting government-friendly civic organisations and pressure groups, or by extremely reducing the time period to be at disposal to submit the stakeholders' reports and opinions (Sebők 2020: 148; Vadál 2019). Certainly, the post-2010 governments found even more creative ways to switch out the anyway defective consultation processes in the pre-legislative phase. Since private members' bills have always been exempted from obligatory preliminary social consultations, the Orbán-government relied heavily on this channel of the legislative process: approximately 40 % of the adopted bills between 2010 and 2014 were proposed by the MPs of Fidesz (Sebők 2020: 300). To be fair, it should also be admitted that this kind of evasion of social consultation processes peaked right after the Fidesz party came into power, since then the share of adopted laws introduced by private member bills has decreased significantly.[2]

Popular involvement in policy making processes might also be secured by direct democratic instruments. Although the Hungarian legal context has changed over time, it belongs even today to the more liberal regulations in international comparison based on required signatures and turnout/approval quorums (Morel 2018). Nevertheless, the direction of subsequent changes seems to be unambiguous: while in the first period (1989–1997) it was extremely easy

2 Data of the most recent legislative term (2018–2022) show that it returned to the 'normal' distribution (10 %) of the 90s (Adatok 2018; Adatok 2019; Adatok 2020; Adatok 2021).

to launch a facultative referendum or a popular agenda initiative due to the low level of required signatures (1.25 % and 0.75 % of the electorate respectively) to be collected without a time limit and without any preliminary scrutiny of the question proposed by a specialised constitutional body, the turnout quorum was determined with quite a high level (50 % of the electorate). Incomplete regulations were clarified by the 1997 reform (a taboo subject determined in the constitution; the National Electoral Committee preliminarily scrutinised the questions, etc.), which changed rather inconsistently the previous regulations: while the number of required signatures was increased to 200,000 (2.5 % of the electorate) and a time-limit of four months was set, the chances of successful referendums were increased by replacing the turnout quorum with a 25 % approval quorum (Kukorelli 2019: 11; Komáromi 2017). Paradoxically, the number of petitions of national referendums was in the first decade extremely low (10 petitions between 1989 and 1997), it started to increase after the number of required signatures had been doubled and peaked in the 2006–2010 legislative terms (with more than thousand petitions) (Kukorelli 2019: 43). Important changes have followed since the adoption of the Fundamental Law in 2011, mainly reducing the incentives and opportunity structures for referendums. The turnout quorum has been restored to 50 % (approval quorum has been abolished), while the number of required signatures (200,000; 2.5 % of the electorate) was preserved. The president of the National Electoral Committee was invested with the competence of a preliminary formal control of petitions, and the number of required petitioners was increased from one to at least 20 (Komáromi 2020: 49). It should also be mentioned that the popular agenda setting initiative has been abolished, although it has never been a very popular instrument of the citizenry: its role in promoting public deliberation is almost negligible.[3] By contrast, the changing attitude of the political actors and the civil servants became a key factor in pushing back bottom-up popular initiatives: political actors withdraw legislation if a sufficient number of signatures has been collected making a referendum irrelevant; jarheads intimidated petitioners preventing them from submitting their petitions timely; or civil servants of the National Electoral Committee rigorously refused petitions arguing that concerns subject taboos determined in the Fundamental Law by a very a strict interpretation of the proposed referendum questions (Körösényi et al 2020: 126).

As a general assessment, we can conclude that opportunity structures for social consultations and deliberations in policy making processes have always been very limited (even before 2010), but it is also true that after the landslide victory of the Fidesz party in 2010 the remaining opportunity structures were either completely closed or tightly controlled by the ruling party. But what

3 In 24 years, there were all together 16 popular agenda initiatives, of which four have been approved by the parliament (https://www.parlament.hu/aktual/2011_xcii/index/nepszav/ogy_dont_nepikezd).

about the series of national consultations? How should we evaluate the role of national consultations against this background? Could national consultations be interpreted as rudimentary forms of deliberative practices? Or did they serve merely strategic aims of the Fidesz party *ab initio*? Does the trajectory of national consultations fit into this general assessment or did they create new opportunity structures for deliberations and participations? To answer these questions, we need an analytical framework which will facilitate the evaluation of the practice of national consultations. We should turn now to this analytical framework.

Analytical Framework

The 'strategic turn' in the history of the national consultations will be analysed below by using a combination of two theoretical frameworks: one normative and the other descriptive. While the normative framework will investigate the *deliberative* character of the national consultations, the descriptive framework will be useful in assessing its *strategic* character.

Within the analytical framework of *deliberative democracy*, democratic decision-making procedures should be legitimate in their input, throughput and output phases: they have to make sure that the opinions and needs of ordinary citizens are translated through deliberative procedures into positive political outcomes. Based on Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2015), Eerola and Reuchamps (2016), Suiter and Reuchamps (2016), and Geissel and Gherghina (2016) these normative aspects of legitimate deliberation can be summarised as follows (see Table 1).

Input legitimacy deals with citizens' opportunities to influence the process and the outcomes of the deliberation, and thus it is a measure of the openness of the deliberative events to the demands and needs of the citizens. It consists of several elements: The *quality of representation* entails an epistemically diverse set of participants and a thorough process of argumentation in which all public positions are represented. *Agenda setting* is of crucial importance to understand the dynamics of the process: an open agenda means that the entire population is able to set the agenda while, at the other end of the spectrum, a closed agenda means that it is set by formal institutions with little room for introducing new issues. *Epistemic completeness* is the final last dimension of the input legitimacy of a process of deliberation: it measures the level and quality of information citizens received during the deliberative process. In an ideal situation, all participants have access to all the relevant information about the issues and are competent to assess them, with access to experts and policy-makers.

Throughput legitimacy focuses on the efficacy, accountability, openness and inclusiveness of the democratic processes under consideration. The *quality of participation* investigates the extent to which participants have the chance to take part in deliberation (for example, in a substantively inclusive process every

participant and minority group is given an equal voice in the discussion). The *quality of decision making* is concerned with examining the question of how deliberation is translated into decisions. Decisions should come about through argumentation and should reflect the reasoned opinion and openness to persuasion of all those involved. Finally, *contextual independence* refers to the political context that influences the process of deliberation. A vibrant deliberative democracy should be able to handle outside influences; if participants suffer from coercion, reasoned argument is completely undermined.

The main aim of *output legitimacy* is to assess how the society at large takes up the issues raised by the process (*public endorsement).* For example, political actors can agree from the beginning that the final recommendations of a deliberative process should be put to a popular vote in a referendum. Feedback can also be generated by broadcasting the event. *Weight of the results* focuses on the links of the deliberative process to formal political decision making: output legitimacy can be said to be high if the process has a direct impact on real-world politics (for example when a government expresses its commitment to implementing the final decision). Finally, *responsiveness and accountability* mean that the decisions taken should offer an answer to the problems that were initially identified and there should also be regular feedback to the participants. A transparent chain of responsibility enables the participants to clearly identify who can be held accountable for the results that come out of the deliberations.

Table 1: The Analytical Framework

	First dimension	**Second dimension**	**Third dimension**
Input legitimacy	Who deliberates? (*quality of representation*)	On what will be deliberated? (*agenda-setting*)	Do citizens have access to all relevant information? (*epistemic completeness*)
Throughput legitimacy	To what extent were participants able to take part? (*inclusiveness*)	What method is chosen to arrive at a decision? (*quality of decision making*)	Are participants independent from outside pressures? (*contextual independence*)
Output legitimacy	How decisions taken by few individuals can be generalized and explained to the entirety of the population? (*public endorsement*)	How outcomes and results of the deliberation are linked to formal political decision making processes? (*weight of the results*)	Are results and outcomes offering an answer to problems initially identified? (*responsiveness and accountability*)

Source: Caluwaerts – Reuchamps, 2015.; Suiter-Reuchamps, 2016; Eerola-Reuchamps, 2016:321)

Beyond this kind of *normative* evaluation of the legitimacy of deliberative practices it is also worth analysing the series of national consultations from the perspective of a *descriptive* theoretical framework. Since advisory and semi-

-official consultations like the series of national consultations in Hungary might be located somewhere between rudimentary forms of deliberation and the kind of plebiscitary decision-making realised in referendums, especially if the consultation was followed by a real referendum or other forms of policy implementation (or both), they should also be connected to another stream of literature which focuses on the strategic use of referendums.[4]

The number of papers investigating why referendums are held and the reasons why they succeed has only increased with the number of referendums held in the world over the last 30 years. The optimistic view, that the general and rising discontent of citizens with representative democracy induces norm--driven and responsive political elites to 'give the control back to the people' (Cronin 1999; Mendelsohn and Parkin 2001; Scarrow 2001; Dalton et al. 2003) is challenged by authors who argue that the strategic interests of the political elite lie behind the increasing number of referendums, and that expansion of direct democratic instruments is not, in reality, universally characteristic of all democratic countries (Butler – Ranney 1978; Setälä 1999; Morel 2001; Walker 2003; Qvortrup 2007; Morel 2007; Closa 2007; Rahat 2009; Oppermann 2013; Mendez 2014; Sottilotta 2017; Qvortrup 2017; Hollander 2019; López and Sanjaume-Calvet 2020). Beyond the theoretical framework of rational choice institutionalism, empirical surveys also confirm the view that members of the political elite have a strategic approach to referendums: referendums initiated by the executive or the legislative minorities are supported by elites which anticipate winning, and, by contrast, are rejected by prospective losers (Svensson 2017).

Based on the insights of rational choice institutionalism, this strand of literature argues that referendums are employed by political elites to solve a particular problem or to justify a particular solution. It is an additional tool in the hands of the political elite to play the political game, one that serves the purposes of the elite (Bjørklund 1982; Morel 2001; Walker 2003; Rahat 2009). Empirical analysis of all the referendums held in Europe between 1950 and 2017 also confirms that these premises of rational choice institutionalism are corroborated while other factors proposed by sociological, historical or classical institutionalism (like public demands or commitment to political values, past referendum experiences, number of veto players or the type of democracy) have significantly less or no explanatory power (Hollander 2019: 267). Consequently, we will use these insights when analysing the practice of national consultations, interpreted in this paper as advisory referendums, from the perspective of rational choice institutionalism.

4 Although the number of responses has been fluctuating (just as the percentage of likely Fidesz voters within the population), it is justified to consider the series of National Consultation as manifestations of mass participation – even if observers might have some reservations concerning the semi-official data on respondents and results.

This rational choice approach distinguishes three strategic reasons (Rahat 2009; Hollander 2019) why referendums might be called by members of the political elite: (1) referendums might be designed to resolve intra-party or inter-party divisions of the governing coalition, or a division between the party and its supporters (*conflict mediation* or *avoidance*). As such, European integration or ethical issues might freeze political alignments and cause a deadlock which might be avoided or resolved by referendums; (2) referendums might be necessary in order to advance the legislative agenda of a party which fears that their policy choice would be voted down in the parliament (*policy-seeking* and *contradiction*). This type of referendum has been frequently used as a bargaining tool in an EU context to protect interests challenged by other member states or EU institutions; (3) referendums might also serve power consolidation and electoral functions (*empowerment* and *additional legitimacy*). In this case referendums may not be necessary, since the initiator has enough support for a decision, but a referendum might provide additional legitimacy to the political majority. This type of referendum might be used not only in domestic politics but also to secure a more favourable outcome in international negotiations by increasing the legitimacy of the domestic political majority. On the other hand, such referendums might also have an empowering effect on the political minority by securing them issue ownership and mobilising their voters (Mendez and Mendez 2017; Beach 2018). It is also important to note that these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive: policy-seeking goals might coincide with the aim of the governing party or coalition to consolidate its power and obtain additional legitimacy (Morel 2001; Qvortrup 2006; Rahat 2009; Qvortrup 2017; Altmann 2019; Hollander 2019).

By combining the *normative* theoretical framework of input, throughput and output legitimacy, on the one hand, and the *descriptive* theoretical framework of strategic use of referendums, on the other hand, we will focus on the following questions in our empirical analysis: (1) what kind of legitimacy structures dominated the input, throughput and output phase of the consultations; and (2) which dimensions of the consultation served exclusively the strategic interests of the Fidesz party (since 2010 the government) and which contributed, even if as a side effect of strategic political actions, to the emergence of rudimentary forms of democratic deliberation.

Two important remarks are in order before starting with the empirical analysis. First, evaluating national consultations from the perspective of deliberative democracy does not imply the assumption that politicians initiating consultations are frankly committed to the idea of deliberative democracy. Even if politicians have their own strategic aims motivated by political self-interest, which is usually the case, the consequences of their actions might also be evaluated separately from their strategic considerations. In this context, this means that the process of national consultations should be analysed from both the strategic-

-descriptive perspective of the political actors and the deliberative-normative perspective of political theory.

Second, it should be stressed that our analysis focuses strictly on the legitimacy structures of and the strategic interests behind the national consultations. Narrowing down the focus on the national consultations means that this paper does not offer a general assessment of the quality of deliberative democracy or that of the direct democracy in Hungary. Presenting and analysing all developments loosely connected to the idea of deliberation and direct democracy in Hungary (like the legal and extra-legal restrictions on and obstacles to referendums at large; the atrophy of tripartite neo-corporatist interest reconciliation forums; the selective crack-down on certain hotbeds of direct democracy and citizen deliberation within civil society) is almost an impossible undertaking in a short article. Consequently, the aim of this paper should certainly be more modest in this regard. On the other hand, national consultations have played such a prominent role in Hungarian politics since 2005 that it seems to be legitimate to analyse them separately.

National Consultation: from deliberative practice to plebiscitary instrument

As argued above we will focus on three national consultations, selected on the principle that they had direct policy implications. We will first evaluate them normatively, before showing how the changes in arranging the consultation process transformed these national consultations from a (partly) deliberative tool to primarily an instrument for mobilising party supporters.

The first step: reinvigorating the activism of Fidesz supporters through deliberation

In 2002, after 4 years in a coalition government, Fidesz lost the parliamentary elections and became a party in opposition. To explain the reasons behind the electoral defeat the party's weak embeddedness in society was highlighted. In order to reorganise the party and to dominate the right-wing camp Orbán launched the national-conservative Movements of Civic Circles (Enyedi, 2005; Greskovits, 2019), while mass mobilisation was also realised through direct political and cultural activities. In February 2005 Viktor Orbán announced in his annual state of the nation address that a national consultation process would be organised in order to bring citizens back to politics and to ensure that public life is about the will of the people.

The Hungarian National Consultation was born in a context where Fidesz faced low levels of party identification, which led Orbán to offer deliberative forums to send a signal that his party had learned from earlier mistakes and

made changes. The body responsible for the 2005 national consultation was a Consultative Board that was (officially) not linked to the party. Following the inaugural meeting a press conference was organised where Viktor Orbán emphasised the organisation's civil character. On 28 April 2005 a questionnaire (consisting of both multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions) was presented to the press that included seven questions about citizens' perception of Hungary's democratic transition (see Table A1 in Appendix). The deadline for filling in and sending back the questionnaire was 30 July. On 18 May the National Consultation Center was opened for citizens who wanted to discuss public life, to consult members of the Board or wanted to submit a consultation questionnaire. On 17 June four buses of the National Consultation Centre started a one-month tour of the country, visiting nearly 700 settlements. The results of the consultation were presented on the Conclusion Day (16 October) by the members of the Consultative Board. A large outdoor event was held where board members responded to participant's questions and the event ended with a concert.

The consultation process was financed by the National Consultation Foundation. According to the final report of the Foundation, 1.6 million people participated in various forums of the National Consultation (village parliaments, the events of the Centre and the meetings of the bus trip). To finance the program organisers also relied on the support of citizens (more than 20,000 individuals supported the consultation financially). As for the results, it should be stressed that transparency and public control over the data collection, evaluation and publication of the consultation results were almost completely missing, consequently reliability of the presented results are rather low. Nevertheless, the organisers announced that to the question 'What are the reasons for your disappointment (in the transition)?' 59 % of the respondents answered that they were dissatisfied with their standard of living and to the question 'What should be changed?' 50 % of the respondents referred to factors determining the standard of living: price increases and taxes. As Fidesz was in opposition these answers had no direct impact on policy-making but they confirmed the evidence from previous opinion polls commissioned by the party that topics related to the standard of living are important for Hungarian voters.

From the perspective of the normative theoretical framework of input, throughput and output legitimacy the 2005 national consultation process can be evaluated as a Janus-faced process. In terms of input legitimacy, in 2005 the national consultation facilitated a deliberative process for those citizens who visited the National Consultation Centre or decided to meet members of the board during the events of the consultation *(quality of representation)*. The Centre was open for a period of 3 months for citizens who wanted to talk about public life, to consult members of the Board or wanted to submit a consultation questionnaire. The agenda of the discussions was pre-determined in the sense that the participants were invited to answer seven questions on the broad topic of how

they imagined the future of Hungary. However, five out of the seven questions posed were open ended, allowing participants to raise their own ideas, while the personal meetings with board members allowed for a dialogue (even though those dialogues were not recorded) (*agenda setting*). As for *epistemic completeness*, members of the board held speeches at different events of the consultation about the aims of the consultation and about Hungary's democratic transition, but there were no small-group discussions organised (with a facilitator) and no information booklet was provided to participants during the events.

As regards *throughput legitimacy*, participants were allowed to consult members of the board and to fill in a questionnaire. At the local level, village parliaments were organised and a bus trip was also organised for the members of the board to create a contact with 700 settlements of Hungary. As an incentive, a lottery was organised by the foundation: those who filled in the questionnaire had the chance to win prizes (the jackpot was a family car). Nevertheless, engaging minority and/or marginalised groups to participate in the consultation process was not a priority of the organisers (*inclusiveness*). Some incentives to generate wide participation were introduced into the process which might have had the effect of not only Fidesz supporters replying to the questionnaire. Nevertheless, we can safely assume that the overwhelming majority of the respondents sympathised with the Fidesz party (limiting the *contextual independence* of the process). Participants could talk to board members and tell them their ideas. Activists (many of them Fidesz members) helped to organise events and they were also in charge of collecting questionnaires. There was no incentive to help participants to reach a consensus or confront different positions, and the events did not end up in any form of voting or decision making: the citizens' role in the decision-making process was restricted to filling in the questionnaires (*quality of decision making*). Consequently, in this sense the consultation process somewhat resembled a political rally except that it was not organised during an electoral campaign period and the speakers were not political candidates for any position.

Regarding the *output legitimacy*, the National Consultation Foundation published a book (Meghallgattuk Magyarországot Nemzeti Konzultáció 2005) about the results of the consultation, providing not only the stories of the board members and the main results of the questionnaire, but also a statistical analysis of the preferences of participants (*public endorsement*). Although only the politicians of Fidesz (especially Viktor Orbán) made references to those results, the evidence taken from the consultation was made public and theoretically was available to any decision maker (*weight of the results*). The results of the consultation made it clear that the majority of its participants were tired of the daily worries of living. A higher standard of living was identified as a common aim of Hungarians. On 23 October 2006 Viktor Orbán announced that Fidesz had submitted seven questions to the National Election Office that were related to the standard of living, fees and prices (in line with the results of the national

consultation, thus indicating some extent of *responsiveness*). After three of the questions (on abolishing co-payments, daily fees at hospitals and college tuition fees) were officially approved on 17 December 2007, a referendum was held on 9 March 2008. As the referendum reached the threshold for validity (50.5 % of voters participated) and all three proposals were supported by a majority (82–84 %) of the voters, the outcome of the referendum was legally binding (consequently the *weight of the results* of the national consultation process increased significantly). The socialist-liberal coalition in power at the time had to abolish the three fees. On 17 March 2008, the National Assembly voted to repeal them. The referendum helped Fidesz to retain momentum until the next general elections in 2010, in which they gained a landslide victory (Pállinger 2016).

Generally speaking, from the perspective of deliberative democracy the first national consultation from 2005 could be evaluated as a Janus-faced phenomenon: while proving to be highly defective as far as input and throughput legitimacy are concerned, the possibility of setting the agenda by including open-ended questions or increasing inclusiveness by novel ways of attracting publicity (lottery) should not be completely ignored. It should also be stressed that the 2005 national consultation process became highly consequential and partly responsive to the demands of the citizens, which contributed to the increase of the output legitimacy of the process. Three of the questions from the referendum from 2008 were directly connected to the results of the first national consultation, and the results of the referendum provided an indirect implementation of the results of the consultation process. From this perspective, it is rather surprising how well the 2005 national consultation performed as far as its output legitimacy is concerned. Furthermore, it should also be acknowledged that rudimentary forms of deliberative democracy were connected by direct democratic decision making (2008 referendum).

It is also clear that the first consultation served the strategic aims of the Fidesz party in opposition. It advanced the party's *legislative agenda* which otherwise would have been blocked by the left-wing-liberal parliamentary majority and strengthened the embeddedness of the party in Hungarian society. While it had no direct consequences as far as the 2006 parliamentary elections are concerned, in tandem with the 2008 referendum the first national consultation certainly played an important role in the 2010 land-slide victory of the Fidesz party: issue ownership and the mobilisation of voters were crucial factors during the 2010 election campaign (*empowerment* and *additional legitimacy*).

The second step: Questions of the prime minister to the people

Fidesz won the 2010 parliamentary elections with 53 % of the votes which, due to the electoral system of Hungary, led to a two-thirds majority (68 % of the mandates) in the Hungarian Parliament. After 2010 national consultations

became institutionalised and turned into a communication tool of the prime minister: a government-funded questionnaire that is sent to Hungarian citizens by mail. Since 2010 each consultation has had a specific topic. Given the nature of these letters and questionnaires, it is safe to conclude that they have served both as instruments of top-down rule and as an agenda-setting tool of the government to influence public opinion. The number of questions and the format of the questionnaire has been simplified over the years (see Table 2).

Table 2. Topics and questions of National Consultations

Title (Year)	Number of questions	Type of questions	Number of responses*
National Consultation (2005)	10	9 Multiple choice questions, 1 open ended question	1 600 000
National Consultation about the Pension System (2010)	5	4 Multiple choice questions, 1 open ended question	200 000
National Consultation about the New Constitution (2011)	12	12 Multiple choice questions (4 options)	920 000
National Consultation about Social Policy (2011)	10	10 Multiple choice questions (4 options)	1 000 000
National Consultation about the Economy (2012)	16	16 Multiple choice questions (3 options)	700 000
National Consultation about Immigration and Terrorism (2015)	12	12 Multiple choice questions (3 options)	1 000 000
National Consultation 'Let's stop Brussels!' (2017)	6	Dichotomous questions (Yes/ No)	1 700 000
National Consultation about the Soros Plan (2017)	7	Dichotomous questions (Yes/ No)	2 300 000
National Consultation about the Protection of Families (2018)	10	Dichotomous questions (Yes/ No)	1 300 000
National Consultation about the COVID-19 virus (2020)	9	Dichotomous questions (Yes/ No)	1 796 988

Source: www.nemzetikonzultacio.kormany.hu

* The number of responses should not be taken at face value due to the lack of transparency and public control over the consultation processes.

As mentioned above, we will focus here on two consultation processes which had significant consequences: the 2010 consultation on the new constitution and the 2015 consultation on migration. Although the 2010 consultation on the constitution did not upturn into a referendum on the new Fundamental Law adopted by the two-thirds right-wing parliamentary majority in 2011, it had some effects on the final version of the constitution (*output legitimacy*). Nevertheless,

the 2010 national consultation was more defective than its 2005 counterpart as far as its input and throughput legitimacy are concerned.

Concerning the tools that were made available to the participants to acquire sound information in 2010, (*epistemic completeness*) an advisory body was appointed by the prime minister to draft the principles and guidelines of the new Fundamental Law of Hungary. József Szájer was put in charge of leading the National Consultation Committee, which prepared the formula and the questionnaire for the public consultations (*agenda setting*). Debates about the text of the new constitution were organised among the members of the body thus *agenda setting* was this time completely restricted to the advisory body. When the draft constitution was announced in late February/early March 2011, a questionnaire with 12 questions was sent out to citizens (see Table A2 in Appendix). Members of the body informed journalists about the planned constitutional changes, but no events were held to reach out to the public thus the participatory dimension (*quality of representation*) was completely limited to sending back the answers to the questionnaire by mail. As no face-to-face public hearings or discussions were organised, the only way citizens could communicate their views was by replying to the questionnaire. The balance between deliberation and interest aggregation had shifted, and the complete neglect of open-ended questions (as a tool of *agenda setting*) certainly did not increase the anyway doubtful input legitimacy of the process.

As for the *throughput legitimacy*, the 2011 national consultation became a tool for both determining the public mood on certain questions (i.e. interest aggregation) and reinforcing the planned policy choices of the Fidesz party: participants were allowed to fill in and send back, free of charge (by post, using pre-paid envelopes), the questionnaires worded by politicians and experts. Consequently, there was no space for lively debates, confronting positions, forming a consensus and taking decisions. Lively deliberation was also impeded by the questions themselves which became more and more tendentious, presupposing an existing consensus within the Hungarian society or at least within that part of Hungarian society which was presumed to be completing the questionnaires. All these shifts had a clear negative effect on the *quality of decision making*. No efforts had been made to increase inclusivity of the process, participants were mainly Fidesz supporters, and there were no signs that citizens with various political backgrounds had been involved in the consultation process (*inclusiveness*). This kind of presupposed self-selection of the respondents was also reflected in the results of the national consultation – even if we should consider the results rather as factoids due to the lack of transparency and public control over data collection and evaluation. Answers which promoted a conservative agenda of Fidesz won a clear majority, with mainly between 80 and 90 percent supporting the position of the governing right-wing party. Thus, a presupposed existing consensus among Fidesz supporters was confirmed rather than formed

through the consultation process. Some questions, nevertheless, were more controversial and had a real stake (e.g. family or plural) voting rights). Here, the agenda setter tested public opinion but efforts to argue for or against any of the propositions, and, consequently, try to find a compromise or consensus among participants were not part of the game (*quality of decision making*). The number of alternatives to the questions was also dramatically decreased in comparison to the 2005 national consultation (see Table 2) (*agenda setting*). While participants were free from outside pressures, biased questions nudged the respondents in a certain way and did not really offer alternative responses (*contextual independence*).

The 2011 questionnaire was a mixture of some controversial questions and others which were formulated with latent suggestions implicitly promoting the 'right answer' (*agenda setting*). The questions on plural or family voting and on limiting the state debt in the constitution clearly fall in the former category, while the question on entrenching the conservative approach of the family in the constitution belongs in the second. A third category consisted of questions which were low-profile enough in the sense that they were not supposed to spark heavy debates in the Hungarian electorate (see question numbers 7, 9 and 10 for example). Nevertheless, it is important to stress that decision-makers included regulations (or, on the contrary, abandoned the regulation of the family vote) in the new Fundamental Law, which reflected the results of the 2011 national consultation (*weight of the results*). However biased the answers might have been due to the self-selection of participants in the national consultation process (see above), the options which allegedly gained an overwhelming majority (question numbers 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11) were more or less faithfully included in the new constitution. The overwhelming majority of the respondents rejected the anyway controversial idea of plural voting rights and the new constitution did not change the one citizen one vote principle, thus the answers to question 4 were also considered by the decision makers (*responsiveness*). Question numbers 5, 7 and 12 did not have any consequences for policy implementation.

It is also worth mentioning that the draft constitution was presented to the parliament only two weeks after the deadline for sending back the questionnaire, which gave opposition circles grounds to doubt whether the answers provided by the respondents had really been taken into account *(responsiveness and accountability*). Nevertheless, as far as *output legitimacy* is concerned the 2011 National Consultation performed quite well, with two important restrictions. The self-selection of respondents (*input legitimacy*) might have distorted the results and some questions served to reinforce the preexisting consensus within the right-wing electorate rather than generate discussion.

All in all, the 2011 national consultation on the new constitution had serious flaws as far as input and throughput legitimacy are concerned: participation was not only self-selective, but it was also restricted to sending back the question-

naire. There were no public events, mini-publics or personal gatherings with lively debates supported by trained moderators, and no balanced information was provided to the participants. Since personal meetings and debates were completely absent, decision-making was also impossible. While input and throughput legitimacy were even more limited than in 2005, as far as output legitimacy is concerned the 2011 national consultation performed slightly better: some answers to the more controversial questions (plural voting, public debt) certainly influenced the decision makers. Nevertheless, most of the questions chiefly served the strategic interests of the governing right-wing party: while it was obvious that the leaders of the Fidesz party rejected the idea of holding a referendum on the newly adopted constitution (mainly due to their fear of being defeated), they were looking for a tool which could guarantee positive results and, at the same time, provide semi-official evidence of popular support and public involvement. The national consultation provided this additional (sham) legitimacy to the new constitution and mobilised the supporters of the Fidesz party. Since the party had a two-thirds majority in the parliament, its *policy agenda* was not really threatened by a blocking minority (i.e. its legislative agenda was not in danger). Consequently, the national consultation of 2011 was primarily used to *consolidate* its power and *mobilise* its voters.

Third step: National Consultation and the strategic use of a referendum

In May 2015, a questionnaire 'on immigration and terrorism' was sent to the Hungarian citizens (see Table A3 in Appendix). The questionnaire contained 12 questions related to terrorism, refugees and immigrants without any open--ended questions, thus the *agenda setting* power was once again exclusively in the hands of the government. Some of the questions did not even refer to alternative courses of action, but simply inquired about whether citizens were aware of some facts. The fourth question was worded as follows: *Did you know that immigrants cross the Hungarian border illegally and that the number of immigrants in Hungary has increased twenty times over the past period?* Such questions did not even try to instigate debates or deliberation, but simply drew attention to some momentous political issues. Consequently, they simply reinforced the agenda-setting power of the government. Instead of being responsive to constituents who organise and present their opinion in packages, the government was employing 'push polls': attempts to manipulate voters' views/beliefs under the guise of conducting an opinion poll. Furthermore, the results of the national consultation questionnaires were interpreted as if they were responses taken from a public opinion survey, but the consultation did not meet any of the methodological standards of opinion polls. Consequently, the national consultation from 2015 could no longer be classed as a rudimentary form of deliberation

(*quality of representation*), and the third dimension of the input legitimacy, i.e. the criterion of *epistemic completeness* not only suffered from serious deficiencies but was completely neglected. Similarly, the consultation's throughput legitimacy was highly doubtful: instead of open pressure respondents were pushed in a particular direction by the way that the questions were formulated and the information provided by public broadcasts (*contextual independence*). Since no official public events, mini-publics or personal gathering were organised, there was no chance for official decision-making (*quality of decision making*), and the principle of inclusivity was once again not honoured since most of the respondents were Fidesz supporters. The questions from the 2015 national consultation about immigration and terrorism paved the way for the question of the 2016 referendum on migration (*weight of the results*). Thus, the national consultation process clearly served campaign aims: it was designed to mobilise supporters for the 2016 referendum. It is a clear manifestation of the strategic and plebiscitary turn in the history of national consultation processes in Hungary: as a precursor and an instrument of the referendum the national consultation completely lost its deliberative character.

In spite of the deficiencies of the 2015 national consultation and the 2016 referendum as far as *input* and *throughput* legitimacy are concerned, it is again possible to evaluate their *output legitimacy* separately. While opponents of the government opted for abstention in the 2016 referendum, thus the required turnout rate for a valid referendum was not reached, the Fidesz party was able to find support even among voters of the opposition. Of a turnout of 44 %, more than 98 % of the votes were cast in line with the government's position. Consequently, the government argued that although the referendum was invalid, a huge majority backed the government's proposition. In consequence, the government initiated a constitutional amendment in November 2016 which would have prohibited the 'settlement of foreign population in Hungary'. Nevertheless, Fidesz temporarily lost (from February 2015 to April 2018) its two-thirds majority in the parliament and even the radical right-wing *Jobbik* party was not willing to support the constitutional amendment. Consequently, the national consultation and the 2016 referendum did not have direct policy effects. While having no direct consequences in 2016, the cumulative effects of the national consultation from 2015, the 2016 referendum and the national consultations on 'Let's stop Brussels' (2017), and on the so-called 'Soros-plan' (2017) certainly contributed to the victory of Fidesz in the 2018 general elections. A two-thirds majority for the third consecutive election secured once again a constitutional majority for Fidesz which amended the constitution shortly after the new parliament assembled (May 2018) in line with the national consultations from 2015 and 2017, and in line with the 2016 referendum. In this sense, some kind of *output legitimacy* was achieved for the national consultation from 2015 (along with the referendum and the two other consultations), since policy implementations

in line with the consultations have been effectuated. Once again, however, due to the low levels of input and throughput legitimacy of the consultations, the relatively modest *output legitimacy* alone could not compensate for the losses of the first two dimensions if the deliberative practices are considered normatively.

Arguably, the 2015 consultation and its follow-up political action, the 2016 referendum on migration, exclusively served the *strategic interests* of the Fidesz party in a *triple sense*: the party tried to advance its *legislative agenda*, it *mobilised* its supporters and gained new supporters and it gained *additional legitimacy* to support its position in international negotiations on migration issues. As mentioned above, after Fidesz candidates were defeated at two by-elections in February and April 2015, the government lost its parliamentary two-thirds majority and could no longer amend the constitution on its own until 2018. Consequently, the results of the 2015 national consultation and the 2016 referendum on migration were also used to pressure the extreme right-wing parliamentary opposition (*Jobbik*) to conform with the *legislative agenda* of the government as far as migration policy is concerned. This pressure, however, ultimately proved to be futile, since the *Jobbik* voted down the constitutional amendment in November 2016 which would have prohibited the 'settlement of foreign population in Hungary'.

By contrast, the 2015 national consultation and its politically even more consequential aftermath, the 2016 referendum on immigration, became an efficient and almost perfect instrument to further another strategic aim, the *mobilisation* of the party's supporter base While the data on the number of respondents of the 2015 national consultation are rather unreliable, it is striking that the 2016 referendum showed a certain kind of 'quantum leap' in support for the migration policy of the government. From 2008 on, the party's supporter base totalled 2–2.5 million voters, but in 2016 more than 3.3 million voters supported the government's position by saying 'no' to the question of the referendum.[5] This does not mean that Fidesz gained 1 million voters, but it is also clear that some voters of the opposition parties also agreed with the policy preferences of the government on this question. This enormous mobilisation and increase of support regarding one important political issue shows that the 2015 consultation, combined with the 2016 referendum, was a highly effective political tool in the hands of the government, even if the turnout of the 2016 referendum was too low (44 %) and, consequently, it was officially declared invalid.

Thirdly, the 2015 national consultation and its political aftermath, the 2016 referendum increased, more or less effectively, the legitimacy of the government's position in international negotiations (*additional legitimacy*). Both were initiated by the government and the questions of the consultation and the ref-

5 'Do you want the European Union to be able to mandate the obligatory resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary even without the approval of the National Assembly?'

erendum were worded in a way which paralleled Viktor Orbán's arguments in opposition to the European Union's proposals to impose mandatory migrant quotas on member states. Citizens were carefully prepared for the issue by a governmental campaign, while the merits of the question were already decided by the authorities (the government voted 'no' in the European Council to assisting with settling migrants, filed a petition before the Court of Justice of the EU and had the clear support of the Hungarian Parliament). The government used both the consultation and the referendum to gain *additional legitimacy* for its foreign policy (Pállinger, 2016: 19). Although the referendum had no legal effect, the government emphasised that over 98 % of valid votes were cast for 'no'.

From the descriptive-strategic perspective, the 2015 consultation and its political aftermath, along with the 2016 referendum, proved to be fairly effective tools in advancing the *legislative agenda* of the government, effectively *strengthening the position* of the government in international negotiations and giving *additional legitimacy* to the migration policy of the government while consolidating the power of the Fidesz party. Thus, while the consultation lost its deliberative character completely, it proved to be a highly effective strategic instrument to realise the political aims of the Fidesz party and the government.

Conclusions

National consultations are rare phenomena but given their importance in the political life of the community from both a deliberative-normative and a descriptive-strategic perspective, it is striking how neglected and under--researched they have been in political science up to now. Focusing on one of the most well-known examples, the series of national consultations in Hungary, this article aimed to highlight and explain the evolution of the series of consultations from a defective but innovative deliberative tool to a strategic instrument in the hands of the Fidesz party both in opposition and in government (see Table 3).

We have argued in this paper that the Fidesz party invented an innovative deliberative practice (with several deficiencies) when the party was in opposition, but after it came to power in 2010 these national consultations gradually lost their deliberative character and lacked normative input and throughput legitimacy. We noted that the 2011 national consultation was even more constrained in its normative legitimacy than the 2005 consultation, but some controversial questions were still included in the questionnaire. Even if the self-selection of respondents might have distorted the results and the reliability of the results is rather limited due to the lack of transparency and public control over the process, the options which gained an overwhelming majority were more or less accurately included in the new constitution. Nevertheless, diminishing legitimacy and increasingly strategic effects are characteristics of the 2011 national consultation. By 2015, the consultations had transformed into

Table 3: Main Findings

		2005	2011	2015
Input legitimacy	Quality of representation	High	Very Low	Very low
	Agenda setting	Limited	Low	No
	Epistemic completeness	Limited	Low	No
Throughput legitimacy	Inclusiveness	High	Low	Low
	Quality of decision making	Limited	Low	No
	Contextual independence	Limited	Low	No
Output legitimacy	Public endorsement	High	Low	Limited
	Weight of the results	Medium	Limited	No
	Responsiveness and accountability	Medium	Low	Limited

Source: own estimation (based on Caluwaerts – Reuchamps, 2015.; Suiter-Reuchamps, 2016; Eerola-Reuchamps, 2016:321).

a strategic instrument for mobilising supporters in political struggles against the migration policies of the EU (external strategic use of consultations and referendum) and into a tool for political campaigning in both the 2016 referendum and the 2018 general elections. By the time of the 2015 consultation and the 2016 referendums, they almost completely lacked deliberative dimensions and served almost exclusively strategic aims of the party (advancing legislative agenda, consolidating power and gaining additional legitimacy in international negotiations).

In terms of a future research agenda, it would certainly be highly instructive to compare the practices and transformation of national consultations in Hungary with the French *Grand Débat National* from both normative-deliberative and descriptive-strategic perspectives. Since France could be considered the homeland of plebiscitary direct democracy, the *Grand Débat National* also displays some elements of deliberative practices – even if they, too, are defective ones. Nevertheless, the comparison could also highlight what kind of strategic reasons induced Macron to initiate the *Grand Débat* and the study could also

exhibit whether there are substantial differences between the consultations in an embedded Western European democracy and a fragile Eastern European one. Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to embed the results of the present analysis to a broader horizon which takes further developments and deficiencies of deliberative and direct democracy in Hungary into account. The lessons drawn from this prospective study could substantively contribute to our understanding of the relationship between deliberative and direct democracy in liberal and illiberal regimes.

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APPENDIX

Table A1

Questions and most supported responses of the "We have listened to Hungary" National Consultation 2005 (Number of responses: 1 600 000)

Question	Number of answer options	Most popular answer
What has the country done for us?	10	Family aid (39 %)
What are the reasons for your disappointment?	9	Development of living standards (5 %)
How was life before 1990?	3	Better and more secure life (59 %)
What are you afraid of?	10	Unemployment (64 %)
What decisions would you like to influence?	7	Accountability of politicians (69 %)
What should be changed?	10	Increase of the price of energy and medication (50 %)
What should be our common goal?	3	Creating safe living conditions (97 %)

Source: Meghallgattuk Magyarországot. Nemzeti Konzultáció 2005.

Table A2

Questions and most supported responses of the "Citizens' Questionnaire on Fundamental Law" (Number of responses: 920 000)

Question	Number of answer options	Most popular answer	Policy impact
Q1: Some people say that the new Hungarian constitution should only declare the rights of citizens and not obligations. Others argue that, in addition to securing rights, the most important civic obligations that express our responsibility to the community (work, learning, defense, protection of our environment) should be included in the document. What do you think?	3	In addition to rights, the new Hungarian constitution should also include civic obligations. (91 %)	Yes

Question	Number of answer options	Most popular answer	Policy impact
Q2: Some people suggest that the new Hungarian constitution should limit the level of indebtedness of the state, thereby taking responsibility for future generations. Others argue that there is no need to require such guarantee. What do you think?	4	The new Hungarian constitution should set a maximum level above which public debt should not rise. This limit should be respected by all future governments in all circumstances. (53 %)	Yes
Q3: Some people suggest that the new Hungarian constitution should protect common values such as family, order, home, work, and health. Others do not think this is necessary. What do you think?	4	In addition to the protection of human rights, the new Hungarian constitution should protect commonly accepted social values (work, home, family, order, health). (91 %)	Yes
Q4: Some people suggest that in accordance with the new Hungarian constitution parents who raise a minor child may exercise their children's right to vote in some way. What do you think?	3	According to the new Hungarian constitution, parents or families with minor children should not be entitled to exercise further voting rights. (74 %)	No
Q5: Some people suggest that the new Hungarian constitution should not allow the government to tax the costs of raising a child (i.e. the cost of raising a child should be recognized by the tax system). Others argue that this is not necessary, and that governments should be allowed to tax these costs. What do you think?	4	The new Hungarian constitution should not allow the government to tax the costs of raising children. (72 %)	No
Q6: Some people suggest that the new Hungarian constitution should commit to future generations. Others say that no such commitment is required. What do you think?	3	The new Hungarian constitution should include a commitment to future generations. (86 %)	Yes
Q7: Some people suggest that the new Hungarian constitution should allow public procurement or state support only for companies with a transparent ownership structure. What do you think?	3	According to the new Hungarian constitution only those enterprises should be allowed to get state support or to take part in public procurement opportunities, whose ownership structure is transparent and all of whose owners can be identified. (92 %)	No
Q8: Some people suggest that Hungary's new constitution should express the value of national cohesion to Hungarians living beyond the borders, others do not think it is necessary. What do you think?	4	The new Hungarian constitution should express the value of national belonging to Hungarians living beyond the borders and oblige the government to protect this value. (61 %)	Yes

Question	Number of answer options	Most popular answer	Policy impact
Q9: Some people suggest that Hungary's new constitution should protect the natural diversity of the Carpathian Basin, animal and plant species, and the Hungaricums. What do you think?	4	The new Hungarian constitution should protect both the natural environment and traditional specialities. (78 %)	Yes
Q10: Some people think that the new constitution should protect national wealth, especially land and water resources. Others do not consider it important. What do you think?	3	The new Hungarian constitution should protect national wealth. (97 %)	Yes
Q11: Some people suggest that Hungary's new constitution should allow courts to impose actual life imprisonment for especially serious crimes. What do you think?	3	The new Hungarian constitution should allow the courts to impose actual life imprisonment for crimes of high severity. (94 %)	Yes
Q12: Some people suggest that Hungary's new constitution should make participation compulsory for anyone summoned to a hearing by a parliamentary committee of inquiry and to impose a penalty on those who stay away. What do you think?	3	The new Hungarian constitution should make participation compulsory for a person who is summoned to a parliamentary committee of inquiry. (83 %)	No

Source: www.nemzetikonzultacio.kormany.hu

Table A3

Questions and most supported responses of the "National Consultation about Immigration and Terrorism" 2016 (Number of responses: 1 000 000)

Question	Number of answer options	Most popular answer
There are many opinions to be heard about the growing number of terrorist attacks. How important do you consider the rise of terrorism for your own life?	3	Very important (70 %)
In your opinion, can Hungary be the target of a terrorist act in the coming years?	3	It can happen (57 %)
Some people say that immigration (which is) poorly handled by Brussels is linked to the rise of terrorism. Do you agree with this opinion?	3	I agree (61 %)
Did you know that immigrants cross the Hungarian border illegally, and the number of immigrants in Hungary has increased twentyfold recently?	3	Yes (73 %)

Question	Number of answer options	Most popular answer
There are different opinions on the issue of immigration. Some say that living immigrants (sic = economic migrants) endanger the jobs and livelihoods of Hungarians. Do you agree with these opinions?	3	I completely agree (73 %)
Some say that Brussels' policy on immigration and terrorism has failed and therefore a new approach to these issues is needed. Do you agree with these opinions?	4	I agree (73 %)
Would you support the Hungarian government introducing stricter immigration rules against Brussels permissible policy?	3	Yes, I completely support it (90 %)
Would you support the Hungarian government in introducing stricter rules for the detention of illegal immigrants crossing the Hungarian border?	3	Yes, I completely support it (88 %)
Do you agree with the opinion that immigrants who cross the Hungarian border illegally should be returned to their home country as soon as possible?	3	I agree (83 %)
Do you agree that immigrants, while staying in Hungary, should cover their cost of living themselves?	3	I agree (83 %)
Do you agree that the best way to combat immigration is for the Member States of the European Union to help the countries from which immigrants come?		I agree (61 %)
Do you agree with the government that instead of allocating funds to immigration we should support Hungarian families and those children yet to be born?	3	I agree (93 %)

Source: www.nemzetikonzultacio.kormany.hu

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Could a Referendum Change the Local Party System? Discussion of the Referendum's Consequences in the Context of Cleavages[1]

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Abstract: *The local policy is sometimes degraded by this opinion: in the small village, there is no policy, self-government is based on the personal character without the political context, it is mainly oriented on the technical side of the government. However, different researches confirm that despite this claim local policy contains political (and ideological) fights. These researches focus on different topics and different attitudes in cleavages or conflict study. However, only a few research types mentioned the importance of local civic activism in connection with the local policy trends. It is interesting because civic activism, values and attitudes are the main points in the cleavage topic. In this research, we will discuss the term cleavage (concept by Deegan-Krause) in the context of four Czech municipalities which have experience with civic activism – the referendum. In our research, we will focus on four municipalities, on which we will present the application of the Deegan-Krause model. Based on the application, we will discuss if civic activism in the form of a referendum could lead to changes in the local party system.*

Keywords: ***local party system, referendum, concept of cleavages, civic activism, local-level politics***

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Introduction

Czech local politics and policy is a unique topic in many ways. Local politics and policies are usually not at the centre of attention in political science. In the Czech context, it is a bit different. Still, it is not the main topic for a political scientist. However, the complexity of the issue makes it attractive for many researchers. From our point of view, we focus mainly on the part of local civic activism, the possibility of using the referendum tool and the local party system. If we take a closer look at these two topics, civic activism at the local level is higher than at any other level of politics. One of the reasons is the possibility of holding a referendum only on the local level. However, the frequency of local political parties and associations is unique not only in the Czech context.

The local party system and the conflicts on this level have been studied by many researchers, which confirmed that Czech local politics has its conflict, and it is not without policy topics and fights (e.g. Bubeníček – Kubálek 2010; Kostelecký – Vobecká 2007). In comparison with our aim, these researches focuses on different topics and attitudes in cleavages or conflict study. Only a few researches mentioned the importance of local civic activism in connection with local policy trends. It is interesting because civic activism, values and attitudes are the main points in the cleavage topic.

In this research, we will discuss the term cleavage (concept by Deegan-Krause) in the context of four municipalities that have experience with civic activism – the referendum. The referendum variable selection is based on previous research (Marien – Kern 2018; Dalton – Welzel 2014; Smith 2009; Qvortup 2017). It is confirmed that the presence of tools of direct democracy leads to more extensive civic activism and interest. In the Czech context, the only means of direct democracy anchored in law is the referendum. In our research, we will focus on four municipalities, on which we will present the application of the Deegan-Krause model. Based on the application, we will discuss if civic activism in the form of a referendum could change the local party system. In the Czech local context, we faced a highly fragmented local party system, and there is no agreement on the concept of its study. This study's secondary aim is to present one unique way to study party system cleavages on the local level.

Previous research on the topic of local cleavages

Research on the local cleavages is not so exhaustive as the research on the national level. However, the local level also offers exciting studies. In this part, we would like to map the concept's approaches and point out their results.

Firstly, we will focus on Balík's (2016) research. In the first place, there is a need to point out the character of the article. The article aims to discuss the difficult moments in the local decision-making in contrast with the anti-political,

non-political (in the ideological meaning) approach to local politics. Based on this, the article discusses possible conflicts in the municipalities, which Balík named cleavages. He did not define the methodology of his research here because of the character of the piece. The concept of local cleavages he established on the *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* conflict (introduced by F. Tönnies). Based on this, Balík claims ideological and political conflicts exist in the municipalities (independently of their size). To spread this argument, he then introduces 11 possible conflicts (cleavages) in the Czech municipalities. To sum up, this article uses the world cleavages in the meaning of conflict (ideological) in the municipality.

The second article we will discuss is written by van der Veer (1994). His work is oriented to urban area studies. Based on this, the concept of cleavages has to be seen in this context. The author also did not define the term cleavages. However, in his research, he uses the term social cleavages, which he uses to differentiate society (socioeconomic differentiation). He then uses the separation of society in the cities and suburbs and explains the success of some political parties – here, he talks about political cleavages. The author uses social cleavages to name the diversity in the society (dichotomy between poor and rich) and the term city-suburban cleavages to differentiate the cities and suburbs. He points out in his text that the pillars in Dutch society do no longer exist. Based on this, we could sum up that this use of the term cleavages does not fulfil Rokkan and Lipset's approach to the cleavages. It is also important to mention the article's aim – the author tried to confirm the thesis that there are differences between old and young metropolitan cities, despite the national redistributive policies. The main objective of his article was not to analyse the cleavages.

Thirdly, a significant publication for the research of cleavages on the Czech municipal level is the work of Bubeníček and Kubálek (2010). They introduce three possible approaches for studying cleavages on the municipal level (specifically on the case study of the municipality Doubice). In the first approach, they analyse the economic conflicts in Doubice. They confirm that this conflict was presented in the municipality in the whole research period. However, the intensity and political impact were not stable (in some elections, the conflict was absent). They characterised this conflict as 'polémos' because this conflicted character does not fulfil the cleavage definition. In this approach, the author combines statistical methods (data from election, etc.) and qualitative methods (interviews and content analysis) (Bubeníček – Kubálek 2010: 34–35). The second approach is based on the dichotomy of *Gesellschaft* vs. *Gemeinschaft* (rationality vs. emotionality in Balík's conception). The authors then mention the base for the stable conflict based on this dichotomy (confirmed by Bubeníček's study). This conflict is characterised as a conflict about the future vision of municipality development. This conflict could be stable because it could be connected with the local political parties. Authors confirm this conflict as

the cleavage: function of the municipality (in the Doubice case – old traditional municipality vs. spa city). This cleavage was present in Doubice in the whole research period and impacted the political party system. Because of limited social space (small municipality), the cleavage tends to lead to the consensus. However, this consensus is only apparent (for example, reunion in one political party). In reality, the conflict is present inside the one political party and inside the assembly decision-making. This reality then confirms Bubeníček's thesis about the participative and deliberative model of democracy on the local level when conflict is not always presented due to election competition. This approach uses an inductive strategy of research. There is a need to go deep in the municipality's environment – for example, use interviews, etc. The analysis of election data, etc. is in this case inappropriate. The authors mention that this approach is challenging for application in a large number of municipalities. However, this approach is an opportunity to study cleavages on the local level (Bubeníček – Kubálek 2010: 35–39). The third approach analyses the conflict between the social groups of the inhabitants. The research method is similar to the second approach – deep analysis of the political process by qualitative methods. Authors confirm the presence of stable social conflict in Doubice, which does not always lead to political conflict. However, this conflict is also present in other conflicts and is very deep in the inhabitants' identity because of an absence of political representativity. They call this conflict a 'rupture' (the break) (Bubeníček and Kubálek 2010: 39–42).

The following work we have to mention is the work of K. Musilová. Her work is focused on post-material cleavage. However, in her work she also discusses the previous approaches to the research topic. She confirmed in her work the possibility of using the concept of cleavages on the local level. She applies the concept of cleavages on the post-material conflict from multilevel governance based on her work. Her work was raised from her previous diploma thesis, in which she analysed post material cleavages in the surrounding municipalities of Šumava National Park. Here she confirmed the possible use of the concept of cleavages (in the widespread meaning); however, she also mentions there is a need to find the specific approach for studying them on the local level (Musilová 2017: 68–70).

In international research, the term local cleavages is mainly used in connection with the sociological approach and the sociological meaning, as the part of the society – ethical or regional cleavage. The local cleavage is then geographically defined. As an example, we could mention the research focused on displacement during an election in the civil war in Columbia. Local cleavages are defined as local communities loyal to the regime, and thanks to this, they avoided displacement (Steele 2011: 424). In another research focused on political polarisation in Switzerland, local cleavages are defined as different geographical settlements – as different local populations (e.g., in large cities,

suburbs, remote areas, cosmopolitan villages or minority cultural regions (Koseki 2018: 28). In this research, local cleavages are not defined as cleavages on the local level (cleavages in the municipal (regional) political party system).

Another kind of use of the term cleavages on the local level is in the research of Schumaker and Burns (1988) *Gender cleavages and the Resolution of Local Policy Issues*. In their study, they tested gender cleavages and gender differences in the local community's decision-making. This text, unfortunately, does not define the term cleavage precisely. The authors only mentioned that cleavage means a big difference between men or women's decisions (Schumaker – Burns 1998: 1078). Based on this, we can see that this text also uses the term cleavage. And again, it does not reflect the previous conceptualisation of the term.

Based on the presented research, we could see that the term cleavage is used differently. The main problem in the Czech environment is, in some cases, the absence of institutional difference (conflict is not presented by one political party) or lack of structural difference. In our case, the referendum tool should treat the institutional difference, which provides a standardised way of civic activism and expression. Then in our research we will focus on the terminology used by Deegan-Krause. From our point of view, this typology enables the use of the idea of cleavages.

Direct democracy and civic activism

In the context of democracy and representative democracy, discussions on citizen participation in decision-making, citizen satisfaction with representative democracy, declining confidence in the government, declining voter turnout, etc., political science focuses on instruments representing a 'complement' alternative to classical representative democracy.

Democratic innovation takes many forms. The concept itself is primarily discussed. There is no clear definition of what democratic innovations are and which states belong here and which no longer do. G. Smith, in the book *Democratic Innovations – Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation*, ranks among the democratic innovations: participatory budgeting, e-democracy, direct democracy (referendums) and local public assembly. However, throughout his research, Smith has spoken of at least 57 kinds of democratic innovation. What are the benefits of direct democracy? Direct participation (e.g., through a referendum) 'has the potential to mobilize citizens to engage, thereby counteracting the current decline in political participation' (Dalton – Welzel 2014).

Our research will focus only on the tool referendum (the only tool of direct democracy with a legal background) and mainly on the connection to mobilise the citizens to set up the organisation and then the candidate in the election. Besides this function of the referendum, in the Czech context we deal with the trend of local representatives – organisation of the referendum to find out

citizens' opinions for controversial topics and topics with various political players (Smith 2007: 89). This trend could lead to the discussion on the deficit of representative democracy and democracy deficit (e.g., Čmejrek 2013) and other problems of small municipalities (e.g., lack of candidates, which lead to uncompetitive elections or unwillingness to run again in the next local election (Ryšavý – Šaradín: 2012)). In connection with our research on local political conflict, we will also discuss these findings.

Difference, divides and cleavages

For example, the cleavages study's difficulties are mentioned by Deegan-Krause (2006), who marks Mair and Bartolini's concept as full cleavage. Deegan-Krause, in his research, explains the new conditions in the political party research (and in political reality) in contrast with the former Lipset and Rokkan conditions. Based on this, he claims that full cleavage has to fulfil the definition of Mair and Bartolini. But the term cleavage is also used in other meanings ('less cleavages'). For these cases, he introduces his simplification and the term 'less cleavage' (Deegan-Krause, 2006: 539). To study less cleavages, based on his finding, we could use the following terms. Firstly, he uses the word '"difference' to explain the concept's cleavage element – a difference we can find inside the structure, attitude or institution. As the second term, he uses 'a divide'. The divide is used in cases where not all three categories (from Mair and Bartolini's definition – structure, attitude and institution) are fulfilled. A divide means the distinct sides of the conflict, and it differs from the concept of cleavages. There are three possible pairs of sides (three types of 'divides'):

- Structure plus Attitudes – 'position divide' – '*offers an alternative to various teleological notions such as "non-politicized cleavage" used to describe the alignment of structural and attitudinal difference without an accompanying political alignment. "Position" carries connotations both of structural location and of individual attitude*' (Deegan-Krause 2006: 539)
- Structure plus Institutions – 'census divide' – '*echoing Horowitz's "census elections" (1985), captures the alignment of group identity and political choice without attitudinal trappings'* (Deegan-Krause 2006: 539)
- Attitudes plus Institutions – 'issue divide' – '*The word "issues" emerges regularly in scholarship in this area and refers to the interplay between attitude and partisanship'* (Deegan-Krause 2006: 539).

Each division and also the full cleavage have their consequences. In the original research on cleavages, the effects were connected mainly with the study of democratisation. However, based on Deegan-Krause's other research, it is evident that it is also helpful for studying, e.g., institutional accountability (Deegan-Krause 2006b: 17).

Research design and methods

The research period will be framed by the referenda database from the Ministry of Interior, which has published the referendum results since 2006.[2] We will end our study in 2018 – the year of the last elections to local assemblies.

The sample of municipalities was based on two variables. Firstly, we selected only municipalities in which the referendum was held independently on the election. This selection is based on the argument that referenda not held during the election days are a referendum about significant (and potentially cleavage) topics. This argument is based on local referendums' experience in the Czech Republic (e.g., Smith 2007). Also, the Supreme Administrative Court's judgment decided that, if possible, local referendums should be held together with the elections to ensure higher participation (e.g., Judgement of the Supreme Administrative Court Ars 2/2012–43). It is evident that a referendum held independently on election should have an essential and immediate topic. In the next step, we selected the only referendum without a general and national topic (it means the division of the municipality, American anti-missile base, ban on gambling, the building of storage for nuclear waste, enlargement of Vodochody Airport, and referenda with very low participation (under 35 %)), because these topics could refer to national cleavage or issues. At least, we selected municipalities with topics directly connected with their local issues – municipality development in the way of the zoning plan, the building of the dam, the building of the sandpit and the building of the pressure sewer. None of these villages are in a vacuum; each of the themes mentioned has regional or national overlap – some more (e.g. Nové Heřminovy), some less. The differences between topics could then be analysed in our research.

Secondly, we examined two election periods in selected municipalities – before the referendum was held and after. Based on this, we found differences in the municipality party system. We decided only on municipalities with different party systems. We also eliminate the municipalities with a party system that shows a declining number of political parties. We claim that if the parties can disappear or merge themselves it shows that there is no conflict. There are some exceptions in municipalities, where the political party is connected with the referendum (e.g., Věrovany) or where local parties displace national parties. Based on this, we selected four municipalities with these two variables and more – their party system consists of one party, which directly in the name mentions the referendum's topic, signalising that the issue is crucial and mobilises citizens to action.

The party system's information, the referendum's impact and the local decision-making conditions were collected through semi-structured interviews

2 Law on the local referendum (no 22/2004) requiring local assemblies the duty to report the information about organising a local referendum. Unfortunately, this law does not provide sanctions for breaches.

with the municipality representatives. This type of interview is also called elite interviewing. It is defined in the meaning of the term target group, which is studied – an 'elite' of some kind and in the term of research technique used, which is called semi-structured interviewing. This technique is presented as 'the most effective way to obtain information about decision-makers and decision--making processes' (Burnham 2008: 231). What differentiates these techniques from, for example, survey interviewing is the kind of respondent. In the elite interviewing, 'some respondents may count more than others in terms of their influence on the decision-making process' (Burnham 2008: 231).

The method of elite interviewing is not standardised, which is also confirmed by the lack of literature about this technique (Burnham 2008: 232). Based on this, there is not a need to establish the whole work on this technique. To avoid this, elite interviewing is often used in research that follows the principle of triangulation. The criticism of the qualitative method is based on its unrepresentativeness and atypicality.

Based on the fact that we want to study a topic that is not covered by previous research and want to study the municipalities' topics deeply, we chose this technique. We reached the representatives by contacts on the websites of the municipalities. Then we reached them by phone. We reached out to all representatives who were elected for the election period 2018–2022. However, in most cases, they did not want to cooperate. For this paper, we collected six in-depth semi-structured interviews. The question and the answers will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Finally, we analysed the answers from the interviews by the concept of cleavages by Deegan-Krause.

Case study: when a referendum start a new political party system

This paragraph will introduce four municipalities in which political parties' change was based on a referendum. In these four municipalities, the referendum topic led to different party system changes. From this point of view, it is possible to confirm the rise of a fundamental cleavage.

Moravany u Brna

Moravany u Brna is a municipality with 2513 inhabitants and 664 hectares (Moravany u Brna 2021). In the Czech municipality context, it is one of the bigger municipalities. To better understand referendum topics and divide in the municipality, it is necessary to mention that Moravany u Brna, as the name suggests, is a municipality close to Brno (the second biggest city in the Czech Republic).

In our research period, the party system of the municipality registered a huge change. In 2006, except for traditional national parties (ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, KSČM,

ODS), there were two other lists of candidates (independent candidates). In 2010[3] there were eleven lists of candidates; in 2014, ten list of candidates; and in 2018, twelve of them. Also, in the Czech local election context, the number of lists of candidates is exceptional. What's more, in 2010 for the first time we can register a list of candidates called Referendum Moravany. Based on the interview, we discovered that the candidate list was created for the purpose of the referendum and construction topic (i.e. New urban development of the municipality (construction of the new municipality part)).

In 2012 there was a hold referendum, the question was: '*Do you agree that the Moravany municipal council, within the spatial planning process, by all legal means to promote the development of the territory according to "Variant A" described in the "Territorial study of long-term development of Moravany u Brna" from September 2011. Fixel & Pech?*'[4] Based on the interview, we could describe it as the referendum in which inhabitants should vote for urban development – change of ordinary plots to buildings plots. Based on the interview, the referendum topic was and still is essential. One of the respondents described that there were two opinion groups, one owned land and wanted building plots (mostly new owners), the other group (more old settlers) did not have land, so they blocked the development. The first group was for more significant development and construction of housing in the village. Another interview also confirmed the same opinion division.

The result of the referendum was: turnout 49.2 %, 89.8 % inhabitants vote YES. The referendum was valid and binding.

In this case, the referendum meant establishing a new party. In the last election, the party was still active and ran together with Majors and Independents (*Starostové a nezávislí*, STAN).

The topic of urban development is still alive.

Nové Heřminovy

There are 375 inhabitants living in Nové Heřminovy (MVCR 2021) in the area of 11.03 km^2. The municipality is located in the Bruntál district in the Moravian-Silesian Region. In the Czech context, it is a small municipality (however, this municipality size is the most common). Despite the municipality's size, it is known due to the intention to build a water dam instead of the municipality (nowadays only instead of one part). This intention is really old (based on the

3 The year 2010 we can call the year of a political earthquake on the national level (Hanley 2012). Two highly successful parties entered in the national party system – Public Affairs (Věci veřejné, VV) and TOP 09. These parties also took part in the local election.

4 In the original: Souhlasíte s tím, aby zastupitelstvo obce Moravany v rámci procesu územního plánování prosazovalo všemi právními prostředky rozvoj území podle "Varianty A" popsané v "Územní studii možností dlouhodobého rozvoje obce Moravany u Brna" ze září 2011, jejímž zhotovitelem je "Ateliér ERA, sdružení architektů Fixel & Pech"?

municipality chronicle it is dated to the beginning of the 20th century) and till nowadays there is still no decision and solution. In the past, the water dam should have been built to produce more drinking water for the Moravian-Silesian region, mainly for the biggest cities. In the last years, with climate change, the purpose was changed for the intention of flood-barriers (Nové Heřminovy 2021). This topic is mediated and encroaches on a higher level of decision-making (regional and national).

In 2008 a referendum was held with the question: *Do you agree that the municipality of Nové Heřminovy will actively use all legal means and other legitimate instruments to prevent the demolition of buildings in the municipality in connection with the planned intention of a dam in the village of Nové Heřminovy, especially that municipality Nové Heřminovy will always oppose the realization of the dam's plan will in all administrative or judicial proceedings related to permitting the dam in the municipality?*[5] The referendum results were: turnout 35 %, and the YES answer was chosen by 71.4 % of voters. The referendum was valid and binding.

This case referendum topic also meant establishing the new party – SNK *Zdravý rozum proti přehradě* (Coalition of independent candidates – Common sense against the dam). The party firstly ran in the election in 2006. Until that year, the party system was stable (there were three parties – KSČM and two lists of independent candidates). In 2006, there were new parties – the national KDU-ČSL, and instead of lists of independent candidates, there was SNK *Zdravý rozum proti přehradě*. In the next two elections, the party again ran under SNK 1, SNK 2 –> lists of independent candidates. However, in 2018 the name SNK *Zdravý rozum proti přehradě* was again used. Based on the interview, the theme of the dam in the village persists, in 2010 and 2014 it was not necessary to name the topic; there was unity against the original mayor (from 2008). In 2018, however, the mayor from 2008 ran again, which meant the sharpening of opinions again.

Věrovany

There are 1398 inhabitants living in Věrovany, which is located in the Olomouc district. It is one of the bigger municipalities in the Olomoucký kraj. The municipality is not unusual, according to our interview with council members: 'In my opinion, this is an electorally typical Moravian municipality, as evidenced by the results in parliamentary, presidential, senate, etc., which do not differ in many ways from the results of other similar municipalities in Moravia (in the Czech Republic).'

5 In the original: Souhlasíte s tím, aby obec Nové Heřminovy aktivně využila všech zákonných prostředků a dalších legitimních nástrojů, aby zabránila bourání budov na území obce v souvislosti s plánovaným záměrem přehrady v obci Nové Heřminovy, zejména aby ve všech správních či soudních řízeních souvisejících s povolováním přehrady v obci Nové Heřminovy vystupovala vždy proti realizaci záměru přehrady?

During our research period there was a stable party system. Since 2006 there have been four candidates listed – national parties ODS, ČSSD (since 2010), KDU-ČSL (which did not participate in the 2010 election), and KSČM (which participated only in the 2006 election) and the party of independent candidates. However, in 2010 in connection with the referendum topic, the independent candidates named the party Civic Association Lives without the Sandpit (*Občanské sdružení Život bez pískovny*). According to the interview, the primary motive (to set up the civic association) was to prevent the establishment of a sandpit; the secondary motive was to use this topic as a reason for a change in the village's council. After 2014, he topic of the sandpit disappeared.

Based on the interviews, the only problem or division in the municipality was connected with the construction of the sandpit. The referendum was held in 2009. The question was: 'Do you agree that the council of Věrovany should support the construction of a sandpit in the cadastral territory of Věrovany, including a change in the zoning plan, which would enable the extraction of sand in this area?'[6] The turnout was 61.3 %, the answer NO was chosen by 91.7 % of voters, which means that the referendum was valid and binding. The referendum's initiator was the coalition of opposition parties, which received the most votes in the next election. The council from the period 2006–2010 did not succeed in the next election.

Trstěnice

Also, Trstěnice is a small municipality in the district Svitavy in the Pardubice Region However, with 532 inhabitants, it is one of the most average and common types of municipalities in the Czech Republic. Similarly, as in the case of Nové Heřminovy, the surrounding space of the municipality suggests its problems and conflicts. The municipality is laid in a valley and is in the direct way of the river Loučná to the nearby big city of Litomyšl. The connection of this location and the typical problem of Czech municipalities – sewerage and drainage – created a big divide between surrounding municipalities and the village and within the village.

In our research period, there was a stable party system. The number of the candidate list was three, and in last election two, when the candidates of the Green Party did not participate.

The referendum topic was associated with the case of a pressure sewer. The question was: *Do you agree with constructing a pressure sewer in the village of Trstěnice?*[7] The referendum was valid and binding – turnout was 69.8 %, and

6 In the original: Souhlasíte s tím, aby zastupitelstvo obce Věrovany podporovalo vybudování pískovny na katastrálním území obce Věrovany včetně změny územního plánu, která by umožnila těžbu písku na tomto území?

7 In the origin: Souhlasím, aby byla vybudovaná v obci Trstěnice tlaková kanalizace?

the answer NO was chosen by 71.3 % of voters. The initiator of the referendum was partly from the Green Party. Based on the interviews, we can confirm that the topic meant a big divide in the village and the council. In 2014, due to the referendum, many people in the council quit and the entire council was replaced. As we mentioned in the previous section, in 2018 the Green Party, despite the referendum's success, did not put up a candidate. Nowadays, the situation in the village could be described in the interviewer's words: 'The result of the referendum – construction stopped (although promised subsidies, etc.) and currently complicates life. Since then, it is not possible to find a solution... The Green Party in 2018 did not run a candidate, so there is no division.'

Application of Deegan-Krause model

Full cleavage

According to the cleavage definition, it has to contain all three structural, attitudinal and institutional differences.

Structural difference

These difference will be analysed by the respondent's answers. Mainly, by the answer to the question: *In your opinion, is there a topic which produces conflicts and differences between inhabitants and the councilman, in your municipality?*[8]

In the Moravany case the answer was: mainly municipality development (extension of building land) and secondly new construction of a sports hall (only by one interviewee). In the Nové Heřminovy case: only the topic of the dam. In the Věrovany case: there was the topic of the sandpit in the past, nowadays there is sometimes a difference in the interests of the local voluntary associations. In the Trstěnice case: in the past, the topic of the pressure sewer, nowadays, the anti-erosion measures. The answers were mainly connected with the name of the conflict so if the respondents were asked if there are two different opinion groups associated with these topics, the answers were: Moravany – there is a difference between old settlers and new young inhabitants, between landowners and others; Nové Heřminovy – opposition is against the ex-mayor; however, people are mainly against the dam. There are more inhabitants against outside influence. In Věrovany – the 'we' and 'they' situation was also specified – which is connected with the history of the municipality (an amalgamation of three municipalities). In the Trstěnice case, there was no stable difference.

8 In the original: Je, dle Vašeho názoru, v obci téma (problém), který obyvatele obce, případně zastupitele rozděluje?

Attitudinal difference

According to the Deegan-Krause model, 'Assessments of attitudinal difference almost always depend on a survey of public attitudes, using Likert scales of semantic differentials, though occasionally attitudes are derived from other types of question or coding of open-ended responses' (Deegan-Krause 2006b: 15). In our case, the other differences are also evaluated according to the respondent's answer; however, mainly in this difference, we have no other option. In the Czech context, there is no public survey of public attitudes connected with the local level. There was no one specific question on this difference. Our interviews were semi-structured, so there was space to ask more deeply about the questions connected with values, attitudes and beliefs. In Moravany, similarly to the structural difference, there is a difference between people who want to develop the municipality (in connection with another building land) and those against them. These opinions are connected with the difference between old settlers and new inhabitants, and with the socio-economic dimension, as one of the interviewees mentioned: '(left (more social) and right (more pragmatic)'. In the case of Nové Heřminovy and Trstěnice, there is no attitudinal difference in the respondents. In the case of Věrovany – there are two groups connected with the local association; however. it does not cover all inhabitants.

Institutional difference

We asked our respondents: *What does the decision-making process of the council usually look like? Does the topic* (from the structural difference) *involve local politics (e.g., council decision-making, establishing a local coalition, etc.)?*[9]

In the Moravany case they answered: '*Coalition and opposition – both in terms of division in the council and the opinion (on the conflict topics)'.* In the Nové Heřminovy case there are two sides of the conflict, and the subject of the dam is still alive. Watmore, according to the interviewee: '(the topic of the dam)… is a motive to engage in politics'. In the Věrovany case connected with the referendum topic, there was stable opposition; however, it is not alive anymore. In connecting with the local association's interest, there is also conflict and division in the council. There was also a new candidate list in the last election, which reflected one side of the conflict. And in our last case, Trstěnice, our interviewee said: 'There is no stable differentiation, no significant divisions. Everyone always presents their opinion, for and against, and then we vote. We're on the same ship. Decision-making is very individual. For those significant cases – there is a suitable referendum.'

9 In the original: Projevuje se toto téma v místní politice (např. rozhodování zastupitelstva, tvoření místních koalic)? A Jak obvykle vypadá rozhodovací proces v zastupitelstvu?

Table 1: Result of the case studies

	Structural difference	Attitudinal difference	Institutional difference	result
Moravany u Brna	✓	✓	✓	cleavage
Nové Heřminovy	✓	✘	✓	Census divide
Věrovany	✓	✘	✓ (in 2010)	Census divide
Trstěnice	✘	✘	✘	✘

Source: research data

However, according to Deegan-Krause's research, it's not only cleavages that play an important role in the party system. In his model, he put forward division, which could also play a vital role in the party system. These terms will be tested on the rest of our cases.

In our examples, only one conflict could be merged as the cleavage. Interestingly, in connection with the previous research (e.g. Bubeníček – Kubálek 2010), also in our case, the topic of spatial development produces conflict, which could be in our research be explained as the cleavage. On the contrary, the Trstěnice case does not fulfil any of the differences. The Trstěnice case is a widespread example of the municipality, where representatives act in agreement and where citizens decide the difficult topics by the tools of direct democracy (referendum or petition). The two municipalities – Nové Heřminovy and Věrovany – are interesting cases. In this case, and based on the analysed differences, we could say that they fulfil the census divide definition. The census divide combines structural and institutional differences. Due to the Deegan-Krause concept, *if the group can agree on questions of identity and formulate corresponding demands, this divide could develop in full cleavage* (Deegan-Krause 2006b: 17). In the case of Nové Heřminovy, the attitudinal difference could be fulfilled in the context of 'we' and 'they' (we – citizens, they – state, the Odra river basin[10]). However, this relationship does not enter the local party-political system. In connection with the regional and national elections – in the last elections in Nové Heřminovy no candidate of any political party ran with this topic. In the Věrovany case, the civic association's ambition to mobilise citizens and agree on the common attitude is unreal. Moreover, in this case, based on the interviews, we have to point out that we discovered that the two opinion groups do not cover all inhabitants. In this case, the census divide marking is very controversial. In this case, we also see that the institutional difference was fulfilled only in 2010, and nowadays the party does not follow up the fundamental motives.

10 In the original: Povodí řeky Odry.

Results and further ways ahead for the research

To sum up, our research presents one of the possibilities for future local cleavage research. Based on our research, we have confirmed that the concept of Deegan-Krause is acceptable at the local level. We have included the part of the civic activism due to the orientation on municipalities with the referendum experiences. Based on our research, we have to point out this significant part of the local political system. Our study discussed this part only briefly because of the lack of information (there is no public survey of public attitudes connected with the local policy level). In our research, we supplemented this lack of information with the data from the interviews. Mainly in this part, our approach and method of the research show possible ways to study cleavages. Our research also shows the variety of the topic 'difference'. Previous research is oriented mainly on the subject of spatial planning. Also, in our case, we confirmed that this topic fulfils the definition of a cleavage. However, we also presented the case of Nové Heřminovy, where the conflict has the ambition and assumptions for the cleavage.

Besides the cleavage research, based on the interviews, we could confirm the tendency of local representatives to use the referendum tool for controversial topics and use referendum results as the argument for further political decision making (e.g., Trstěnice: 'For those big cases – there is a suitable referendum'), moreover, in connection with one of the big issues of Czech local politics – unwillingness to run for local councils. We have discovered that in these municipalities, the presence of controversial topics and topics with the potential of full cleavage (e.g., dam topic) is the main factor for candidates in the election.

We also have to point out the weaknesses of this research. The research is conceived as a case study. However, our cases could show the way for further analysis. The second weakness could be seen in the method of the interview. An interview, as every method, has its limits. In our research, we are aware of this limit. However, this was a valid tool because of the lack of public surveys of public attitudes on the local level. Also, for the attitudinal questions, the interview could be one of the best tools.

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The European Union's Transformative Power in the Countries of the Eastern Partnership

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Abstract: *The article examines the Eastern Partnership (EaP) as the initiative of the European Union (EU) through the prism of the constructivist concepts of soft power, normative power and transformative power. The research focuses on the assessment of the EU's transformative strength in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, based on the analysis of declared EU policy goals and instruments and the real results of political reforms in partner countries. The results of the study show that the EaP has little transformative impact and needs further revision. The analysis of empirical indicators in the field of political transformation of the EaP countries shows that since its inception, as well as after the signing of Association Agreements with three countries and the renewal of the European Neighborhood Policy in 2015, no radical changes have been made, and the EU's influence on the course of reforms has been insignificant. Institutional and geopolitical constraints and challenges that complicate the EU's ability to influence its eastern neighbours are addressed. The article analyses prospects for strengthening the effectiveness of the EaP in the context of its latest update after 2020.*

Keywords: ***Eastern Partnership, normative power, transformative power, eastern neighbours, transformation.***

Introduction

Since the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) has become one of the EU's most discussed policy initiatives. Later, the interest in the programme intensified during the celebration of its 10th anniversary in 2019. At the heart of the discussion, there was the urgent need to update the ideas and mechanisms of the EaP in order to strengthen the EU's ability

to promote regional stability by promoting European values in the countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. However, the radical transformation of the EaP did not take place, but rather, on the contrary, the EU seems to have reduced its transformative ambitions in the region. The ongoing Russia--Ukraine conflict and growing tensions between the EU and Russia have been testing the EaP for strength and putting the EU in a position to choose between fundamental values and interests.

Since its launch in 2009, the EaP has reflected the EU's desire to exert normative influence on its neighbours in order to spread common European values and norms, e.g., democratic institutions, the rule of law, good governance, etc. The EU's transformation aspirations stemmed from its experience of enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe in 2004 and 2007. For post-communist Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s and early 21st century, the EU's model had a magnetic power that led candidate countries to dramatic transformations, which the EU used successfully to stabilise the states of the former Yugoslavia (Middelaar 2021: 102). Moreover, this formula of transformative influence later became the basis of the European Neighborhood Policy, launched in 2003–2004, and the EaP as its eastern regional dimension since 2009. The main aim of this model was to influence the behaviour of the countries which wanted something from the EU. As Middelaar rightly points out, at that time, the EU did not realise or acted as if it did not realise how much this influence depended on the promise of membership which is the main prize available to the EU (Middelaar 2021: 103). In addition, the EU's policy in its eastern neighbourhood has clashed with Russia's policy towards neighbouring countries, its subversive information strategy and the spread of misinformation in Europe and neighbouring countries. The strength of the EU's influence also depends on the correspondence between the values of the EU and the values, aspirations and interests of neighbouring countries and their political elites. Permanent crises and internal political instability in the EaP countries have a negative impact on the EU's ability to act here in a normative manner. In addition, today, the EU's normative influence is not regarded in a neutral context but in a contradictory and turbulent regional and international environment.

There is a lot of literature on the analysis of the EU as a transformative power in the process of its enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe, which proves the important role of the EU in the process of democratic transformation of candidate countries (Grabbe 2004; Borzel – Risse 2009; Lavenex – Schimmelfennig 2009; Vakhudova 2009). At the same time, the question of the effectiveness of the EaP as a project to promote the transformation of neighbouring countries through normative socialisation and material incentives remains less explored. A number of authors draw attention to the contradiction between EU norms and values in the region, as well as to the influence of the Russian factor, etc. (Dimitrova – Dragneva 2009; Valiyeva 2016; Crombois 2019). Nevertheless, the

limits of the EU's transformative power in the eastern neighbourhood are not thoroughly examined.

The study of the transformative power of the EU in the EaP countries at the present stage is of particular interest for a number of reasons. Firstly, the signing of the Association Agreements with the three countries (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) in 2014 and the further liberalisation of the visa regime with them marked a new step in developing the EaP. Thus, it is necessary to determine to what extent these events affected its transformative power. Secondly, the Russia-Ukraine conflict and, more broadly, Russia's vivid desire to prevent further Europeanisation of Eastern Europe have created a new political reality in Europe; taking it into account, the EU can change (weaken or strengthen) its own transformative aspirations. Thirdly, the analysis of the EU's transformative power in the EaP is likely to develop further or refine the concepts through which the EU's foreign policy is most often explored, i.e., soft power, regulatory power, transformative power, etc.

The above ideas define the following structure of the article. In the first part, we describe the concept of transformative power based on its comparison and contrast with such concepts as soft power and normative power. The second part includes the analysis of the EaP documents, which reflect the EU's intention to transform its eastern neighbourhood, the goals and mechanisms of the programme and their evolution. In the same part, we analyse empirical data on the results of transformation processes in six EaP countries based on a comparison of several indices (Freedom House, World Justice Project and Transparency International) and determine the EU's role in these processes. In the third part, we consider three groups of factors that, in our opinion, affect the effectiveness of the EU's transformative power in the region: 1) conceptual and institutional constraints of EU policy; 2) internal challenges in partner countries; 3) Russia's influence as a counterweight to Europeanisation of the EU in the region.

Soft, normative and transformative power as basic approaches to studying the EU's policy towards its neighbours

In current studies of the EU's foreign policy, as well as the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the EaP, the main discussion centres on rationalist and constructivist approaches. Without going into their detailed description, which has been well done in the scientific literature (Valiyeva 2016: 13–17), we note that while constructivists consider ideas and values to be a major factor in EU foreign policy, rationalists argue that the EU is primarily concerned with maximising its interests, and, as a result, its behaviour is strategic. This discussion in the context of the EaP continues because the EU's policy towards Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus shows an evident fluctuation between the two leading approaches, which are due to its rational strategic interests and

the desire to spread fundamental values in the nearest neighbourhood. Thus, often the EU's behaviour cannot be placed in a purely constructivist or purely rationalist framework because, in practice, both interests and values can play some role in introducing certain EU initiatives.

At the same time, it should be emphasised that the promotion of European values and norms remains one of the most important dimensions of the EU's foreign policy and its international and regional activity. The EU's foreign policy stems from a certain system of values and principles that constitute the essence of European integration and define the EU's goals in the international arena. The dramatic historical experience of the world wars has strengthened Europe's shared belief that these principles are of absolute value in relations between European states and that they should be extended in the outside world. Thus, they are a fundamental part of the EU's foreign policy identity. Moreover, this quality of the EU and its strong experience of integration and cooperation distinguishes it from traditional state entities, which are guided primarily by national interests (Valiyeva 2016: 15).

During the 1990s, the EU's desire to extend its norms, ideas and values in third countries, combined with membership conditions, had a significant impact on the promotion of norms, rules and policies for candidate countries in Central and Eastern Europe wishing to join the EU. Therefore, a lot of scholars have recognised the EU as a soft power (a term used to refer to the EU's ability to influence other countries through nonmaterial factors such as ideology, culture and institutions) (Dimitrova et al. 2016: 8–9), a normative power (a term used to denote the EU's role in creating and spreading international norms) (Manners 2008: 23) and a transformative power (a term used to denote the EU's influence on candidate countries or neighbours) (Grabbe 2004: 36).

The original definition of soft power belongs to Joseph Nye. He interprets it as the ability of an international actor to achieve the desired results in foreign policy through its attractiveness and involvement, i.e., the ability to get 'others to want the outcomes that you want' using nonmaterial factors such as ideology, culture, etc. (Nye 1990: 153–171). Thus, when the EU promoted democracy and human rights principles adopted by many Central and Eastern European countries through the enlargement process, it exercised its soft power.

Manners, the author of the concept of normative power of the EU, believes that the EU is a normative power, which has an ideational nature, based on shared values and principles. Moreover, in recent years, according to the researcher, the EU has increasingly used normative power, striving to form its own international norms (Manners 2008: 23). The primary way the EU implements normative power is by building asymmetric relations with third countries, where the EU extends its norms and values based on the legitimacy of the EU as the bearer of these norms. As Manners says, 'the concept of normative power is an attempt to suggest that not only is the EU constructed on a norma-

tive basis, but importantly that this predisposes it to act in a normative way in world politics' (2002: 252). He argues that 'the most important factor shaping the international role of the EU is not what it does or what it says, but what it is' (2002: 252). Thus, an actor which is defined as a normative power does not aim to impose its own rules and regulations and does not use that power as an instrument of power, e.g., military or economic power. On the contrary, normative power primarily lies in the power of the norms themselves and their attractiveness to other subjects, and it is realised mainly through socialisation mechanisms.

The question of the relationship between soft power and normative power remains poorly studied. Manners points out that soft power is an empirical construction and a foreign policy instrument, while normative power is a purely theoretical concept based on social diffusion and normative practices. He also believes that Nye uses the term soft power to describe US foreign policy, making it unsuitable for studying the EU (2002: 236).

Finally, there is a wealth of literature on the EU as a transformative power (Grabbe 2004; Borzel – Risse 2009; Lavenex – Schimmelfennig 2009; Vakhudova 2009; Dimitrova – Dragneva 2009; Dimitrova – Pridham 2005), which is mainly based on its essential role in the process of democratic transformations of the candidate countries, as well as initiatives to promote reform in neighbouring countries through regulatory socialisation and material incentives. It is rightly argued that the EU's transformative power is explicitly or implicitly rooted in the model of European integration, through which the EU can influence states that would like to join or develop closer ties with the EU (Dimitrova – Pridham 2005: 91–95). Thus, the transformative power of the EU is limited to potential candidate countries and neighbours, while soft and normative power can be exercised further. However, the results of some studies suggest that outside of its eastern and southern neighbourhoods, the EU is not perceived as a normative power (Chaban – Knodt – Verdun 2016). The success of the EU as a transformative power depends on several conditions, such as the ability to include the prospect of membership for the country it is trying to influence, as well as the compliance of the EU's policies with the interests of the local elites (Borzel – Ademmer 2013: 606–607). In the case of candidate countries, the EU's transformative power may be limited by internal factors, and in the case of the EU's eastern neighbourhood might be influenced by Russia (Dimitrova – Dragneva 2009: 870).

Thus, for more than two decades after the fall of communism, the EU was able to make neighbouring European states want what it wanted, which Nye defines as soft power. The EU's focus on the norms of its relations with third countries made the EU unique among international actors, and that is why Manners calls it a normative power. For countries wishing to join the EU, the EU not only promoted international norms but also encouraged a wide range

of reforms in the spheres of democracy, market economy and good governance, which allowed it to be classified as a transformative power.

In this article, the transformative power of the EU in the EaP countries refers to the degree of its influence on the transition from undemocratic or hybrid political systems to the creation of true democracy and the rule of law, as well as from a command to a market economy in target countries using non-coercive means. Thus, the next part analyses the transformative power of the EaP through the prism of the stated EU goals, tools for achieving them and, most importantly, the results of political reforms in the target countries on the basis of empirical indicators. The authors do not consider the role of the EU in promoting economic transformation; it may be the subject of a separate study.

The Eastern Partnership of the European Union as a weak attempt to transform its eastern neighbourhood

After the Eastern enlargement, the EU, wishing to transform its external environment, has focused on its eastern and southern neighbours, driven by growing interdependence with those countries and new threats to the EU's security and prosperity. The ENP and its regional branches, including the EaP, have become a concrete embodiment of the EU's desire to change, i.e., democratise, Europeanise and stabilise its environment using norms, rules and values. It was openly stated by former European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle, who explained the overall goal of the EU concerning its eastern neighbours: 'It is about finishing the transformation of the European continent' (Dempsey 2013).

The EaP has paved the way for the gradual and partial integration of partner countries with the EU, based on their progress with internal reforms. The innovation of its bilateral dimension was that all eastern neighbours got opportunities for the development of the relations, like those that the EU previously offered to Ukraine, i.e., Association Agreements, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, visa liberalisation, integrated institutional development programmes, etc. (European Commission 2008). The instruments provided by the multilateral dimension, e.g., a summit, Council of Ministers, thematic platforms, working panels, flagship initiatives, Civil Society Forum, Euronest, etc.) have become entirely new for the region (European Commission 2008).

The EaP aims to promote transformation processes in its member countries in order to spread EU norms and values, such as commitment to the rule of law, respect for human rights, good governance, approximation of national legislation to the rules of the EU single market. Whether defined as soft, normative or transformative power, the EU's influence is based on a complex combination of its economic attractiveness, interdependence, promotion of international norms and the promise of closer integration, attractive to some of its eastern

neighbours, e.g., Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine. Ultimately, the influence of the EU also depends on its actual policy and ability to implement it effectively.

From the very beginning, the EaP has left open the question of what should happen if any partner country implements the envisaged reform programme and becomes Europeanised and compatible with the EU. As a result, the EaP is rightly described as a failed attempt at a bureaucratic answer to a political question (Wilson 2017). The political question is where the final borders of a united Europe should be drawn. Therefore, the EaP is designed to provide a projection of the EU normative model in the eastern neighbourhood while keeping silent about the possibility of future enlargement. That is why the problem of the EU's eastern border in the EaP seems to have been avoided.

Since the founding summit of the EaP on 7th May 2009, in Prague, the EU has reviewed some of its instruments as part of the ENP reforms initiated by the European Commission's joint Communication, i.e., *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood* on 25th May 2011 (European Commission 2011) and *The Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy* on 18th November 2015 (European Commission 2015), as well as by the results of six EaP summits. In particular, in 2011, a clear 'more for more' principle was established to show interdependence between the EU's assistance and adopted reforms in partner countries (European Commission 2011). Moreover, partnerships with neighbouring societies were strengthened, and support for non-governmental organisations in partner countries was stepped up (European Commission 2011). At the same time, since 2015, there has been a marked shift in emphasis on the stabilisation and differentiation of the eastern neighbourhood and a certain departure from the value-oriented normative approach focused on its democratic transformation (European Commission 2015). In this context, several researchers speak about the geopoliticisation of the EaP, the formation of a more pragmatic view of the EU on its eastern neighbourhood and the reduction of its transformative ambitions in the region (Valiyeva 2016, Crombois 2019).

In 2015, the ambitions initially stated in the EaP yielded mixed results and underwent changes. In the Review of the ENP on 18th November 2015, the EU reviewed not only certain instruments of the EaP but also the previously accepted assumptions about its attractiveness to its neighbours in the east, focusing more on stabilisation and differentiation than on reforms in the eastern neighbourhood (European Commission 2015). This document reflects the EU's tendency to move towards a real policy to the detriment of a universal approach based on its own values (Crombois 2019: 93) and the transition from normative rhetoric to the priority of stabilisation (Valiyeva 2016: 20). The changed approach to the neighbourhood, including the EaP, shifts the focus from promoting democracy to stabilisation as a key political priority of the renewed ENP. The EU document also recognises that not all partners seek to adhere to its rules and standards, so there is a need to consider each country's wishes regarding the nature and

dynamics of its relations with the EU. If reforms continue, a differentiated approach combined with the 'more for more' principle will enable reform-oriented partners, i.e., Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, to benefit from enhanced financial and technical assistance. However, in the case of Armenia, Azerbaijan or Belarus, which are seeking to avoid political and regulatory conditions in political dialogue with the EU, the principle of differentiation may undermine the EU's image as a normative power, and the EaP may lose its relevance as a tool for a democratic transformation of the partner countries.

In practice, these new EU approaches can be traced to the preparation and signing of less ambitious, compared to the Association Agreements, Partnership Agreements with Armenia and Azerbaijan, and stabilisation of relations with Belarus from 2016 until the presidential elections on 9th August 2020. Despite Armenia joining the Eurasian Economic Union in October 2015, the EU began negotiations with it on a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, which was signed at the EaP Summit in Brussels in November 2017. The trade part of the Partnership Agreement, unlike the Association Agreements, does not contain their most important component, i.e., the free trade zone, and is adapted to Armenia's obligations under the Eurasian Economic Union (Sydoruk – Tyshchenko 2018: 219). In February 2017, the EU began the negotiation process on a Comprehensive and Extended Partnership Agreement with Azerbaijan (Sydoruk – Tyshchenko 2018: 219).

Approved at the EaP Summit in Brussels in November 2017, the 20 Deliverables for 2020 are primarily aimed at increasing the stability of the region, its economic development, strengthening people-to-people contacts, improving infrastructure, promoting energy cooperation and collaboration at the civil society level, etc. (Sydoruk – Tyshchenko 2018: 222). The fulfillment of these tasks certainly helps strengthen ties between eastern neighbours and the EU, but they reaffirm that the latter is increasingly focused on practical cooperation with partner countries and avoids strategically and politically ambitious tasks.

The Joint Communication of the European Commission *Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all*, published on 18 March 2020 (European Commission 2020), and Joint Staff Working Document *Recovery, resilience, and reform: post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities*, issued on 2 July 2021 (European Commission 2021) confirm the strengthening of the resilience as the overall policy framework of the EaP and identify its five key long-term goals, i.e., resilient, sustainable and integrated economies; accountable institutions, the rule of law and security; environmental and climate resilience; digital transformation; fair and inclusive societies. At the same time, the Communication of the European Commission from 2020 emphasises:

'The EaP will continue to aim to build an area of democracy, prosperity, stability, and increased cooperation based on common values. The EU has a strategic

interest in advancing its global leadership on human rights and democracy in external action, including in relation to the EaP. Respect for human rights is an essential element of resilient, inclusive and democratic societies. Focus will therefore continue to be on outstanding issues from the current objectives, notably the rule of law, protection of human rights, the fight against corruption and discrimination, the role of an independent media and civil society and promotion of gender equality' (European Commission 2020).

In this way, Brussels reaffirms its transformative ambitions in the region, desiring to continue contributing to the continuation of political reforms in the target countries. Moreover, the European Commission declares its desire to develop an incentive-based approach, clearer guidance on specific reform priorities with objective, accurate and detailed benchmarks. First and foremost, it provides ways to better assess the quality of judicial reform and facilitates progress in ensuring the rule of law and strengthening EU support in the fight against corruption (European Commission 2020).

After a brief presentation of the content and mechanisms of the initiative, it is sensible to analyse the real results of this policy. Despite the significant deepening of political and economic cooperation, i.e., the signing of the Association Agreements with three (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) of six partners in 2014, the launch of the EaP did not achieve the stated goals, especially in terms of its transformative impact. In order to assess how successful the EU's transformation efforts have been, it is necessary to analyse, first of all, its progress in promoting the principles of democracy and human rights and bringing national legislation closer to European standards.

An analysis of Freedom House's annual Transition Reports over a twelve-year period since the EaP launch (2009–2020) for the six participating countries (see Table 1) shows that their democracy index has remained at the same level, while in some countries, such as Azerbaijan and Ukraine, it has even decreased

Table 1: Index of democracy in the EaP countries in 2009-2020.

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Azerbaijan	6.25	6.39	6.46	6.57	6.64	6.68	6.75	6.86	6.93	6.93	6.93	6.86
Belarus	6.57	6.57	6.57	6.68	6.71	6.71	6.71	6.64	6.61	6.61	6.61	6.61
Armenia	5.39	5.39	5.43	5.39	5.36	5.36	5.36	5.36	5.39	5.43	5.07	5
Georgia	4.93	4.93	4.86	4.82	4.75	4.68	4.64	4.61	4.61	4.68	4.71	4.75
Moldova	5.07	5.14	4.96	4.89	4.82	4.86	4.86	4.89	4.93	4.93	4.96	4.89
Ukraine	4.39	4.39	4.61	4.82	4.86	4.93	4.75	4.68	4.61	4.64	4.64	4.61

Source: *Nations in Transit. Comparative and Historical Data Files*. All Data – Nations in Transit, 2005-2020. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit

(the scale from one to seven, where one is the highest index and seven is the lowest one). Countries, e.g., Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine that had hybrid regimes twelve years ago, have remained so. During this time, they all have undergone a rapid political change, but their political systems have not changed. Azerbaijan and Belarus have entrenched consolidated authoritarian regimes throughout this period, while Armenia has not changed its semi-consolidated authoritarian regime.

Other indices show similar dynamics. The Rule of Law Index, developed by the World Justice Project and aimed to measure adherence to the rule of law in the world from 2014 to 2021 (earlier it was not assessed), shows that the indicators for four EaP countries during this period fluctuated within a few points with a slight trend of improvement in Ukraine and Moldova and some deterioration in Belarus (see Table 2). On the scale, a score less than 0.40 indicates worse compliance with the rule of law, whereas more than 0.81 shows better adherence to the rule of law.

Table 2: Rule of Law Index in the EaP countries in 2014-2021

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2019	2020	2021
Azerbaijan	The evaluation was not performed						
Belarus	0.51	0.53	0.54	0.51	0.52	0.51	0.48
Armenia	The evaluation was not performed						
Georgia	0.60	0.65	0.65	0.61	0.61	0.6	0.61
Moldova	0.45	0.48	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.5	0.51
Ukraine	0.47	0.48	0.49	0.50	0.50	0.51	0.51

Source: World Justice Project. Rule of Law Index. Available at: https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2021.

The most credible indicator of the quality of anti-corruption reforms is the Corruption Perceptions Index, an annual ranking of countries in the world compiled by Transparency International on a scale from 100 (with no corruption) to 0 (highly corrupt). The dynamics of this index for most EaP countries from 2012 to 2020 (earlier a different assessment methodology was used) also fluctuated within a few points, except for significant improvements in Belarus since 2015 and Armenia since 2019 (see Table 3).

Table 3: Corruption Perceptions Index in the EaP countries in 2012-2020

Country	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Azerbaijan	27	28	29	29	30	31	25	30	30
Belarus	31	29	31	32	40	44	44	45	47
Armenia	34	36	37	35	33	35	35	42	49
Georgia	52	49	52	52	57	56	58	56	56
Moldova	36	35	35	33	30	31	31	32	34
Ukraine	26	25	26	27	29	30	32	30	33

Source: Transparency International. Corruption Perceptions Index. Available at: https://www.transparency.org/en/countries.

It is clear that anti-corruption policy has been more successful in recent years in countries, e.g., Armenia and Belarus, that are not associate partners of the EU. Moreover, the latter still does not have a basic agreement with the EU and withdrew from the EaP in 2021. The introduction of an electronic declaration system for the assets of government officials and the creation of new anti-corruption bodies in Ukraine, which are rightly related to the country's achievements in fulfilling its obligations to the EU, has slightly improved Ukraine's performance after 2014; the country moved from 26th to 32nd place in the 2014–2018 period, then dropped to 30th place in 2019, and rose to 33rd place in the ranking in 2020. Despite similar efforts, Moldova had a lower index (34th place) in 2020 compared to its 36th place in 2012.

Thus, the analysis of empirical indicators in the field of political transformation of the EaP countries shows that since its launch, as well as after the signing of the Association Agreements and renewal of the ENP in 2015, no radical changes have taken place, except for the 'jump' of Armenia in its anti-corruption policy. This example, as well as the previous experience of Georgia, which is significantly ahead of the rest of the countries in terms of the rule of law and anti-corruption activities, shows that progress in reforms is mainly achieved due to internal factors, i.e., political motivation of elites, and the EU's transformative power has a barely noticeable positive effect (Ukraine and Moldova). The link between the EaP and internal transformation in the target countries remains weak and unclear.

Although the promotion of democratisation is included in the priority objectives of the ENP, and its importance has been later further emphasised in the EaP, the ENP allocates only 30 % of its funding for this purpose (Shapovalova – Youngs 2012). For all states, including the EU's associate partners, there remain the same threatening problems, e.g., to fight against corruption, ensure judicial independence and the rule of law, stop excessive state monitoring of the activi-

ties of non-governmental organisations, etc. Even the legal approximation of associate partners' legislation to the single market rules required by the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area parts of the Association Agreements has proved to be more difficult than expected due to the lack of funding needed to mitigate the inevitable costs (Delcour – Wolczuk, 2013).

On the other hand, the EU's desire to expand its economic and political influence in the region through the signing of Association Agreements and establishing the free trade zones has met resistance from Russia, which has seen such policies as interfering in its traditional sphere of influence. This situation has created new dividing lines as partner countries had to choose between two integration projects and centres of power. Thus, the EaP has also failed to ensure stability and security in the region, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict clearly illustrates it.

More than ten years of experience in the EaP's policy implementation show that the EU has not yet managed to seriously increase its influence in the region of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. In recent years, the range of instruments of the EaP has expanded many times, but despite the efforts, the real influence of the EU on the transformation processes in its partner countries remains insignificant. It is clearly illustrated by the example of Ukraine, in the case of which the EU's policy has an important but not transformative impact. In the next part of the article, we analyse why the EU's efforts to transform the Eastern Partners have not yielded obvious positive results.

Institutional and geopolitical constraints of the European Union's transformative power in the Eastern Partnership

Three groups of reasons hinder the EU's regulatory influence and hamper democratic transformations in partner countries: a) conceptual and institutional constraints on EU policy towards the eastern neighbours (lack of membership prospects, weak incentives, etc.); b) internal challenges for the sustainable transformation of the EaP countries (selfish interests of elites, systemic corruption, inefficient state institutions, etc.); c) Russia's influence, which counterbalances the Europeanisation of the EU in the region.

The main weakness of the EaP, which is already well described in academic publications (Valiyeva 2016, Wilson 2017), is the lack of support in the form of membership prospects and generally weak incentives offered by the EU to partner countries. Indeed, market access or visa-free travel offered in the EaP as an alternative to membership is important but not vital. That is why the European magnet has less attraction for its eastern neighbours than for the candidate countries.

Incentives, offered by the EU in the framework of the EaP, are traditionally formulated as three M's, i.e., money, markets, and mobility (Kasciūnas et al. 2014: 15). They are proposed in Association Agreements, which set out guide-

lines for political and economic reforms aimed at making countries conform to EU rules and standards. These incentives include EU financial assistance for reforms; access to the EU common market (its part), which is envisaged within the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area and is legally and technically coordinated; and visa liberalisation. The EaP and enlargement policy are based on conditionality (to get an 'x', you have to do a 'y'), but its main incentives, e.g., free trade and free movement of the population, are not as attractive as full EU membership. Moreover, the EaP's financial assistance is insufficient to offset the costs of comprehensive reforms. Schimmelfennig and Scholtz believe that due to the lack of membership prospects, the effect of conditionality in the ENP is doomed to failure (Schimmelfennig – Scholtz 2007: 3).

Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are also based on conditionality, but the costs of implementing the necessary reforms remain high. It is therefore unclear how these Agreements alone can contribute to the required legislative and practical changes. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas promise the eastern neighbours access to the EU's internal market. The offer is certainly generous but somewhat vague, distant and expensive in terms of assessing short- and medium-term prospects for neighbours. The EU's strategy is based on the benefits of neighbouring countries from access to the EU's internal market, but this access depends on compliance with the rules and standards of the internal market. Therefore, the EU proposes that neighbouring countries adopt a significant part of the acquis, which regulates the activity of the internal market (about 80 %). In the case of the EaP countries, such a proposal presents a considerable challenge not only due to the lack of legal and administrative capacity to adopt and implement the acquis and the need to change established business practices but also because of the inevitably considerable expenses. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe that joined the EU incurred such expenses for membership benefits (including access to EU structural funds). The EaP does not provide such motivation. Most of the EU's financial assistance to partner countries is loans, but not grants. For example, grants for Ukraine account for only 6 % of total EU assistance (Kobzova 2017). The EU's model of integration without membership proposed in the framework of the EaP does not have the tools to stimulate truly profound reforms.

Uncertainties of Eastern partners about the membership prospects will sooner or later clear up, at least for pro-European Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Nevertheless, there is another weakness of the EU's transformative power in the EaP, i.e., EU attractiveness is passive and, as such, it does not provide opportunities for active influence. That is why the questions remain as to how to influence governments insensitive to European attraction or how to act if a movement caused by European magnetism leads to opposition from other players, instability or conflict (as in the case of the Russia-Ukraine conflict). Such cases require a completely different set of foreign policy instruments.

Analysing the role of the EU in the internal reform of Central and Eastern Europe, Vakhudova divides the levers of EU influence on the internal life of candidate countries into passive and active. The researcher defines passive levers as the power of gravity that the EU exerts on the domestic political life of candidate countries. The components of these levers are the enormous political and economic benefits of membership, the threatening loss of membership and the EU's harsh treatment of non-EU countries, e.g., in trade negotiations, protecting the EU producer, the EU market, etc. However, the researcher proves that between 1989 and 1994 the EU had little influence on the political change of candidate countries. The EU's passive levers made liberal reform strategies in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic stronger but failed to prevent illiberal strategies from gaining and exploiting power in Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia. Only after the EU 'moved towards enlargement', i.e., began to use active levers, i.e., targeted policy towards candidate countries, its influence on the course of internal transformations increased disproportionately (Vakhudova 2009: 20–21). Three characteristics of active levers make them particularly powerful, i.e., asymmetric interdependence (candidates are weak), coercion (rigid but fair), conditionality (to get an 'x', you have to do a 'y'). Therefore, candidate countries voluntarily agreed to comply with extensive internal requirements and then overcome tedious verification procedures to join the EU (Vakhudova 2009: 21). This strategy has appeared to be successful.

The EaP does not provide the use of active levers of the EU's influence on the domestic political life of neighbouring countries. The lack of prospects of EU membership in the foreseeable future eliminates the potential benefits from using active EU levers (disciplines of the pre-accession process). Recognition of the EU membership prospect for a certain country allows the pre-accession process to start, thus allowing the use of active levers of EU influence on the internal life of candidate countries, such as coercion, strict conditionality and constant monitoring of progress on internal change. The EaP does not allow the EU to shape the reform agenda the way it is in candidate countries during the pre-accession period. Only asymmetric relations between the candidate country and the EU give the latter the opportunity to influence domestic policy-making.

In our opinion, the high efficiency of the EU's transformative power, demonstrated during the enlargement policy in Central and Eastern Europe, is explained by the fact that it was not only soft and normative (passive) but also included tools of coercion (active influence) by using the levers of enlargement policy. A good combination of them provided the desired result.

Instead of a clear membership perspective that more securely binds candidate countries to the EU, the EaP proposes a vague concept of rapprochement with partner countries, which does not impose serious commitments on them. In the absence of a proper set of tools to stimulate democratisation, value transformation is perceived by the political elites of hybrid and authoritarian

partner countries as a significant threat to their power (Valiyeva 2016: 21). The reluctance of the political elites of the EaP countries to carry out reforms that threaten their power and existence (the fight against corruption, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, etc.) remains one of the biggest obstacles to their democratic transformation. After all, the success or failure of reforms largely depends on the transformative potential of partner countries, in particular the political will of the ruling elites, the level of development of civil society, etc. In this context, the EU's six partner countries remain weak states. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have made progress in ensuring free elections, developing many elements of civil society and implementing European norms and standards in a number of areas, but the proper implementation of these norms and ensuring sustainability and irreversibility of change remain a challenge. Most of the problems that hinder effective reforms are systemic corruption, lack of respect for the rule of law and inefficient state institutions in partner countries (Sydoruk – Tyshchenko 2018: 224–231).

Finally, a significant obstacle for the EU in terms of rapprochement with the EaP countries is the Russian factor, the importance of which the EU seems to have initially underestimated. The format of the EaP was deliberately aimed at shifting the main focus of the dialogue with neighbouring countries from political issues related to the prospect of membership in the EU to the issues of gradual rapprochement and integration in certain practical sectors. Russia, however, being hostile from the beginning, started looking for ways to stop the possible European drift of the common neighbourhood countries (this is indicated by the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015). The EU does not seem to have taken account of Russia's geopolitical concerns about its initiative and the strong leverage it has in the region. Back then, the EU sought to avoid rivalry with Russia, which can be illustrated by the eloquent opinion of Executive Secretary-General of the European External Action Service Pierre Vimont on Brussels' strategies in the eastern neighbourhood: 'Hence there is a permanent weakness in most of the strategies developed by the European Union's institutions, lying precisely in the fact that they are not real strategies, since there is no significant geopolitical analysis. Therefore the Eastern Partnership carefully avoids the issue of relations with Russia… Procedures are put forward (association agreement monitoring), principles are delivered (differentiation), instruments are developed (simplified action plans), but all of this provides the feeling of a political and strategic vacuum from which all power dynamics, antagonisms, and lines of division between nations have been sucked out' (Middelaar 2021: 109).

The movement towards closer ties between the EU and some partner countries, i.e., preparation of Association Agreements with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, has provoked resistance and opposition from Russia, so the region has become an arena for clashes between the two centres of power. The Russia-

-Ukraine conflict pertains to Ukraine's place in the continental system, as well as whether it will ever become a member of the EU. In 2013, the choice between the two centres of gravity was of the highest political importance for Ukraine. Just before the scheduled date for the signing of the Association Agreement at the EaP summit in Vilnius, the European regulatory power failed to attract Ukraine into its sphere. The power of opposition used by Moscow was too strong. The Kremlin played a geopolitical game, and the EU, remaining only a normative power and maintaining its geopolitical virtue, had nothing to oppose it (Middelaar 2021: 116).

With the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the need to supplement the European normative power in the eastern neighbourhood with a policy of broader tools, e.g., sanctions, rhetoric and actions, has become obvious. For the European Union, this conflict has become one of the main factors in its geopolitical awakening and first steps towards clearer awareness of its own interests as political unity and its ability to defend them. Confrontation with the most serious opponent on the European continent led to the fact that the EU's political base outweighed economic interests, and the EU as a normative power had to recognise its existence as a geopolitical power capable of active diplomacy and pressure (Middelaar 2021: 114–117). Despite significant differences between the governments of individual European states on the issue of sanctions against Russia, their introduction and consistent continuation testifies to the unanimity of the view of the EU states on the fundamental nature of the threat and the strategic importance of a united front.

According to some researchers, the growing geopoliticisation of the EU's relations with Eastern partners may force the EU to reduce its transformative ambitions, which will weaken its role in the eastern neighbourhood and question the fundamental aspect of its foreign policy identity that distinguishes it from other actors and makes it a post-Westphalian political entity, i.e., its normative and transformative power (Crombois 2019: 89). Given the doubts about the EU's desire to continue to promote reforms in partner countries after the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the renewal of the ENP in 2015 (European Commission 2015), the EU should reaffirm its transformative ambitions in the Eastern Neighbourhood. To maintain its position as a regulatory and transformative power and to avoid criticism for pursuing strategic interests, the EU must find the right balance between values and interests, i.e., its own desire to stabilise the region through exports of the European normative model and its geopolitical rivalry with Russia. From this perspective, we share the opinion of Youngs and Pishchikova that the EU can simultaneously act as a geopolitical power and remain committed to its based on norms project of transformation of the eastern neighbourhood. However, to ensure a sustainable balance between the two alternatives, the EU must be strategically consistent (Youngs – Pishchikova 2013).

From this perspective, in academic debates and in political discourse, there exist three opposing views on the prospects of the EaP, which have been widely discussed since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. A number of researchers (Wilson 2017, Kobzova 2017), as well as politicians, mainly from the new EU member states, support further deeper involvement of the EU in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus despite Russian resistance and do not rule out the membership prospect for associated EU partners, which is considered the main condition for an effective Eastern policy. On the other hand, there is a group of member states, mainly southern, which oppose the strengthening of the EU's policy in the region, stressing the need to focus attention on the Mediterranean. There is another view that the EaP policy has upset the balance of power in Eastern Europe, so that Russia has been forced to defend itself and take steps to restore it. For example, Mearsheimer, a well-known representative of neorealism, argues that the United States and its European allies, who have pursued overly active policies in the region, are primarily responsible for the crisis in Ukraine, not Russia. Mearsheimer underlines that 'the West had been moving into Russia's backyard and threatening its core strategic interests' (Mearsheimer 2014). According to the researcher, the conflict proves that 'U.S. and European leaders blundered in attempting to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia's border. Now that the consequences have been laid bare, it would be an even greater mistake to continue this misbegotten policy' (Mearsheimer 2014). Consequently, the only solution is to restore the balance of power, recognise Russia's influence and suspend NATO and EU initiatives in the region (Mearsheimer 2014).

In our opinion, in recent decades, the strategy of the EU's eastern policy, i.e., not to create problems in relations with Russia, has appeared unsuccessful. Despite the EU's reluctance to clash with Russia, a confrontation with it is inevitable if the EU really seeks to promote democratisation, modernisation and the gradual integration of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, as it directly contradicts Russia's interests in the region. The EU must not leave the region and stop supporting those Western-oriented states. The EU has already won in many ways in the area, e.g., Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine are trying to avoid Moscow's embrace and seek further rapprochement with Brussels. However, this 'victory' also means more responsibility. The EU, looking for potential compromises with Russia, must be ready to confront it and provide assistance to the EaP countries if necessary (Kobzova 2017). Instead, the refusal of the EU to support the transformation of the eastern neighbourhood will untie Russia's hands and will not guarantee the restoration of stability in the region, and, as the situation in Ukraine shows, it could even pose more threats to the EU. Leaving Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia alone will lead to new aggressive attempts by Russia to limit their sovereignty. West-oriented citizens of these states will resist in response, which could lead to even more destabilisation. In

addition, such developments will not only weaken the EU's role in the eastern neighbourhood but will also undermine its normative power as the basis of its foreign policy.

Conclusions

Thus, the EaP, as a regional branch of the European Neighbourhood Policy, was launched as a tool to promote the transformation of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. However, its initiators did not consider the limitations of the EU's transformative power without the prospect of membership, significant internal obstacles to reforms in partner countries, the geopolitical situation in the region and the power of Russian influence. The EU's inability to offer strong incentives to deliver real democratic reforms in partner countries, as well as the lack of effective geopolitical levers to counter Russia's presence in the region, have weakened the EU's approach. The signing of the Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine has not had a drastic impact on the dynamics of political reforms in the target countries, and the transformative power of the EaP continues to have a slight positive effect or is neutral.

After the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the related revision of the ENP in 2015, the EU has focused on stabilising and differentiating countries in the region. However, assumptions about a possible reduction in the EU's transformative ambitions are refuted by the European Commission's Communications published in 2020 and 2021, which confirmed the EU's desire to continue promoting political and economic reforms in partner countries. If the EU is genuinely interested in it, in that case, the core of the renewed EaP's activity should be to strengthen incentives, especially for associate partners, to recognise the potential for EU membership, and to set more explicit requirements for specific reform priorities and objectives, as well as precise and detailed benchmarks. At the same time, the EU must also realise itself as a geopolitical power capable of active diplomacy and the use of levers of political influence, which is inevitable given the importance of the Russian factor in the region.

In contrast to the normative power, the transformative one of the EU is based not only on the power of its norms. According to the experience of enlargement, the EU can also use real policy instruments and material means of influence. Strengthening this part of the EaP is likely to make full use of its potential for a more profound transformation of the EU's eastern neighbourhood.

Possible directions for future research may be the analysis of the EaP's transformative power in forming free trade zones with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, particularly the impact of these processes on economic transformation, and the EU support programmes for civil societies of partner countries.

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How to follow and Study Through the Sites and Situations of Expert Knowledge Diffusion in International Politics: Research Challenges and Methodological Responses[1]

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Abstract: *The central aim of this article is to consider tools and methods for studying expert knowledge (EK) diffusion in international politics. What we need are methodological devices to enable research of the object in motion and to study small or multiple sites, and even global scales in time, as well as the object of inquiry at different levels of analysis. Based on the marriage of network analysis and mobility research this article discusses the research potential of several methodological tools: bibliometrics, QHA, SNA techniques, topology, topography and biography. I conclude that despite these methods being imperfect, they 1) make possible the bridging of traditional IR dilemmas, such as the level-of-analysis problem, the micro-macro gap, and the agent-structure debate, 2) enable to collect and evaluate a much richer class of evidence and contextualization than methods usually used in IR offer, and 3) make possible to be much more ethnographically sensitive than IR research traditionally is.*

Key words: ***expert knowledge, diffusion, international politics, methods***

Information, innovation, and expert knowledge (EK) are parts of modern life; they are a prerequisite for the functioning of the state, business, and society. The diffusion of EK in international politics and whether actors engaged in this environment have or have not the EK influences their behavior, power, or agenda.

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The diffusion of specific EK has contributed, for example, to the inception of international agreements limiting the use of micro-plastics, banning the production and use of landmines, and banning the use of freons and halons. The ability to diffuse EK in international politics, manage the process, and understand it, is one of the pillars of working international politics and the lives of actors in this environment. States, international organizations and companies have set up special bodies to diffuse and communicate data, information, and EK. Bodies have also emerged which aim to stop, or at least slow down the diffusion of particular information, such as Facebook's fact-checkers. All this indicates that the diffusion of EK is not automatic or spontaneous, there are many different actors involved in the process which is also not simply a technical process based on a series of isolated events. It may be accelerated or slowed by various factors and instruments (Hall 1989; Hveem – Knutsen 2012).

While the research of EK diffusion is already well embedded in the research traditions of other disciplines[2], for International Relations it is a relative novelty. To date, IR scholars paid attention to the actors of diffusion (e.g. Haas 1975; Ruggie 1975; Haas 1992; Stone 2013; Antoniades 2015) and to the instruments and mechanisms of diffusion (Checkel 2005; Schimmelfening 2008), and in recent years also to the influence of structures and networks on the diffusion (Khaler 2009; Maoz 2012). However, the process of diffusion itself has been in IR little analyzed. Several pioneering studies were published in last years (e.g. Bueger – Bethke 2014; Sending 2015; Waisová 2018), but they were mainly organized as in-depth theoretically informed analyses following the socio-genesis of specific EK and did not consider how to approach the issue methodologically. The main causes of this situation seem to be the fact that for IR, *it is not easy to grasp an object in motion which crosses levels and in which micro events and micro structures may have macro impacts*.

In this contribution, attention is given to the process of expert knowledge diffusion in international politics, particularly how to study the process. My aim is to consider how to follow the pathways of EK in international politics, how to study through the sites and situations of EK international diffusion, and to discuss methods of data collection and evaluation enabling to know more about the process, pathways, mechanisms and practices by which EK has been spreading and circulating in international politics. To discuss how to study EK diffusion in international politics is today more important than before. Today, the diffusion of EK often occurs quickly and globally, and the significance of time and place decreases.

2 See e.g. Science and Technology Studies (see more in the section on ANT below), anthropology (e.g. Grannovetter 1973), management and organizational studies (e.g. Roger, 1983/2001; Amin and Cohende, 2004; Saxenian 2008); sociology (e.g. Jasanoff 2004; Knorr-Cetina 2007; Sheller – Urry 2006) and health studies (Christakic – Fowler 2007).

The article proceeds in three steps: 1) the objects of the research will be discussed and defined – particularly "expert knowledge" and "the diffusion process"; how *EK* and *diffusion* are defined influences the thinking into possible research methods and techniques, 2) the methodology which could frame the scrutiny will be debated and 3) based on this techniques which may be used in the process of collection and evaluation of data will be introduced, their application demonstrated, and their limits discussed. What we need are methodological devices enabling research of small sites, as well as instruments to study multiple sites and even global scales in time, along with the object of inquiry at different levels of analysis and in motion. A final discussion gives a critical appraisal of all the methods introduced and debated in the third section.

Placing expert knowledge and diffusion

Within the research two approaches to knowledge may be identified: the first sees knowledge as something which is possessed; the second sees knowledge as an action and something which is practiced.[3] In other words, the second approach works with the idea that knowledge is the product of habits of everyday interaction in which creation, thinking and acting are combined. Because in the real world, it is not possible to delineate a clear border between knowledge that is "possessed" and knowledge that is "practiced", in this article, I understand EK (which is inspired by the works of Cook – Brown 1999; Adler – Pouliot 2011; Sending 2015; Bueger – Gadinger 2018) as a hybrid entity which is a spatio-temporal arrangement including facts, information, professional codes and skills gained and generated through everyday actions, education and training, socialization and research (not necessarily done in the laboratory), and through the theoretical and practical understanding of the subject. To circulate and diffuse EK, it must be converted into a form (messages, artifacts, deeds) that allows it to circulate and diffuse (Amin – Cohendet 2004). The form alone depends mainly on the epistemic content of the knowledge and its generality.

Viewing knowledge as an action determines the idea of the process of diffusion. Diffusion is approached as a set of non-isolated activities which result from social structures, embedded practices, technical processes, absorptive capacities of recipients, and from the institutions and forms in which they take place, develop and are maintained (Amin – Cohendet 2004; McCann and Ward 2011). Practiced knowledge is distributed because it is collectively enacted through relations between and mediated by the intersubjective meanings that are invested in the artefacts they produce (Amin – Cohendet 2004: xiv). My view here is that the diffusion of EK in international politics is a non-random,

3 The difference could be summarized in a short question, "Is knowledge best understood as a thing or a relationship?" A more nuanced view is offered by Bueger (2014).

not necessarily linear multidimensional socially complex process consisting of global, international, transnational, domestic and inter-organizational social interactions which occur among different entities such as state agencies, scientists, experts, and international organizations, and interconnects and constitutes actors, institutions and territories.

Regarding the understanding of EK diffusion, it is clear that we need a toolbox which enables to trace and observe the object (being it artefact or action) across time, space, and scales, and in which actors (authors, users and diffusers), practices, relations, materiality, and structures interact and build connections, all being constantly in motion and assembled and reassembled in changing configurations in hardly predictable ways.

How to think through the EK diffusion: network analysis, mobility research and Following the Policy

The challenge for IR is to marry a commitment to follow a trans-local hybrid entity in motion in the environment of international politics, its associated network--communities, and connections between micro-practices and macro-forces. To face the challenge, I offer marrying network analysis and mobility research, namely Actor-Network Theory (ANT), Social Network Analysis (SNA), and the "Following the Policy" approach. They, as approaches to inquiry, offer inspiration and instruments on how to grasp dynamic, unstructured, non-centralized and non-hierarchic heterogeneous and, in fact, autonomous entities and their collections, both in permanent motion, and make no specific claims about how the world operates, but instead suggest ways and analytical tools to trace the activities and relations of particular entities to reveal how worlds are made.

Since neither ANT, SNA, nor "Following the Policy" are embedded in IR, they will be briefly introduced. However, while they represent approaches to wider social world, the attention will be paid mainly to those aspects which may enrich the scrutiny of EK diffusion in international politics and IR as a discipline.

Even with the word "theory" in its title, *Actor-Network Theory* is not a theory as such; it developed as a holistic way to understand the social construction of science and knowledge and as a set of methods to trace and understand this process. The research inspired by ANT originally aimed to analyze small spaces such as laboratories; later it was used to research the market (Law 1987) and overseas discoveries (Callon 1986). As a novelty, it was used to scrutinize the diffusion of particular concept in international politics (Bueger – Bethke 2014). According to ANT, nothing in the social and natural worlds exists separately and everything is rather constantly being generated and transformed by the mutual relations between actors within the network. All-important innovations and human enterprise are the function of the interactions of mutually constituting heterogeneous elements assimilated into networks (Law 1987). ANT believes that networks

develop organically during the process of the active participation of actors. For researchers it means that networks do not have predetermined borders and researchers can even not pre-draw borders. ANT scholars follow the relations and actors and map the networks as they emerge. Actors and networks are viewed as interdependent entities in the making when actors fill networks with sense and enable them to exist and survive and networks determine the actors' roles and functions. Latour (2005: 107) summarizes it as follows: although we do not know how actors are connected, the connections are assumed and we also assume that these connections transform the actors' world. Activities are not understood as the product of any independent selection or decision, but rather as the product of influences of relations, linkages, and networks. ANT's goal is to trace routes, relations and activities linking actors and actants[4] and how associations between actors create networks, and to understand how actors and actants enable and mediate organized activities. *The acting must be mapped as a network, where the movement of links and relations and the circulation of information is traced* (Elder-Vass 2019). Concerning the EK, ANT adherents understand it as embedded and carried by social arrangements in which the value of EK is negotiated. Through the ANT lenses, *to study EK means to study social arrangements and their insides*.

Social Network Analysis has been evaluated as an inter-disciplinary research program aiming to analyze and predict the structure of relations between social entities and the impact of this structure on other social phenomena (Borgatti et al 2009; Mützel 2009). It believes that "structure matters", in other words in the importance of relations between mutually influencing entities. Relational linkages between actors in the social structure are seen as being prior to actors' attributes, such as individual characteristics or qualities. However, the connections – as opposed to attributive data – are not the individual qualities of specific agents, but the quality of the conglomerate of agents who produce the social network. The social network is defined as a limited set of at least two actors, each of them having at least one link to another actor (Wasserman – Faust 1994). Network analysis was not used in IR until recently. However, since the late 1990s, Maoz (2009, 2012) has tried to adapt it to the study of international phenomena. He argues that SNA enables to analyse the formation, structure, and effects of indirect relations, and offers a bridge to connect levels of analysis and link micro and macro. Maoz pioneering studies demonstrate that the benefit of using SNA in IR resides in its ability to combine relations, attributes, and structure and simultaneously treat relations as units, their attributes, and the emergent structure as part of the same logical and analytical package. For the debate on methods, the value of SNA lies in the opportunity to offer tools for studying the complex social interactions between individuals and organizations, the constraints and opportunities that result

4 ANT ascribes the agency to human, as well as non-human entities. This idea is often the object of criticism.

from the patterned relationships between them, and the impact of the structural environment on their behavior and actions (Emirbayer –Goodwin 1994).

As demonstrated, both, ANT and SNA are network approaches; however, what differentiates one from the other is that SNA pays attention to the partial, clearly limited systems and assigns the agency only to human entities, i.e. can only map relations between actors; whereas, ANT is interested in how to map routes and techniques through which actors define and distribute roles and mobilize and support others to play these roles, it analysis the chains of relations, the range of the analyzed network is not predetermined, and the agency (ability to act and determine the activities of others) is also assigned to non-human objects (Law – Callon 1988). Despite such differences, both approaches also share some elements: they both 1) approach reality ex-post and "process its imprint" (the same position is shared by the Following the Process approach – see below), 2) are interested in the production of meaning, in the activities of actors and their definitions of situations, in tracing their stories and their connections and disconnections with others, 3) perceive reality as dynamic and changing in a chaotic random world, 4) perceive networks as results of a culturally constituted process and of discursive practices, 5) combine relations, attributes, and structure within one package, 6) are symmetrical, while both give equal status to scientists and other actors and focus on how different actors together weave textures of the world, and 7) share ethnographic sensibilities.

Here, the value of combining ANT and SNA is seen in the opportunity to bridge the level-of-analysis, to take the heterogeneity of actors, time, and the micro-macro link into consideration, to analyze direct and indirect relations and their implications and to be ethnographically attentive. The combination of SNA and ANT enables us to trace connections, to discover a central point of the network, bridges between nodes, the existence of partial networks, how they form a new whole, how the new whole influences the distribution of knowledge and how it structures international politics. For IR and the scrutiny of EK diffusion in international politics, the integration of both approaches is a way to connect structural and interpretative analyses and trace actors and routes through which they (re)constitute categories, relations and networks, instead of a prior definition of categories and relations.

The *Following the Policy Approach* was introduced by Peck and Theodore (2015) when they were thinking about how to research the processes of policy formation, reproduction and circulation, and flows and connections between actors and issues, however within one political system. FPA has been built as an exploratory approach using a rich tradition of multi-sited ethnography[5] and

5 Multi-sited ethnography emerged as a methodological reaction to the failure of traditional ethnography to "work" globally and in more locations simultaneously respectively. More see (Marcus 1995; Burawoy 2000; Desmond 2014; Stepputat – Larsen, 2015).

progress in mobility research in sociology (Sheller and Urry 2006) and geography (Prince 2016, 2017). To follow the policies Peck and Theodore (2015: xxvi, 31–33) involved the research of local socio-institutional context and actors, and situated and connected investigations across a variety of sites along various channels which take account of frictions and backwash effects in addition to dominant currents and tides. They stressed that scholars must always consider the individuality of each object and process, particularly where it is traced and where it takes place. To collect data Peck and Theodore advise to use the so--called extended case method, which has been used within so-called multi-sited ethnography. Extended case method aims to enable to "to be in more locations simultaneously"; it replaced observation and presence at the place with a complex combination of methods enabling *to follow* even when the scholar is not there. Burawoy (1998) defined it as an extended ethnographic practice across space and time based on the ideas that the observer is extended to the participant[6], the study of context of context is also important, and that the research is not replicable because "history is not a laboratory experiment that can be replicated again and again under the same conditions" (Burawoy 1998: 11). The ethnographic approach – no matter how unusual for IR – is important for "studying through" EK diffusion in international politics because we cannot only consider the idea that there are relations within and between places, objects and people, but interrogate what precisely holds these networks together, and ethnographic methods open the door to explanations from Inside Out. Inclusion of ethnography into network approach may immensely enrich IR because unlike IR it tends to see network structure as flowing from transactions rather than vice versa and focuses on the networks themselves as object and subject of enquiry and attention.[7]

By this methodology exposé, I wanted to emphasize that to scrutinize the EK diffusion in international politics IR scholars shall be open and reflexive otherwise we will not be able to trace objects in motion, to map inter-scalar relations, to collect data ex-post taking socially distributed activity systems and various types of social arrangements, as well as material dimension into consideration, enabling the reconstruction of the history of the object in motion and the motion itself, and the discovery and description of how different entities were related and ordered to each other, and a whole web of reality thereby created. The next section develops a toolbox of specific techniques for the collection and evaluation of data on EK diffusion in international politics.

6 This idea is also shared by ANT and SNA. Optimally, the scholar traces the process of everyday social transactions "face to face" and is part of the processes (Latour 2005).

7 An inspiration for the combination of network analysis with ethnography offers the previous work of Ball – Junemann (2012). They used ethnography in network analysis to map the network evolution, the form and content of policy relations in a particular field, and a particular form of relationships and interactions, with an emphasis on understanding the contents, transactions and meanings.

How to follow the pathways of EK in international politics: a research toolbox

This part concentrates on tools enabling the reconstruction of the history of the object in motion and the motion itself. The attention is paid to methods enabling the collection of data on EK diffusion as well as to the analysis and visualization of data on EK diffusion. In the following sections, it is not to provide empirical evidence of EK diffusion, however, empirical evidence is used to demonstrate the application and eventual weaknesses of a concrete method. The following section introduces the potential of bibliometrics, Qualitative Historical Analysis, biography, SNA tools, topography and topology. While bibliometric and QHA are not entirely new for IR scholars, biography, SNA techniques, topology, and topography have been rarely used. Biography has been typically used in ethnography, sociology, or anthropology, usually for the analysis of the life cycle of a particular individual and, in IR, the individual is rather ignored as a relevant actor. SNA is at home in anthropology and sociology and is used for the study of small groups of individuals; the study of extensive communities and global relations is typically beyond its interest. Topography was originally used in geography; however, it gradually turned into an interdisciplinary approach emphasizing fixity, space and proximity, and observing the socio-spatial distribution of phenomena. Topology originated in mathematics to research the relations, spatiality, and architecture of connections. It was first used in IR a decade ago to study networks, power, and technology (Hafner-Burton, Kahler – Montgomery, 2009; Martin – Secor 2014). The research toolbox introduced here is by no means complete; it is presumable that based on changes in international politics and the content or form of EK and diffusion processes researchers will also test and use other methods.

Bibliometrics: who with whom writes about whom and what, how often and from what resources

Bibliometric analysis has become a generic term for a whole range of specific measurements and indicators; its original purpose was to measure the output of scientific and technological research through data derived from scientific literature and from patents (Wallin 2005). Today, bibliometrics has universal application in different fields of knowledge. It is used as a statistical tool to map the state of the art in a given area of scientific knowledge and the identification of essential information. It is applied to a wide variety of fields: for measuring, monitoring, studying and mapping the expansion of knowledge about a particular area of research; evidencing connections between main publications, authors, institutions, themes, and other characteristics of the field under study, be it academic production or policy documents (de Oliveira et al 2019). Biblio-

metric techniques include keyword analysis, co-citation relationships analysis, cluster analysis, analysis of interactions, and timeline overview. All of these techniques combine to give more detailed and more effective measurements. Results are presented in various forms to depict relationships between participants and expand the means for analysis (Wallin 2005).

In political science and IR bibliometrics is instrumental; it was used for example to uncover the patterns and trajectory of policy development through the analysis of documents on policies, or in the field of science policy, such as the study of environmental change or public health (English – Pourbohloul 2017). In research of the EK diffusion process, bibliometric tools help discover when specific EK was published for the first time, how publication counts develop over time, when and how a particular EK penetrates internationally spread documents, who the authors are and where they reside, where the EK originated (e.g. through the timeline of citations and their localization), and in what context, time and intensity. Publication data may be also used to identify how EK is shared in time and space, to whom, and what the most cited texts are. In epitome, bibliometrics provides insight into the scope of EK and how its circulation intensifies.

Bibliometric analysis of academic production today is rather easy, because scientific articles, their metrics and citation indexes, including the necessary software for analysis, are readily accessible via science platforms such as JSTOR and WoS. However, when researching EK diffusion in international politics, the analysis of academic production does not give the full picture of the issue. The analysis of policy documents is also necessary, and scientific platforms do not usually include documents and policy publications, not even those prepared exclusively by scholars. It should also be kept in mind that not all books are contained in academic databases.

The problem of the absence of publications in scientific databases is demonstrated by knowledge on environmental peacebuilding. One of the formative publications of the environmental peacebuilding movement is the academic book "Environmental Peacemaking", edited by G. Dabelko and K. Conca (2002). The book is not covered by SCOPUS, JSTOR, nor WoS. There are three reviews published in JSTOR, and the Cited Reference Index indicates that the book and its chapters are cited in four WoS records (as of May 4, 2021). This would indicate that the book is rather insignificant. But when a wider corpus of policy papers and documents is collected, the story is different. A Google scholar search, which also takes some policy documents into consideration, indicates 348 citations (as of May 4, 2021). UNEP official documents published between 2002 and 2018 in excess of 500 citations (Waisová 2020). Similarly misleading may be to only consult scientific platforms to research authors. One more example from environmental peacebuilding: David Jensen[8], Head of

8 Author ID: 37861639500.

the Environmental Peacebuilding Programme at UN Environment since 2008, actively publishes on environmental peacebuilding. Jensen has no entry in WoS and one co-author entry in JSTOR, but 18 documents and 47 citations in SCOPUS. His public CV, accessible via UNEP's webpages, indicates that Jensen has coordinated and co-authored six UNEP flagship policy reports on risks and opportunities from natural resources and was a series co-editor of a six-volume set of books on post-conflict peacebuilding and natural resource management, with 150 chapters published by Routledge.[9]

Both empirical cases demonstrate the value of bibliometrics but also the importance of sensitive and reflexive data collection. Researcher equipped with adequate software tools (e.g. wordle.net and VOSviewer.com) is able to go beyond the Cited Reference Index, make more complete data available and get maximum from biblometrics.

Qualitative Historical Analysis: obtain basic information and know where to start and finish the investigation

QHA employs qualitative, not quantitative measurement, and the use of primary historical documents, or a historian's interpretation, usually in the service of theory development or testing (Thies 2002). Its goal is to examine the presence or absence of certain qualities or attributes in some phenomenon of interest. Because QHA is not for IR scholars a novelty, I will concentrate only on why and how EK diffusion research may benefit from QHA.

For the study of EK diffusion in international politics, QHA may be used to obtain "basic information" (Topolski 1999) on manifest and latent events which help us to construct a chronology of events, to discover the socio-genesis of specific EK, and the development and context of diffusion processes. To study context is for IR unusual but would bring an enormous benefit for the discipline (Goodin – Tilly 2006). Context might be thought of as a bundle of historical/cultural or material/political facts and perceptions informing the interests of any given actor, and it enables us to explain the ways in which actors negotiate. EK diffusion research also benefits from QHA when it comes to determine *key agents* and *key events*. Key agents are those who drive the process of diffusion and who keep EK in motion, key events are milestones in the diffusion process. When the object is in motion to know key agents and key events is necessary for the decision on "when and where to start and finish the research". In research of EK diffusion in international politics, the key event must verifiably demonstrate the presence of specific EK in international politics and its actionability. Once the initial event is known, the researcher then traces "the connections and networks... and actors who do something", observes how they assemble

9 UNEP: https://www.unenvironment.org/people/david-jensen.

from that point (Latour 2005: 98, 128), and tries to discover how the initial event emerged. QHA may also help to find where the EK was embodied in the event origins and how it was translated into the initial event. The rhizomatic logic of the diffusion process and its planetary-wide potential bring us to the question of how long and how widely to trace the process. As noted by Latour (2005), if a researcher does not predetermine their research space and the set of actors and connections analyzed, it is then the pragmatic decision of each scholar based on the relevance of the event to a specific research question. The research shall be finished when enough empirical evidence has been gathered to enable the consideration and analysis of the problem. It is like in biology: to understand how a plant and its roots work, it is not necessary to study all plants of the same species, only a representative part. Tilly (1992: 36) put it well when he wrote that the goal is "not to give a 'complete' account (whatever that might be) but to get the main connections right."

However, the employment of QHA is not without problems. It is based on access to a wide resource pool and extensive sources. But we live in a time when the problem is not a lack of resources, but quite the opposite: an enormous amount. Therefore, the use of QHA needs time and enthusiasm to filter resources and triangulate the information. On the other hand, despite the quantity of information, it is often brief and general, only rarely indicating any personal relations and the roles actors played. To illustrate: how does one explain the cooperative and working relationship between UN Secretary General K. Annan and UNHCR Director S. Ogata in setting up human security in the UN agenda in the 1990s; and how did D. Jensen, the Director of UNEP Swiss branch, find EK about environmental peacebuilding and why does he promote it globally? Without personal communication with the people involved, the answer is practically inaccessible. The information deficiency is strengthened by the interpretation of international politics as high-level impersonal interactions. We may read anthropomorphized statements such as "Germany said," or "the US Department of State decided," but it does not help us to know who really "said" or "did", and we know nothing about the flow of information and knowledge to "Germany" before it "said", or to the "Department of State" before it "decided".

To conclude, it can be stated that detailed, reflexive, and sensitive QHA is a fundamental step in any scrutiny of the EK diffusion process in international politics. It helps us, among other things, to overcome the problems of where to begin and end research when scrutinizing objects in motion and processes, and enables the collection of data for other methods, such as a set of so-called key agents when using SNA. However, both examples show that it is more than appropriate to also use other methods and techniques to obtain and triangulate data and information.

Biography: who those are diffusing EK and where their relations originated

Biography encourages the understanding and interpretation of experience across national, cultural, and other boundaries to better understand individual actions and engagements in society. Biography helps to discover relations, affiliations, identities, and values and enables to trace the circulation of relevant people across jobs and personal and institutional connections. Biography assumes that the link between social context and individual could be best analyzed by single cases and their individual experiences. Biography involves gathering data about a specific individual and interpreting these data to create a representation or portrayal of particular aspects of the subject's life. A biographical case reconstruction includes (objective) biographical data analysis, text and thematic field analyses (structure of self-presentation; reconstruction of the life story), a life history reconstruction (lived life as experienced), individual text segment microanalysis (e.g. letters, publications), and semi-structured interview-strategies, to name but a few.

In studying EK diffusion in international politics, biographical research is especially promising in bridging the traditional "micro-macro" gap, to understand the relationships between individuals and organizations, and to obtain more evidence on individuals identified as *key agents*. Even when the IR mainstream marginalizes the role of individuals, as demonstrated by e.g. Foreign Policy Analysis, their role is immense in international politics. As Granovetter (1973) discovered, to diffuse information quickly, weak interpersonal connections (defined as connections with people other than family members, friends, and colleagues) and diversity in communication channels is necessary. Those paying attention to knowledge diffusion across the market (Henry – Pinch 2000; Saxenian 2008) found that one of the main diffusion mechanisms is the regular movement of staff between companies. In international politics, individuals circulate across policy-making, academic and bureaucratic positions domestically and internationally, and tie others together. It may be expected that these people, like businesspeople, take their values, interests, and knowledge with them. Only when we know their professional and personal lives, for example that S. Ogata and K. Annan worked for UNHCR in the 1980s, shared an office and were friends (interview with S. Ogata, November 3, 2014), can we understand their special relationship in support of human security in the 1990s when Ogata was UNHCR Director and K. Annan UN Secretary General. Biography helps to trace the global pathways of individuals and the development of their relations going beyond borders and continents, as well as the micro-structures these people work and live in, an important context highlighting individual connections, relations, affiliations, identities, and values.

In the research of EK diffusion in international politics, biography may also be used for the collection of data for other methods, such as prosopography and topology. It enables us to look inside institutions and behind official high-positioned representatives of institutions and, with interviews and other techniques, to discover who the real driving forces behind ideas and policies were (Wedel et al 2005).

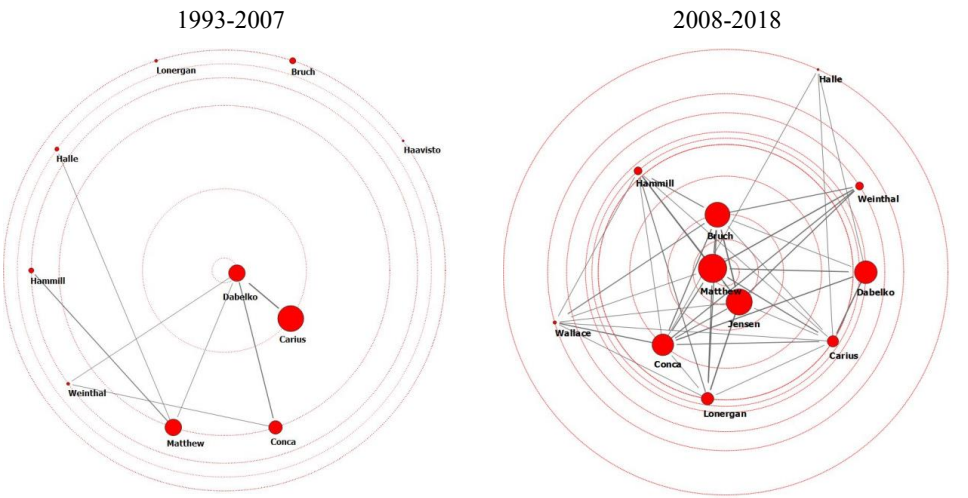
Social Network Analysis: who with whom and what roles of actors in the network

SNA as a methodology was introduced above. In this subsection, specific metrics, methods of relation structure systematic analysis, connections between *set of agents* and appropriate and tractable strategies for studying nodes, changes in networks over time, and symmetries or asymmetries in relations will be discussed. SNA is not interested in the architecture of connections (like topology), but rather in the network (quality and density of relations) and the positions of agents ('nodes') within the network. The decision on metrics, strategies and methods of data collection depends on the goal of the analysis. Data can be derived from interviews, CVs, academic and non-academic databases and archives, or from on-line repositories and knowledge hubs (Bender et al 2015; Maoz 2009, 2012).

Since SNA goes beyond territoriality and working positions to identify the importance of a specific person within a network, it offers a number of opportunities in the research of EK diffusion in international politics. For example, it enables a network analysis of (co)authors (academicians as well as non-academicians) writing about specific EK showing links between a set of people and the position of a specific individual within the network. The measurement and analysis of a co-authorship network may be used when analyzing the role of specific people in the diffusion of EK about environmental peacebuilding in international politics. We can measure the betweenness centrality within the co-authorship network. This metric indicates how many times a node (a specific author) within a network must be passed by; i.e. the betweenness centrality of node X can be interpreted as how many times node X becomes the pathway when other nodes connect with each other within the network. Nodes with a high betweenness centrality often connect components of a network that would be disconnected if the node were removed. A high betweenness centrality in co-authorship networks indicates that an author is frequently identified if other authors within the co-authorship network need to be connected with one another, and they lie "between" them as an intermediary (Bender et al 2015). Based on QHA, it can be identified a group of key persons writing about environmental peacebuilding, collected data on all their publications (co/authorship, editorship), and, using SNA, showed that there are significant relations between

people from this group and the position of some people from the set was more important than that of the others, regardless of their professional position or where they lived and worked. The results may be visualized (Picture 1) based on a radial model. The robustness of the line indicated how often specific people published together, the size of the node how often the person was an editor. When the set of people is mapped in time, it shows how relations and nodes changed or developed respectively.

Picture 1: Betweenness centrality within a network of people writing about environmental peacebuilding



Topography: where EK really occurred and which localities it really reached

Topography was originally used by geographers when studying terrain and possibilities of its representation. It was, among other things, used to produce topographical maps. These maps, within the limits of scale, show as accurately as possible the location and shape of both natural and man-made features. Today, topography is an interdisciplinary approach. This is because most things that circulate across distances can be tracked, associations can be traced, and connections and networks mapped in a conventional cartographical manner (Allen 2011, 2016).

In IR, topography has been used to study the (geographical) environment and the behavior of nations[10] (Gottmann 1951), to analyze the expression

10 The effects of locational, geomorphological and topographical conditions for national expansion and national power were regarded as being essential.

of power and authority in a physical space (including the discipline itself; Kristensen 2015), to find out senses of place and space for politics and how a particular spatiality of power is produced (Agnew 2007; Agnew –Livingstone 2011). The importance of topography for IR was well formulated by Easterling (2014: 15), when he wrote that in the contemporary world, "some of the most radical changes to the globalizing world are being written, not in the language of law and diplomacy, but rather in the spatial formation of infrastructure." Topography may be used to chart the outcomes-so-far of these struggles, displaying where place shapes status and how legitimate practices legitimate space.

IR research of EK diffusion in international politics may also well benefit from topography; EK, like other phenomena, has 'location and extension' and even in a time of rapid technological development, EK diffusion must inevitably be situated "somewhere", and places remain "fundamental to understand knowledge production and dissemination… provide both the social settings or venues in which new ideas develop (and to which they diffuse) and the claims to authority that rest on having been somewhere (doing fieldwork, hanging around, etc.)" (Agnew – Livingstone 2011). Scholars, research institutions and epistemic communities may be understood as nodes of infrastructure and parts of a social arrangement which serve as pertinent empirical sites through which we can learn more about the territoriality of EK. A topography of EK, for instance, can place research authors on a traditional, metric map, or trace the territorial expansion of EK in time, where it concentrates territorially, and where it already is, and where it still is not. Topography need not be used for the production of cartographical maps, but also for visualizations, being the spatial metaphors, which enable us to analyze space as an assemblage of social relations and identify proximity/distance, upper/lower, or intermediate, not as accurate representations, but as expressions of a spatial concept of social structure, particularly the localization of agents, their proximity and hierarchy. When the factor of time is added, the flows of EK in space may be traced. Topography (in combination with bibliometrics) was used, for example, by Waisová (2018) to study the diffusion of the human security concept. She traced the geographical locations of scholars (institutions they were affiliated to) writing on human security since the 1990s. Picture 2 visualizes the territorial spread of the human security concept and its popularity in a particular country (the size of the country's name indicates how many articles were published by scholars from that country). Place and time are important contexts, and contextual changes and their configuration can have an immense impact (Agnew –Livingstone 2011).

Picture 2: The development of the geographic distribution of authors writing on human security

Resource: Waisová 2018

Topology: who relates to whom and what the architecture of connection is

The goal of topology is to study the characteristics of space and the architecture of connections. In topology, space is no longer a medium where an object with a certain shape is found. Relationality is more important than proximity; for most of us, our children, even when thousands of miles away, are closer and more intimate than other children from the neighborhood. In other words, "elements can be topologically close, even if they are topographically distant" (Prince 2017: 337–338). What counts is not metric distance, but exchanges and interactions. Such a view is becoming increasingly relevant with the emergence of technologies that mediate long metric distances. Based on the idea that the architecture of network matters, topological studies describe the attributes of space by means of connections and their characteristics. Several types of architecture of connections have already been described (see Sosinsky 2009) and scholars have discovered that the architecture of connections influences, for example, the cost of the creation and maintenance of a network, the speed of transfer, and the flexibility of the network.

Work on political topology stresses how relations make up and endlessly reconstitute space and emphasizes who and which ideas extend the influence, unrelated to physical closeness (Loughlan, Olsson and Schouten 2014; Allen 2016). Indeed, who creates and shapes space is often independent of proximity and distance. For research of EK diffusion in international politics, topology offers a way to bridge the problem of scalarity and observe the architecture of connections. Following interactions and studying properties of structures is not limited by "level of analysis thinking", and relations and objects are traced and mapped in social space across scales without prejudice. Following interactions and discovering the architecture of connections may show how interactive and socially embedded a diffusion process is, how the relational character of the space is produced through social practice, and how microstructural mechanisms are combined with global reach. In IR, topology data may be collected from the web pages and documents of institutions; project reports; interviews, introductions and acknowledgments in publications; newsletters and biographies, to name but a few. As demonstrated for example by Wedel et al (2005) the best way to present topological data and the architecture of connections is the visualization of the topological space.

Conclusion

EK is part of modern life. As experienced, the diffusion of specific EK in international politics may contribute to the inception of international agreements, sanction mechanisms, or simply change. To study the process of EK diffusion

in international politics, needs a toolbox of relevant methods. The central aim of this article has been to consider instruments for studying EK diffusion in international politics. Distinct methodological mapping tools are offered based on the marriage of network analysis and mobility research, namely ANT, SNA, and the "Following the Policy" approach. As approaches to inquiry, they have been the inspiration to find instruments to grasp a dynamic, unstructured, non-centralized and non-hierarchic heterogeneous object in permanent motion and suggest ways and tools to trace the global pathways of EK, to study through the sites and situations of EK diffusion. However, the selection of methods and techniques has not been random, but resulted from the definitions of "expert knowledge" and "diffusion".

When debating methods and techniques, in the interests of space, I will limit the discussion to critical appraisal of the toolbox and its specific tools. From the analysis and discussion above it has emerged that: – To study EK diffusion in international politics, a mixed method and reflexive approach is necessary. Today, the production of EK is enormous and there are many different types of EK with different characteristics (general/specific, from techno-science, social sciences, and humanities) which diffuse in international politics. Moreover, international politics itself has profoundly changed. The focus on EK mobility and its global pathways has, since its inception, been an open, inventive, and reflexive, rather than prescriptive approach. The content and form of EK and changes in international politics may alter the process of diffusion, which will in turn alter the methodology; – The application of felicitous methods (and their mix) will enable us to scrutinize an object in motion and – albeit imperfectly – bridge some traditional IR dilemmas: the level-of-analysis problem (process as a unit of analysis going through levels), the micro-macro gap (e.g. the inclusion of individuals and international organizations into one framework and the idea of micro-structures having an impact on macro-level), and the agent-structure debate (relations are prior, not agents or structures). Methods enabling triumph over traditional IR dilemmas include topology and SNA techniques. However, this issue must be discussed further and the application of these tools tested; – The application of methods presented here is not without difficulties; e.g. "putting individuals and organizations into one sack", and using levels of analysis as a methodological tool rather than ontological postulates (for deeper discussion on this issue see Temby 2015). However, even when they are not perfect that does not mean that we should abandon them. Even when it is difficult or risky to use them in IR research, they could be innovative and enrich our discipline immensely. They enable the "hunting and gathering" of data and information, offering a much richer class of evidence and contextualization than traditional IR approaches and are endowed with various metrics and are able to utilize special analytical software, producing both new information and knowledge that allows us to widen our learning and understanding of the working of

international politics; – The use of aforementioned methods to EK diffusion research in IR also produce practical problems. Some of these methods are not part of conventional IR repertoire; to use them means to learn them, i.e. they take time, need an open mind, enthusiasm and material resources, and bring with them several risks, as demanding and highly professional issues almost always do for beginners. As demonstrated by Montison (2018), the fact that IR scholars are not familiar with disciplines such as anthropology and ethnography and their methods led to reductionism within IR. Such reductionism itself is not without academic risk; – From the debate on methods it clearly emerged that all the collection and analysis of data on EK diffusion across international politics and its interpretation must be ethnographically sensitive, no matter how far ethnography is outside typical IR. This is particularly challenging because ethnographers themselves intensively debate how to approach events and situations which do not meet the traditional one-location engagement (Marcus 1995; Gusterson 1997; Desmond 2014; Stepputat – Larsen 2015); – The methods presented here assume in many respects the immense role of materialism, taking relations, networks, material capacities, and human resources for granted. Methods such as topology, topography and SNA are based on the idea that we live in a world in which material 'stuff' creates places, and such stuff is always in motion, being assembled and reassembled in changing configurations. The sum of relations and the networks which emerge in the process of diffusion represent new forms of social arrangement and assemblage. However, IR today is so ideational that such a material view could be rejected. I do not deny the role of ideas in IR, nor in international politics; however, the material elements of the EK diffusion process are so important that we should not be blind to them; – Finally, using the methods I have presented for researching the EK diffusion process in international politics may help open new issues to be debated in the IR discipline: the possibility that structure and non-humans may have agency; that the agent-structure debate has been translated into a new form – the agency-structure-relations dilemma; and that level-of-analysis can be used as a methodological tool, not only as an ontological postulate. I have shown that the methodological issue of which level of analysis a researcher employs is insignificant; it is more important to find the tools that enable research across various levels. IR scholars should also return to the debate on the role of the individual and of the "micro" in international politics. We should consider the relationship between individuals' activities and the existence of micro-structures on the one hand, and macro-transformations and changes on the other. However, these debates are already beyond this article.

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- 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.