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The Populist Discourse of the Hungarian Prime Minister: The Case Study of Gyöngyöspata and Migration Crisis[1]

TOFIG ISMAYILZADA

Abstract: *The study aims to analyse if the Hungarian prime minister attempted to portray an 'other' image of the Roma ethnic minority group during the segregated primary school conflict in Gyöngyöspata. Moreover, the study will explore the Hungarian prime minister's discourse on the migration crisis to understand if Viktor Orbán adopted the same communication strategy as in the Gyöngyöspata conflict. Comparing the two cases will allow us to identify the key similarities and differences in the discourse adopted by the Hungarian prime minister in different events. This research uses the qualitative content analysis methodology to examine the collected data. Besides this, the study concludes that Viktor Orbán attempted to portray an 'other' image of the Roma ethnic minority group during the Gyöngyöspata conflict. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature by analysing the Hungarian prime minister's discourse on the Gyöngyöspata conflict and comparing his discourse on both cases.*

Key words: *populism; discourse; Hungary; Gyöngyöspata; migration crisis.*

I. Introduction

Recently, the European political sphere began to transform for several reasons, including the euro and European migration crises. These changes led to the rise of populist political parties and politicians. However, Mudde (2016) claims that the recent rise of populism in Europe is part of a bigger narrative

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that can be traced back to the post-industrial revolution, which resulted in significant changes in European society in the 1960s. According to Kriesi and Pappas (2015), the economic crisis (the so-called Great Recession) impacted populist movements. Indeed, other scholars argue that the economic crises make populist parties more noticeable and successful (Hernández – Kriesi 2016; Moffitt 2016). Another argument is that political dissatisfaction toward representative institutions intensifies due to the economic crisis, and this factor is strongly linked to populism (Caiani – Graziano 2019). At the same time, economic crises and cultural crises should be considered crucial elements. Ronald and Norris (2016), in their study, suggest that the emergence and rise of populist political parties is a response to a broad range of cultural changes that appear to be weakening Western cultures' fundamental values and traditions. This explanation refers to the issue of migration. It is important to note that anti-immigrant sentiment is linked to support for radical right populists (Norris 2005). This means that radical right populist parties tend to support anti-immigration policies.

The last two crises in the European Union (EU) have played a critical part in the growth of populist movements in Europe. The recent election results showed us that there is a rise in populist parties and politicians in the EU member states. For example, Alternative for Germany in Germany, True Finns in Finland, League or Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Marine Le Pen in France have all gained popularity. At the same time, the populist parties and politicians became decisive in politics among Eastern European countries. For example, the current government of Hungary was labelled populist by many political scientists and scholars. In the last years of his governance, the current prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, tends to use more populist discourse. Kalyvas (2005) argues that after the 2010 election victory, Orbán's government took the first steps to work on a new constitution, fitting into the populist ideology. Mudde (2016), in his work, notes that the situation in Hungary is exceptional because Viktor Orbán's success has inspired other populist right-wing politicians such as Jaroslaw Kaczynski in Poland or Marine Le Pen in France.

Moreover, the example of Hungary shows that populism is not only a campaign method or a style of political mobilisation that politicians abandon once they gain political power (ibid.). It is important to emphasise that the head of the current government Viktor Orbán has been in office since 2010 (Hutt 2022). In power for a long time, he has managed to impose influence and control over almost every sphere of Hungarian society. As a result, this long-lasting control has impacted some groups positively but others negatively.

Mudde (2004: 544) observed that populism is only a 'thin-centred ideology, exhibiting a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts'. The core concept of populism is the people. A defining feature of populism is the centrality of people (Rooduijn 2014). Populists claim that people should

have an essential role in politics, and their position is at the centre of politics (Kazin 1995; Taggart 2000). On the other hand, it is a tendency of populism to characterise an 'other' (Sahin et al. 2021). Populist movements identify a pure 'people' and an 'other' who is not included in the concept of the people. Also, 'populist movements use the other and the actions of the other in their articulation of existential threats against the people' (ibid: 4). People from different races, ethnic or cultural backgrounds can be labelled as 'other' by populist political leaders. According to Muller (2016), populist movements intentionally present a scenario as an existential threat to legitimise their form of governance. As a result, populist political leaders or movements, in their portrayal of existential threats against the people, use the concept of the 'other' and their actions. Foucault (1980) argues that these movements usually push a certain interpretation of threat, and it helps them to understand and identify who is a 'friend' and a 'foe'. Due to its highly nationalist, chauvinist and xenophobic character, minority groups are particularly vulnerable to extremism and populism (Tabajdi 2008: 94). According to the findings of the Vidra and Fox (2014) study, several political and social factors have contributed to the growing trend of intolerant public discourse in Hungary towards the Roma ethnic minority group, which has extended to practically all political parties.

In our research, we will investigate if the populist Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán attempted to portray an 'other' image of the Roma ethnic minority group during the segregated primary school conflict in Gyöngyöspata. The conflict in Gyöngyöspata appeared in the public media when it was found that children belonging to the Roma ethnic minority group are segregated in primary school (Brassoi 2020). The current literature on populism in the case of Hungary mainly focuses on researching anti-migrant and anti-elite populist topics. The literature lacks research that analyses the case of a segregated school in Gyöngyöspata and the discourse of the Hungarian Prime Minister on the conflict.

The theoretical framework of the research will study populism and how populist parties, or leaders, are associated with creating dangerous 'other' concepts. Following that, an example will be given from the migration crisis. The focus is to analyse the discourse of Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán and whether he created an environment in which newcomers were identified as 'others'. Understanding the migration crisis will help us assess if Viktor Orbán adopted the same discourse strategy and the main similarities between the discourse used in the Gyöngyöspata case.

The questions we posed in this research are:
1. What kind of environment for the Roma ethnic minority group did Hungary's Prime Minister create during the segregated primary school conflict in Gyöngyöspata?
2. What kind of environment for newcomers did Hungary's Prime Minister create during the migration crisis?

The qualitative content analysis methodology will be used to answer the research questions. This research methodology will help us better understand the content of the selected materials for analysis and accomplish our research objectives.

II.   Populism and the Dangerous 'Other' Concept

The rise of the popularity of populist political parties and politicians in the European political sphere facilitated research on populism in academia. More recently, populist parties successfully managed to move from the political margins to the centre (Berman 2019). Despite this, there is no commonly accepted definition, and scholars debate classifications, labels and boundaries between its many different aspects (Mudde 2004). Because of the long-running debate regarding the essence of populism, some scholars claim that populism cannot be a relevant concept in the social sciences (Mudde – Kaltwasser 2017). On the other hand, other group scholars see it mainly as a normative term in media and politics (ibid.). As a result of the above-mentioned reasons, populism is one of the most common political buzzwords used to describe a wide range of political parties and politicians and still refers to distinct phenomena in different situations. In their work, Mudde and Kaltwasser state that the term populism referred to left-wing presidents in Latin America, right-wing challenger parties in Europe and both left-wing and right-wing presidential candidates in the United States (ibid: 1).

At the same time, three different groups of literature characterise different types of political actors as populists. First, American literature like the People's Party of the nineteenth century, Ross Perot's Progress Party and, more recently, the Tea Party, are described as populist. However, Latin American literature studies authoritarian regimes and portrays their leaders as populists – for example, Peron in Argentina, Chavez in Venezuela and Morales in Bolivia. Third, Western European literature defines political parties such as Le Pen's National Front in France, Berlusconi's Forza Italia in Italy and Haider's Austrian Freedom Party as populist (Rooduijn 2014).

It is essential to mention that how each group of literature classifies political parties or political actors is usually in line with a contextual meaning of populism in each body of literature. That is why populist parties such as National Front in France will not be seen as populist in American literature. In his study, Matthijs Rooduijn argues and demonstrates four common characteristics of populism which exist in all literature. It is an important finding because it indicates that despite the differences in the contextual meaning of populism within each literature group, there are standard features. This can help us clarify the complication, such as no commonly accepted definition, or debates about the essence of populism. Also, we need to select the most suitable and explana-

tive definition of populism. According to Matthijs Rooduijn, four common characteristics are: '(1) populists emphasise the central position of the people; (2) they criticise the elite; (3) they conceive of the people as a homogeneous entity; and (4) they proclaim that there is a serious crisis' (ibid: 573).

Furthermore, populism has been conceptualised from a theoretical viewpoint as: '(1) a political discourse characterised by the unethical manipulation and instrumentalisation of widespread public feelings of concern and dissatisfaction' (Betz 1994: 4). Also, populist parties and leaders question the legitimacy of the existing political establishment and appeal to the power of the people (Abts – Rummens 2007: 407). Moreover, populism has also been defined as (2) an ideology which considers 'society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: the pure people versus the corrupt elite, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonte generale of the people' (Mudde 2004: 543). In addition, populism has been outlined (3) as a type of organisation characterised by a charismatic and robust personalistic leader (Taggart 2000). Because of the centralised aspect of the populist organisation, the leader plays an important role.

On the other hand, Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008: 4) define populism as follows: 'an ideology which pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous others who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice'. It is important to note that this study adopts Albertazzi and McDonnell's definition of populism. The main reason is that the current trends of populism, especially in Europe, contain not only anti-elite or anti-establishment but also dangerous 'others'.

Recent examples demonstrate that populist political actors or parties target elites and particular groups who are eventually labelled as 'other' depending on the situation. During the migration crisis, we witnessed a new wave of populism in Europe. In some countries like Hungary, the populist government strengthened its position using the migration crisis. However, Alternative for Germany in Germany, Marine Le Pen in France and Party for Freedom in the Netherlands managed to exceed expectations primarily because of the migration crisis. Most populist parties in Europe used the migration crisis as a political tactic, and asylum seekers and migrants were an easy scapegoat for them to portray 'others' as dangerous. They presented them as the enemy of the European culture or as newcomers attempting to deprive them of their religion, culture and jobs.

Populism can be observed on both sides of the political spectrum. The difference between left and right is included in the inclusionary-exclusionary differentiation (Caiani – Graziano 2019). Left-wing parties are associated with inclusionary populism, whereas right-wing parties are associated with exclusionary populism (March 2011). Left-wing populism had been regarded as a Latin American phenomenon until recently, but lately it has also been seen

in European states. For example, Podemos in Spain and France Insoumise in France. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013: 158) note that most Latin American literature discusses populism's capacity to be inclusive, while the exclusivity of populism is underlined in all European literature. Inclusionary populism predominantly focuses on the socioeconomic dimension of society, but exclusionary has a dominant sociocultural characteristic. Latin literature and politics are driven by inclusionary populism can be partially explained by the region's lack of socioeconomic development compared to Europe. On the other hand, Europe has advanced to the point where post-material politics are nearly as crucial as socioeconomic politics. In this context, the emergence of the populist radical right is a modern phenomenon (ibid.).

Caiani and Graziano studied (2019) the exclusionary and inclusionary populist parties in 30 European countries (all European Union countries, including the United Kingdom, and adding Norway and Switzerland). Their research shows that before 1994 only one inclusionary populist party existed compared to 22 exclusionary populist parties. From 1995 to 2008, there were three inclusionary populist parties and 26 exclusionary populist parties. However, from 2008 to 2017, the number of inclusionary populist parties increased to six, while seven exclusionary populist parties were documented. This data proves that, as mentioned above, the European political sphere started to change after the euro crisis, and it is not surprising that from 2008 to 2017 the number of populist parties more focused on the socioeconomic side of politics increased.

Furthermore, the migration crisis led to the gain of popularity among exclusionary populist parties associated with creating a dangerous 'other' from migrants. Hungary can be an example where the populist Prime Minister exploited the crisis to create an environment where newcomers were classified as dangerous 'others'. The Hungarian government has had a strict political stance on migration since the beginning of the crisis. They used the crisis as a political tool to implement their policies and consolidate their political power. In his communications, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has exploited the concept of multiculturalism and migration as a threat to European identity (Szalai – Gőbl 2015). He usually adopted the political communication style of presenting Muslim migrants as invaders in his discourse (Staudenmaier 2018). He portrayed himself as a saviour of Hungary and Christian culture (Browne 2018).

III.   The Current Situation of the Roma Ethnic Minority in Hungary

The Roma ethnic minority group is ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse with a long and rich history. The Roma is one of Europe's most marginalised, socially unaccepted and morally condemned ethnic minority groups, particularly in East-Central European countries (Ladanyi 2001). On an interpersonal, institutional and national level, Roma people are presented as lazy beg-

gars, criminals and profiteers in most countries where they constitute a sizeable ethnic minority group (van Baar 2011). According to several empirical studies, anti-Roma prejudices concentrate on crime, laziness and getting undeserved state benefits (Kende et al. 2017; Villano et al. 2017). This is one of the reasons they are subject to discrimination and violence, as well as marginalisation and social isolation. It is also important to note that the Roma are Europe's largest ethnic minority.

According to the 2011 census, 315,583 people from the Roma ethnic minority group were recorded by Hungarian authorities (Minority Rights Group International 2018). However, unofficial numbers vary between 250,000 and 800,000 Roma people living in Hungary (ibid.). Most of the Roma community members in Hungary have assimilated and speak the Hungarian language. There are at least three main, distinct linguistic groups within the Roma population in Hungary: 'the first group is Hungarian Roma (magyar cigányok), who speaks Hungarian and identify themselves as Hungarian or Musician Roma. The second group is Vlach Roma (oláh cigányok), who speak two languages, Hungarian and Romani (Lovari and Kalderash dialects), and who identify themselves as Roma or Rom. And the last one is the Beás people (beások), who speak two languages, Hungarian and Beás, and who identify themselves as Beás' (Kemény – Janky 2005: 100).

Following the fall of communism, Hungary took the lead in advocating minority rights and bringing the Roma to the EU institutions' agenda (Rostas – Kovacs 2021). In 2011, the Fidesz government adopted Decree 1136, which defined a plan that would last through 2020 and address the issues such as promoting social inclusion of excluded groups like the Roma (Magyar Közlöny 2011: 10935). The adopted programme focused on excluding regional disadvantages and improving social conditions in four main areas: education, employment, housing and health (ibid.). Even after the government's latest actions to promote the effective integration of Roma people into Hungarian society, problems remain (Rostas – Kovacs 2021).

According to a 2017 survey by the Pew Research Center (2017), in Hungary 54% of respondents stated that they are not willing to accept Roma as members of their family, 44% said they would not want them as a neighbour while 27% would not want them as citizens of Hungary. Furthermore, based on the results of another survey conducted by the same research institute in 2019, 61% of Hungarians say they have unfavourable views on the Roma (Pew Research Center 2019).

Additionally, most of the Roma in Hungary are considered to be at a high risk of poverty due to a lack of proper education and a high rate of unemployment (Rostas – Kovacs 2021). According to research published between 2006 and 2012, approximately 10% of non-Roma students and nearly 50% of Roma students failed to complete their education by the summer of 2012. Also, 75% of non-Roma students get bachelor's degrees, whereas Roma students have

a bachelor's degree rate of 24%. Only 5% of Roma young people start college or university studies, compared to 35% of non-Roma young people (European Commission – Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers 2019). Moreover, in 2015, 16% of Roma between 15 and 64 years of age did not graduate from primary school, and 63% did not attend high school, or have a technical or tertiary education (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal 2016).

On the other hand, there are severe concerns in Hungary about school segregation of Roma children in schools. Research conducted by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences published in 2018 concluded that school segregation in Hungary increased by almost 10% between 2008 and 2016 (United States Department of State 2020). The Sixth Periodic Report of the UN Human Rights Committee voiced concern that based on the 'public Education Act of 2012, segregation remains prevalent in schools, especially church and private schools, and the number of Roma children placed in schools for children with mild disabilities remains disproportionately high' (United Nations 2018).

As the numbers demonstrate, attitudes toward the Roma ethnic minority group are still quite unfavourable. At the same time, Roma people continue to face problems regarding employment, health, school enrolment and segregation.

IV.   The Case Study of Primary School in Gyöngyöspata

Gyöngyöspata originally made headlines in 2011 when a far-right paramilitary organisation, Véder, picked the village as the location for their training camp in response to a reported rise in crimes committed by Roma people. Within a short period, another paramilitary group began marching through the town. The main objective of these organisations was to restore public order in town. Gyöngyöspata became a symbol of anti-Roma movements due to these activities by far-right organisations (Hungary Today 2020).

In the same year, Ernő Kállai, the former Minority Ombudsman published a report on the incidents that happened in Gyöngyöspata. According to the report, the Roma kids of Gyöngyöspata Nekcsei Demeter Primary School were physically separated. It was said that the 'Minority Ombudsman has conducted investigations not only on the issue of patrols and paramilitary marches, which got great press attention, but also on the segregation of Roma pupils in school and the segregation in the field of housing, neither of which can be separated from the events that have occurred in spring 2011 in Gyöngyöspata' (Kállai 2011). The Chance For Children Foundation (CFCF) (2012) filed a lawsuit based on the report. The CFCF claimed that 'Roma children in the primary school are taught separately from non-Roma children, their classrooms are located on different floors. CFCF also claimed that Roma children are unlawfully excluded from swimming classes, which is compulsory for all non-Roma children and receive a lower education level than non-Roma students.'

On 6 December 2012, the Eger Regional Court ruled in favour of CFCF, concluding that the municipality and the school separated Roma students into Roma-only classes and provided them with a substandard education (ibid.). After the first victory, the CFCF filed another lawsuit claiming damages. In their final judgment, the Debrecen Court of Appeals ruled that the school must pay 100 million Hungarian forints as compensation to the children because of the violation to their rights (Hungary Today 2020).

V. Methodology

The material collected for the analyses comprises interviews given by Prime Minister Orbán to local and international media. The author selected the materials from the personal website of the Hungarian Prime Minister. Furthermore, thanks to the availability of the English language records by the other EU prime ministers or presidents, this research can open the way to comparative studies. The main advantage of using the official website as a source of the material collection is that there is a high level of accuracy in the translation process from Hungarian to English.

The data collection for the research was divided into several steps. To answer RQ 1, all the available materials from the official website of the Hungarian Prime Minister which talked about the Gyöngyöspata case were collected for analysis. In the six interviews, Hungary's Prime Minister discussed the segregated primary school conflict in Gyöngyöspata from January 2020 to May 2020. In the case of RQ 2, twelve interviews with Hungary's Prime Minister were collected in 2015, in which he discussed the migration issue. The main reason to focus on 2015 is that Hungary, along with other EU member states, witnessed the migration crisis's peak during that year. At the same time, it was the leading subject in the discourse of the Hungarian Prime Minister. According to Eurostat (2022), the responsible Hungarian authorities received 177,135 applications for asylum in 2015. However, in 2014 the number of asylum applicants was 42,775 and 29,430 in 2016 (ibid.).

As mentioned earlier, qualitative content analysis was performed to analyse the interviews. According to Krippendorff (2003: 18), 'content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.' Content analysis is also considered an effective tool for document analysis. Furthermore, this research methodology helps to understand the data better and enables the researcher to evaluate theoretical hypotheses (Elo – Kyngäs 2008).

On the other hand, one of the main limitations of qualitative content analysis is that it is less standardised and formulaic compared to quantitative analysis (Polit – Beck 2004). Also, Elo and Kyngäs (2008) mention that there is no right way to do qualitative content analysis. In this study, the coding frame structure

combines a concept-driven (a deductive approach) and a data-driven strategy (an inductive approach). After building the coding frame (main categories and subcategories), the material was divided into coding units, and the coding frame was checked by double-coding. This process helps us evaluate the coding frame in terms of coding consistency and validity. After this pilot study, the main categories and subcategories were identified, and the material was coded with a revised version of the coding frame. The five main categories were identified: 1) Portrayal of blame, 2) Elements of exclusionary, 3) Focus on negativity, 4) Support and 5) Integration Perspective. The main categories and category descriptions are summarised in Table 1.

VI. Results

Migration Crisis

With the beginning of the migration crisis at the end of 2014, we witnessed the polarisation of European politics. One group of politics were in favour of accepting newcomers to the territory of the EU as a humanitarian gesture, but another group was totally against it, seeing it as a securitisation issue. The Prime Minister of Hungary belongs to the group which considered the migration crisis a security threat to the EU and Hungary. That is why his political discourse on migration was sharp. For example, our analysis demonstrates that in his interviews the Hungarian Prime Minister constantly blamed the EU and its member states for not being decisive enough and being unable to protect its external borders.

It is even worse news that we cannot expect help from the West either, but then again this was also true back in the time of János Hunyadi. But the situation is what it is, and instead of helping us – or, as I asked them when I was last in Brussels, at least leaving us to our work without further attacks, because we are the only ones observing the Schengen Agreement, which we strongly intend to and will observe – the voices from the West criticising our actions are not diminishing in volume (Viktor Orbán, 08/09/2015).

On the other hand, he was critical towards Greece for not fulfilling its obligation to protect its southern borders. Another interesting point is that Viktor Orbán blamed George Soros in his interviews for demanding an open border policy and for accepting migrants.

The European Union comes into the equation when one has a country such as Greece, which signs an agreement – the Schengen Agreement – and agrees to protect its southern border, but fails to honour its obligation. Then it must be excluded (Viktor Orbán, 16/11/2020).

People today are setting out – assisted by human traffickers and political activists, particularly with the support of activists from the Soros network –

because they know that Germany awaits them, and events confirm this (Viktor Orbán, 16/11/2020).

Our results suggest that in the discourse of the Hungarian Prime Minister elements of exclusion towards the migrants are easily detected. He mainly focused on cultural differences between the newcomers and Europeans or Hungarians. He repeatedly emphasised that the culture of Hungary or Europe was being forced to change and was under invasion. It is also important to mention that he focused on ethnicity and religious differences a few times.

It is difficult to explain to a Hungarian what is happening: that the cultural identity of our continent and our own country is being changed from the outside, against our will, using an invasion. What good is there in this? We do not understand it, but there are people who make their living from concocting theories, writing books, training activists, keeping them stationed all over the world and employing them in this spirit. This is part of the modern world today (Viktor Orbán, 30/10/2015).

At the same time, in his discourse, while talking about the migration crisis, the Prime Minister constantly focused on negativity towards newcomers. He described them as a group of people who are unwilling to observe Hungary's laws and who refuse to cooperate with the responsible authorities. Additionally, he mentioned that wherever there are immigrants in large numbers, the facts show that crime rates increase and he emphasised that terrorists are arriving in Europe via migration.

We need new rules if we do not want immigration to continuously undermine public security – because wherever there are immigrants in large numbers, the facts show that crime rates increase (Viktor Orbán, 20/11/2015).

While analysing the discourse of Viktor Orbán on the migration crisis, another notable finding is that only in two cases we were able to find support elements. These support elements were towards asylum seekers and refugees. While answering the questions, he mentioned that Hungarian authorities conducted the necessary procedures, and women and children received favourable treatment. The Prime Minister told an interviewer that they care for every asylum seeker in Hungary.

Furthermore, our study indicates that during the discussion of the migration crisis, the integration aspect of the migrants was the hot topic. The Prime Minister of Hungary identified problems with integration. Results show that, according to Viktor Orbán, not integrating into European or Hungarian societies is the problem of migrants. In several instances, the Prime Minister said that migrants do not want to live as we do because they hold different views on the world or have a different mentality. Also, he added that most of them are entirely uneducated, and many only speak Arabic, making the integration process harder.

We cannot only take their manpower into consideration, because it is the whole human being we get – together with their own cultural identities, the prob-

lems they have living with them, and with the fact that they do not at all consider European attitudes to life as a philosophy to be followed. They consider their own cultures to be more valuable, so they do not want to integrate, but organise their own parallel lives. This is what has happened everywhere; this is the phenomenon of parallel societies, experienced recently in Europe, in countries where there are a large number of people who have arrived from elsewhere. Central Europe has not experienced this problem so far (Viktor Orbán, 19/12/2015).

Gyöngyöspata conflict

The qualitative content analysis of the selected materials in the case of the segregated primary school conflict in Gyöngyöspata shows that Prime Minister Orbán highlighted a different aspect of the conflict. Analysed interviews with Viktor Orbán demonstrate an augmented emphasis on placing blame while presenting the Gyöngyöspata conflict. Results indicated that he, to the same degree, blamed George Soros or his organisations and the Roma ethnic minority group in Gyöngyöspata. In the case of George Soros, he blamed his organisations for provoking the issue, resulting in a court case. In one of his interviews, he said:

Furthermore, and this is what we always come back to, if we look at the people who started the lawsuit, we find Soros organisations everywhere. I think the whole thing is a provocation (Viktor Orbán, 17/01/2020).

However, the Hungarian Prime Minister mainly blamed the Roma ethnic minority group in Gyöngyöspata for causing trouble in school in a different way and for not attending school. At the same time, while discussing this issue, he accused the Roma people in Gyöngyöspata preventing native Hungarians from having normal education conditions:

We stand by the 80 per cent of decent Hungarians who work and demand a normal education for their children, who in Gyöngyöspata now are on the back foot and are being made to look as if they've done something wrong. So, I told the Member of Parliament to take urgent action to turn this situation around. It is absurd that people have to take their children out of their own settlement, where they're in a majority, to a school in a neighbouring settlement because a minority is preventing normal conditions for education where they live (Viktor Orbán, 31/01/2020).

Also, it is significant to mention that he blamed the previous government for the dispute in Gyöngyöspata, though to a lesser degree compared to George Soros or his organisations and the Roma ethnic minority group in Gyöngyöspata.

Naturally, I don't want to point the finger, but this didn't start under our government. This is a practice that started during the term of a left-liberal government (Viktor Orbán, 17/01/2020).

When the exclusionary elements examined in the Hungarian Prime Minister's discourse, we noticed that he highlighted that he disagreed with the final

judgment of the court and refused to accept that the government should pay compensation. On the other hand, only in one case did the Hungarian Prime Minister focus on the ethnicity aspect of the Roma minority group.

Well, I'm also someone with a law degree, and I have to say that, as it stands, this court verdict is an unjust one. It has been made in the service of legality, but not in the service of justice. And I can see that justice in Gyöngyöspata is not visible from the Supreme Court in Budapest's 5th district. But we shall seek out that justice (Viktor Orbán, 15/05/2020).

Let me repeat: we are ready to provide anything, but we cannot just give money (Viktor Orbán, 17/01/2020).

In different interviews, the Prime Minister mentioned the negative actions of the Roma people in Gyöngyöspata. The general context of these comments was mainly about the negative behaviour of Roma children in the school. While answering the questions, he listed negative behaviour such as physical assaults by parents or children on teachers, causing havoc and behaving in a way that makes teaching impossible when they are in school. In one of the interviews he gave to Kossuth Radio programme, he even accused Roma parents for not sending children to school.

In Gyöngyöspata an 80-per cent non-Roma population lives with a 20-per cent Roma population. In recent years an alarming situation has developed in the school there. Many families didn't send their children to school, and there was one child who missed five hundred hours of schooling. Children who did attend didn't follow the rules, sometimes parents or children threatened teachers, occasionally there were instances of physical assault, and when teachers tried to restore normality they were accused of racism (Viktor Orbán, 31,01,2020).

In the case of if the particular side was supported in the discourse of the Prime Minister while presenting the Gyöngyöspata conflict, our results show that Viktor Orbán totally support the predominant native Hungarians in Gyöngyöspata. During the analysis, Orbán's support of the Roma population in Gyöngyöspata was not detected. At the same time, he, in many cases, mentioned that Hungarians are in the majority position in Gyöngyöspata. It is significant to mention that this kind of discourse can create disbalance between two groups in a small town such as Gyöngyöspata.

They feel that they're in a hostile environment in their own country: that the legal system, the courts and the government in their own country aren't standing by them, but are instead somehow working against them. And they are expected to tolerate all this. And to this my answer is no (Viktor Orbán, 31/01/2020).

One interesting observation is that in several interviews, after blaming the Roma minority group or showing support to native Hungarians, the Prime Minister sought to discuss the issue. He did not criticise or talk about the Roma ethnic minority group in Gyöngyöspata not being integrated into the host society. Instead, he focused on the Hungarian government's integration opportunities

for the Roma people. Moreover, the emphasis was on the government's commitment to integrating Roma people into Hungarian society through different government programmes.

This is happening at a time when Roma families – or many of them, at least – are embarking on a change in their way of life. We cannot speak dispassionately about the great change represented by the fact that tens of thousands of Roma families have taken up offers of work, and that after working in public works schemes tens of thousands of them are making headway in the private sector. They are living off the proceeds of their work instead of welfare benefits, they are raising their children properly, and they have thus earned recognition from all of us. Their children are attending kindergarten from the age of three, something which prepares them for school and gives them the chance of keeping up with their peers from more advantageous backgrounds. It is well known that the government has openly committed itself – and I also see this as my personal responsibility – to eradicating poverty in Hungary. We have therefore also committed ourselves to the advancement of Roma families. Indeed, we have also succeeded in establishing consensus across society on this point (Viktor Orbán 16/02/2020).

VII.   Discussion

To the author's knowledge, this qualitative study is the first to explore Prime Minister Orbán's discourse on the primary school conflict in Gyöngyöspata. Furthermore, this study advances its essence by studying Viktor Orbán's discourse on the migration crisis. It is followed by examining similarities in the Hungarian prime minister's discourse on both selected cases.

This research confirms that, in the case of the 'portrayal of blame' category, we can identify the most similarities between the two case studies. At the same time, this category in both cases received the highest percentage. This means that the Hungarian prime minister mostly used blame elements while discussing the migration crisis and the Gyöngyöspata conflict. In the case of the migration crisis, he mainly blamed the EU and its member states, particularly Greece. However, in the case of the Gyöngyöspata conflict, he blamed the Roma ethnic minority group in Gyöngyöspata. In both case studies, the negativity and blame were high towards George Soros or his organisations. Relatively low similarities were identified in the 'elements of exclusionary' category compared to the 'portrayal of blame' category. Viktor Orbán highlighted the court's compensation decision in the Gyöngyöspata case to use it to exclude the Roma ethnic minority group. He exploited the court's decision to portray the Roma ethnic minority group in a way that they were getting unfair compensation from the government. On the hand, cultural, ethnic and religious exclusionary elements were identified in the case of the migration crisis.

Table 1: Main categories and category descriptions

Main Category	Category Description
Portrayal of blame	This category aims to determine whom Hungarian Prime Minister blamed while presenting the Gyöngyöspata conflict and migration crisis
Elements of exclusionary	This category aims to determine if any exclusionary elements appeared in the Hungarian Prime Minister's discourse while presenting the Gyöngyöspata conflict and migration crisis
Focus on negativity	This category aims to determine if the Hungarian Prime Minister focused on a specific type of negativity in his discourse toward the Roma ethnic minority group and migrants while presenting the Gyöngyöspata conflict and migration crisis
Support	This category aims to determine if the Hungarian Prime Minister supported a particular side in his discourse while presenting the Gyöngyöspata conflict and migration crisis
Integration	This category aims to determine if the Hungarian Prime Minister focused on a specific type of integration issue in his discourse while presenting the Gyöngyöspata conflict and migration crisis

The third similarity between the case studies was discovered in the 'integration' category. However, the intriguing conclusion in this category was that Viktor Orbán, while speaking about the integration of the Roma ethnic minority group, tends to talk about more positive examples, such as how the government provides an opportunity for them or how the situation is improved compared to previous years. Nevertheless, the opposite was observable in the case of the migration crisis, in which migrants were blamed for not integrating into Hungarian or European societies.

Based on our analysis, Figure 1 shows that the most striking difference between the selected cases is found in the 'support' category. This concludes that in the discourse of the Hungarian prime minister, support elements on the migration crisis were significantly lower compared to the Gyöngyöspata conflict. Nevertheless, it is significant to mention that Viktor Orbán, in his interviews, largely supported native Hungarians in Gyöngyöspata. However, while talking about the migration crisis, he mentioned support in a few cases, especially for women and children refugees. The 'focus on negativity' category also illustrates significant differences between the cases. However, contrary to the 'support' category, there was more negative discourse towards the migrants compared to the Roma ethnic minority group.

Figure 1: The overall results of the study of the Gyöngyöspata conflict and the migration crisis
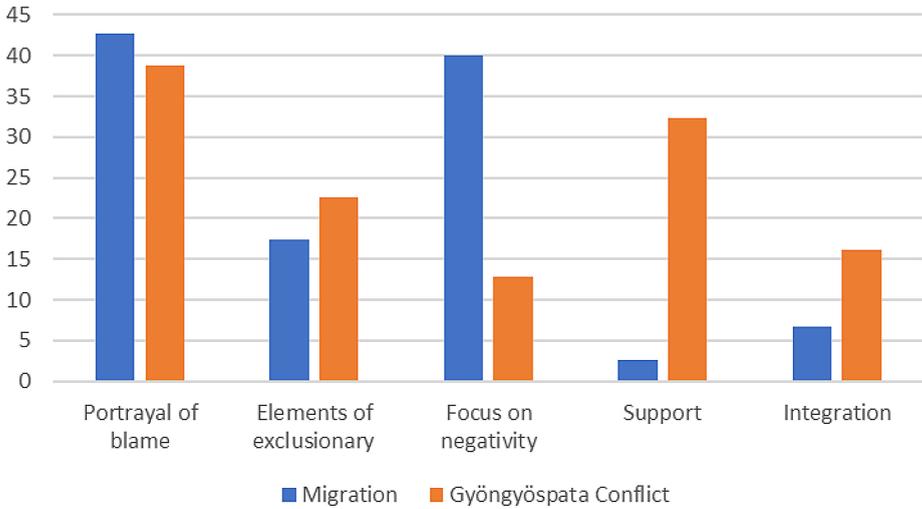
VIII. Conclusion

This study using qualitative content analysis focused on the discourse of Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán in the segregated primary school conflict in Gyöngyöspata and migration. This research can confirm that populist Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán attempted to portray an 'other' image of the Roma ethnic minority group during the segregated primary school conflict in Gyöngyöspata. The findings in this study indicate that elements of blame, exclusionary, negativity towards the Roma ethnic minority group and support for the native Hungarians in the Gyöngyöspata conflict were evident in the discourse of the Hungarian prime minister. Moreover, it was found that there are general similarities in the discourse of Viktor Orbán while talking about both examined cases. The blame and exclusionary communication style were noticeable in both case studies. At the same time and as mentioned above, this research adopted Albertazzi and McDonnell's definition of populism. Moreover, the results of our study can confirm that Albertazzi and McDonnell's definition of populism is relevant for this research because contemporary populism in the discourse of Hungarian prime minister does not contain only anti-elite or anti-establishment but also dangerous 'other' elements.

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Tofig Ismayilzada *is a PhD candidate at the Doctoral School of International Relations and Political Science at the Corvinus University of Budapest. Her research interests are migration crisis, security studies, populism / far right in the context of the European Union and contemporary politics of Central European Union members. She finished the bachelor's degree at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas/Lithuania and master's degree at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest/Hungary. E-mail: ofiqismayilzzade@gmail.com*

Cui prodest? Why local governance came to a deadlock in Hungary[1]

LÁSZLÓ KÁKAI AND ILONA PÁLNÉ KOVÁCS

Abstract: *More than thirty years after Hungary's transition to democracy and the change of territorial governance model, the time is now right to assess the outcome. This paper is primarily an assessment, concluding that the deadlock of the Hungarian local government system can be explained not only by the centralisation efforts of the governing and opposition political elites or the continuous decline of the budgetary position, but also by the indifference of local society. The fact is that the Hungarian local governments were not protected from being squeezed out of a significant part of public services, from a narrowing of their room to manoeuvre and from their authority position being weakened, by the general constitutional provisions introduced in 1990. An important proposition of this paper is that (local) society, although still more trusting of local governments than the central government according to various surveys, has not been able to become an 'ally' of local governments. The question rightly posed in the title of the paper is, whose interest is the local government system, who finds the values of self-governance important? The paper seeks (based mainly on academic literature and on its own and secondary analyses) the reasons/changes that have led to the stalemate of Hungarian local governments despite their initially strong mandate.*

Keywords: *public law, constitution framework, local governments, local elections, voter turnout, municipal duties*

I. Introduction, theoretical methodological framework

The involvement of the European Community and the Council of Europe has made local autonomy and decentralisation normative political values in European countries. Several international organisations around the world have not only taken up this objective but also taken an active role in providing political and technical assistance for decentralisation reforms (Cheema – Rondinelli 2007). In recent decades, a large body of literature has been accumulated on the subject and comparative analyses and measurements based on complex criteria have been launched. These suggest that, although there is a group of permanently decentralised countries, many countries also show significant changes and fluctuations, and even signs of clear centralisation have become apparent in some countries as a result of the 2008 economic crisis (Ladner et al. 2019). This trend is partially the cause of the fact that the last decade has been marked by increasing centralisation (CEMR 2013; Göymen et al. 2014).

According to analyses, rankings and various reports, Hungary has shown a particularly strong drift, unfortunately towards centralisation, leaving the East-Central European bloc which had been considered unified according to the usual groupings (Loughlin 2011; Ladner et al. 2019; Hooghe et al. 2016). This happened despite the fact that the index of trust in local governments far exceeded that of the central government.

The data clearly show that institutional trust is already highly differentiated in this group of countries, but the trend does not show dramatic changes, with political parties consistently enjoying the least trust and local governments the most (Table 1). The question arises: what is the cause of this paradox, and why, despite the data, has politics moved in the direction of greater centralisation?

The authors of this paper have been studying local governments for decades, with a special focus on the changes of the Hungarian local government system. In addition to the study of the legislation applicable to local governments and public administration reforms, theoretical and international comparative analysis, joint or parallel empirical research has also been conducted on the functioning of local governments, their public service activities, their role in development policy, but also on local politics, elections and the characteristics of local civil society (Pálné 2011, 2019; Kákai 2004, 2019). This paper attempts to explain the above paradox, through which the current situation of local government, considered one of the success stories of the Hungarian transition to democracy, becomes visible and perhaps understandable. Our research question is therefore to identify the direct and indirect causes of the loss of power and prestige of the local government sector. What explains the unwillingness and inability of voters and civil society actors to operate a decentralised, sustainable, democratic and effective local governance system? The question is whether centralisation is the cause or the consequence of this democratic deficit. Over

Table 1: Percentage of trusted members in political parties, national government and local government in Central and Eastern European countries in 2004, 2010 and 2017 (%)

	Political parties			National Government			Local Government		
	2004	2010	2017	2004	2010	2017	2004	2010	2017
Bulgaria	11	13	13	26	34	29	–	35	39
Czech Republic	10	12	13	27	26	22	–	50	56
Estonia	17	18	19	47	55	57	–	64	57
Croatia	–	5	11	–	9	15	–	17	26
Hungary	18	22	23	40	48	48	–	57	63
Lithuania	16	7	10	38	15	33	–	28	47
Latvia	6	6	9	26	20	27	–	40	50
Poland	5	12	14	13	29	29	–	47	47
Romania	18	7	13	40	12	21	–	32	35
Slovenia	17	7	8	35	18	17	–	39	43
Slovakia	9	18	15	22	36	28	–	47	41
EU-25 / EU-28	17	15	18	34	28	36	–	47	51

Source: Eurobarometer 2004, 2010, 2017 based on own calculated.

the last thirty years, has public support for self-governance grown tired or has enthusiasm waned? To what extent has the declining position and performance of local governments contributed to the erosion of local politics and civil society activity? Is the consistently low turnout in local elections[2] or the declining number of local referendums[3] an indicator of this phenomenon? Even during the drastic local government reforms after 2010, there was no perception that citizens understood how their important rights and interests were being violated through centralisation. The number of candidates for mayors and assembly members in local elections is decreasing, especially in small municipalities, and the proportion of multiple re-elections is high: In 2019, only 30% of the more than 3000 mayors were new, and 3% had been in office since 1994. Can these data be considered more of a sign of a crisis in local democracy rather than a sign of overall satisfaction with local leadership?

This paper presents the public law and public policy changes affecting decentralisation over the last thirty years. It also presents some empirical inputs and outputs of the operation of local governments, such as the narrowing of the range of candidates in local elections and public opinion on the improve-

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2   With municipality types and regional differences, the average is around 50% (https://www.valasztas.hu)

3   The majority of referendums held over the last two decades – a few hundred in total – have been invalid (Radics, 2019).

ment of local public services. The analysis also briefly discusses the years of the pandemic, which show the increasingly conflictual nature of vertical and horizontal relations of the local governments.

The first chapter of the paper outlines the historical, public law and constitutional foundations. The second chapter details the political consequences of the restructuring of the local election system, the narrowing of the candidate base. This is followed by a discussion of the consequences of the change to a centralised model of governance[4] and its social reception of some (mainly public) services with the specificities of the management of the Covid pandemic. Our research[5] examined the public's perception of the accessibility of local public services and subjective expectations related to the objective conditions characterising the public service system. Its aim was to explore individual perceptions of government centralisation of public services, i.e. how much importance individuals attach to whether a given service is provided by the state, local government, non-profit or for-profit organisations, and whether they perceive a difference between the quality of public services and the identity of the provider.[6] The paper ends with a summary of conclusions.

II. The road dependency, the main changes in the situation, public law and constitutional framework of the Hungarian local government system

According to the 1000-year history of the organised state of Hungary, there was no strong tradition of local government decentralisation in the context of a strong, centralising state and weak local societies. In certain periods, elements of self-government could be detected in the governance of large cities, but the feudal dependence of the predominantly village society was the standard basis for the paternalistic functioning of local government.

External factors influencing the development of the Hungarian state cannot be neglected either. The limited state sovereignty and the foreign state models applied within the imperial framework had a significant influence on the Hungarian political elite's thinking on public law and their views on self-

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4   The applied methodology for examining the above issues rests on two pillars. One implies the collection of secondary information (desk-based research), i.e. the processing, systematisation and analysis of existing data and information.

5   The survey was based on a sample of 1,500 inhabitants that was representative in terms of settlement size, level of education, gender and age group. For the purposes of the research, a population survey was ordered by the National University of Public Service. (The research was implemented within the framework of the flagship project no. KÖFOP-2.12.-VEKOP-15-2016-00001, entitled 'Public service development basing good governance' /Kákai, 2019/).

6   In the sampling for the purposes of the questionnaire, special attention was given to ensuring that the surveyed settlements are representative of the full spectrum of Hungarian settlements. The analysis was primarily focused on public services that were represented in the case of the analysed settlements.

-government. However, a Western-style modernisation cycle after the liberation from the Soviet empire has also started to revalue self-government.

In 1990, when adopting the Local governments act, the national assembly did not follow a pragmatic model based on professional analysis, nor did it focus on the preparedness of society, but on abstract 'Westernised' values such as autonomy, freedom and grassroots democracy, which ensured the good reputation of the changing country in Europe.

Public law autonomy could not be linked to actual room to manoeuvre (especially in the economic and financial sense), partly because of the flawed spatial structure of the local government system. The dominant basic unit was the municipality, regardless of population size. The former local councils were replaced by twice as many (3,100) local governments (see Table 2). As the table shows, the municipalities and their populations have evolved interestingly over the past decades, the country has remained predominantly rural. While the number and population of the smallest municipalities (under 500 inhabitants) has increased, the number of municipalities with more than 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants has decreased.

Table 2: Number and population of municipalities in Hungary by size category, 1990–2021

Municipality population	Number of municipalities					Total population of each municipality type				
	1990		2021		change [%]	1990		2021		change [%]
	number	[%]	number	[%]		number	[%]	number	[%]	
below 499	965	31.4	1144	36.3	18.5	269 458	2.6	286 488	3.0	6.3
500-999	709	23.1	669	21.2	-6.0	517 670	5.0	490 075	5.0	-5.6
1000-1999	647	21.1	594	18.8	-8.9	927 841	9.0	858 891	8.8	-8.0
2000-4999	479	15.6	476	15.1	-0.6	1 421 841	13.7	1 431 430	14.7	0.7
5000-9999	130	4.2	129	4.1	-0.8	886 272	8.6	886 039	9.2	-0.02
10,000-49,999	120	3.9	124	3.9	3.3	2 317 883	22.4	2 319 821	23.8	0.08
50,000-99,999	12	0.4	11	0.3	-9.0	785 278	7.6	724 272	7.4	-8.4
over 100 000	9	0.3	8	0.3	-12.5	3 229 021	31.2	2 733 756	28.1	-18.1
Total	3071	100	3155	100	2.7	10 354 842	100	9 730 772	100	-6.4

Source: Gazetteer of the Republic of Hungary, 1990-2021.

Not even the low incentive for integration could rectify the fragmented settlement structure. The years highlighted in Table 3 illustrate how even the incentives in funding and the introduction of compulsory partnerships could

not significantly improve the scale efficiency of village governments. The fragmented local government system has also led to a lack of rationality in the institutional setup of local public services. The newly-elected local authorities sought to run schools and health services themselves, sacrificing economies of scale and quality of service in the name of local autonomy. Central financial and sectoral public service regulations have not encouraged efficiency and quality. The partnership model was voluntary, but the offered financial support was not an actual incentive. Most towns and cities failed to fulfil a regional integrating and service-provider role.

Table 3: Main structural data of local municipalities in Hungary 1990–2021

Year	Municipal governments	Municipalities operating independent offices	Municipalities operating joint offices	Joint office
		number (total)		
1990	1420	782	2188	638
1994	3137	1752	1385	499
1998	3154	1827	1327	505
2002	3158	1632	1526	593
2006	3168	1525	1643	646
2010	3175	1202	1973	768
2014	3177	545	2632	749
2019	3178	545	2633	738
2021	3178	553	2625	712

Source: Public administration list of Hungarian municipalities, Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2021.

In this fragmented and 'self-sufficient' model, the role of regional, medium-level self-governments (19 counties plus the capital) would have been particularly important. The legislature has taken a historic revenge on the counties (county councils), which had been powerful before the regime change, by drastically reducing their role. County councils were given hardly any powers of their own in the law. The counties were deprived of their planning and coordination roles. The political authority of the county councils and their relationships were weak due to the indirect election approach, and the county seat cities are not allowed to elect representatives to the county assemblies.

The initial territorial governance model did not ensure effective functioning due to structural problems. Although there have been several reform efforts since the transition to democracy, these have been generated mainly by the necessity to adapt to the European Union. Hungary was one of the quick and well--adapted candidates in the run-up to accession, and meeting the expectations linked to the use of cohesion funds in particular was a matter of concern for the political elite. Thus, in 1996 the so-called territorial development councils were set up at county and a larger regional (NUTS) level. In 2002 and again in 2006,

the government made unsuccessful attempts to create elected regions, invoking the EU principles of subsidiarity and regional decentralisation. Following accession to the EU (2004), it was not the territorial actors (elected or delegated partnerships) that were designated to receive EU funds, but the central government agency (Pálné 2015), as a result of which the Hungarian administration of the EU cohesion policy has remained highly centralised to this day.

Self-governance and decentralisation have lost significance as political priorities. Even before 2010, local governments were already suffering increasing financial constraints. The steadily declining share of financial resources of local governments in relation to the central budget and GDP shows that the real decentralisation of resources has not been in line with the legislative decentralisation of responsibilities (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Evolution of local government expenditure as a percentage of GDP between 2009 and 2018
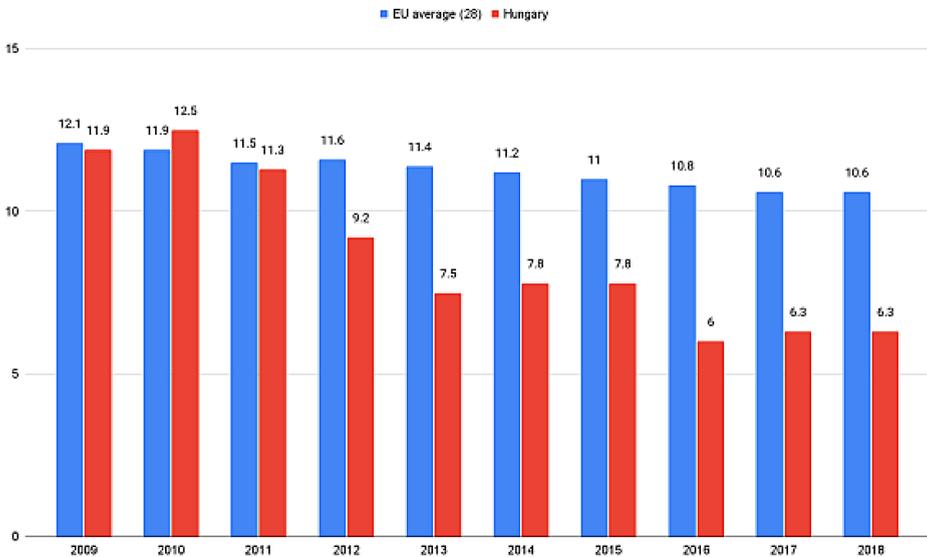
Source: Calculated on the basis on Eurostat data (2018) (Bordás et al. 2020: 94)

Local governments have therefore not been put in important positions in public services, or the development of local economy and infrastructure either, and their means and room to manoeuvre have been steadily reduced. This process cannot be exclusively linked to right-wing governments, centralisation was a permanent ambition of government policy even before 2010 (albeit sometimes hidden behind loud slogans) (Pálné et al. 2016).

The right-wing government that came to power in 2010 is associated with the most major and in-depth disempowerment of the local government system. The

new Fundamental Law laid down the foundations for a process of centralisation that was to expand, e.g. it no longer declares the collective right of local communities to self-government (Balázs – Hoffman, 2017). The article of the constitution on the territorial division of the state also brought an end to the era of attempts at regionalisation, reinstating the power of the counties. The references to Budapest and county government offices in the constitution foreshadowed that they would have a greater role in governance than elected county councils.

In 2011, following the adoption of the new local government act, they lost their most important public service functions (education, healthcare, social care, etc.) and thus state institutions took over a significant part of public services and infrastructure operation. It is difficult to draw the line between forcing municipalities to manage finances rationally and eliminating their autonomy. While there were rational elements in the tightening of financial rules, such as the prevention of indebtedness, the financial crisis was also the primary reason given for nationalising public services.

The reform also calls into question Hungary's compliance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government (CoE 2013, 2020). The new law also included responses to previous issues of economies of scale of municipalities. In municipalities with a population under 2,000, mayor's offices have been eliminated (see Table 3), the number of representative bodies has been halved, the supervisory role of committees has been weakened and the mayor's position against both the assembly and the notary has been strengthened. All these changes have also brought with them the risk of a local democratic deficit.

III. The social context of the new model of territorial governance

The position of the local government system has been steadily declining over the past decades, but the most significant negative turnaround occurred after 2010. In the following, through the analysis of some empirical correlations and operational data, we aim to shed light on the role of social reactions and support in this process.

3.1. Elections

In the following, we examine the changes in participation and electoral competition that have occurred in the context of local elections by municipality type. There is no doubt that the post-2010 electoral system has brought along a new logic to the central and territorial power relations, resulting in the very strong overall dominance of the ruling parties, limiting the possibility of real competition between political sides. The number of representatives has been reduced, the cycles of national and local elections have been differentiated, the latter period being extended to five years, and the abolition of the county electoral

list means that parties are no longer forced to engage in county politics and sustain party organisations in the parliamentary elections. Since 2014, the rules on conflicts of interest have pushed out mayors from parliament (previously around 100 municipal leaders held mandates).

The rules for local elections have also been tightened, reducing the chances of non-partisan organisations. And the rules on the allocation of seats further strengthened the dominance of national (mass) parties. Parties became dominant not only in county assemblies but also in cities with county rights (Dobos 2011). Also, the reduction of compensation paid to local representatives and mayors devalued the prestige and weight of local politics and thus the role of competition between the candidates.

In previous decades, conservative, nationalist parties in rural areas and left--wing, liberal parties in larger cities generally performed better. Since 2010, the right has gained a steady advantage over the opposition (left-wing) parties throughout the country (Mészáros et al. 2022: 393). Among the most vulnerable, the popularity of the governing party, FIDESZ, is particularly prominent. Low-educated, low-income and low-wealth voters, manual workers, people living in villages, the Roma and those without internet access show a significantly higher than average proportion of pro-government voters (Róna et al., 2020: 13). There is also a remarkable variation in the proportion of voters by municipality size (Stumpf, 2019, see Table 4).[7]

Table 4: Turnout rates by municipality size and legal status (2019)

	participation rate
below 1000	60.2
population: 1001-10 000	49.2
above 10 001	44.9
Villages	52.5
Towns and cities	46.9
Total	48.6

Source: https://www.valasztas.hu/valasztasok-szavazasok.

There has been a negative impact on the electoral chances of smaller organisations, mainly NGOs, and their role, like that of the opposition parties, has been very small (Table 5). As 89% of Hungarian municipalities have a population of less than 5,000, the role of parties in this category of municipalities is not decisive, and thus local politics is apparently dominated by independents. However, parties hold strong positions in cities.

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7   This also supports the theory of Dahl and Tufte (1973) that democratic legitimacy can be more efficiently sustained in small municipalities than in big cities. This (in principle) explains the higher turnout in electoral contests of small municipalities than in large municipalities (Maciej – Gendźwiłł, 2021).

Table 5: Distribution of individual list candidates by nominating and winning organisations

Municipality	Municipal election results 2019							
	candidate				seat won			
	Independent candidate	NGO, civil society association	Pro-government	Pro-opposition	Independent candidate	NGO, civil society association	Pro-government	Pro-opposition
Village	93.6	0.8	4.5	1.0	93.4	0.8	5.4	0.3
City	69.9	5.1	20.9	4.1	64.0	5.7	28.8	1.5
Total	**91.0**	**1.3**	**6.3**	**1.4**	**90.6**	**1.3**	**7.7**	**0.4**

Source: https://www.valasztas.hu/valasztasok-szavazasok.

The dominance of the governing parties in this dimension was broken only in large cities, mainly by the formation of special coalitions pretending to be non-partisan in nature (Table 6). In the larger cities with county rights, the number of independent parties has declined and the involvement of joint or separate coalitions of parties and NGOs to win seats has become more pronounced, although these electoral coalition formats have little to do with genuine social organisations.

Table 6: Proportion of mandates of the cities with county rank, by type of nominating organisation, 2010–2019

	2010	2014	2019
Independent parties	45.6	16.4	3.7
Coalitions of parties	44.4	65.5	53.2
Parties' and social organisations' alliances	5.6	15.0	23.5
Independent social organisations	3.3	1.4	18.9
Coalitions of social organisations	0.2	0.6	–
Other (independent)	0.9	1.1	0.7
Total	**100.0**	**100 0**	**100.0**

Source: Own calculation based on data of BM OVI, 2010; 2014; 2019.

The data for cities with county rights however show significant volatility, as the 65% FIDESZ-KDNP mandate advantage in this category of municipalities in 2014 was reduced to 48% in 2019.[8] In the Budapest capital and county assemblies, the share of seats won independently has also decreased, while the share of party and civil coalitions has increased (see Table 7).

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8   The voters of the cities with county rights do not vote for the lists of the county assemblies, so the support of FIDESZ outside the capital and the county capitals is less prevalent at the level of small municipalities.

Table 7: Proportion of mandates of the Budapest and County Assemblies, by type of nominating organisation, 2010–2019

	2010	2014	2019
Independent parties	36.5	39.5	26.3
Coalitions of parties	61.6	59.3	68.8
Parties' and social organisations' alliances	–	–	3.4
Independent social organisations	1.9	1.0	1.1
Coalitions of social organisations	-	0.2	–
Other (independent)	–	–	0.5
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: Own calculation based on data of BM OVI, 2010; 2014; 2019.

The results show a clear dominance of the governing parties (Kákai – Pálné, 2021). The proportions can be followed over time in the following table, which, with the exception of the cities with county rights, gives an accurate picture of the not particularly volatile party preference in the countryside over the past decade (see Table 8).

Table 8: County list election results, 2010–2019

	2010	2014	2019
Proportion of municipalities where Fidesz did not win	2.4	3.2	1.4
Proportion of municipalities where Fidesz earned close victory (relative difference of votes <50%)	6.6	10.3	4.4
Proportion of municipalities where Fidesz earned landslide victory (relative difference of votes >100%)	79.1	69.9	87.1

Source: https://www.valasztas.hu/valasztasok-szavazasok.

Only the capital city Budapest can be considered an exception, where opposition parties won 18 of the 33 seats up for grabs in 2019, not only winning the election for mayor, but also a majority in the capital's assembly. However, the results of the parliamentary elections held in April 2022 show that neither in the capital nor in the larger cities, where the opposition still had the upper hand in 2019, could the expansion of FIDESZ be prevented, with opposition candidates on average 12 percentage points worse off than in the 2018 parliamentary elections. The by-elections held in 2022 confirm this trend, with only 12 opposition or independent candidates winning at elections for mayor and representatives held in around seventy places.

3.2 Changes and acceptance of the municipal task system

In this chapter we explore the question of how the rearrangement of local government functions has been responded to by the local population and whether this correlates with the size of the municipalities. As mentioned earlier, after 2011, local governments lost control over the management of very important local public affairs (Balázs – Hoffman 2017; Kákai – Vető 2019). The entire system of primary and secondary education, as well as specialised health care facilities, became state-run. The role of local governments has also been reduced in the area of municipal and infrastructural services. The role of the state has become dominant in the provision of energy, water and sewerage, waste management, urban management, road maintenance and local public transport duties. County councils have been deprived of all their public service functions (cultural centres, libraries, museums, archives, etc.), and as compensation, participation in development policy has become almost their only function (Pálné; 2019). The continuous cuts in municipal budgets for public services before 2010 indeed worsened the quality of public services. However, empirical analyses show that the nationalisation of these functions has not contributed to improving quality (ÁROP 2012; KÖFOP 2017; Horváth 2014, 2015).

With the nationalisation of almost the entire range of public human services, the right of local society, the 'consumers', to control and have a say was also violated. When autonomy and room to manoeuvre is shrinking, on what basis can people place their trust in the local government? Have their interests been damaged by centralisation?

In 2018–2019, the authors of this paper conducted empirical research on how the reform was received by consumers. Can they even tell the difference between who provides the service and whether there is/are significant differences between the state and the municipality as service providers?[9] The results show (Figure 2) that the local community did not perceive any significant change. The opinions of people living in villages did not differ significantly from those of people living in larger settlements. There are only a few areas where people living in villages were more satisfied after nationalisation, which may be explained by the fact that these services were mostly not available locally before.

The majority of respondents see a more important role for local governments in the provision of public services (Figure 3). However, they also recognise that there are some duties that the state has to carry out, so they agree that the division of tasks between the two actors needs to be very carefully implemented.

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9   The primary research was based on a nationwide population questionnaire survey of 1,500 respondents. The sample used for the survey is representative of gender, type of municipality and educational level. The research was carried out in the framework of the project 'KÖFOP-2.1.2-VEKOP-15-2016-00001 Improving public services for good governance'.

There has been a clear negative view on the over-extension of the state and the centralisation of local government functions (see Figure 4).

Figure 2: Since 2011, how do you think the quality of the following services has changed? *(among all respondents and people living in villages)*

Service	all respondents	living in villages
sport services	3.6	3.6
general services (cultural centre, library)	3.6	3.5
nursery	3.5	3.8
kindergarten	3.5	3.7
waste removal	3.5	3.6
peadiatrican	3.5	3.5
health visitor services	3.4	3.6
family assistence and catering	3.4	3.6
general practitioner	3.4	3.5
local social services	3.4	3.6
drinking water supply	3.4	3.5
child food	3.4	3.6
primary school education	3.3	3.4
secondary school education	3.3	3.3
local public transport	3.2	3.1

(scale: 1 much deteriorated — 3 has not changed — 5 much improved)

Source: Based on KÖFOP-2.12.-VEKOP-15-2016-00001 calculation by Kákai, 2019.

Figure 3: Local government or state? *(among all respondents and people living in villages)*

Statement	Respondent group	fully agree	somewhat agree	both agree or disagree	somewhat disagree	fully disagree	does not know, does not answer
Local governments play an important role in providing public serveces	all respondents	54%	29%		15%	1%	
	living in villages	56%	27%		14%	2%	
Local governments can fulfil the task in providing public services better than the state they have more knowledge of local governments	all respondents	48%	29%		18%	3%	
	living in villages	51%	31%		14%	3%	
Some of the services influencing the people's lives should be provided by the state but some of them should not	all respondents	42%	29%		24%	2%	
	living in villages	44%	27%		25%	2%	
The services influencing the poeple's lives must in any case be provided by the state	all respondents	30%	21%	30%	7%	10%	2%
	living in villages	25%	17%	32%	10%	15%	
The services provided by local govenments are usually more expensive than those providid by the state	all respondents	19%	19%	3%	11%	11%	14%
	living in villages	18%	14%	27%	9%	17%	15%

Source: Based on KÖFOP-2.12.-VEKOP-15-2016-00001 calculation by Kákai, 2019.

Figure 4: Local government or state? (*among all respondents and people living in villages*)

		fully agree	somewhat agree	both agree or disagree	somewhat disagree	fully disagree	does not know, does not answer
The question of what tasks can be better fulfilled by the local governments and which ones by the state should thoroughly be examined	all respondents	58%	26%	14%	1%		
	living in villages	60%	23%	14%	1%		
Local governments should be given more money to provide local services	all respondents	53%	25%	15%	4%		
	living in villages	56%	26%	13%	3%		
The contribution of the local governments in public services muts be maintained	all respondents	44%	30%	19%	4%		
	living in villages	50%	26%	18%	4%		
NGOs should be given a bigger share in providing local services	all respondents	26%	26%	24%	8%	10%	6%
	living in villages	22%	25%	26%	9%	11%	7%
It is absolutely the same whether a service is provided by the state or the local government	all respondents	14%	16%	25%	13%	28%	4%
	living in villages	18%	12%	22%	9%	37%	2%
It is all right that the state has taken over the task of providing services from the local government	all respondents	11%	18%	29%	13%	24%	5%
	living in villages	11%	17%	27%	10%	29%	6%

Source: Based on KÖFOP-2.12.-VEKOP-15-2016-00001 calculation by Kákai, 2019.

The Likert scale analysis showed that centralisation, the ubiquitous role of the state, has a very small support base (2%). Half of citizens (49%) would clearly put the provision of everyday services in the hands of local governments. Among people with a university or college degree, there is a clear majority (62%) in favour of local government, but the proportion of those in favour and those who are not is evenly balanced in other education groups. There was no significant degree of clear 'pro-government' stance in any group. A similar pattern can be seen in the breakdown by the type of municipality: there is a clear predominance of support for local government among those living in cities with county rank and in villages (55–55%), while in the capital and cities the proportion of those who support the local government and those who are swinging is balanced. There is no significant support for centralisation at any level of municipality (see Figure 5).

Previous research[10] has also concluded that people prefer local governments to organise public services. In 2013, when asked which provider they trusted most, local governments came out on top (52%), compared to public, private, civil society and church providers. Also in 2017, around 30% of respondents agreed that the state had taken over institutions from local authorities, with people particularly demanding local government involvement in human services (ÁROP 2012–2013; KÖFOP 2016–2019).

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10 Results of a questionnaire survey of a representative sample of 1,500 people each time, in two periods (2012–2013 and 2017–2018).

Figure 5: Local Government or state?

|	pro local government	wavering	pro central government	non-detectable
All THE PEOPLE ASKED	49%	47%	2%	
EDUCATION				
Primary level at most	42%	49%	4%	5%
Skilled worker	46%	50%	2%	
Secondary school	49%	47%	2%	
Diploma	62%	36%	1%	
AGE GROUPS				
18-29 years	44%	50%	2%	
30-39 years	54%	41%	3%	
40-49 years	47%	51%	1%	
50-59 years	48%	46%	2%	
60 years and more	50%	45%	3%	
ACTIVITY GROUPS				
Active	49%	47%	2%	
Retired	51%	44%	3%	
Other inactive	44%	50%	1%	
SETTLEMENT TYPE				
Capital	42%	48%	5%	5%
County seats	55%	44%	1%	
Other towns	43%	53%	2%	
Villages	55%	41%	2%	

Source: Based on KÖFOP-2.12.-VEKOP-15-2016-00001 calculation by Kákai, 2019.

3.3. NGOs in public services

The state has not only reorganised public services with regard to local authorities, but also for other actors, including non-profit organisations. With the new act on NGOs in 2011, the governments have not only changed their legal standing, but their roles as well. Since significant government task centralisation has primarily been implemented in the area of human public services, the civil society sector, which plays a role in this area, also found itself in a new position (Kákai 2019).[11] Organisations involved in the provision of public services have somewhat different characteristics than the civil society sector as a whole (see Figure 6). They include a higher proportion of employing organisations, a higher proportion of organisations with a public benefit status and a higher proportion of organisations with significant revenue. However, in addition to more intensive employment, volunteering also plays a larger than average role in their activities, and public subsidies account for the majority of their income, right because of their active involvement in public services.

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11 In a full survey of data from 2012 (Sebestény 2015), local governments mentioned a total of only 340 foundations and 768 associations, i.e. 1,108 NGOs nationwide with which they had a contractual relationship for such purposes. This is significantly less than in the previous period. In 1996, 338 municipalities had contracts with 900 non-profit organisations. By 2000, 632 municipalities had contracts with 1,666 non-profit organisations. Finally, the 2004 municipal data collection reported 752 municipalities contracting with 2,666 NGOs to perform public duties (Kákai, 2019: 63).

Figure 6: Key indicators of the sector involved in the provision of public services, 2011–2016
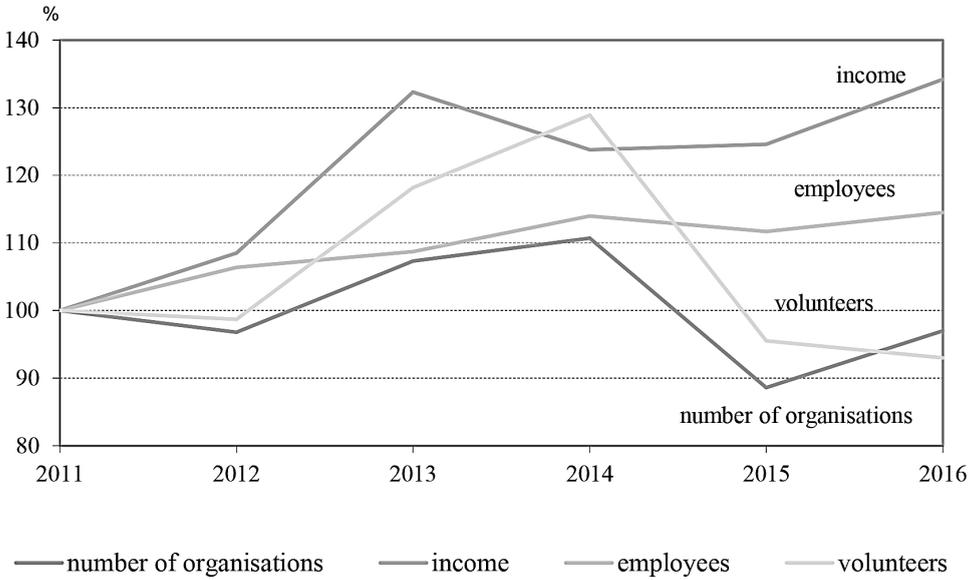
Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) data from 2011–2016, own calculation

Figure 7: Number of organisations involved in the provision of public services based on organisation type, public benefit status and relations with local governments, 2011–2016
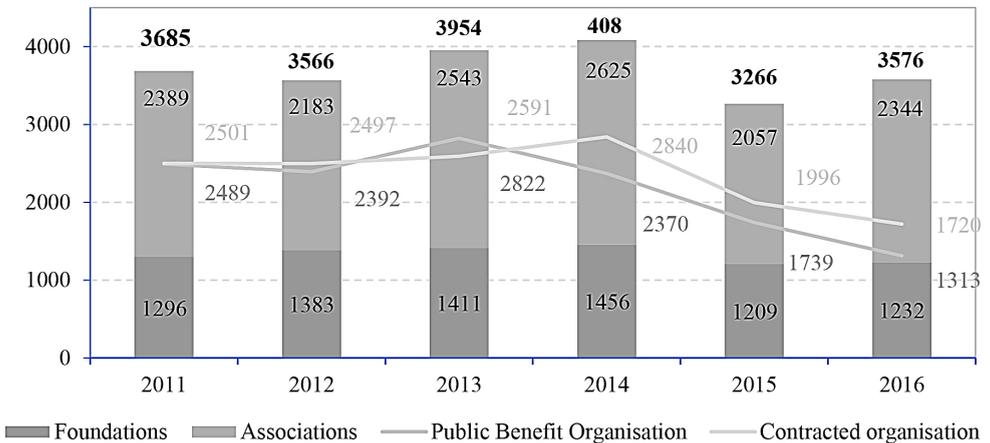
Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) data from 2011–2016, own calculation

The ups and downs in the number of organisations is closely correlated with government measures. The nationalisation of public services has not favoured the expansion of organisations involved in the provision of public services (Kákai 2018: 61), which is reflected in the dramatic decline in the number of foundations and associations contracted to perform public tasks (see Figure 7).

3.4. Conflicts during a pandemic

Empirical research conducted during the pandemic confirmed that the role of local governments was side-lined by the government, although they played a crucial role in local crisis management (Finta et al. 2020a).

The municipalities were generally successful in fulfilling the tasks assigned to them by the central government. The community leaders considered their own performance to be appropriate, many were dissatisfied with the level of state aid or its absence and the lack of money proved to be the main limiting factor.

On the one hand, the resources of local governments were cut because of the epidemic, and on the other hand no supplementary funds were provided for the additional tasks. In addition to budget cuts, a further problem was that the vast majority of municipalities had no mobilisable reserves of their own (Finta et al. 2020b).

The settlements identified as the other major problem the lack of information and trust, which was more evident in the cities (Table 9).

Table 9: The basic limits of municipal defence work (rated on a scale of 1 to 5)

	in all settlements	in towns	in municipalities
shortage of money	3,1	3,4	2,9
lack of information	2,7	3,1	2,2
lack of trust	2,0	2,3	1,8
lack of expertise	1,8	1,9	1,7
shortage of human capacity	1,7	1,7	1,8
lack of legal authorization	1,6	1,8	1,5

Source: Telephone questionnaire survey April-May 2020[12]

In the period following these empirical research efforts, the situation did not improve in the following waves of the pandemic either. Cuts in local revenues and chronic lack of information became commonplace, and cooperation with

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12 The backbone of the empirical research was a telephone survey covering 44 municipalities. Nineteen questions were formulated for the leaders of towns and municipalities with different population sizes, different spatial roles and a representation of the country's settlement structure and settlement characteristics.

the central government was also hampered by political differences. The financial situation of municipalities, especially the larger cities, had deteriorated further, with the loss of important local revenues (tourism, vehicle taxes). To make up for the lost revenue, the government started to negotiate with municipalities one by one, and deals rather than transparent agreements were reached, heavily penalising the larger municipalities, mostly led by the opposition.

IV. Conclusion, discussion

This rapid and profound transformation of the local government system in Hungary was not just a manifestation of the constraints of the economic crisis, but a deliberate strategy prepared by the government. Clearly, negative changes in democratic political systems in many places (Ágh 2014) have strongly influenced attitudes towards local governments. The government has given what was considered a rational public policy response to the problems that have been plaguing the local government system since 1990, and has also settled the issue of centralisation and decentralisation that has existed since the transition to democracy in favour of the former. However, it is difficult to draw the line between forcing municipalities to manage finances rationally and eliminating their autonomy. If the well-being and satisfaction of the people depend on local governments, their underfunding becomes a political liability. The Hungarian model of governance is increasingly characterised by competition for power between different levels and the shifting of responsibility. For decades, the share of local governments from public expenditure has been declining, while the range of local government functions has remained unchanged or even increased. However, after 2010 the range of functions has been greatly decreased. The position of the central government has significantly improved over the local governments; however, it is also apparent that centralisation failed to bring about the prevalence of public consumer interests that has been expected and promised (Kákai 2021) and contributed to degradation.

When interpreting the data, it should also be taken into consideration that neither election results, nor voter opinion on public services, nor the strength of civil society cooperation provide a solid basis for local government as a model of territorial governance. To put it like this: the values of self-governance and decentralisation have not been supported enough by society. Note that social perceptions of self-governance in the CEE region were by no means uniform and easy to interpret (Swianiewicz 2001).

Government action and legislative steps taken since the government's landslide parliamentary election victory in 2022 do not forecast a positive turnaround for municipalities. The question arises as to whether local governments, in a much weaker position of power than in the past, can play an integrating role in society at all, or whether they will function in the future as subordinate

agents of the central will, as local states. It is certain that the autonomy of local governments will not be strengthened in the medium term, that the scope of their powers will not be extended, and that their dependence on government resources and connections will remain high. The very significant regional and municipal differences in living conditions and the quality of public services differentiate the rooms to manoeuvre available to local governments and, of course, public satisfaction. It can be assumed that, in the longer term, dissatisfaction with local living conditions will also undermine, or at least strongly differentiate, confidence in local government. So there is no expected positive outlook either for local government room to manoeuvre, autonomy or satisfaction with public services.

The question is whether the role of local government is shifting away from public services towards local community organisation and advocacy, which could provide some counterweight in a governance and political system with strong hegemonic features. It is possible, however, that trust or dependency on government will be stronger in relation to local government. Even with a stronger local embeddedness, it is not certain that they can succeed in gaining greater influence over central public policy decisions that determine local development and quality of life, but without it, the only option is patriarchal dependency. In centralised, shrinking political arenas, local politics may become not simply second-rate but irrelevant.

Our results show that people do not base their trust in local government solely on local government performance and satisfaction with public services, since the quality of services was not perfect when local government was maintained, but they still preferred the local government. People prefer access and proximity more than who provides the service, especially if they do not perceive a significant improvement in quality or access. Surely, we are not far wrong to claim that local government is in a sense itself a source of value for people. The fact that Hungarian society already favours the governing parties in local elections may be a well-perceived pragmatic interest.

Based on the electoral behaviour, the attrition of the opposition parties, the question remains open: whose interest is local government, who are the allies of local government? Is there a social and political alternative against centralisation in the long term?

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László Kákai graduated from Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest in 1994 with a degree in sociology and in 1995 with a degree in political science. In 2004, he obtained a PhD in Political Science, and in 2009 he habilitated. In 2016 he was appointed professor by the President of the Republic of Hungary. He is the Director of the Institute of Social Relations at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Pécs and Head of the Department of Political Science and International Studies. E-mail: kakai.laszlo@pte.hu

Ilona Pálné Kovács is a research professor of the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies in Hungary and she is a full-time professor at the Department for Political and International Studies of University of Pécs. She was elected as a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2013 and Academia Europaea in 2019. Her scientific interests are local, regional governance and regional policy, management of local public s having hundreds of books and scientific articles. E-mail: palne.kovacs.ilona@krtk.hu

Ostalgy in Flux? Transformations of the concept reflected in the case of (East) Germany[1]

PETR KÖRFER

Abstract: *The contribution focuses on the origin, genesis and transformation of (n)ostalgy in the new German Bundesländer. It focuses on the political-ideological, life biography, societal and economic frame of ostalgy and presents this phaenomenon as a general East-Central European feature. Later, it specifically analyses the East German case presenting and analysing the uniqueness of this case. The intra-German discourse is used as the main shape for such analysis, and the bipolarisation of the discourse and the stereotypes used. In the last analytical part we present the transmission of ostalgic supporters of the successor Party of Democratic Socialism towards the new radical party Alternative for Germany, showing the overlap of ostalgy as the socio-economic and ideo-political background with the new forms of anti-liberal and nativist stances.*

Key Words: *nostalgia; ostalgy; post-Communism; East Germany; counter-cosmopolitanism*

I.   Introduction

When I started thinking about the (n)ostalgy phaenomenon, I began with the heuristic research at one of the e-portals offering books. Using the keywords 'nostalgy' and 'East Germany', I got a few hundred matches showing the significance of the issue. Furthermore, about forty of the first matches offered dozens of diaries rising from the nostalgic reflection of the former GDR. Among these 'Ossi Kalender' (Eastern diaries) we can find among others titles such as

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'Stolzer Ossi' (proud East German) or 'Held der Arbeit' (Hero of the Labour), a majority of them study the milestones of East-German history, the national holidays, birthdays of the leading persons of the Communist regime, as well as other important anniversaries related to the existence of the communist East and international labour movement history.

Naturally, it would be possible to snub these diaries – as well as many other artefacts and relics related to the communist past of East Germany – referencing to the marketing and pop-art nature of such an 'article' which might be compared with the marketing use of Latin American revolutionist Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. On the other hand, we have to mention that in motion since 1990 in the post-communist states of East-Central Europe – and even more in the reunified Federal Republic of Germany – is a distinctive de-communisation related with processes such as lustration, digitalisation and declassification of the archives of the former secret police (Stasi) and *de iure* denial of the GDR as a sovereign state. For example, Helmut Fehr (2016: 56–58) stresses the terms 'Niemandsland' (nobodies land) or 'Unrechtsstaat' (lawlessness state) reflecting the recent perception of the GDR in the German official discourse.

In the German public and political debate, it is an unquestionable and proven fact that the political regime of the GDR was totalitarian and criminal, many critics compare the regime with the national-socialist totalitarianism between 1933 and 1945, labelling it as the 'Stasiland' (Funder 2011). Indeed, while the Nazi period is fully and completely considered repulsive and legally, politically and medially constantly condemned, in the case of the communist dictatorship and its perception the situation is distinctively different. At least by some societal groups the GDR-period is considered specifically 'retro' and related to the selected products, including the promo-campaigns (Lieder 2020). Often, the GDR-period is distinctively idealised and the alleged partially positive aspects of the East German regime and East German everyday reality are placed in the opposition against the alleged or real deficiencies of the Federal Republic. Thus, the reflection of the existence and history of the GDR became the specific form of nostalgy, rooted in the specific construction of the collective memory.

In this contribution, I focus on the recent development of the (n)ostalgic discourse in Germany as well as the broader East-Central European region, and the development regarding the scholarly discussion about the (n)ostalgy. I focus primarily on the transformation of ostalgy into the amalgamised form of doctrine and conviction combining the constructed myth about the pre-1989 past with other impulses related to both the older legacies (among others, nativism) as well as the recent forms of counter-globalism. Specifically, I assume that ostalgy as the phaenomenon related specifically to the generations that grew up before 1989 is continually turning to new forms of a radical or even an extremist form of political opposition against the liberal-democratic regimes (in my case specifically against the regime in Germany). Such analysis

is embedded in the general debate on the polarisation of Western societies in the last decade(s).

II.   Ostalgy – genesis and scope of the concept

After more than four decades of non-democratic reality, the transition towards democracy and liberal market economy in the late 1980s and 1990s brought about a truly radical transformation. Such a reversal presented for many of the individuals and social groups not primarily new opportunities, but the loss of the up-to-then-achieved security and living standards, and it profoundly changed their existence. Alongside the economic fears, new phenomena such as unemployment, criminality and individualisation (as the opposite of the collectivism promoted by the former regime) were considered the aspects dismantling and undermining the relative – and stressed by communist and post-communist propaganda and its promoters – stability of the real-socialist regimes (Buden 2013: 37; Cox 1996; Kabele 2005: 63).

After 1989, the newly free societies in East-Central Europe found itself without the censorship used by the communist regimes to keep the real problems secret. With censorship, the regimes created in the citizens a fake impression of a trouble-free life in different spheres such as economics, living standard, health, environment or international affairs. With the commencement of democracy and abolition of an information vacuum many people did not endure the reality and started to confirm the fiction that their lives under communism were better (Kabát 2011: 94–95).

The phaenomenon of ostalgy reflects a specific type of nostalgy observed in the post-communist societies in East-Central Europe. 'The word Ostalgie is a noun combined of the German terms "Ost" that is translated as East, and "Nostalgie", which signify nostalgia. It was publicly introduced to the German language in 1993, when the first movements that attested that the significance of East Germany survived in the collective mind of German people were recorded' (Figus – Pisaniello – Mustica 2018: 50).

The content of the term 'ostalgy' is not fully fixed and it depends strongly on the context. It might involve the geographic component, the political label, as well as rejection or acceptance of concrete identity embedded in the 'other' Germany (Blum 2000). Usually, ostalgy is presented as missing specific events and/or artefacts related with everyday life in former communist countries, while omitting the negative components of this past. Hloušková (2014: 43) considers ostalgy as grieving the lost idyll of one's own childhood and youth influenced by communism interconnected with the fascination by the socio-realist objects, products, lifestyle or free-time activities. 'Ostalgia can be defined as a romantic idea about what has passed, it is "memory", and it is understandable (maybe not in all justifiable). Let's always remember that every man (generally) nos-

talgically remembers his past and the citizens of East Germany, have no other' (Figus – Pisaniello – Mustica 2018: 57).

Presenting also an important component of the political life and political expression of its proponents, ostalgy became a distinctive issue in social sciences. Historians often focus on everyday life during the Communist period searching for embedded reasons for the positive reflection of the regime which, by evidence, was anti-liberal and violent. In this sense the historical sociology specifically reflects the ideological influence the Communist regime associated with strengthening the interpersonal ties within the regime-controlled communities (recreation stays organised by the labour unions) and the specific focus on the education and upbringing of the children and youth (political organisations, summer camps), as well as backing leisure time activities (camping and other types of organised hobbies) (Franc 2008; Franc 2015: 27–28; Rychlík 2015, 37–39).

Also considered highly influential was the dissemination of the official ideology through the culture. Specifically, movies and TV series were able to address the wide public – firstly with the historical themes reflected in the communist perspective and clear propagandist frame, and later with the hidden propaganda aimed at everyday life (Machek 2013: 65–73). Also Machonin and Tuček (1996: 337) agree that alongside politicians, marketing and media play an important role in the creation and capitalisation of ostalgy. As regards marketing, businessmen use so-called 'retro' editions and there is a return of 'traditional' products. Nevertheless, the most important share in maintaining the ostalgic frame of mind in society is produced by the media, should it be in the form of the never-ending repetition of TV series, movies and shows from the Communist period, or placing new movies into the setting of real socialism (Hloušková 2014: 46–47). The retro style develops in social networks, dance parties, design and fashion.[2] Symbols of the Communist regime and everyday life in socialism are also used in tourism, in merchandising or museum management (for example the so-called GDR museums in several East-German cities). 'The phenomenon of Ostalgie revolves around expression through cultural artefacts, such as TV shows, return of GDR products and objects of consumption; and Internet sites that sell memorabilia. Moreover, the years Sixty and Seventy are represented through material culture, counting furniture, wallpaper and outdated technology, and etc. etc' (Figus – Pisaniello – Mustica 2018: 53).

As mentioned, the phenomenon of ostalgy became an important issue in social sciences with growing importance. This growing interest is related to the visible electoral results of political actors promoting the alleged positive sides

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2   As one of the first symbolic expressions, the East German traffic light figures for pedestrians (*Ampelmänchen*) might be mentioned, also the Trabi-clubs, parties with the East German fashion style, shops with the GDR-products, as well as the high popularity of former East German radio stations and music (Sierp 2009: 49).

of the pre-transitive period, as well as with the search for the correlation of the ostalgy 'wave' with the polycrisis after 2008 (economic, migration, pandemic, Russian war against Ukraine). Furthermore, along with the initial shape of ostalgy the research also focuses on the changes and transmutations generated by the new actors and new perspectives using and developing the ostalgic strategies. On one hand we are searching for the distinctive similarities of ostalgy in partial post-communist societies, on the other we can observe the 'national' paths. For example, in Czechia ostalgy has been linked to the persistence of a relatively strong and stable and only weakly-reformed Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Cabada 2015), but it is assumed that after the electoral failure of the party in 2021 (Popálený – Cabada 2022) the ostalgic frame will bring about an important cleavage in the society. Such a multi-faceted form corresponds with the general concepts of nostalgy examined as a political factor. For example, Ekman a Linde (2005: 356) differentiated four analytical frames of nostalgy – the political-ideological, life biography, societal and economic; some authors connect the latter two into one, socio-economic (Sierp 2009: 48).

Basically, there is agreement that the former GDR is a specific case in post--communist societies. While these societies underwent long – and in many ways still unfinished – transformation, the new *Bundesländer* were included into the Federal Republic of Germany less than one year after the beginning of the autumn revolt in 1989. In a much faster and much more intensive manner than any other post-communist nation, East Germans were swallowed by Western capitalism, goods, living values and norms. Indeed, after a few years the enthusiasm for re-unification cooled down. The East Germans continually got the feeling that their identity, history and national pride were being stolen. Compared with West Germany, they started to feel like second-rate citizens (Hloušková 2014: 44). The disillusion and frustration from the development after 1989 and the growing desire after the return to the former way of life brought about a new societal phaenomenon – the ostalgy – manifesting itself in a sentimental reflection on everyday life before the change and disregarding the awkward events and nature of the real-socialist regime (Buden 2013: 245).

Similarly, we can observe the so-called Yugo-nostalgia (Boškovič 2013; Muranovic 2019), which is based in cultural, economic and political patterns. In culture it refers to the mutual music or film tradition, in economics to the relative Yugoslav prosperity compared with the recent economic problems of several post-Yugoslav nations, and in the political sphere above-all in the idolising admiration for the grounder of socialist Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito (Dizdarević 2002). In a similar way we also have nostalgy for the Soviet Union (USSR), which after all became a significant part of the USSR's image created by the Russian president Vladimir Putin.

In the Russian/Soviet case (and others), we can at least partly interconnect ostalgy with the concept of *homo sovieticus*, developed in economy, sociology

and anthropology, and specifically portraying the passive individual depending on often weak, but general social services, promoting the paternalist state and adhering to conservative, anti-liberal and authoritarian values and politics. Nevertheless, ostalgy cannot be synonymised with *homo sovieticus*. Furthermore, some authors present a different opinion regarding the value system of these sociotypes. For example, Marody (2010: 80) notes that 'it is unclear what kind of values might be regarded as specific for *homo sovieticus*. One can even say that an important element of its definition is the lack of values rather than the presence of any specific moral standards' (Marody 2010: 80). The author further mentioned the sociological assumption that 'each system moulds people's characteristics, both on the level of cognition and on the level of behavioural dispositions. It does so by triggering processes of individual adjustment to the rationale of general structural qualities of systemic reality. In such a perspective *homo sovieticus* would be a kind of Weberian ideal type or just a shortening for those characteristics of people living under the communist regime' (Marody 2010: 80).

Tischner assumes that *homo sovieticus* is not primarily the product of the Communist regime, but the opposite – the customer searching for real or at least rhetorical profits offered by the Communist regime such as equality, financial egalitarianism, conformity or security (Marody 2010: 81–84). *Homo sovieticus* is 'a type of person who lived on communism and, owing everything to that system, became addicted to it. With the collapse of communism s/he became deprived of his/her "natural environment". Therefore, s/he has been unable to live under new democratic and liberal system, longed for the "old, good times" and attempted to "escape from freedom" by shifting the responsibility for his/her own life onto the authorities' (Tischner 2005, in Marody 2010: 84). In my opinion, such an examination of 'ostalgic' *homo sovieticus* is in full concordance with the de-mythicisation of the sort of 'USSR cult' offered up by the Belarussian winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature Svetlana Alexievich in her book *Secondhand Time* (2017). Similarly, another Nobel Prize winner, the German-Romanian writer Herta Müller considers the damaging nature of real-socialist regimes as producing value-less, unscrupulous and shallow individuals (for example) in *The Fox Was Ever the Hunter* (Müller 1994).

III. Specifics of ostalgy in the former GDR

As mentioned, the post-communist transformation in East-Germany was in many aspects different from other post-communist societies. As Pryce-Jones (1996: 222) notes, one of the important specifics was the practically continuous and damaging dictatorship from the beginning of the 1930s, i.e., the continuity between nazi and communist totalitarianism. Such a negative perception of the GDR belonged to the narrative developed in West Germany. It created

a fear in the West that the 'GDR could become an instantiation of German "authoritarian traditions" that threatened a return of dictatorial terror to Germany" (Boyer 2006: 369). After the re-unification, such a perception was linked to the reflection of the Nazi regime within the complex discourse of 'past burden' (*Vergangenheitsbelastung*).

The nations in the Eastern Block considered the West as the 'other', and those who did not accept the hypocrisy of real socialist regimes considered the West as their 'dream'. Specifically, for the East Germans such a positive view of the West was narrowed. As Ahbe (2018b) noted, when they still belonged to the *Second World* they acquired the comparison with the *First World* from Western TV. Some of them got the experience at Balaton Lake or on the beach by Varna that even an unemployed West German person or a student enjoys a better living standard than the typical GDR-citizen. Based on this perception, it is not surprising that West Germany became the symbol of paradise for an important part of East Germans. 'By the spring of 1990, a new slogan had taken hold: *Kommt die D-Mark, bleiben wir, kommt sie nicht, geh'n wir zu ihr*! (If we get the Deutsche Mark, we'll stay, if we don't, we'll come get it). The last part of the slogan referred on the threat of mass emigration from the GDR to escape economic misery. In the East German election campaigns of 1990, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) offered an obvious way forward: quick reunification and, *en route*, economic and monetary union with West Germany' (Ther 2020: 37).

The extremely positive view of West Germany and the re-unification idea was also reflected in public opinion surveys. Half a year before unification 61% of Eastern Germans felt more German than Eastern German. Nevertheless, only two years later, by 1992, these figures had reversed: only 35% identified themselves as German and 60% as Eastern German. Such decline for the preference of 'single-German' identity was continually sinking and in 1999 only one out of five inhabitants in the new *Bundesländer* said they felt like a citizen of the unified Germany (Sierp 2009: 50). A majority of the main reasons for such regression in the support for the 'single-German' identity are definitely related to the alienation of new citizens in the unified Germany.

Among these reasons, often the economic and developmental 'misery' in East Germany is mentioned in the first place, also related with the dramatic intra-German migration from the East to the West. 'By the mid-1990s, industrial production in eastern Germany had dropped to 27 per cent of its 1988 level. No other post-communist country, not even war-torn Bosnia and Herzegovina, saw a comparably dramatic decline. As a result, 1.4 million people from the new *Länder* left their homes by 1994. This number corresponded almost exactly to that on newly established business in Czechoslovakia... In Poland and Hungary, too, many people started their own businesses... In the GDR, the number of newly founded businesses was significantly lower' (Ther 2020: 41). High unemployment figures, an increasing social gap and difficulties in adapting to

a market economy, made people tend to not only look towards the future but also back to the past (Sierp 2009: 49).

So far, this situation did not fundamentally change. The catching up and the levelling-up is still only partial, as the regularly reports and analyses show: 'The biggest remaining differences fell under the heading of lower gross domestic product per capita; few cities like Jena and Leipzig were able to match the economic power of West German regions... In terms of GDP per capita, East Germany is miles ahead of most of the transition regions in central and eastern Europe, and indeed many southern regions of the EU' (Leggewie 2020: 53; 56).

Compared with other post-communist nations, in the East German case we have to stress the weakening and even deconstruction of the social group often understood as the most important pillar of democratic society – the middle class. Alongside this group, also the (real or constructed) elite was destabilised. Only shortly after the fall of the Communist regime, the GDR was included in the political, societal, economic and value system of West Germany, and the old East--German elites, specialists and managers were removed and replaced by West Germans. Such discontinuity is unique and cannot be compared to any other post-communist society (Ahbe 2009; Hogwood 2001). 'The professional group that suffered the least were civil servants... Through the monetary union, and the expansion of collective wage agreements... eastern German civil servants saw their salaries climb substantially' (Ther 2020: 41).

Regardless of the clear significance of the above-mentioned socio-economic upheaval, the most negative impulse to the birth and strengthening of ostalgy was the loss of one's own identity, associated with the construction of the new image of East Germany as *Niemandstaat*. As Figus, Pisaniello and Mustica (2018: 56) pointed out, demonisation of GDR history led to the mental confusion and shouting for roots and essence. Furthermore, the full denial of the East German history and identity produced a strong negative emotion of needlessness of East Germany which is also recently reflected more or less as the anomaly (Novotný 2019: 10).

It is understandable that the ostalgic response to such stimulus was much stronger in the new *Bundesländer* than in the majority of post-communist societies. The East Germans began to contend with the feeling of loss and dislocation. They found themselves in an unknown society with alien rules, values and hierarchies. They began to feel in unified Germany like 'immigrants who were expected to integrate into a society they did not know and that did not welcome them' (Blum 2000: 230). Continually, it became visible that the initial social differences and mentality among the West and East Germans are much bigger than originally expected (Stone 2017). Such disparity produced the creation of new stereotypes (or strengthening of older ones). The West Germans considered the East Germans burdensome, mocking their disorderly consumption, lack of temperance or desire to catch up. East Germans were often seen as the poor

brothers and sisters, underdeveloped, hopelessly old-fashioned and uncivilised (Merkel 2006). To the major disappointment of East Germans, the expected change did not bring about the 'capitalist paradise', but an extremely competitive society they were not accustomed to, with high unemployment, low salaries and the feeling of being second-rate citizens. All this created a situation where an important part of East German society still believes that 'everything was better back when everything was worse' (Archer 2018, Figus – Pisanuello – Mustica 2018; Stone 2017).

Ostalgy became an important part of the recent societal debates in Germany, including cultural expression. Alongside the Wolfgang Becker movie *Good Bye, Lenin* (2003) several other films should be mentioned (Ziegengeist 2011). And a similar situation might be observed in other artistic branches. In literature, the name Thomas Brussig became a flagship (Brussig 2002, 2003, 2008). Specifically, we should mention the books produced by GRIN-Verlag, the publishing house with a rich production of books focusing on GDR history and the phaenomenon of ostalgy. All this is framed with the continually (re-)constructed label 'ostalgy' and the specific form of collective memory and identity, and imagined community (Anderson 1983; Cabada – Walsch et al 2019).

Ostalgy was also continually developed as an important strategy of social identification not only in new *Bundesländer*, but also in West Germany. The East Germans produced the Auto- and Stereotypes, but so did the (West)German politics, public discourse and media. As Boyer (2006: 371) commented, the 'West Germans need the figure of the cryptoauthoritarian, introverted *Jammerossi* (whiny Eastie) to legitimate their claims to a more cosmopolitan Germanness. East Germans likewise need the cryptoauthoritarian, extroverted *Besserwessi* (*arrogant Westie*) to legitimate their own sense of themselves as gentler, kinder Germans'. Proceeding from de-constructivist and post-colonial attitudes, Boyer proposes reversing the general logic and argument and thinking and talking in the German case rather about the *Westalgie*, i.e., the nostalgy after West Germany (without the problematic East Germans), alternatively about *Nostomania* as a specific form of obsession by the East German 'syndrome' that grows through German society and is questioned by the *Westalgie* (Boyer 2006: 379–380).

Based on such imagination, we do not share the somewhat astonished reflection expressed by Sierp (2009: 47–48), who observed that twenty years after the Berlin Wall fall we can notice a 'certain kind of nostalgia for the communist past expressing itself not only in opinion polls and political discourse but also in art and a renewed attachment to certain material objects'. As the author concludes, these objects we continually made stronger as the 'symbols of resistance to Western-style consumerism and a global competitive environment' (Sierp 2009: 51). Surely, such a positive self-perception, as well as the criticism against the 'West' might be seen also as a sign of frustration. In this sense we should not forget that the East German identity in the four decades

after World War II was designed as the *Trotzidentität*, i.e., the identity based on defiance (Sierp 2009: 50).

The impression of un-rootedness of the inhabitants living in the new *Bundesländer* is also strengthened by the matter of fact that Germany is still divided into the 'West German managers and their East German subordinates, the West German lessors and East German lodgers, the West German generals and high-rank officers and East German non-commissioned officers and soldiers…' (Ahbe 2018b: 19). Such negative emotion was not weakened by the matter of fact that politicians with East German origin occupied the most important positions in the executive – the long-term Chancellor Angela Merkel, as well as the Federal President Joachim Gauck. Paradoxically, these politicians were often presented as followers of the 'West German mainstream' that ignores the needs and appeals coming from the East.

Ahbe (2018b: 19) particularly stresses the role of German media, which the East German stances either do not display, or if they do only as problematic and unacceptable. This seems to be one of the important incentives for the deep mistrust of the inhabitants in the new *Länder* towards the 'untruthful public press' (*Lügenpresse*), as well as falling in with conspiracy theories. Specifically, the critics stress the clear disbalance where the West German perspective solely creates the stereotypes of both the West and the East.[3] In other words, mistrust towards the media and general public discourse stems from the matter of fact that the image of East Germany is produced and established only from the Western mainstream. As Boyer (2006: 374–376) pointed out, even the 'flagship' artistic representation of the transition towards democracy in the GDR and re-unification of Germany – the movie *Good Bye, Lenin* – is authored by artists without East German identity; the scriptwriter and director Wolfgang Becker originates from Westphalia, the co-scriptwriter from Cologne. And the nostalgic magazine *Super Illu* is produced by the Bavarian publisher Burda Verlag, punchlines Boyer.

As a result of such development (and also self-perception), 'the status quo is a widespread feeling of alienation, which has become all the more entrenched in recent years in spite of advances in material wellbeing and social cohesion; and this feeling will be difficult to address through social-political redistribution. While infrastructure in the East German states has improved greatly, a subjective feeling of second-class citizenship is rife, as some areas really have been left behind in terms of healthcare, entertainment facilities, digital connectivity and offline shopping opportunities' (Leggewie 2020: 56). The author calls this situation 'welfare-state-centred passivity'.

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3   'The initiatives of the East German citizens' movement in democratic politics were largely ignored; the post-communist left struck anti-western postures and preached a socialist tradition which had never been practiced in the GDR… in the East of the country a national-neutral outlook persisted, as did a Russophilia unruffled by Vladimir Putin's aggressive policies' (Leggewie 2020: 51).

IV. From PDS and Die Linke to the AfD

The concluding sentence from the previous section brings us to the 'purely' political expression of ostalgy. Again, the development in (East) Germany might be understood as unique in the East-Central European region, maybe with the exception of the Czech Republic and the long-term presence and activities of an almost un-reformed Communist Party. In (East) Germany, the role of successor and (n)ostalgic party representing the electorate denying the fundamental changes after 1989 was assumed by the Party of Democratic Socialism (*Partei des demokratischen Sozialismus*, PDS) that continually developed from the former monolithic Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). When we look into the party manifestos, internal organisation, development of the membership base, etc., we can observe the visible focus on the rejection of the change in and after 1989. The PDS acted as the 'regionalist protest party' that advanced ostalgy in the socio-economic, ideological and biographical dimensions (Sierp 2009: 52), and next to the two catch-all parties implemented from the West (the Christian Democratic Union – CDU, and Social Democrats – SPD) she became the stable pillar of the party systems in the new *Bundesländer*. During the 2000s the party started to cooperate with the left-radical splitter party from SPD – The Left (*Die Linke*) and in 2007 both parties merged under the later name. Also *Die Linke* addressed the ostalgic voters and anti-Western attitudes, was egalitarian and counted the votes from dissatisfied voters (Novotný 2019: 205).

Nevertheless, the PDS/Left were continually losing support, and such a decline of support also correlated with the continuous ageing of their members. During the 2010s, the role of the leading protest party with an all-German scope of activity was taken by the new Eurosceptic and later anti-migrant party Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD), established in 2013. As the results of the last parliamentary elections demonstrated, specifically in the new *Bundesländer* (Saxony, Thuringia, southern half of Saxony-Anhalt[4]) we can observe the spill-over effect. Furthermore, alongside the former voters of the PDS/Linke party (and an important share of first-time voters) AfD is also able to address the supporters of radical-right parties and movements.

Based on Iacob, Mark and Rupprecht (2020: 125), for the radical political actors from West Germany, the new *Länder* and the specific electorate became extremely attractive: 'In the reunited Germany of the 1990s, western right-wing groups and figures sought contact with like-minded fellow Germans in the former Democratic Republic. Björn Höcke, today (2020 – quoted by P.K.) a leading figure of the radical, *völkisch* wing of the AfD in Thuringia, had moved from West Germany to become a teacher and political activist in a part of the country he saw as

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4   https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2021/ergebnisse/bund-99.html (8 February 2023).

less tainted by immigration, Americanization, and multiculturalism. Like Höcke in the former GDR, the rising western European populist- and far-right… encouraged eastern Europeans to see themselves as the last true defenders of Europe.'

As Klikauer (2020: 2) stressed in his analyses of AfD onset and internal transformation into the radical and at least partly extremist subject, 'the major socio-economic conflict does no longer appear to be *about* capitalism but *within* capitalism. It sets globalised-neoliberal capitalism against authoritarian-nationalistic capitalism'. Such a notion convenes to the earlier discussion on the new cleavages in (East-)European societies substantiated in the axiological axis about the fundamental principles of liberal democracy. As Rensmann (2012: 77) noted, the new cleavages are structured in three juxtapositions: 1) support of post-national political institutions (for example, EU) vs. opposition to post-national political institutions (for example, EU); 2) free (global) market allocation vs. economic redistribution or protectionism; 3) liberal-cosmopolitan values and recognition of cultural diversity (secularism) vs. authoritarian conformism, social cohesion and cultural homogeneity (including clericalism).

Klikauer (2020: 3–4) labels the opposition against the liberal-democratic principles the conservative reactionary politics and culture war; Tucker (2020) uses the term 'neo-illiberalism'; Norris and Inglehart (2019), analysing events such as Brexit, the electoral success and performance of Donald Trump and the rise of Orbán-like politicians, use the term 'cultural backlash'. As Leggewie (2020: 49) demonstrates, focusing specifically on the East German case, the 'people in countries of the former Eastern Bloc have become more estranged from the EU, and this sentiment exists in East Germany too, more strongly than in the west of the country. In the former GDR, too, name "Brussels" often inspires a post-colonial aversion, nostalgia for the Deutsche Mark, a yearning for greater representation, a nationalistic reserve'.

As with the Visegrad Group countries, the 'East German defensive reflex was similar to that seen in former Eastern Bloc states' regarding the migration issue in 2015 (Leggewie 2020: 56). Migration became a strong impulse for the appeal of AfD and like-minded actors in Europe to utilise the fear factor in politics: 'Feeling trapped between the fear of declining living standards and an uncertain future as neoliberalism takes hold' (Klikauer 2020: 51).

The following acts of the polycrisis also strengthened the counter-cosmopolitan and nativist nature of the transformed form of ostalgy. The inhabitants of East Germany came to the conviction that they 'suffer an untold loss of social security' and they do not have any chance to equalise their lives with the West German standard. 'There hardened a feeling of not having made it in the new Germany, of not being respected there. *Integriert doch erst mal uns!* (First off, integrate us!) was the title of a 2018 polemic published by a politician who grew up in the GDR, and which spoke to the heart of many "Ossis"' (Leggewie 2020: 53).

All this might explain why the AfD became so successful specifically in the new *Bundesländer*. 'Overall, the AfD has been highly successful in utilising East German resentment against West Germany. For a long time, West Germans have mistreated East Germans as second-class citizens in a *BMW-vs.-Trabbi* contest... The AfD has also been successful in attracting voters who live in rural areas with a low population density... The more rural and the lower the population density, the higher the AfD vote' (Klikauer 2020: 48; Pates – Leser 2021). As the analysis showed, the AfD voters evince important features combining the ostalgy with the general characteristics of anti-liberal and anti-modern social groups. Klikauer (2020: 147nn), discussing the 14 constitutive elements of fascism, observes here the important overwhelming of some of these elements with (n)ostalgy. Specifically, we have to stress the cult of tradition and the rejection of modernity producing the 'romantic-nostalgic hallucinations' (Klikauer 2020: 148).

As Klikauer notes, 'AfD voters are predominantly male and older. The typical East-German AfD voter in the state of Thuringia, for example, lives in a declining region, is male, has not voted before or voted for the NPD' (Klikauer 2020: 49). Such a situation also gets worse due to the continued (e)migration to West Germany, which is causing the even faster eldering of the populations, and paradoxically the abandonment of East Germany opens the door for external actors – migrants. Let us quote: 'The core problem is still the internal migration, above all, of young, well-qualified people from East to West Germany... the population, and especially the working population, is still falling in East German *Länder*, and the average age is rising faster than in the West of the Republic... East Germany is in the grip of a serious labour shortage that cannot be compensated by migrant labour force of latent or acute xenophobia' (Leggewie 2020: 54).

Such a matter of fact would support the sociological assumption that the remnants of the 'old mentality' might be explained by socio-demographic characteristics such as lower education, old age and lower social status. Nevertheless, the 'persistence of some elements of "old mentality"... appears to be a signal of current institutional shortcomings, rather than an indicator of the strength of individual habits' (Marody 2010: 84–85). As Leggewie (2020: 55) precisely summarised, 'the rallying of the *Wütburger* (angry, reactionary citizens) draws its power first and foremost from the passivity or indolence of the majority, and secondly from secret sympathy for the xenophobic movement in bourgeois circles'.

V. Conclusion

As presented, ostalgy is not disappearing in the East-European societies including the new German federal units. As I tried to argue, from the single-issue phaenomenon (ostalgy in East Germany) the concept was developed into the general issue related to the collective memory and identity in post-transitive

societies (Boyer 2006; Clarke – Wölfel, eds. 2011; Cooke 2005; De La Motte – Green 2015; Ekman – Linde 2005; Grieder 2012 ad.). Specifically, after 2008 and in the following set of crises – the polycrisis – the ostalgy-prone parts of the societies in the former East European region began to transform into the mixture of ostalgic and anti-modern values and attitudes. This change allowed the transmission of the fundamental characteristics of ostalgy as political phaenomenon also to younger generations, often born only after the collapse of the real socialist regimes in the Eastern Block.

This trans-generation transfer shows that ostalgy rooted in the psychologically rooted positive perception of the youth of recently elder people cannot be the only explanation of the visible axiological cleavage in post-communist societies, including that of East Germany. Here we have to stress the at least partial overlap of the concepts of ostalgy and *homo sovieticus*. As mentioned, the label *homo sovieticus* is often used 'as a tool of stigmatizing certain deplorable behaviour which resembles behavioural patterns from the Communist period. It has become an equivalent of adjectives such as "unadjusted", "unmodernized" and "conservative". It is applied both in the case of people who explicitly express their nostalgia for at least some features of the Communist system (security, lack of competitiveness), and also in the case of those who accept the new systemic reality, but whose actions and expectations seem rooted in bygone behavioural patterns' (Marody 2010: 89).

When we focus solely on East Germany, such development and transmission was clearly substantiated in the electoral successes of successor parties (PDS, Die Linke) and a shift of the electoral – and general support – to the new radical subjects – Pegida, and above all AfD. Let us stress that Saxony was the only federal unit where this subject won in the last parliamentary elections. As shown, AfD was able to interconnect the ostalgy with old-new nativist concepts and counter-globalism (Holzhauser 2018; Novotný 2019).

A specific feature characterising the East Germany (and East German ostalgy) is the fact that alongside the collapse of the Communist regime the change in and after 1989 was accompanied by the termination of the East German nation and state (Sierp 2009: 48). Maybe such a claim is excessively ultimative, when we consider the similar emotions observable by several collectivist actors with ethno-nationalist features from the vanished federations – the nostalgy after Titos Yugoslavia, the USSR and, in specific epistemic communities, Czechoslovakia (Kipke – Vodička 1993). On the other hand, it presents another dimension of the specific East German (n)ostalgy, the impression of civic and economic inferiority and colonial framing consisted in the transfer of the West German models. In other words, where the other post-communist nations 'painfully stumbled' in the transformation, in the East German case, very directly and unilaterally, 'Bonn' was deciding.

All this seems to be related to East Germany searching for it's own identity and the missing response to the question 'who are we?' As Bieber (2020) notes

in the post-communist societies we often miss the clear response regarding the present day and future. 'Central Europe is post-communist, the western Balkans are post-Yugoslav, post-war, post-socialist; but there is no word to describe what they currently *are*, as if the present remained permanently elusive. The defining feature of these central, eastern and south-eastern parts of Europe is that they are in a place where there is no name for the present' (Bieber 2020: 80–81). As he continues: The 'longing for the past reflects less about history and more about the present. Stark inequalities and poverty partly explain why nostalgia is so strong, but it is the uncertainties of never-ending transformation and crisis that are the driving forces of nostalgia and of disillusionment with the present. Continuous crisis and open-ended transition have created a permanent sense of anxiety which is profoundly destructive for liberal democratic politics' (Bieber 2020: 81–82).

Similarly, Ágh shows that the recent national populist actors in ECE 'champion the politics of past and historical memory, including the (re)construction of historical narratives. The nativists formulated the "traditionalization" narrative about the "glorious past that never was", remembering the "Golden Age" of national history' (Cabada 2021: 298). Ágh, Tismaneanu (1998) and other authors primarily reflect the traditionalisation forced by the actors glorifying the interwar or even older periods of national history. Indeed, in my opinion the assumptions presented are fully valid also for the nostalgy after the GDR--regime. As Figus, Pisaniello and Mustica (2018: 57) conclude: 'Ostalgie today is, to conclude, also in part, the system that binds two generations, that of grandparents, who built that system, that of grandchildren who strongly wanted change and freedom. The oldest are "ostalgic" by heart, the youngest are "ostalgic" by necessity, the latter, are generating intransigent and aggressive policies, which also frighten Europe (such as the Neo-Nazi movements), because of disappointed expectations, missed promises, generating a reaction typical of the sub-proletariat.' From all the presented reasons 'nostalgia remains a potent force even though the former socialist regimes offer little to be nostalgic about' (Bieber 2020: 81).

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Petr Körfer *is a PhD student at the Department of Political Science and Anglophone Studies, Metropolitan University Prague. E-mail: korfer@seznam.cz.*

What Explains Party Membership
in Post-Yugoslav Countries: Socialism,
Nationalism, Clientelism or False Reporting?[1]

DARIO NIKIĆ ČAKAR AND GORAN ČULAR

Abstract: *Earlier studies on party membership in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) led to the conclusion that political parties in new democracies are not inclined to build strong party organisations or invest in recruiting members. However, several recent individual country studies point to the opposite conclusions, indicating that there are significant cross-country variations in party membership figures across the post-communist region. By using a unique dataset on party membership in post-communist Europe, in this article we argue that the average membership level in CEE seems to be higher than in Western Europe. This holds true even when party membership figures for CEE countries are 'corrected' after conducting validity and reliability tests. Furthermore, we also find that party membership figures across CEE countries vary to a much higher degree than in established Western democracies. Our analysis shows that former Yugoslav countries are clustered at the top and other CEE countries at the bottom, leading to the conclusion that selection bias has been present in many studies on party membership that only included a limited number of post-communist countries. In order to explain higher levels of party membership in post-Yugoslav countries, we test three sets of explanatory variables, namely socialism, nationalism and clientelism. This exploratory study suggests that nationalist movements from the early period of transition, coupled with clientelistic politics, could serve as the most convincing explanation of high membership density in former Yugoslav countries.*

Keywords: *party membership, post-communist countries, former Yugoslav states, socialism, clientelism, nationalism*

I. Introduction

When assessing the role of political party members in modern democracies, recent studies point to two somewhat contradictory trends that have attracted significant scholarly interest. On the one hand, most of these studies indicate the central importance of active party members for the health of democracy, in that their participation affects the vitality and legitimacy of the democratic system. This is particularly evident in the literature on intra-party democracy, with the growing evidence of political parties becoming much more inclusive and broadening their grassroots base (Cross – Blais 2012; Cross – Katz 2013; Pilet – Cross 2014). On the other hand, party studies also raise concerns about widespread patterns of declining levels of party membership in both old and new democracies, pointing to the fact that parties are rapidly losing their social support, which is a direct consequence of citizens becoming more and more disaffected with parties and looking for alternative forms of expressing political preferences (van Haute – Gauja 2015; Scarrow 2015).

Political parties as membership organisations in new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) are particularly problematic from the perspective of this normative ideal, because initial scholarly observations indicated that the conditions for the development of parties as mass organisations in CEE were unfavourable (van Biezen 2003). Still, initial scholarly interest in studying party politics in post-communist countries has not been followed by systematic cross-national accounts of party membership in CEE, especially when it comes to the democratic latecomers in Southeast Europe. This is in stark contrast with the wealth of comparative and single-country studies that have documented trends of party membership decline in Western Europe. However, a growing body of recently published studies shows that there are significant cross-country variations in party membership figures across the post-communist region (van Biezen et al. 2012; Gherghina et al. 2018).

Accordingly, our focus in this article is on party membership in CEE. Specifically, we ask what factors can explain significantly higher levels of party membership in post-Yugoslav countries in comparison with the rest of the region. In order to answer the research question, we structure this article as an exploratory study for testing three sets of independent variables that we consider to be plausible explanations for the observed differences in membership levels, namely socialism, nationalism and clientelism. We argue that the nationalist movements that were the driving force in the initial period of democratic transition and which were led to the emergence of dominant party systems are the main drivers of the relatively high membership levels found in former Yugoslav countries.

In the next section, we survey the literature on party membership in post--communist countries, and then systematically compare party membership

figures in 17 countries across the region by using a unique dataset on party membership in new democracies. We place a special emphasis on testing the validity and reliability of data collected and seek to detect patterns of cross-national similarities and differences. In the subsequent section, we test three hypotheses on high levels of party membership in post-Yugoslav countries. Our findings should be treated as preliminary, in accordance with the exploratory nature of this study. We conclude by reflecting on implications for further research.

II. Studying party membership in CEE countries: The research to date

Research of party membership in CEE is characterised by a general lack of systematic and comparative work, with only a handful of countries in the region included in cross-national studies, mostly when comparing established and emerging democracies. This is even more true for the former Yugoslav region which was for a long time the blind spot in comparative research on party members and their role in contemporary party politics. Wincławska et al. (2020: 2) argue that 'the "non-importance" of the members' paradigm led to a much lower interest of researchers in party members in general, and notably their role in the party organisation or perception of intra-party dynamics'. Part of the explanation also lies in the limited availability of data on party membership, as the access to 'objective' data in the post-communist region is often constrained by party secrecy and a lack of organisational capacity to regularly maintain membership registers, which makes it difficult to gather reliable estimates of party membership figures. The same is true for the availability of 'subjective' data, as comparative opinion survey studies do not regularly include all the countries in the region, but instead cover only 'the usual suspects' like Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

Initial scholarly observations on post-communist party membership pointed to the conclusion that membership parties in Central and Eastern Europe were unlikely to develop due to the various social and historical factors that made the development of mass membership organisations very difficult (van Biezen 2003; Kopecky 2008; Smith 2020). It was expected that political parties in CEE would develop as 'formations with loose electoral constituencies, in which a relatively unimportant role is played by the party membership, and the dominant role by party leaders' (Kopecky 1995: 517). Starting from these expectations, most studies of post-communist party politics agree that political parties in new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, in contrast to their Western counterparts, have rather weak organisational capacity with a marginalised role for members (Kopecky 1995; Lewis 2000; Szczerbiak 2001; van Biezen 2003; Webb – White 2007; van Biezen at al. 2012). Haughton and Deegan-Krause (2020) concluded that with the emergence of newer parties in the CEE region traditional member-

ship is even less in the focus of contemporary actors. As one scholar interested in post-communist party politics noted, 'to the extent that votes rather than members are the primary asset that aspiring politicians seek to acquire, there have clearly been more direct ways of acquiring them than the arduous path of membership growth and organisational development' (Lewis 2000: 101).

The literature has indicated several factors at play in explaining the unimportance and low membership figures in CEE democracies. In her seminal work on how parties organise in the context of new democracies, van Biezen (2003) pointed to three specific explanatory arguments. First, she identified that political parties in CEE countries have skipped several organisational stages that parties in Western Europe went through. This means that they were internally created from above as parties in public office and strengthened their organisational links with the state from the beginning, while being discouraged at the same time from building organisational capacities in terms of territorial penetration and membership base. Second, van Biezen argues that the lack of strong social cleavages in post-communist countries created parties as electoral machines, which lacked stable constituencies and strong partisan identities. Third, parties in new democracies were raised in an era of mass communication, when diversity of communication channels created an environment in which party membership was of limited relevance. This was coupled with widely available state subsidies to political parties which deterred parties from investing in building their organisational capacity (see also Kopecky 2008).

Against such a backdrop, several cross-national studies of party membership have concluded that the average level of party membership in CEE countries is well below the average for the established Western democracies (Whiteley 2011; van Biezen et al. 2012; van Biezen – Poguntke 2014; Ponce – Scarrow 2016). For instance, van Biezen et al. (2012) show that the average level of party membership in post-communist democracies in CEE is just 3.0 percent, which is significantly lower than the 5.6 percent average for the established West European democracies and democratic latecomers of Southern Europe. In addition, it has been observed that there is a longitudinal trend of overall decline of party membership across European democracies, which 'demonstrates that in contemporary democracies, old and new alike, the opportunity structure for political mobilisation has become largely unreceptive to mass organisation' (van Biezen – Poguntke 2014: 207). Furthermore, membership studies at the individual country level also report that party membership has been steadily declining since the beginning of democratisation in CEE countries, with party membership figures in some countries dropping below one percent of the entire electorate (Cabada 2013; Linek – Pecháček 2007; Auers 2018; Gherghina et al. 2018; Wincławska et al. 2020; Iancu – Soare 2020).

However, despite this initial scepticism about the importance of members for the development of post-communist political parties, a growing body of

literature on party membership in CEE countries shows that investments in membership organisation can significantly improve parties' endurance and electability over time. In her research on the organisational strength of political parties in post-communist democracies, Tavits (2012; 2013) convincingly argues that investments in organisational capacities (i.e., the professionalisation of staff in central office, a growing membership base and territorial penetration) increase both the electoral support and survivability of parties in the long run. Similarly, two case studies of political parties in Bulgaria (Spirova 2005) and Lithuania (Ibenskas 2014) show that party membership helps explain prolonged electoral success of political parties, particularly in the highly volatile party systems in the CEE region. In his recent study of six new democracies in CEE, Gherghina (2015: 48) tests institutional variables in explaining voting choice, including the initial hypotheses that 'political parties with large membership organisations have lower levels of electoral volatility'. While the results of his analysis offer some support for the hypothesis, Gherghina warns that the strength of this relationship varies across countries, which means that 'the enlargement of party membership can hardly represent a mechanism through which parties can stabilise their vote in CEE' (Gherghina 2015: 159). In a novel study of party membership in the CEE region, Smith (2020) concludes that investing in a membership base is beneficial for parties because by doing so they are better able to survive electoral challenges and improve the stability of the party system.

In the most recent study on variations in party membership, van Haute and Ribeiro (2022) apply a novel investigation strategy as they make a move away from 'western-centric studies and offer the largest test of explanations of membership variation to date', by broadening the scope of their research to include one of the largest dataset of parties in 38 countries, many of which are cases of new democracies, some even outside Europe. In this study they test several country-level and party-level variables that affect membership variations across parties. Among country-level factors they outline the state structure (the level of state decentralisation), the system of government (presidential and hybrid countries with directly elected presidents), national party laws (incentives for membership recruit) and the age of democracy (democratic latecomers vs established democracies) as the external drivers of membership fluctuations. Although the authors found that party-level variables explain much more variance in membership ratios than macro-variables, we think that some macro-level findings did not get due attention. For instance, a steady negative effect of the age of a democracy (parties in new democracies have more members than in the old ones) was just touched upon in interpretation, without discussion on possible hidden effects of discrete world regions. This is the exact reason why we in this study decided to operate only at the country-level, making sub regional groupings the central matter of the research puzzle.

Also, some studies of the CEE region have also indicated that there are significant cross-country variations in party membership/electorate ratio, ranging from 0.74 in Latvia to 6.28 in Slovenia (van Biezen et al. 2012). Moreover, when the view is expanded to take in the post-Yugoslav countries even greater variations can be observed across the entire post-communist region. Political parties in this sub-region report exceedingly high levels of party members, for instance 13.1 percent in Serbia, 17.0 percent in Montenegro and 17.1 percent in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Gherghina et al. 2018). Some scholars have expressed surprise with such high membership numbers in post-Yugoslav countries (Kosowska-Gąstoł et al. 2016: 473–474). Such high figures also raise questions about the reliability of data and how far numbers reported by the parties themselves can be trusted. In order to address potential methodological doubts about the validity and reliability of these data, in the next section we pay special attention to these issues by systematically analysing data on party membership in 17 post-communist countries in CEE.

III. The data

In order to systematically assess the party membership size in the region, we planned to gather data on a relatively large sample of 128 parties across 17 CEE countries, ranging from four parties in Albania to twelve parties in Serbia. The main criteria were to include parties represented by at least two MPs in national parliaments in 2018.[2] 'Objective' data was reported by parties themselves and comes from different sources: Internet sources (89 cases), Political Party Database Project (PPDB) (73 cases), Members and Activists of Political Parties Project (MAPP) (50 cases) and other political science literature and the press (9). Additionally, in the second half of 2018, we conducted an online survey of party secretaries, using a short questionnaire that was sent to all 128 parties. Apart from questions on the number of party members and some other organisational issues, we also asked for estimates on how precisely the number of members from the party record mirrors the real state of membership on the ground. Due to the high non-response rate, even after three rounds of reminders, in the end there were 58 responses, of which 51 (40 percent) were included in the analysis.

Comparing and crosschecking the sources, we found a rather high correspondence between them, due in part to overlapping data sources. In cases when there was data from two or three sources, we opted for the most recent one. As expected,

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2   Having in mind that each threshold is somewhat arbitrary, we opted for at least two MPs since this criterion maximised the number of party members in a country included in the analysis and minimised the cost of gathering data with regard to very small parties that do not substantially contribute to the number of party members in a country. Nonetheless, in the case of two Polish parties we did depart from this criterion: we excluded Kukiz's 15, since it was not formally registered as a political party and we included the Polish Social Democrats (SLD), the party that lost parliamentary representation in the 2015 elections. For electoral results, we relied on the information provided by the internet source Parties and Elections (http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/).

parties have generally lost members over time, which explains why the online survey, as the most recent source, records lower numbers than other sources. However, there were several cases (e.g., the Albanian Socialist Party or the Croatian Peasant Party) when respondents reported considerably lower figures in comparison to other sources. We believe that this kind of discrepancy justifies the usage of the online survey as a reliable – if more conservative – source of information.

Ultimately, we ended up with 115 cases, 49 from the online survey, 37 from PPDB, 18 from Internet sources, eight from the scholarly literature and three from MAPP, with 13 cases left without any information. The number of parties per country ranges from three in Albania to twelve in Serbia (see Table 1). The data covers from 2010 to 2018, with 55 percent of figures reported for 2018, a further 22 percent for 2017 and in total some 96 percent since 2014. Party membership density, our dependent variable, is measured by the members/electorate (M/E) ratio and serves as the main objective measure. All figures are generated by aggregating data for individual parties at the national level.

IV. Party membership in 17 countries in CEE: Reliability and validity

Table 1 shows the 'objective' uncorrected measure (M/E) of party membership in CEE countries, with the mean value around eight percent. When compared to Western European democracies where the average level of party membership is 4.12 percent (Webb – Keith 2017: 33)[3], post-communist countries have almost double the level of party members. This is an interesting finding since most studies of party membership points to the opposite conclusion (Whiteley 2011; van Biezen et al. 2012; van Biezen – Poguntke 2014; Ponce – Scarrow 2016).

One possible explanation of this contradictory observation lies in the distribution of party membership across countries in CEE, since the range and variance of the distribution are much higher than in Western Europe. In CEE, there are several democracies with M/E ratios around one percent and several above ten percent, while in Western Europe only the UK clusters around one percent and Austria above ten percent (Webb – Keith 2017: 33). The second explanation argues that the value dispersion in the post-communist region follows a rather clear geographical pattern, separating other CEE countries from democratic latecomers in Southeast Europe. While Central European and Baltic democracies report rather low levels of party membership (with the exception of Estonia), former Yugoslav countries have very high membership densities (with the exception of Slovenia). Since most cross-national studies of party membership in Europe usually include only Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary (and occasionally Slovenia and Romania), it is evident that they deal

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3 Reported mean differs from the source, since we calculated mean value only for 12 Western countries and for the most recent period.

with a biased sample of post-communist democracies. Moreover, these three 'usual suspects' from CEE have the lowest M/E ratios among all European democracies (Webb – Keith 2017: 33).

However, what is more important is the explanation of differences in party membership density across post-communist Europe. Former Yugoslav countries record M/E ratios several times higher (15.3) than the rest of the post--communist region (2.79) or Western Europe (4.12), clustering five out of seven post-Yugoslav countries at the top of the list in Europe. These rather sharp diversities, and the clear geographical pattern which structures them, point to an interesting research puzzle that has not yet been systematically analysed.

Table 1: Party Membership in CEE

Country	Number of parties	Objective M/E	ESS 2010	WVS 2010–2014	ISSP 2014	EBRD LITS III 2016	Various sources 2016–2017	M/E corrected
Albania	3	5.37				18.6	7.9 /	5.37
Bosnia-Herzegovina	7	19.43				11.5	10.1 /	10.10
Bulgaria	4	3.52	6.0			4.3		3.52
Croatia	8	8.66	8.6		12.7	6.3	/ 7.4	8.66
Czech Republic	9	1.26	3.2		5.9	2.0		1.26
Estonia	6	5.62	4.4	6.0		3.3		5.62
Hungary	7	1.06	1.2		2.7	0.6		1.06
Kosovo	4	13.13				9.9	9.0 /	9.00
Latvia	8	0.70				0.7		0.70
Lithuania	7	2.85	3.2		5.5	3.1		2.85
Montenegro	9	26.18				11.2	9.6 / 19.3	9.60
North Macedonia	5	16.25				13.7	13.3 /	13.30
Poland	5	0.70	0.7	4.2	0.9	3.1		0.70
Romania	5	6.07		4.6		2.1		6.07
Serbia	12	19.37				8.1	9.7/	8.10
Slovakia	8	0.73	1.4		3.3	1.1		0.73
Slovenia	8	4.05	3.9	5.1	4.5	2.3		4.05
(Sum) Mean	**(115)**	**7.94**				**6.0**		**5.33**

Note: Objective data (M/E) is created by adding up the figures for individual parties. M/E ratio is expressed in percentages. In the case of multiple sources, we opted for the most recent one. Last column (M/E corrected) is created by lowering objective figures (M/E) to subjective ones only for countries with significant differences between the two measures (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia).

Source: Objective data comes mainly from the online survey (49 cases) and PPDB (39 cases). Data on the size of electorate from IDEA (https://www.idea.int/data-tools/question-countries-view/439/Europe/cnt). Data in the penultimate column is taken from Bliznakovski, Gjuzelov and Popovikj (2017: 8). Data in the final column is from: for Croatia from Croatian National Election Study (CEPIS, 2016) and for Montenegro from Montenegrin National Election Study (2016). Other sources: EES (European Social Survey), WVS (World Value Survey), ISSP (International Social Survey Programme), EBRD LITS III (Life in Transition Survey III, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development).

The objective data raises *prima facie* questions about validity and reliability. For instance, extremely high M/E ratios in Montenegro, Serbia or Bosnia-Herzegovina look very suspicious methodologically and, at the same time, considerably inflate the overall M/E mean for the region. One way to test the reliability of the objective data reported by the parties themselves is to turn to the individual reporting of citizens – subjective data. Table 1 also reports data from different surveys and public opinion polls that asked respondents about their engagement in political parties. Earlier studies (Ponce – Scarrow 2014: 3–6; Scarrow 2015: 83–86; van Haute – Gauja 2015: 11–12) show that this procedure has its own shortcomings, which are particularly pronounced in the case of CEE countries. Therefore, methodological problems like the availability of data, different question wording in different surveys, different time points, varying response rates and the varied quality of surveys, along with inevitable random errors, result in rather scattered and inconsistent figures. For instance, in Montenegro two surveys conducted within a year show dramatically different results.

However, while for most countries the subjective measure more or less corresponds to the objective measure, in some countries these two measures show a systematic and significant bias, especially in the same five former Yugoslav countries with the highest official numbers. Focusing on more recent surveys, particularly on the LITS III that covers all cases, it is not hard to notice that subjective data for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and, to a lesser degree, Kosovo and North Macedonia, reduces party membership by more than half.[4]

We can take a step further to test the validity of measurements. Up to now we have dealt with official membership numbers as they are recorded in the party register. While some reliability problems emerge from false reporting, other methodological difficulties stem from the fact that parties often correctly report numbers as they are recorded in the party registers, but at the same time these numbers do not mirror the actual state of the membership. This problem refers to a group of causes that Scarrow calls 'type 3: poor data' (Scarrow 2015: 77). Unlike other types of errors in data on party membership, this type refers more to the problem of validity than to the reliability of measurement. Namely, even when parties frankly and to 'their best knowledge' report on membership figures in a way that is externally reliable insofar as it is consistent through space and time, it seems that these figures do not correctly reflect the actual state of membership; that is, they are not valid insomuch as they fail to measure what we intended to measure.

This problem can occur for different reasons. For instance, a party does not have a technically advanced way of maintaining party membership records

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4   It is also true that LITS III, in relation to the objective data, largely underestimated Romania and Slovenia. In contrast, figures for Albania and Poland were considerably overestimated.

(e.g., a central electronic database) nor does it have an efficient way of updating membership, especially in regularly erasing those individuals that ceased to be members. Furthermore, some parties from time to time engage in collective updating of their membership by implementing some sort of re-registration of members, while others never do this. Finally, members are generally more important for some parties than for others, which can also be reflected in varied party membership data quality. We assume that this type of error can particularly be pronounced in new democracies in CEE.

In order to overcome at least some of these problems, the online survey of party secretaries

uses respondents' judgement on correspondence between the party membership record and the actual number of members. This variable is expressed in percentages that theoretically can vary between 0 and 100 and represents what we call a 'corrective factor' in membership density estimation. In short, out of 47 valid answers, party secretaries estimate that actual party members constitute on average 87 percent of members recorded in party registers, with half of the parties estimating it above 90 percent. Still, since the range goes from 30 to 100 percent, it is clear that parties differ considerably in this respect.

Studying different aspects of party organisation very often points to national-level organisational styles as the main explanatory variable. Namely, parties in a given country tend to resemble each other organisationally more than parties belonging to the same family elsewhere do (Poguntke et al. 2016; Webb – Keith 2017: 33). If this holds true, parties in each country should share similar corrective factors and we should be able to observe national differences in the validity of official party membership figures, even working on the limited sample of parties. However, our data does not confirm this proposition, since differences between countries with data available for two or more parties are not statistically significant (ANOVA, F=1.774; p=.10).

However, it is possible that relatively small sample size explains the apparent lack of a statistically significant country effect in this regard. By taking this possibility into consideration, we ask if there is a link between the M/E ratio and corrective factor at the country level. Figure 1 points to a certain correlation between the two variables in expected direction (r=−.48; p=.057), suggesting that we should approach higher official membership figures at the national level with caution. Despite the fact that differences between countries on 'corrective factor' are not large and can hardly explain the level of discrepancies between subjective and objective measures seen in Table 1, at the same time it is interesting to notice that five countries with the highest official number of members and highest drop in survey estimates also show a higher mismatch between party registers and the actual state of membership.

We therefore decided to correct the objective number of members in Bosnia--Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia and reduce

Figure 1: Correlation of objective measure and corrective factor at the country level
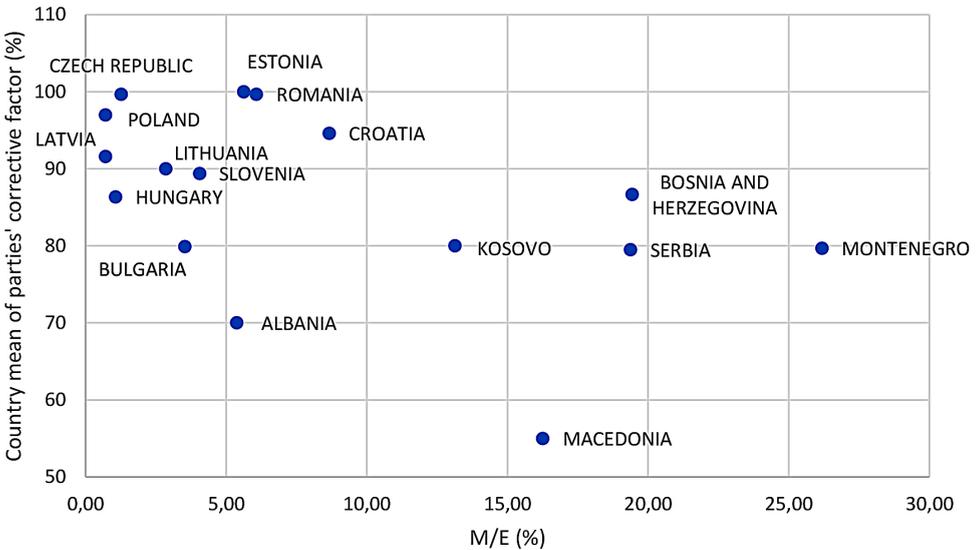
Note: Slovakia is missing since there is no available corrective factor. Data for Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Poland are based only on one observation.

Source: Online survey.

it to the lowest subjective figures (shaded cells in the final column of Table 1). Since all these countries have a shared history in former Yugoslavia, it creates the most unfavourable condition for confirming the hypothesis on regional differences in party membership density in post-communist Europe. In other words, we are conservatively cautious and in the remaining analysis work only with corrected M/E as dependent variable.

Naturally, this lowers the average membership in the whole post-communist region from almost 8 to 5.33 per cent of the electorate, but this figure is still higher than for Western Europe. In addition, this adjustment did not affect the pattern of regional clustering with regard to party membership. We still can identify countries with low (Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia), medium (Albania, Estonia, Romania and Slovenia) and high membership densities (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia). In other words, Central European and Baltic countries are clustered on one side, while post-Yugoslav countries are clustered on the other side. Therefore, even if there is, intentional or accidental, false reporting of the number of party members in post-Yugoslav countries, it does not substantially affect regional variance of party membership. In the next section, we test some preliminary explanations of the higher membership density in the former Yugoslav region in comparison to other CEE countries.

V. Preliminary explanations

Table 2 shows the corrected M/E percentage as a dependent variable. When clustering the cases into two groups, ex-Yugoslav vs. other CEE countries, a significant difference in the average membership density (9.0 vs. 2.8 per cent) is observed. Thus, a clear between-group variation is also observed, since all the countries in the ex-Yugoslav group, except Slovenia, exceed the overall average and show a higher M/E value than any of the cases in another group. Nevertheless, regional clustering is theoretically an empty shell if not followed by substantive explanations. Therefore, in the rest of the article we discuss three sets of explanations for regional differences in the national party membership rate, namely socialism, nationalism and clientelism. For each explanation, we present the theoretical background, hypotheses, and indicators which are analysed at descriptive and bivariate level. Given the country-level analysis and small number of cases, we refrain from any multivariate statistical analysis, considering that descriptive and bivariate analysis should suffice for initial insights. Therefore, these findings and explanations should be treated as preliminary, in accordance with the exploratory nature of this study.

Socialism

Mishler and Rose (1997, 2001, 2002, 2007) have produced a series of studies in which they tested different hypotheses about origins and determinants of regime support for newly established democracies in CEE, using, among others, the 'cultural theory' explanation. This approach holds that different aspects of support for democratic regimes can be best explained by an exogenous socialisation effect: institutional support for democracy will be contingent upon the dominant type of socialisation of people under communism. In a later paper, Rose and Mishler (1998) coined the term 'negative partisanship' and showed that in post-communist democracies negative partisanship dominates over positive party identification, presumably as a counter-reaction to often instrumental and forced political mobilisation during the communist era. They argue that '[i]n societies in which the Communist Party was for two generations the only party, there are good grounds for expecting popular reservations about parties to continue indefinitely' (Rose – Mishler 1998: 230). In a similar vein, Gherghina states that 'in the aftermath of regime change, mostly as a result of the extensive membership pursued by the communist parties the newly emerging political actors considered membership a legacy of the past. Their discourse responded to and further fuelled the existing anti-party feelings' (Gherghina 2015: 98).

If cultural theory holds true, we might assume that there is a negative correlation between communist party membership prior to 1990 and today's membership density in the observed countries. Table 2 shows the official number

of former communist party members relative to the size of the population for each country. Although former Yugoslav countries on average show somewhat lower levels of communist party membership, the difference is not significant and there is no correlation between former communist party members and actual party membership at the country level (r=.05, see Appendix).

Socialisation theory also takes into consideration the level of legitimacy of former communist regimes among citizens. Regardless of the percentage of the communist party members, socialist countries differed in terms of how much public support their regimes mobilised among the vast majority of non-allied citizens and the extent to which communist party membership was forced or instrumental rather than genuine and ideological. Consequently, we expect such differences to generate an impact on contemporary anti-party sentiments and current party membership. It is generally accepted that Yugoslav communism deviated greatly from the CEE communist countries under Soviet control (Pickering – Baskin 2008: 522–523). It was perceived as more 'liberal', less forced and violent, economically more developed and internationally more open. As a result, Yugoslav communism enjoyed greater legitimacy and support among citizens compared to other CEE communist regimes, which could be a potential explanation for less strong anti-party sentiments and consequently higher membership rates in post-Yugoslav countries.

However, the socialisation theory does not work only at the aggregate level. At the level of individual citizens, we can hypothesise that citizens that were linked to the communist regime have less chance to develop anti-party sentiments in a democratic period than citizens that do not have a tradition of close ties to communism. In order to estimate impact of the level of legitimacy of the communist regimes on current party membership in CEE, we draw on the ERBD Life in Transition Survey III (2016) to calculate the national ratios of current party members who had prior family ties to the communist party and those who had not, controlling the size of both parameters (see Table 2).[5] Individual level analysis suggests that family links to the communist party increase the probability of current party membership by a factor of around one third to more than four. Looking from an opposite angle of current party non-members, the results are reversed. Thus, we interpret these differences as 'regime generated anti-party sentiments'.

At first glance, the findings at the individual level seem to be at odds with socialisation theory at the macro-level, since individual linkage to the previous

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5   ERBD Life in Transition Survey III includes two important variables for our research: personal or family ties of respondents to the Communist Party during socialism and actual party membership. The survey was conducted in 31 countries, including all countries in post-communist Europe. Each country was represented with roughly 1,500 respondents. The survey's estimates of the current party membership are in line with other surveys (see Table 1) and shows high correlation with M/E corrected at country level (r=0.73). Also, the reported family ties to former Communist parties and the official number of the Communist Party members (Table 2) correlate highly at country level (r=0.68).

Table 2: Indicators of socialism, nationalism and clientelism hypothesis, former Yugoslav vs. other CEE countries

country	M/E corrected	Socialism hypothesis		Nationalism hypothesis				Clientelism hypothesis
		Communist Party membership (M/P)	Anti-party sentiments index	Nationalist move-ment	Dominant party, years	Largest party/all parties (%)	M/E without 'the largest party effect'	Clientelism index
Bosnia-Herzegovina	10.1	9.0	1.45	yes	yes, 31 (SDA+HDZ+ SDS/SNSD)	65.0	3.54	0.74
Croatia	8.7	6.9	1.45	yes	yes, 10 (HDZ)	64.3	3.09	0.18
Kosovo	9.0	5.3	2.18	yes	yes, 17 (LDK)	40.4	5.37	0.55
Montenegro	9.6	11.5	2.04	yes	yes, 31 (DPS)	48.5	4.99	0.77
North Macedonia	13.3	7.3	1.37	yes	no	58.6	5.51	0.65
Serbia	8.1	9.7	3.09	yes	yes, 17 (SPS/SNS)	53.6	3.76	0.64
Slovenia	4.1	6.0	1.36	yes	no	43.5	2.29	0.13
Ex-YU countries, (mean)	*(9.0)*	*(8.0)*	*(1.85)*	*7/7*	*5/7 (15.1 years)*	*(53.4)*	*(4.08)*	*(0.52)*
Albania	5.4	4,7	1.66	no	no	56.7	2.33	0.79
Bulgaria	3.5	10,4	4.25	no	no	41.5	2.06	0.41
Czech R.	1.3	10,9	3.82	no	no	36.0	0.81	0.16
Estonia	5.6	7.1	1.75	yes	no	29.3	3.98	0.05
Hungary	1.1	7,7	3.80	no	yes, 11 (Fidesz 2010–2020)	45.3	0.58	0.39
Latvia	0.7	6.5	1.43	yes	no	33.7	0.46	0.28
Lithuania	2.9	5.5	1.64	yes	no	24.7	2.15	0.21
Poland	0.7	5.8	2.92	no	no	47.0	0,37	0.11
Romania	6.1	16.1	3.00	no	no	45.6	3.30	0.45
Slovakia	0.7	10.9	2.22	yes	yes, 24 (HZDS, 1990–1998; Smer 2006–2020)	47.1	0.39	0.17
Other ECE countries, (mean)	*(2.8)*	*(9.6)*	*(2.65)*	*4/10*	*2/10 (3.5 years)*	*(40.7)*	*(1.65)*	*(0.30)*
Overall mean	**(5.3)**	**(8.3)**	**(2.32)**	**11/17**	**7/17 (8.2 years)**	**(45.9)**	**(2.65)**	**(0.39)**

Note: 'M/E corrected' is taken from Table 1. 'Communist party membership' refers to 1987 (for Lithuania 1986) officially reported data for most countries. Only in the case of Estonia and Latvia are these estimates based on data for previous years (1961 and 1973) for three Baltic countries and Lithuania for 1986. Czechia and Slovakia have the value for Czechoslovakia. 'Anti-party sentiments index' are ratios between percentage of respondents with ties to the communist party who are now party members and percentage of respondents without ties to communist party who are now party members. 'Largest party/all parties' refers to party with most party members as percentage of all members in a country. 'M/E without the largest party' is calculated without number of members of the largest party. All calculations are done after absolute numbers of party members for each party in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia are proportionally lowered to fit the corrected M/E.

Sources: Communist party membership: Staar (1989: 60), Radelić (2006: 520–521). Anti-party sentiments index: LITS III (2016); Clientelism index: Varieties of Democracy (2018).

regime is positively rather than negatively related to current party membership.[6] However, given that current party membership and ties with the former regime represent rather small parts of national samples, the aggregate effects among the opposite camps (non-members and non-allied with communism) dominate national pictures. Socialisation theory works primarily at the aggregate level, where regime generated anti-party sentiments function as an intervening variable: they are higher in countries with more communist party members (r=.47, see Appendix), but they also lower the total current party membership (r=−.41, see Appendix). Thus, at the individual level, the theory of prior socialisation works differently for different groups of respondents with regard to family links to the communist regime, but at the aggregate the compound effect leads to the same direction of lower overall party membership.

With regard to differences between former Yugoslav countries and the rest of the post-communist region they go in the expected direction. Ex-Yugoslav countries on average show a lower level of anti-party sentiments as a reaction to the previous regime, with Serbia as a significant outlier. In the group of other CEE countries, it seems that the Baltic states and Albania also depart from their group mean, but in the opposite direction. However, these regional differences, whether in the communist party membership or anti-party sentiments, are too small and too inconsistent to account for much larger differences in the current M/E ratio between post-Yugoslav states and the rest of the CEE region. Overall, although the impact of socialism through micro-macro interplay of socialisation theory could partially work as a sort of general explanation of differences between countries, it accounts for very little when it comes to differences between the observed regions.

Nationalism

The transition to democracy in post-communist Europe differed also with regard to the state-building process. While this process did not affect transition in several countries, in the majority of our cases the early transitional phases were dominated by movements for national independence. National uprisings, often generated by rhetoric of ethnic nationalism, created nationalist movements that left their imprint on various characteristics of newly established democracies (Kuzio 2001; von Beyme 1996: 42–62). More specifically, nationalist movements contributed to the political mobilisation of citizens and often determined types and levels of party formation and organisation. The nationalism hypothesis

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6 This is exactly what Rose and Mishler concluded. While assuming a negative total aggregate effect of previous regime socialisation on party identification, the analysis at the individual level showed that ex-Communists tend to be more positively identified with a party than non-Communists (Rose – Mishler 1998: 221–222).

presumes that this effect, created in the early phase of transition, has persisted and can explain differences in contemporary party membership densities. In this respect, popular movements for independence that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the Baltic states and Yugoslavia are the best examples. Although Czechoslovakia was another complex state that dissolved during the process of democratic transition, its dissolution was different since it took place later and was not a political issue at the first democratic elections. Nevertheless, we treat Slovakia as a case of nationalism, primarily because of Mečiar's movement that appeared very soon after the demise of communism (Deegan-Krause 2004). Nationalist movements appeared in all former Yugoslav countries and in four out of ten countries belonging to the other group (see Table 2).

However, there is a crucial difference with regard to the type of relationship between initial nationalist movements and the future party organisation and membership density. While in some countries these movements dissolved very soon after transition started and national independence was achieved, assuming that the initial high political mobilisation has not turned into a long-lasting mass type of party organisations, in other countries nationalist movements transformed into party organisations and survived as dominant parties in the party system (see Table 2). In the latter cases, the initial broad political mobilisation has been encapsulated in the form of massive party membership, very often not limited only to the dominant party.[7] The electoral dominance of these parties sometimes has lasted throughout the entire democratic period (e.g., Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro) and in some cases, the party systems with dominant parties became the norm even though one initially dominant party was replaced by a different one (e.g., Serbia, Slovakia, Republic of Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina).[8]

This kind of party system is more often a trademark within the group of former Yugoslav countries (five out of seven) than in other CEE countries (two out of ten). Moreover, the average period under party dominance differs greatly in

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7   It is strange to find that the relationship between type of transition and subsequent party development in Eastern Europe has not been analysed so far, not even through the link between nationalist movements for independence and dominant party emergence, nor as a direct link of prevalent nationalist political culture and size of party membership. One should go back to the literature on decolonisation and liberation movements in Africa and Asia in order to find any similar discourse focused on the relationship between nationalist movements and dominant parties. Some of the contemporary studies on the third world democratisations still employ this nexus as a fruitful explanation of party dominance and mass organisations (see Reddy 2005; Carbone 2007: 14–16).

8   We define dominant parties as those that formed single-party governments through three consecutive elections or were the leading parties in coalition governments and that won 15 percent more votes than the second-ranked party. Since Bosnia-Herzegovina is a special case of an ethnically divided party system, we count all three main ethnic parties as one dominant party. Although in Kosovo there were no legal elections until 2001, we count the Democratic League of Kosovo, a leading political party in Kosovo during the 1990s, as the dominant party throughout the whole period. For different definitions and measures of dominant parties see Bogaards (2004).

the two observed regions. Although it is not possible to establish a clear causal mechanism, early nationalism certainly played a role in setting favourable conditions for dominant parties to emerge. Hungary is the only deviant case of dominant party system, since Fidesz did not emerge from the transitional nationalist movement.

Working with 'dominant party' variable potentially opens an alternative and very simple explanation for membership density. Since the higher membership density in a party system with a dominant party can be explained as the effect of the largest party, we decided to control for 'the largest party effect'. Table 2 shows the percentage of members that belong to the party with the largest membership.[9] Results range from roughly one quarter in Lithuania to almost two thirds in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. In former Yugoslav countries, the largest parties attract on average more than half of all party members, but 40 percent in other CEE countries is also large. A very similar difference can be found by comparing the 'dominant party' group of countries with countries without a dominant party. If we add that the 'largest party variable' correlates significantly with the M/E measure (r=.58, see Appendix), it is clear that all results point to the necessity of controlling for the largest party effect.

After eliminating the largest party effect by subtracting absolute membership of the largest party in each country, the newly calculated M/E index (see Table 2) was halved in comparison with the original M/E index corrected, yielding 45 percent of it for ex-Yugoslav countries and 59 percent for others. A stronger impact of the largest party on the M/E index in the ex-Yugoslav countries is obviously the result of more frequent cases of dominant party systems in this region. However, an important insight is that the largest party effect is far from explaining the whole variance in membership density. Although it makes the M/E difference between the regions smaller, the remaining parties in the ex--Yugoslav region still produce a considerably higher M/E ratio than other parties in the 'other countries' group. Moreover, ex-Yugoslav other parties show higher M/E ratios than all the parties in the rest of CEE. Actually, the effect of 'other parties' contributes generally to the M/E ratio much more than 'the largest party effect', since it yields a much higher correlation of.93 (see Appendix). However, a more detailed analysis reveals that the 'other party effect' does not stem from the dominant party, in the sense of a spill-over effect, as much as from the initial nationalist movements.[10]

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9   The largest parties in terms of absolute members are always either dominant parties or amongst two electorally most successful parties, except in two cases: In the Czech Republic it refers to the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), and in Poland it refers to the Polish People's Party (PSL).

10   T-tests with three types of case groupings, with regard to nationalism, existence of dominant party and a compound effect of both, showed that the 'nationalism' group is the best explanation of the remaining variance in the M/E ratio after elimination of the largest party effect and the only grouping that yields better predictive value for M/E without largest party than for the original M/E ratio.

In conclusion, nationalistic movements at the beginning of transitions were conducive to the development of party systems with a dominant party. Dominant parties thus played an intervening role as a mechanism that individually contributed to higher M/E ratios in a country. However, initial nationalistic mobilisation also had an independent, direct and enduring effect on the organisational capacities of other parties. Finally, ex-Yugoslav countries show the best regional overlapping with all three measures: nationalism, dominant party and a combined effect of the two.

Clientelism

Clientelism is not only a type of linkage of parties with voters and society, but it is also a rather efficient way of maintaining organisational capacity of parties. Regardless of whether authors use the term clientelism with emphases on party-society linkages (Kitschelt 2000; Kitschelt – Wilkinson 2007) or the term patronage with emphases on party-state linkages (Kopecký at al. 2012; Kopecký at al. 2008; Kopecký – Spirova 2011), they agree that party organisational resources are important, either as an instrument of clientelistic politics (Kitschelt 2000: 849; Kitschelt – Wilkinson 2007: 8) or as one of the goals of patronage (Kopecký – Mair 2012a: 7). However, it is less clear whether increasing organisational capacities in this respect necessarily leads to traditional vertical organisation and building party membership. Historical interpretation holds that the emergence of modern politics and ideological mass parties were obstacles to traditional patronage (Kopecký – Mair 2012a: 6; Kopecký – Spirova 2011: 899). Moreover, contemporary forms of patronage build and maintain party networks within the public sphere rather than build classic party membership organisations (Kopecký – Mair 2012b: 372–374). On the other hand, Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007: 17) concluded that '[w]e can think of mass party organisation models as highly effective group devices for surveillance and mobilisation, in which local party bosses closely monitor individuals' conduct. In contrast to Shefter's (1977, 1994) conceptualisation of mass party organisations as the antithesis of clientelistic machine politics, mass parties provide the capabilities of serving clientelistic monitoring practices… '

Some empirical studies from the post-communist region suggest that strong membership parties go hand in hand with clientelistic politics. In their work on clientelism in Romania, Gherghina and Volintiru argue that 'Romanian political parties do not have strong membership organisations that would allow them to engage in multiple clientelistic linkages with the electorate', concluding that more than six percent of members within the Romanian electorate is 'a relatively small percentage of members' (Gherghina – Volintiru 2017: 126, 133). They also show that a wide territorial coverage by party local organisations is the best predictor of the level of clientelism in three Eastern European democracies

(Gherghina – Volintiru 2020). Spirova (2012) argues that extensive patronage politics in Bulgaria in the mid-2000s was rooted in the comparatively large membership of governing parties, which used patronage to reward members and attract new ones.

In order to check the clientelism hypothesis at the aggregate level, we introduce the clientelism index from the Varieties of Democracy project for the year we have the most M/E observations (2018). The index is composed from three variables: vote-buying, particularistic vs. public goods and programmatic vs. clientelistic linkages, with a higher score indicating a higher level of clientelism. In Table 2 we can see that the index yields a difference between ex-Yugoslav countries and the group of other CEE countries, albeit with Slovenia, Croatia and Albania as outliers from their respective groups. Apart from a solid correlation of the clientelism index with dependent variable (r=.65), clientelism is also connected with the largest party membership percentage (r=.55) as well as with years of domination of one party in the system (r=.46) (see Appendix). These findings support initial expectations that party systems with dominant parties tend to be more prone to clientelistic politics than systems where parties developed more evenly. If a party dominates government over the years, this gives it more opportunity to exploit state resources for patronage and to maintain both its membership and its electorate.

These findings are also confirmed by the fact that dominant party systems, alone or combined with nationalist cases, yield the largest differences on the clientelism index. On the other hand, correlations between the clientelism index and indicators of the socialism hypothesis, whether cultural (anti-party sentiments) or institutional (former communist party membership) are negligible (see Appendix). At this stage, we can conclude that the type of transition better explains the emergence of clientelistic politics than the specific nature of the previous regime. We have already seen that transitions that were marked with nationalist movements in their initial phases were almost a necessary precondition for the emergence of dominant party systems. Thus, we can hypothesise that these systems enabled dominant parties to engage in patronage and clientelistic strategies, which became the norm for the overall political landscape in a country.

We are aware that for more robust conclusions on dynamics of nationalism, dominant party systems and clientelism one should turn to longitudinal analysis. Also, the relatively high clientelism scores for Albania, Romania or Bulgaria certainly cannot be explained by the theory outlined here. However, we believe that for the group of former Yugoslav countries there is sufficient evidence to support such an interpretation. With one important caveat; Slovenia performs as a serious outlier from the group, both on the dependent variable and most of the independent ones. This is not strange given the fact that Slovenia, as many studies show, departed from the rest of the ex-Yugoslav states in many other

dimensions of political development, or even economic or social, which led to the exclusion of Slovenia from the Balkan or South-East European comparative group. Exception from explanation of party membership, in this respect, fits the overall developmental pattern.

VI. Concluding remarks and further research

We believe that this exploratory research and preliminary interpretations of party membership in post-communist Europe has contributed to the research field in several respects. With regard to the data, it offers a systematic coverage of party membership figures for almost all parties in 17 countries in the region. By using PPDB data as well as an original online survey of party secretaries, it fills the gap in information that existed in party literature with regard to many countries in post-communist Europe. The figures are, however, still not perfect; there are still missing parties in the database and probably include dubious cases.

Given methodological problems with the accuracy of the reported numbers, which are probably more pronounced in new than in established democracies, the collected data have been exposed to reliability and validity tests. We have isolated suspect cases and offered corrected M/E ratios for several countries. This procedure might be seen as imperfect, and calls for further improvement, particularly in finding ways to implement corrections at the level of individual parties. However, working with corrected data did not change the main pattern of distribution in the M/E variable among countries in the region. If there is a problem with data validity and reliability, it does not substantially affect the overall picture.

This brings us to the main insight of the article. Even when working with data that intentionally lowered the mean and variance in our dependent variable, average membership density appears to be higher in CEE countries than in Western Europe. This was what many scholars from the region have regularly noticed working within single cases. However, the party membership literature still points to the opposite conclusion. Furthermore, we find that variance in national membership rates in CEE is much higher than in the West and it has been regionally clustered. Thus, former Yugoslav countries are at the top and other CEE countries on the bottom, with some intermediate cases and a few regional outliers (like Slovenia or Estonia). This regional pattern has been responsible for selection bias in many studies of party membership that have included only a limited number of post-communist countries.

Additionally, our analysis shows that initial nationalist movements that transformed into dominant party systems could offer the most appropriate explanation of the high membership density of former Yugoslav countries. Coupled with clientelistic politics, this explanation is the most promising for developing a theory of this regional clustering. Interestingly, although the ex-

-Yugoslav region was formed primarily of countries that for 70 years (45 under communism) shared the same political system, the socialism hypothesis did not show much explanatory power. Unfortunately, the small number of cases is a serious constraint on more ambitious and explanatory quantitative analysis at the level of countries. Turning to party-level analysis is therefore logically the next step that would make it possible to estimate the independent effects of specific variables, while controlling for regional and national effects.

Finally, we believe that this country-level analysis helps us raise some conceptual questions. Party membership has been for a long one of the most frequently used indicators of party organisational strength. Studies undertaken at the party-level, even when incorporating macro variables as predictors or controls, may miss substantively important factors. Particularly if we talk about regions or national peculiarities, party membership sometimes measures much more than the mere organisational capacity of a party. It can reflect longstanding historical developments, attitudes towards previous regimes, transitional circumstances, national institutional specificities or a specific type of political culture. This article shows that CEE, and particularly the former Yugoslav region, might be the area where more variance in party membership levels could be explained between regions than between parties.

		M_E	M_E_CORR	KP_MP_1987	ANTI_PARTY	LARGEST_PARTY	DOM_YEARS	OTHER_PARTIES	CLIENT
M_E objective measure (uncorrected)	Pearson Correlation	1	0,862**	0,177	-0,263	0,505*	0,655**	0,815**	0,741**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,496	0,308	0,039	0,004	0,000	0,001
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
M_E_CORR M/E corrected	Pearson Correlation	0,862**	1	0,047	-0,411	0,577*	0,365	0,931**	0,649**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000		0,859	0,101	0,015	0,149	0,000	0,005
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
KP_MP_1987 Communist party memebrship (% of population)	Pearson Correlation	0,177	0,047	1	0,466	0,075	0,241	0,049	0,130
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,496	0,859		0,059	0,774	0,352	0,851	0,619
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
ANTI_PARTY regime generated anti-party sentiments index	Pearson Correlation	-0,263	-0,411	0,466	1	-0,184	-0,110	-0,354	-0,080
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,308	0,101	0,059		0,479	0,674	0,163	0,760
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
LARGEST_PARTY largest party in the system (% of national membership)	Pearson Correlation	0,505*	0,577*	0,075	-0,184	1	0,433	0,283	0,548*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,039	0,015	0,774	0,479		0,083	0,271	0,023
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
DOM_YEARS years of dominant party system	Pearson Correlation	0,655**	0,365	0,241	-0,110	0,433	1	0,288	0,464
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,004	0,149	0,352	0,674	0,083		0,262	0,061
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
OTHER_PARTIES M/E corrected without the largest party	Pearson Correlation	0,815**	0,931**	0,049	-0,354	0,283	0,288	1	0,559*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,851	0,163	0,271	0,262		0,020
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
CLIENT index of clientelism (Vdem)	Pearson Correlation	0,741**	0,649**	0,130	-0,080	0,548*	0,464	0,559*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,001	0,005	0,619	0,760	0,023	0,061	0,020	
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17

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Dario Nikić Čakar *is an associate professor at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb. He holds a PhD in comparative politics from the same University. He works in the area of comparative politics and his research interests include political parties and party systems, elections, political leadership, intra-party democracy and executive politics with a focus on the European politics. He is currently serving as a vice-dean for science and international relations at the faculty. E-mail: dario.nikic-cakar@fpzg.hr*

Goran Čular *holds PhD in Political Science and is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb. His research focuses on political parties and party competition, elections and electoral behaviour and democratic institutions and consolidation. He is a member of the Croatian National Election Study team and teaches courses on Political System of Croatia, Political Parties and Methodology. Currently, he is President of the Croatian Political Science Association. E-mail: goran.cular@fpzg.hr*

'Sympathy for the Devil?' McDonald's between imperialism and the building of post-Yugoslav Serbian identity

LAURENT TOURNOIS

Abstract: *Since the opening of its first restaurant in a communist country, which was Yugoslavia, not only is the huge success of the U.S. franchise something that was merely not supposed to happen, but 'consuming McDonald's' has left its mark on the post-Yugoslav identity building process. Our central argument is that the singularity of the 'McDonaldization of Serbia' encompasses the interactions between expansion/ localness, dominance/adaptation and those who take part in this historical process which spans more than three decades, their responses that apprise, shape and constrain their everyday life conditions. This paper starts from the observation that most of the existing scholarly literature on identity building addresses the end of the Yugoslav experience whether through state narratives or identities introverted. We chose a different and understudied angle, which is a people-centred perspective. Accordingly, this paper uses different research methods under the umbrella of a biographical perspective from 1988 to 2021. Ethnographic fieldwork, comprising 45 semi-structured interviews with Belgradians, aims to expand scholarly knowledge on consumption and identity building in post-Yugoslav Serbia. In addition, conversations with influential individuals contributed to identify periods in the intermingled life of McDonald's and people in contemporary Serbia. In the early 1990s, the McDonaldisation to some extent escalated cultural disputes between the republics against a backdrop of identity tensions. During the period spanning from the late years of Milosevic's rule to the advent of Alexandar Vučić in 2012, political conflicts over sovereignty sparked ambiguous civic responses. Finally, McDonald's has brought Serbs into the Western sphere which is probably best encapsulated in a local popular saying 'McDonald's is McDonald's' ('Mek je Mek'), despite being considered 'tasty'/unhealthy, expensive/rewarding or socially stimulating.*

Key Words: *Identity building; Consumerism; People-centred perspective; McDonald's; Yugoslavia; Serbia*

I. Introduction

Habitually portrayed as 'a unilateral symbol of American imperialism' (DeBres 2005: 115), McDonald's made its debut in Belgrade, the Serbian capital of Yugoslavia, on 23 March 1988. And it received a huge 'vote of confidence' from the public: the first outlet in Eastern Europe, located in a newly renovated building in Slavija Square, set a European record for the fast food franchise by serving an average 6,000 meals daily during the first month of operation (Los Angeles Times 1988). Such a performance is reputedly unrivaled anywhere else in the world. Moreover, this achievement has lasted for more than 30 years in Serbia, where it is regarded (as) 'one of the most popular American brands and symbols of the Western "fast lifestyle"' (Radić 2009). So, how did it happen that McDonald's has left such a mark on a post-communist country?

In the words of the influential anthropologist Ivan Čolović, politics at the highest level is inconceivable without symbolism (Čolović 2002). He probably did not expect that McDonald's had been in 'the field of the symbolic' since the end of the Yugoslav experiment and has prospered during the most nationalist period of Serbia. Remarkably, the biography of McDonald's in Yugoslavia and Serbia reveal that there has never been any politicisation of such a symbol from the top (to the best of our knowledge) suggesting that a fresh look is needed to grasp the role it has played. Consequently, we argue that, in the absence of political narratives about 'consuming McDonald's', its reappropriation and reinterpretation by Serbian agents contributed to 1) the break-away from communist habits, that is, the shift from collectivism to individualism as part of a broader identification with Western civilisation, 2) the differentiation of Serbs from other ethnic groups, and 3) the ultimately cultural revitalisation of an imagined community.

We therefore need to overcome the widespread belief that socialism and 'consumer societies' are antinomic. Contrary to a prevalent Western assumption, the transition to a consumer society did not start after the secession of the former Yugoslav republics. Historically, a consumer society was bound to the Yugoslav ideal and the underlying cultural hybridity between socialism and capitalism (Jelača – Kolanović – Lugarić 2017). In such an environment, purchased goods and services are endowed with symbolic, expressive and cultural value, and thus contribute crucially to the construction of a collective and individual identity (Patterson, 2011). In this paper, we endorse the view of Zukin and Maguire (2004: 173) for whom consumption is an 'institutional field' that connects 'economic and cultural institutions, large-scale changes in social structure, and discourses of the self'. Following this line of reasoning, the arrival of McDonald's in the late Yugoslavia has set a motivating agenda in which individual Serbian men and women underwent consumption as a project of shaping and voicing a 'new-found' identity. Put in simple words, McDonald's,

and its corollary McDonaldisation conceived 'at large' as a cultural process, have a forceful influence on the 'way individuals experience their world' (Ritzer – Stillman 2003: 33). More precisely, our argument borrows and extends that of Featherstone, Lash and Robertson (1995), that McDonaldisation has given an international but also an ethnic character to microcosmic routines. Here, McDonaldisation is viewed as a post-communist emancipatory consumption pattern and an implicit identity building phenomenon. As such, it differs from but also aims to complement previous scholarly studies focusing on 'production' aspects (e.g., Czeglédy 2002).

This article is organised as follows. First, we condense the existing scholarly literature on consumption and bottom-up identity building with a particular focus on Yugoslavia/Serbia. We added comparative insights from other communist countries as the advent of a consumer society under socialist regimes was far from being homogeneous and followed structurally different paths. Then, the research methodology we implemented is briefly outlined. Next, we identify four distinct, but still interconnected, periods in the McDonaldisation of Yugoslavia/Serbia. These moments reveal their relevance for understanding the mutations of Serbian society and their underlying identity issues in both the pre- and post-Yugoslav Serbia. The third section is dedicated to the first stage of the McDonaldisation of Yugoslavia/Serbia, going from 1988 to 1991. Here, we explore how McDonald's reconfigured the citizen-consumer interface, a major transformation that exemplified a (cultural) turn from collectivism to individualism. The main contention is that if, at the micro-level, consumers were the bearers of Yugoslav socialism (Duda 2017), they also shaped the post-Yugoslav social and cultural landscape.

In the fourth section, we delve into the exclusive launch of McDonald's in Serbia as a way to establish how the construction of a post-Yugoslav Serbian identity mobilised alternative and bottom-up strategies for defining the Serbian nation vis-a-vis other Yugoslav republics/nations. It is examined in relation to the official Yugoslav ideology and reflects a shift towards the ideal of new state developmentalism in a period of increased globalisation, 'national-liberal and xenophobic nationalism' (Guzina 2003). The fifth section highlights civic responses in the form of a 'love and hate' affair with the U.S. franchise to the Serbian political crisis over national sovereignty from the end of the 1990s to 2012. The sixth section analyses the ultimate phase of the McDonaldisation process following Aleksandar Vučić's. He is currently president of Serbia. In 2012, he served as prime minister.[1] This is the time in which, in parallel to a break-up with past nationalist state discourses, citizens of Serbia through the consumption of McDonald's revamped some sort of Yugoslav cultural hybridity in bridging Western cultural citizenship and local traditions. Finally, the conclusion recaps the contributions of the paper.

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1   He currently holds the 'President of Serbia' position. In 2012, he served as prime minister.

We wish to heighten our comprehension of how McDonaldisation has been working in an Eastern European setting and add the Serbian and Yugoslav cases to the growing stream of scholarly works on identity building through consumption in post-communist societies (e.g., Berdahl 2005; Patico – Caldwell 2002; Seliverstova 2017). Up to now, in Yugoslavia/Serbia the study of identity construction has largely focused on the role of the country's political elites while the responsibility of human action has been neglected. This paper aims to fill this gap.

II. Theoretical insights

We start from the premise that if Yugoslavia represents the past, then McDonaldisation incarnates a bridge between past and a 'conceivable future' in the sense of Ritzer (2002) and has helped the Serbs to 'synchronize their historical watch' (Appadurai 1996: 2) with the West. More specifically, the dynamics of McDonaldisation understood as a global phenomenon, induce a change in how people identify themselves in relation to the world at a specific historical situation following Friedman (1994). Applying the author's line of reasoning leads to the suggestion that McDonaldisation is articulated dialectically with the structures and boundaries of Serbian society, both containing and transforming their own internal boundaries. Consequently, we endorse the allegation that the local and the global concurrently form the content of a new reality that organises the already existing social and identity fields (see Friedman 1994) within which Westernised as well as globalised foodstuffs such as (Mac) burgers and broadly speaking McDonald's restaurants, (then) become a 'major locus' of post-communist identification, more than a foray into Western culture. Consumption, and specifically that of foreign brands such as McDonald's, offers an original lens for analysing the mutation of Serbian society from the last convulsions of Yugoslavia to the present time.

On the one hand, scholarly literature has primarily addressed consumption issues in both Yugoslavia and Serbia from a historical and social-cultural perspectives (for a review, see Erdei 2018). During the Yugoslav period and along diverse shopping experiences, Luthar (2006) emphasised the symbolic value and community significance of taking possession of material commodities. This characteristic makes the Yugoslav case rather unique given that in other state socialist societies such as Romania, consumption practices (in a situation of shortage) were almost exclusively restricted to 'hoarding, rationing, intensive recycling and extensive repairs' (Chelcea 2002). In GDR, consumption focused on usefulness instead of symbolic differentiation and comprised a social vs. an individual orientation (Merkel – Courtois 1997).

During the transition period, (Western) 'global icons' played a critical role in the emancipation process within which progress and resistance encountered

each other in everyday life (see Erdei 2011). Surprisingly, the progressive ritualisation of consuming McDonald's (see Kottak 1978) in Serbia has received little consideration with the exception of Vučetić (2013), whereas this phenomenon went beyond mere 'discovery' for post-socialist citizens and rationalisation of food processes. It is part of a modernisation process (through consumption) made of 'moments and movements' (Slater – Miller 2007). This is to suggest that, like television, which had a major social and cultural influence on the development of Yugoslavia after World War II and tightly linked with 'future-oriented ideology' (Erdei 2021: 93), the transformative role of McDonald's since the last years of the Yugoslav federation has been misjudged.

On the other hand, most existing studies dealing with post-Yugoslav identities are introverted and point to the contribution of local cultural artefacts, from popular music such as Serbian 'heroic songs' (Hudson 2003) to history textbooks (Crawford 2003; Obradović 2016) and the Turbofolk musical style (see Archer 2012). Moreover, top-down approaches largely dominate the debates, from the influence of the 1986 'Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences' to the Serbian national project in reconstructing a 'cultural unity' (Miller 2004) and its role in building an exclusive and politically (and emotionally) charged Serbian identity (Morus 2007) to the role of state narratives and nationalist discourses (e.g. Vujaccić 2003) with regular references to historical events, such as the battle of Kosovo in 1389 (e.g. Cohen 2014). In this regard, the book *The politics of symbols in Serbia* (Čolović 2002) probably best encapsulates ethnocentric discourse, and naturalises and essentialises key topoi of ethno-national mythology. While these approaches have the merit to highlight an ethnicisation process that contributed to the distancing of the Other, they leave little space to investigate the role of human agency in the construction of post-Yugoslav Serbian identity.

We build from the argument that 'nations and their associated phenomena [such as nationalism] are dual phenomena, constructed primarily from above, but which can only be understood if analysed from below as well. That is, in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, desires and interests of ordinary people, who are not necessarily nationals and even less nationalists' (Hobsbawm 1991: 10). The so-called 'bottom-up' or 'soft' approaches to identity issues have multiplied over the past ten years. They mainly emphasise the role of micro-actors and thus place the construction of identity in a 'day-to-day' perspective (Fox – Miller-Idriss 2008; Polese et al. 2017). This position has stimulated the development of a research stream aimed at examining the role of human action and how identities are 'renegotiated' on a daily basis, taking as a field of study countries belonging to the former Soviet bloc (e.g., Knott 2019; Kulyk 2011; Cheskin 2013). This paper is part of this trend.

III. Research methodology

The present paper is based on two different research methods articulated around the biographical approach developed by Kopytoff (1986). Such a narrative scheme aims to uncover the latent reasons why 'alien objects' are adopted and how people culturally redefine them.

Consequently, besides methodically amassed historical data between 1988 and 2021 including both local (in Serbian) and foreign newspapers (mainly in English), it combines ethnographic fieldwork and an ordinary citizen's perspective. In order to understand what concepts such as McDonaldisation and citizenship mean in the context of people's day-to-day (eating and drinking) routines across more than three decades, it is critical to provide an alternative view to the taken-for-granted dichotomy between East and West and to challenge top-down approaches to identity building. Besides, we aim to go beyond any fixed political category (Kott 2004), to go beneath the 'uniform surface of dictatorship' as Jarausch (1999) recommended it and, accordingly, how it daily worked under the various successive regimes since the collapse of Yugoslavia. As emphasised by Knott (2015: 467) such an approach adds 'a richness of context and a bottom-up perspective that quantitative and elite-level interviews fail to provide'. Thus, participants were explicitly asked 'Do you/Would you go for a burger or ice-cream or coffee/tea or cake at McDonald's? Yes/No, why?' We also posed more general questions about the importance of the country of origin and the company's longevity in Serbia in affecting (or not) their consumption decision.

Forty-five semi-structured interviews[2] (30–50 minutes) with Belgradians were conducted *in situ* and individually during a two-month period (April-May 2018). The survey sampling method used was a systematic random sampling because of its intrinsic qualities (see Acharya et al. 2013). Moreover, control for potential method biases was achieved in following the procedures recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003) with a particular focus on respondents' diversity (in terms of location and age) and privacy issues. With respect to the latter, given that most of our respondents neither wished their first name to be mentionned nor agreed to be recorded or to write their answers on the questionnaire (we uncovered this peculiarity during the pre-test phase), we have respected their request for privacy in using M for male and F for female for gender type, in addition to their age, and we documented their responses on the questionnaire itself.

The study sample comprises educated (38.6% hold a BA) Belgrade inhabitants aged 19 to 77 years. On the former point, our respondents hold a higher education level compared to the population of the Belgrade region according

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2   Data used in this paper belong to a large body of material that was formed for the sake of a wider research project which explores the role of general factors (attachment, type of clientele, etc.) potentially affecting residents' attitudes towards eating and/or drinking places.

to national statistics (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2019: 12). This may be explained by the positioning of the franchise (higher prices compared to local substitutes[3]) in Serbia and consequently the structure of McDonald's clientele, which is composed of individuals possessing a higher purchasing power. Male and female respondents are evenly distributed, and a majority works in the private sector (36.4%). The participants' profile is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample descriptive statistics

	Level	%*
Age	18–24	25
	25–34	29.5
	35–44	20.5
	45–54	9.1
	55–64	11.4
	65+	4.5
Gender	Male	50
	Female	50
Level of education	Primary school	0
	High school	25
	Lyceum	25
	BA	38.6
	Master	6.8
	PhD	4.5
Job position	Private sector employee	36.4
	Public sector employee	6.8
	Self-employed	4.5
	Unemployed	6.8
	Housewife	2.3
	Retired	11.4
	Student	29.5
	Other	2.3

* Rounded to one decimal place.

Apart from interviews with Belgrade inhabitants, we also consulted key informants (marketing-communication designer/Expert 1, ministry of interior official/Expert 2, essayist/Expert 3), raising questions with them to explore the microsocial role McDonald's played in Yugoslavia/Serbia after its arrival in 1988. 'Conversations were conducted under a historical perspective aiming to place Serbia in context' (see Gowan 1999) and accordingly to identify 'ages' or periods in the intermingled life of McDonald's and people in contemporary Serbia, these experts thus acting as 'crystallization points' (Bogner – Menz 2009: 2). Their 'privileged' knowledge (in the sense that they were and are still

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3   In Serbia, the average price of a meal in a 'cheap restaurant' is 700 Dinars (400–1200) while a 'McMeal' or 'combo meal' at McDonald's costs on average 600 Dinars (500–700) (Available at: http://hikersbay.com/prices/serbia?lang=en).

customers of McDonald's) contributed to contextualising the development of the franchise in Yugoslavia/Serbia and its underlying political, cultural and temporal dynamics.

Data was analysed using an iterative reflexive process in the sense of 'what the data are telling us' giving 'subscribed theoretical frameworks, subjective perspectives, ontological and epistemological positions, and intuitive field understandings' with the aim of 'sparking insights and developing meaning' (Srivastava – Hopwood 2009: 77).

The decision to locate the empirical investigation in the Belgrade region was based on two major reasons. Firstly, the first McDonald's restaurant was opened in Belgrade. Secondly, in 2018, 80% of McDonald's restaurants were located in the Belgrade region (21/26). Accordingly, we aim to deliver an in-depth and contextualised comprehension of certain facets of everyday human experience through the intensive examination of a specific case (Polit – Beck 2010). Our/This/Such an approach pertains to the second model of generalisability proposed by Firestone (1993), which is 'analytic generalization'.

IV.   Contextualising the arrival of McDonald's in a communist country: the Yugoslav ideal and birth of a consumer society

While the communist dogma 'demonized the excesses of Western capitalism by depicting its consumption practices as hedonistic and fueled by exploitation' (Swader – Ross 2020: 2), the U.S. franchise found a fertile ground in Yugoslavia: among the countries that belonged to the Eastern Bloc, Yugoslavia contested the ideological demarcation of the cold war by putting into practice a local order of 'economic democracy and decentralized, market socialism' (Woodward 1995: xiii). Its corollary, mass consumption, was economically and symbolically important as part of the Yugoslav League of Communists' political agenda concerned with providing its citizens the highest living standards compared to other communist countries, such as the GDR where a changing class structure led to its dawn in the 1970s and 1980s (see Merkel 1999). The inception of a mass consumer culture dates back to the late fifties (Duda 2017) and materialised with the opening of an 'American-style' supermarket in downtown Belgrade in April 1958 (Rusinow 2008). Then, it became progressively obvious that Marshal Tito's political and cultural project was inspired by the United States, leading the Yugoslav socialist model or 'cultural hybridity' to be designated by quite a few historiographical metaphors (Jelača – Kolanović – Lugarić 2017) such as 'Coca-Cola socialism', an expression coined by Vučetić (2018) to describe the Americanisation of Yugoslav culture throughout the 1960s.

The 1980s' in Yugoslavia showed a contrasting picture. Although the country faced an important economic crisis (shortage of some goods such as plain flour or sugar), for its citizens consumption was symbolically more important than

ever and occurred in numerous ways as 'transnational consumerism' evolved from 'seasonal shopping' in Italy, which had been popular since the 1950s, (Luthar 2006) to the frenetic search for *Starke* (All-Star Converse) and *Najke* (Nike) sports shoes during the 1980s. Actually, despite low economic growth, consumption spread among the various layers of society to become a mode of social and cultural action (see Hirschle 2014).

At this stage of development of Yugoslavia, the arrival of McDonald's marked a turning point in the transformation of Serbian society. In 1988, the use of a national identity rhetoric by the new Serbian political establishment led to a 'verbal civil war' between Yugoslav republics (Hayden 1988: iv). Whereas increasing tensions between its constituents were shaking the Yugoslav Federation, one could hear another sound from Belgrade's Slavija Square where the golden arches of McDonald's reached over the communist world for the first time: 'I can't believe American hamburgers are finally here', said an American woman living in Belgrade (Stojanović 1988) or 'I'm going to the Army tomorrow', bemoans an 18-year-old young man, 'why aren't they open yet?' (Echikson 1988).

A few days after its official opening, my cousin Jelena told me a McDonald's restaurant just opened in Belgrade. 'Next time you come to visit us, we must take you to McDonald's!' It sounded like the new attraction in town, a must-see, anyone and particularly foreigners must visit like the Kalemegdan fortress or Beogradjanka mall and supermarket tower, the city's tallest and most modern building. While she was really excited, I told myself 'Why do you need a Mac?! You have *cevapis*[4] and *pljeskavicas*[5] served in traditional *kafanas*[6]'. Actually, they were highly proud of having a McDonald's restaurant.

V.   The late 1980s in Yugoslavia/Serbia

To begin with, "Yugoslavia is no exception when it came to the pressures for change in Eastern Europe, which increased in the 1980s and which were rooted in 'the communist regimes' inability to solve the central problem of legitimation and these pressures found multivarious outlets such as in culture, while simultaneously exciting tensions along latent axes such as those of an ethnic nature' (Ramet 1995: 4). It took shape in Yugoslavia in apparently diverging phenomena that are, on the one hand, a weakening of the unitary state and, on the other hand, a transition towards a market economy and political diversity. Under the auspices of McDonald's, an influx of positive influences led to three paradigm changes in the ordinary lives of the Serbs.

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4   Minced meat rolls are a typical meal from the Balkan region.

5   *Pljeskavica* is a kind of spicy hamburger. It is considered 'one of the most famous dishes in traditional Serbian cuisine' (Available at: https://www.worldfoodstory.co.uk/recipe/pljeskavica) but is also very popular in all former Yugoslav republics.

6   A typical local tavern.

While the queue was 'a constant and immediately recognisable attribute of Soviet everyday life' (Bogdanov 2012: 77), *kafanas* were acknowledged as noteworthy attributes of the everyday economic and cultural life of the Yugoslav urban landscape. From small villages to the main cities, its dominant picture was that of groups of men and sometimes women hanging together and groups of people (families and/or friends) gathering around a line of tables for a meal. Operating in such places is what Jeffrey et al. (2018) named 'intimacy--geopolitics', where 'embodied practices of proximity, institutional belonging and quotidian routines forge new articulations of political subjectivity, often challenging social cleavages on which state formation has been based' (p. 113). They were immortalised by the legend surrounding the Zlatna Moruna tavern located in Belgrade, where Gavrilo Princip and the members of the organisation 'Mlada Bosna' planned the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian archduke Franz Ferdinand.[7]

The arrival of McDonald's has reconfigured the citizen/restaurant interface. Its corollary, McDonaldisation, broke the traditional communalist rule of *kafanas* typified by 'sitting and eating at the same table' and replaced it with individualist attitudes of 'buy and leave' as Jimbo has emphasised in its blog: 'Namely, as it happens in our country, because we Balkan people are a tavern people, people knew how to eat and then sit, smoke and shit on the political elite/politics, as it is the custom [here]. But there is no such thing in McDonalds. Did you consume it? Yes? Go for a walk! They say they trained staff in Belgrade on how to discreetly chase people away after eating. Why are you now polluting and wasting space? Get out [of here] bro, you're consumed!'[8] Thus, a new mundane social and cultural ritual replaced an older one as a 'new' source of satisfaction.

Specifically, this 'tectonic shift' has created a new 'urban (café) sociality', attracting young people and women who usually did not go to *kafanas* on their own but with parents and on particular occasions. Such a post-communist realm is then characterised by 'particular types of togetherness and (partial) forms of belonging' (Bookman 2014).

> 'When I was a kid, about 13 years old, I ran away from school to McDonald's with friends and we threw fries on each other… It was great!' (Expert 1/49).

Obviously, as Ritzer (2002) put it, there is a sort of delight coupled with such food and its surroundings. Nevertheless, in the Yugoslav case, due to its intimate functioning, McDonaldisation had a wide scope of influence in generating

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7   Available at: https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/beograd/2274695-ovo-je-beogradska-kafana-iz-koje-je--gavrilo-princip-krenuo-u-atentat-na-franca-ferdinanda-video

8   Available at: http://jimblog.com.hr/2017/06/21/kako-je-mcdonalds-instantno-unistio-veliku-cekaonicu/ (published on 21 June 2017).

a (new) 'third place experience' for specific social groups. It redefined social interactions particularly for women who were engaged in a long and winding road from the washing machine and the construction of a housewives' role (Sitar 2015) to the establishment of a new narrative of women as 'working girls'.

> 'I liked McDonald's because I could sit alone there and "in peace" [understood as "none bothered me"]. I was 20 years old, and it was unthinkable for me to sit in a traditional *kafana* alone, I could do it at McDonald's. "He" set me free in that sense... Nobody asked me, but to say' (Expert 3/52).

> After the long-lasting struggle between socialist economic transformations and patriarchal social models stressed by Đurović (2018), and before scholars provided empirical evidence of the negative consequences of transition on women's lives in Eastern European countries, such as the perception that the fight for women's rights was enforced by the Western World (Morvai 2004), the market economy carried by McDonald's provided a parenthesis in the daily lives of women through 'ripples of formal equality and emancipation in a seemingly endless patriarchal ocean' (Petrova 2018: 22).

These mutations of Yugoslav society were the preamble of a deeper and wider call for questioning the construction of legitimacy 'from the top' which was the prerogative of communist regimes. Yugoslavia also endured 'a collective crisis of faith' in the Yugoslav ideal of 'brotherhood and unity'. This is to contend that civil society in post-Yugoslav Serbia survived as a cultural and pragmatic counterimage of communism and a supporter to nationalists' exclusive hegemonic goals (see Di Palma 1991).

McDonald's as an identity marker and maker in the early 1990s

Nations' chronicles are paved with events illustrating that sport and national identity are intricately linked (Bogdanov 2011). Throughout the 1980s, the frustrations and 'powerlessness' that inhabitants of Yugoslavia faced in their daily routines were growing. Moreover, the worsening of economic conditions which highlighted the failure of the Yugoslav socialist programme, in return, fed ethnonationalist sentiments among political elites. In her survey of Yugoslav scholars, Dević (2016) pointed out that 'many ordinary people in Yugoslavia observed the existence of conflicts along ethnic and nationalist lines as a top--down threat, played out among the top layers of the six republics' Leagues of Communists, in contrast to the non-conflictual inter-ethnic relations at the grassroots level' (p. 21). This argument is (somewhat) belied by the facts. The exclusive opening of McDonald's in Serbia gave power to the people/Serbs to affirm their (national) identity over the citizens of the other republics while

multifaceted tensions between the Yugoslav republics were reflected in sports and particularly football.

During the 'Yugoslav socialist project', sports exposed the (local) forms of nationalism at work within the former Federation and overseen by the League of Communists of Yugoslavia patriotic rhetoric of interethnic 'brotherhood and unity' (Perica 2001). It is therefore not surprising that the Yugoslav crisis sparked eruptions of overt ethnic hostility and violence in sports arenas and uncovered a definitive fracture between Yugoslav republics and detachment from the Yugoslav ideology. On 13 May 1990, during a game between Dinamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade at Maksimir,[9] Red Star Belgrade (Serbian) fans sang 'We have got McDonalds, where is yours?' ('Mi imamo 'Mekdonalds', a gde je vama?'[10]).

> 'There was pride because it [McDonald's] is not in Zagreb and the like. Just proud to have it. Something similar to how we could buy jeans in Trieste, and the Czechs, Hungarians, Bulgarians can't. In a sense, we are more modern, we are more advanced, something like that' (Expert 3/52).

In other words, the US franchise implicitly validated 'on the pitch' that Serbia symbolically embraced globalisation and entered into modernity while other republics or 'former YU-new states' didn't. Accordingly, McDonald's fostered a sense of pride in Serbian society and definitely distanced it from its neighbours. McDonald's was not only associated with the Serbs but also with the capital city of Belgrade, which, de facto, carried symbolically both unique and distinct features that helped to differentiate oneself from others and raise self-esteem (Twigger-Ross – Uzzell 1996). Although the U.S. fast-food chain was a passive actor of this event, the brand instilled feelings of (economic/cultural) superiority and national ascendancy (Ariely 2016) of the Serbs over other ethnic groups (Croats, etc.) and, as such, was regarded as a symbol of Serbian nationalism besides folkloric texts (e.g., Čolović 2002) and popular songs (e.g., Hudson 2003).

In a period of dying supranational Yugoslav identity, the early successful story of McDonald's in Serbia supported the contention that modernisation did not lead to a major loss of national identity but, on the contrary, it invigorated national culture (Sznaider 2000).

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9   Maksimir is the name of Dinamo Zagreb's stadium.

10   Available at: https://arhiva.nedeljnik.rs/nedeljnik/portalnews/kako-je-otvoren-prvi-mekdonalds-u-srbiji--dogadaji-koji-su-menjali-srbiju-77/

VI.   The 'I love you neither do I'[11] period

When Yugoslavia entered civil war in 1991, on the one hand, international and domestic (nationalist) politics fueled a cultural dilemma, strengthening the divisions that exist in diverse societies between 'nativists' or 'traditionalists' and 'westernizers' (e.g., Hnatiuk 2006; Dai 2005). On the other hand, McDonald's was probably the only 'window on the world' for Yugoslavs/Serbs given the huge economic and political sanctions and bans from international institutions. Going to McDonald's, the most well-known symbol of the American style of living, has grown to be a 'sign' that an individual from an ostracised and in-regression country is still in tune with the modern lifestyle.

> I remember a hypocritical comment from the time of the bombing addressed to a friend of mine 'what are you playing that American music for?', and the gentlemen probably have a German TV, white goods and other things in the house (M/39).

The year 1999 and the NATO bombing campaign contested Thomas Friedman's statement that 'no two countries that both had McDonald's restaurants had ever gone to war' (Friedman 1996). About a decade later, euphoria gave way to resentment directed towards American foreign policy when groups of angry people damaged McDonald's main facility in Belgrade. However, contrary to what happened in Russia, that is to say the closing of three restaurants in Crimea and calls from right wing leaders to shut down all of its outlets, which apparently concurred with a wider wave of anti-Westernism in the Russian Federation (Taylor 2014), there was no such a wave of anti-Americanism or Westernism in Serbia. It is possible that the attitude of franchise owners that branded franchise symbols, such as the golden arches, with Serbian ethnic symbols, such as the traditional Serbian cap called '*šajkača*', and transformed the lower-floor seating area of one of its facilities into a bomb shelter (Lynch 2012) contributed to appeasing some sort of 'cultural hooliganism' that materialised by the degradation of goods and materials belonging to a Western (but mainly American) cultural symbol.

This episode of violence mirrored a social malaise within Serbian society in relation to the world outside, a means to cope with cultural and political problems and take action against a desired but contested identity which had been built in the social imagination (see Bodin, Robène – Héas 2005), especially since the end of the 1980s.

In 2008 there is another milestone in McDonald's joint history with (contemporary) Serbia displaying a double face that is 'Americanization' and 'anti-

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11   It is the title of a French popular song played in 1963 (Brigitte Bardot and Serge Gainsbourg).

-Americanism' (Vučetić 2013). By opening the first McCafé in Belgrade, McDonald's was again at the forefront of 'global/local modernities', that is, giving an international character to microcosmic practices (see Featherstone, Lash – Robertson 1995). Dragoš Pavićević, General Manager of McDonald's for Serbia, expressed it plainly: 'Serbia is known as a climate where you drink a lot of coffee. Here, life without coffee is quite empty, it is something more than a hot beverage. Coffee gives some charm to life, so for us, that part of the business is very interesting as a supplement to the offer of the existing McDonald's restaurants.'[12]

However, following Kosovo's declaration of independence of 17 February 2008, demonstrations and protests took place in Serbia. The Serbian government, through the prime minister Vojislav Koštunica, accused the United States of 'violating international law in favor of its own military interests' and added that 'as long as the Serbian people will exist, Kosovo will remain Serbian'[1]. On 21 February 2008, a group of around a hundred protesters headed from the U.S. Embassy to the downtown area, yelled slogans at the expense of Kosovo Albanians next to the building of the government of Serbia and ultimately vandalised the McDonald's restaurant located on Terazije (B92 2008).[13]

This was the last stand of a form of 'cultural hooliganism', embodied by the French director Chantal Akerman in her documentary *From the East* (1993), observing that Eastern Europe had always had a 'love/hate affair' with the West and particularly with America, that 'object of troubled desire' (Jelača, Kolanović – Lugarić 2017). However, none of the respondents stressed a form of 'depravation' of their country with the markers of Western capitalism such as McDonald's. This period devoted this American symbol as a receptacle of frustrations accumulated since the break-up of Yugoslavia, but is also viewed as a cultural and political metaphor through which the Yugoslav socialist legacy is conveyed (see Kolanović 2016). One of the interviewees summed up it unambiguously:

'When they opened a McDonald's [restaurant], I thought America was on our [Serbian] side. Little joke… I remember the queues; I had a great time there; I liked that it was self-service… and it was important that it was an American chain…' I told him that there were canteens with self-service before, but he said that 'at McDonald's, it was somehow better, more elegant, at a higher level! although there is no waiter' (Expert 2/52).

Interestingly, besides the fast-food chain KFC, which has opened several locations in Belgrade/Serbia since 2007, no other U.S. franchise has either transcended tumultuous periods or succeeded in Serbia: Pizza Hut closed its outlets

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12   Available at: https://www.ekapija.com/news/293925/dragos-pavicevic-generalni-direktor-mcdonalds-restorana-za-srbiju-u-2010-ulazemo-vise

13   Available at: https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2008andmm=02anddd=17andnav_category=640andnav_id=285229

in 2012 after nine years of operation[14] and Subway has preferred to operate in Kosovo where there is a U.S. military base.

VII. Since 2008: bridging the 'ethnic East' and the 'civic West'[15]

From the 'ethno-national mythic discourse' that characterised Serbian society from the end of the 1980s, the previous decade saw a progressive move towards a 'soulless world of modern materialism and rationalism' (Čolović 2002: 7–8) to the extent that McDonald's was awarded the 'youth's favorite chain of restaurants in Serbia' prize in 2021.[16]

McDonald's is the only foreign company that has survived several territorial contractions (1991, 2006, 2008). Furthermore, among those firms that are part of citizens' daily lives both spatially as an enduring fragment of the urban environment and socially as a shared edifice of consumption rituals over the past thirty years, the U.S. franchise has maintained, to some extent, the continuity of the Serbian national idea after the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

> 'McDonald's has been present in Serbia since '88, when I visited it for the first time with my parents, and it means 30 years of tradition to me' (M/39).

This assessment provides empirical evidence to the argument of Jovanović (2014) that Serbian citizens view their new state as an extension of the former Yugoslavia. In the course of action, the late years of Yugoslav socialism turned out to be a revived object of yearning for some respondents (see Todorova 2010).

> 'Yes. I'm going [to McDonald's]. Not only do I love the taste of junk food, but it also reminds me of a beautiful period of life' (M/36).

As McDonald's has become an integral part of residents' cultural memories, it adds to the contention that remembering and belonging are intimately related (Obradović 2016). Moreover, none lamented that McDonald's exists at the expense of local *kafanas* or restaurants. Indeed, several respondents do not consider buying local and going to McDonald's as mutually exclusive. When asked 'Is the origin / where does the brand you are buying come from / important to you? Yes / No, why?', one of them replied:

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14 Available at : https://mondo.rs/Info/Ekonomija/amp/a267698/Pizza-Hut-u-Beogradu-propao.html

15 This refers to Kuzio's (2002) view about the 'ethnic-East/civic-West' divide: 'the proportional composition of a country's ethnic particularism and civic universalism has always been in tension and dependent not on geography but on two factors: the historic stage of the evolution from ethnic to civic state and nationhood and the depth of democratic consolidation' (p. 20).

16 Available at: https://www.bizlife.rs/mcdonald-s-je-omiljeni-lanac-restorana-mladih-u-srbiji/

It certainly matters. First of all, one should buy domestic products in order to encourage the expansion of products, and thus the strengthening of the economy. In case there is a demand for brands that the domestic market cannot offer, I have nothing against buying them. I visit McDonald's a couple of times a year solely for a milkshake, and sometimes a burger (M/33).

In addition, McDonald's often acts as an inferred, not to say overt, point of reference at both the local and international levels. Domestically, the U.S. franchise serves as a metric for service quality (hygiene, staff kindness) standards.

'I don't go to McDonald's often, but since I pass by their restaurant on Zeleni Venac quite frequently, it happens that I eat something along the way. I love that their premises are always clean, and they have always kind workers' (F/60).

In an international scope, McDonald's outlets could act as a prism through which Serbs view or 'filter' the world outside their own cultural sphere.

'I go to McDonald's quite often, especially when I go out with friends. The best French fries in the world, and I love that they are always the same wherever you go. When I went to Germany to visit my aunt, I went exclusively to McDonald's because I'm quite picky about food and I don't like German cuisine' (M/20).

For better and for worse, from individualistic concerns about health ('No [I don't go to McDonald's] because I try to eat healthy', F/23) to a social gathering place for families ('I am often at Macdonald's [sic]; prices are not low but the service is always fast and I like that there is an area where children can play freely', F/31) and youth groups ('I mostly avoid McDonald's, although my friends love it and sometimes I go there because of them when we're already together. I don't like fast food, but I must admit that their ice cream is very good', M/34) and finally a social class reminder ('I go to McDonald's occasionally, when I come across some coupons, because it's quite expensive for me considering that a person can't have a full belly by eating their food. Their coffee is very lovely, and I like to sit in the garden to drink cappuccino when the weather is nice and I can afford it', F/64), McDonald's has propelled Serbs into 'new times', these changes that once formed Western 'material and cultural conditions of existence' (Hall 2006: 222–223). While the Yugoslav conflict ruined the unitary ideal constructed by Marshal Tito, McDonaldisation has 'recalibrated' Yugoslav socialism into the bitter daily reality of Western societies, shifting from the collectivist top-down wellbeing project to individualistic promises of material achievement which are increasingly sought after even for those with low purchasing power.

VIII.   Conclusions

Without a state endorsement, nor calls for boycott[17] or buycott, the role that Mc-Donald's has completed in citizens' everyday lives in the pre- and post-Yugoslav era was much more complex than acting just as a fast-food provider. The whole phenomenon of McDonaldisation has created a bond between past and an imagined future for Serbs, as well as a commitment to progress. The development of the U.S. franchise in this transition period illustrates one of the hidden and mainly uncovered aspects of the cultural war that was occurring between the Yugoslav republics and within the larger Balkan region. This article shows how the historical course of McDonald's in pre- and post-Yugoslav Serbia was and stays dominated by matters centred on what it means to be Serbian and provides a real-world example of the (symbolic) power of 'going to McDonald's' in forming senses of belonging in, at the same time, inclusive and exclusive terms. The development of McDonald's, under the rubric of identity building, has become more evident in the post-Yugoslav era. As such, it has expanded the conception of McDonaldisation.

Specifically, contrary to common assumptions, cultural articulations of capitalism as represented by McDonald's and Yugoslav socialism were not formed by the apparent exclusion of the other but was locally reinterpreted as Us/ Serbs vs. Others/Croats, Montenegrins. Unlike Turkey and the launch of Cola Turka which aimed to surmount a sense of relative inferiority (Ozkan – Foster 2005), the consumption of McDonald's in Serbia 'materialized differences' (Berta 2019) between Serbs and other ethnic groups belonging to the (former) Yugoslav Federation.

Massively celebrated over more than three decades, the history of McDonald's in pre- and post-Yugoslav Serbia has defied the most optimistic forecasts. It also challenges theoretical assumptions that the U.S. franchise, as a capitalist symbol, is neither perceived as a form of neocolonialism nor that the neoliberal standardisation of core Balkan countries such as Serbia has failed (see Bjelić 2018). In a broader perspective and compared to Central European countries, Russia and/or China, McDonald's personified a form of post-communist capitalism that somewhat borrows from Central Europe's Western liberal model, Russian patrimonial approach and China's own unique way (see Szelényi – Mihályi 2019). It has accompanied drastic changes in the social fabric of the post-Yugoslav realm which has included global (re-)integration to the international community at least symbolically. The McDonaldisation of the Serbian society, predominantly conceived as a cultural process and less as an economic modernisation, correlates instead of opposes the 'Magna Carta' and the 'Magna

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17   Unlike what happened in Hungary in the 1990s (see Harper 1999), there was no such anticorporate activism as a response to the local development of McDonald's or other foreign/Western well-known transnationals in Yugoslavia/Serbia.

Mac' (see Huntington in Betts 2010). In line with Jensen (2003), the 'newly' formed cultural identity embraces the beliefs and practices of one or more cultural groups that are, here, the East and the West (some are welcomed, and others rejected) thus echoing Yugoslavia's hybridity. Paradoxically, in parallel to nationalist state narratives, the chauvinist attitude that materialised in the early 1990s has widened the gap between the various ethnic groups and has certainly facilitated Serbia's 'national awakening' during Serbia's struggle for positioning itself in the international society while splitting Yugoslavism and Serbian national ideals (see Ejdus 2017).

At least implicitly, the McDonaldisation of Serbia has made an 'imagined community' to become reality, thus extending Anderson's (1991) contention about the importance of rational expression of capitalism for shaping national identity. This paper highlighted the role of consumption as another emanation of capitalism in breaking a unified but constructed national imagery into multiple cultural and ethnic groups.

Cultural hybridity was one of the founding pillars of the Yugoslav ideology, so the McDonaldisation of the Serbian society is not predominantly perceived as a form of cultural imperialism. Placed in a comparative perspective and although McDonald's has its supporters and detractors as the empirical study evidenced it, McDonaldisation had not led to a 'deauthentication' of local culinary culture like in the Czech Republic (Zeleny et al. 2020). Thus, the result of the McDonaldisation process that started in 1988 shows no primacy to traditions over global Western values but merges both, expressing the contradiction between rationality (valuing quality) and emotionality particularly when (symbolic) boundaries are at stake. Furthermore, Serbia's case goes beyond McDonald's' experience in Russia (see Caldwell 2004) and shares similarities with Japan for grasping the appropriation of, broadly speaking, America in Japanese culture (see Kawai 2009): one of the symbols of American culture (that is McDonald's) was significant for the 'reinvention' of Serbian cultural identity in the post-Yugoslav period, and the idea of America allows Serbia to act out the paradox of being both nationalist and oriented towards the West, i.e. open to the 'world outside' its regional sphere of influence.

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Laurent Tournois *holds a Ph.D. from the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers de Paris. Previously, he served as Department Head at ESSCA Paris-Angers (AACSB accredited), DBA Program Director at Grenoble Ecole de Management (Triple Crown accredited) and Director of Business Graduate Studies at University of Dubai (AACSB accredited). His research activities deal with the relationships between politics, symbolic geographies of belonging, and top/down identity building strategies in the Balkans, with a specific focus on Serbia. He has published in journals such as Political Geography, Cities, Politics in Central Europe, and Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies among others. He speaks fluently and writes Serbian. Email: Laurent.tournois@proton.me; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8804-0159*

Turbulent energy transformations in Central Europe: Nord Stream projects in the context of geopolitics

ATTILA VIRÁG AND GRÉTA TANCSA

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Abstract: *The sabotage related to the Nord Stream pipelines does not only signify the Russo-Ukrainian War's escalated realities and potential future risks, also tied to the energy security of supply, but in addition to traditional economic and energetic dilemmas, it also has a specific meaning in light of classic geopolitical concepts. Our study aims to highlight that the contradictions between the direct or indirect nation-state stakeholders, even nowadays, fit into the logic of the power plays illustrated in traditional geopolitical theories. And thus, the events related to the Nord Stream 2 project, as guiding principles, underline not only the energy relations of relevant international state actors appearing in the pipeline's environment but also in the context of geopolitical positions and the structure of potential geopolitical transformations.*

Keywords: *geopolitics, Nord Stream 2, natural gas, gas pipeline, LNG*

I. Introduction

For most news consumers, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline has not appeared to be more than the average energy project up until 2022. The endeavour itself consists of two 1230 km long pipelines with an aggregate capacity of 55 billion cubic metres per year (Nord Stream 2 AG 2021a). Construction began in 2018 and was finalised in the autumn of 2021. Nord Stream 2 AG, a project company owned by Gazprom, was in charge of the implementation. Regarding its route, the pipeline runs through the Baltic Sea from Vyborg, Russia to Greifswald, Germany (Nord Stream 2 AG 2021b). Fifty percent of the 9.5 billion euro invest-

ment is financed by Gazprom, while five giant European energy corporations, namely Wintershall, Uniper, Engie, Royal Dutch Shell and OMV provide the remaining 50% of the funds (Gazprom 2017).[1]

Being observant, one could recognise Nord Stream 2 as a highly controversial energy project originally supported by Russia and Germany, while most European stakeholders, as well as the United States, were opposing it. All of this seemed to be apparent during the progression of the endeavour, as one did not need to be a policy expert or project manager genius to acknowledge that the implementation of the pipeline did not go without difficulties due to the conflict between the related stakeholders. The laying of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline was halted on several occasions due to certification-related issues and the sanctioning of construction companies, the completion originally planned for 2019 was only realised in 2021 (de Jong – Van de Graaf 2021).

Following this, the licencing procedure was initiated to obtain an operating permit for the pipeline, which falls under the jurisdiction of the German regulatory authorities with energy being one of the policy areas in which the EU and its member states exercise shared competence (European Union 2007). Witnessing as the procedure was prolonged, it became evident that for this energy project balancing on the frontier of politics and economic considerations, along with policy deliberations, it is the great geopolitical powers that steer the proceedings, and the customary bureaucratic sluggishness of regulatory authorities only strengthens this notion.

Just prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, on 22 February, Germany announced suspending the certification process of Nord Stream 2, once again halting the project indefinitely. As a result, the future of a completely operational pipeline became quite uncertain before it even started functioning. Amongst experts, it was apparent that the decades-long Soviet/Russian-European links, particularly the pragmatic Russian-German energy relations, served as a strong basis for realising Nord Stream 2; however, the decision to halt the project was more than a mere falling out in the shadow of war between the two states.

Moreover, on 26 September 2022, tremors of explosions were detected by Danish authorities, after which leaks were discovered on the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines (Rasmussen 2022). Though not operating at the time, both pipelines were filled with natural gas when the blasts occurred. The leaks were discovered in the Exclusive Economic Zones of Denmark and Sweden, investigations were conducted in the following weeks and all evidence indicated sabotage, natural causes behind the leaks were ruled out (Skopljak 2022). Es-

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1   Prior to the current Nord Stream 2, inaugurated in 2011, a considerable German-Russian natural gas market collaboration, the Nord Stream 1 pipeline was realised (Wood – Henke 2021). Similarly, along with Gazprom, major European energy companies Wintershall, PEG Infrastruktur AG, Gasunie and Engie participated in this pipeline project (Nord Stream AG 2011).

pecially in light of these progressions and more than anything, the sabotage of the project reflected the transformation of geopolitical balances of power.

The geopolitical theoretical framework and nation-state oriented focus of our study are in need of a brief justification. Globalisation coming into effect at the dawn of the modern era and gaining speed at an unprecedented level after the cold war posed a significant challenge for classical geopolitical thinking. According to a number of experts, technological development leads to the demise of distances or constantly shrinking maps (Bracken 1999), and an ever-denser space-time coordinate system (Nayar 2005). In this setting, the view according to which globalisation undermines the explanatory power of global political theories favouring geopolitical considerations seemed to gain more importance (McGrew 2021).

However, we are of a different opinion. The considerations and facts of geopolitics also prevail in the 21st century, especially when it comes to the energy sector. We believe that geopolitical reasoning remains crucial in understanding and shaping the processes taking place in the international milieu. With globalisation, our world has become remarkably fragile,[2] which could bring about a certain renaissance of the geopolitical way of thinking as well as the recognition of the fact that states continue to play an indispensable role in the international order.

Considering its public sector and government-controlled nature, the energy sector is highly exposed to political currents, providing further rationale for studying nations as geopolitical actors. Decisions are typically politicised, energy corporations are often owned or supervised by the state, energy prices frequently emerge in political conversations, determining which power source and in what ratio the energy use of a given state or entity is based on (energy mix) is a strategy of a political nature and the management and regulation of market failures requires state intervention (Farkas 2019).

In our view, the Russo-Ukrainian War beginning on 24 February also warrants the need to examine states in a geopolitical context and through this lens, to focus on concepts based on geographical considerations. This event is of particular importance from the point of Nord Stream 2 as well,[3] seeing as the Russian aggression, among other things, has the potential to evoke changes in the energy sector that in extreme cases could lead to the dramatic alteration of the current trends of globalisation.

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2   This is justified by the fact that the belief in the supremacy of the market appears to be wavering as a result of the 2008/2009 global financial crisis, the recently discovered vulnerability of global supply chains during the pandemics and the risks related to security of supply arising from the planet's increasing energy demand.

3   Of course, it poses a thought-provoking question to what degree the Russian offensive can be explained by the obsolete thinking of the architects of the 'old geopolitics' introduced by Richard Falk (2012) and to what extent the events give validation to this approach, but the fact remains that the war has started, and Hannibal is once again at the gates.

Therefore, it can be stated with great certainty that the current affairs of world politics once again generate the need to blow the dust off traditional geopolitical literature and reinterpret its theories adjusted to contemporary challenges. In our opinion, this also helps in making sense of the approaches and angles behind Nord Stream 2 and, through this lens, understanding the related transformation processes.

To provide a theoretical foundation, geopolitical conceptualisation will take up the first part of our analysis, along with a brief historical overview of the field of study by mentioning the theoretical framework the current study is based on. Subsequently, we will point out the relevance of geopolitics in the energy segment. By doing so, we will arrive at the geopolitical dilemma of Nord Stream 2 and the strategies of the project's paramount stakeholders will be introduced with respect to classical geopolitical considerations. For each state actor individually, we will review their geopolitical attributes most relevant from an energy standpoint, then with regard to the project, the changes prior to and after the outbreak of the war will be examined.

Our study aims to review the geopolitical background behind the energy--related positions and strategic aspects of the stakeholders most affected by the implementation of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The logic behind selecting the particular state actors to be examined and the structure in which they will be reviewed in the study is explained at length prior to the individual analysis of the stakeholders.

Our hypothesis states that the Nord Stream 2 project, going beyond its conventional policy and project framework, also sheds some light on the interrelationships of relevant international state actors appearing in the pipeline's environment as a real litmus test

II.   Theoretical framework

Colloquially, we use the phrase geopolitics in a number of contexts. As a result, the expression can be a part of virtually any discussion related to international political issues, without carrying substantial meaning. In fact, geopolitics is the geographical dimension of politics where the power relations between political units are demonstrated visually, employing geographical terminology.[4] The expression itself originates from the ancient Greek terms geos (Earth) and politicos (community), so the concerted actions of communities determined by space and politics, that is to say, the considerations of power and seizing and maintaining it, serve as the basis of the concept. In accordance with this

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4   At present it is a generally accepted view that geopolitics, along with the realist-non-realist and the idealist-institutionalist paradigm, has become the third classical theoretical approach to study international relations (Szilágyi 2018).

view, geopolitics is none other than the impact geography has on groups of individuals.[5]

According to the Dictionary of Geopolitics, this particular approach to politics on the one hand provides descriptive information and explanations regarding foreign policy decisions by introducing the geographical, demographic and resource-related characteristics, i.e., the specific spatial structure of regions and countries; on the other hand, geopolitics can also alter and transform these elements, thus as a particular ideological construction, it can serve political interests and aspirations (O'Loughlin 1994).

Renowned expert of political geography John Agnew's view is that every geopolitical construction, though considering itself objective and based on scientific facts, is eventually human-made, so through a specific worldview it describes political reality from a narrative aligning with the existing power structure and is even able to alter it by explaining momentarily sought-after relations with geographical determination.[6] In this context, geopolitical considerations can offer a theoretical foundation and support for state administrations by providing (sometimes just seemingly) scientific geographical views.

This is no different in the case of the Nord Stream 2 project, which as a particular spatial construction influences and also sheds some light on the development of geopolitical relations. The idea and, geographically, the implementation of the project alone carries the potential to alter geopolitical reality and to expose the power relations obscured behind it.

III. Geopolitical concepts

Geopolitics began to move to the centre of attention in the late 19ᵗʰ century. The first notable political concepts analysing international relations from a geographical standpoint, which hold significance even today, came into existence around that time. The current study builds on a number of such approaches relevant to Nord Stream 2 as well, putting the individual strategies of nation--states into the right perspective.

This work is in particular based on the Anglo-Saxon geopolitical school's main concepts, at present considered classics, such as the approach of Halford Mack-

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5   As Geoffrey Sloan and Colin Gray mention in their work entitled 'Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy', one of the aims of geopolitics is emphasising that political power is not only determined by human and material resources, but also the geographical conditions and circumstances within which said power is exercised (Gray – Sloan 1999).

6   Scholars in the field of so-called critical geopolitics are in fact attempting to unveil the interests related to power, hidden behind certain geopolitical approaches. *The Geopolitics Reader* by authors Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Simon Dalby and Paul Routledge can be mentioned here among other prominent works (Ó Tuathail et al. 1998).

inder[7] (1861–1947), a pioneer of the discipline, who worked at the turn of the 20th century and who is considered by many the geopolitical founder of the international system in the aftermath of World War II. Several other geopolitical theoreticians also contributed to the theoretical framework of the Heartland-centred American containment policy. Chief amongst them are US naval officer Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914), founder of the so-called sea power geopolitical approach and Nicholas J. Spykman (1893–1943), a Dutch-born American political scientist and strategist. Both played a significant role in establishing the foundations of the geopolitical aspects of the international order after 1945, therefore their views also serve as guiding principles in our study. Considering the geo-strategic views after World War II, during the Cold War and the following period, the works of Henry Kissinger[8] and Zbigniew Brzezinski[9] are especially notable and are also of key importance in the current study's theoretical framework.

Undoubtedly, our research cannot be all-encompassing despite being strongly based on the above-mentioned theoretical approaches. The accumulated geopolitical knowledge and the opulence of geography-based political concepts carry the prospect of including so-called critical geopolitics[10] or geo-economic trends in our analysis. However, this would go beyond the framework of the current study. Similarly, the topic at hand could be examined in the context of Central-European and Soviet/Russian concepts, considering that in this region the gradual rehabilitation of geopolitics[11] began after the Cold War, though this would also require a separate study to be conducted.

IV.   Geopolitics and natural gas

The current relations and structure of world politics has numerous areas that can be examined through geopolitical aspects, chief of which is energy, the field that by providing its engine guarantees the endurance of our globalised world,

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7   It is interesting to note that the Scottish-born scholar did not use the expression geopolitics in his works.

8   The geopolitical method of Henry Kissinger (1923–) can be considered a specific aspect of the realist approach to international relations, with realising American preferences regarding balances of power at its focal point.

9   Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928–2017) focused on highlighting the geopolitical aspects of the political power plays aiming to acquire resources and as a result, influence, from the normative perspective that upholding peace, that is to say, the stability of the international order, can only be realised by maintaining the hegemony of the American Empire.

10   Among others, notable studies of this innovative field are the works of Saul Bernard Cohen, Yves Lacoste and John Agnew.

11   Germany's situation is particularly interesting in this respect. Though the current study references the views of German geopolitical theoreticians working between the two World Wars (Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), Karl Haushofer (1896–1946), since these outlooks, in part based on Mackinder's work, ultimately led to Germany's failure in World War II – discrediting the geopolitical approach for decades – they are less relevant with respect to German relations in our research.

not to mention establishes its sociocultural dimensions. Fossil fuels paved the way for the dynamic unfolding of the globalisation process and, simultaneously, the rise of energy security of supply dilemmas. All this placed the geography--based political approach to resource-related challenges into the focal point of geopolitical thinking.

Energy has become too important from a security perspective to be treated as a regular economic good. Globalisation would have been inconceivable without satisfying the ever- increasing energy usage. Considering the current global demographic trends, the growing energy consumption, partially due to the rising demand in developing counties and the problem of resources as they are becoming less available at higher costs, we believe that the struggles for energy carriers and natural resources (ensuring the production and storage of the former) is turning into the key factor. So in a nutshell, the issue of energy security is turning into the key factor of geopolitical considerations.

Reviewing the latest tendencies in Europe makes it apparent that the continuously diminishing domestic production of member states, which more than halved between 2010 and 2020, is less and less able to satisfy the growing natural gas consumption of the EU (Eurostat 2022). The European Union is struggling with substantial dependency on imports, the primary source of which in the case of natural gas is Russia; in 2020 the country alone supplied more than 40% of the total import volume of the EU (Liuhto 2022). In spite of frequent, renewed efforts by the European Union to diversify its natural gas supplies, this dependency has only grown more prominent through the course of the last decade. For Europe, the significance of Russian import is well-demonstrated by the extensive pipeline infrastructure on the continent.[12] All of this is of key importance with regard to the pace of the ongoing energy transformation efforts triggered by the war in Ukraine, which will be mentioned in the following chapters.

In the following section of the study, the most significant state actors regarding the Nord Stream 2 project will be examined, namely Germany, Russia and the United States, followed by EU members Denmark, Poland and the Baltic States, and finally, Ukraine. The stakeholders will be reviewed in this specific order, as German-Russian relations serve as a starting point for our analysis. Subsequently, this scope will be widened to first examine American-Russian links, then to include the relevant actors with regard to the project situated between Germany and Russia, starting with the EU's north eastern regions – Denmark, Poland and the Baltics – and then Ukraine. State actors relevant from the Russo-Ukrainian War's perspective, but not having a substantial or direct influence on the future of the Nord Stream 2 project will not be included in

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12 Nord Stream 1 and Yamal-Europe in the north, the Ukrainian gas corridor with the Brotherhood, Soyuz and Progress pipelines also supplying Central Europe; the transport line reaching Turkey (through Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria) in the southeast and the Blue Stream and TurkStream pipelines running across the Black Sea (Gazprom 2021).

the study, therefore the United Kingdom, V4 countries – with the exception of Poland – and China will not be reviewed.

For each stakeholder, geopolitical aspects will be the first point of study in order to provide a framework and establish the logic for further examinations, followed by considerations of the energy sector and the Nord Stream 2 project. In this context, the actors' strategies and motivations will be examined before and after the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War and the sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipelines.

V. Germany

As per the views of Halford Mackinder (1861–1947), the merely hundred-and--fifty-year-old nation-state[13] located in the heart of the continent occupies the exact same strategic central Pivot area of Europe as Russia takes up in the world with its Eurasian location (Mackinder 1904). Due to the unique geographical position of the country, it is no coincidence that in the 1920s and 1930s mainly only the Germans developed the sort of institutionalised geopolitics (*Geopolitik*) that in German terminology referred to the concept of politically and militarily dominated space.[14] This system of views, partially based on Mackinder's work, led to the defeat of Germany in World War II and discredited the geopolitical approach for generations.

Germany is simultaneously a sea and land power connected to both the Western European naval territories and the Eastern European land masses. When it comes to natural gas, the energy dependency is particularly noticeable in the EU's leading economy, as by the end of the past decade Russia supplied approximately 55% of Germany's gas imports, which play a crucial role in its domestic energy production (Bachmann et al. 2022). In a nutshell, the cooperation in the energy sector, based on the interdependency between the European Union and Russia, appeared to be unshakable for a long time.[15] From an import perspective, Germany could be the greatest beneficiary with regard to the natural gas volume that could be transmitted through the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

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13 Before its 1871 unification, the Holy Roman Empire (later named Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation) started losing its influence in the Middle Ages, but due to its authority being rather symbolic and spiritual this did not threaten the European balance of power. This state of affairs, however, changed after the German unification in 1871 (Gyurgyák 2018).

14 The term Geopolitik was coined by Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén (1864–1922), a student of the German Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904). The works of booth Ratzel and Kjellén served as a basis for the concept of Karl Haushofer (1896–1946) that became the geopolitical foundation of the ideology of the Nazi Third Reich.

15 The statement still holds in spite of multiple conflicts perceptible during recent years that could have escalated the estrangement of the parties. Such incidents include the security of supply issues arising from Russian-Ukrainian gas price disputes or the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. The situation, however, changed dramatically in 2022.

Before the Russo-Ukrainian War, the possibility that the infrastructural axis of Russian gas imports would move towards the country by delivering a significant portion of the total European supply volume directly to Germany through an offshore route appeared to be advantageous. The opinion was that the improvement of Germany's transit role, on the one hand, could be profitable for domestic gas suppliers and pipeline operators; on the other hand, thanks to the shorter route of the new offshore pipeline, and as a direct result, a decrease in operating expenses, Nord Stream 2 could have a positive impact on gas prices enclosed in Gazprom's long term supply contracts.

Bypassing transit countries seemed to have the security of supply-related rationale as well as an economic one, as it could have played an integral part in securing natural gas supplies for Germany.[16] However, the fact stands that even before the Russo-Ukrainian War it was not in the best interest of Germany to heighten its exposure to Russia by enhancing its reliance on its gas supplies, nevertheless Germany was not intent on challenging the established status quo either. Prior to the Ukrainian conflict, EU regulations made it possible for the country to enjoy such a favourable position.[17]

Before the outbreak of the armed conflict, the post-Merkel German political leadership did not address the issue of sanctioning Nord Stream 2 and did not support the notion of energy being subject to sanctions policy. Eventually, the turnaround occurred just prior to the war, on 22 February, when Germany directed its economy ministry to withdraw a report about the security of supply impact of Nord Stream 2, effectively halting the ongoing certification process. The decision was welcomed by numerous actors on the international scene, chief of which being the United States.

The escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, the outbreak of armed combat, then the eventual war and the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines greatly damages the prospects of German energy policies, since halting the Nord Stream 2 project seemingly deprives the country of its potential benefits to domestic gas supplies, not to mention that the geopolitical risks emphasised by those opposed to the project appear to be coming true. In addition, due to the drawn-out war, the diplomatic and political gap between Russia and the West is widening, which could have a long-term adverse effect on the decades-long German-Russian cooperation in the energy sector.

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16 It was not too long ago that gas flows to Ukraine were halted for weeks, as a consequence of the 2009 Russo-Ukrainian conflict having an impact on all European supplies (Skalamera 2018). This past incident already clearly demonstrated that bypassing transit countries, from both the Russian and German perspective, can significantly reduce the risk of gas supply disruptions.

17 As energy is one of the areas in which shared competence applies between the EU and member states, the German regulatory authorities hold most of the decision-making power regarding the certification of the project. Consequently, the interdependency of Germany and Russia in the energy sector took up a more symmetrical shape and to a certain extent, the related risks were counterbalanced.

In this respect, sanctioning Russia causes Germany to suffer substantial losses.[18] The current situation exposed major issues related to the energy policy of the country, prompting the need to review whether the current objectives and direction should be reconsidered.[19]

In reflection of the war in Ukraine, the main strategic objective of the German energy policy at present is to diversify its natural gas supplies, with the primary aim of increasing the country's independence from Russian imports.[20] Moreover, the record-high prices due to the energy crisis emerging in the second half of 2021 could stimulate diversification attempts, since compared to pipeline gas, the relatively expensive LNG could become a more viable and economically rational alternative. However, it is crucial to understand that realistically, an effective diversification strategy can only be realised as a mid- or long-term goal.

Putting a stop to the Nord Stream 2 project could be interpreted as the first step to reducing the German energy sector's exposure to Russia, though making this decision did not necessarily appear to be equivalent to the termination of the project for good. Achieving the objectives of Germany and Europe to detach from the Russian energy trade and find viable replacements requires massive investments and major infrastructure development, while from the side of suppliers, already having some tied-down capacities, boosting production and increasing export propensity is essential. It is also important to mention that despite the sabotage and underwater detonations resulting in a total of four leaks on the Nord Stream pipelines, one string of Nord Stream 2 was undamaged (Linde 2022).[21]

Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), founder of the German school of geopolitics, wrote about Europe's, and as part of it, Germany's defensive position against

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18　This reasoning was well-displayed throughout the course of events, as in the early stages of the clash, Germany refrained from making firm statements about conflicting Russia. However, it was Germany itself, perhaps somewhat due to the increasing pressure from its allies – mostly the United States – who eventually halted the project.

19　Germany's dependency on Russian natural gas is exceptionally high, over 50% of the country's total gas import needs were supplied by Russia. The issue is further magnified by the fact that Germany strategically shut down many of its nuclear power plants in an effort to phase out nuclear energy, not to mention that for diversification-related purposes, until late 2022, it did not have an infrastructure fit for receiving and storing LNG. This appears to be changing, on 17 December Germany launched its first LNG terminal, while two other terminals were still awaiting final testing and permits to start operating and, additionally, the country plans to inaugurate three more such units by the winter of 2023 (Kurmayer 2022).

20　These strategic aims are not only relevant for Germany, as the conflict created such an extraordinary situation that Europe plays a considerable role in financing Russia's war against Ukraine by paying for its natural gas and oil imports. However, the extent to which all this measures into the conflict was and can further be reduced by EU sanctions policy.

21　Taking all this into consideration, the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines can be interpreted in two separate ways. On the one hand, from Russia's perspective, the sabotage is a considerable adversity. On the other hand, the undamaged string of Nord Stream 2 offers the prospect of starting gas deliveries in case Germany was ever in need of supplies.

the two rim powers, the United States and Russia (Ratzel 1999). His work from 1897, in light of the challenges arising as consequences of the Russo-Ukrainian War, poses interesting questions, especially regarding Germany's orientation in the energy sector. The Nord Stream 2 project and its future is not merely the symbol, but also the practical embodiment and the very indicator of this dilemma.

There is much at stake. Overcoming Germany's World War II tragedy was a peculiar process, in which instead of acknowledging the past, searching for scapegoats, punishments and atonements, the cure proved to be economic consolidation, a series of reforms later known as the German economic miracle. The country will be tested by the economic hardships currently awaiting Europe. The question is, how an identity based on economic performance and growth can be preserved, and if it turns out to be preserved, what kind of geopolitical consequences it will result in at a time when Germany's globally renowned competitiveness is threatened by the developments currently unfolding. Hence, it is a fundamental point whether Germany restores its previous pragmatic economic approach or to what extent and in which manner it will readopt (if it will even readopt) a traditional geopolitical perspective with Russian relations as one of its key elements.

VI. Russia

Russia is the largest land power in the world; it was part of both the European and Asian power orders and consequently, due to its geographical attributes, it has always been the focal point of geopolitical studies. Resulting from the country's unique spatial structure, Russians are prone to think and strategise on a more geographical basis (Billington 1966), compared to sea powers such as the British and the Americans. (Kaplan 2019)

From a Russian standpoint, achieving security and stability was never feasible without undertaking major conflicts and oppression. This mentality is not solely determined by excessive Russian geopolitical thinking and paranoia but also rests on historical experiences resulting from the country's geographical characteristics.[22] Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) theorised that the country either expands and conquers (Mahan 1900) or suffers defeat by others, a view that fell in perfect line with the Russian tsarist logic.[23]

In Mackinder's terminology, the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union meant that Russia lost its former positions with regard to the Heartland, not to mention that

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22 While in 1708 it was Sweden led by Charles XII, and Napoleon in 1812, during the World Wars, in 1914 and 1941 respectively, Russia was attacked by Germany, which brought about the necessity for the country to create a safety zone out of the quailing regimes situated between historical Russia and Central Europe (Kaplan 2019).

23 As Catherine the Great expressed, she had no way to defend her borders, but to extend them (Middelaar 2011).

parallel to the shrinking of its economic and political influence; moreover, the policy of containment by the United States, a sea power of the outer crescent, was getting ever more prominent in both Europe (EU and NATO expansions) and the post-soviet region (Colour Revolutions), which was interpreted by the Putin regime as the country getting surrounded. On 25 April 2005, Putin famously called the collapse of the Soviet Union the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, as it radically altered the previously-known global balance of power.[24]

Present-day Russia is essentially trying to ensure that the Heartland, as defined by Mackinder, falls within its sphere of influence. Prior to the Ukrainian War, the most effective means to achieve this goal was the country's potential regarding its energy carriers. Russian energy and foreign policy are closely bound together, not simply by geopolitical concepts, but also by geographical realities, frequently reflected in its foreign policy approaches.[25]

The hydrocarbon basins of northern West Siberia, discovered in the 1960s, made Russia an energy superpower by the millennium. The country is in possession of one of the world's largest discovered natural gas reserves, second only to the United States, and up until the start of the aggression against Ukraine, Russia was the world leader in pipeline exports.

The natural gas supplies of the country have crucial importance in Europe, especially in its central and eastern regions. As to certain nations, Russia was not merely a significant actor in the natural gas trade, but the exclusive supplier of the fuel. This is due to historic reasons and related geographical attributes, also reflected in the price of the energy carrier. Russia supplied 44% of the EU's total natural gas imports and provided 25% of its total natural gas demand.

Russia was also the greatest supporter of the Nord Stream 2 project. A project company owned by Gazprom, Nord Stream 2 AG is responsible for the planning, construction and operation of the pipeline. The financing of the endeavour is structured in such a way that Russia is granted the most important decision--making rights and responsibilities.

Gazprom's stance on the issue is that the Nord Stream 2 project, by circumventing the traditional Ukrainian transit route and diminishing its importance, is economically justified, as the expenses necessary to upgrade the outdated Ukrainian gas infrastructure would exceed the estimated costs of the project.[26]

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24 For a detailed discussion of the geopolitical conceptual background, see Gerace (1991).

25 Although the first explorers were drawn into depths of Russia's Asian territories by trapping, eventually the extraction of natural resources became priority. The barren landscape is a mining place of numerous minerals, metals and energy carriers.

26 Although the interests of Russia and Gazprom are not entirely the same, the political logic according to which the company is managed is clearly illustrated by the fact that in spite of the supposed benefits, such as supplying higher gas volumes, lower transit costs and operating expenses, on a strictly economic basis the project is not necessarily warranted.

With regard to German-Russian relations, it can be noted that by building a new transit pipeline and through collaboration with the Western energy giants participating in the project, Russia attempted to intensify its collaboration with Germany in the natural gas trade by delivering an even greater portion of the country's total supplies and thus, by exploiting Germany's heavy reliance on Russian energy carriers, increasing its influence over the largest economy of the European Union. Prior to the war, the dependency with respect to Germany and Russia appeared to be more or less mutual, though the relation's asymmetric nature was apparent since Russia's exports essentially flow to a number of countries, while meeting Germany's energy demands seemed to be inconceivable without Russian supplies.

Before the outbreak of armed conflicts, it seemed that thanks to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, Russia would manage to, on the one hand, increase the reliance of Europe, particularly Germany on its energy exports, and on the other hand, taking American relations into consideration, prevent carrying out costlier and, in terms of transportation, more problematic LNG-projects towards the Old Continent.

In the years before the war, the Russian geopolitical strategy was mainly built on Europe's energy dependency, its reliance on Russian natural gas imports and regarding the Nord Stream projects, Germany's support and the interests of Europe's large energy enterprises involved in financing the pipelines. By making the decision to attack Ukraine, Russia presumably assessed the potential reactions from the West as an acceptable risk, trusting that the exposure and interests of European actors in relation to Russia would prevent them from retaliating in a highly radical manner.[27] In case of a swift military operation, much like the annexation of Crimea, Russia had reason to assume that the West would once again fail to deliver a strong response, not to mention a moderate conflict could bring about a higher price environment on energy markets, which would only benefit Russia.

Halting the Nord Stream 2 project right before the eruption of the war was unequivocally a turning point in German-Russian relations, paving the way for further steps and sanctions, from this point possibly applied to the energy sector as well. In addition to these measures, the physical damage of Nord Stream 2 resulting from the explosions also casts an enormous shadow over the project. The act of sabotage is certainly not something many would have predicted, especially prior to the outbreak of the war.

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27 Regarding the supposed motivation behind the Russian attack, aside from the overoptimism in Ukraine's weak opposition, the indecisiveness of European politics in the post-Merkel era and the foreign policy incompetence of the US as a NATO leader exemplified by the 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan, it is also important to mention energy considerations and thus natural gas market-related factors.

With respect to the natural gas industry, Russia's leeway for both geographical and technological reasons is extremely narrow. A number of factors make delivering the resource to markets outside Europe extremely challenging, such as the geographical location of natural gas fields, the gas-specific problems of halting production, the inflexibility of the pipeline infrastructure, realising the country's LNG potential was in its initial stages, business partners abandoning current and already planned future projects and the lack of financing make delivering the resource to markets outside Europe extremely challenging. The question is how the relationship of some major geopolitical actors with Russia will progress in the future, in other words, whether they will identify with and support the strategy of the United States and the European Union aiming for the isolation of the Russian economy.

The sanctions imposed by European governments and corporations from the private sector could generate the greatest economic problems for Russia, considering its significant trade relations with the EU. Drawn-out tensions could result in the transformation of political and economic links with the West, which could bring about new partnerships and the alteration of relationships with regard to other Russian ties.[28]

In any case, with the progression of the war and especially in light of the sabotage of the pipelines, not merely the prospects of Nord Stream 2, but also the outlook on the future of Russia's European energy exports seems to be deteriorating (Eddy 2022a). Moreover, responses from individual member states are becoming firmer, Germany appears to be reconstructing its entire energy strategy, as indicated by planned LNG infrastructure investments, seeking potential new suppliers and the intended greater focus on renewable energy sources within the energy mix (Eddy 2022b). Taking all this into consideration, the future of the Nord Stream 2 project and Russian natural gas in Europe is becoming ever more questionable, as the import side decisions regarding infrastructure, contracts and trading partners determine the regional energy market for years to come and as it stands, the role intended for Russia in the natural gas trade is substantially smaller compared to what it used to be.

VII.   United States

Following the two World Wars, the United States became the supreme global power, partially for a number of geographical reasons.[29] However, contrary to

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28   The future position of China is questionable (Shahbazov 2022). Although, in the long-term Beijing could become a considerable market for Russian gas exports, time remains a critical factor and shutting down the European pipelines could turn out to be immensely damaging for Russia as well.

29   The United States having a continent-sized landmass on the economically, politically and militarily more significant Northern Hemisphere is bordered by two oceans, making the country well-defensible and due to its central position between the world's two most populated areas (Europe and East-Asia) it has control over the most relevant trade routes (Spykman 1942).

the Germans and Russians, the Americans were much less likely to strategise on a geographical basis during the first part of the 20th century. It was the country's role in World War II that brought about substantial change regarding this approach.

The fundamentals of traditional American geopolitical strategy with regard to Russia originate in the sea power concept of Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) and the Heartland theory of Halford John Mackinder (1861–1947). In Mahan's view, it was inevitable that the United States became a sea power; his approach states that Eurasia enjoys a unique position, in which Russia as a land power, thanks to its size and location, could also be recognised as a potential sea power, threatening the position of the US. Russia's expansion and acquisition of warm sea ports in addition to its close collaboration with Germany could establish its hegemony not only on a regional level but by dominating Eurasia on a global scale as well (Mahan 1900, 1918). Mackinder defines the Heartland as the territory of Northern and Central Eurasia, geographically the Pivot area of the world and the centre of global politics where historically the best conditions and resources are granted for a state to achieve global hegemony (Mackinder 1904, 1919, 1943). The Heartland is more or less identical to the former Soviet and current Russian sphere of interests, which is one of the focal points of American geopolitics.

Drawing on the concept of Mackinder and Mahan, Nicholas Spykman (1893–1943), a Dutch-born American geopolitical strategist focusing specifically on the unfolding Soviet-American rivalry from the US foreign policy perspective, came up with the Rimland theory. He argues that the dominant power position of the US is not threatened by the Soviet influence over the continental Pivot area – that is to say, the Heartland – alone, but if it is paired with a Russian alliance with a state located in the rimlands of Eurasia, for instance in Western Europe or the Middle East (Spykman 1942, Spykman – Nicholl 1944).

It is apparent, therefore, that these initial geopolitical concepts serve as a basis for the determinant principal in US foreign policy emphasising the crucial importance of preventing a potential German-Russian alliance and underlining the approach that it is not merely the responsibility but the mission of the United States as a global leader to control the Eurasian geopolitical balance of power. According to Henry Kissinger (1923–), Europe drifting into a geopolitical vacuum in the meantime does not serve the interests of the United States. He believes a European-American alliance is crucial to preventing the US from becoming merely an island a long way from Eurasia and crucial for Europe to avoid getting degraded to simply being an extension of the Middle East (Kissinger 2015).

In Kissinger's opinion, the firm belief that its own principals are self-evidently universal always prevailed in the United States, although its zealous participation and interference in global affairs added a considerable conflict factor to

the international system, as this approach leads to the conclusion that the governments not adhering to these principals are not unreservedly legitimate (Kissinger 2015).

Besides Kissinger, it was Zbigniew Brzezinski who most acutely outlined the preferred objectives of US foreign policy in his book *The Grand Chessboard* (1997). He points out that the main geopolitical target for the United States is Eurasia. Brzezinski considers it fundamentally important that a Eurasian power or alliance of powers capable of dominating this pivotal continent never comes into existence (Brzezinski 1999).

From a broader perspective, it is evident that there is a conflict of interest of a geopolitical nature between the United States and Russia, uniquely manifested by certain aspects of the energy sector. It is not surprising, therefore, that the US was opposed to the Nord Stream 2 project from the beginning.

With regard to natural gas, ramping up the extraction of unconventional hydrocarbons in the 2010s, an undertaking that can be considered the greatest innovation in the 21st-century history of energy (Yergin 2019), provided a context to this geopolitical rivalry.[30] The process was labelled the Shale Revolution in the media. Extracting the above-mentioned hydrocarbons, known as shale oil and gas requires specific methods.[31]

Boosting production with this technology began in the second half of the 2000s, throughout the two presidencies of Barack Obama, and gaining new momentum during the Trump administration. As a result of the technology advancing extraction and the positive regulatory environment making it even more dynamic, the United States is not only able to meet domestic demand, but from a net importer of natural gas, the country became a net exporter by 2017 (BP 2019). All this necessitated the rethinking of US involvement in the Middle East and the role of LNG in North America,[32] as the opportunity to reach Europe, one of the world's leading energy consumers, presented itself. The sea power approached the territory covered entirely by pipelines, constituting the sphere of influence for Russia, the dominant land power of the Heartland by sea. The highly profitable European markets are amongst the chief targets of the US, with Poland and Lithuania showing the greatest interest.

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30 Initially, resources that can be brought to the surface cost effectively constituted conventional gas stocks, but as per a more recent, geology-based definition, gases induced by gravitational segregation (buoyant forces), accumulated in tectonic fold traps with geometrically definable dimensions make up this group (Lakatos – Lakatosné 2011).

31 For a more detailed overview of hydraulic fracturing first used in the 1940s and of horizontal drilling beginning to develop in the 1980s, see Yergin (2019: 274–277) for the technical background of the method, see Gandossi – Von Estorff (2013).

32 The growing relevance of shale gas also generates environmental debates with sustainability and security aspects. Questions about the security of drinking water supplies and in close relation to the former, regulatory issues regarding drilling take centre stage in these disputes (Yergin 2019).

On the other hand, due to the significant distance between the continents, the endeavour is a highly capital-intensive investment. Ramping up LNG technology is of key importance to enable sea transport. During the years prior to the pandemic, transportation network projects (gas pipelines and LNG terminals) were already implemented, facilitating the international sales of significant natural gas volumes for American companies.

However, exporting American produced nonconventional natural gas supplies to Europe was limited to a degree by the fact that pipeline gas is significantly cheaper compared to liquefied gas. Before the outbreak of the war, existing LNG terminals and transport capacities were insufficient to substitute Russian pipeline gas supplies in Europe. However, taking competitiveness into consideration, LNG gaining ground seemed to be beneficial as it could strengthen the bargaining positions of European countries when it comes to procurement.

The United States can be considered a stakeholder in the Nord Stream 2 project due to its unique position in natural gas markets. As the world's largest exporter of energy, the US became a competitor of Russia. Nord Stream 2, a project aiming to enhance the partnership of the European Union and Russia, is clearly opposite to the geopolitical pursuits of Washington.

Nord Stream 2 had the potential to be the next significant link in the intensifying Russian-German energy cooperation, which can be interpreted as a crucial geopolitical step that is used to project an image of a prospective Eurasia unified through Europe and Russia. This potential is a major threat to the current world order, in which American hegemony is prevailing. Besides China, another alternative pole of the international order seemed to be on the rise, possibly jeopardising the global status quo dominated by the United States.

Therefore, the US, despite the geographical distance separating it from the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, is considered a key stakeholder of the project. The American significance lies in the fact that the country possesses the means and devices necessary to effectively block the project, which was well-represented by the US sanctions policy from its initial, investment stage.

The American political argument for opposing the project was built on protecting the interests of Ukraine as a transit country and emphasising the risks of Nord Stream 2 on European natural gas security of supply, stating the pipeline evidently enhances the continent's reliance on Russia for electricity (Jacobsen 2021). Moreover, economic considerations, though less frequently pointed out, are also present from the US side, as large volumes of lower-cost pipeline gas could be transmitted to Europe through Nord Stream 2, with an annual capacity of 55 million cubic metres, undermining the prospects of the economically less viable American liquefied gas exports.

Advocating US interests through sanctions policy dates back to the 2014 Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Even then, Gazprom was one of the companies targeted by the American economic restrictive measures, mostly of a financial

nature. At a later point, the scope of sanctions was broadened granting the right to apply them to gas pipelines as well, though for a long time there were no such measures, so the construction works of Nord Stream 2, launched in 2018, were progressing steadily (Nord Stream 2 AG 2021a). Relevant interference from the United States came about in 2019, when sanctioning the corporations involved in the construction of the pipeline halted the project temporarily (European Parliament 2021).

Following this, a certain reorientation occurred in the American strategy that could partially be explained by the election and change of government. The environmental policy approach and the initial measures of the Biden administration with respect to the project seemed to prognosticate a less aggressive pursuit of LNG exports. This is reinforced by the fact that the new political leadership considered mending transatlantic, particularly German-American, ties more important than taking further measures to block the construction works of Nord Stream 2. So in the summer of 2021, the US reached an agreement with Germany, the primary European stakeholder related to the project.[33]

As a result of the permanently high energy prices, more flexible US regulations and the sanctions against Russia, the American-liquefied natural gas exports targeting Europe started to get more competitive even prior to the war. The tendencies unfolding on the LNG market significantly impaired the European continental energy interests of Russia. With the gas market being liberalised and becoming more flexible, the potential of American natural gas exports along with sanctions policy created a novel and, in its nature, geopolitical conflict in Europe in relation to the Nord Stream 2 project. The escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian clash and the outbreak of armed combat, from a strategic, geopolitical perspective, generated a uniquely favourable situation for the United States regarding Nord Stream 2 and the geopolitical processes and considerations behind the project.

As stated earlier, one of the pivotal principles of American foreign policy is to completely prevent or at least hinder Russia and the European Union and especially – one of its leading nation-sates – Germany, in forming a serious alliance built on mutual interests. The EU's technological and economic potential combined with the military might and natural resource abundance of Russia could make the region a global superpower, posing a significant challenge to the dominant position of the United States. Currently, the main contender for this leading role is China and, accordingly, American foreign policy is primarily focused on the country, while continuously attempting to damage European--Russian relations, undermining the chances of cooperation.

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33 As per the agreement, Germany guaranteed that through its regulatory role it would make sure Nord Stream 2 complies with the EU's energy directives and would prevent Russia from using the project as a means to realise its own geopolitical objectives (European Parliament 2021).

The war in Ukraine creates an opportunity for realising such objectives, the West presenting a unified front and issuing sanctions could reinforce the isolation of Russia. On the other hand, American military intervention, due to the risk of creating a wider conflict that might even bring about China's involvement is unlikely. Hence the current situation with the war, from this geopolitical viewpoint focusing on energy, could be advantageous for the United States.

One of the chief targets of American efforts aiming to separate Russia and Europe is the energy sector, particularly diminishing European import dependency by reducing Russian natural gas exports. In view of this, the termination of the Nord Stream 2 project and its subsequent sabotage fits perfectly into the American geopolitical strategy, not to mention its additional economic benefits. Although it is crucial to keep in mind that the undamaged string of the pipeline still offers a chance for the potential rehabilitation of German-Russian ties.

As a result of the conflict, Europe appears to have become more conscious of the risks that stem from being too reliant on Russian natural gas and other fossil fuels, reinforcing diversification efforts and thus the propensity for purchasing American liquefied natural gas. Moreover, the record-high price environment on the global market, in part generated by the war, further enhances the prospects of LNG exports against the generally much cheaper Russian pipeline gas.

To sum it up, the situation in the wake of the Russian attack provides a favourable geopolitical environment for the United States to reach its goals; however, there are also challenges present. These difficulties are primarily related to the nature and severity of the measures taken against Russia, as it is crucial for the US to find the appropriate balance with these actions. Due to the recent Afghan debacle casting the country in a bad light, a foreign policy conveying strength became vital for the government. On the other hand, a serious intervention and putting too much pressure on Russia carries the hazard of escalating the conflict further, let alone the risk that isolating Moscow from Europe could drive it too close to China and the potential unification of Eurasia through eastern relations is also a threat to US interests.

VIII.   Closer alliance with the US in the EU

During the 2000s the growing influence and active geopolitical presence of Russia presented an ever-growing security policy risk for Europe. Chief amongst the affected countries are the Baltic states and Poland,[34] which thanks to their geographical location and characteristics take the Russian threat very seriously. According to Brzezinski, Germany frequently entertained the Bismarck-like idea of a special relationship to be formed with Russia, which would inevitably

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34   Throughout the centuries Poland has seen and experienced that sometimes the tide of Russia floods them, other times it retreats and now they stand assured that following the retreat in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse the next motion can only happen in the opposite direction.

frighten some Eastern-European countries, motivating them to forge even more intensive security cooperation with the United States (Brzezinski 2013). Spreading from Northeast Germany to the Ural Mountains and including Denmark, there is a flat landmass difficult to defend as per a traditional military strategy perspective, which is a determining factor with respect to Russian and European geopolitical reasoning and historical experiences, foreshadowing certain security policy risks for Russia, as well as for the countries of the Northeast European region.

As the symbol of the German-Russian cooperation and the European positions of Russia, Nord Stream 2 had a significance beyond itself in these countries. A major part of the pipeline runs under the Baltic Sea, across the territorial waters of Finland, Sweden and Denmark; consequently, permits from the regulators of these countries were necessary for pipe laying. From amongst the nations affected by Nord Stream 2 due to its route, Denmark was the one playing a significant role in delaying the project by withholding the permits required to start construction on its territorial waters. By doing so, Denmark effectively obstructed the progression of the pipe laying procedure, which can be interpreted as taking a stand against Russia's advances on the natural gas market and, consequently, in the geopolitical space.[35]

One of the focal points of Gazprom's European infrastructure development endeavours in the last few years, as demonstrated by the Nord Stream 1 and 2 projects, was the Baltic region, continuously increasing Russian interests in the area. Based on these nations' historically strained political relationship with Russia, their intentions to block the project gain an even greater understanding, although the fact remains that by themselves they do not possess the necessary means to realise these aspirations.

Nord Stream 2 was, without question, an economic drawback for Poland; as the Yamal-Europe pipeline running across the country might assume a less significant role, a possible consequence is Poland receiving lower transit revenues or losing these incomes entirely. Taking these factors into consideration, during the last few years Warsaw has been actively seeking to reduce its reliance on Russian imports and diversify its supplies by exploiting the potential of liquefied natural gas. The primary ally for Poland in this undertaking was the United States, the Polish LNG terminal on the Baltic Sea serves as an ideal entrance to European gas markets (Ruszel 2020).

In the last few years, a tendency based on diversification aiming to disconnect from the Russian-dominated gas supply system is discernible in the case of the Baltic states, with LNG making it possible to achieve such goals. This trend is

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35 Thanks to Denmark's actions there was a sufficient time frame to devise and implement the American sanctions, not to mention what might be the most significant result of delaying the project, namely that Gazprom was forced to renew its supply contract with Ukraine, guaranteeing the country's position as a transit state in the European gas trade until 2024 (Wood – Henke 2021).

particularly visible for Lithuania, which already began the construction of a so-called Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU) in 2014 (Hinchey 2018).

Aside from investing significant resources in realising the potential within LNG, the Baltic states along with Northern-European countries also initiated a new pipeline project, aiming to enhance gas trade amongst themselves. The Baltic Pipe runs from Denmark to Poland, transmitting the fuel originally from Norwegian fields, creating a new gas corridor in the region (Wood – Henke 2021). The pipeline with an annual capacity of 10 billion cubic metres went into operation on 30 November 2022 (Energinet 2022). The attack on Ukraine once again reinforced the concerns previously ingrained in Poland and the Baltic states with respect to Russia. All this reinforced the already close Euro-Atlantic ties and the Polish cooperation with the United States, exceptional in its significance even amongst European countries. These tendencies are brought about by the ambition to stop Russia from gaining ground, while the success of these aspirations is a matter of geostrategic consideration for the US and one of survival for Poland.

Suspending the ongoing certification process of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline as a consequence of the war is unmistakably a favourable outcome for the above-mentioned countries, since they were opposing the project from the beginning.[36] Considering the natural gas market, the situation at hand stimulates diversification ventures and serves as a foundation for the argument on the importance of increasing European independence from Russian gas supplies. The Baltic Pipe project, previously halted due to environmental considerations is once again relaunched.[37]

IX. Ukraine

From the Russian perspective, Ukraine is of key importance thanks to its function as a border state between Central and Eastern Europe.[38] In Brzezinski's view, the geopolitical relevance of Ukraine lies in the fact that without Kyiv Russia only has the potential to be, at best, a predominantly Asian empire, that is to say an entity in conflict with mostly Caucasian and Central-Asian states (Brzezinski 2013). Aside from this rationalisation, Ukraine is also relevant due to its large territory, its strategic location and, consequently, its role as a commercial hub

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36 In the early stages of the steadily escalating conflict, before the decision about suspending the certification process of Nord Stream 2 was made, Poland already requested, among other things, that Germany halt the project, which was accomplished at a later point, though not necessarily as a result of Poland's demand (Portfolio 2022).

37 The decision to continue construction works was made in March 2022, so it is not implausible that as a consequence of the conflict, the re-evaluated position of Europe in matters of energy is at least partially responsible for the outcome.

38 This is displayed in the country's name itself, meaning 'borderland'.

regarding trade towards Africa, as well as its abundance of natural resources, such as black soil, iron ore and hydrocarbons.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine found itself in a central position from an energy perspective as well, and although Russia repeatedly attempted to use energy as a means to control and influence the politics of proximate countries to serve its own interests, this proved to be counterproductive in the case of Ukraine due to a number of gas price disputes.[39]

Today, the chances of Russia achieving such objectives are completely diminished thanks to the narrowing room to manoeuvre for Ukrainian foreign policy with its multiple angles and, in parallel, the increased dynamism of Western orientation (the Orange Revolution, then the 2013–2014 elections in Ukraine). Amongst the reasons behind these tendencies is the stance of the EU and especially the US advocating the shift towards the West, once again driven by significant geopolitical considerations.

Though the Nord Stream 2 project is extremely controversial both within Europe and on a global scale, it is beyond question that its greatest casualty is Ukraine with respect to natural gas market, security and geopolitical considerations.

It is indisputable that blocking and, going even further, entirely cancelling the Nord Stream 2 project would serve Ukrainian interests best. The economic rationale behind this originates in the country's function on the gas market, since Ukraine with its extensive pipeline network was the most significant transit state for European gas supplies.[40] As per its current transit contract effective between 2019 and 2024, Ukraine would be eligible to receive approximately 7 billion dollars in the form of gas transit revenues (Popadiuk 2021). However, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline enabled Gazprom to bypass the Ukrainian transit route, or at least reduce its significance to an extent. Aside from the loss of transit revenues, transmitting lower volumes of natural gas could lead to further financial losses and increased domestic gas prices for Ukraine due to the capacity underutilisation of an infrastructure that operates with comparatively high fixed costs.

The last couple of years have proven that winding down the Ukrainian transit is also a way for Russia to exert geopolitical pressure. The primary objective for Ukraine is to prevent its vulnerability to Russia from increasing even further; however, the Nord Stream 2 project facilitates just that by making it possible for Russian gas supplies to reach Europe without using the traditional Ukrainian transit route, additionally, at lower operating costs. Hence, the greatest hazard of Nord Stream 2 with respect to Ukraine is that the above-mentioned scenario becomes reality following the expiration of the Ukrainian gas transit contract in 2024.

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39 This is illustrated by the consequences of the gas price disputes in 2006 and (especially) in 2009, namely that halting energy exports resulted in an increasing loss of trust towards Russia by profitable European markets.

40 After gaining its independence, initially 80% of Russia's natural gas exports to Europe flowed through the country.

In spite of its aims being clearly defined and detectable, Ukraine's opportunities to pursue its interests related to Nord Stream 2 were greatly limited, in effect the country was lacking the resources, legal means and regulatory authority to even create a situation in which blocking the project would be a viable outcome.

The tension perceptibly escalating since 2010 in the two country's bilateral relations reached its zenith when Russia launched a military attack on Ukraine. These proceedings served as proof to other nations opposing the Nord Stream 2 project that their reasoning and concerns were not unfounded. In light of the war's outbreak, it would be wrong to assume that halting the project or Ukraine's role in transmitting natural gas supplies to Europe gives enough of an incentive to Russia to preserve peace and keep its aggressive geopolitical aspirations in check.

Despite the military conflict and the extraordinary social, political and economic challenges Ukraine finds itself facing, the objectives of the country essentially remain the same. It still serves its best interests to maintain its transit position on the gas market, previously enjoyed for decades, and to intensify its orientation towards the European Union and NATO. Germany putting the Nord Stream 2 project on hold and the sabotage of both Nord Stream pipelines are decidedly positive developments for Ukraine, even beyond the potential preservation of its transit role. Suspending the certification process of Nord Stream 2 is one of the symbolic steps representing the fundamental change of attitude and alteration of strategy towards Russia, witnessed from member states of the EU, primarily from Germany, since the escalation of the conflict.

The Ukrainian leadership believes that the sanctions against Russia along with the increasing economic and diplomatic pressure improve the prospects of Ukraine to reinforce and deepen its alliance with the United States and the European Union. On the other hand, it is crucial to note that a possible military intervention or assistance from these allies carries enormous risk, as such actions could easily escalate the conflict to a global level.

Ukraine wants sanctions against the Russian energy sector to have a wider range of targets and for these to be imposed on an EU level, which is essentially equal to the partial or total boycott of Russian energy supplies. Ukraine's aim with these suggested measures is to completely destroy Russia economically and financially, forcing it to stop the war. It is in question, though, whether the entire European Union will be willing to make such an immense sacrifice, since substituting the import volumes of Russian energy carriers, especially natural gas with other alternatives is not feasible in the short term due to capacity issues and financial obstacles. This is not to mention that partially halting or decreasing the volume of gas supplies from Russia would put a considerable financial burden on Europe, the economic and social consequences of which are unforeseeable at the time of writing this study.

X. Conclusion

Considering the increasing Russian-Ukrainian hostility during recent years, and the current war, the evolution of the Nord Stream 2 project can primarily be interpreted within the context of this conflict. The state of the project at any given time serves as a rule of thumb to indicate European geopolitical orientations with respect to the United States and Russia. The results of the actor-specific analysis based on the actions and objectives of the key stakeholders of the pipeline, summarised in Table 1, further accentuate this framework.

Table 1: Results of actor-specific analysis: objectives of key stakeholders.

		Objectives prior to the war in Ukraine and the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines	Objectives after the war in Ukraine and the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines
Germany	Aim	Improving natural gas security of supply	Improving natural gas security of supply by reforming national energy policy and energy relations
	Energy strategy	Deepening pragmatic energy cooperation with Russia	Diversification: decreasing dependency on Russia, strengthening alternative cooperations
	Tactic	Supporting and advocating the NS2 pipeline project	Halting the certification of the NS2 project, developing LNG infrastructure, finding new gas recourses, imposing sanctions against Russia, including the energy sector
Russia	Aim	Preserving the gas status quo with EU countries and exerting influence over Ukraine	Diversify gas markets and keep up the possibility of mending the relationship with Europe and widening its sphere of influence over post-soviet states
	Energy strategic	Increasing/keeping energy cooperation in the EU with new alternative pipeline projects, reducing/blocking the alternative gas exports in Europe (especially LNG) and Ukraine's transit role	Limiting/blocking energy cooperation in the EU using energy as a tool for intimidation against Ukraine's western supporters and turning towards new markets outside Europe
	Tactic	Using the NS2 project and its narrative	Developing new pipeline projects outside Europe, declaring that abandoning Russian supplies is more harmful to Europe than to Russia, potentially repairing the damaged Nord Stream pipelines to keep up the possibility of mending the relationship with Europe

United States	Aim	Preventing a unified Eurasia's potential rise	Follow previous goals
	Energy strategy	Cooperating with Europe in the gas sector, preventing it from building close ties with Russia, protecting the interests and transit position of Ukraine against Russia	Following previous strategies, utilising the higher price environment to boost LNG sales in Europe
	Tactic	Trying to stop the NS2 project with economic measures, implementing regulatory changes to make their LNG exports more competitive, supporting European LNG initiatives	Imposing sanctions against Russia, including the energy sector, boosting domestic energy production to prepare for catering to European markets trying to detach from Russian supplies
Closer alliance with the US in the EU	Aim	Trying to prevent Russia from its aggressive geopolitical pursuits	Follow previous goals
	Energy strategy	Orienting towards the US, trying to detach from the Russian gas supply system	Strengthening energy cooperation in the region and replacing Russian supplies
	Tactic	Opposing/using administrative barriers to block the NS2 project, initiating alternatives	Realising LNG and pipeline projects (Baltic pipe)
Ukraine	Aim	Orienting towards the West to compensate for its vulnerability to the escalating Russian geopolitical pressure	Preserving sovereignty, cooperating with the West
	Energy strategy	Preserving as much as possible from its advantageous transit role in the European gas market	Cooperating with the West, even though this might interfere with its interests regarding its transit role
	Tactic	Opposing the Nord Stream 2 pipeline	Lobbying for an EU-level, a total boycott of Russian energy supplies

Source: Authors' own tabulation

A number of geopolitical concepts offer an explanation to the particular strategy of the US related to Russia and continental Europe. Our study accentuated that the vast majority of these concepts have defined US strategy during the previous century and they also highlight current tendencies of the American involvement in the context of Nord Stream 2 and the correlations between the project and the war in Ukraine. [41]

The economic ties between the European Union and Russia in the 21st century, in particular, the close energy cooperation built on mutual dependence directly contradicts the majority of American geopolitical aspirations aiming to divide Eurasia. From the US perspective it is vital to prevent an outcome in which another alternative pole of the international order, combining Russia's abundance in energy carriers, resources and its military might with Europe's technological

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41 Even Mackinder considered the geographical territory the Nord Stream 2 pipeline runs through an area of key geopolitical significance.

and economic potential, could emerge next to the United States, the current global hegemon.

For this reason, reinforcing transatlantic ties and the American-European alliance, naturally while maintaining the American dominance, and in parallel undermining European-Russian relations, serves the interests of the United States. The situation escalating in 2022 also has a number of interpretations.[42] Regardless, in one way or another, the antagonism between the US and Russia with respect to the Ukrainian War has reached a level not witnessed since the Cold War.

The halting and then sabotage of Nord Stream 2, a project that reinforces German-Russian collaboration on the natural gas market, the outbreak of the Ukrainian War driving an ever more prominent diplomatic, economic and political wedge between Russia and Europe could all support these above-mentioned American geopolitical objectives.

Natural gas provided an opportunity for Russia to utilise its pipeline system to regain control over its neighbouring territories. European countries served as the primary markets for Russian natural gas, establishing the region's significance through the energy segment. Therefore, it also appeared to be a relevant geopolitical objective to preserve and, if possible, enhance Russia's gas market positions by initiating suitable projects aimed at system capacities – that is to say, investing in infrastructure development – while cooperating with international energy corporations.

Prior to the war, the actual motivation behind the Nord Stream 2 project was more than likely the maintenance of the European natural gas status quo and simultaneously the isolation of Ukraine by marginalising its role related to transmitting Russian gas supplies. From Gazprom's perspective, these goals cannot simply be attributed to financial and gas market considerations, displaying that the geopolitical and strategic rationale of the Russian political leadership was more dominant with respect to the implementation of the pipeline project.

The nations of Europe were divided in their approaches to gas diversification and had different views about realising these ideas. Prime examples of this are the disagreements around the Nord Stream 2 pipeline that usually came along with serious quarrels prior to the outbreak of the war. Before the Russian aggression, the German political elite was less critical of the political manoeuvring of Moscow and were attempting to maintain a pragmatic energy relationship with Russia. The rationale, as well as the result of the German position, was that over half of the country's natural gas consumption was supplied by its eastern partner.

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42 Some experts consider the American war on terror a misstep, since while its military was occupied, the US enabled Russia to gain ground and secure a favourable position in Post-Soviet states, including Ukraine (Marshall 2018). Others see a persistent and arrogant series of American operations as the reason behind the changes witnessed in Ukraine's orientation.

As opposed to Germany, the leaders and most prominent experts of Euro-Atlantic nations observed the intensifying relationship between Europe and Russia with concerns prior to the Ukrainian War (Kaplan 2019). The criticism against the Nord Stream 2 project in the Baltic region and Poland is explained by historical experiences, the hostile geopolitical aspirations of Russia towards Post-Soviet successor states and the risks associated with the growing energy dependency of Europe. The United States and the United Kingdom, in close alliance with Poland and the Baltic States, did not view the presence of Russian energy in Europe as a means to supply the region, but considered the country an inescapable and therefore extremely influential stakeholder in energy relations, emphasising the related geopolitical risks (Dempsey 2017).

According to Mackinder, Western Europe needs to oppose any power that would attempt to obtain the resources of Eastern-Europe and the Heartland (Mackinder 1919). At the time of writing, the vast majority of EU member states appear to be in alignment with this view regarding the Russian attack on Ukraine, an Eastern-European country, which at this point seems to have reversed the former German-Russian interest-based energy cooperation, effectively blocking the commissioning of the Nord Stream 2 project.

The current Ukrainian state of war could bring about unanticipated consequences not only about the future of Nord Stream 2, but also in the context of long-term German-Russian relations. Reducing the reliance on Russian natural gas supplies has been a key element of the energy market strategies of Poland and the Baltic States for years and, due to the present conflict, these nations could expect greater, even EU-level endorsements and initiatives in accomplishing this goal; nevertheless, merely the European Union's change of attitude towards Russian gas imports serves their interests.

On the other hand, it is critical to note that in spite of sanctioning the energy industry, the former interdependency between the EU and Russia still prevails in the natural gas sector. The only way to limit the continent's exposure to Russian energy carriers is import diversification; however, developing the necessary infrastructure is a highly time-consuming and cost intensive process.[43] The path dependence of energy systems is exceptionally prominent. Consequently, former investments are determining factors in the development of the related sectors, not to mention that expanding or reconstructing the existing infrastructure is a lengthy and expensive process (Farkas 2019).

Although maintaining the continuity of gas supplies is vital for Russia to be able to finance its military expenditures from its export revenues, especially in light of the sanctions issued against the country, due to gas supply disruptions

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43 European markets are vitally important for Russian gas exports. This was also reflected in the fact that in the weeks and months following the outbreak of the conflict, gas flows to Europe were not halted, restrictions were only issued gradually and only because of the implementation of sanctions as a response to the fighting, many times cloaked in creative narratives.

inflating prices, Gazprom could generate higher incomes with lower export volumes in the short term. However, it is important to recognise that this behaviour could become counterproductive in the medium and long term.

Taking Ukraine's interests into account and keeping Russia's aggressive geopolitical pursuits in check with respect to the project is primarily the responsibility of Germany as the main regulatory authority, especially in view of its agreement with the United States. The US decidedly aims to prevent any attempt by Russia to gain ground, which in this case is equivalent to supporting Ukraine.

The question is whether Germany will yield somewhat to the Russian influence due to the negative consequences of the war and the related sanctions it must endure or will remain unwavering in its stance against Russia.

A prolonged war along with the allies of the United States, in particular the European Union losing trust in Russia, point towards Europe's detachment from Russian-supplied resources and energy carriers at the time of writing. This trend, on the other hand, necessitates an exceedingly expensive transformation process that carries the risk of absorbing the funds needed for research and investments connected to ensuring the sustainability of energy supplies. Hence reducing security of supply related threats also involves significant risks to competitiveness, not to mention that, from an ecological standpoint, sustainable energy management considerations could take a secondary role to concerns of security of supply, potentially increasing the use of carbon in the short term – that is, during the initial phases of the above mentioned transformation. Therefore, the future of the Nord Stream 2 project, in light of the implied challenges, could outline European geopolitical orientations along with their prospective alterations or realignments.

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Attila Virág *is Associate Professor of the Institute of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Department of Innovation and Business Incubation at Corvinus University of*

Budapest. His research fields include EU policies, energy policy, especially security of energy supply in Central Europe and security policy. E-mail: attila.virag@uni--corvinus.hu

Gréta Tancsa *graduated from Corvinus University of Budapest in International Business, her thesis researches the effects of Nord Stream 2 on natural gas security of supply and regional gas market relations. E-mail: attila.virag@uni-corvinus.hu*

Populist attitudes in Croatia: first analysis with notes on conceptualisation and measurement

BARTUL VUKSAN-ĆUSA

Abstract: *This paper analyses individual-level populism in Croatia. Starting from the ideational definition of populism, the study tests to what extent the economic grievances, sociocultural and ideational explanations, respectively, reflect the average populism subscriber in Croatia. The analysis was made using hierarchical linear regression based on field survey data from 2020 (n=979). Results show how populism is mostly associated with authoritarianism, conspiratorial thinking and institutional (dis)trust. The economic grievances explanation has only marginal relevance, revealing that sociotropic perception is more important than the socioeconomic position of the individual. Furthermore, the study emphasises the importance of operationalising populism in accordance with the assumed structure of the concept. In the same vein, it is noted that populism on an attitudinal level should be separated from the concepts of thick ideologies. If this is not done with caution, the conclusions drawn are questionable, and the analytical contribution of populism is imprecisely determined.*

Keywords: *populist attitudes, ideational theory, economic grievances, sociocultural backlash, authoritarianism, conspiracy theories*

I. Introduction

One should not spend a lot of words on proving that populism is one of the central research interests of political science: from the pioneering studies of populism (Ionescu and Gellner 1969; Canovan 1981), through the intensive development of the research tradition in the 2000s (Taggart 2000; Mudde, 2004; 2007), up to recent advances primarily characterised by the evolution of

various attitudinal populist scales, the study of populism has gradually become part of the disciplinary mainstream.

However, the intensity of this development in populism studies is not the same everywhere. In Croatia, as elsewhere, most studies have focused on the political supply-side by analysing populist parties and actors. Recently, though, this field has been increasingly marked by demand-side phenomenon analysis, with an emphasis on attitudes at the individual level. This type of study has not yet been made in Croatia, and it seems necessary given that populism in Croatian society is an omnipresent part of political discourse and media narratives (Grbeša – Volarević 2021). As Grbeša and Šalaj (2018) put it, the analysis of populism in Croatia is mostly placed in the framework of daily political comments, with a more comprehensive study yet to be undertaken at the individual level.

This study seeks to fill this gap by settling into an ideational tradition, emphasising micro-level analysis of the correlates of populism. Since the previous scholarly work on populism at the individual level has not covered Croatia, this broadens the reach of the ideational approach and thus the extent of populism studies in general. Also, this study has the added value of addressing particular in-field conceptual and measurement pitfalls; that is, additional attention is paid to the operationalisation of populism as a dependent variable. On that basis, some common wisdom on populism is being challenged: as studies of populism have developed rapidly, this has sometimes implied conceptual ambiguity, leading to populism being inferred from measures that do not depict the phenomenon faithfully.

This study processes as follows: first, populism and its components are defined, after which the perspectives on its predictors are explained. Next, the framework narrows to the Croatian context, from which the hypotheses are derived. The following section is dedicated to the operationalisation of populism and the creation of an adequate model for its measurement. Independent variables are then described, the grouping of which reflects the dominant explanandums. Finally, the results of linear regressions based on survey data from Croatia are presented and interpreted.

II.   Populism and its components

Although much ink has been spilled in attempts to define it, populism remains an essentially contested concept (Mudde – Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). From pioneering to contemporary studies, notions about slipperiness and impalpability of populism seem axiomatic (Taggart 2000). This elusiveness of populism is reflected in the number of its conceptions that mostly fit into ideational (Hawkins et al. 2018), political-strategic (Weyland 2001) and sociocultural or relational approaches (Ostiguy 2017).

Whilst no conceptualisation is completely dominant in the study of populism, the ideational approach has become increasingly prominent over time. This perspective stemmed substantially from Mudde's benchmark definition, according to which populism is a thin-centred ideology that sees society as divided into two homogeneous but antagonistic groups of pure people on one side and a corrupt elite on the other side, and which, in addition, believes that politics needs to be an expression of volonté générale (Mudde 2004: 543–544). However, it should be emphasised that, for the ideational camp, the key element of this definition is not in treating populism as an ideology. More precisely, the pivotal segment of this understanding is that it acknowledges a distinctive but rather limited morphology of the concept. Therefore, the decisive moment in Mudde's definition is the reference to the ideational thinness of the concept; the substance of populism is the unique albeit minimalist body of normative ideas (Mudde – Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 6; Hawkins – Rovira Kaltwasser 2019: 3), with secondary importance being given to whether the phenomenon is conceived as a discourse, outlook or ideology. But what set of ideas are we talking about and what elements make up this minimalist notion of populism?

As indicated, the first key component in the ideational conceptualisation of populism is people-centrism as its core feature (Canovan 1981) – people are understood here as an essentially pure and idealised community (Taggart 2004). Simply put, 'ordinary folk' is perceived as a homogeneous entity that embodies democratic virtues (Hawkins – Rovira Kaltwasser 2017) which is why its sovereignty should constitute the basis of the political system. In the populist imaginary, all differences between people have been reconciled (Muller 2016), which is why the expression of a common will is uniform and thus easily identifiable.[1]

However, in the populist mind, the underlying reason for this is that pure people are in struggle with a contrasting entity: the elites, who are their primary adversaries in the political landscape. This juxtaposition makes anti-elitism the second key concept in the ideational notion of populism. In the populist interpretation, the elite corrupted the system and institutions by subordinating them to their interests at the expense of the benefits of ordinary people. This crystallised homogeneous groups on both sides and created an antagonistic relationship between them, although the embodiment of these groups is contextually conditioned; ergo, people and elites can be defined economically, politically, culturally, *et cetera*. (Roodujin 2014).

What is most important, however, is that the distinction between entities is primarily of a moral nature (Mudde – Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; 2013). From this follows how the essence of the ideational conceptualisation is the Manichaean

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1   To be precise, Mudde (2004) makes a theoretical distinction between people-centrism and popular sovereignty. However, later studies show that at the empirical level it is not possible to clearly differentiate between these concepts (Castanho Silva et al. 2018).

worldview which divides people and the elite in the monistic and ethical sense; the people are classified as pure because they are morally virtuous, while elites are categorised as corrupt because they embody moral deficiency and monopolise vice (Mudde – Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Castanho Silva et al. 2018; Rovira Kaltwasser 2014). In other words, this is an essentialist political cosmology according to which politics is a struggle between good and evil, whereby the nature of all opponents is interpreted as diabolical (s. Hawkins 2009). Based on the above, it can be said that populism is a set of ideas whose distinctiveness hinges on the interplay or 'simultaneous co-occurrence' (Erisen et al. 2021: 165) of Manichaean outlook, anti-elitism and people-centrism, i.e., its specificity rests on the interaction of these subcomponents which form an idiosyncratic interpretation of political and especially democratic reality (Van Hauwaert – Schimpf – Azavedo 2020: 5).

If we conceive populism as a set of ideas, it is implied that the construct can manifest itself on an individual level and, consequently, that it can be measured (van Hauwaert – Schimpf – Azevedo 2019). On this basis, there has been a proliferation of what is often called the study of populist attitudes at the individual level which in effect testifies to the empirical utilisation of the ideational approach (Stanley 2011; Hawkins – Ridding – Mudde 2012; Akkerman – Mudde – Zaslove 2014; Spruyt – Keppens – van Droogenbroeck 2016; Castanho Silva – Veggeti – Littvay 2017; Castanho Silva et al. 2018; van Hauwaert – Schimpf – Azavedo, 2020). But it should be noted that populism is not to be perceived as a full-fledged attitude – it is more of a latent disposition whose activation depends on the context (Hawkins – Rovira Kaltwasser 2019: 7). This means that the populist predisposition remains quiescent until credible populist discourse and rhetoric trigger it (Ardag et al. 2019).

The previously presented conceptual map and definition of populism form the theoretical starting point of this study; that is, the paper builds on the settings of the ideational tradition according to which populism is understood as a latently present set of ideas whose core consists of the simultaneous presence of people-centrism, anti-elitism and Manichaeanism. This kind of elaboration is crucial because ideational conceptualisation is widely used without being properly reflected in terms of measurement. However, this shortcoming will be addressed more closely in the methodological section of the text, which comes after an overview of theories about the causes of populism and an explanation of the context of Croatia.

III. Studying the demand side of populism

To classify the explanans that have gained significant momentum in the clarification of the characteristics of a populist citizen, there are two key positions worth noting. That is, scholars emphasise that most studies start from an eco-

nomic grievances perspective or viewpoint that highlights sociocultural back-lash (Castanho Silva 2017; Hawkins – Rovira Kaltwasser 2019; Berman 2021).

The perspective in which economic grievances and demands are the focal point essentially echoes the Downsian political-economic outlook. According to this interpretation, human behaviour is mostly conditioned by our self-interested nature: in a time of post-industrialisation characterised by the increasing importance of the service and information sector and the decline of the industrial sector, populism occurs as response to the increased vulnerability and insecurity of citizens whose skill set is not flexible enough to meet these changes. Increased competition in the labour market and growing liberalisation of national economies have benefited managers and professional classes, investors, multinational companies and banks, whilst workers and the middle class have found themselves in a less favourable position (Rodrik 2018). Thus, this endangered social stratum has found the defense and vent mechanism in populism whose actors represent a departure from established parties that have implemented such, at least from their perspective, disadvantageous policies. In sum, it is argued how these developments do not suit the pockets of the less educated, unskilled, older and those who come from rural areas; alternatively, all those commonly placed under the syntagm of globalisation losers (Kriesi et al. 2006).

The second perspective puts the value dimension of the previously mentioned changes in the spotlight. It is argued that increased access to education (Bovens – Wille 2017), intergenerational change (Inglehart 1997) and the increasingly urban population structure (Norris and Inglehart 2019) have led to the proliferation of post-materialist, multicultural and liberal values that have begun to overtake a more socially conservative outlook. The changed understanding of gender roles and the increasing emphasis on the values of self-expression and individual autonomy (Inglehart – Welzel 2005) have triggered a reaction in the part of the population that does not look at the world through similar lenses. In a context where the importance of a common identity and norms is eroding, certain sections of the population are turning to populism because, through the notion of an idealised community of pure people, populism gives them meaningful placement in a rapidly changing world. This counter-response is most often characterised by authoritarianism (Oesch 2008; Inglehart – Norris 2017) and, from a right-wing populist parties' perspective, by an anti-migration stance and nativism (Mudde 2007; Roodujin 2018). For authoritarians, populism is a natural ally because, under the guise of unlimited general will, it opens space for legitimising attacks on all those perceived as a threat to alleged homogeneity (Mudde – Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). For right-wingers, populism represents a new point of convergence for the restoration of national identity whose demise has been fueled by minority rights and a growing share of the non-native population.

However, both perspectives base their contributions mostly on the confusion between the populist voter and the populist citizen (Rovira Kaltwasser – van Hauwaert 2020). That is, it is shown how even though populist dispositions may be widespread (Hawkins – Littvay 2019; Rico – Anduiza 2019; Rovira Kaltwasser – van Hauwaert 2019; van Hauwaert – van Kessel 2018), this does not mean that these sentiments transfer to votes for populists – populist potential must be activated (s. Hawkins – Rovira Kaltwasser – Andreadis, 2020). What's more, it is shown how most in-field findings are often based on a lack of distinction between populism and other concepts such as nativism, radicalism and protectionism (Hunger – Paxton 2022). As response to this, the ideational approach emerged which, by defining the construct as a unique set of ideas, established the study of populism as a distinctive concept; i.e., it directed the analysis of populism towards the research of the concept without simultaneously clustering it with the phenomenological baggage of other concepts and host ideologies.

IV.   Characteristics of the ideational approach

First, the ideationalist camp pinpoints the importance of normative ideas in understanding the emergence of populism (Hawkins – Rovira Kaltwasser 2019). In other words, a fundamental objection to existing explanations is that they do not leave enough room for normative concerns that are indicated by the very definition of populism; that is, the question of how to interpret populism in the context of democracy, institutions, norms and fundamental ideas of the regime has been neglected.

In that sense, ideationalists have articulated some other explanations about demand for populism. As this stance is strongly anti-elitist, then it is logical to characterise populists as distrustful of institutions as objects of elite habitat. Given that institutions rest on a set of rules whose role is to protect the normative ideas of their founding (Warren 1999), it is reasonable to assume that populists do not trust institutions since normative democratic ideas are largely circumvented in their perspective (s. Castanho Silva 2017; Erisen et al. 2021). Along with political trust, the ideational approach has opened space for discussion about interpersonal trust as a predictor of populism. On that note, several studies have found that low trust in others is negatively correlated with voting for populist parties (Berning – Ziller 2017; Staerklé – Green 2018). Oliver and Wood (2014) are on the same track in terms of the Manichaean outlook, i.e., it is shown that lower interpersonal trust is associated with Manichaeanism. From an ideational perspective, this would mean that the Manichaean struggle between good and evil is projected onto the understanding of other people in the populist imaginary.

Furthermore, treating populism as a distinctive set of ideas enables analysis of whether populism is associated with other beliefs. One such set of beliefs is the conspiratorial mindset whose reasoning structure coincides with a populist

worldview. Namely, conspiratorial thinking and populism are both characterised by simple dualistic narratives that separate groups on a moral basis (Castanho Silva – Veggeti – Littvay, 2017). Moreover, conspiracies can be a coping mechanism in conditions of insecurity and lack of control, with which populism, as a politics of hope (Spruyt – Keppens – van Droogenbroeck, 2016) resonates significantly, especially in its people-centrist dimension.

In addition, the ideational approach provides a different perspective in the context of some hitherto established insights on populism. Ergo, once populism began to be treated independently of other 'neighboring' concepts, it quickly became apparent that it was not reserved only for either radical right or left ideologies at the individual level. In a sense, it is shown how populism is ideologically ambivalent; some studies show that left-wing people are more prone to populism (Rico – Guinjoan – Anduiza 2017; Tsatsanis – Andreadis – Teperoglu 2018; Rovira Kaltwasser – van Hauwaert 2020) while others show that right-wing people are characterised by higher levels of populism (Bernhard – Hänggli 2018; Wehrkamp – Wratil 2018). At the same time, there is increasing evidence that populism is associated with extremism at both ideological ends, thus the so-called extremity hypothesis is becoming more resonant (s. Hawkins – Riding – Mudde 2012; Wettstein et al. 2020).

This overview covers most of the soil, as it considers perspectives of economic grievances, sociocultural backlash and the ideational approach thus merging the research line of new populism scholars and the somewhat older comparative tradition (Mudde – Rovira Kaltwasser 2018). All in all, this body of comparative literature provides the contours of a populist citizen, and thus a rough sketch of the hypotheses of this text.

V.   Croatian context and hypotheses

After the collapse of socialism and the acquisition of independence, the party system that emerged in Croatia can best be described as relatively stable bipolarism (Henjak – Zakošek – Čular 2013). This axis of party competition is based on the dominant historical-identitarian cleavage, the focal point of which is a different family affiliation in the Second World War which serves as the basis of a divergent interpretation of the conflict itself, its legacy and the socialist period (Šiber 1997; Raos 2020). Other ideological and value divisions are based on these foundations, whereby two main parties act as polarised symbols with strong expressive functions (Henjak 2017). At the same time, research shows that party competition and voter mobilisation on economic grounds in Croatia is absent (Henjak 2005; Nikić Čakar – Čular 2012); moreover, the relationship between socioeconomic mobilisation and party identification is shown to be somewhat inverse, with party identification shaping attitudes about economic issues such as property taxes (Henjak 2007).

However, this hitherto solid bipolar party system was challenged in the 2015 and 2016 elections, in which newly formed populist parties gained significant voter support (Grbeša – Šalaj 2019). In more detail, the greatest success was achieved by MOST (*The Bridge*) and Živi zid (*The Human Shield*), which most studies categorise as populist parties (Meijers – Zaslove 2021; Zulianello 2020; Grbeša – Šalaj 2018). Given that Živi zid, among other things, advocated redistribution and protectionist policies and had an anti-capitalistic character (s. Henjak, 2018), one may argue that populism in Croatia can be a sign of voter mobilisation on a formerly absent socioeconomic basis, i.e., it might be an expression of economic grievances. Still, studies have not confirmed that socioeconomic determinants have a consistent influence on support for these parties (Henjak 2018). Or, to put it differently, although the new parties clearly positioned themselves as critics of the existing political and economic model, their voters did not have the profile of globalisation losers. In addition, it is shown that in Croatia preferences for what could be described as economic populism are not related to more permanent elements of socioeconomic position such as education, occupation and property ownership (Henjak – Vuksan-Ćusa 2019), which is at odds with the economic grievances' perspective. Therefore, the first hypothesis is that *variables that measure an individual's economic position will have no effect on the level of populist attitudes* (H1). Nevertheless, a small addition to this needs to be done. One should remember that populism, as an ideational approach would put it, is primarily a matter of ideas about the world. This implies that sociotropic evaluations of society may have a greater effect on political ideas than egotropic ones (Anduiza – Guinjoan – Rico 2018) especially when it comes to retrospective evaluations in which eventual resentment can be stated in clearer manner (Rico – Anduiza 2019). This is also related to findings on how perceptions of relative deprivation and anomie can affect populist attitudes (Elchardus – Spruyt 2016), given that these measures tap into the feeling of shared grievances of community. Therefore, the next hypothesis is that *negative sociotropic evaluations of the economic situation are associated with higher levels of populism* (H1a).

As for the sociocultural characteristics of the electorate in Croatia, there are well-documented findings about the preference for authoritarianism among a noticeable share of the population (s. Nikodem 2019). In other words, democratic consolidation in Croatia is still on a thorny path: the number of people who favour an authoritarian leader at the expense of democracy is increasing (Čular – Šalaj 2019). If we assume that populist rhetoric can trigger this apparent authoritarian disposition, then populism and authoritarianism can be expected to go hand in hand on an attitudinal level (s. Castanho Silva et al. 2018). The same can be said for the link between conspiracy theories and populist attitudes, as these are shown to be correlated in both domestic and international literature. In more concrete terms, Blanuša (2013) shows how in

Croatia conspiracy theories are associated with 'simulated democracy', which is a concept whose content partially coincides with populism. More precisely, simulated democracy describes a situation in which democratic institutions and norms, although functioning, are seriously violated by elites and important social groups (s. Lengyel – Ilonszki 2012), which overlaps with the anti-elitist component of populism. Therefore, the next hypothesis is that *conspiratorial thinking and authoritarianism are positively associated with populism* (H2).

Considering the substantial impact of the historical-identarian cleavage on sociocultural values of citizens in Croatia, it seems plausible to test its eventual association with populism on an individual level. On that note, previous studies show that voters of Most and Živi zid are less associated with historical events and personalities that otherwise serve as the backbone of the fundamental identarian cleavage (Henjak 2018), implying that these people are less associated with components of established left and right political identities in Croatia. This was also supported by the finding that the voters of these parties are substantially closer to centrist ideological self-positioning (Henjak 2018). So, in Croatian context, it seems reasonable to assume that populism is not the stance of ideological extremists, as is usually recorded in comparative literature on populism. However, this should not come as a surprise given that Central and Eastern Europe is the natural habitat of centrist or mainstream reformist populism (Pop-Eleches 2010; Hanley – Sikk 2014; Stanley 2017). Parties like this are prescribed to the 'non-positional' framework of democratic reforms and the fight against corruption, which were the dominant themes in the rhetoric of Most and, although combined with other elements, in the programme of Živi zid (Zulianello, 2020).

At the same time, this does not mean that the populist parties of Central and Eastern Europe do not come in radical right or left variants. The populist radical right exists there as well, with a significant difference in terms of who is portrayed as the 'undesirable others'. Due to the lack of clear patterns of mass migration (Mudde – Rovira Kaltwasser 2018), migrants are not a group that is excluded from 'pure people' as is the case with parties of the same profile in the Western part of the continent; instead, ethnic minorities that are already positioned within the state and outside the nation are targeted (Mudde 2007; Pirro 2014). However, such findings, no matter how widespread they are, still rest on an approach that blends populism with nativism. Given that such an operationalisation treats populism as part of a broader and multipart phenomenological set, it is possible that populism is not the driving force of anti-minority sentiment. This seems particularly cogent in the case of Croatia, where the new populist actors did not base their support on such nativist elements of right-wing imagery (Grbeša – Šalaj 2018). Therefore, based on the above, the second hypothesis regarding sociocultural values is that *familiarisation with the dominant historical-identarian cleavage, extremist ideological self-positioning and*

intolerance towards minorities are not associated with populism at the micro-level in Croatia (H2a).

Finally, the Croatian context should also be described from an ideational perspective. The key concept of this approach is political (institutional) trust, i.e., its negative relationship with populism. The same association can be expected in Croatia, otherwise characterised by low levels of institutional trust (Rose – Mishler 2010) which has further decreased in recent years (Bovan – Baketa 2022). Furthermore, as signaled in previous chapters, recent studies connect populism with social mistrust. Considering that social mistrust is often an indicator that an individual perceives the world in generally threatening terms (Berning – Ziller 2017), for those who do not trust others, populism can provide a notion of community that protects them. This seems plausible in Croatia as well, since Croatians have low levels of social trust too (Šalaj 2005). Therefore, from an ideational perspective, the hypothesis is that *institutional and interpersonal trust are negatively associated with populist attitudes* (H3). In the next section, the operationalisation of the concepts listed here is described, followed by an empirical test of the hypotheses set.

VI.   Data and methods

The analysis is based on a nationally representative probability sample survey conducted by the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb. This survey is part of a research series called the *Croatian Election Studies* that has been running since 1990. The survey from 2020 is used because its questionnaire is the only one to include a populism scale in the context of Croatia. In more detail, this is a field survey with a sample of 979 respondents. It was carried out in February and March 2020 by the *Ipsos*, i.e., data collection was completed just before the introduction of public health measures caused by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Only respondents over the age of 18 participated in the survey.

VII.   Dependent variable: measurement of populist attitudes

As said, ideational tradition understands populism as a construct that sits at the intersection of several distinctive subcomponents that exist independently of each other. That is, for example, a certain part of the population may think the worst of the elites, but that does not mean that these citizens at the same time interpret the political world as a moral struggle between good and evil. What is more, studies show that Manichaeanism is weakly (Castanho Silva et al. 2018) and even negatively correlated with other subcomponents (Erisen et al. 2021; Castanho Silva – Vegetti – Littvay 2017). The point here is that components of populism in the individual mind often do not occur together, which is why measuring instruments should consider for core concepts separately; i.e., the

scales should not be unidimensional as this does not reflect the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon (Schulz et al. 2018). In a nutshell, we need a scale whose structure mirrors this conceptual setting.

The scale by Castanho Silva et al (2018) was developed following this logic; starting with a large pool of items, researchers developed a three-subcomponent battery of populism that follows the ideational theory and is cross-nationally validated.[2] Although research on populism is growing rapidly, this is the only scale whose development has been described and tested in detail and which performs well in terms of psychometric properties (Castanho Silva et al. 2020). The scale by Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove (2014), which is probably the most--used instrument, also performs well, but its construction does not depict the multidimensional nature of populism (Huber – Fesenfeld – Bernauer 2020) as it uses double-barreled items that relate to more than one subcomponent (Wuttke – Schimpf – Schoen, 2020).

This study uses items that Castanho Silva and coauthors have incorporated into a longer (9-item) scale. Two items are used to capture each subcomponent of populism: items *Politicians should always listen closely to the problems of the people* (pc1) and *The will of the people should be the highest principle in this country's politics* (pc2) measure people-centrism while *The government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves* (ae1) and *A few of the people running the government are crooked* (ae2) are items that indicate anti--elitism.[3] Manichaean outlook is measured by *You can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics* (man1) and *The people I disagree with politically are just misinformed* (man2) items. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale where 1 stands for complete disagreement and 5 for complete agreement with the statement.

To be able to use this battery as a dependent variable, it should be shown that the proposed model fits the data. To meet this, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted, with populism modeled as a second-order factor with three subcomponents. Since this is a dimensionalised structure, items were allowed to load only on latent constructs (subcomponents) that they are expected to measure (Schulz et al. 2018). However, the model designed in this way did not

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2   Of course, there are studies that have measured populism as a multidimensional construct. Of these, Stanley (2011) measured subcomponents without operationalising the scale altogether, while Oliver and Rahn (2016) treated populism with anti-elitism, national affiliation and mistrust in experts, which does not correspond to the nucleus of the phenomenon. More recent scales developed by Schulz et al. (2018), Mohrenberg, Huber, and Freyburg (2019) and Wettstein et al. (2020) have not incorporated items that tap into the Manichaean dimension.

3   The second item indicating anti-elitism in the original scale (Castanho Silva et al. 2018) goes as *Quite few of the people running the government are crooked*, which has the opposite direction from the item used here. That is, in the original scale this item is not negatively worded, while in the battery used here it is, which is the result of an error that occurred in translating the scale from English to Croatian. Because of this, the item had to be recoded in the opposite direction.

have a satisfactory fit. As shown in Table 1., the majority of goodness-of-fit indicators are below recommended levels; CFI (comparative fit index) is 0.94 which is slightly below the suggested point of 0.95, TLI (Tucker-Lewis index) is also lower than the recommended value (0.85 <0.90) and RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) is 0.086 which is above the recommended value of 0.06. Only SRMR (standardised root mean square residual) value is satisfactory at 0.05 – that is, below the advocated cut-off value of 0.08 (Hu – Bentler 1999).

Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis results (three-factor populism model)

Component/Item	Baseline model	Modified model
People-centrism (PC)		
pc1	0.727	0.747
pc2	0.688	0.653
Anti-elitism (AE)		
ae1	0.546	0.662
ae2/ae2rep	0.379	0.452
Manichaean outlook (MAN)		
man1	0.515	0.517
man2	0.813	0.798
Covariances		
PC-ANTIE	0.730	0.649
PC-MAN	0.021	0.009
ANTIE-MAN	-0.268	-0.099
Fit indices		
χ^2	42.84 (0.000)	11.45 (0.076)
RMSEA	0.086	0.033
CFI	0.938	0.991
TLI	0.846	0.977
SRMR	0.053	0.020

Source: Croatian Election Studies, 2020. Authors' own compilation.

This means that the initial model needs re-specification. This is probably because the items used, although taken from the scale developed by Castanho Silva et al. (2018), do not correspond to it fully. Namely, the original scale has nine items, and the shorter version has six, with one positively worded and negatively

worded item on each factor, which is not reflected in the scale that is part of the *Croatian Election Studies* surveys where all items are positively worded. In addition, the fourth item (ae2), as noted in footnote 5, was mistranslated when compiling the questionnaire. Therefore, for the purpose of model re-specification, item ae2 was dropped, and the item *Political scandals show us that elites, when their interests are threatened, abuse public institutions* (ae2rep) was added to the scale. When these adjustments are made, the fit of the model improves. Now all indices show an acceptable fit; RMSEA is 0.033, CFI is 0.991, TLI is 0.977 and SRMR has a value of 0.020. Models are illustrated in Appendix (Figures 1 and 2).

The final step in the construction of the dependent variable concerns the aggregation of the subcomponents. To label someone as a populist, one needs to be a people-centrist, anti-elitist and Manichaeanist at the same time. In a word, populism has a non-compensatory nature which should be reflected in its operationalisation (Wuttke – Schimpf – Schoen 2020). Therefore, factor scores were taken for each subcomponent after which the three results were rescaled from 0 to 1 and then multiplied (s. Castanho Silva et al. 2020; Erisen et al. 2021; Mohrenberg – Huber – Freyburg 2019). This ensures that only individuals with high scores on all three subcomponents can obtain high scores on the final populism scale.

VIII. Independent variables

To test the set hypotheses, the main explanatory variables are categorised into three groups that reflect the dominant theoretical explanations of populism at the individual level. The first category of variables refers to economic grievances; that is, indicators measuring education, household income, assets, unemployment and sociotropic evaluation of the economy are included in analysis. Education was measured on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means that the respondent has not completed primary school and 7 stands for a completed master or doctoral level of study. Income was measured with the question on monthly household income in October of the corresponding year, where respondents were free to write their response. As is often done, to reduce the effect of outlier values, the logarithmic value of this measure was used in the analysis. Assets is a composite measure created by adding up values of variables that ask whether a respondent has a house or flat, a property that can be rented, stocks or bonds, and savings. Unemployment is operationalised as a dummy variable (1-unemployed, 0-everything else), whilst the variable measuring sociotropic evaluation asks respondents whether the economic situation in the country has improved or deteriorated (on a 5-item scale where higher values indicate the perception of worsening). This item was added as an indicator of subjective perception, in contrast to previous measures that are impartial indicators of an individual's economic hardship.

The next category of variables refers to sociocultural indicators. Authoritarianism is operationalised with the 4-item scale developed by Šiber (1998), which treats this concept as a one-dimensional syndrome characterised by a combination of submissiveness and conformism (Čular – Šalaj, 2019). The in-scale items are presented in Appendix (Table 4). Cronbach's α coefficient for this scale is 0.62 and the average inter-item correlation is 0.28 which is consistent with interpretations that state how the mean correlation of in-scale items should be above 0.15 or 0.2 (Clark – Watson 1995; Briggs – Cheek 1986).[4] Conspiracy theories inclination was measured with an *ad hoc* scale consisting of nine items categorised into three subtypes. The three groupings represent distinct factors that measure theories about personal wellbeing, malevolent global conspiracies, and control of information (Brotherton – French – Pickering 2013). The CFA showed that the fit of the model is relatively good (RMSEA=0.065, CFI=0.96, TLI=0.95, SRMR=0.033). More precisely, only the RMSEA value is slightly above the recommended 0.06. However, the RMSEA 90 percent confidence interval is between 0.05 and 0.08, i.e., below the reasonable error of approximation criterion (Browne – Cudeck 1993) which indicates a mediocre but adequate fit. All items that make up the scale can be seen in the Appendix (Table 5.).

Other predictors from the sociocultural set of variables refer to familiarisation with the historical-identarian cleavage, extremist ideological self-positioning and attitude towards minorities. Proximity of an individual to the main political cleavage in Croatia is operationalised by questioning the position of the respondent's family during World War II (Šiber 1997). This variable was recoded in such a way that 1 labels the anti-fascist position of the family and 0 marks all other categories of answers, as is usually operationalised in voter behaviour studies in Croatia (s. Henjak – Zakošek – Čular 2013; Raos 2020). Extremist ideological self-positioning is measured by the classic left-right scale in which 1 represents the left and 10 the right pole of the scale. The variable was recoded so that the extreme values (1 and 10) were given a value of 1 and other values were coded as 0. The attitude towards minorities is operationalised using Bogardus' social distance scale which measures what kind of social relationship one is willing to enter with Albanians, Bosnians, Roma people and Serbs. The scale represents a continuum with seven answers, where 1 labels the will for the closest type of interaction (kinship) and 7 indicates the greatest distance (ban on entering Croatia) towards members of the group. Cronbach's α for this measure is 0.90, while the average correlation between items is 0.69. A composite variable was created by taking the arithmetic means of the enumerated minorities.

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4   Although the value of Cronbach's α is not at the recommended level of 0.7 or 0.8 (Hair et al. 2019), it should be borne in mind that there is no universal cutoff value when it comes to this coefficient (Hoekstra et al. 2019). Specifically, there are suggestions that note how value above 0.5 can be considered reliable (Schmitt 1996).

The last category of variables refers to institutional and interpersonal trust as indicators of ideational theory (Castanho Silva 2017). Institutional trust is created by taking the mean value of the respondent's answers on trust in the government, parliament, courts and public administration where higher values indicate more trust. Cronbach's alpha of this battery of items is 0.85 and the average inter-item correlation is 0.59. Interpersonal trust is measured by the question of whether most people can be trusted which, as an indicator of social capital, is one of the instruments present for decades in comparative research. This variable is dichotomous: 1 indicates the stance that most people can be trusted, whilst 0 stands for the opinion that one should be careful in dealing with other people. Finally, a group of control variables including gender, age and settlement size were also added to the analysis. Descriptive statistics of independent variables is shown in detail in Appendix.[5]

IX. Results

Since the included variables relate to different perspectives, four separate linear regression models have been created that reflect this; Model 1 consists of variables that measure economic grievances, Model 2 of variables that cover socio-cultural backlash indicators and Model 3 of ideational theory variables, with controls added in each model. This approach makes it possible to see how much each perspective contributes to the explanation of the variance of populism. Model 4 consists of all variables included, and ultimately tells which independent variables are most significant when controlled for measures of all perspectives involved. The results of linear regressions are shown in Table 2 below.

The results of the first model show that the perspective emphasising economic grievances is not particularly relevant in Croatia. Namely, although the variables measuring education, assets and sociotropic evaluation are significant, the first model explains only 3.7 percent of the variance of populism which is in line with the findings showing the weak explanatory power of the economic vulnerability--based approach (Margalit 2019). More precisely, in the final model that includes all variables, none of the variables that measure the objective indicators of an individual's socioeconomic position are significant, indicating that populism is not a reaction of the losers of globalisation or, to put it somewhat closer to the Croatian context, this shows how there is no sign that populism outlines the hitherto absent socioeconomic cleavage. The only variable that is significant in the final model is one that measures sociotropic evaluation, showing how those who feel that the state of the economy has deteriorated in the past four years are more prone to populism. This shows that, in the context of the economic

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5   In addition, it should be added that direct oblimin rotation was used in all factor analyses because it produces orthogonal results if there is no correlation between factors, and at the same time allows for the possibility of their mutual relationship (Watkins 2018).

Table 2: Results of OLS regressions (populist attitudes as a dependent variable)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	
Controls	B (std. err)	B (std. err)	B (std. err)	B (std. err)	Beta
Gender (1-female)	-0.032 (0.017)	-0.027 (0.014)	-0.030 (0.015) *	-0.029 (0.016)	-0.062
Age	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.001 (0.000) **	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.021
Settlement size	-0.002 (0.007)	0.004 (0.006)	-0.012 (0.006)	0.007 (0.007)	-0.034
Economic grievances					
Education	-0.019 (0.007) **			-0.011 (0.007)	-0.059
Income	-0.006 (0.014)			-0.010 (0.013)	0.025
Assets	-0.020 (0.009) *			-0.012 (0.009)	-0.046
Unemployed	0.015 (0.030)			-0.000 (0.029)	-0.000
Sociotropic evaluation	0.024 (0.008) **			0.018 (0.008) *	0.078 *
Socio-cultural backlash					
Authoritarianism		0.057 (0.009) ***		0.061 (0.009) ***	0.238***
Ethnic distance		0.007 (0.005)		0.005 (0.005)	0.037
Extremist ideology		0.021 (0.020)		0.018 (0.021)	0.029
Anti-fascist pol. afill.		0.009 (0.021)		0.014 (0.022)	0.023
Conspiratorial thinking		0.203 (0.035) ***		0.195 (0.038) ***	0.178***
Ideational approach					
Trust in institutions			-0.037 (0.009) ***	-0.032 (0.009) ***	-0.123***
Interpersonal trust			-0.055 (0.024) *	-0.027 (0.024)	-0.036
Constant	0.303 (0.074)	-0.047 (0.043)	0.360 (0.034)	0.008 (0.086)	
Observations	823	977	952	803	
R squared	0.037	0.111	0.044	0.153	
F statistic	3.94***	15.10***	8.74***	9.46***	

Note: significance levels are .05*, .01**, .001***.

Multicollinearity statistics (average VIF): Model 1 (1,07), Model 2 (1,13), Model 3 (1,02), Model 4 (1,14).

Source: Croatian Election Studies, 2020. Authors' own compilation.

vulnerability of the individual, populism in Croatia is more a matter of holistic perception than personal hardship; it is more about general feeling than egotropic calculation. Therefore, the results confirmed hypotheses H1 and H1a.

On the other hand, results show that Model 2, which measures sociocultural backlash, explains the higher percentage of variance in populist attitudes (around 11%). As expected, the variables that measure authoritarianism and propensity for conspiratorial thinking have a statistically significant positive effect on populist attitudes, meaning that higher values on these scales are associated with higher levels of populism. This was also verified by the results of the final model in which authoritarianism and conspiratorial thinking have the highest effects on individual level populism, meaning that H2 is strongly supported. Given that authoritarianism and conspiratorial thinking are correlated among respondents in Croatia (Tonković et al. 2021), this nexus should certainly be further investigated. This is even more relevant in the context of the current pandemic which, as a period of increased uncertainty and unpredictability, is characterised by an increased propensity for conspiracy theories (Douglas 2021).

However, in the context of comparative research on populism, the more interesting findings regard affiliation with the fundamental political cleavage, extremist ideological self-identification and ethnic distance towards minorities. More specifically, the results show that these variables have no effect on the variance of populism, thus confirming Hypothesis H2a. This demonstrates how populist citizens structure their political attitudes beyond the historical-identarian cleavage that dominates Croatian politics, as indicated by previous research. However, given that the effect of the main cleavage is operationalised through anti-fascist family affiliation which is otherwise an important (thick) element of left-wing political identity in Croatia (Šiber 1997; Henjak – Zakošek – Čular 2013; Raos 2020), this may have a wider implication. Namely, experimental studies show that thick positions of host ideologies such as advocacy of taxation of the rich, anti-globalism, Euroscepticism and opposition to migration do not generate greater support among populist citizens (Neuner – Wratil 2022). Considering how thick elements of host ideologies are often conflated with populism (Hunger – Paxton 2022), this points to a broader need for their explicit differentiation, if we are to properly address and analyse phenomena separately or in their interplay. From the perspective of findings of this study, this is also corroborated by the lack of effect of ethnic distance on populism as xenophobia and ethnocentrism are usually thick elements of right-wing identities. Even though these findings, along with the lack of effect of extremist ideological self-positioning, are in line with this thesis on centrist populism, more robust tests have yet to be done in this regard.[6]

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6   That is, one should note that anti-fascist historical affiliation is not emblematic of the conventional content of the left. Therefore, these results should not be taken as solid evidence that populism in

Going forward, future works should analyse if populism is indeed centrist; it remains to be tested whether individual-level populism is associated with elements of centrist politics such as the fight against corruption and advocacy for increased transparency. While it seems that micro-level populism in Croatia is not based on the positioning of the individual in relation to the thick level concepts of established ideologies, it is also possible that populism has a different face. Although the non-extremist and anti-establishment posture dominates, this does not mean that this attitude is free of ideology or purely centrist; it can be non-extremist in a form of expression and still receptive to loaded ideological elements, depending on what triggers it and how it is channeled by populist actors. Ultimately, populism is a dynamic phenomenon whose activation can be vitalised by different sentiments. Above all, these findings suggest that populist heartland represents an open call for all sides of the ideological continuum – no ideological position, as such, is *a priori* reserved for populism. All things considered, although Taggart (2002: 70) spoke primarily about populist movements, the same seems to be true for the analysis of micro-level populism: 'insofar as it [populism] is chameleonic, the study of populism needs to be aware of this as we study it'.

As for the assumptions of the ideational approach, the results of Model 3 and the final model partially confirm them. More precisely, it is shown how institutional trust is associated with populism, while interpersonal trust, although significant in Model 3, does not have an effect on populism in the final model. Therefore, H3 is only partially confirmed. If we are to generalise, this exhibits that populism in Croatia is the attitude of those who are above all politically distrustful, where the social dimension of trust is only peripherally important. Also, it is important to note how one should not be too quick about generalising these results as Model 3 explains only four percent of the variance in populist attitudes.

Overall, it can be said that in Croatia there is no homogeneity in terms of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of populist citizens. Somewhat paradoxically, the impression one may get is that indicators that did not prove to be significant in the analysis say more about populist attitudes in Croatia than significant ones. More precisely, along with the 'standard' comparative findings on the link of populism with authoritarianism, conspiratorial thinking, institutional trust and sociotropic evaluation of the economy, the variables whose association lacked imply that the sketch of the ordinary populist citizen in Croatia is not as straightforward as stipulated in most of the literature (s. Roodujin 2018).

Croatia (or elsewhere) is not associated with common left-wing components that go beyond specifics of given context, such as advocacy of taxation of the rich, pro-redistributive policies, protectionism, etc.

X. Conclusion

This study set out to analyse populism in Croatia at an individual level for the first time. Since previous studies have focused exclusively on the demand side, this has emerged as a research vacuum to be filled. The study started from the ideational approach and defined populism as a latent set of ideas consisting of three subcomponents: anti-elitism, people-centrism and Manichean outlook. One of the study's contributions is that the operationalisation of populism reflects background theory; although there are many studies out there on populism at the individual level, most cover only some of its elements (Van Hauwaert – Schimpf – Azevedo 2019) and/or do not adequately treat its non-compensatory nature (Wuttke – Schimpf – Schoen 2020). An even bigger omission is that the phenomenon is often tangled up with a conceptual baggage of host ideologies and their thick components. As results show that left-wing (anti-fascist historical affiliation) and right-wing (ethnic distance) concepts are not connected with populism, this paper, along with others (Hunger –Paxton 2021), testifies against such unclear conceptualisations. At the same time, this is not to say that populism exists in an ideological and conceptual vacuum – it is more about the fact that we need to disentangle these phenomena so that we can properly identify their effects when they appear separately, as well as when they appear intertwined. In addition, this is the only way to see to what extent the concept of populism is analytically useful at the individual level, as an increasing body of evidence alerts (Art, 2022; Castanho Silva – Neuner – Wratil 2022).

As for Croatia, the results show that populism is not the attitude of the economic losers of globalisation, but a slant that is associated with certain sociocultural predictors and distrust. The common findings on the link of populism with sociotropic evaluations, authoritarianism, conspiratorial thinking and institutional distrust have been confirmed – in this regard, the usual suspects have come to the fore once again. Moreover, whilst the results imply that individual-level populism in Croatia is not ideology-loaded, future research should test whether populism is associated with other elements of the left and right, apart from those covered here. Furthermore, subsequent studies should disaggregate populism into its subcomponents to see if these results hold when people-centrism, anti-elitism and Manichaeanism are operationalised separately, as their prevalence among the population is significantly different (Erisen et al. 2021; Kefford – Moffit –Werner 2021).

Finally, this study has limitations that should be kept in mind. As this is a study of populism in one country, its generalisability is quite limited, especially since the analysis is based on data from a single survey. A further important caveat is that this study is based on 2020 data, which is more than five years after the first populist actors became a relevant part of politics in Croatia. This opens the possibility that populist attitudes were different at the time when

populists achieved major electoral success. Also, the populism scale used here does not fully correspond to the most-used instruments. To be exact, although most of the items were taken from the Castanho Silva et al. (2018) scale, one item measuring anti-elitism was added *ad hoc*, which may have influenced the results. In addition, the final model explains about 15% of the variance of populism, meaning that such attitudes are still clarified to a limited extent. Given that the original scale (Castanho Silva et al. 2018) performed less well in terms of invariance testing in the case of Croatia and considering that the baseline model in this analysis had an inadequate fit, future research might try to create a scale whose content would be more suitable to the local context.
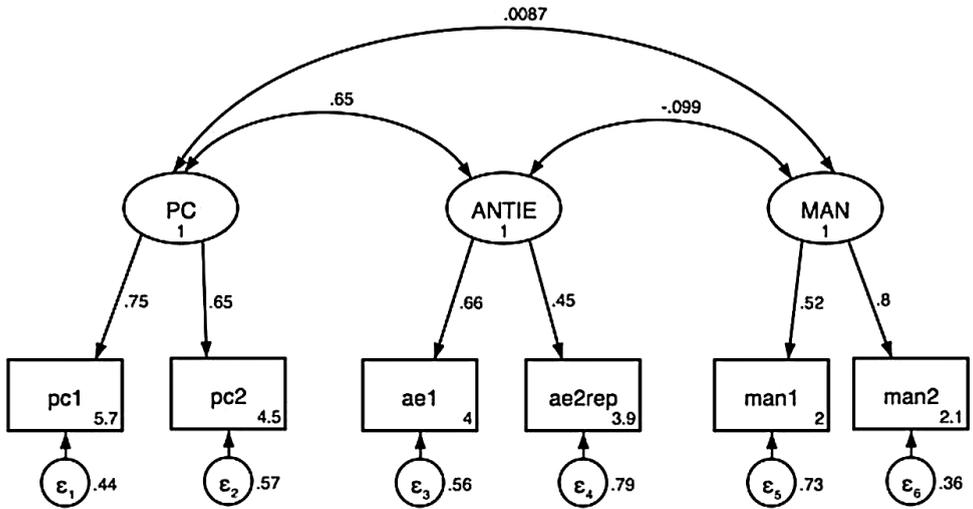
Appendix

Figure 1: Populism (baseline model, SEM)
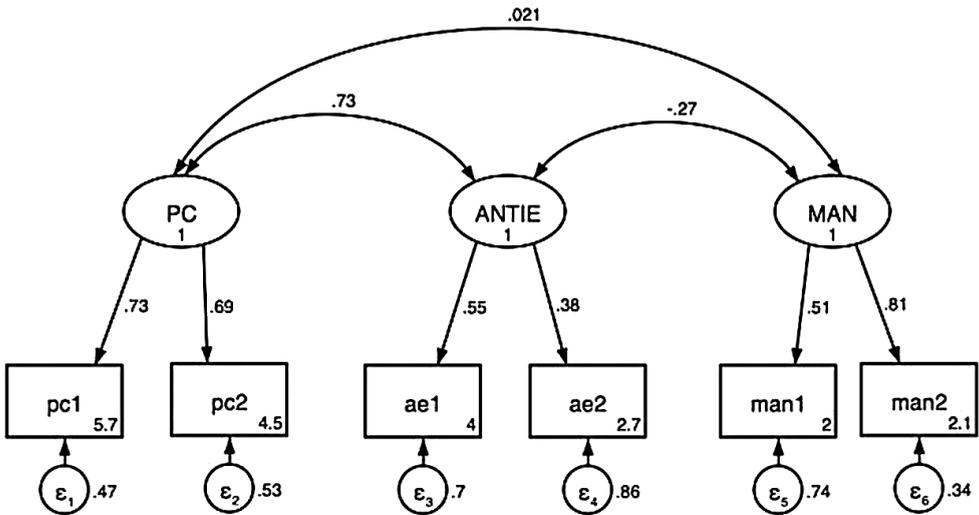
Source: Croatian Election Studies, 2020. Authors' own compilation.

Figure 2: Populism (modified model, SEM)

Source: Croatian Election Studies, 2020. Authors' own compilation.

Table 3: EFA (authoritarianism scale)

Items/Dimension	1
The opinion of the majority is always the best.	0.591
One does not need to express one's own opinion because person never knows they may suffer from.	0.778
Authorities and powerful people should not be opposed.	0.784
Young people need strict discipline, dedication, and willingness to work and to fight for family and homeland.	0.554
Variance explained (%)	46.88
Eigenvalue	1.86

Source: Croatian Election Studies, 2020. Authors' own compilation.

Table 4: CFA (conspiratorial thinking scale)

Component/Item	Baseline model
Personal well-being (PW)	
It is hidden from the public that vaccines are harmful to health.	0.607
Big pharmaceutical companies deliberately spread various diseases to increase drug sales.	0.778
The global elite seeks to control the growth of the Earth's population through genetically modified food.	0.758
Malevolent global conspiracies (MG)	
Jews control the most important world events.	0.670
Freemasons and the Illuminati have been influencing the decisions of the authorities in many countries for a long time.	0.793
There is a secret organization in the world whose goal is to destroy nation states and impose a "New World Order".	0.791
Control of information (CI)	
The white streaks in the sky that are left behind by the plane are chemicals used in experiments on humans.	0.606
Anyone with a computer connected to the Internet is being secretly tracked and surveilled.	0.611
Evidence of contacts with extraterrestrials is hidden from the public.	0.443
Covariances	
PW-MG	0.769
PW-CI	0.677
MG-CI	0.761
Fit indices	
χ^2	81.00 (0.000)
RMSEA	0.065
CFI	0.964
TLI	0.946
SRMR	0.033

Source: Croatian Election Studies, 2020. Authors' own compilation.

Table 5: EFA (ethnic distance scale)

Items/Dimension	1
Albanians	0.886
Bosnians	0.894
Roma people	0.849
Serbs	0.881
Variance explained (%)	77.07
Eigenvalue	3.83

Source: Croatian Election Studies, 2020. Authors' own compilation.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics (non-dichotomous independent variables)

Predictors	Min	Max	N	M	SD	0,25	0,75
Age	18	99	979	47,21	17,31	31,00	61,00
Settlement size	1	4	979	2,45	1,23	1,00	4,00
Education	1	7	979	4,01	1,22	3,00	4,00
Household income	0	80000	837	8352,75	6646,98	4150	11000
Assets	0	4	979	1,43	0,90	1,00	2,00
Sociotropic evaluations	1	5	962	3,23	1,01	2,00	4,00
Ethnic distance	1	7	979	4,61	1,62	3,50	6,00
Authoritarianism	1	5	977	3,20	0,91	2,50	3,75
Conspiratorial thinking	0	1	979	0,57	0,23	0,44	0,72
Institutional trust	1	5	974	2,13	0,90	1,50	2,75

Source: Croatian Election Studies, 2020. Authors' own compilation.

Table 7: Contingency table of dichotomous predictors

Gender		Unemployed		Extreme ideology		Antifa pol. affiliation		Interp. trust	
1(F)	0(M)	Yes	Other	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
53,7%	46,3%	8,2%	91,8%	16,3%	83,7%	16,2%	83,8%	11,2%	88,8%

Source: Croatian Election Studies, 2020. Authors' own compilation.

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Bartul Vuksan-Ćusa *is an assistant and lecturer at the Faculty of Political Sciences (University of Zagreb). He gained his MA at Central European University in 2022. His main research interests include populism, economic attitudes and voting behavior. E-mail: bartul.vuksan-cusa@fpzg.hr.*

REVIEW ESSAY

Poor communication and weak coordination: Why is the development cooperation fragmented and international commitments to make it more efficient not working?[1]

ŠÁRKA WAISOVÁ[2]

sciendo

Development cooperation has gradually evolved since the Second World War. Since then several international development organisations have emerged, such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP/1966), Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD/ 1961) and regional banks, namely the Asian Development Bank (1966) and the African Development Bank (1964). Many other organisations have progressively included development cooperation into their agenda, such as the World Bank or the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Many rich and developed countries have established national development agencies and have opened development projects in many underdeveloped countries (in contemporary terminology 'partner countries'). During the 1950s and 1960s development agencies were established in West European countries, and in the 1960s in North America – the United States in 1961[3] and Canada in 1970.[4] In the 1970s, development agencies also emerged in several countries of the Arab Peninsula (e.g. the Saudi Fund for Development[5] in Saudi Arabia) after these countries were able to cumulate financial

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2   Šárka Waisová is Associated Professor in International Relations at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Faculty of Arts, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen. E-mail: waisova@ kap.zcu.cz.

3   USAID, www.usaid.gov

4   CIDA existed until 2013 when the Conservative government of then prime minister Stephen Harper merged the agency into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/funding--financement/funding_development_projects-financement_projets_developpement.aspx?lang=eng

5   Saudi Fund for Development, ww.sfd.gov.sa/en/

resources because of oil shocks in 1973 and rising oil prices. After the Cold War ended and countries of Central and Eastern Europe joined the OECD and the European Union (EU), they also established development agencies and development policy, respectively. Today, however, development agencies are not only in rich, developed industrial countries in Europe or North America, they have also emerged in countries that alone are development assistance recipients (e.g. China[6]). Since the beginning of the 1990s, development cooperation (in different terms 'official development aid' and 'development assistance') is not only the domain of state or international organisations; important actors and big donors have become non-governmental organisations, such as the Christian charity World Vison, British-based Oxfam International or the Swiss-based Doctors without Borders to name a few (more see Banks 2021, or OECD 2020). Since the 1990s, development funds and projects financed by individual persons or companies such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation or Grameen Bank,[7] a microfinance organisation and community development bank, have also appeared. This multiplicity of actors and their relations have been called 'New Aid Architecture' (Klingebiel 2014). In short, since the Second World War, thousands of development actors have carried out thousands of development projects and development agenda has become an important part of international politics.

Since its beginning, development cooperation projects have been generally classified as bilateral or multilateral based on 'who the donor is'. Bilateral development cooperation is assistance where the donor is one country; multilateral development cooperation is assistance where the donor is an international organisation. States – when granting development aid – use bilateral as well as multilateral channels, or they use both channels at the same time. A good example of such a complicated system is the European Union. The EU itself has development policy and EU member countries pay an annual contribution to the development fund.[8] European Union development projects are carried out by EU bodies or in cooperation with international or local NGOs and governments of partner countries. At the same time, all EU member countries are OECD members and OECD members annually pay a contribution into the OECD development budget. Outside of this multilateral participation on development cooperation, most EU and OECD member countries pay a contribution to the UNDP and other international bodies that participate in development action such as the World Health Organization or the FAO. Based on OECD data, today, the United Nations, the World Bank and another two hundred multilateral agencies and

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6   China International Development Cooperation Agency, en.cidca.gov.cn

7   Founded by Bangladeshi professor M. Yunus, grameenbank.org

8   EU International Cooperation and Partnership, www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/international-cooperation-partnership_en

global funds receive about one third of the total ODA.[9] However, EU member countries also have their own development policy and development agencies. In such an extensive system, it is not rare that projects of different organisations and agencies in partner countries overlap or even double. This situation was termed 'the fragmentation of aid' (Klingebiel – Mahn – Negre 2016).[10]

> My aim here is not to make an introduction into development assistance and donor institutions, but to outline how complicated the system of development cooperation is and how many different state and non-state bodies participate in it.

The reviewed book, written by Michael Strautmann, belongs to those which aim to analyse why the contemporary system of development cooperation is so complicated, how actors participating in development cooperation (donors as well as recipients) communicate across the system and why the efficient delivery of development cooperation is increasingly difficult. Strautmann writes that his research interest is to discover (p. 19): 'in what ways do national interests and bureaucratic regulations impact on the behavior of development organizations (DOs) – and to what extent do they allow for interorganizational coordination and cooperation?' Strautmann argues that fragmentation of development assistance (p. 20) 'carries a substantial burden for partner countries'. Development cooperation fragmentation is not a new problem; it was already mentioned in the so-called Person Report (1969) and the Brandt Report (1989), and repeatedly accentuated in the 1990s and 2000s (OECD 2009). The milestone in the debate on fragmentation of development cooperation and its harmonisation was the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005. In the declaration, donors committed to harmonising their development cooperation activities to increase the influence, efficiency and effectiveness of development projects. Strautmann writes (p. 23) 'despite all the international commitments… fragmentation is rather increasing than decreasing… therefore this research focuses on the more pressing issue of interorganisational coordination and cooperation among DOs – and how overlap and duplication of their work can be reduced'. To explore the issue and to find answers Strautmann used two case studies of partner countries, specifically Indonesia and Madagascar (why these two countries were selected in particular is explained on page 110 of the book). In both cases the author – based on the evidence from field research, interviews with local development officials and qualitative content analysis – scrutinises

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9   OECD, Multilateral Development Finance, www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/multilateralaid.htm

10 Klingebiel, Mahn and Negre (2016) explain fragmentation as 'the phenomenon of a multiplication of actors and growing atomisation, affecting goals, modalities and instruments as well as numerous operational and non-operational activities'.

the experience and lessons learned from development cooperation in the environment and education sector. To that point, the author and his book are clear and the aim of the research understandable. However, what takes place in the pages following is a bit chaotic, complicated and sometimes even confusing.

The format of the book review gives me only limited opportunity to discuss Strautmann's book and its problems in detail, which is why I will concentrate on the two main problems of the present book: firstly, the research question, particularly its formulation, content and understandability; and secondly, the conclusions presented.

Comments on the research question

Each academic research starts with a research question/problem. For example, as written by Bryman (2007) or (earlier) by Guba and Lincoln (1994), a research problem is a definite or clear statement about an area of concern, a condition to be improved upon, a difficulty to be eliminated or a troubling question that exists in scholarly literature, in theory, or within existing practice that point to a need for meaningful understanding and deliberate investigation. A problem statement has to be, among other things, clear and precise, it must identify what will be studied as well as key concepts and terms. A problem statement shall be followed by identification of an overarching question or a small set of questions accompanied by key factors and variables. The problem of Michael Strautmann's book is that there are many research questions scattered throughout the book and more than twenty research hypotheses which the author plans to test in the case studies.

A research interest is formulated on page 19 (for citation see above), on the following pages, the author evolves several sub-questions and sets up further steps:
- (p. 23) 'Therefore, this research focuses on the more pressing issue of interorganizational coordination and cooperation among DOs – and how overlap and duplication of their work can be reduced.'
- (p. 62–63) 'This study seeks to develop and conduct a more elaborate theory-led investigation of interorganizational cooperation mechanisms at the partner country level.… Lead research questions: How do different frames of reference conflict on different levels and affect DC organization's behavior towards cooperation? How do informal structures and incentives impact on cooperation among organizations?'
- Based on the information from the conclusion (p. 207) Strautmanns' 'study set out to investigate in what ways a) national interest and b) bureaucratic regulations affect the behavior of development organizations and to what extent these two allow for interorganizational coordination and cooperation'.

- As mentioned, several hypotheses have been formulated which can be found between pages 95 and 98; the author offered 25 hypotheses 'conflated into five different causal process hypotheses'.
- On page 115 dependent and independent variables, and mechanisms are introduced.

As a reader, I have to say that the way the research problem and research questions are presented and how the research questions, hypotheses and variables are scattered throughout more than a hundred pages is confusing; the reader can hardly remember all the questions and sub-questions. Nevertheless, the problem is not only research questions spread out over more than a hundred pages, but is is also missing identification and operationalisation of key concepts and terms used in the research questions and variables: (p. 115) 'development organizations/Dos' and 'donor countries' national interests'. From the context, it seems that by DOs the author means the national development agencies such as USAID, but what is meant by 'the national interest" is not even clear from the context (see pp. 145–146). The definition of DOs is necessary because if by Dos the author means not only national development agencies, but also bodies such as the UNDP or OECD, then the term 'national interest' is hardly relevant. That the author means by DOs a wider group of bodies and not only national development agencies supports the paragraph from the conclusion (p. 209) which evaluates 'the role of multilateral Dos'. However, as mentioned above, multilateral development organisations can hardly be in the national interest. Because the book is about 'development cooperation', I would also expect the definition of the term and an explanation of how the term differs from 'Official Development Assistance', which is the official term used in development agenda and defined by the OECD.[11]

To sum up all observations about the research questions, the problem is that they are not explained and key terms are not operationalised, and there are too many hypotheses. These all result in a very complicated text that is hardly followable.

Comments on the conclusion

The conclusion has several problems as well, but the most burdensome is the tendency to generalise the evidence from two case studies. Even though Michael Strautmann correctly mentions in the first part of the book that the two case studies, though representing 'the most different cases', cannot bring forth enough evidence to generally think of the problems of development pro-

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11 OECD, definition of ODA, www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance--standards/officialdevelopmentassistancedefinitionandcoverage.htm

jects' fragmentation and interorganisational communication, it seems that this commitment was forgotten in the conclusion. What the author writes between pages 207 and 210 comes under general statements: (p. 207) 'In most cases (and what is meant by cases? SW), DOs have been incapable of developing and implementing projects and programs jointly', (p. 208) 'DO employees at partner country level do not only contribute to increased aid effectiveness.' The author also concludes on what he probably did not even analyse – the role of multilateral DOs (p. 209).

To sum up reflections of Michael Strautmann's book 'International Coordination in Development Cooperation', I have to admit that even though both case studies – Indonesia and Madagascar – are very interesting and every researcher who spends time and enthusiasm with field research is enriched by an importantly academic work, the book or the construction and logic of the text is too complicated so that even a reader with development studies experience has problems getting through the text. However, the most pressing problem of the book is the absence of operational definitions of used terms and concepts. Without it, the book rather remains an interesting but not academic debate and a presentation of personal experience of the development workers from two partner countries and of the author himself. And this is a pity because the general idea of the book, that poor communication, weak knowledge diffusion and bad coordination are barriers to the harmonisation of development cooperation, and making international development commitments more efficient, is relevant and more than interesting. Because of the COVID pandemics and the Russian war against Ukraine, the prices of food and many other commodities are rising (The Economist 2022) and in the year 2023 many more people in partner countries will need the support of development agencies and effective development cooperation is an absolute prerequisite to save people's lives.

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