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ESSAYS

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SIMON BRADFORD AND FIN CULLEN

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Abstract: *The Hungarian Government's long-standing politicisation of migration has recently become more complex. Two factors are particularly important here. First, following Russia's war on Ukraine, over 60,000 refugees have arrived in Hungary seeking temporary protection. Second, Hungary's FDI-based growth model and the country's integration into global value-chains has exposed serious labour shortages. Hungary's prime minister recently indicated the need for 500,000 new workers in the next two years. New government legislation now allows 'third country' nationals residence in Hungary as 'guestworkers' under strict conditions. More than 100,000 foreign workers are now in employment. The article explores contradictions between politicised anti-migrant discourse, the arrival of Ukrainian refugees and the introduction of guestworkers into the Hungarian labour market. It draws on qualitative data analysis including political speeches, social media postings and visual images. The article concludes by suggesting that Hungary can be understood as currently caught in a paradox between national economic imperatives on one hand and domestic political and public demands for the preservation of national identity on the other.*

Keywords: ***Hungary, migration, refugees, guestworkers, economy, populism, nationalism***

1 This was sloganised in Orbán's presentation at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Budapest, May 2023 (Orbán 2023a).

Introduction

Hungary's Fidesz party prime minister, Viktor Orbán, in power since 2010,[2] has successfully politicised migration and used migration discourse to attract political support not only within Hungary but more widely. Hungary's discursive landscape of migration is complex and contradictory and its topology is shaped by external and internal events. The dominant Hungarian migration narrative, beginning in 2015 (Boda & Rakovics 2022: 67; Messing & Ságvári 2020), relies on an orchestrated antipathy towards 'stranger-foreigners' (other than tourists, essential to the Hungarian economy) who come to Hungary ('illegally'). Though clearly having political utility the real or imagined presence of strangers arriving as a consequence of *migration* is an appropriate allegory for the uncertainties and anxieties associated with modernity (Bauman 2010: 157–162).

Since 2015, Hungarian state-funded broadcast media, public space billboards and social media posters have targeted refugees and asylum seekers, pejoratively defined as *migránsok,* who allegedly threaten Hungarian culture and economy despite their actual presence in Hungary being negligible. Orbán has remained fixated on immigration, dramatically complaining in a 2023 interview that the outcome of an EU heads of state and government summit means Brussels would build 'tens of thousands of migrant ghettoes in Hungary. We won't let it! I am fighting hand and foot against it' (Magyar Nemzet 2023). The EU's 2024 Pact on Migration and Asylum has received similar hostility. However, Hungary's geo-political and economic circumstances have shifted migration discourse from simple resistance to something more complex. At least two factors are important here. First, refugees seeking protection from Russia's war in neighbouring Ukraine arrived in Hungary. Second, Hungary's foreign direct investment (FDI) economic growth model and consequent industrial expansion (HIPA 2024) has created labour shortages. Hungarian legislation now formalises a new category of 'guestworker' which permits 'third-country-nationals' (i.e. those from outside of the EU) to gain residence in Hungary for up to three years under strict conditions (Miniszterelnökség 2023). Some of Hungary's opposition parties oppose this, citing concerns about guestworkers undercutting wage rates and arguing that domestic labour should be employed instead. Nevertheless, a relatively rapid admittance of guestworkers (*vendégmunkások*) from outside the EU has occurred. This aspect of migration policy is a key instrument of economic development but, as we will see, has led to political dilemmas for the government.

Ukrainian refugees' and guestworkers' presence in Hungary has problematised simple binaries of citizen/migrant. Seemingly contradictory positions co-exist, sometimes converging but distinguishing between politically framed

2 Fidesz governs in coalition with KDNP (Christian Democratic People's Party), winning 135 seats out of 199 in the 2022 Parliament (of which 18 are from KDNP).

'worthy' and 'unworthy' migrant identities (Herman & Chomsky 2008: 37). The 'unworthy' framing, especially by media, of refugees from sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East has been opportunistically deployed to secure electoral advantage but a shift towards 'worthiness' emerged when refugees began arriving from Ukraine in 2022. The subsequent arrival of 'third country' guestworkers rendered this binary framing more uncertain in the popular imagination. Are guestworkers migrants, temporary residents, some unknown ambiguous category? Are they worthy or unworthy? We analyse Fidesz's shifting discourses of migration and migrants in the period from 2015 and explore tensions in these migrant identities constructed juridically and in policy terms as *partial subjects* (Sassen 2008: 293). We also consider whether Fidesz's anti-migrant discourse might be more elastic than first appears, depending on the status of the particular migrants and broader social-economic and political factors.

In the article, we unpack some of the complexities in Hungary's current situation and identify the possible consequences for domestic and European politics. We draw on data from various media sources, identifying strands of Fidesz discourse which shape a performative and dramatic narrative drawing on historic, popular and cultural references and entangling actors, audiences and institutions. The first section of the article offers a contextual overview of Hungary's populist-nationalism and its migration politics. We go on to define our methodological assumptions and data collection. We identify the construction of a migration crisis and then trace subsequent shifts in migration discourse in Hungary. Finally, we identify the effects of this for Hungarian and European politics. We suggest that Hungary's situation reflects broader currents as populist--nationalist regimes confront local and global economic challenges, complexities in types and flows of migration and their consequences and potential for drawing down political capital. We note contradictions that politicians have to face. By teasing out these entanglements we contribute to a broader scholarship examining how these contradictions are played out through migration policy in populist-nationalist states. The article also contributes to the literature on populist politicisation of migration in the context of guestworker programmes. The insights provided by an exploration of this in a post-communist state and the consequences of transition from state-capitalism[3] to the 'world market' also highlight limits within the existing literature in this area and, we suggest, renders this open to further exploration.

3 Following 1989's regime-change, Hungary's IMF membership, its integration in international financial networks, its exposure to foreign markets, investment and joint ventures ensured that the domestic financial elite was open to 'FDI-led industrialisation' (Drahakoupil 2008: 180), setting Hungary on an externally-oriented economic path in which FDI (and its consequences) remain paramount. This places Hungary in a paradoxical situation of semi-peripheral dependency whilst also advancing its claims to 'sovereignty'.

Hungarian populist-nationalism and migration politics

Some analysts regard populism as 'thin ideology', ideologically 'weightless' (Stanley 2008) and predominantly a form of performative political practice. However, politics is always located somewhere between form and content, strategy and ideology. In Hungary a relatively clear and 'thick' ideological corpus grounds Fidesz politics. Challenging the political left, foregrounding the nation-state as the source of security and solidarity, building a bourgeois national capitalism, unifying central Europe's Hungarian diaspora and establishing a conservative regional geopolitical solidarity have continuously sustained the Fidesz national project (Schöpflin 2013; Kovács 2024). Orbán's political and policy ambitions extend beyond Hungary and Viktor Orbán has assiduously networked across Europe's far-right. His so-called 'sovereigntist' position has supported the formation of a new trans-EU right-wing Parliamentary group 'Patriots for Europe' (*Hazafiak Európáért*). This is based on ontologically 'white' ethno-*nations* forming a similar European ethno-*region,* encompassing (contested) European values and forming what has been referred to as an 'undemocratic organisation of illiberal states' (Hoeksma 2024: 4). This envisages the EU as an illiberal and supposedly Christian ethno-regional entity, a new imagined community which challenges a hitherto broadly liberal-constitutional-democratic space (Scheppele 2019).[4] The ethno-*nation* and ethno-*region* work in parallel, with important implications for European politics. Migration discourse, relying on mythologised national identities, is central to these developments. Critics have referred to Fidesz's Hungary as a 'prebendalist' state (Szelényi 2015), a 'post-communist mafia state' (Magyar 2016) and a 'kleptocracy' (Tóth & Hajdu 2018). These analyses variously allude to a 'political capitalism' in which those close to power attain exclusive access to economic opportunities that offer huge financial returns through the sale of public assets, massive state spending in the private sector and tax breaks (Riley & Brenner 2022: 6).

Populist-nationalist politics is always concerned with acquiring and keeping power under the guise of purifying the supposedly elite-corrupted social and political space of the 'nation', construed in Hungary as a primarily *ethnic* entity and the source of Fidesz's preoccupation with migration. Iterations of an enduring Hungarian *Christian* nationalism, powerful in the inter-war years, resurfaced in the middle 2000s. Appealing especially to conservative voters the authority of the sacred nation, reverence for (always imagined) tradition and a mythologised and ethnicised national history is deployed politically to legitimate the present and future.[5] Orbán's own authority is set in a charismatic relationship

4 Fidesz's links with American far-right anti-immigration groups (GPAHE 2024, Rivera 2024) indicate its involvement in wider transnational relationships.

5 Despite Orbán's representations of 'traditional' Hungary as ethnically pure (*Magyar*), its history shows a very different picture. Hungary was historically multi-ethnic comprising Jews, Muslims Christians and

with his 'people' (Körösényi 2018), channelled through his exclusionary (and therefore simultaneously *inclusive*) politics and his capacity to represent these in simple terms. Orbán is self-styled protector of Hungarian *and* European Christian cultures.[6] When 'we draw the boundaries of our identity, we mark out Christian culture as the source of our pride' (Orbán 2017). For Orbán, 'Christian democracy', conterminous with 'illiberal democracy', necessitates strict anti-immigration policies to protect Hungarian *and* European culture (Orbán 2015a; 2018a), whilst also flouting EU and wider international law.

Hungary's 2004 EU accession required adherence to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which provides for EU protection of those subject to persecution or harm in their countries of origin. However, during the last decade Hungary failed to uphold its own and EU asylum laws, emphasising migration as predominantly a security problem (Nagy 2017). Hungary rejected the so-called 'quota system' of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council to distribute 120,000 refugees seeking international protection among the member states (Szalai & Gőbl 2015: 21). Hungary was asked to accommodate 1,294 refugees but argued that the system was legally dubious (Varju & Czina 2016) and, asserting a link between migration and terrorism, claimed that immigration represented a dangerous threat to European security as well as to European and Hungarian culture. Refusing to accept applicants requiring international protection, Hungary was referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union and was eventually judged to have breached its obligations under European law (CJEU 2020). In response to the Court's support of the refugee relocation programme, Foreign Minister Szijjártó was quoted as saying 'Politics has raped European law' (Bajer 2017). Asylum procedures have been largely suspended in Hungary since 2020, the CJEU ruling in 2023 that current procedures once again breach EU law (ECRE 2023). In June 2024 this resulted in the CJEU levelling substantial fines on Hungary until compliance with earlier rulings is secured (Barrett 2024).

From the outset, Hungary's primary policy response to cross-border mobilities was set within a framework of 'securitisation' discourse (Juhász 2020), despite an existing inward flow of migrant workers and an emergent paradox between market and rights discourses. Securitising actors articulate audiences, contexts and power (Balzacq, Leonard & Ruzicka 2015), securitisation invariably tending to centrifugal expansion as a permanent technology of government

non-Christians in the medieval period (Berend 2001), and Magyar, Germanic, Jewish, Slavic and other populations co-existing into the twentieth century. Following the Treaty of Trianon in 1919 when Hungary lost 2/3 of its territory and the deportation of some half-million Hungarian Jews in 1944 it became less diverse. Hungary's present population includes about 10% Roma, a long-standing Chinese community of some 40,000 in Budapest and smaller communities from neighbouring countries. This includes transnational identities, especially prominent in some of Hungary's Olympic and other sports teams.

6 For Orbán 'Christian' values are synonymous with 'European' values, yet other than comprising a dominant 'liberalism', the latter remain contested. Orbán's claims to a Christian position have been widely critised as opportunist 'political Christianity'.

as in Hungary (Agamben 2005). Typically, powerful political actors (Orbán for example) represent threats (refugees/migrants) and their consequences to the lives of key audiences (Hungarian voters' and the nation's security). This potentiates non-discursive/discursive interventions ostensibly designed to mitigate danger. In Hungary, Fidesz has argued that intensified national border-making security practices and apparatus are the only solutions to the current crisis. The 500-kilometre steel and barbed wire fence on Hungary's southern border defines an 'inside' and 'outside', the 'us' and the 'them' and materialises Hungary's protective Christian presence on European terrain (Kitanics & Hegedüs 2021).

Crises do not just happen but are brought into existence discursively. State supporting (and *supported*) media are key sites for assembling crises and creating public awareness. The Fidesz *media juggernaut* (Krekó & Enyedi 2018) configures state, national, regional and online media, institutionally empowered by the Central European Press and Media Foundation, KESMA.[7] Government-supporting media have continuously disseminated discourse through on and offline sites, forming a distinctive symbolic imaginary that reflects Fidesz politics and through which a migration crisis has become part of popular discourse.

However, Hungary exists in no privileged space outside of wider social and economic forces. Global integration of markets for goods, services and capital inevitably leads to increased population flows across borders in the form of emigration and immigration as it has in Hungary since 2015. Hollifield's concept of the 'migration state' (2004) offers a way of thinking about the dilemmas that states face in managing migration and the economic, political and social trade-offs which migration entails. These states, Hollifield argues, are caught in an ideological bind centred around economic development whilst simultaneously seeking to uphold territoriality and control borders whilst maintaining the rights of local citizens. Hollifield's argument is that liberal states are caught in a paradox between economic logics of markets and global trade and logics of sovereignty and rights. Critiques of this approach centre on Hollifield's emphasis on specifically high capacity 'liberal' states, a concentration on immigration (thus, the 'immigration state' may be more accurate) whilst ignoring emigration and referring solely to economic migration (Adamson & Tsourapas 2020). There is considerable literature exploring the role and function of migration states in Western liberal economies and more recent work has started to examine 'outward' migratory states in the Global South and elsewhere (Adamson, Chung & Hollifield 2024). However, little attention has been given to the utility of the migration state concept in post-communist states such as Hungary. Despite Orbán's declaration that Hungary is an 'illiberal' state (Orbán 2014)

7 Fidesz-supporting media operates under the imprimatur of the Central European Press and Media Foundation (KESMA), some 400 media outlets subject neither to competition policy nor independent scrutiny.

Hungary is seemingly caught in the essentially *liberal* paradox by virtue of its EU membership. This emerges in its reliance on FDI and the increasing need for labour from external third-country sources on one hand, and politicised domestic demands focused on sovereignty, closure and the preservation of national identity on the other. Pragmatically, Hungary's migration policy and its practices have to take account of cross-border movement of people in both non-economic and economic forms, refugees or asylum seekers *and* guestworkers. Therefore, we consider the extent to which Hungary is caught between contradictory logics of global trade and markets and logics of sovereignty and rights.

Methodology and data

We draw on data covering the period after 2015, notionally the start of the migration crisis in Hungary. Data were collected as part of a broader interest in political discourse in Hungary (Bradford & Cullen 2021; Bradford & Cullen 2022). Following Hall, we define discourse as 'a group of statements which provide a language… a way of representing… a particular kind of knowledge' (Hall 1992: 291). In political settings, these representations become valorised through continuous media distribution and online circulation and recirculation. Our analysis focuses on texts/discourses, their relationships with other texts/discourses and the institutional, political and historical contexts in which they are embedded and from which they emerge in political practices (Wodak 2015: 75). We adopt a version of critical discourse analysis that emphasises the performativity of language and symbols in the realisation of political power. We draw on a range of texts, acknowledging the significance of sometimes spectacular *visual* texts and symbols in public space and online platforms. These examples of 'visual populism' distribute representations of populist themes. Their interplay with textual and audio sources across older and newer forms of media provide insights into political practices (Szebeni & Salojärvi 2022) that configure threats to Hungary from migration. In Hungary, Fidesz continuously invokes a national past textually and visually (in billboards and social media posts) seeking to create collective identifications and political allegiances. Since 2015, print, broadcast, film, social media, texts and images displayed in material and virtual public space have constructed a media landscape on which migration and migrants have become prominent in the construction of crisis.

The Hungarian media environment exemplifies a hybridity in which new and older media forms (social media platforms, broadcast and print media, billboards and street advertising pillars) are configured and reconfigured in the continuous communication of political messaging (Chadwick 2017). These are combined with Hungary's mainstreamed 'hyper-partisan (media) outlets… (including) major legacy news brands' that have strengthened Hungary's il-

liberal public sphere (Stetka & Mihelj 2024: 37). Fidesz's robust online media presence on Facebook, Instagram and Tik-Tok saturates the media landscape.

Methodologically, we understand political crisis as a 'performative drama' (Turner 1988) creating that which it claims to resolve, shaped by key actors around a discursive 'corpus' which is developed and deployed according to political circumstances. Diverse actors are involved in constructing the drama: politicians, journalists, broadcasters and 'influencers' (*publicisták*) who undertake the 'dirty work' of politics, often expressing ideas that politicians are unable to voice openly yet from which they draw political capital. The temporality of the current drama stresses either a present or future reality, often spatialised in relation to vulnerable borders. Both temporal and spatial dimensions are constantly made evident in Hungary's migration crisis ('migrants on the border and many more on the way'). Though external events created the conditions in which crisis might develop, diverse social and cultural components (law, borders, identities, fear, media, shifting populations, etc.) facilitated the construction of a substantive crisis by the government and its agents: politicians, experts, media, influencers and so on. Of course, it is *migrants* themselves who are identified as the main, yet generally invisible, 'bad actors'. Hungary's migration crisis remains potent and constantly troubled relations with the EU are an empowering element in this crisis. In that sense, crisis is a vital *internal* aspect of authoritarian populism's rationale enabling politicians like Orbán to identify dangerous 'others' (migrants, Brussels, Washington, George Soros[8]) against whom, as representatives of 'the people', they can offer security and resolution (Moffit 2015: 210; Sata 2024).

Our data are necessarily context-specific, and limited, but they have value in developing exemplars necessary in the process of generalisation to other settings and in understanding those settings (Flyvbjerg 2001: 73–74), for example where other illiberal populist-nationalist politics dominate. However, our claims are inevitably modest and require development through further research.

Constructing a crisis in the migration state: 'Unworthy' and 'worthy' migrants

Most Hungarians have little direct experience of inward migration. Hungary is primarily an *emigration* state and many Hungarians left for western European destinations in 1956 and after EU accession. Immigration discourse emerged opportunistically in 2015 (Bajomi-Lázár 2019) and refreshed Fidesz's then weakening political position, creating what one analyst describes as 'an entirely new wave of forms of virulent hate, racist discourse and xenophobic neo-nationalist

8 Hungarian-born George Soros, liberal, Jewish financier-philanthropist has long been demonised by Fidesz as an enemy of Hungary because of his 'globalism' in which 'open borders' and migration are promoted.

rhetoric' (Kürti 2020: 63). In a letter to Hungarian citizens in April 2015, Orbán conflated migration with terrorism, defining refugees as an economic and security threat: '[they] cross our borders illegally, and while they present themselves as asylum-seekers, in fact they are coming to enjoy our welfare systems and the employment opportunities our countries have to offer' (Orbán 2015b), setting the scene for subsequent discourse on migration. Throughout 2015, people displaced by war, climate emergency, poverty and inequality in sub-Saharan and North Africa and the Middle East arrived on Europe's external borders. Entitled to protection in Hungary under the Hungarian Constitution (*Magyarország Alaptörvénye*) and EU law, many reached Hungary's southern border aiming to transit westwards. This quickly became defined by the government as a 'migration crisis'. A constitutional authorisation was used to declare 'a nationwide crisis situation due to mass migration' (Magyar Közlöny 2016), since renewed 15 times.[9] This 'state of exception' facilitated divergence from EU provisions on asylum. Most significantly, however, it added to the continuing sense of crisis orchestrated around migration sustained by deploying representations of cultural destruction, exploitation of public services and risks to labour market security. In 2015, bill-board posters appeared alluding to migration as an economic threat.

Picture 1: Hungary's anti-immigration billboard – 'If you come to Hungary, you can't take Hungarians' jobs!'

Source: 24.HU

9 Despite prevailing 'anti-migrant' views, rights and civil activists attempted to support and assist refugees who had arrived in Hungary during this period, see for example European Commission (2019).

Picture 1's Hungarian text ('If you come to Hungary, you can't take Hungarians' jobs!') plainly aimed at a domestic audience rather than refugees, is especially ironic in the current context of recruitment of guestworkers for the Hungarian labour market. In May 2016, Orbán's internal security adviser, György Bakondi, revealed on prime-time state television the apparently apocalyptic scale of the crisis as an imagined future 'migration pressure is not decreasing… according to estimates, just in the sub-Saharan region 30–35 million people may leave for Europe hoping for a better life' (Haszán 2016). Such headlines have continuously emerged from government-supporting media sources, perhaps most salient during the run-up to elections. Throughout the 2018 and 2022 parliamentary elections migration discourse was central to Fidesz's campaigning. Negative tropes of *economic* migrants masquerading as refugees, seeking 'a better life' exploiting or abusing others' benevolence – welfare systems, for example – or as *terrorists* disguised as refugees, were continually disseminated. Picture 2 is an example.

Picture 2: Hungary's anti-immigration billboard – stop signs placed over the crowd of 'migrants'

Source: Authors

Picture 2's messaging seems plain. The poster apparently shows an endless line of 'migrants', all male and seemingly dystopian figures massing somewhere on the border and flooding into Hungary, threatening security and society.[10] Its power in dramatising Bakondi's predictions is clear.

10 The image is not Hungarian but taken from a Slovenian photograph originally used in Nigel Farage's Ukip campaign during the 2016 British EU referendum.

The simple moral binary underlying the migration crisis between unworthy 'migrants' and 'the people' was challenged in the later stages of the 2022 parliamentary election by the arrival of refugees from Russia's war in Ukraine. This necessitated partial and selective re-working of extant anti-*migrant* scripts to create genuine *refugee* identities, victims of circumstances beyond their control and, thus, 'worthy'. The war initiated a rapid mid-campaign 'discursive switch' altering Fidesz's earlier hot-nationalist hostility to refugees (as *migrants*) by adding a parallel virtuous response to Ukrainians redrawn as *refugees* and framed by universal solidarity and welcome.[11] Fidesz's narrative emphasised refuge and hospitality for 'Ukrainians as white, Christian, European refugees' (Pepinsky, Reiff & Szabo 2024). Contrasting with the paucity of 2015 provision for refugees on the southern border, 'welcome hubs' offering advice, food, shelter and possible accommodation were established principally by civil society organisations and churches, rather than the state (Bernát 2020) on the Hungary-Ukraine border and at railway stations. Hungary's response was represented by Fidesz as demonstrating solidarity and collective (Christian) kinship and constituted a radical shift in representations of refugees. However, there is an important caveat here. The discursive switch related solely to *white* Ukrainian refugees. Hungarian-speaking Roma refugees from Kárpártalja (the part of Ukraine closest to Hungary), some of whom were dual Ukrainian-Hungarian citizens, reportedly suffered discrimination in Hungary and were treated simply as 'Roma' rather than as refugees (Romaversitas Alapítvány 2022; Hungarian Helsinki Committee 2023). Reports recently emerged of hundreds of Roma refugee families (many dual Ukrainian-Hungarian citizens) being liable to eviction from subsidised accommodation in Hungary because of a change in government regulations applying to 'protected status' (Magyar Helsinki Bizottság 2024). This is ironic given government commitments to 'family-friendly' policies and the desire to support Hungarians beyond the borders. It would be difficult to see these refugees as being regarded as anything other than *unworthy*.

We offer two contrasting visual examples of migrant identities in Pictures 3 and 4 posted on Orbán's Facebook feed in January and March 2022, prior to the April 2022 election. These demonstrate the positional shift and cleavage between unworthy and worthy refugees, moving from the identity of *migrant* to *refugee* and their divergent connotations.

Picture 3 relies on a long-standing trope effectively mobilised by Fidesz since 2015. In the foreground, the migration crisis is represented by and embodied in the central figure of *migrant* Jihadi insurgent: young, male, masked, trouble, national threat. In the background, smoke billows and masked men lurk amidst

11 The situation was complicated by 157,000 ethnic Hungarian Ukrainian citizens (some with Hungarian citizenship and eligible to vote in Hungarian elections) living in western Ukraine's Transcarpathia, Hungarian territory prior to 1920 and still considered by some Hungarians to be part of Hungary.

Picture 3: Hungary's anti-immigration billboard – 'The migrants must be stopped!'

Source: Authors

the chaos, eerily reminiscent of images of war-damaged Ukraine. Apparently designed to heighten fear and legitimise exclusion the text reads 'The Migrants must be stopped!' The image's cinematic quality represents a 'spectacularisation' of imputed failures (in this instance EU migration policy) that underlie and facilitate the continuous construction of crisis (Moffitt 2014: 190) as well as marking young Muslims as 'useful enemies' (Malcolm 2019). Five weeks later, images of migrant insurgence were supplanted by a different but parallel narrative (perhaps reflecting a different cinematic genre) of welcome for worthy refugees, involving a compassionate and personally-involved Orbán. In Picture 4, for example, his head slightly bowed as if in supplication, Orbán clasps the right hand of, we assume, a young white Ukrainian mother as she holds her baby bundled up against the cold. Orbán is represented as the gentle patriarch and national leader welcoming and protecting women and children far from home.

Such images dramatically distinguish between worthy and unworthy identities, creating a performative narrativisation of the migration crisis. Although unworthy Muslim *migrants* must be stopped, worthy (white Christian) Ukrainian *refugees* can be welcomed but responses to Ukrainian Roma refugees are less

Picture 4: Orbán greeting Ukrainian mother in Hungary

Source: Authors

positive. These contrasting representations were disseminated simultaneously. Both seemingly reflected iterations of 'Hungarian values', entailing compassion for some *refugees* (white Ukrainians) whilst reviling others (Syrians, Afghans or Roma) as *migrants*, necessitating either compulsory exclusion (Picture 3) or voluntary inclusion (Picture 4). By September 2024, some 5.6 million refugees had left Ukraine with about 3.5 million border crossings into Hungary. Most refugees transited westwards, although 62,456 Ukrainians were registered for Temporary Protection in Hungary (UNHCR 2024). Despite some reports that state support for refugees from Ukraine was limited, as well as numbers of Ukrainians under temporary protection being low for the region, images of worthy refugees (and of Hungarian benevolence) were positively represented on the Hungarian Government's outward-facing *About Hungary* web portal.

The narrative of immigration and refugees (qua *migrants*) threatening Hungarian identity and culture continued. The migrant was constructed as social contagion endangering the purity of nation and, apparently, the Hungarian 'race', Orbán having pronounced in summer 2022 that 'the West' is 'the world of mixed races', but Hungarians 'don't want to become a mixed race' (Orbán 2022d).[12] Orbán's identity politics ignores Hungary's history (see footnote 5, above) and, indeed, the contemporary presence of Hungarian Roma and others. This theme persisted into 2023 with new and disquieting descriptive terms

12 Zsuzsa Hegedűs, former long-term Orbán adviser, referred to this speech as 'a pure Nazi text… worthy of Goebbels' (Bajer 2022). Somewhat perversely, the speech also ignores Orbán's celebration of Hungary's central Asian roots and the mythologised history of Hungarian Turanism (Ablonczy 2021). These, of course, raise further questions about white Hungarian-ness, purity and homogeneity.

emerging. Tamás Deutsch, Fidesz member of the European Parliament, referred to 'migrant-pampering' policies (*migránssimogató politika*) in the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum (Deutsch 2023). Similarly, the notion of the 'migrant ghetto' (migránsgettó) was coined by Fidesz politicians to describe the consequences of EU policies for Hungary.[13] This term informed a question in another National Consultation in Hungary distributed to citizens in late 2023, stating that EU migration policy would 'create migrant ghettos in Hungary. What do you think about this?' Responses to the question appeared in one of a series of billboard posters just prior to the 2024 EU parliamentary elections, claiming rejection by 99%.

Picture 5: Hungary's anti-immigration billboard – '99% say no to migrant ghettos, we don't dance to Brussels' tune!'

Source: Authors

The Consultation received 1.5 million responses from a possible 8 million. Picture 5's text claims '99% say no to migrant ghettos, we don't dance to Brussels' tune!'

Fidesz's position on migration and migrants in the period from 2015 was dominated by relentless negative depictions of migrants moderated slightly by the presence of refugees from Ukraine in 2022. Reflecting 'official' discourse,

13 On one reading, the term ghetto has unfortunate historic resonance recalling the second world war Jewish ghettos in Hungary and elsewhere.

most available data suggest that Hungarians reject inward migration as threatening and dangerous, especially from Muslim countries (Messing & Ságvári 2019; Simonovits 2020). However, these representations have been further complicated by media coverage of guestworkers' arrival in Hungary.

Guestworkers in the Hungarian migration state

Labour market factors (and associated geopolitics) are powerful determinants of migration policy in Hungary as elsewhere, sometimes overriding political risks. In a 2023 speech, Orbán asserted that the economy will require 500,000 new workers in the next two years as a consequence of FDI, some coming from what he describes as 'internal reserves' or ethnic Hungarians from neighbouring states.[14] However 'the Hungarian economy must provide jobs first and foremost to Hungarians… If we bring in foreign workers for our convenience… then – just like the West – we'll be undermining our own lives in a cultural sense… This cannot be allowed!' (Orbán 2023b). Orbán's statement highlights a disconnect between populist-nationalist rhetoric and Hungary's demographic and economic circumstances (Waterbury 2022). It underlines a contradiction between labour market needs and the desire for an ethnically homogenous society, essentially the 'liberal paradox' referred to earlier.

Long-term demographic trends in Hungary (a falling birth rate and emigration of skilled and unskilled workers, especially well-educated young people) have created discrepancies between labour market needs and extant skills (Hárs 2019; Eurostat 2024; OECD 2024). FDI combined with extensive state subsidies underpins Hungary's economic growth model (Bruszt & Vukov 2024: 852) and shapes its dependent integration into global value-chains. Hungary provides production facilities (and cheap labour) for German and other transnational companies. For example, Bosch, Audi, Mercedes, BMW, Opel, Suzuki and Daimler all have well-established Hungarian assembly plants.

There is a longer history of migrant labour coming to Hungary, a consequence of geographies of uneven development, Hungary's place in the EU division of labour and beyond, and the mobilities of ethnic Hungarians from neighbouring countries (see for example, Janko et al. 2024). Perhaps because these earlier migrants were white, they largely went unnoticed. However, established patterns of inward labour migration have recently shifted as Hungary loses its regional wage advantage, and labour shortages have been filled by foreign workers from beyond the Hungarian diaspora, neighbouring countries and the EU. Hungarian Government labour market data shows that in 2023 the number of workers from

14 The Hungarian Roma, some 10% of Hungary's total population has a substantially lower employment rate than non-Roma. Perhaps this group is included in Orbán's category of 'internal reserves'? Inclusion would need development in skills and knowledge acquisition, training and support infrastructures (transport, accommodation, etc.) requiring substantial state investment (Csurgó 2024).

Ukraine and Romania decreased by about 4,000, whilst worker numbers from the Philippines, Vietnam, Kyrgyzstan and India increased by about 10,000. The Ministry of National Economy State Secretary is reported in 2023 as saying there were then some 120,000 foreign workers in Hungary (KSH 2023; Szabó 2023) mainly employed in unskilled work, although the workers themselves may be skilled or highly skilled. As a percentage of the Hungarian labour force these numbers are low, yet ironically, their political significance in Hungary has been considerable.

EU policies on climate neutrality and electromobility have created opportunities for Hungary to become part of the European EV lithium battery value--chain (Győrffy 2024a). Orbán has claimed that Hungary will rapidly become the world's third largest battery producer (Orbán 2022). At the end of 2022 there were 29 new companies with Hungarian plants in the battery value-chain, either in operation or confirmed. The production value of Hungarian 'batteries and accumulators' was the second highest in Europe in 2020, at 1846 million Euros (Czirfusz 2023). Attracting Asian FDI, especially from China, is incorporated in Hungary's controversial 'Eastern opening' (Mészáros 2022) and the so-called 'prudent global connectivity' policy which Orbán's political director describes as extending Hungary's historic and mythologised identity as a 'bridge' between East and West (Orbán B. 2023). One analysis called this a form of *political marketing* (Song & Li 2024), foreign policy supporting populism. The economic benefit of these developments to Hungary is contested. These plants will require non-Hungarian labour so the benefits for the domstic labour market are unclear. However, the 'China connection' can be represented by the government as symbolising national development and progress, huge factories and complex industrial developments reflecting Orbán's will to power, and incidentally demonstrating that there is 'life outside the EU'. However, the focus on low-wage manufacturing offers little technological spillover through research and development activity (Gerőcs 2021: 177) and potentially serious environmental consequences have been identified from these plants' activities (Győrffy 2024b). There are clear business advantages for Eastern companies: cheap labour, low corporate tax benefits, state subsidies, strong employer rights, protection from EU-imposed tariffs and access to Western European markets, while Hungary's positive political statements challenging Western China-discourse may create a 'political receptivity' (Szunomár et al. 2024: 293) attractive to China.

Guestworker programmes offer a partial solution in negotiating the paradoxes of the 'immigration state' as these programmes permit a restricted number of temporary migrants to service key industries without commitments in terms of citizenship rights.[15] Ruhs and Martin (2008) explore a spectrum of guestworker

15 In contrast, reports that Russian and Belorussian citizens are now allowed to work in Hungary using the so-called 'national card' have appeared, with few of the restrictions applying to existing guestworkers, see for example, Dahl (2024).

rights, acknowledging how the relative numbers of migrant workers within a state and the state's financial and political context shapes rights afforded to guestworkers. Put simply, states' guestworker programmes are predicated on a relationship between 'numbers' and 'rights'. For example, high income states (such as Sweden) with comparatively low numbers of migrants offer relatively extensive employment and civil rights. States with comparatively high numbers of migrants (such as Dubai in the UAE) offer limited rights. Hungary's situation complicates this spectrum by affording limited rights to relatively small numbers of guestworkers.

Recently, the so-called 'Debrecen-Nyíregyháza-Miskolc Triangle' in Eastern Hungary has attracted substantial FDI and state subsidies, aiming to create what Orbán has identified as Hungary's most developed economic zone. Guestworkers are currently employed in Debrecen constructing new factories and have been domiciled in smaller outlying towns. Media reports of tensions have emerged representing the 'labour market/pure nation' contradiction expressed through the views of local residents and politicians. A range of opinions exist, some reflecting Fidesz anti-migrant discourse while others are less judgemental. However, concerns about 'security', property prices, the presence of guestworkers discouraging tourism and depressing local wages have been clearly expressed in press reports throughout this region. We offer two examples from Hajdúszoboszló, a rural spa resort of some 24,000 people near Debrecen where guestworkers have been accommodated since 2022. Hajdúszoboszló is politically Fidesz-supporting and mirrors events in other parts of the Triangle.

Our first example refers to Hajdúszoboszló residents' increasing anxieties in 2023 about the town becoming a de-facto dormitory for guestworkers employed in Debrecen. Independent national and local media published feature articles and vox-pop videos circulated through online news and social media, contributing to the drama around the arrival and presence of guestworkers. One example, a video broadcast on independent news portal '444', presented by *Jobbik* opposition party politician, György László Lukács, contributed to the sense of crisis that has characterised migration discourse in Hungary.[16] The video showed hazmat-suited non-European construction workers alighting company transport in the centre of Hajdúszoboszló after their shift. Lukács graphically described 'chaotic scenes' with 'cheap Asian migrant workers… this is what it looks like when large numbers of migrant workers [Lukács uses the more negative term *migránsmunkások* rather than guestworkers] pour into Hajdúszoboszló … and take Hungarians' jobs' (Alfahír 2023). However, it is difficult to align what is presented in the video with Lukács' narrative. What we see is workers leaving their (six) buses and quietly dispersing. No 'chaotic scenes' with workers

16 Jobbik (now 'Jobbik-Konszervatívok') has a history of neo-Nazi, anti-Roma and antisemitic activity but now positions itself as a national conservative party.

'pouring' into Hajdúszoboszló were apparent in the video but Lukács' political agenda (guestworkers undermining Hungarian wages and the alleged loss of Hungarian jobs) apparently necessitates such description and, perhaps unwittingly, contributes to the crisis developed since 2015 by Fidesz.

In our second example from 2023, then Hajdúszoboszló mayor, Gyula Czeglédi expressed similar fears about the local economy, suggesting on social media that guestworkers could damage the town's tourist industry and, at one point, threatening (later withdrawing this) to expose anyone renting accommodation to guestworkers. Czeglédi's Facebook account and that of other municipal representatives was alive with debate about the detrimental impact on Hajdúszoboszló of workers being domiciled in the town, with an appeal to accommodation owners not to 'give in to financial temptation' (Kálmán 2023). However, one hotel owner responded with 'I welcome all paying guests, be they Hungarian, Ukrainian or Chinese, and I am very happy about any industrial development in the area!' (Czeglédi 2023). Different interests clearly prompt different responses, and Fidesz charges of *Brussels* aiming to establish 'migrant ghettos' in Hungary are, ironically, somewhat undermined by local entrepreneurs establishing de facto workers' hostels in dormitory towns. As we see, the paradox between economics and sovereignty plays out locally as well as nationally.

Social media's distribution logic enables 'direct' communication between populist politicians (and others) and 'the people' whilst also offering an immediate means of non-elite participation in constructing, distributing and re-distributing discourse. Facebook offers virtual space for citizens to engage in political debate and activity, creating some political agency within the hybridised media environment (Chadwick 2017: 55) where citizens speak back to dominant political discourse. For example, one Facebook account, *Szoboszlón Hallottam* ('I heard it in Hajdúszoboszló'), ostensibly with some 18,000 members, was particularly active in carrying discussions on migration and the presence of guestworkers in the town, echoing some of Czeglédi's fears. Postings were subsequently included in articles on national independent platforms from which we draw. *Szoboszlón Hallottam* posts included localised arguments about sovereignty, conveyed using emotive and dehumanising vocabularies.

> [with guestworkers here] daily conflict was on the cards. Sexual violence, aggressive behaviour, forcing their culture on us, thefts, robberies and even fatalities.
>
> These [guestworkers] will easily kill people. Unfortunately I know them well.
>
> Children and women will be at risk. It's true that [these guestworkers] are used to goats but there are few goats here.

> Whoever supports and permits the dilution of their country's ethnic composition is stupid! As well as guest workers depressing the already low wages of Hungarian workers!!!
>
> There will only be trouble if you take your slant-eyed grandchild to kindergarten.
>
> Why don't we organise a meeting where citizens… run together? Don't start to fear a few bad, smelly dirty Bedouins [disparaging term for guestworkers] in our own beloved country and our own city.
>
> We must launch the cleansing fire project. (Makói 2023)

Baseless social media allegations of guestworkers being involved in street violence, rape and even murder in Hajdúszoboszló also emerged (Iván-Nagy & Bozzay 2023) and reflected the potential of social media-based rumour in extending a sense of crisis, reproducing fear and anxiety and shaping popular discourse. Despite this racist narrative, some local resentment was also articulated with a sense of betrayal by the government. As one post put it, 'the problem is not with the Bedouins… but with the government [which] fights against migration but only in words… [and]… legalizes migration with settlement bonds and guestworkers'[17] (Kálmán 2023). Those who posted sometimes echoed Orbán's declaration that 'Not a single migrant should be allowed into Hungary' (Orbán 2018b), contrasting this with the arrival of notionally *government* sponsored guestworkers in the Triangle,[18] implying political hypocrisy. These posts clearly mirror anti-migrant discourse and embody the domestic pressures that form part of the paradox at the heart of the liberal migration state. They show how significant these social media platforms can be in contextualising events, disseminating and developing political discourse, but also creating spaces in which political elites (in this case who claim to act on behalf of 'the people') can be challenged. Social media clearly structures the popular imagination, in this instance constituting imagined guestworkers as a prolific source of anxiety. Though it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the influence of *Szoboszlón Hallottam,* its content was instrumental in drawing attention to events in Hajdúszoboszló which were followed by articles in the non-Fidesz national media. The disconnect between populist-nationalist anti-migrant rhetoric and Fidesz's attempts to develop a globally flexible investment-oriented growth model is plain in the examples above.

17 This refers to Hungary's policy of allowing foreign citizens and their families to purchase long-term and renewable resident status by investing 250,000 Euros in the country. Perhaps this can best be understood as a neoliberal commodification of *partial* citizenship, and nothing to do with citizenship as constituted in political belonging.

18 Employment of guestworkers is undertaken by recruitment agencies, some close to Fidesz associates despite them having been critical of FDI and immigration into the EU (Átlátszó 2023).

Discussion and conclusions

This article has explored the shifting political use of migration discourse (and migration) in Hungary since 2015. Methodologically, we regard Hungary's politicisation of migration as a processual decade-long continuing social and political drama in which crisis is constructed and managed as a focus for populist-nationalist politics. Indeed, Orbán and Fidesz are, arguably, dependent on an unrelenting sense of crisis. This has been facilitated by Hungary's hybrid media, a system of representation that is a vital resource in trying to establish political hegemony. Hybridity's capacity to create and transmit political messages through 'old' media forms *and* 'new' media's ability to circulate, recirculate and reconfigure discourse online as well as to attract popular participation in creating online content (for example, via Facebook or Tik-Tok) constitutes a formidable potential in forming or shaping public knowledge. As we have shown, social media platforms enable apparently direct communication with diverse sections of 'the people' who, it is claimed, are ignored by elite media. Fidesz supporters' use of social media in activating and valorising emotion, inciting and inflaming resentment realises that potential as we have seen in the example of Hajdúszoboszló. Matters of 'policy' are invariably absent. These media technologies, practices and genres attempt to politicise by saturating the national consciousness with messages of extant and future crisis. Regular National Consultations add to this. As we have shown, the deployment of expert knowledge in creating crisis narratives and providing epistemological weight is also important in creating fear of migration.

Throughout the paper we have shown some of Fidesz's attempts at 'bordering', boundary practises that differentiate between 'authentic' Hungarian history, culture, people and *others* by flattening Hungary's syncretic past. Migratory patterns and movements have led to the media re-appearance of different and diverse identities and cultures in Hungary. Migration and migrants (almost always *imagined* as in most of Hungary there are few) disrupt the Fidesz symbolic order mythologised in tradition: nation, church and family discourses. Migration has worked effectively for the last decade, restoring historical anxieties about the 'death of nation', partially a consequence of Trianon (Bibó 1946: 130–150).[19] Fidesz's ideas of purification, division and separation practices constitute political attempts to strategically systematise modernity's 'inherently untidy experience' (Douglas 1966: 5) not only in relation to migration but to sexuality too. We do not suggest any bifurcation between tradition and modernity here, rather that elements of both are inevitably set in collision. All cultures encounter anomalous others (often as 'strangers') produced by their

19 Fear of national death emerged in Hungary's 2024 EU election. As leader of the nation, Orbán's election appeal to voters was framed as the choice between placing a vote for Fidesz or 'death for Ukraine' (Orbán, 2024).

classificatory norms and practices and face the task of resolving the ambiguity that surrounds strangers. Orbán's political work has aimed at establishing symbolic and material boundaries both discursively and non-discursively through border security systems and apparatuses, often by exaggerating difference (Hungarians 'don't want to become a mixed race'). Given Fidesz's seemingly *absolute* celebration of an imagined and homogenising 'tradition' (and in Orbán's terms a pure [not 'mixed'] Hungarian race' whose 'whiteness' is, presumably, a marker of tradition) it is difficult to see how refugees/asylum-seekers/migrants/ can be understood as other than *polluting*. Hungary's introduction of a further categoric anomaly – guestworkers – as neither 'ordinary' migrants nor indigenous workers, poses further challenges to the symbolic order. Yet, perhaps curiously, Fidesz and its influencers remain focused on inciting fear and resentment, seemingly effectively as our data from Hajdúszoboszló suggest. Various solutions emerge, *temporally* through limited-term visa arrangements and *spatially* by ensuring that guestworkers are domiciled to distinguish between the 'emplaced' local population and the 'placeless' others.

Crisis is inherent in these politics. The political *fabulization* (Turner 1988: 40) of disparate elements and narratives (as images, texts and digital objects) used as 'signalling devices' to create spectacular and dramatic crisis is important in securing the attention of voters and citizens by politicising the symbolic domain (Osborne 2021: 187). We have seen this, for example, in the use of political posters in Hungarian public space. The choice of crisis is important, especially its historical and ontological status, its popular relevance and resonance (migration, gender and war are all relevant). Fidesz and its adherents have been able to deploy a broad migration discourse which identifies a series of *others*: refugees/asylum-seekers/migrants/guestworkers, and a network of institutional actors against which Fidesz and Hungary are positioned. Arguably, given Hungary's FDI growth model and its increasing dependency on migrant labour, this might be understood as acting against Fidesz's own interests. However, as we have shown, Fidesz's migration discourse has shifted slightly from a clear binary position to 'migrant' identities coexisting, often uncomfortably. The war in Ukraine especially, though not altering fundamental antipathies towards migration, has necessitated more complex (and ambiguous) policy positions. The new juridical and policy legitimation of guestworker status is part of this.

Key questions remain. How much is Hungary caught in a liberal dichotomy between logics of the market and logics of sovereignty? Our data suggest that the paradox is significant, yet the contradiction (partially self-inflicted) between 'Not a single migrant should be allowed into Hungary' and the active recruitment of guestworkers is, at least publicly, ignored by Fidesz politicians. Perhaps guestworkers will be understood (and legitimised as in recent legislation) as a category different from 'ordinary' *migránsok*. Our data suggest otherwise. Perhaps there is an assumption that juridical, temporal and spatial restrictions will

mediate domestic pressures while demonstrable economic progress deriving from investments will ease any tensions. Alternatively, perhaps the collateral damage of social resentment and division is considered an acceptable consequence. Some data from Hajdúszoboszló suggest that these are risky strategies. Politicians' obsession with migration (apparently vital to successful election strategies) arguably runs counter to the needs of Hungary's economy as well as failing to acknowledge Hungarians' own mobility into western Europe and, of course, the significance of emigrant remittances for the domestic economy (KSH 2024). The impact of extensive politicisation of migration will likely continue to strengthen Hungarians' views of migration.

As a semi-peripheral post-communist state, Hungary's EU membership and its expected adherence to EU law tends to suggest that it should be regarded as a liberal state, even though Orbán rejects this, claiming Hungary's 'illiberal' status. Indeed, there is an extensive literature arguing that Hungary's liberal and democratic credentials have been eroded in the last decade. Whether these claims significantly or entirely differentiate Hungary from other EU states in terms of cross-border mobilities is a matter of further debate. However, the current Hungarian guestworker programme is driven by economic rationale and in that sense the paradox identified by Hollifield is certainly evident. However, there are aspects of Fidesz politics which shift it from Hollifield's liberal migration state category and which reflect non-economic factors. Attempts to unify the extra-territorial Hungarian diaspora, for example, including using Ukrainian-Hungarian labour in Hungary, might be seen as instances of migration being exploited for nationalist rather than, or as well as, economic motives. Attempts have also been made to reintegrate emigrant Hungarians, a form of 'ethnic return' aimed at recapitalising the nation (Adamson & Tsourapas, op cit; Lados & Hegedűs, 2019).

Overall, as we have shown, the politicisation of migration in Hungary is in itself an expression of nationalist inclinations that emanate from, inter alia, a history of occupation, external threat and territorial dismemberment which have become mythologised to form a coherent whole. In that sense, Hungary represents something of a hybrid form that incorporates shifting elements of liberal, neoliberal and nationalising inclinations, the significance of these being shaped through time and space. We have teased out some of the complexities within a broad class of refugees and asylum seekers and, secondly, guestworkers. As categories of 'alienage', contrasting with citizenship, both express substantial differences in relation to their rights and recognition within broader Fidesz policy, yet both highlight Hungary's inherent tensions as an illiberal migration state. The Hungarian context provides an important and interesting counterpoint to existing scholarship on guestworker programmes. Further analysis of its politics and practices in this respect are necessary. These will have to be considered in the context of strengthening relationships between illiberal politicians and

parties in Europe and globally. An important example is Orbán's involvement in 'Patriots for Europe', already significant within the EU in the context of the rising profile of right-wing illiberal parties across Europe. In this respect, Hungary has been something of a 'pedagogic text', offering a model for others that has been followed elsewhere. How Hungary deals with the paradoxes outlined here has potential to provide further guidance in shaping politics more widely. This potentially offers further insights into migration policy tensions that remain under explored within other Central European states.

As we have noted, ideological work in Hungary over the last decade has emboldened political and domestic demands for what is understood as sovereignty, effectively creating an anti-migrant popular consensus sufficient to support Fidesz's continuing political dominance. We have suggested that discursive and symbolic work are ubiquitous in Hungarian politics. However, as Gramsci has pointed out (Hoare & Nowell Smith,1971: 161) consent in the form of continuing hegemony rests on a real material and economic base, ideology being necessary but insufficient to sustain hegemony. Whether the paradox(es) outlined in this article can be resolved is likely to be contingent on wider circumstances not least within the economy.

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The Faces of Joke Parties: Comparative Analysis of the Party Organization of the Hungarian Two-tailed Dog Party and the Die PARTEI

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Abstract: *This research aims to examine the organisational structure of two so-called joke parties: the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) and the German Die PARTEI. These parties occupy a unique position within their respective party systems, as neither has secured seats in the national parliament. However, both have achieved notable successes in secondary elections, such as the European Parliament elections and at the local level. Despite being primarily recognised for their humorous, satirical and ironic communication strategies, this study seeks to move beyond the surface level of their political messaging and explore their deeper organisational structures. It is hypothesised that joke parties, as a distinct party family, share structural similarities beyond their communication style. To investigate this, two key theories of party organisation have been applied. The first is the 'three faces' theory proposed by Peter Mair and Peter Katz, which challenges the notion of monolithic party organisation and instead conceptualises parties as entities composed of separate yet interconnected segments, each with distinct functions, powers and responsibilities. The second theoretical framework is the movement party theory, which suggests that the boundaries between political parties and social movements are less rigid than traditionally assumed in political science. This theory posits that certain parties maintain stronger ties with civil society, exhibit grassroots organisational structures, emphasise direct democracy and prioritise street-level activism. To test this hypothesis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of Die PARTEI and MKKP. A diverse range of respondents was selected to ensure comprehensive data collection across national, regional (state), and local levels. In addition to analysing the vertical structure of these parties, their horizontal organisation was also examined. Consequently, data were gathered from prominent figures representing the party on the ground, the party in public office and the party in the central office. The findings indicate that both parties exhibit common*

organisational characteristics. Notably, the segment referred to as the 'party on the ground' appears to be the most prominent, as their political activity places significant emphasis on street-level engagement. Furthermore, both parties demonstrate stronger connections with civil society than traditional cartel parties, aligning them with the characteristics of movement parties.

Keywords: ***joke parties, Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party, Die PARTEI, movement parties***

Introduction

Although joke parties have been part of the Western European political arena since the 1970s, they have remained marginal for political science. This can be explained by their election results, which, according to the interpretation of Giovanni Sartori (1976[2005]), cannot be considered relevant. In other words, they cannot significantly influence either the party system or public policy decisions. However, the phenomenon of satirical parties has become widespread in Europe, exemplified by the Official Monster Raving Loony Party in the United Kingdom, the beer parties of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s, or perhaps the most famous and successful example, the Besti Flokkurinn (Best Party), which, under Jón Gnarr's leadership, secured the mayoralty of Reykjavík. Nonetheless, the majority of these organizations have ceased operations or failed to move beyond a highly marginalized position and establish a functioning party structure.

The two satirical parties examined in this research, however, have somewhat transcended this marginalization. While neither is represented in their respective national parliaments, both maintain a presence in local governments, and Die PARTEI holds two mandates in the European Parliament. Based on these findings, it can be asserted that both parties are integrated components of their respective countries' party systems and rank among the strongest non-parliamentary parties. Furthermore, both parties remain active to this day and have demonstrated the necessity and ability to build a genuine party structure, as their operations are no longer solely driven by the involvement of their founders, unlike many other satirical parties. Therefore, this research examines the organizational structure of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) and the Partei für Arbeit, Rechtsstaat, Tierschutz, Elitenförderung und basisdemokratische Initiative (Die PARTEI) using focused comparative methods to highlight the similarities and differences between the parties.

In the structure of the study, the joke political parties, as well as Die PARTEI and the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), will first be briefly introduced. Following this, the theoretical background of party organizations will be explored, with particular reference to Peter Mair and Richard Katz's theory of the three faces of political parties, which will serve as the basis for the analysis. The empirical section will then follow, focusing on a comparison of the organizational features of the two parties and an exploration of their structures.

Joke political parties

The phenomenon of joke parties fundamentally refers to political organizations where humour plays a central role. In the case of these parties, humour is not merely a rhetorical device but a defining element of their overall functioning. Essentially, the party interprets its socio-political and economic environment through humour, which often underlies its motivations for action (Szegedi 2021). The party family derives its name from this characteristic, which serves as the most significant common feature of joke parties. However, beyond this, several additional similarities can be identified, such as the strong anti-establishment attitudes and the emphasis on post-materialist values. Given that the primary targets of their humour are those in positions of power, joke parties can be characterized by a strong anti-elitist attitude.

When examining the emergence of joke parties and the humour they employ, two main periods can be distinguished (Glied & Szegedi 2024). First,[1] the classic joke parties emerged in the 1980s, primarily in Anglo-Saxon countries, influenced by new leftist movements. These parties utilized playful, non-offensive humour and were significantly shaped by the electoral systems of Anglo-Saxon countries, particularly concerning wasted votes, as well as dissatisfaction caused by the neoliberal economic shift.

The second wave of joke parties appeared during the 2010s, predominantly in continental Europe. This period marked electoral successes for joke parties, such as the election of Jón Gnarr, the candidate of the Best Party (Besti Flokkurinn), as mayor of Reykjavík (Boyer 2013; Proppé 2015). Additionally, two other notable actors central to the analysis are the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party and Die PARTEI. Furthermore, the Austrian Beer Party (Die Bierpartei), which achieved 2.02% of the vote in the 2024 elections (bundeswahlen.gv.at 2024), may become a significant joke party in the future.

1 Excluding Jaroslav Hašek's The Party of Moderate Progress Within the Bounds of the Law (*Strana mírného pokroku v mezích zákona*), which participated in the 1911 elections in the Cisleithanian territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it is considered more of a proto-joke party, having preceded the emergence of joke parties by a significant margin.

Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party

The Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) began its activities in 2006, initially as a street art movement, becoming known for its socially critical messages in the city of Szeged (Bucs 2011). The party first participated in elections during the 2010 municipal elections in a few districts of Budapest but failed to gather the required number of nominations. Since 2014, it has operated as a political party due to a legislative amendment prohibiting non-parties from participating in elections. However, in 2014, it was unable to compete in the elections because the court did not approve its registration as a party, deeming its name 'misleading'. Following an appeal to the Curia,[2] the Curia approved the party's operation (Oross, Farkas & Papp 2018).

The party achieved its first nationwide recognition in 2015. During this year, the government launched an anti-migration billboard campaign, significantly deviating from traditional Hungarian political themes. In response, the MKKP initiated a counter-counter billboard campaign funded through public donations. In the 2018 parliamentary elections, the party garnered 1.79% of the vote, failing to cross the 5% parliamentary threshold (NVI.hu 2018). However, in the 2019 municipal elections, it won representative seats in several Budapest districts and secured a deputy-mayor position in one district (NVI.hu 2018). In the 2022 elections, the party again did not reach the 5% threshold but significantly expanded its voter base, achieving a 3.27% result (NVI.hu 2022).

The MKKP has launched several billboard campaigns countering the government's narratives. It gained nationwide attention in 2015 during the first Hungarian anti-migration government campaign, raising 33 million HUF (~110,000 €) through public donations to formulate a counter-narrative. The billboards mimicked the visual characteristics of the government's billboards but featured different texts, such as *'Sorry about our prime minister'* or *'If you're Hungary's Prime Minister, you have to respect our laws!'*[3] (Nagy 2016: 121). The party continues to employ similar methods in its street campaigns. Since 2018, their main campaign slogan has been 'Eternal life, Free beer, Tax reduction' (see Figure 1). Its primary campaign message in the 2022 parliamentary election was 'More animals into the Parliament' (Szegedi 2022a: 96). Furthermore, they reflected on the political-economic situation in Hungary in their campaigns (see Figure 2).

Since becoming a member of the Budapest City Assembly, co-chair Gergely Kovács has submitted several unconventional proposals, such as the initiative titled *'Proposal to ban Imperial Walkers from Budapest',* in which the following reasoning was provided:

2 Hungarian Supreme Court

3 This was a response to the government's billboard stating: *'If you come to Hungary, you have to keep our laws'* (Thorpe, 2015).

With the following proposal, we wish to demonstrate that the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party's representative group is equally capable of drafting proposals of such quality, seriousness, and depth of professional content as those brought forward by some of our fellow representatives in previous sessions. Let the humour factor belong to the Dog Party! Many have surely noticed that Imperial Walkers (officially known as AT-ATs, or All-Terrain Armored Transports) have overrun the capital. Unfortunately, it is increasingly observed that they ignore traffic signals, run red lights, and tear down cables. Not to mention that they occupy numerous parking spaces. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for them to transport cargo (e.g., weapons, troops, lunch, etc.). (Budapest.hu 2024)[4]

Figure 1: Slogan of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party

Source: MKKP.party 2019a
'Eternal life, Free beer, Tax reduction'

4 The proposal was not supported by the assembly.

Figure 2: MKKP EP election poster (2019)

Source: MKKP.party 2019b
'We will significantly reduce the insultingly high foreign wages.
in England -70%, in Germany -65%, in Austria -75%, in Romania -3%.
Come Home Hungarian! programme.'

Die PARTEI

The Party for Labour, Rule of Law, Animal Protection, Promotion of Elites, and Grassroots Democratic Initiative (Die Partei für Arbeit, Rechtsstaat, Tierschutz, Elitenförderung und basisdemokratische Initiative), abbreviated as Die PARTEI, was founded in 2004 by the editorial staff of Titanic magazine (Neu 2018). In 2005, the party was only able to participate in elections in Berlin and Hamburg, where it achieved results well below 1%. In the 2009 elections, the party was unable to participate because the Federal Election Committee did not authorize its candidacy, deeming it not a 'serious party.' However, this decision was overturned by the Federal Constitutional Court (bundesverfassungsgericht.de 2011).

In the 2013 federal elections, Die PARTEI received 0.2% of the vote, followed by 1% in the 2017 federal elections. In the 2021 elections, it again achieved 1%, but due to significantly higher voter turnout, the nominal number of votes was nearly double compared to 2017 (bundeswahlleiterin.de 2021). Thus, Die PARTEI has yet to surpass the parliamentary threshold in Germany. However, in the Euro-

pean Parliament elections, where there is no parliamentary threshold in Germany, the party has secured mandates in every EP election since 2014—winning one seat in 2014 and two seats each in 2019 and 2024 (bundeswahlleiterin.de 2024).

The party's relative popularity is primarily attributed to its extensive use of social media (Olterman 2017) and attention-grabbing actions that generate significant media coverage. For instance, during one election campaign, a 90-second blurred sex video was released as a political advertisement (Reuters.com, 2013). Another notable action involved displaying the slogan 'a Nazi could be hanging here' on billboards (Knight 2017). They make fun of other political parties (see Figure 3) or even their party leader (see Figure 4) in their campaigns.

Additionally, Martin Sonneborn's speeches in the European Parliament deviate from conventional norms, such as:

> Madam President! Dear Mrs. von der Leyen, welcome! I am genuinely pleased that, as of now, I am no longer the least serious representative of European democracy. The personnel line-up presented by the Council is something to

Figure 3: Die PARTEI poster about other parties

Source: Glied & Szegedi 2024: 502
'CDU: not Christians, SPD not social, Grüne: not ecological, FDP: not liberal, AfD: not alternative, Die PARTEI: not funny'

Figure 4: Die PARTEI EP election poster (2024)

Source: Facebook.com/Die PARTEI
'You know me! Leave Europe to Sonneborn.'

> behold: Josep Borrell—a Spanish figure who had to resign as President of the European University Institute because he "forgot" to declare an annual gratuity of 300,000 euros—is supposed to represent European values to the world as High Representative for Foreign Affairs. Christine Lagarde—a lawyer convicted of misappropriating 400 million euros of public funds, with no experience leading a national central bank—is supposed to head the ECB. Charles Michel—a Belgian who couldn't even form a functioning government in Belgium—is supposed to become Council President and mediate an increasingly complex web of national interests. And then there's you, Mrs. von der Leyen—a German minister completely devoid of European policy expertise, who has only stood out for a bizarre penchant for overpriced consultants, mismanagement, and euphemisms like "financial turnaround" to describe Germany's largest rearmament campaign since the end of the war.

To secure this parade of incompetence and moral laxity, you are making deals with the illiberal PiS party, the wannabe fascist Orbán, and Benito Salvini? We should not leave Europe to amateurs—wink emoji. (Europäisches Parlament 2018).

Methodology

The theoretical framework of the research primarily aims to examine joke parties through two major party theories. Firstly, we intend to use the theory of movement parties to better understand the three faces of party organizations and then integrate the organizational structures of Die PARTEI and MKKP into these theories. We assume that both joke parties fall into the category of movement parties, which is reflected in the aspects of party organization. We hypothesize that the organizational unit of the party on the ground is overrepresented compared to other parties and plays a crucial role in the life of the party. In other words, we assume that the autonomy and independence of local organizations are greater than those in traditional parties.

To empirically confirm or refute this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with prominent figures of Die PARTEI and MKKP. The aim was to explore the relationships between different units within each party's organization and to uncover their unconventional participatory, political community-building, and other political strategic tools. Interviews were conducted with national and local politicians, leaders, and activists for both parties.

The study is primarily descriptive research, as it currently seeks to find answers to how the organizational structures of MKKP and Die PARTEI are built and how the individual parts behave relative to each other. It aims to identify similarities and differences between the two structures. However, it can become an important foundational study in the field of joke parties.

The interviewees provided almost identical responses to nearly all questions, therefore, not every interviewee's opinion is included in the analysis section. Instead, the opinions of those who were able to answer the questions most succinctly are presented. However, the study strives to ensure that the list of used interviews is as diverse as possible.

Party organizations

The examination of party organizations is almost as old as the research on parties itself, with Moisey Ostrogorsky (1902) and Robert Michels (1915) approaching parties from the perspective of party organizations. Over the past century, party organizations have undergone numerous changes. If we consider only centralization, we have transitioned from loosely organized parties with cadre or honorary structures, often not even existing in a modern sense, to the development of modern hierarchized, bureaucratic, professional machinery, as described by catch-all parties (Kirchheimer 1966) or professional electoral parties (Panebianco 1988). Subsequently, we witnessed the emergence of looser forms such as cartel parties (Katz & Mair 1995) or parties resembling economic circles (Hopkin & Paolucci 1999). We can also include party organizations reminiscent of the franchise system (Carty 2004). With the spread and widespread use of the internet, cyber parties (Margetts 2006) have emerged, organizing almost entirely in the online space (Lioy, Esteve Del Valle & Gottlieb 2019).

However, it is essential to highlight Tomáš Cirhan's theory (2023), which states that anti-establishment parties have a unique, particular organizational structure where charismatic leadership and local organizations play the most significant role in party organization.

The central element of Cirhan's theory bears a strong resemblance to Herbert Kitschelt's (2006) thesis on movement parties, describing a group of parties that, in some aspects, resemble social movements. Similar to Cirhan, charismatic leadership and local organizations play a central role in party organization. However, Kitschelt presents this as mutually exclusive phenomena, suggesting that charismatic leaders primarily influence radical (populist) right-wing parties, while new left-wing and green parties are dominated by the base-democratic structure of local organizations (Caiani & Cisař 2018). Nevertheless, in some cases, a hybrid manifestation of the two phenomena can be observed, as seen in the case of the Five Star Movement (Mikola & Oross 2018) or in the early organizational development of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), for which Gergely Kovács, the co-chair of MKKP, used the term 'base-dictatorial' (Oross, Farkas & Papp 2018: 175).

Movement parties, according to the typology of Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond (2003), are relatively recent formations. However, according to Donatella della Porta and her colleagues (2017), movement parties have served as alternatives to mainstream parties since the era of mass parties, and Ma-

rina Prentoulis and Lasse Thomassen (2019) even include 19th-century labor movements in this category. Paul Almeida's research (2015) suggests that the emergence of movement parties is linked to the rise of neoliberal economic policies, at least in Latin America. Opposition parties have developed new political strategies, emphasizing street-level politics, collective action, and stronger collaboration with civil society and organizations. This has significantly shaped the functioning of these parties compared to traditional and formal political spaces.

Marco Deseriis (2020) complements this by highlighting the increasing non-conventional political participation and interest articulation shifting to virtual spaces. Movement parties with a strong online presence aim to mobilize and promote, offsetting their weak organizational structure in traditional terms. Lorenzo Mosca and Mario Quaranta (2017) found empirical evidence of participation in non-conventional politics, orientation from the internet, and voting for movement parties in Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Spain, and Greece.

Furthermore, the characteristics of party organization are greatly influenced by the emergence of movement parties, which are closely tied to various socio-economic issues. In two-party systems where new political actors have little chance of achieving real success, social movements break into the political arena within established parties (e.g., the Tea Party, Jeremy Corbyn, Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, etc.). However, in countries with multi-party systems where new entrants can relatively easily enter the political space, social movements emerge as new parties if they institutionalize (e.g., Podemos, SYRIZA, AfD, Five Star Movement, etc.) (Hutter, Kriesi & Lorenzini 2019).

The three faces of party organizations

In their influential work, where they departed from the previously monolithic interpretation of parties, Peter Mair and Richard Katz (1993) identified three main 'faces' or organizational components of party structures. Firstly, there is the leadership component, referred to as the central office of the party, with the primary task of organizing the party's activities, including coordinating campaigns and activists. Secondly, there is the segment of party members occupying public offices, which includes representatives of the party in parliamentary, governmental, or local government positions. Members of this group can become influential within the party based on their success and popularity, as their performance is determined by factors external to the party, namely elections. Additionally, in most modern democratic countries, some form of party funding exists, calculated based on electoral success, allowing successful politicians to contribute funds to the party treasury. Thirdly, there is the category of membership, activists, and reliable voters, collectively described as the party on the ground. Their main function is to channel local information to higher levels and, during campaigns, to participate as (unpaid) labour in party activities.

One significant advantage of Mair and Katz's theory is that it allows for a well-comparable analysis of various party formations across eras and party families. In contemporary party organizations, such as cartel parties or business enterprise parties, we observe the strengthening of actors fulfilling public offices. This trend can be explained by the increasing personalization, amplified by the effects of mediatization, as well as the financial dependence of representatives on their success. Successful characters familiar with campaigns are more frequently featured in the media, enhancing their influence within the party, potentially even against the party elite.

In contrast, with movement parties, we see relative independence of the party on the ground, which can become an autonomous actor due to its direct democratic and grassroots structure, making its own decisions and strategies at the local level. This can be explained by the fact that movement parties, being fresh protest formations, lack dominant representatives, making activists and party members involved in actual work relevant.

Faces of the joke parties

Party in the central office

In the case of Die PARTEI, we can observe a multi-level structure of the party organization, fitting the peculiarities of the German federal system. Thus, there is one national organization, 19 states, and 366 local organizations. However, the national and state organizations exert less bureaucracy and influence over local organizations compared to other parties. For MKKP, we also observe similar phenomena in the sense that the organizational structure operates in a three-tier system, with one national organization connecting with local organizations through six national coordinators, which numbered around 100 outside Budapest in the spring of 2023. However, in the case of MKKP, the national organization seems to be more involved in organizing matters related to the national level. As an interviewee said: 'The Die PARTEI leadership does not have a particularly active role. It takes care of the administrative necessities. The rare pronouncements of a substantive nature carry some weight. Now and then, the federal executive board initiates nationwide campaigns. Otherwise, only the legally required administration is centralized' (Interview 9). Another politician confirmed this: 'The party develops the party strategy and what would apply to the whole country at the federal level [...] In the states, they work out their activities according to local specifics' (Interview 13).

'With the approach of the elections, the selection of candidates, who can be candidates, who can be mayor candidates, all these are decided by the party membership' (Interview 19).

In both parties, the charisma of the founders is influential. They are not charismatic leaders in the traditional sense of radical right-wing charismatic leaders (cf. Kitschelt 1995; van der Burgh & Mughan 2007), but rather serve as ethical guides for those involved in party work, determining what aligns with the founder's taste and what does not. In reality, their role in terms of identification is much more important than their influence on practical decision-making. The decisions of both parties are primarily focused on long-term national strategies rather than immediate, localized decisions.

Regarding Die PARTEI, Martin Sonneborn's public pronouncements are certainly followed semi-attentively by most members. Its role is thus on the one hand very large, on the other hand, expresses itself practically little, except in the usual celebrity horniness and exaggeration' (Interview 9). 'He [Martin Sonneborn] is a sort of an identification person' (Interview 14). Or 'We are a leader-centered party with anarchist rules. The party chairman Martin Sonneborn is our father, God and friend, he allows us to do anything and does not dictate any rules' (Interview 24).

In MKKP, 'Gergő [Gergely Kovács] has been running this whole thing for quite a long time, and everyone is on the same wavelength, and if we have any problems with each other, we usually manage to solve them' (Interview 11). Legally, 'I don't think there is [a separate jurisdiction for the co-chairs], in the sense that [...] they are the ones who determine the party's direction. But basically, Gergő and Szuzi[5] who usually have the last words [...] Gergő has a special role' (Interview 18).

The main difference lies in party membership. While in the case of MKKP, party membership is the primary national decision-making body, involving around 70 actual members who form an integral part of the central office, Die PARTEI presents more of a parody of traditional party membership. Joining is as simple as filling out an online questionnaire. Party membership is more of a formal institution in Die PARTEI's life, not carrying any obligations, and apart from the annual party members' meeting, it does not entail specific rights. 'We always have a membership appliance with us [at the events] and everybody can just join... Most parties don't allow you to be in another party at the same time, we allow that, we don't care' (Interview 16). They also vote on the composition of the Federal Executive Board at these meetings, which has essentially not changed since the founding. Additionally, they confirm the positions of commissioners appointed by the Federal Executive Board. However, the meeting nature predominantly dominates (and this is also not mandatory).

Party in public office

In the case of individuals holding public offices for the parties, we can see that they are marginal in both parties. The public office and the central office are not

5 Leaders of the MKKP

distinctly separated. In the case of MKKP, their three municipal representatives are part of the presidency, with two of them also being co-chairs. Similarly, in the case of Die PARTEI, we observe a similar phenomenon where Martin Sonneborn, the party's president and European Parliament representative, is also involved in public office. Additionally, Die PARTEI has representatives in local governments who are selected from influential members or leaders at the local level. There are instances where someone transitions from the federal executive board of the party to become a representative. Thus, in both cases, we can observe processes contrary to traditional parties. Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1993) highlight that the party in the public office gradually dominates other party organizational units, partly due to the predominance of state support distributed based on the number of representatives or election results in most countries (cf. cartel party [Katz & Mair 1995, 1996; Mair 1997], electoral-professional parties [Panebianco 1988], or modern cadre parties [Koole 1994]). Moreover, regarding party workers, since the 1980s, individuals related to representative work have become more cardinal, while those connected to party work have been marginalized (Katz & Mair 2002). In contrast, for MKKP and Die PARTEI, individuals who are fundamentally dominant in the party become representatives. Thus, while traditional parties are characterized by representatives dominating the party organization, becoming prominent media actors representing a country's political elite, MKKP and Die PARTEI exhibit the reverse. Party leaders acquire representative positions, mainly due to a lack of resources and because they are parties organizing outside of parliament (Oross, Farkas & Papp 2018). Hence, the organizational structure and dominant members became significant in the party before securing representative positions.

> In the party [MKKP], the people who are dominant in the party became representatives [...] Out of the five-member presidency [...] 3 are municipal members [...] there is no one who is not a member of the presidency and a representative (Interview 12).

> We separate the time of the mandate by the seats and [...] anyone who wants to can. We don't take it seriously. The only people [...] who have a special role in the party, for example, Martin Sonneborn (Interview 24).

Therefore, in the case of Die PARTEI, representatives do not only come from the presidency at the local level, but at a higher level, they do not have representatives except in the European Parliament, where the party president holds a mandate.

Party on the ground

The party on the ground, in both party cases, enjoys relative autonomy, meaning that the national and federal party leadership does not heavily intervene in the affairs of local organizations. Local organizations essentially have free rein within the party's framework, and as long as their activities align with the party's image, the upper leadership does not interfere. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the case of Die PARTEI due to its federal system, where urban organizations loosely connect through regional coordinators, who primarily facilitate communication between the organizations.

> The regional level is actually more of an administrative level... actions and activities either come from the federal level by the party leadership or... from active local basic organizations (Interview 13).

> The federal leadership not at all, like we never had any permission or something, the state leadership neither [...] They trust in the people who are kind of in charge [at the local level] (Interview 24).

A similar phenomenon is observed in the case of MKKP.

> Regarding local affairs, I think the activists have a huge impact... what kind of events we have, for example, our fall schedule, we put it together completely jointly [...] Since this is a bottom-up organized organization of ours, if someone has a good idea and we can realize it, then we do it (Interview 19).

> In theory, the local organizations can make [independent decisions], only if it really doesn't fit into the direction, they might say okay, do it, but we won't associate our name with it. So, you do what you want (Interview 21).

Local organizations perform the active part of party work, which primarily does not concern the media or national issues. They enjoy relatively broad autonomy, having almost complete freedom, similar to Die PARTEI. Therefore, since they are not professional politicians at the local level but rather civilians, alternative political tools had to be found to attract attention. For MKKP, this became street art and city beautification actions, where neglected street furniture is renovated. Similarly, unconventional political activism is seen in Die PARTEI when they present various political performances or intentionally use conflict-seeking, provocative posters. In many cases, these activities are independent of the national leadership, building on local knowledge. Additionally, in both parties, the community of local participants collectively makes decisions, ensuring the appearance of every opinion or idea through a grassroots democratic function-

ing. Moreover, both organizations are strongly connected to civil society, and some interviewees engage in civil work alongside their party work, often in civil organizations or the social welfare system. For example:

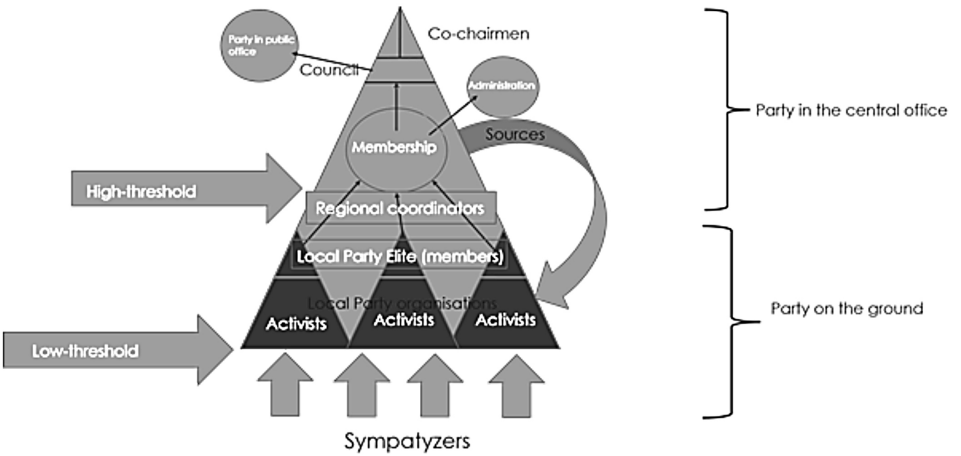
> Every member of the party is an activist who can be an individual. influence the decision-making process in his or her own way, because the party's democratic idea is better than in society and in the other big parties (Interview 27).

Organizational structure

Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party

In the case of MKKP (see Figure 5), we observe a three-tier organizational structure where the middle level plays a role in administration, maintaining connections, and facilitating information flow. The upper and lower levels are involved in actual political party work. The main strength of the organizational structure lies in its low entry barrier, meaning that anyone can easily join the party's street activities (street art, city beautification, etc.), not in a formal manner as in most parties, but through collective action. Thus, one can become an active participant in party work. However, formal party membership is granted only to actively participating activists, turning it into an internal reward system. Therefore, achieving membership is a significant advancement opportunity for activists. Additionally, membership is the most important decision-making body in the party, allowing those with membership to actively influence the

Figure 5: Organizational Structure of The Hungarian Two-tailed Dog Party



Source: Author

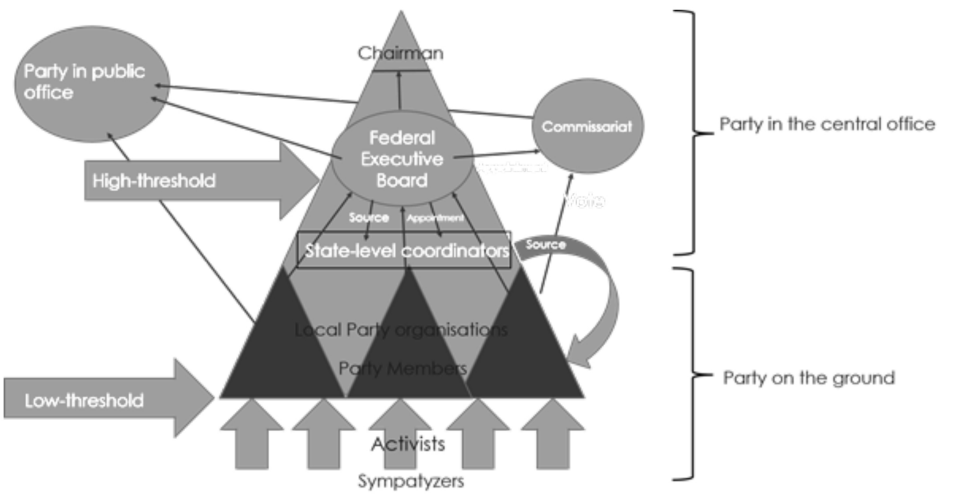
party's national decisions and the party itself. Members elect the leadership, including the president and co-presidents, and make decisions about election candidates and other administrative staff. Furthermore, the party leadership primarily handles national organizational and campaign tasks, providing resources to the local organization. Therefore, local organizations are relatively autonomous, independent entities within the party, separate from both higher levels and other organizational parts within their tier. The primary goal of MKKP with this intentional organizational structure is resource balancing and the creation of strong local communities that are active not just based on election victories but also due to internal motivations (Szegedi 2022b).

Die PARTEI

In the case of Die PARTEI (see Figure 6), we see a structure more aligned with the organizational setup of traditional parties, albeit in a satirical party version (Szegedi 2021). Similar to MKKP, it employs a three-tier organization. The middle tier, as in MKKP, mainly functions within the party organization, focusing on resource allocation, organization, and information dissemination, akin to MKKP's regional coordinators.

The main difference between the two parties lies in the level of the formal membership entry threshold. In Die PARTEI, anyone can become a party member without significant criteria, making membership less weighty, and deci-

Figure 6: Organizational Structure of The Die PARTEI



Source: Author

sions are not influenced to the same extent as in the case of MKKP. The low entry threshold in this case pertains to party membership, but reaching more important positions is considerably more challenging. In Die PARTEI, a higher entry threshold has been established for these roles. This is evident in the fact that the party's leadership primarily consists of individuals from the editorial staff of the Titanic magazine, who also founded the party. Therefore, party membership is more of a symbolic commitment, carrying no real obligations.

Federal-level decisions regarding the party are made by the Federal Executive Board and Commissioners appointed by it, responsible for 'specialized' party work. The Federal Executive Board is elected by the federal party conference, where membership is the sole exercising authority (Die PARTEI.de 2022).

Most local-level members actively involved in party work do so out of personal conviction. Die PARTEI's reward system involves advancing within the party organization and obtaining local mandates with the party's support. One significant difference from MKKP is that Die PARTEI has seen not only the party's upper leadership but also local-level leaders securing mandates. However, it is typically the commissioners and members of the Federal Executive Board who become representatives.

Conclusion

In summary, we can observe a distinct organizational structure for both MKKP and Die PARTEI. While there are marked similarities between the two organizations, differences also exist. In both parties, we see that, at the local level, the 'party on the ground' enjoys relative independence from the party's upper leadership. Joining either party is relatively easy, and in the case of Die PARTEI, this almost always comes with formal party membership. In contrast, in the case of MKKP, party membership is a privilege of a narrow elite within the party, constituting the most influential decision-making body.

Die PARTEI's party elite consists of the Federal Executive Board and Commissioners, while MKKP has a more charismatic leadership role typically fulfilled by the party's founder. Despite the opportunity for anyone to become the party president in theory, in practice, the founders play a crucial role in both parties, acting as key figures in both the party and its media presence. Consequently, a strong party elite has developed in both cases, potentially leading to the suppression of local organizations and centralized control. However, we find that local organizations maintain a significant degree of autonomy. While the party leadership deals with national affairs (campaigns, unified communication, media appearances, etc.), local organizations focus on local party work and often engage in non-partisan political actions (e.g., MKKP's painting of bus stops or Die PARTEI's free hug day). Thus, national campaigns are complemented by unconventional actions initiated by local organizations.

These actions align more with the strategies of social movements, allowing the parties to connect more easily with civil society, from which cartel parties have generally distanced themselves (Katz & Mair 1995). Consequently, both parties can be classified into the category of movement parties.

In the 2024 EP elections, both parties will compete, and while neither is likely to finish first, Die PARTEI, especially in Germany, where there is no parliamentary threshold (Sabbati & Grosek 2024), could potentially win two seats. For MKKP, most polls in the fall of 2023 indicated that they were polling above the 5% threshold.

Finally, Die PARTEI received 1.9% of the vote in the elections, resulting in 2 mandates. However, this represented a decrease of 0.5 percentage points compared to 2019, despite voter turnout in Germany being 3.4 percentage points higher (bundeswahlleiterin.de 2024). Conversely, the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) once again failed to surpass the 5% electoral threshold,[6] although this election marked its strongest performance to date, with a result of 3.59% (NVI.hu 2024a). Additionally, municipal elections were held in Hungary alongside the European Parliament elections, where the MKKP secured 51 mandates. Furthermore, Gergely Kovács won the mayoral seat of Budapest's 12th district[7], and the MKKP achieved a majority in the district's municipal assembly (NVI 2024b).

Future research could be expanded to include the study of other satirical parties (e.g., the Austrian Beer Party). It could also serve as a foundation for examining the relationships between smaller parties and those lacking significant elite representation or robust organizational structures. Moreover, the investigation of these particular parties may contribute to a deeper understanding of the operation of movement-based parties in the long term. An intriguing area for future research is the examination of post-2024 election changes, particularly in the case of the MKKP, focusing on how the drastic increase in the number of elected representatives may alter the party's structure.

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6 This phenomenon can primarily be attributed to the emergence of Péter Magyar and the Tisza Party, which effectively overshadowed nearly all opposition parties. In March 2024, the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) was polled at over 10% by the Median polling company. However, by June, MKKP voters (along with those of most other opposition parties) had largely shifted their support to the Tisza Party.

7 Traditionally, this district of the capital, characterized by greater wealth and a more bourgeois profile, has been an area where right-wing parties have performed better since the regime change.

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Hungarian Foreign Policy towards the Turkic States: A Motivation for a More Authoritarian-Leaning Political Model or a Pragmatic Will for Economic Gain?

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Abstract: *This study examines the relationship between the recent discussions that Hungary has moved away from fundamental democratic values and turned into an illiberal democracy and the transformation of Hungarian foreign policy by taking Hungary's relations with the Turkic states as a case. The dynamics of Hungarian foreign policy towards the Turkic states as part of Hungary's post-2010 strategy of Eastern Opening are taken as a case study and the influences of these dynamics on perception differences about Hungarian democracy are analysed. It is discussed whether Hungary's developing political and economic relations with the Turkic states since 2010 involve an emulation of the political models of these states and whether this has an impact on the so-called transformation of Hungarian democracy into an illiberal democracy. It attempts to reveal the extent to which foreign policy developments are decisive for Hungarian domestic politics and, in particular, to identify the triggering factors for Hungary's rapprochement with the Turkic states. It seeks to answer the question of whether Hungary's motivation to adapt a more authoritarian-leaning political model or pragmatic economic intentions are more hegemonic in the relationship between Hungary and the Turkic states.*

Keywords: ***Hungary, foreign policy, Turkic states, illiberal democracy, pragmatism.***

Introduction

Hungary's ethno-cultural connection with the Turkic countries and historical claims about the Turkic roots of Hungarians have always been controversial topics when discussing Hungary's relations with the states outside the political map of Europe, especially in the Turkic states. Although the discussions on Hungary's European/Turkic identity are beyond the scope of this article, Hungary's observer membership in the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's words 'We are Christian Turkic people and we stand firm on Kipchak-Turkic principles... we are honoured to live as the grandchildren of Attila' at the Turkic Council summit in Baku in October 2019 has undoubtedly put this historical debate back on the agenda within the framework of the current economic-political dynamics. However, in order to understand the fundamental elements of Hungary's relations with the Turkic countries in the 21st century, it is necessary to attempt an explanation with a much broader perspective, going beyond historical ethnic kinship debates by including the pragmatic influences of international politics, where economic interests predominate, in the analysis.

As the historian and Turkologist Hungarian diplomat János Hóvári (2022) has stated, Hungary is located to the east of the Stockholm-Hamburg-Munich--Rome line, in an area of much greater geo-economic importance than the west of this line. Hungary's geographical location at this intersection of transport and trade routes between Western Europe and the Turkic countries, with which each member of the European Union (EU) has more or less intensive economic and political relations, necessitates that Hungary reconsider its relations with these countries far beyond the ethno-cultural ties. From this point of view, in order to conceive and define the fundamental characteristics of the increasingly complex relations between the Turkic countries and Hungary, it seems necessary to explain the changes in the Hungarian foreign policy motivation with the effects of the elements imposed by the global political transformations and economic necessities, without resorting to reductionism.

In this sense, the risk of reductionism is most likely to arise when explaining Hungary's relations with non–Euro-Atlantic actors such as the Turkic states. This risk is often more apparent when the essence of the relationship and the impacts of what makes it necessary are not analysed. This superficiality, which can lead to a discourse in which the political models of the Turkic states are adapted to an EU member state through relative inferences, creates the risk of misinterpreting Hungarian foreign policy transformations and the dynamics that produce them, and of making inaccurate analogies in the final analyses. More precisely, inferences such as the beginning of Hungary's adoption of anti--democratic traditions – frequently discussed in the literature – stem mostly from the challenge of attempting to adapt the dynamics that determine foreign

policy to domestic policy by taking the Hungary-Turkic states rapprochement as a given case. For these reasons, the main aim of this study is to explain the extent to which pragmatic political and economic elements are hegemonic in the Hungarian foreign policy towards the Turkic states, without getting bogged down in the debates about Hungarian domestic policy, and ultimately to reveal what the outcomes of Hungary's strategic relations with the Turkic states are under this hegemony.

Conceptual framework: Pragmatism in Hungarian foreign policy

In order to understand the framework and extension of Hungary's relations with the Turkic states, it is necessary to be able to consider the reflection of pragmatic political behaviour in foreign policy. Pragmatism in contemporary international relations differs from the mainstream theoretical approaches in that it is eclectic, especially in an analytical sense, and that the agency, structures and identities of the interacting actors are drawn by pragmatist forms in some practices (Cochran 2012). From the point where structures and identities take on a pragmatic orientation, what is done or what can be done in practice, mostly shaped by a realistic mindset, becomes more important for the actor. Because it is inevitable that there are interconnected fundamental facts that affect the behaviour of the actors involved in the interaction and significantly determine the framework of the practice, actors cannot avoid interacting with their environment, and the primacy of practice emerges as the world interferes with the beliefs that shape behaviour (Hellmann et. al. 2009). Therefore, the role of practice is the key factor in the pragmatist mentality, and as the practices and actions are generally habitual and reflexive, they are essentially antecedents of the actor and the environment in which the behaviour occurs, and serve to generate the behaviour and the environment (Pratt 2016).

The significant element that shapes the behaviour of the actor is the instinct to act in the face of a development or to produce a solution in the face of a problem, and the existence of this instinct is perpetual. This is where the relationship between pragmatism and foreign policy comes into play. The instinct to take a stance against a foreign policy development or to find solutions to problems leads foreign policymakers to resort to the accumulated experience gained from practice. Because, foreign policymakers often have to deal with situations that require quick and decisive action, they have to make decisions without having all the information and being sure of the costs of the decisions (Tzvetkova 2018). This is the essence of pragmatic foreign policy behaviour and the basic link in the chain that extends from the level of the unit (state) to the level of the systemic order. The sum of the experiences revealed by practices constitutes the cornerstones of pragmatic foreign policy implementation, while the sum of foreign policy behaviour generates the order from regional to global at the

systemic level. In short, in the environment of pragmatic foreign policy intentions, foreign policy practices and the global order produce each other, or in other words, while foreign policy practices shape the order, the order builds the structural conditions that shape the foreign policy practices of the states (Franke & Hellmann 2018). Strategies of the states arise from this relationship between foreign policy and order, and when these strategies are synthesised with national interest, pragmatic foreign policy takes place. This foreign policy, which is politically realistic and implemented to adapt to various situations, including tactical adjustments and withdrawals, and establishing relations with non-traditional actors in order to achieve the goals determined in the national interest, is a strategically pragmatic foreign policy (Phua 2022).

The pragmatism of Hungarian foreign policy exemplifies this behaviour of adapting to different situations according to the dimension of the relationship between national interest and the systemic order. In this first quarter of the 21st century, dominated by global insecurities and national security concerns, Hungarian foreign policy began to override its traditional Western orientation, realising that other opportunities existed outside the traditional EU-NATO circles and concluding that it was a bad decision to give up the benefits provided by relations with actors outside the EU-NATO circles in the past, it began to implement a policy of redefining relations, especially with the powers outside the Euro-Atlantic axis (Tarrósy & Vörös 2020). This policy fits into a pragmatic framework as it aims to pursue an interactive foreign policy towards these actors by using closer partnerships as a political lever and an effective economic instrument (Kacziba & Hasan 2022). At this point, pragmatism, which manifests itself as Hungary's systemic reinterpretation of its existence within the global order and the redefinition of its foreign policy actions within this order, becomes the main feature of the Hungarian governments' projections to improve Hungary's economic relations with different actors through various policy instruments and to make rational decisions in a dynamically changing and vulnerable international environment. As a consequence of that, Hungarian foreign policy develops pragmatic relations with a number of important powers and regions of the globe (Tarrósy & Solymári 2022).

Transformation of Hungarian foreign policy: Eastern opening

The change in Hungary's approach to its relations with the Turkic states becomes meaningful when considered in the context of the significant transformation that Hungarian foreign policy began to undergo after 2010, when FIDESZ – Hungarian Civic Alliance returned to power. The basis of this transformation is undoubtedly the introduction of a new approach to the Hungarian foreign policy tradition, which includes economic determinants rather than viewing foreign policy solely within a geopolitical framework. In this respect, the most

decisive impact of FIDESZ and its leader Viktor Orbán has been the shaping of the new orientation in Hungarian foreign policy since 2010, in which economic instruments have also been given a high priority by putting the foreign policy in a new direction to serve the forging of commercial networks and to attract new business circles to invest in Hungary (Puzyniak 2022). This introduction of new foreign policy concept, in which there is a clear tendency to go beyond the traditional Euro-Atlantic orientation, has caused Hungarian foreign policy to follow an ambivalent path in the last decade. On the one hand, the effort not to put Hungary's place in the Euro-Atlantic into doubt remains evident; on the other hand, Hungary seemed to leave mainstream European strategies on international issues by increasingly taking a sovereigntist approach and defecting from common European positions on different international problems and developments (Hettyey 2021). This ambivalent path, especially after 2014, and more visibly at the end of the decade, curved towards a pragmatic Hungarian foreign policy that brought non-European commercial interests and geographical priorities into focus, and the strengthening of the country's economic competitiveness by focusing on non–Euro-Atlantic regions became the main goal in order to reduce and eliminate the influences of Euro-Atlantic structures on the Hungarian economy and Hungary's political dependencies (Müller & Gazsi 2023).

It should be underlined that there are both internal and external factors contributing to this transformation in Hungarian foreign policy. Although it is outside the scope of this study, despite the fact that Hungarian society is still more pro-European than the EU average with support for EU membership consistently above 70% (Bíró-Nagy et. al. 2023), the motivation for Europeanisation has declined, especially among the ruling elite in Hungary, during the years of economic disruption in the late 2000s. This was because European integration failed to provide the expected economic prosperity, as was promised during the EU accession process. This led to populist politics taking power, and the intense attempts of the populist circles to normalise the nature of relations with non–Euro-Atlantic actors by incorporating them into traditional foreign policy-making processes. More to the point, the external factor is that the effects of sharing hegemony in the global order, i.e. the transition from a unipolar world order to a multipolar one, in which different centres of power appear as poles, are increasingly influencing the foreign policy of medium and small-sized states. In this transition process of Hungarian foreign policy, according to Tarrósy and Vörös (2014), the evolution of multipolar relations in the changing unipolar international context has affected Hungarian foreign policy. As a result, Hungary, a small-sized European state, revised its foreign policy by accepting above all else the maximisation of national interest as the only valid and rational behaviour, and the new foreign policy began to focus pragmatically on repositioning Hungary on the global arena and pushing the country's economy and society in

a more dynamic development route. In this sense, the transformation of Hungarian foreign policy refers to a structural degeneration in which economic tools are integrated with the traditional instruments of foreign policy strategies. In particular, this new understanding of external policy in which foreign economic policy and foreign policy are intertwined, or more precisely the economisation of Hungarian foreign policy, particularly after 2010, represents an increase in the weight of economic relations and geographical extension within foreign interactions and a response to the changes and reorganisation taking place in world politics and economy (Csiki et. al. 2014).

The Hungarian government's persistent consideration of the global rift and the change in the balance of power from an economic-political perspective inevitably put the state of Hungary's economic relations with centres of power outside the Euro-Atlantic, the post–Cold War hegemonic axis, and the extent to which they could be improved, on the Hungarian foreign policy agenda. As a consequence, inherent economic motivations such as ensuring a positive trade balance by increasing Hungary's competitiveness and gaining a larger share of the trade volumes in fast-growing non–Euro-Atlantic countries led to the shaping and implementation of the Eastern Opening policy. Eastern Opening, which became the main economic policy strategy aimed at reducing Hungary's economic dependence on its Western partners, especially the EU, as the EU's global economic hegemony began to decline relatively in the 2010s in the eyes of Hungarian policymakers, especially following the 2008 financial crisis, progressed into a more complex foreign policy concept, involving the autonomous expansion of linkages with non–Euro-Atlantic countries and market actors in the fields of trade, infrastructure and investment, including public diplomatic relations (Greilinger 2023). The fundamental characteristic of this policy is the projection that Hungary's economic relations and the composition of investments coming into the country will not fulfil the targets of economic development and welfare increase in Hungary to catch up with the EU standards, and therefore the additional resources needed to finance the necessary public investments and economic growth acceleration should be obtained from 'rising' Eastern powers (Végh 2015). Thus, the Eastern Opening turned into a foreign policy practice that focused on the economic dimension of foreign relations especially after 2014, first in the Prime Minister's Office and then in the foreign affairs bureaucracy that later became the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pointing to a foreign policy phase in which economic interests were prioritised. Therefore, as a strategy for achieving the goals of this phase of foreign policy, the Eastern Opening primarily focused on Hungary's geo-strategic position as a transport hub between Asia and developed Western Europe, and was constructed as a political tool to facilitate Hungary's access to the markets of Asian and post-Soviet countries in particular.

The Hungarian Eastern Opening has been constructed as a strategy moulded according to the current world economic trends and global political balance fractions, which are projected to indicate the rise of Eurasian powers. In such a challenging projection, the rising economic power of the Eurasian space is predicted to contribute to the country's political success as a result of the creation of systems of instruments to promote the geographical diversification of Hungarian economic interactions by increasing the activity of Hungarian economic diplomacy in new foreign trade directions, strengthening the network of Hungarian foreign trade diplomacy and establishing trade structures primarily to help Hungarian actors access Eurasian markets (Bernek 2018). Despite different approaches and interpretations regarding the operation of these instruments and the political contribution of the outputs they produce, it remains a fact of Hungarian foreign policy in the last decade that Hungarian decision-makers insist on expanding the practices of the Eastern Opening policy. Although a wide variety of instruments are used to implement the strategy, especially the extensive support of Hungarian governments for the field activities of organisations such as business committees, the revitalisation of the economy-oriented structures, including the Turkic countries of Eurasia such as Türkiye and Kazakhstan, and the rapid increase in the number of high-level state organisations with the countries in the 'East' reflect the commitment of Hungarian governments to the Eastern Opening policy (Éltető & Völgyi 2013). Despite this stubbornness and the efforts made to implement it, it is quite difficult to claim that the policy of Eastern Opening satisfied expectations and that there has been a change in the trade balance in favour of Hungary, especially with the great powers such as China and Russia. However, the opposite is true when it comes to the Turkic states, which are closer to Hungary's calibre in terms of economic and political capacity. The situation is different in the case of the Turkic countries and Hungary is actively increasing its exports and economic relations with the Turkic partners, at the same time drawing economic interest from these countries to develop further cooperation (Gusseinov 2023).

Hungary's opening towards the Turkic states: Political aspects

In essence, Hungary's global opening in foreign policy proceeded by essentially dividing the non–Euro-Atlantic networks into two: the Opening to the South and Eastern Opening. While the former was doomed to failure due to the inadequacy of the elements that would provide benefits to Hungary in terms of the balance of economic interests, the latter, despite the problems and setbacks, continued to move forward under the influence of the priority of economic elements critical for Hungary, such as energy and transport. Conceived as a pro-Hungarian strategy that would serve the interests of the Hungarian national economy in the new world order, the Opening to the South aimed at reformulating Hun-

gary's economic relations with some countries of the Global South, especially by targeting Africa and Latin America. However, the new type of competition introduced by leading Asian powers such as China and India and rising powers such as Russia and Brazil on the African continent and Hungary's lack of capacity to sustain this race challenged the process of opening to Africa together with the shortcomings of Hungary's political networks and active government activities which created serious obstacles in the implementation of the strategy (Tarrósy & Morenth 2013). On the other hand, the opening to Latin America could not go beyond the development of Hungarian–Latin American relations in soft political areas such as student exchanges and cultural programmes and a limited achievement in economic terms, such as facilitating the entry of Hungarian companies into Latin American markets (Nagy 2019), and these factors led the Opening to the South strategy to a dead end. Ultimately, such failures elevate the discussion on the transformation of Hungarian foreign policy from a purely democratic value perspective and lead to an underestimation of the influence of other factors.

The conclusions that Hungary is moving away from Western values and leaning towards the autocratic practices in its relations with non–Euro-Atlantic circles is usually the result of not taking into account the consequences of pragmatic influence in foreign policy. In this respect, to respond to how we will evaluate when we see the Hungarian rulers sitting around the same table with their Turkic counterparts, it is necessary to find an answer to the question of whether the emulation of a new political model or the motivation for economic interest maximisation is hegemonic. For this reason, the nature of Hungary's sui generis relationship with the Turkic states, which constitutes a significant part of the Eastern Opening, plays a key role. And it is necessary to determine the extent to which political aspects have weight in this nature, only then can it be understood whether autocratic aspirations or economic pragmatism predominate in Hungary's relations with the Turkic states.

This Eurasianist ideological approach legitimises Orbán's frequent clashes with Brussels and his friendly relations with Russian and Turkic leaders. Orbán's government has pursued a foreign policy and trade strategy aligned with its ideological centring of Hungary as a link between Western liberalism and Eastern illiberalism (Haas 2023). In fact, Hungary's political relations with non–Euro-Atlantic, and especially Asian, actors is a relationship model in which pragmatic elements have historically been hegemonic. Hungarian policy towards the Eurasian powers was already constructed at the beginning of this century, when it was not yet a full member of the EU, on the perception that it was the most dynamically developing region of the world, and as a consequence of the breakdown of the bipolar world order and the comprehensive reorganisation of strategic forces, it became a geopolitical centre of gravity, so that Hungary had to structure its political and economic strategies on diversifying the choices of

the export-oriented Hungarian economy in the international system in order to diminish the influences of the EU's predominance (Terényi 2002). As Ablonczy (2022) puts it, especially the disappointment with the economic-oriented expectations, which were not sufficiently fulfilled after Hungary's accession to the EU due to the economic crises by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, triggered stronger public discourses demanding a turn away from Western political models, and they constituted the main source of the Eastern Opening in terms of the political aspect. However, as Ablonczy (2022) points out, the FIDESZ government, the architect of the Eastern Opening, never took political similarity with the Turkic states as a reference point, and they do not assign themselves the mission of turning Hungary to the Turkic East, but their political projection is related to the reorientation of Hungarian foreign policy and international relations by using the rhetoric to facilitate and to attract support for the government's endeavours to reconstruct Hungary's position in the transforming international system.

In fact, the main direction of the foreign policy opening towards the East points to the regeneration of political relations with the emerging regional powers of Eurasia, such as Türkiye and the Central Asian Turkic states. Based on this perception, a new geopolitical narrative has crystallised over the past decade on the part of Hungarian governments, which is summed up in the construction of Eurasia in the sense of an economically oriented political approach. Particularly after the economic depreciation of 2008, when the expectations of the Western economic model remained unfulfilled for broad sections of Hungarian society, this made the partial shift of foreign policy preferences to the East more acceptable. Hungary's collective history with the Central Asian peoples represents a specific direction in Hungarian foreign policy, where focusing on the Turkic countries is an affordable priority (Salamin, Megyesi & Klemensits 2021). At this point, the main problem is whether the pragmatic economic part of this priority overrides the part of emulating a political model, or vice versa. It would be far-fetched to argue that Hungary's unique and increasingly close relations with the Turkic states involve taking inspiration from the autocratic-leaning political models, because the evidence suggests that economic pragmatism prevails. In this sense, Hungarian foreign policy towards the Turkic states functions as an instrument where geopolitical interests supplement economic ones. This policy stands out as a strategic model that blends Hungarian foreign and economic policy with a multi-vector feature. This Hungarian foreign economic policy allows Hungary to act as a catalyst in the Turkic states' desire for economic-political rapprochement with Europe and the West, and Hungarian foreign policy plays a distinctive role in supporting Hungary's foreign economic relations in order to obtain a greater share of economic resources in relations with the Turkic states (Vasa 2021). Considering that the volume of Hungarian foreign trade with the Central Asian Turkic countries and Türkiye

has been steadily increasing over the last decade, from a strategic point of view, this active Hungarian participation in economic-political cooperation with the Turkic states is projected as a key to establishing a bridgehead for Hungary to interconnect Western Europe and Asia. This is because the Turkic states are perhaps the most important target countries for such a geostrategic projection (Gyene 2023).

The hegemony of the pragmatic effect in this projection is likely to be discussed by touching upon two cases. For instance, Hungary, as an EU member, is moving towards some strategic policy partnerships with the two Turkic states of Türkiye and Azerbaijan. While Hungary is taking a common path with Türkiye in slowing down the NATO membership process of Sweden and Finland, it is ignoring Armenia and taking a firm stance in favour of Azerbaijan in the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict as a state defending Christian values in the Euro-Atlantic world. This kind of policy choice is mainly due to the fact that in Hungary, where economic interest is a central theme as an outcome of the aim of balancing the country's embeddedness in the EU's trade networks, the overall policy towards the European institutions does not include the ultimate target of keeping Hungary out of the Euro-Atlantic circles because of the financial benefits (Végh 2021). When the Turkish government pursued a stalling strategy by putting forward political conditions for the NATO membership of Sweden and Finland on the grounds that these countries allowed the activities of terrorist organisations that threatened the security of Türkiye, the Hungarian government, drawing strength from its close relationship with Türkiye, also implemented a hostage-taking strategy by associating the NATO membership of these two countries with its unresolved conflicts with EU institutions on the rule of law (Müller & Slominski 2024). However, since the critical attitude of Sweden and Finland towards Hungary was directly related to freezing the flow of EU funds to Hungary, the Hungarian veto threat became a means of softening the Swedish-Finnish attitude towards the release of the funds. The fact that these two Scandinavian countries linked the unfreezing of EU funds to Hungary's commitment to being a democratic member of the EU, coupled with Prime Minister Orbán's (and Türkiye's) belief in the decline of the West, motivated Hungary to punish Sweden and Finland over their NATO membership process (Zalewski 2023).

When considering the direction of Hungary's relations with Azerbaijan, it seems relatively less difficult to embrace the hegemonic feature of the pragmatic effect in the Hungarian-Azerbaijani political affinity. This is because the undeniable influence of energy in Hungarian-Azerbaijani relations easily triggers pragmatic foreign policy behaviour and, more interestingly, adds continuity to this pragmatism. Before Orbán, and particularly during the Gyurcsány government from 2006 onwards, Azerbaijan was already a key actor in terms of Hungary's energy security. Notably, in the post-2010 period, this prominence

enabled Azerbaijan, as a target country in the post-Soviet geography of Hungary's Eastern Opening, to evolve into a strategic economic partner for Hungary with more complex commercial connections (Racz 2012). Fundamentally, the need for security and diversity of energy supplies made Azerbaijan the partner with which Hungary most dynamically developed and deepened its relations in the South Caucasus, ahead of Armenia. The fact that Azerbaijan is rich in mineral resources and serves as a jumping-off point for Hungarian economic actors to access the Caucasian and Central Asian markets, which are Russia's backyard, motivated Hungarian rulers to establish more intimate relations with Azerbaijan (Herczeg 2013). Furthermore, Armenia's diplomatic moves, whose rationality is uncertain, have had an impact on the development of Hungarian-Azerbaijani relations towards a strategic partnership over the past decade. Following the extradition of an Azerbaijani military officer convicted of the murder of an Armenian officer during a NATO training programme in Hungary, 'Christian' Armenia, who had completely cut off diplomatic relations with Hungary, was replaced by 'Muslim' Azerbaijan with the momentum created by the energy dynamics. In this process, Azerbaijan became one of Hungary's energy providers, and at a time when Armenian-Hungarian diplomatic relations were severed, the emergence of the potential for Azerbaijan to become one of Hungary's third-largest gas suppliers in the near future, with an annual capacity of one billion cubic metres, within the scope of the strategic partnership (Kránitz 2024), inevitably represented a political outlook in which Hungary appeared to be on Azerbaijan's side.

At this point, the question arises as to whether it is the enthusiasm for a political model or the motivation to gain an economic advantage that is hegemonic in Hungary's foreign policy towards the Turkic states. Essentially, this Hungarian foreign policy behaviour has the dual characteristic of being both strategic and pragmatic, and it would be a reductionist approach to see it as purely economic-pragmatic. On the one hand, this foreign policy is strategic, because, although Hungary, as a member of the EU, is heavily dependent on the EU in economic terms, it cannot, by its very nature, remain immune to the influences of global changes. Hungary sees itself as an actor on the strategic path between China and the EU in the global balances evolving from unipolarity to multipolarity, and for this reason, it considers the Turkic states of Central Asia to be in a strategic position in the China-EU economic interaction. As an EU member, it is located at the easternmost end of the EU side of this interaction, so Hungary is intensifying its relations with the Turkic countries, and in the big picture, this Hungarian–Turkic states relationship on the EU-China strategic route stands out as an element that brings political/strategic and economic benefits to Hungary. On the other hand, the Hungarian policy is pragmatic, because Hungary considers these countries to be alternative energy suppliers in order to balance its energy supply dependence on Russia, and at this point the

aim of making an economic benefit emerges. In this economic motivation, the Hungarian ruling elite defines itself as relatives to the Turkic peoples, making the cultural connection a beneficial instrument.[1] Hungary is definitely a country with European identity, and yet it would be an outrageous challenge to establish a direct link between the current Hungarian sociological structure and Central Asian ancestry. This is because the Hungarian identity has been formed by several factors over the centuries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), in which different cultural elements have been involved. However, there is a widespread public belief among Hungarians that Hungarian society is of Central Asian origin. And while recent archaeological research on Hungarian historical settlements indicates that their roots go back to the very early Middle Ages in the Urals and Central Asian basin (Molnár 2001), modern Hungarian identity has been developed with influences of different peoples living in the CEE region, and here kinship with Turkic countries is actually constructed as an effective tool that helps to expand the strategic and pragmatic space in Hungarian-Turkic states relations. Hungary's observer membership in the OTS is the result of such a unique construction, and thus Hungary's foreign policy towards the Turkic states is basically built on this projection, and it seems that the significant target is to achieve geostrategic and geoeconomic gains rather than to emulate the political models of these states. Therefore, it makes sense that the Hungarian strategy towards Central Asia seems to establish a connection between economic perspectives and geopolitical arguments. The narrative of historical roots paves the way for forthcoming economic strategies. Meanwhile, Hungary's approach to the Turkic states represents the world view of the Orbán governments, which has been constructed on the idea that the global economic future will be Asian. Thus, Hungary's economic and political connection with the Turkic countries symbolises a reasonable effort to find a place in this future (Jaeger 2019). For instance, a political will has arisen in the Azerbaijan-Türkiye-Hungary trio, with significant attempts already made, especially within the OTS, to work on joint infrastructure projects. In the field of energy, 30% of Hungary's natural gas imports are planned to come from Azerbaijan by 2025, indicating the slowly growing influence of the OTS countries on the Hungarian economy.[2]

1 The discussion on the dual characteristic of Hungarian foreign policy and its impact on Hungarian-Turkic states relations through the strategic dimension of China-EU economic interactions is the conclusion of prof. Márton Krasznai. It is taken from the interview with prof. Márton Krasznai held on 18 April 2023. Prof. Krasznai is the scientific director of the Corvinus Centre for Central Asia Research at the Corvinus University of Budapest and is a well-known professor for his studies on Hungarian policy towards Central Asia.

2 Interview with Kanat Ydyrys on 17 May 2023. Kanat Ydyrys is Kazakhstan's diplomatic representative to the Representation Office of the Organization of Turkic States in Budapest. In our interview, Ydyrys pointed out that Hungary is looking for alternative sources for investment projects as the EU cuts back on funding and stops the flow of funds in some areas. While China is the most important alternative source, the OTS countries also stand out as alternative economic partners, especially in energy and trade.

It is also a projection that includes a long-term strategic mindset behind the deepening interest in Hungary to build relations with the Turkic states, and there are two components to this eagerness. On the one hand, there is a fundamental understanding in Hungary that there is huge economic potential in building relations with this region. Economic relations with Türkiye are already strong, but there is still room for development, while the potential of the Central Asian region has been left unused. Inevitably, energy is a crucial question, but far from being the only relevant one – boosting non-energy related trade and investment is also coming to the forefront. On the other hand, the Hungarian government recognises fundamental changes taking place in the international and global order, which highlights the importance of Türkiye as a regional power and the Central Asian Turkic countries as a battleground region. In this sense, both the Hungarian government and the diplomatic circles recognise that there is a culture-based sympathy which is used as soft power for Hungary to build economic relations with the Turkic states and there is a general thinking that the observer status in the OTS helps Hungary build economic and political relations and enlarges the soft power of Budapest (including economic) with a mid-level guidance and conceptualisation of belonging to the political Turkic world. In terms of domestic political discussions, some Hungarian opposition factions believe that Orbán favours Turkic governments because their domestic political system and values are more similar to his own than to those of European countries. However, it is still an exaggeration to claim that the Hungarian government takes the ethnic kinship and political culture as historically given. Neither the Hungarian government, nor the Hungarian opposition really considers ethno-cultural ties to be important in this regard, and when Prime Minister Orbán held a speech about Hungary's 'Kipchak' identity at the OTS summit, it was not a matter of ethno-cultural identity even for many right-wing Hungarian politicians. So, the essence of Hungary–Turkic states relations is more related to the realisation of the new quasi-multipolar order, in which Turkic states play key roles regionally. From the Hungarian point of view, it involves an economic expectation for the future, but at the same time a political reflection of the ongoing transformation in the global politics; however, that does not mean that Hungarian and Turkic states' interests rely on each other, and that is the distinctive characteristic of the pragmatic perspective of Hungary's rapprochement with the Turkic world, which does not signify a motivation to absorb political authoritarianism.[3]

It is necessary to remember a frequently repeated observation among the Hungarian public. Hungarian foreign policy had almost completely forgotten

3 Interview with Dr. Máté Szalai on 15 May 2023. Dr. Máté Szalai is a member of the Corvinus University of Budapest, an expert on Hungarian foreign policy towards Türkiye and the Middle East, was the Middle East and North Africa Research Program coordinator at the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs at the time of the interview.

its relations with the former Soviet countries (including the Central Asian ones) and the non–Euro-Atlantic countries (during the Euro-Atlantic integration process), and the Eastern Opening emerged as a result of the requisition to rediscover Hungary's relations with the non–Euro-Atlantic players generated by this oblivion. Some strategic deficiencies in this rediscovery process created a miscommunication regarding the Eastern Opening, and therefore the Eastern Opening was perceived as an initiative towards autocracy leaning. Hereby, the Turkic countries occupied a sui generis place due to the existence of an ethno--cultural connection, although this connection is not strong in socio-political terms. It is worth noting that this ethno-cultural connectivity was not formed upon the enforcement of Viktor Orbán to accompany his populist narrative, but that scientific opinion almost agrees that the origins of the Hungarians are based on Central Asian nomadic ancestors, although Hungarian social traditions and language have changed a lot as a result of migrations and other factors in the historical process. What makes Orbán's politics distinctive at this point is that he uses the ethno-cultural connection as a justification for making the Hungarian national identity more nationalistic in terms of domestic politics. In foreign policy, he constructs a background for Hungary to attribute more than a pragmatic economic framework to the relations with the Turkic states, and instrumentalises it in the Hungarian-Turkic states relations. If we look at how this instrumentalisation is reflected in the Hungarian foreign policy practices, it is possible to realise that Orbán thinks that there is a power shift in the global system from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific and that he is trying to position the Hungarian foreign policy in favour of connectivity between East and West. In other words, Orbán's Hungary defines itself as an actor that will contribute to connectivity in the form of a bridge between Asia-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic, and this strategic positioning is a complementary element in the argument of the Hungarian bridge between Central Asia and Europe to further the relations with the Turkic states. From this point of view, Hungary's observer membership in the OTS represents a status that will benefit both Hungary and the Turkic states. This is because, thanks to this status and its active involvement in the OTS, Hungary has a comfort zone for special access to the economic resources of these countries, while the Turkic states can use Hungary's presence there as a facilitator in their relations with Europe.[4]

Despite these notional discourses, in the political realisation, the extension of the adaptation of common economic strategies among the OTS states, since many economic fields have a high degree of public incentives in the OTS countries, which makes the political decisions at the OTS level influential on

4 Interview with Dr. Péter Wagner on 17 May 2023. Dr. Péter Wagner is an expert and researcher on Hungarian foreign policy towards Central Asia and the Middle East, and was a senior research fellow at the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs at the time of the interview.

the future directions of their economies, and establishing a bridge between the OTS states and the EU are considered as practically realisable from the point of view of Hungarian foreign policy (Baranyi 2022). The most important indicator that Hungary does not have a tendency to adapt to the authoritarian-leaning disposition in practice is the stable course of political relations within the OTS and the increasingly complex context of economic relations.

Hungary's relations with the Turkic states in the spheres of economy and transport

The OTS is an institutional driving force for cooperation among the Turkic countries and currently coordinates cooperation in almost twenty different areas among the member states. These areas of cooperation range from political and economic cooperation to sectoral, technical, social and more specific areas such as customs, transport, tourism, education, information and media, youth and sports, diaspora, information and communication technologies, energy, health, migration, agriculture, law, humanitarian issues and development, human resources, international organisations (Ercan 2023). As a matter of fact, the main governing body and instrument for the management of the cooperation areas, where the main directions for further cooperation are given, is the political area, as the heads of state and the Council of Foreign Ministers gather under this cooperation area.

When the main data on the OTS countries in terms of geographical area, population, total value of the GDP and the trade figures are examined, the economic potential of the OTS countries can be comprehended. The basic figures show that the population of the OTS countries is 173.8 million people, which is almost 2.2% of the world's population; the total area of the OTS countries is 4.8 million km^2, which is nearly 1% of the world's total area; the total sum of the GDP of the member states is USD 1.5 trillion, which is 1.6% of the world's total, and more to the point, the overall trade of the member states is USD 1.1 trillion, which is 2.4% of the world's total, while Central Asia covers vast natural resources such as oil and gas and uranium (Gasimli 2023). The economic profile of the OTS countries displays the fact that the economies of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are mainly dependent on oil and gas, and therefore these countries export oil and gas to Asia and Europe. On the other hand, Türkiye, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have more diversified economies and export mainly manufactured goods, ores and metals.

Comparing the size of the GDPs of the OTS member and observer countries, Türkiye has the largest GDP at USD 803 billion, followed by Kazakhstan with a total GDP of USD 164.79 billion. Hungary has a GDP of USD 154.3 billion. Uzbekistan has the fourth largest GDP at USD 69.24 billion. Azerbaijan ranks

fifth with a GDP of USD 54.52 billion. Azerbaijan is followed by Turkmenistan with USD 45.23 billion and Kyrgyzstan with USD 7.4 billion (Baghirov 2022).

Hungary has an export-oriented economy and the export in 2021 was USD 141.256 billion. Hungary ranks 35th in the world in terms of exports. When the export figures of the other OTS members are examined, it will be seen that Türkiye ranks 29th in the world with exports worth USD 254.264 billion, Kazakhstan ranks 49th in the world with USD 56.805 billion worth of exports, Azerbaijan ranks 72nd with USD 22.206 billion worth of exports, Uzbekistan is in 80th place with exports worth USD 14.024 billion, Turkmenistan is in 96th ranking with exports of USD 8.973 billion and Kyrgyzstan ranks 141st in the world with exports worth USD 1.658 billion. In 2021, Hungary's total imports were USD 139.1 billion and there was a surplus of USD 2 billion in 2021; however, the balance was negative in 2022 due to the increase in the energy and resource prices.

The trade figures of Hungary with the OTS member states show that the largest trading partner of Hungary in the Turkic world is Türkiye, as the trade turnover between the two countries was USD 4.6 billion in 2023. Since 2013, Hungary and Türkiye have elevated their relations to a strategic partnership and set a target of USD 6 billion for their bilateral trade. For the development of economic and trade relations among the OTS member and observer countries, the OTS has established ministerial and working group structures since its foundation, and within the scope of this structural formation, in addition to the summits of heads of state, the OTS has developed a number of mechanisms and tools to further increase trade and investment relations among the OTS member and observer countries. The activities of the Turkic Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the establishment of the Turkic Trade Houses in the member states, the business forum meetings and the Turkic business portal are important elements of economic cooperation within the OTS. As part of these efforts, the OTS strives to facilitate trade between member and observer states by eliminating trade barriers. In this respect, Hungary seems to be benefiting from its position in the OTS in order to create room for manoeuvre in the international arena while strengthening economic ties with the Turkic states, and the trade between Hungary and Turkic partners has been gradually increasing since 2010 as a result of economic agreements structured to support Hungary's commercial cooperation with Turkic countries (Egeresi 2023).

The recent establishment of the Turkic Investment Fund (TIF) is another development on the way to strengthening economic relations between the OTS member and observer states. With the aim of supporting the SMEs of the OTS countries, the presidents at the Samarkand Summit in 2022 tasked the OTS Secretariat with the establishment of the TIF. The TIF will be responsible for carrying out joint projects of the OTS countries and will exert efforts on the way to work on agriculture, logistics and transport, energy efficiency, renewable and alternative energy, industrial projects in manufacturing, information and

Table 1: Key indicators of the volume of Hungary's foreign trade with the OTS countries (Million USD)

Year	Country						OTS Countries (Total)
	Azerbaijan	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Türkiye	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	
2010	84.75	324.16	13.23	2163.61	35.46	59.03	2680.25
2011	81.56	394.48	12.74	2542.37	12.25	63.81	3107.24
2012	53.65	323.59	14.14	2227.28	13.94	71.11	2703.74
2013	71.68	308.88	13.59	2782.74	112.20	78.37	3367.49
2014	82.56	227.95	18.78	3017.53	27.38	69.20	3443.42
2015	74.01	189.17	10.26	2998.30	55.02	48.58	3375.36
2016	64.99	204.85	10.11	2966.73	32.73	44.68	3324.11
2017	58.93	588.60	8.29	3189.17	18.65	61.61	3925.27
2018	68.18	693.37	10.77	3292.23	14.54	52.42	4131.54
2019	58.48	447.65	9.78	3388.72	15.45	94.32	4014.43
2020	47.14	354.16	8.77	3508.54	15.10	120.12	4053.87
2021	53.11	436.65	13.22	4052.18	10.36	116.23	4681.78
2022	70.59	444.56	24.17	3775.08	28.72	96.61	4439.78
2023	137.79	603.01	32.36	4633.81	6.73	122.87	5536.60

Source: Compiled from data on https://www.ksh.hu

communication technologies, tourism, infrastructure projects, public-private partnership projects, human development, creative industries, natural and urban environment schemes. The TIF plans to receive contributions from various potential investor groups including the OTS observer and future partner countries, government agencies, national and international financial institutions. Hungary has also already started to participate in the TIF and all other initiatives aimed at facilitating trade flows and increasing trade turnover among the OTS countries (Organization of Turkic States 2022).

One of the most crucial intersection points in Hungary's relations with the OTS is the European Office of the OTS in Hungary. The Office plays a crucial role for the European connection by bringing together the main actors of the Turkic cooperation. The Turkic Business Forum, which was held on 23 September 2021 in Budapest, is an important event organised in this regard. The Forum which was attended by the secretary general of the OTS, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, the Hungarian Export Promotion Agency and the board members of the Turkic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, brought together more than one hundred business representatives from member and observer states. The Forum was an opportunity for the Turkic states to increase their economic and trade links with Hungary and Europe. Indeed, in the open-

ing speeches, the authorities mentioned the great potential of the OTS for cooperation in the economy and Hungary's future expectations in this field of cooperation. In the opening speeches of the Forum, the executive director of the Representation Office mentioned that economic cooperation is the main area of cooperation between Hungary and the OTS. Both the OTS and the Hungarian authorities mentioned the potential benefits of this cooperation by referring to the economic figures of the OTS countries (Organization of Turkic States 2021). According to the figures indicated in the speeches, Hungary's exports to the OTS region have increased by 77%, while trade has doubled since 2009, when Hungary started to focus on the region. Further, in order to increase trade and investment with the OTS countries, Hungary has opened credits worth EUR 577 million to the OTS countries. In this context, EUR 195 million have been allocated to Türkiye, EUR 80 million to Kazakhstan, EUR 80 million to Uzbekistan, EUR 80 million to Azerbaijan and EUR 27 million to Kyrgyzstan. Péter Szijjártó stated in Baku in 2019 that Hungary has doubled its trade with the countries of the OTS, which has reached about USD 4 billion in 2020 (Egeresi 2020).

The potential of the OTS in the field of transport and Hungary's economic-political position in the OTS

Strengthening the transport cooperation between the OTS countries has always been one of the main priorities of the OTS. Through its various mechanisms, such as the regular meetings of the ministers of transport of the OTS, Transport Coordination Committee, Working Group on the Development of Transport and the 'Sister Ports' process, as well as the implementation of projects aimed at the widespread use of digital tools in transport and transit procedures, such as ePermit, digital TIR and eCMR, the OTS serves to actively promote practical cooperation and strengthen the transport potential of the Turkic countries in line with its strategic document 'Turkic World Vision – 2040'. At the Samarkand Summit in 2022, the OTS heads of state increased the efforts for cooperation in the field of transport with the Combined Freight Transport Agreement and Transport Connectivity Program. Hungary is also one of the parties to the Transport Connectivity Program (Güngör 2022).

Assessing the geopolitical potential of the OTS in the area of transport, it could be seen that the OTS members are horizontally spread across Eurasia, which is already an inherent political advantage for them. They are important players between Europe and China, and the Middle Corridor connects China and the EU through Central Asia, the Caucasus, Türkiye and Eastern Europe, and the corridor is considered to have the potential to transport up to 10 million tonnes per year (Baghirov 2022).

Before discussing Hungary's specific weight here, it would be beneficial to recall some of the key actions taken by the Hungarian governments to strengthen

Hungary's position and political intentions within the OTS. For example, the Hungarian government, with the coordination of the OTS Secretariat in İstanbul and the OTS Representation Office in Hungary, organised the 5th Meeting of Ministers of Transport of the OTS member and observer states in Budapest in October 2021. The meeting, which was hosted by the then minister of innovation and technology of Hungary, László Palkovics, was attended by high-level ministers from Türkiye, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Hungary. During the meeting the Hungarian side emphasised its willingness to transform Hungary into a strategic transport hub of Europe by building modern railroad infrastructure and ensuring efficiency and transparency in the transport sector. The participants of the meeting highlighted the significant economic potential of the Turkic states. The meeting mentioned the capacity of the Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor and highlighted the steps to be taken to improve the transit potential of the Middle Corridor by reducing logistics costs and speeding up transport and customs procedures. This meeting was another milestone event that practically transformed the OTS geography into a hub where the impediments against trade were to be eliminated (Organization of Turkic States 2021).

The Russia-Ukraine war in particular increased the significance of the Middle Corridor. The blockade of the northern route caused by the war led many countries to turn to the Middle Corridor in order to save time and ensure the safety of cargo transport. Today, additional volumes of transit cargo from the countries of East and South Asia, the Middle East and Europe are joining the Middle Corridor.

The transport in the Middle Corridor has already increased by 120% from January to March 2022 compared to the same period in 2021. The leading companies from Denmark, Finland and Germany such as Maersk, Nurminen Logistics, CEVA Logistic, Azerbaijan's ADY Container and some Chinese rail operators have started to use the Middle Corridor. In the upcoming years, the volume of cargo passing through the Middle Corridor is expected to be six times higher than in previous years (Eldem 2022).

The newly established Quadrilateral Coordination Council between Türkiye, Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary for the improvement of cargo capacity and infrastructure is another crucial development for the importance of the Middle Corridor. On 5 July 2022, Adil Karaismailoğlu, the then minister of transport and infrastructure of Türkiye, stated that the essentiality of the Middle Corridor is increasing. According to the minister, if the Northern Sea Route through Russia is chosen, 10,000 km could be covered in 20 days, while in the Southern Corridor, 20,000 km could be covered by ship through the Suez Canal in 45–60 days. In the Middle Corridor, on the other hand, 7,000 km can be covered in 12 days by train via the route through Türkiye. These figures, according to the Turkish minister, put forward the increasingly advantageous and secure

position of the Middle Corridor in global trade, especially between Asia and Europe (T.C. Ulaştırma ve Altyapı Bakanlığı [R.o.T. Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure] 2022).

Another significant development, which further increases the importance of the Middle Corridor, is the victory of Azerbaijan over the Armenian occupation in the internationally recognised territories of Azerbaijan in 2020. Until the end of the war, the connection between Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic was not established. With Azerbaijan's victory, the possibility of opening the Zangezur Corridor is expected to contribute to the smooth operation of the Middle Corridor, as this new connection also provides a route between Türkiye and Central Asia. With the recent efforts to reach a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the possibility of the Zangezur Corridor coming to life is closer than ever.

With all the initiatives of the OTS countries and the inclusion of Hungary in these efforts, and with the Russia-Ukraine war, the OTS region and the Middle Corridor are becoming a crucial transport network for global trade. The OTS countries from the borders of China to Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Türkiye and from there to Europe with the connection of Hungary are planning this route as the most important and viable way for East-West trade.

Conclusion

The Hungarian government's Eastern Opening policy, which has been implemented since 2010, is primarily aimed at improving the relations with China and Russia, but rising powers outside the traditional alliances, such as the Turkic partners, are increasingly occupying an extensive place in this policy. Hungary's economic challenges and the tectonic shifts in the global system have made it necessary for Hungary to establish stronger contacts with the countries of the East. Hungary's dexterity in quickly adapting to and predicting the rise of the East was reflected in its relations with the Turkic states. Soon after the initiation of the Eastern Opening, political and economic relations between Hungary and the Turkic states began to develop, culminating in Hungary's observer status in the OTS, where Hungary hosts the only OTS Representation Office in Europe. Hungary's application of a multi-vector approach to its foreign policy, particularly in the spheres of trade, transport and energy cooperation, has made it an influential player in the OTS region and a bridgehead between the OTS and Europe.

The most distinctive conclusion of this study is that there is a strong impression that economic motivation has a hegemonic role in shaping the political dynamics of Hungarian-Turkic states relations. Hungary's trade with Türkiye and Central Asian countries has increased by 51.5% since the early period of the Eastern Opening, and technical areas have become a more significant focus

point for Hungarian decision-makers, thanks to the projections within the OTS, which mostly highlight the economic rather than the political aspect, such as infrastructure and transport, and these two distinguishing constituents allow us to conclude that pragmatic gains occupy a larger place in Hungarian foreign policy mindset. In this sense, the answer to the question of whether Hungary emulates the political models of the Turkic states still points to a vague area. This vague area seems to be a political sphere where Hungarian foreign policy behaviour is developed in order to preserve the pragmatic position of a small state like Hungary, based on the prediction that there are fractures in global geopolitics and a new international balance is being formed. Therefore, Hungary is following the path of maintaining its relations with the Turkic countries by steadily advancing them on the economic level, without creating doubts about the existence of the values it has adopted as a result of its historical position in the traditional Euro-Atlantic alliance, but by keeping the ethno-cultural affinity discourse on the populist agenda on the political level. Accordingly, this situation creates a picture that Hungary's pragmatic will for economic gain is covered by the political relations with the Turkic states, which can sometimes cause a delusion that Hungarian rulers are inclined towards authoritarian-leaning political models. Although this is described as a delusion for the time being, it cannot, of course, be admitted as an estimation or anticipation, given the historical experience of where political power holders can direct a country's orientation; however, the data and the current essence of the issues prioritised by Hungarian policymakers in their relations with the OTS states engender an outcome that Hungary's partnership with the Turkic states to be based on economic interests to prevail.

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The Impact of Electoral Gender Quota on Women's Representation Trend in Parliaments of Western Balkan Countries

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Abstract: *Although women began to exercise their right to vote many years ago, women's representation in the national parliaments remains an issue to be addressed by many countries. The right to be elected is guaranteed through national and international legislation. In addition, Western Balkan countries have introduced an electoral gender quota aiming to ensure gender balance in national parliaments. This article aims to identify the trend of women's representation in parliaments of Western Balkan countries and the impact of electoral gender quota thereon. Relevant legislation, scientific articles and official statistical data on women's representation in the parliaments of these countries have been analysed and compared. The results demonstrate that the trend of women's representation in the parliaments of all Western Balkan countries has marked an increase due to quota introduction. Moreover, Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia went beyond the electoral gender quota in the last elections.*

Keywords: ***electoral gender quota, right to be elected Women, parliamentary elections, Western Balkan***

Introduction

Retrospective insight into the history of women's efforts to gain the right to vote and to be a candidate for a member of parliament (MP) shows the importance of the right to vote enjoyed by women today and the necessity to introduce gender quotas.

Thus, women's commitment to gaining their political rights dates back to the nineteenth century (Paxton et al. 2006). They were very active through women's movements and protests, as a result of which many were imprisoned and killed (Amorosa 2019). In 1888, educated women from the United States of America (USA) and Europe organised the first International Council of Women (Platiner 1995–1996). From the 1830s to 1920, nineteen (19) countries recognised the right to vote for women, the first being New Zealand in 1893 (Schaeffer 2020). Women living in the USA and Great Britain fought for more than 80 years for the right to vote and only managed to gain this right between 1918–1920 (Benedek 2012). However, this right was restricted in different countries based on age, colour, level of election and other factors. In 1893, New Zealand allowed women to vote in national elections (Schaeffer 2020). In 1918, Great Britain, known as the 'homeland of feminism', protected fashionable women for over 30 years for their suffrage (Benedek 2012), and South Africa recognised the right to vote for black women only in 1993, 60 years later after white women (Schaeffer 2020). Regarding Switzerland, women were granted the right to vote at the national level in 1971, while some cantons had already allowed them to vote at the local level since 1959 (Tobler 2018). Women in Appenzell Innerrhoden, the smallest canton in Switzerland, were not granted the right to vote at the local and canton level until the early 1990s (Stephens 2015). Finland was the first European country to guarantee the right to vote for Finnish women in 1906, followed by Norway in 1913, Denmark and Iceland in 1915, the UK and Germany in 1918, France in 1944 and Greece in 1952 (Miller 2020; France 24 2014). Haug (2015) stated that the inclusion of women in political life has been a challenging fight.

Thanks to these movements, women's political rights are guaranteed at the international level (Coomaraswamy 2002), specifically by the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (United Nations 1953), whose articles 1 to 3 aim to codify women's political rights within the spirit of Article 21 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), which ensures the right to run for public office including a seat in the national parliament. This convention facilitated the political life of women (Procopio 2005) by requiring states to take temporary measures – namely, to introduce gender quotas for women's representation in the legislative institutions. Similarly, Article 25 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations 1966) stipulates that every citizen has the right 'to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections. Such political rights are also granted by the regional legislation such as Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe 1950). Another regional legal act for European citizens that ensures the right to vote and to stand as a candidate for the European Parliament election and the local elections in the EU member states is the European Charter for Fundamental Human Rights (European Union 2012, Articles 39 and 40). The American Con-

vention on Human Rights (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1969, Article 23) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Union of Africa 1981; Skovsholm 1999) ensure the observance of the right to vote and to be elected in the USA and Africa respectively.

As concerns women from the Western Balkan countries (Kosovo, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina), many researchers describe the challenges faced in their patriarchal societies (Cvetanoska 2021; Spehar 2018; Huma 2017; Bianca 2013; Sousa 2005; Ramet 1999). Cvetanoska (2022) argues that corruption impacts women's access to politics in North Macedonia and Kosovo. She based her arguments on the hypothesis of Sundström and Wängnerud (2016) that 'corruption is a direct obstacle for women's political representation when male-dominated networks influence political parties' candidate selection'. Women's access to politics in the Western Balkan countries is also affected by financial challenges (Cvetanoska 2021: 251). Momčinović (2020) states that the women striving for political rights in the Western Balkan countries face many challenges although it is part of the state agenda. Indeed, much study has been done on women's representation in politics and the gender quota in Western Balkan countries (Nacevska & Lokar 2017; Nacevska 2014; Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015; Björkdahl 2012; Garunja 2021; Rashkova & Zankina 2017).

Indeed, all these efforts have contributed significantly to the introduction of gender quotas aimed at improving women's representation in politics. As elaborated below, these gender quotas have increased the level of women's representation in politics and decision making, but there is a lot of research that argues the lack of implementation of these quotas and non-effectiveness. So, their effectiveness or impact has been the subject of extensive research and debate. The present research aims to analyse the impact of the gender quotas on the women's representation of Western Balkan countries in national parliaments with a focus on women's descriptive representation in these countries over the last thirty years (from 1991 to 2023). To achieve this purpose, the following research questions were addressed:

- Does the legislation of the Western Balkan countries stipulate an electoral gender quota for parliamentary elections?
- What is the percentage of women's representation in the parliaments of the Western Balkan countries from 1991 to 2023?
- Did electoral gender quotas increase women's numerical representation?

Answers to these questions assist in testing the hypothesises of the present research:

Hypothesis 1: The trend of women's representation in the parliaments of Western Balkan countries marks an incredible increase as a result of the electoral gender quota introduced by the legislation of these countries.

Hypothesis 2: The electoral gender quotas had a significant impact on women's descriptive representation in the national parliaments of the Western Balkan countries due to the reserved seats and sanctions for the non-compliance with candidate list quotas.

The methodology used to test this hypothesis and address the research questions of the present research is elaborated below.

Methodology

Three research methods applied for the present research are textual analysis, comparative approach and survey data. To test the hypothesis, primary and secondary sources were used, such as books, scientific articles, reports, newspapers, and legislation on the gender quotas, and women's rights to vote and run for a political mandate in Western Balkan countries. The trend of women's representation in the parliaments of these countries from 1991 to 2022 was determined and compared between countries of the Western Balkans. As for the survey data, surveys conducted by various organisations and official data from the institutions of Western Balkan countries were used.

Literature review

Aim and types of the electoral gender quotas

Gender quotas have become a global marvel aimed at increasing the representation of women in political and decision-making positions. There are more than 130 countries around the world that have adopted the gender quotas (Kim & Fallon 2023; O'Brien & Rickne 2016). Scholars have identified several reasons for the adoption of gender quotas (Krook 2006). These include the need to rectify historical gender imbalances in political representation, promote gender diversity, improve democratic legitimacy and reassure women's representation in politics (Krook 2006, 2007; O'Brien & Rickne 2016; Adriaanse & Schofield 2014). Studies often cite international agreements – such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations 1979) along with Recommendation 23 (UN Women 1997) on electoral gender quotas as a temporary measure – as influencing the global adoption of electoral gender quotas, along with other measures mentioned above (Cook 2012; Figueroa 2017; Simmons 2009; Abdullahi 1987–1988), including in the Western Balkan countries (Browne 2017). Bush (2011) associates the adoption of electoral gender quotas with pressure from the international community, particularly through their post-conflict peace missions and financial incentives, especially for developing countries reliant on foreign aid.

The adoption and implementation of the electoral gender quotas have taken different forms and there are three types: i) candidate quotas or legislative quota mandating that a certain proportion of candidates must be female; reserved seats allocating a specific number or percentage of seats for women; and iii) voluntary party quotas through which parties set aside a portion of their candidate list for women candidates (Kim & Fallon 2023; Walsh 2020; Davidson-Schmich 2006). Kim and Fallon (2023) categorise them as *weak* or *robust* quotas based on two important factors: threshold or percentage of women to be elected and enforcement mechanisms. According to them, quotas with a minimum 10% de facto threshold are deemed robust quotas, while those below 10% are considered weak quotas (Kim & Fallon 2023). Researchers confirmed that quotas' effectiveness is measured by their de facto threshold, which are ranged from 5% to 50%, and it shows that higher thresholds typically bring more significant gains in representation (Kim & Fellon 2023, Rosen 2017; Schwindt-Bayer 2009). Regarding the second factor, Kim and Fallon (2023) argue that an enforcement mechanism not only enhances fairness but also improves the efficacy of the electoral gender quotas, thereby leading to enhanced women's descriptive representation in politics. Thus, quotas lacking enforcement measures are not as effective as quotas that have enforcement mechanisms, such as reserved quotas and candidate quotas with placement mandates and/or sanctions. The enforcement mechanism increases women's descriptive representation in national parliaments, meaning there is an increase in the numerical representation of women in national parliaments.

The women's descriptive representation and the electoral gender quotas

In fact, there is a lot of research dealing with gender quotas' impact on women's representation by focusing on the descriptive and substantive representation (Kim & Fallon 2023, Clayton 2021; Alexander 2012, Krook 2006, 2007; Franceschet et al. 2008; Xydias 2008). Scholars conceptualised descriptive women's representation as an increase in the elected women's numbers in national parliaments (Franceschet et al. 2009). While substantive women's representation is difficult to conceptualise, researchers define it as the capacities of women to change policies, impact and promote women's interest (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2010). Regardless of such difficulty, Walsh (2020) states that the idea behind the introduction of gender quotas was to enhance both descriptive and substantive women's representation, based on the presumption that descriptive representation inevitably fosters substantive representation. According to them, more women get elected to national parliaments, and, while in national parliaments, women can push for more policies relevant to women's issues. For this linkage between descriptive and substantive women's representation,

Nayar (2022) concludes that globally, increased female representation in national parliaments through quotas leads to heightened advocacy for policies addressing women's issues, while Whash (2020) argues that gender quotas are solely intended to increase descriptive representation. However, the impact of electoral gender quotas on descriptive women's representation depends on the types of quotas, resulting in varying numerical impacts across countries (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2010; Rosen 2017).

Thus, through cross-national research, Rosen (2017) argued that voluntary party quotas show considerably greater effectiveness in developed countries, whereas reserved seat quotas exhibit significance solely in the least developed nations. Of course, the impact of reserved seat quotas is influenced by the quota levels mandated (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2010). The threshold of reserved seats depends on the legislation of the countries. Through its analysis, Meier (2009: 1) argued that 'there are as many formulas for reserved seats as there are cases'. Of course, the descriptive women's representation or the numbers of women elected as members of parliament (MP) depend on formulas or thresholds of reserved seats as well as sanctions for non-compliance with candidate lists. As for the candidate quotas, it applies across all the countries regardless of the development level (Rosen 2017). However, Rosen (2017) concluded that their positive impact relies on three factors: i) requiring placement mandates alongside such quotas to ensure women secure viable positions, ii) imposing substantial sanctions for non-compliance to enforce adherence and iii) establishing a minimum mandated threshold of at least 30%.

Drawing on insights from Rosen (2017) and other scholars, it's evident that the positive impact of electoral gender quotas hinges on three key factors: requiring placement mandates, imposing substantial sanctions for non-compliance and setting a minimum threshold of at least 30%. It's notable that approximately 130 countries have implemented electoral gender quotas through legislation. The Western Balkan countries are no exception, as all these nations apply such quotas. The section below elaborates on the legislation of the Western Balkan countries relating to the introduction of electoral gender quotas, aiming to identify the types of quotas introduced, present statistical data on number of women elected as MPs in their national parliaments between 1991 and 2022, as well as the level of women's descriptive representation.

These international legal instruments have influenced the legislation of almost all the countries in the world (Cook 2012; Figueroa 2017; Simmons 2009: Abdullahi 1987–1988), including the Western Balkan countries (Browne 2017). Half of the countries worldwide, including those in the Western Balkans, implement electoral gender quotas, as mandated by their legislation, to promote gender equality in political life and align with the international standards set by the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (United Nations 1953 as cited by Dahlerup 2007). The section below elaborates on the legislation of the

Western Balkan countries that relates to women's political rights such as the right to vote and to be elected as a member of parliament (MP), as well as the electoral gender quotas for ensuring gender equality in political institutions such as the national parliaments of these countries.

Adoption of electoral gender quotas by the Western Balkan countries

Guaranteeing women's political rights through constitutional provisions in the Western Balkan countries not only provides higher legal security for women but also proves that their society has advanced into a more democratic society on par with Western values (Nathan 1986). The constitutions of the Western Balkan countries, as their highest legal acts, guarantee the right to run for an MP mandate to every citizen. Constitutions of four Western Balkan countries explicitly guarantee the right to vote and the right to be elected as MP. The Constitution of the Republic of Albanian (Parliament of Albania 1998: Art. 45: para.: 1), the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo (Parliament of Kosovo 2008a: Art. 45), the Constitution of Serbia (Parliament of Serbia 2006: Art. 52) and the Constitution of Montenegro (Parliament of Montenegro 2013: Art. 45; Uljarevic & Muk 2011: 393) expressly guarantee the right to elect and the right to be elected. On the other hand, the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia (Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia 2019: Art. 22; Popovska 2022) and the Constitution of the Federation of the Bosnia and Herzegovina (Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2003: Art. 2, para. 1; Kadribašić et al. 2020; Belloni 2004) indirectly stipulates the right to stand for MP.

These constitutional provisions of the Western Balkan countries are implemented by their respective laws on national elections and gender equality. These laws introduce the electoral gender quotas as a means for increasing the number of women in politics (Cvetanoska 2022) and ensuring equality in the societies of Western Balkans countries. The two sections that follow are focused on the text analysis of the laws on gender equality and laws on elections of the Western Balkan countries.

Legislation on gender equality in the Western Balkan countries and percentage of quota

Western Balkan countries have approved legislation on gender equality. The Law on Gender Equality in Serbia (Parliament of Serbia 2009: Art. 36–37) guarantees the right of women to vote and to run for national elections and stipulates gender equality on the list of candidates running for an MP mandate by making it mandatory for political parties to prepare a list following gender-based criteria.

According to this, article lists of candidates are considered incomplete when there is noncompliance with the gender quota. A similar provision is included in the Law on Gender Equality in Albania (Parliament of Albania 2008), which states that 'A representation of not less than 30% of each sex in the candidates' list presented by the political parties for the proportional system for the general Assembly elections is ensured.' It also imposes sanctions for political parties that violate the provisions of this article by blocking up to one-tenth of the state funds for the electoral campaign until such a violation is rectified.

The Law on Gender Equality in Montenegro (Parliament of Montenegro 2007: Art. 27) does not define the quota. Instead, it enacts special measures to remove existing obstacles that objectively lead to an unequal representation of men and women. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Law on Gender Equality (Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina 2009: Arts. 2–20) stipulates 'equal representation of women and men when one of the sexes is represented with at least 40%' (Kadribašić et al. 2020).

The Law on Gender Equality in North Macedonian (Parliament of North Macedonian 2012: Art. 16) regulates very broadly the quota system for women's representation in politics. The Law on Gender Equality in the Republic of Kosovo (Parliament of Kosovo 2015: Art. 14) is different in that it stipulates equal gender representation at the legislative level with a minimum of fifty percent (50%) of both genders.

Table 1: Gender quotas according to the gender equality legislation of the Western Balkan countries

Country	Quota
Republic of Kosovo	50%
Bosnia-Herzegovina	40%
Albania	30%
Montenegro	No specific % but obliges political parties to ensure equality
North Macedonia	No specific % but obliges political parties to ensure equality
Serbia	No specific % but obliges political parties to ensure equality

Sources: The table was prepared by the author based on the laws on gender equality in each Western Balkan country

Electoral gender quotas according to the legislation of Western Balkan countries

As part of the gender quotas guaranteed under the legislation on gender equality, mandatory electoral gender quotas are stipulated under the laws on national elections of each Western Balkan country (Nacevska 2014). As stated above,

there are three types of electoral gender quotas: a) reserved seats, b) legal candidate quotas and c) political party quotas (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2009; Dahlerup 2007). In terms of Western Balkan countries, their legislation on national elections includes two types of quotas as mandatory for political parties – the candidate list quota and reserved seats quota.

The Law on General Elections in Kosovo (Parliament of Kosovo 2008b: Art. 27) states that

> In each Political Entity's candidate list, at least thirty (30%) percent shall be male and at least thirty (30%) percent shall be female, with one candidate from each gender included at least once in each group of three candidates, counting from the first candidate in the list.

Article 111 of the same law states that

> If, after the allocation of seats… the candidates of the minority gender within a Political Entity have not been allocated at least 30% of the total seats for that Political Entity, the last elected candidate of the majority gender will be replaced by the next candidate of the opposite gender on the reordered candidate list until the total number of seats allocated to the minority gender is at least 30%.

Kosovo introduced this electoral gender quota in 2000 (Szeląg 2021: 136). Fines for non-compliance with this quota are regulated by the regulation of the Central Election Commission (Parliament of Kosovo 2008b: Art. 126). Moreover, it should be emphasised that Kosovo introduced this electoral quota in 2000 through regulation of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (Szeląg 2021: 36), and after Kosovo declared independence, these provisions were passed to the Law on General Election, which means that electoral gender quotas are introduced as results of such international mission pressure or influence. In addition, the types of quotas introduced by Kosovo can be classified as robust quotas, as defined by Kim and Fallon (2023), due to the threshold for women to be included in candidate lists and reserved seats for women in parliament, as well as the sanctions imposed by legislation in case of non-compliance with the threshold.

The Law on Election of Councillors and Members of Parliament in Montenegro (Parliament of Montenegro 2011: Art. 39a) mandates that at least 30% of candidates on the candidate list shall be from the underrepresented sex. Montenegro introduced the electoral gender quota as mandatory in 2011 (Dinc & Hadzic 2018). There were attempts to oblige political parties to respect the gender quota during elections but such obligations were included in the legislation and were hence not complied with by the political parties. There have been attempts to compel political parties to adhere to the electoral gender quota during

elections, aiming to require by their statutes the inclusion of women in their candidate list. However, this obligation was envisioned as a legal requirement for political parties in the above-mentioned law. Furthermore, Article 39a of this law imposes sanctions for the failure to respect this obligation – specifically, the non-publication of such a candidate list by the Election Committee. With a threshold set at 30% and an enforcement mechanism for non-compliance, Montenegro's approach aligns with the definition of *robust quotas* outlined by Kim and Fallon (2023). However, the legislation does not include provisions for reserved seats for women to become MP.

North Macedonia introduced an electoral gender quota of 30% in 2002 (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2010), which later increased through legislation revisions. Currently, the Electoral Code of North Macedonia (Parliament of North Macedonia 2018: Art. 64) stipulates that at least 40% of the candidates shall be from the underrepresented gender. Placement order for women to be included in the candidate list is required as well. According to this Code, it can be concluded that North Macedonia implemented quotas that meet the criteria for *robust quotas* as outlined by Kim and Fallon (2023), as its code sets out the threshold factor and also sanctions for non-compliance with the requirement of electoral gender quotas.

In 1998, Bosnia and Herzegovina became the first country among the Western Balkan countries to introduce quotas by the Provisional Election Commission (Rashkova & Zankina 2017: 398), which was later introduced in the country's legislation (Björkdahl 2012). It can be stated that the introduction of the electoral gender quota in this country is also a result of international community presence after the war ended. The Law on Election of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2001: Art. 4, para. 1S9) states that

> The minority gender candidates shall be distributed on the candidate's list in the following manner: at least one (1) minority gender candidate amongst the first two (2) candidates, two (2) minority gender candidates amongst the first fie (5) candidates, and three (3) minority gender candidates amongst the first eight (8) candidates et seq. The number of minority gender candidates shall be at least equal to the total number of candidates on the list, divided by three (3) rounded up to the closest integer.

So, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina required placement order as well for women to be included in the candidate list. In addition, the same article of this law sanctions the failure to respect this quota by granting the Central Election Commission of BIH the authority to certify only the number of candidates that fulfil the requirements for the gender quota. Considering the threshold for women to be included in the candidate list and provisions on sanctions

for not respecting it, their electoral gender quotas can be qualified as *robust quotas*. However, it should be emphasised that the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not introduce reserved seats.

Similar to North Macedonia, Serbia introduced the electoral gender quota in 2004 (Nacevska & Lokar 2017: 298) and revised it in 2022. The Law on Elections for Members of Parliament in Serbia (Parliament of Serbia 2022: Art. 73) states that

> There must be at least 40% of members of the underrepresented gender on the electoral list, so that among every five candidates in the list according to their order (the first five places, the next five places, and so on until the end) there must be three members of one and two members of the other gender.

So, this candidate quota is followed by the placement order and sanctioned through Article 78 of this law, which penalises political parties for non-compliance by authorising the Republic Electoral Commission to reject the candidate list and refrain from publishing it. The electoral gender quotas outlined in the legislation of Serbia can also be classified as *robust quotas* (Kim & Fallon 2023). However, this law does not establish a quota for reserved seats to ensure women's representation in the Serbian national parliament.

Albania introduced the electoral gender quota in 2008 (Garunja 2021: 5). The Electoral Code of Albania (Parliament of Albania 2015: Art. 4) sets both candidate quotas and reserved seat quotas to at least 30% for the underrepresented gender, ensuring representation for women respectively (Albanian Central Election Commission 2020). The same laws provide for sanctions if the political parties do not respect the gender quota in their candidate lists. The candidate list is not supported by the placement order but Article 175 of this code provides for sanctions if political parties fail to respect the gender quota in their candidate lists, leading to the rejection of the candidate list by the Central Election Commission (Parliament of Albania 2021c). Finally, it should be stated that the types of quotas introduced in Albania also qualify as *robust quotas* (Kim & Fallon 2023).

> As Cvetanoska (2022) stated, it is important to check if these electoral gender quotas are implemented in practice, especially in terms of ensuring that the women of the Western Balkan countries have effective access to national parliaments in a male-dominated society. The section below presents the percentage and trend of women's representation in the parliaments of Western Balkan countries over the last thirty years. This analysis is based on the statistical data published by the state institutions of the Western Balkans and statistical reports published by international organisations on the percentage of women's representation in national parliaments.

Table 2a: The electoral gender quota for MPs under the legislation of the Western Balkan countries

Country	Quota according to the Law/Code on Elections
Republic of Kosovo	Every third candidate in the list is a woman or 30%
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Every third candidate in the list is a woman or 30%
Albania	Every third candidate in the list is a woman or 30%
Montenegro	Every third candidate in the list is a woman or 30%
North Macedonia	At least equal to the total number of candidates on the list, divided by three (3) or 40%
Serbia	Every five candidates in the list must be three members of one and two members of the other gender or 40%

Source: Author. Based on the laws/codes on elections of the Western Balkan countries

Table 2b: The electoral gender quota for MPs under the parliamentary election legislation of the Western Balkan countries

Country	Quota according to the parliamentary election laws		Sanctions for non-compliance are foreseen by law	Placement order foreseen by law
	Candidate quotas	Reserved quotas		
Republic of Kosovo	30%	yes	Yes	yes
Bosnia-Herzegovina	40%	No	Yes	yes
Albania	30%	Yes	yes	no
Montenegro	30%	No	Yes	Yes
North Macedonia	40%	Yes	Yes	yes
Serbia	40%	No	yes	yes

Source: Author. Based on the laws/codes on elections of the Western Balkan countries

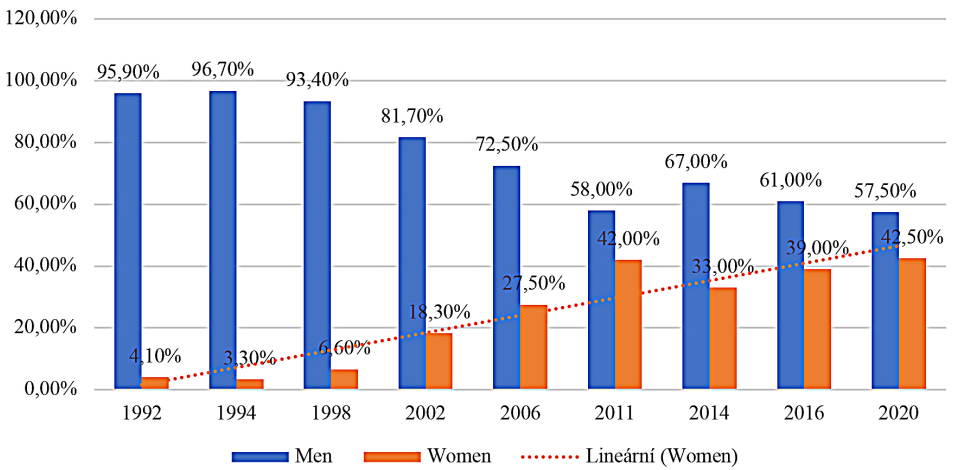
Empirical Analysis and Discussion

Women's representation in parliaments of the Western Balkan countries from 1991 to 2023

To check if the electoral gender quota stipulated under the legislation of the Western Balkan countries has become a reality, it is necessary to present and analyse statistical data on the percentage of women's representation in the parliaments of Western Balkan countries before and after the introduction of the electoral gender quota. This analysis also shows the trend of women's represen-

tation in the parliaments of these countries throughout the last thirty years, i.e. from 1991 to 2023. This period covers the period of the former Yugoslavia when some of the Western Balkan countries had different institutional setups from now (Jones 1994; Haug 2015). Kosovo was one of the federal units of former Yugoslavia but it did not have the same prerogative as other federal units. In addition, Serbia and Montenegro functioned as a Union for some years. Despite this institutional background, Figures 1 to 6 present very clearly the percentage of women elected as MPs in the national parliaments of the Western Balkan countries over the last thirty years.

Figure 1: The percentage of women MPs in North Macedonia's parliament

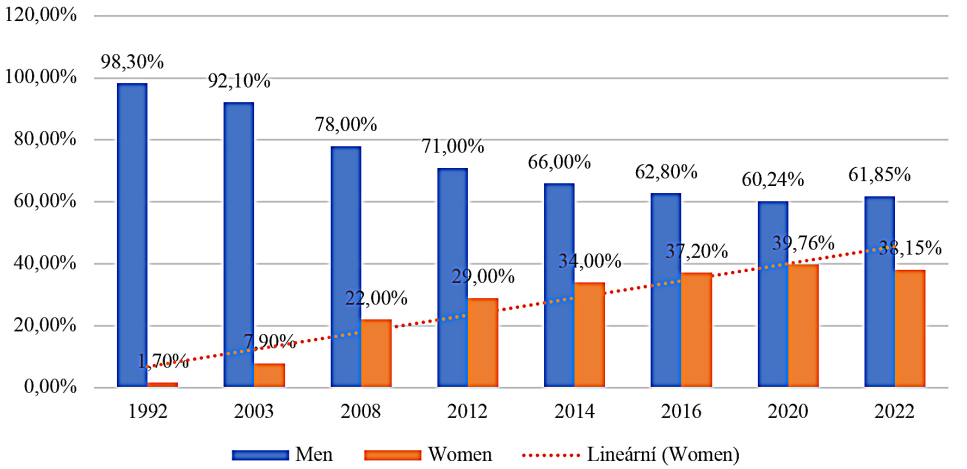


Source: Authors. Based on data published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union 2004, 2006, 2020a; Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe 2020; Parliament of North Macedonia 2011; Parliament of North Macedonia 2021

Figure 1 shows that the percentage of women elected as MPs in the parliament of North Macedonia has increased constantly from 1992 to 2020, with an overall growth of 38.4%. Before the introduction of the electoral gender quota by North Macedonia, this percentage was very low – 4.10% in 1992, 3.30% in 1994 and 6.60% in 1998. Following the introduction of the electoral gender quota, this percentage increased consistently from 18.30% in 2002 up to 42.50% in 2020, exceeding the mandatory electoral gender quota of 40%.

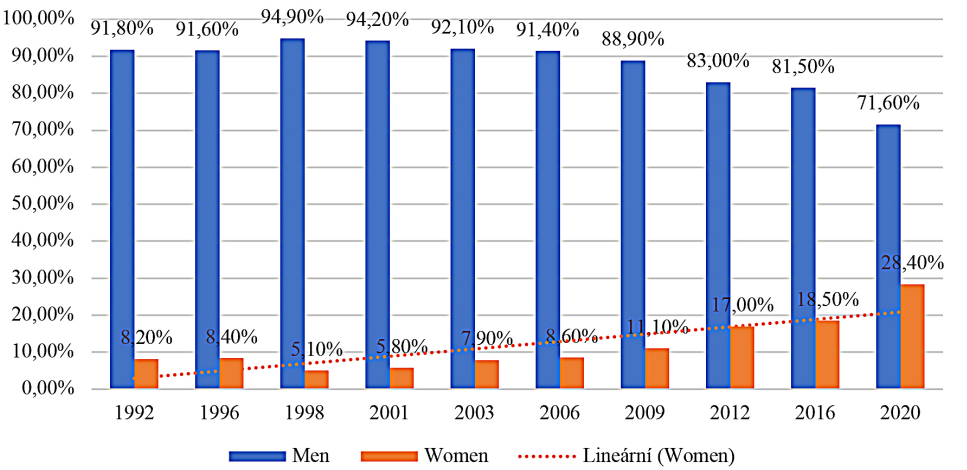
Figure 2 shows that the percentage of women elected as MPs in the parliament of Serbia increased during the research period (1992–2022) by 36.45%. Before the introduction of the electoral gender quota by Serbia, this percentage was very low – 1.70% in 1992 and 7.90% in 2003. Following the introduction of the electoral gender quota in 2004, this percentage increased constantly: 22.00% in 2008, 29% in 2012, 34% in 2014, 37.20% in 2016 and 39.76% in 2022.

Figure 2: The percentage of women MPs in Serbia's Parliament



Source: Authors. Based on data published by the parliament of Serbia in 2022, 2020, 2016, 2014, 2012, and I know politics 2012; Parliamentary Union 2004, 2007, 2022

Figure 3: The percentage of Women MPs in Montenegro's Parliament



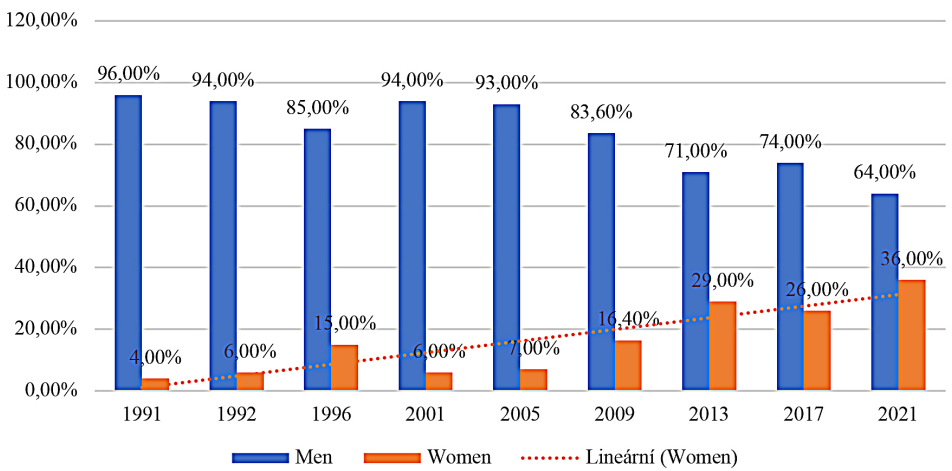
Source: Authors. Based on the data published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union 2004, 2006, 2009, 2020b; Parliament of Montenegro 2021; Brnović 2016; Council of Europe 2001; UNDP 2012

Figure 3 shows that the percentage of women elected as MPs in the parliament of Montenegro increased during the research period (1992–2020) by 20.2%. Before the introduction of the electoral gender quota by Montenegro, this percentage was very low – 8.20% in 1992, 8.40% in 1996, 5.10% in 1998,

5.80% in 2001, 7.90% in 2003, 8.60% in 2006 and 11.10% in 2009, while following the introduction of the electoral gender quota in 2011, this percentage increased consistently, i.e. 17.00% in 2012, 18.50% in 2016 and 28.40 % in 2020.

Figure 4 shows that the percentage of women elected as MPs in the parliament of Albania increased by 32% from 1991 to 2021. Before the introduction of the electoral gender quota by Albania, this percentage was very low, ranging from 4% in 1991 to 7% in 2005. Following the introduction of the electoral gender quota in 2008, this percentage increased constantly – 16.40% in 2009, 29% in 2013, 26% in 2017 and 36% in 2021. In the last election, the percentage of women MPs in the parliament of Albania exceeded the electoral gender quota of 30%.

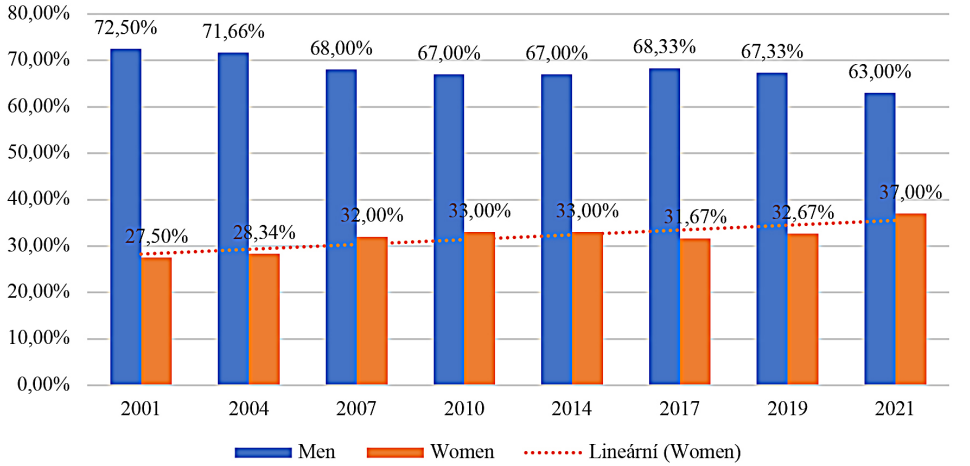
Figure 4: The percentage of women MPs in Albania's parliament



Source: Authors. Based on data by the Parliament of Albania 2021a, Parliament of Albania 2021b; Central Election Commission 2021; ACER and ASET 2009: 11; Inter-Parliamentary Union 2004, 2005; Institute of Political Studies 2020

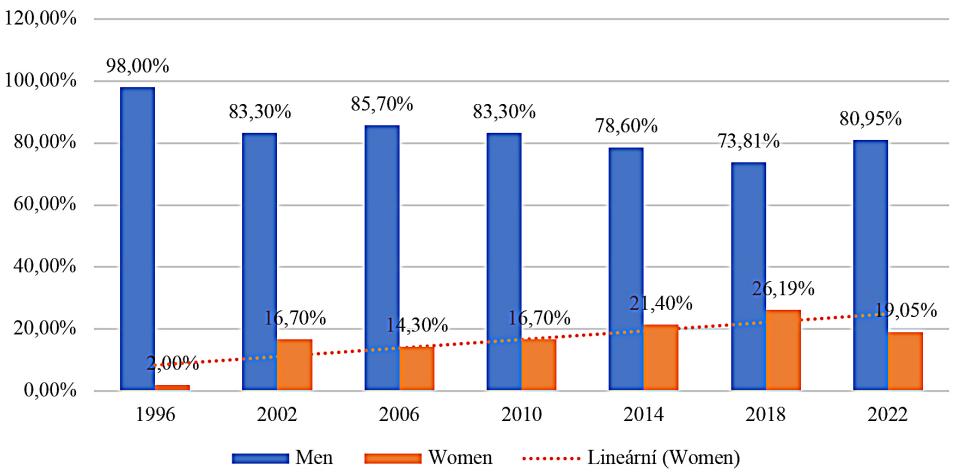
Figure 5 shows that the percentage of women elected as MPs in the parliament of Kosovo increased by 9.5% from 2001 to 2021. It was impossible to find data on women's representation in the parliament of Kosovo before the war. The global organisation dealing with data collection on women's representation in national parliaments (Inter-Parliamentary Union, IDEA) does not publish data for Kosovo's parliament. However, Figure 5 proves that the percentage of women's representation in Kosovo's parliament not only increased constantly but was also higher than in the other countries since the introduction of the electoral gender quota in 2000: 27.50% in 2001, 28.34% in 2004, 32% in 2007, 33% in 2010, 33% in 2014, 31.67% in 2017, 32.5% in 2019 and 37% in 2021.

Figure 5: The percentage of women MPs in Kosovo's parliament



Source: Authors. Based on the data published by the Assembly of Kosovo 2022a and 2022b; Peci et al. 2015; Infokus 2017; GazetaMetro 2019

Figure 6: The percentage of women MPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina's parliament



Source: Authors. Based on the data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union 2004, 2006, 2010, 2018, 2023, and World Bank 2014

Figure 6 shows that the percentage of women elected as MPs in the parliament (House of Representatives) of Bosnia and Herzegovina increased by 17.05% from 1996 to 2022. Before the introduction of the electoral gender quota in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the percentage of women's representation was very low, i.e. 2% in 1996. However, it increased constantly following the introduction of the electoral gender quota in 1998 – 16.70% in 2002, 14.30% in 2006, 16.7% in 2010, 21.4% in 2014, 26.19% in 2018 and 19.05% in 2022.

Women's representation trends in Western Balkan parliaments and the electoral gender quota

Figures 1–6 show that the trend of women's representation in the parliaments of the Western Balkan countries has generally witnessed an increase during the last thirty years (1991–2023). In the last election held in 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina made an exception to this trend, experiencing a decrease from 26.19% in 2018 to 19.05% (see Figure 6). On the other hand, the percentage of women MPs in Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia increased beyond their electoral gender quota (see Figures 2–5). In the case of Kosovo, it should be noted that the percentage of women MPs has surpassed the quotas stipulated by the Law on General Elections but has not reached the gender quota of 50% as outlined in the Law on Gender Equality (2015). Finally, it is also important to emphasise that the percentage of women MPs in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro is below the electoral gender quota, even though the trend has shown an increase, which is positive nevertheless. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is an exception as the percentage of their women MPs decreased by 7.14% from 2008 to 2022 (Figure 6).

Regarding the question of whether the electoral gender quota introduced by the Western Balkan countries had an impact on this trend, the answer is certainly yes. The comparison of the statistical data before and after the introduction of electoral gender quotas as presented above proves it. Before the introduction of electoral gender quotas, the percentage of women's representation in the national parliaments of these countries was as follows: i) 1.7%–7.9% in Serbia, ii) 2% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, iii) 4.1% and 3.3% in North Macedonia, iv) 4%–7% in Albania and v) 8.2%–11.1% in Montenegro. Kosovo introduced the electoral gender quota in 2000, but there are no data available before this year due to the country's position before the war. After the introduction of the electoral gender quota, the percentage of women's representation increased as follows: i) in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 16.7% to 19.05% (slight decrease from 26.19% in 2018); ii) in Kosovo from 27.5% to 37%; iii) in Albania from 16.4% to 36%; iv) in North Macedonia from 18.4% to 42.5%; v) in Montenegro from 17% to 28.4%; and vi) in Serbia from 22% to 38.15%.

So, without electoral gender quotas, the increase of women's representation in the parliaments of these developing countries with a long tradition of patriarchal society would never have happened, especially to such a significant extent. Huma (2017) and Björkdahl and Selimovic (2015) consider the introduction of a quota system as the main contributor to the increase of women's representation in the parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other scholars confirm the same for Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro (Nacevska & Lokar 2017; Dragoti et al. 2011; and Spehar 2018). Cvetanoska (2022) argued that 'the introduction of quotas may empower women to get involved in politics... but... when quotas are not implemented as intended in the law, their positive impact will be limited at best'. Based on the data presented above (Figures 1 to 6), the electoral gender quotas in Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia not only implemented quotas as intended by the law but exceeded it. In this case, the positive impact was not limited.

Unfortunately, the other three countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia – did not implement electoral gender quotas as intended by legislation, and their positive impact was limited. Indeed, these three countries challenge the theory of Bayer-Schwindt (2009). According to him, to maximise the effectiveness of the electoral gender quota and enhance women's representation in politics, the election legislation should foresee specific quotas for women in the candidate lists and impose sanctions on political parties for non-compliance with these electoral gender quotas. However, this appears to be insufficient in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, where their election legislation includes provisions for candidate gender quotas and sanctions for non-compliance. Consequently, these countries should mandate adherence to such quotas even in the composition of their parliaments, mirroring the approach taken by other countries in the region that have implemented and demonstrated positive results. Perhaps these results stem from the electoral gender quota, which must also be respected during the distribution of seats for MPs. So, the electoral legislation of these countries does not require reserved quotas, while the legislation of North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo does.

Even though this article only demonstrates the impact of quotas on women's descriptive representation, it already signifies a significant positive development for women in these developing countries with long-standing patriarchal traditions. Of course, in the long run, they will also influence the substantive representation of women in the parliaments of these nations. Overall, the information presented in this article confirms the argument of Haughes et al. (2019) that 'the electoral gender quota has transformed the composition of national parliaments worldwide during the last fifty years', including the parliaments of the Western Balkan countries.

Conclusions

The Western Balkan countries have established a legal basis for women's political rights in line with international standards. Their constitutions guarantee such rights, while their laws on gender equality and parliamentary elections ensure the implementation of such rights. The legislation on gender equality encourages women's representation in the political life of these countries. In this regard, the Law on Gender Equality of Kosovo (Parliament of Kosovo 2015) is the most advanced because it obliges institutions to implement a gender quota of 50%. With regards to the electoral gender quota, the election codes of North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Serbia stipulate that 40% of MPs in their parliaments should be women. This is the highest quota among the election codes of the Western Balkan countries. The rest of these countries provide for a lower electoral gender quota (30%). The legislation on parliamentary elections in all these countries includes sanctions for non-compliance with the requirement to respect candidate gender quotas and/or reserved gender quotas. All these countries apply candidate gender quotas, and only three of them also apply reserved gender quotas – Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia – which have exceeded the quota in terms of the number of women elected as MPs in their national parliaments.

Indeed, all types of electoral gender quotas aim to ensure equality between men and women in the parliaments of the Western Balkan countries and to increase women's representation in the institutional structures. Based on the data presented above, it can be concluded that the electoral quotas introduced by the Western Balkan countries have contributed positively on women's representation in their parliaments. The trend of women's representation in the parliaments of the Western Balkan countries marked an increase during the last thirty years. In agreement with Cvetanoska (2022) and based on the statistical data, it can be concluded that these electoral quotas were most effective in the case of North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo because the percentage of women MPs in their parliaments increased beyond the set quota. Serbia amended the law on election last year, increasing the electoral quota up to 40%, which has not yet been achieved. While the percentage of women elected as MPs in national parliaments of Montenegro and Bosnia Herzegovina is below the percentage of the electoral gender quota as required under their legislation. However, the trend is positive in the case of Montenegro.

The results of this research demonstrate the impact of quotas in terms of women's descriptive representation. However, overcoming the issue of representation involves more than just meeting quotas; it entails reflecting women's inclusion in more tangible issues concerning gender, social issues and those of greater overall interest in political, economic and general development matters. Substantive representation of women in the national parliaments of the Western Balkan countries also remains a topic for further research.

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Development of the Eastern Partnership Policy: Mechanism and Problems of Implementation

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Abstract: *Recent years have been marked by the transformation of the European Neighbourhood Policy within the framework of the Eastern Partnership into the expansion policy towards Ukraine and Moldova, as well as the withdrawal of Belarus from the programme. These circumstances determine the research's relevance. The research aims to analyse the mechanisms of development of the Eastern Partnership programme, formulate the problems of the implementation of this initiative at the present stage and propose options for their solution. The methodological basis of the research was compiled on the combination of such methods as analogy, classification, historical, political, legal analysis, forecasting, statistical data analysis, structural-functional and comparative. The research characterises the main stages of the Eastern Partnership programme's evolution and identifies cooperation principles within the initiative across different periods. It also formulates the main directions and features of EU interaction with participating countries, determines trade turnover volumes between partners, assesses Brexit's impact on programme implementation and explores the reasons and circumstances behind Belarus' withdrawal from the initiative. The article can be used by scholars whose interests include the problems of European integration, the EU foreign policy and areas of cooperation between the countries of the organisation and the post-Soviet states.*

Keywords: ***European integration, interstate cooperation, neighbourhood and partnership, post-Soviet space, EU foreign policy***

Introduction

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, launched by the European Union (EU) in 2009, remains highly relevant today amidst evolving geopolitical dynamics in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus region. With its aim to forge closer ties with six post-Soviet states – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – the EaP continues to serve as a crucial framework for fostering political cooperation and economic integration (Caras 2021). However, the initiative faces a range of challenges and complexities that warrant closer examination. These include varying levels of commitment among partner countries, geopolitical tensions, internal governance issues and the EU's own capacity to effectively engage with the region (Latoszek & Klos 2016). Additionally, recent developments, such as the granting of candidate status for EU accession to Ukraine and Moldova in 2022, highlight the dynamic nature of the EaP and the need for ongoing analysis and evaluation.

Against this backdrop, this article seeks to explore the current state of affairs within the Eastern Partnership, assess the progress made towards its objectives and identify key challenges and opportunities moving forward. By delving into issues such as political association, economic integration, energy security and the EU accession process, the article aims to provide insights into the complexities of EU engagement in the region and contribute to informed policy discussions. Specifically, the objectives include:

1. Characterising the historical stages of the Eastern Partnership programme's implementation, delineating key milestones and transitions.
2. Analysing the primary areas of cooperation and interaction within the initiative, encompassing political, economic and social dimensions.
3. Identifying and discussing the challenges and obstacles encountered during the implementation of the Eastern Partnership programme, with a nuanced understanding of the international context.

At the same time, in June 2021, the Belarusian authorities announced the suspension of participation in the initiative in response to EU sanctions. The ongoing armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the war in Ukraine and separatism in Georgia and Moldova are also of particular concern to Europe, whose security interests directly depend on the region, which is part of the Eastern Partnership and is in the immediate geographical neighbourhood of the EU. Therefore, the problematics of the EU's Eastern policy are becoming increasingly important, both in terms of the geopolitical situation in the world and in the socio-political transformation of individual EaP countries. Furthermore, the differentiated approach in the implementation of the Eastern Partnership initiative gave an impetus to the development of mutually beneficial cooperation between the parties. These circumstances require the

development of new mechanisms and directions of interaction between the European Union and partner countries. This determines the research's relevance.

Despite some criticism and challenges faced by the Eastern Partnership initiative, the topic remains intriguing due to its significance in shaping EU foreign policy in the post-Soviet space. The Eastern Partnership represents an attempt by the EU to foster political association and economic integration with neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe without offering them full membership (Zhukorska 2024). This approach reflects the complex geopolitical dynamics and diverse interests at play in the region. This article makes several contributions to the discourse on EU external relations and regional cooperation initiatives. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the Eastern Partnership, outlining its historical development, key objectives and implementation strategies. By examining the experiences of participating countries, the article offers insights into the successes and challenges of the initiative. Secondly, the article delves into the specific interactions and cooperation areas within the Eastern Partnership framework. It highlights the varied approaches adopted by partner countries, ranging from ambitious aspirations for full EU membership to the pragmatic maintaining of a neutral stance.

Scholars devote much attention to the problems of the implementation of the Eastern Partnership programme in its various aspects. At the same time, a comprehensive assessment of the initiative considering the current geopolitical realities is carried out for the first time. Only a comprehensive study of the specifics of the transformation of the EU policy towards the partner countries will make it possible to improve the effectiveness of interaction between the parties. Thus, researcher Crombois (2023) expresses the opinion that the armed conflict in Ukraine may lead to the reformatting of the Eastern Partnership. According to the author, the fundamentals of the programme will remain unchanged for some time.

Laumulin (2014) considered the geopolitical component of the Eastern Partnership programme. He believes that this initiative aims to reduce Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space and integrate the former Soviet Union countries into the European economic and political community. Azerbaijani author Ismailli (2021) examined the EU policy of integration of the states of the former Soviet Union within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. He concluded that the EU as a mainstream integration union has noticeably strengthened and continues to strengthen its geostrategic position in the post-Soviet space by implementing the EaP programme. Russia, in its turn, by creating a regional economic union has formed its key integration trend in opposition to the EU and is trying to prevent the process of integration of all Eastern Partnership members into European structures (Kalaganov et al. 2018).

Paramonov et al. (2017) focused on the EU's influence on Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan) and assessed

the likelihood of expanding the EaP programme to this region. The authors believe that due to the deteriorating situation in Europe itself, the EU will devote more attention to internal problems and relations with its immediate neighbours, taking cooperation with such a geographically distant region as Central Asia out of its priorities. Ibrayeva et al. (2017) considered the problem of strengthening the cooperation of the Caspian region countries (Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Russia) with the EU in the field of energy security. Azerbaijan, which is a member of the EaP and plays an important role in the transit of energy carriers from Central Asia to Europe, is of particular interest in this context.

According to the researchers, Brussels is pursuing a policy to preserve energy security, which has two dimensions in the form of integration and diversification. The first component consists of expanding trade ties with the countries of the Caspian region, which have rich oil and gas reserves. Diversification efforts are related to attempts to establish new routes bypassing Russia, to attract new energy suppliers and, finally, to promote the development of 'green' energy. At the same time, the authors note that the EU lacks a comprehensive energy strategy for the states in the region.

The research object is the relations between the European Union and the post-Soviet states within the framework of the 'Eastern Partnership'.

Materials and methods

The methodological basis of this research was formed on a qualitative combination of such methods as analogy, classification, comparative method, historical, forecasting, method of political and legal analysis, and structural, functional and statistical analyses of data. In addition, the empirical data provided an assessment of publications in periodicals, materials of scientific and practical conferences, official documents, interstate agreements and international treaties.

The analogy method was used to identify common features of the post-Soviet countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus that joined the Eastern Partnership initiative. The classification method was used to identify the main objectives of cooperation between the EU and partner countries within the framework of the EaP programme.

The historical method was used to characterise the stages of the evolution of the Eastern Partnership initiative, highlight the characteristic features of each of them, identify cause-and-effect relations and trace the emerging trends and peculiarities of the development of relations between the project participants. In addition, it was used to study the historical prerequisites for the formation of the project based on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

The comparative method became the basis for comparing the conditions of cooperation between the European Union and Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus until 2021, as well as for analysing the achieved results

in this sector. It also provided an opportunity to highlight the peculiarities and main directions of cooperation between the partner states in this context. The main focus was on cooperation in the economic, cultural and political spheres, as well as interaction between the participants of the initiative themselves.

The method of political and legal analysis was used to examine bilateral agreements, international treaties and other documents that characterise the directions and conditions of joint work between the European Union and the partner countries. In particular, the Joint Address 'Strengthening Sustainability – Eastern Partnership that Benefits All' (EaP priorities after 2020), the memorandum between the ministers of foreign affairs of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine on the establishment of the Associated Trio and the declaration 'Recovery, Sustainability and Reform' were studied (Eastern Partnership Policy... 2020; Ministry of Foreign Affairs... 2021; Council of the European Union 2021).

The method of statistical data analysis was used to assess the trends of social and economic development of the states participating in the programme. Namely, statistical information from the World Trade Organisation and the World Bank was used, characterising the economy and foreign trade of the states that joined the initiative, as well as export and import volumes by country and commodity (World Bank 2023). These data helped to formulate a picture of economic development trends, to determine the volume of EU investments in the economies of the partner states and the trade turnover between them.

The forecasting method was used to outline the main and most probable ways of developing the Eastern Partnership programme for the coming years, identify regularities and trends of changes in the implementation of the initiative considering the current geopolitical realities, as well as to formulate promising sectors for further cooperation, considering the principle of differentiation of the partner countries.

The structural-functional method was used to study the place of the post-Soviet states in the EU foreign policy and to assess Brussels' approaches in relations with the countries participating in the Eastern Partnership programme. It was also used to analyse the multi-level institutional structure through which the EU political influence on the states of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus is exercised, the mechanisms and instruments of this influence, and its manifestations in domestic political processes.

Results

Conditions and prerequisites for the formation of the Eastern Partnership initiative, the first achievements of the programme

After the collapse of the USSR, the main targets of Brussels' eastern policy were the states of the socialist camp. They immediately announced their European

choice, although they travelled the path of integration with varying speed and success. As a result of these processes, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia became EU members in 2004, and Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. After that, Brussels' attention shifted to the post-Soviet countries. In 2004, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, together with ten Southern Mediterranean states, were invited to participate in the European Neighbourhood Policy programme.

In 2009, when the Eastern Partnership was launched, the political situation in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus was notably complex and tumultuous. Prior to this, Eastern Europe had experienced significant political upheavals, including the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003. Additionally, the region was plagued by unresolved conflicts such as the disputes in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia (the so-called Tskhinvali Region) and the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The fall of the communist regime in Moldova in 2009 further exemplifies the era's political instability and the broader context of change and uncertainty in the region. These events had a major impact on international politics and security in the region. The EaP was not primarily designed as a tool for crisis management or conflict resolution (Razakova 2024). Instead, its focus was on fostering political association and economic integration with the European Union. As described in the literature, the EaP sought to support the development of democratic institutions, enhance economic cooperation and strengthen bilateral ties with the EU. While it did address some aspects of regional instability, its core objectives were centred around reform and integration rather than directly managing crises or resolving conflicts. In particular, the European Union sought to strengthen stability and democracy in the region through cooperation with the countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus.

The creation of the Eastern Partnership was a response to the need to develop a new strategy for cooperation between the EU and the countries of the Eastern neighbourhood, aiming to differentiate the approach from that applied to the 'neighbours of Europe' in the south (Volkov & Poleshchuk 2019). This strategy focused on supporting reforms, fostering trade and economic growth, and strengthening democracy and human rights in the region. In a broader regional context, the launch of the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008 also played a significant role. This initiative was established as a response to similar challenges in the southern Mediterranean region and sought to enhance political and economic cooperation between EU member states and Mediterranean countries. The Union for the Mediterranean aimed to address regional issues through collaborative projects and initiatives, complementing the Eastern Partnership by focusing on different geographical and political dynamics. Both the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean were part of the EU's broader strategy to engage with its neighbouring regions, addressing

specific regional needs while promoting stability, prosperity and cooperation (Walter 2020).

The first meeting, which adopted a joint declaration and formally endorsed the Eastern Partnership, took place in Prague in May 2009. This historic moment reflected an important step in cooperation between the EU and the partner countries. The main goal of the initiative was to create conditions for accelerating political and economic integration between the EU and partner countries by promoting socio-economic and political structural reforms. In its initial phase, the initiative envisaged the conclusion of Association Agreements with the EU, signing of agreements on the establishment of a free trade area based on the harmonisation of national legislation with the EU regulatory framework, and visa liberalisation, taking into account measures to improve security and combat illegal migration. These measures were aimed at strengthening cooperation and partnership between the EU and the EaP countries to promote sustainable economic growth and democratic development in the region. Warsaw then hosted the second EaP summit in 2011, when the two-year-long-terms for the high-level summits were confirmed.

It announced that, by the end of the year, negotiations with Georgia and Moldova on concluding FTA agreements were planned to start. Armenia also demonstrated its readiness to engage in dialogue on this issue. Negotiations with partner countries also continued in the energy sector. Moldova and Ukraine signed an agreement on an energy community, which implies obligations to ensure uninterrupted supplies of transit energy carriers to Europe.

In November 2013, the third Eastern Partnership Summit took place in Vilnius. It was scheduled to initiate an FTA with Moldova and, if several requirements were met, to sign Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU. Representatives of Georgia and Moldova initiated the agreements, while Armenia and Ukraine refused to sign similar agreements. In May 2015, the fourth EaP Summit in Riga highlighted the need to revise the ENP and to pursue a differentiated policy towards the post-Soviet states. This included a tailored approach to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, which do not aspire to EU membership.

Meanwhile, notable progress was observed in the collaboration with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, which have committed to European integration. These countries have signed Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs), with the agreements entering into force on different dates: 1 July 2016 for Georgia and Moldova, and 1 September 2017 for Ukraine. Moldova gained visa-free travel privileges in 2014, while Georgia and Ukraine obtained this status in 2017. Consequently, Brussels has tailored specific partnerships with each of these states, making it somewhat inaccurate to lump them together under the umbrella term 'Eastern Partnership countries'. The fifth Eastern Partnership Summit convened in November 2017, with a primary focus on advancing the initiative's objectives, particularly in sectors

such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the digital economy, transportation, infrastructure and energy. During the Summit, progress was made on several agreements, including a new bilateral agreement between the EU and Armenia, the establishment of a Common Aviation Area Agreement with Armenia, and the expansion of the Trans-European Transport Network to include the Eastern Partnership states. However, it is important to recognise that while these achievements represent steps forward, the overall progress of the Eastern Partnership has not yet reached the level of significant change that was initially hoped for. Despite these developments, the outcomes have been more incremental, highlighting the ongoing challenges and the need for continued efforts to achieve more substantial and transformative results. On the eve of the sixth Eastern Partnership Summit, in May 2021, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia established the Associated Trio. This is a trilateral format for enhanced cooperation, coordination and dialogue between the foreign ministries of the three countries, as well as with the EU on issues of mutual interest related to European integration. The importance of Brussels' support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine within their internationally recognised borders and for strengthening their stability and security is also noted. The trio is working, inter alia, to strengthen the EU's role in promoting peaceful conflict resolution in appropriate formats and platforms.

At the summit itself in December, plans to invest more than EUR 2 billion in the countries of the initiative were announced, with the possibility of attracting up to EUR 17 billion of public and private investment in the future. These funds would be used to help small and medium-sized enterprises, reconstruct roads, fight corruption and support media and non-governmental organisations. In addition, the Summit participants identified new challenges related to recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and opportunities for cooperation on green and digital transitions.

Problems of project implementation at the present stage

So far, the EU has signed association agreements, started implementing FTAs and agreed to visa-free travel with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. In addition, in June 2022, Brussels granted Ukraine and Moldova candidate status for membership in the organisation (Mosches 2022). Within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, these three countries have managed to modernise their economies, diversify trade flows and improve energy security, as well as consolidate civil society and strengthen political pluralism. However, Georgia has not yet been granted candidate status. Tbilisi needs to do more in the areas of judicial reforms, rule of law and media freedom if it is to succeed on its path to EU membership.

Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have a high level of ambition towards the EU, while the other three have taken different paths. Armenia, for example, is a member of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), but it has also concluded a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with the EU in an attempt to balance its relations with the West. Azerbaijan, seeking to capitalise on its role as Europe's largest energy supplier, has agreed on several partnership priorities and has begun negotiations on a new framework agreement with the EU. Belarus has had the weakest institutional relations with the European Union all these years, not even a framework agreement was signed. And in 2021, the country suspended participation in the programme in response to the European sanctions. As emphasised by the official representative of the EU Foreign Policy Service N. Massrali, Minsk's decision will lead to 'further isolation of Belarus and is another demonstration of the regime's disdainful attitude towards the Belarusian people' (Kovalenko 2021). The head of the EU diplomacy, J. Borrel, stated in his turn that Brussels was ready to continue cooperation with the Belarusian people. Political scientist E. Preigerman noted that the wording of the statement of the Belarusian authorities sounds like they retain the possibility of returning to the EaP if changes in foreign policy circumstances occur. However, in his opinion, the improvement of relations is a rather distant and vague prospect (Without the Eastern Partnership 2021).

Further complicating the implementation of the programme is the security situation in the region, which remains fragile and unstable. This is due to various frozen armed conflicts (Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh and Donbas). If Azerbaijan and Armenia have come close to signing a peace treaty, the situation in Ukraine and Moldova is far from being resolved. At the same time, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU supported Kyiv in the war politically and financially. Assistance is provided in the form of budgetary injections, and macro-financial and humanitarian aid (Ketners 2024). In addition, for the first time in its history Brussels is allocating funds for the purchase of weapons and other military equipment for a non-member country. At the same time, the EU imposed unprecedented sanctions against Russia and Belarus for complicity in the war. Therefore, in all likelihood, the EU's cooperation with partner countries in the coming years will be aimed at conflict resolution and strengthening regional security.

Regarding Brexit, the UK's withdrawal from the EU had virtually no impact on the implementation of the EaP. London's desire to independently determine the foundations of its foreign policy course only testifies to the fundamental changes that have taken place in world politics – the active phase of formation of a multipolar world and the victory of the concept of 'Europe of different speeds' (Brexit 2016). London was one of the main donors to EU funds, including the Eastern project. However, Brexit was not a financial blow to the EaP states. From 2020 to 2025, EUR 2.3 billion in grants, blended finance and guarantees

are planned for the initiative. This investment and economic plan will combine local, national and regional projects, and will be tailored to the specific needs of each country.

Priority areas of cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership

The creation of the EaP represents a strategic move by the EU to bolster its economic, cultural and political presence in the post-Soviet region. Engaging in this initiative offers participating countries opportunities to enhance collaboration with the EU across key sectors, including trade, transportation, environmental protection, digital development, border security, customs, energy security and the promotion of investment. The main objectives of the partnership are stated in the Joint Declaration of the EaP Prague Founding Summit held on 7–8 May 2009 (Joint Declaration of... 2009). The document states that the initiative aims to create the conditions necessary to accelerate the process of political association and further economic integration between the EU and the partner states. It is planned that it will be achieved through the implementation of political and socio-economic reforms in the post-Soviet countries. At the same time, it was proposed to develop cooperation both bilaterally and multilaterally.

Within the EaP, the European Commission initially defined four areas of co-operation: democracy, quality of public administration and stability – promotion of administrative reforms, training of personnel, implementation of anti-corruption measures, development of civil society institutions and free press; economic integration and rapprochement with the EU in the field of sectoral policy – harmonisation of the countries' legislation with the EU legal framework and creation of FTAs; energy security – improving the energy security of the EU and partners by diversifying energy supply routes bypassing the Russian Federation, integrating the energy markets of the initiative's parties; people-to-people contacts – liberalising the visa regime between the EU and the partnership countries, as well as combating illegal migration. An updated Eastern Partnership policy programme was approved at the Brussels Summit in 2021 (Eastern Partnership Policy... 2020). This document includes five main objectives aimed at economic recovery, sustainable development and reforms: together towards robust, resilient and integrated economies; together towards accountable institutions, rule of law and security; together towards environmental and climate resilience; together towards sustainable digital transformation; together towards sustainable, just and inclusive societies.

A joint working document 'Recovery, Resilience and Reform: Post-2020 Priorities' was also adopted, which builds on these goals and sets the agenda for addressing the priorities. The top ten goals by 2025 in this new programme are as follows: investing in competitive and innovative economies; investing

in people and knowledge societies; investing in security and cyber resilience; investing in digital transformation; investing in inclusive, diverse, gender-equitable societies and strategic communication; and investing in health systems sustainability. The new programme and long-term goals are supported by an economic and investment plan. The investment volume will amount to EUR 2.3 billion with the possibility of further attracting up to EUR 17 billion of public and private investment. The investment and economic plan are underpinned by two components – investment and governance (Ketners & Tsiatkovska 2024). The investment component of the EaP's post-2020 priorities promote socio-economic recovery from the coronavirus and its revitalisation through accelerated green transition and digitalisation. These investments must go hand in hand with clear progress in public administration and human rights, as well as judicial reform. These are the ingredients of the governance pillar, which includes support for democracy, human rights, rule of law reforms, anti-corruption, gender equality and a developed civil society.

The development of trade, the entry of the products of the states of the initiative to the world markets and, as a consequence, the achievement of sustainable economic growth by the states holds a prominent place in the implementation of the Eastern Partnership programme (Table 1).

Table 1: Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the EaP countries (USD billion)

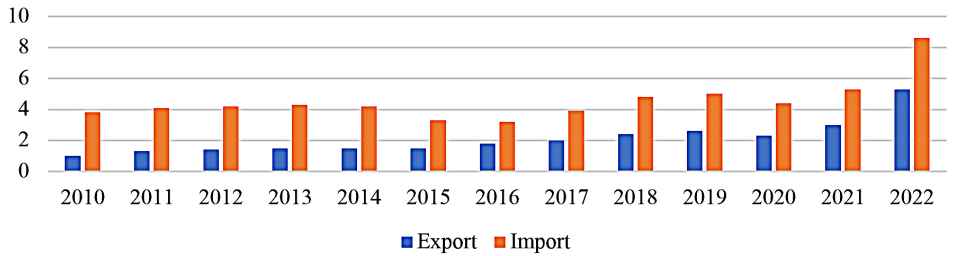
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Azerbaijan	46.94	48.05	42.69	54.62	78.72
Armenia	38.4	42.1	39.6	43.8	52.7
Belarus	59.66	63.08	60.26	68.21	72.79
Georgia	16.21	17.74	15.89	18.63	24.61
Moldova	11.31	11.96	11.91	13.68	14.42
Ukraine	131	154	156	200	160

Source: World Bank (2023)

The government in Armenia, with the assistance of international donors, has been implementing reforms aimed at intensifying trade and attracting foreign investment (Figure 1). This has yielded positive results in the form of GDP growth. The only exception is 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic crisis began. The main growth driver was the services sector, which grew by more than 10%, driven by retail, tourism, financial services and hospitality. However, Armenia's relatively small market size and closed borders with two of its four neighbouring countries limit the potential for rapid economic growth. At the same time, new opportunities are opening up for the

country to use the potential of the EaP and European engagement as a pillar for deeper democratisation, accelerating economic reforms, attracting foreign investment and expanding trade relations. However, Armenia is also a member of the EAEU. The main reasons for joining the organisation were not economic, but rather geopolitical, as Moscow and Yerevan have allied relations. But the Armenian authorities also pointed to the more favourable economic prospects of cooperation with Russia compared to the European Union.

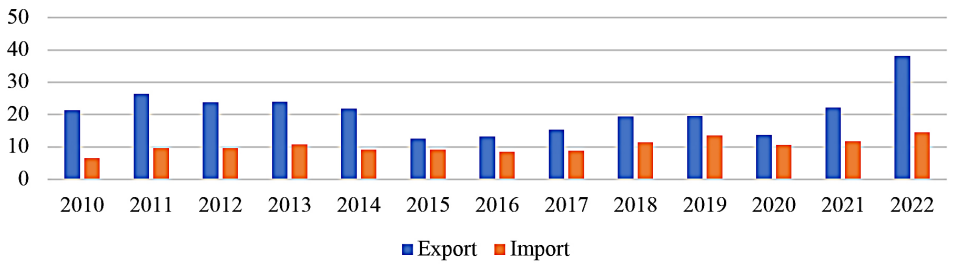
Figure 1: Dynamics of Armenia's exports and imports of goods (USD billion)



Source: Authors (based on their own calculations)

Azerbaijan's economy is growing mainly due to the oil and gas sector. By the end of 2022, Azerbaijan's GDP grew to a record high of almost USD 80 billion. The country's foreign trade turnover for the same period exceeded USD 50 billion, with a foreign trade surplus (excess of exports over imports) of about USD 25 billion (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Dynamics of Azerbaijan's exports and imports of goods (USD billion)



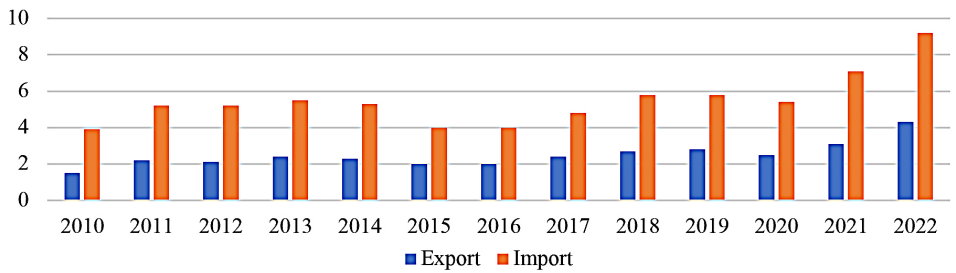
Source: Foreign Trade of Azerbaijan (2023)

The country exports oil, gas, refined products, non-food products of the oil sector and precious metals to the world markets. Therefore, it is not surprising that for Brussels Baku is, first of all, an important energy partner, providing about 5% of gas demand. For Azerbaijan, the EU states are the largest trading

partners. The top five countries in 2022 for exports from Azerbaijan are Italy, Turkey, Russia, India and China, and for imports are Russia, Turkey, China, Germany and Kazakhstan. Moreover, after Western countries imposed unprecedented economic sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine and refused to use Russian energy carriers, Baku benefited from gas and oil sales to Europe. Thus, by the end of 2022, total gas exports from Azerbaijan amounted to about 19 billion m^3, of which over 9 billion cubic metres to Europe (Musavi 2023). In addition, in recent years, certain improvements have been recorded in the country in the sphere of doing business. Even though these changes did not occur directly due to the Eastern Partnership, the programme has become a kind of catalyst for these processes.

EU-Moldova relations within the EaP have gone through different periods. Although the country has become as open as possible to various European projects, it has so far failed to build sustainable markets and political institutions. Chisinau needs to strengthen its engagement with Brussels in the area of security and the sustainability of state institutions, as well as to provide opportunities to expand the range of products exported to the European market. At the same time, the macroeconomic situation in Moldova is relatively stable. Over the last 10 years, the economy has been growing at an average annual rate of 4.6%. Imports of goods and services account for a high share of GDP and exceed exports in a ratio of 2:1. Compared to 2010, imports increased by 1.4 times and exports by 1.6 times (Figure 3). The EU is Moldova's largest trading partner, accounting for over 50% of its total trade.

Figure 3: Dynamics of Moldova's exports and imports of goods (USD billion)

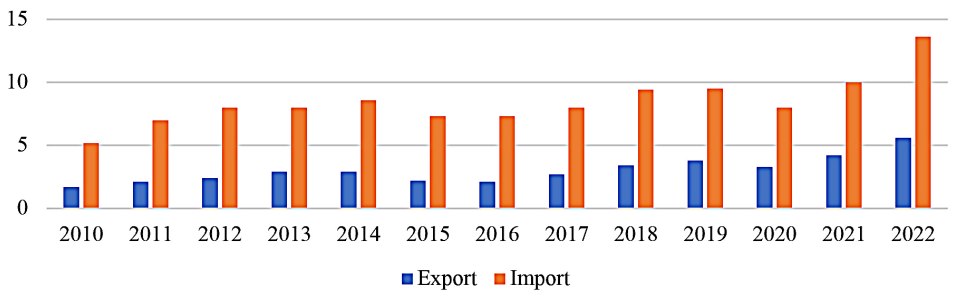


Source: Foreign Trade of the Republic of Moldova (2023)

Over the past 13 years, the Georgian authorities have been implementing reforms to support private sector development and sustainable economic growth. The country's achievements in the context of the EaP initiative can also be considered significant. These include visa-free travel, opening of FTAs, adaptation of laws to the European legal system and cooperation in energy, tech-

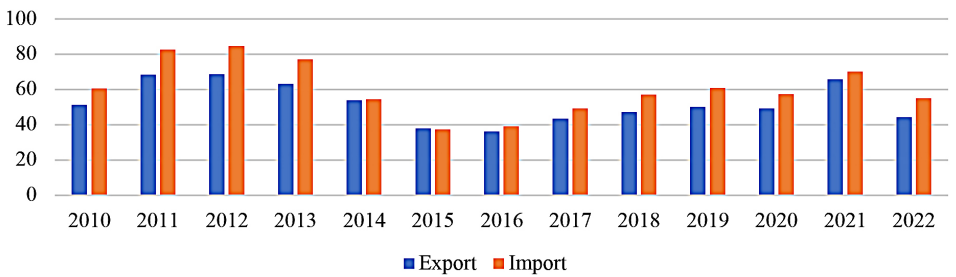
nology, transport and communications (Shiolashvili 2020). At the same time, the country needs to integrate more with EU markets and apply for membership in the Central European Free Trade Association. Georgia's foreign trade is characterised by a negative trade balance, which means that imports are several times higher than exports (Figure 4). To develop foreign trade, the authorities have simplified customs procedures, which has already yielded positive results. Reforms have been made to bring trade legislation in line with EU standards.

Figure 4: Dynamics of Georgia's exports and imports of goods (USD billion)



Source: External Merchandise Trade (2023)

Figure 5: Dynamics of Ukraine's exports and imports of goods (USD billion)



Source: Foreign Trade of Certain Types of Goods by Countries of the World (2023)

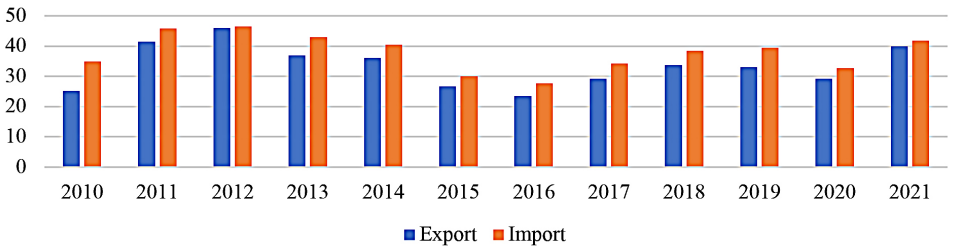
Regarding Ukraine, the Eastern Partnership remains an important platform for interaction between Kyiv and Brussels. However, the country's geopolitical ambitions are aimed at EU membership and are enshrined in the constitution. The armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia has contributed to deepening cooperation in the economic and security sectors. In 2022, the EU provided Ukraine with 9 billion euros in macro-financial assistance in the form of loans and grants. Another 18 billion euros are planned to be allocated

in 2023. Brussels has also temporarily liberalised trade with Ukraine; since May 2022, no duties have been levied on any Ukrainian exports to the EU (What has Already

... 2023). Largely due to these measures, the EU has significantly supported Ukraine's economy. According to Eurostat, from January to October 2022 the EU imported 15.7% more goods from Ukraine than in the same period in 2021, while exports increased by 3.2% (EU Trade with Ukraine 2023). Together with Moldova, the EU launched railway 'solidarity lines' to allow Ukraine to reopen blocked agricultural exports (Figure 5). Through this initiative, more than 20 million tonnes of grain were exported from the country.

An important factor for Belarus in joining the EaP was to strengthen cooperation with the EU in the economic and energy sectors, as well as to attract European investments and technologies to the country. Minsk's political interest, in turn, was to expand its possibilities for manoeuvring in the international arena and to give the state's foreign policy a real multi-vector approach. Despite some positive changes in relations since 2013, Minsk and Brussels have not been able to form a full-fledged contractual framework and agree on the priority areas of partnership within the framework of the initiative. In 2021, the EU imposed economic sanctions on Belarus, which include a ban on the direct or indirect sale, supply, transfer or export to anyone in Belarus of equipment, technology or software for use in monitoring or interception of internet and telephone communications, as well as dual-use goods and technology for military use and to specified persons, organisations or bodies in Belarus. Trade in petroleum products, potassium chloride and goods used for the production or manufacture of tobacco products is restricted (EU Imposed Sanctions... 2021). In addition, the European Investment Bank has ceased payments and disbursements under any existing agreements for public sector projects and any existing technical assistance service contracts. EU member states will also be required to take measures to limit the country's participation in multilateral development banks of which they are members.

Figure 6: Dynamics of Belarus' exports and imports of goods (USD billion)



Source: Foreign Trade in Goods (2023)

In response to these measures, Belarus suspended its participation in the Eastern Partnership programme, focusing on interaction with Asian countries. At the same time, the top five key trade partners in 2022 include two EU countries – Germany and Poland (Figure 6). And the top three are Russia, China and Ukraine.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that trade relations between the EU and partner countries are mutually beneficial. On the one hand, the EaP states are new markets and consumers for European enterprises. On the other hand, the deep and comprehensive FTAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine provide their citizens with a wide choice of quality and safe products. In addition, higher consumer protection standards make these products more affordable. Trade between the EU and the EaP countries has almost doubled in the last decade (Priorities of the Eastern... 2021). The EU is the first trading partner for Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, and the second largest for Armenia and Belarus.

Prospects for programme implementation in the coming years

Almost 14 years of programme implementation have demonstrated that the aspirations of the partnership states vary widely, from stopping participation in the initiative to full integration into the European Union. Therefore, it is likely to continue to maintain the integrity of the initiative and to adopt a country-by-country approach. Thus, in June 2021, Belarus suspended its participation in the programme and started implementing the procedure for terminating the readmission agreement with the EU. Minsk explained such steps as a forced response to the introduction of restrictive measures by Brussels. The EU sanctions against the Belarusian authorities are related to the repression of opposition politicians and journalists. Belarus is not expected to resume participation in the programme in the near future. After all, in 2022, the EU imposed new restrictions against Minsk for complicity in the war against Ukraine.

Azerbaijan maintains a balance and keeps its distance towards all geopolitical actors. The most likely scenario will be the preservation of the present situation in relations between Baku and Brussels. Trade and energy will continue to be potential sectors of cooperation between the sides. The country is key for the EU on the issues of diversification of energy sources and their delivery, as well as reducing Russia's presence in the European energy market. Since Azerbaijan is located at the intersection of East-West and North-South transport corridors, the country is constantly improving its logistics infrastructure and plays an important role in the transit of goods, including those from Asia to the EU. Of particular note is the East-West transport corridor, which is more than 5000 km long. It is the shortest route between China and Europe and is efficient in terms of transit and cargo transport. The average transit time along it is 15 days. With the launch of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway in 2017,

a significant increase in container traffic along the international transport corridor was achieved.

In the case of Armenia, the Eastern Partnership could open up prospects for democratisation and economic reforms for the country. However, Russia's influence will remain strong in the country. Moscow's increasing confrontation with the West makes it impossible for Armenia to deepen its cooperation with the European Union. Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have announced plans to become part of the EU. The first two countries were granted candidate status for EU membership in 2022. Along with the candidate status, they were given several recommendations, the fulfilment of which was a condition for moving to the next stage – membership negotiations. Georgia will have to fulfil several requirements to obtain candidate status. But at the same time, all three states need to undertake several reforms to meet the standards of a united Europe. These countries also have uncontrolled territories (in the form of self-proclaimed republics in Moldova and Georgia and annexation of regions of the Russian Federation in the case of Ukraine) and threats of further aggression from Russia. Therefore, there is a request for the creation of a special institute within the EaP whose activities would be aimed at coordinating actions in the field of security and the return of lost territories. The effectiveness of such cooperation will depend on at least three indicators: filling the Eastern Partnership with new real content, the political will of all parties to develop cooperation and common responsibility for the results (Turchyn 2016).

Brussels, for its part, will try to develop relations in the region and continue the work of the programme. This is confirmed by the 'Recovery, Resilience and Reform: Priorities for the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020', which outlines the priorities of the programme as a whole, complementary performance indicators and flagship initiatives for each country. On this basis, it can be concluded that the implementation of the programme will continue and will receive a new focus in the context of the current security challenges. The initiative may lose its relevance in connection with the accession of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia to the EU. However, this process may drag on for years. Brussels may then shift its focus to Central Asia and establish a new project aimed at deepening cooperation with the Central Asian states.

Discussion

The question of cooperation between European countries and post-Soviet states became prominent immediately after the collapse of the USSR. However, Brussels' relations with them began to develop into a coherent foreign policy direction only post-2004 when the ENP was developed. It includes cooperation with the post-Soviet countries and the states of the Mediterranean region. And since 2009 the scientific interest in this topic has significantly increased in connec-

tion with the launch of the Eastern Partnership initiative. European scholars and authors from the post-Soviet countries are mainly engaged in the research of the problem. For example, some European scholars view the EaP from the perspective of the security component, which has been given little consideration in the implementation of the initiative. The regional analysis notes that after 2022, the EaP has gradually become marginalised within the EU's foreign policy. This phenomenon reflects the change in the EU's priorities and strategic interests, which has affected the role and importance of the EaP (Reassessing the EU Enlargement... 2023). The analysis shows that although the EaP initiative was created to strengthen cooperation with the Eastern Neighbourhood countries and to support political and economic reforms in these countries, its impact has diminished due to several key factors. The EU's strategic priorities have changed, in particular due to increased attention to other regions, such as the Southern Mediterranean and Western Balkans, as well as changes in the EU's internal politics. The war in Ukraine and its aftermath, as well as other geopolitical developments, forced the EU to rethink its foreign policy strategies. As a result, the Eastern Partnership has become less important in the context of the EU's overall policy, which has affected the funding and support for initiatives under this programme. Internal political and economic crises in the EaP countries themselves also contributed to the marginalisation of this initiative. The lack of significant achievements in implementing reforms and stabilising the situation in the region has reduced the EU's motivation to actively support the EaP (Youngs 2017).

Havlicek (2023) discusses the prospects for the EU's approach to Eastern Europe in the face of changes in the international context. The author emphasises that the EU's strategy in Eastern Europe needs to be rethought, in particular in light of new geopolitical and economic challenges. The author emphasises the need for a more active and flexible approach to the Eastern Partnership countries to ensure effective support for reforms and stability in the region. An article by Dubský et al. (2024) examines the impact of the European Union's eastward enlargement in the context of its foreign policy. The authors analyse how changes in the EU's enlargement policy, in particular those aimed at integrating the Eastern Partnership countries, have affected the EU's foreign policy. They argue that the eastward enlargement has become a key moment in the change of the EU's foreign policy, creating new challenges and opportunities for the EaP countries. The article also discusses how these changes may affect the EU's future strategies towards its neighbours.

Raik (2022) explores the problem of the development of the EU's ties with the Eastern Partnership countries, given the growing competition between liberal and illiberal approaches to regional integration. He conducted his study on the example of Ukraine and concluded that for the integration of the EaP states into Europe it is necessary to strengthen physical links. In particular, the author

highlights the development of road infrastructure, establishing cooperation in the field of energy and optimising trade flows. It is in these sectors that positive developments in cooperation between Kyiv and Brussels have been observed.

The significance of the Eastern Partnership for Belarus is considered by Tikhomirov (2018). According to the researcher, concerning Minsk, Brussels' goals within the EaP were to change the foundations of domestic and foreign policy. It is primarily the liberalisation of the political system and the weakening of Moscow's influence. For the Belarusian leadership, the priority areas of cooperation were strengthening trade and economic cooperation, receiving financial assistance from the EU, implementing joint energy and transport projects, and simplifying the visa regime. The unwillingness of the parties to make concessions to each other predetermined the insufficiently high efficiency of cooperation. It was these contradictions that led Belarus to withdraw from the programme and focus on cooperation with Russia and China.

Kaunert & Pereira (2023) explore the prospects of the EaP in the context of geopolitical changes and regional security challenges. The scholars suggest that one of the goals of the initiative is to preserve security in the countries neighbouring the EU. At the same time, the war in Ukraine has demonstrated Brussels' inability to provide it. According to the authors, this is caused by Russian considering the post-Soviet states its sphere of influence and preventing their convergence with the EU in every possible way. However, it should be noted that when faced with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU reacted quickly and decisively, using all of its economic, diplomatic, military and financial power instruments (Akchurina & Della Sala 2018; Mirel 2022). However, Brussels has so far not been proactive in resolving the frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia. The Finnish scholar Haukkala (2015) also considered the same issue. The author considers the Eastern Partnership countries as a zone of confrontation between the European Union and Russia in the post-Cold War period. He calls the war in Ukraine the culmination of this confrontation.

The peculiarities of the European Union's interaction with the South Caucasus states (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia) from the early 1990s to the present are studied by Aliyeva (2022). The researcher calls this region an object of geopolitical competition between major international forces. In the author's opinion, the countries of the South Caucasus have achieved certain results in the economic sphere with the support of the EU. Within the framework of the EaP, democratic reforms have been implemented in Georgia and Armenia. However, problems in the justice sector, the fight against corruption and environmental protection remain unresolved. At the same time, the author does not consider the security problems in the region, including the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the occupation of a part of Georgia's territory, nor does the author suggest ways to solve them through Brussels' involvement. Shortcomings of the EU's policy in the South Caucasus,

which is manifested in the growing Russian and Turkish influence in the region, are also not analysed in the study (Delcour & Hoffmann 2018).

The evolution of the EU's relationship with Central Asian (CA) states as part of the post-Soviet space is explored by Ospanova & Kilybaeva (2019). The scholars conclude that the region is currently the object of Brussels' attention. This is because Central Asia has rich oil and gas deposits. This region also has a strategically important location on the Eurasian continent. Therefore, the EU's interest in Central Asia can be expressed by launching a programme similar to the Eastern Partnership. Cooperation within the framework of the project could be relevant in the field of security, the fight against organised crime and international terrorism, as well as in the economic sector.

The conclusion that can be drawn here is that it is difficult to consider the Eastern Partnership countries as one whole. Although all the states have a common past, they have chosen different paths of development after gaining independence in 1991. In addition, the mechanisms, and conditions of their interaction with the European Union differ. The war in Ukraine and the confrontation between Russia and the EU for influence in the post-Soviet space occupy a special place in the study of this issue.

Conclusions

The Eastern dimension of the EU foreign policy was formed based on the common interests of Brussels and the post-Soviet countries in preserving peace and stability on the European continent and creating favourable foreign policy conditions for development. At the same time, Brussels did not initially offer the initiative states the prospect of full membership. The programme envisaged only 'political association' and 'economic integration' with the EU and offered association agreements, participation in (DC)FTAs and visa-free travel as instruments of implementation. Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia utilised the potential of the EaP and declared their aspirations to join the EU as full members. In addition, the first two countries were granted candidate status for EU membership.

Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus took a different path, choosing a relatively neutral and certainly pragmatic positions on the issue of rapprochement with the EU. In addition, Belarus suspended its participation in the initiative in response to the sanctions, preferring interaction with Russia and China. As for the future of the Eastern Partnership, the initiative may lose its relevance after the accession to the EU of the two states that have embarked on a course of European integration. However, Ukraine and Moldova are not expected to acquire membership in the coming years due to the need to carry out large-scale reforms. The official Minsk will not return to the programme in the near future, as the EU has imposed new sanctions on the country for complicity in the war against Ukraine, even if the EaP remains open for its citizens. The situation may

further change radically only in the case of a change of power on a democratic basis. Azerbaijan is likely to maintain the status quo in its interaction with the EU within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, balancing between East and West. Cooperation between Baku and Brussels will continue to focus on economic and energy sectors.

The prospect of further research on this topic is to consider the experience of other countries or regions of the world in cooperation with the European Union. In addition, this study can serve as a reference point for studying the problems of European integration and the EU policy towards the post-Soviet states.

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Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Conflict Ukraine

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Abstract: *This article deals with the effectiveness of a potential Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the case of Ukraine. A framework of common factors, which can either influence the effectiveness of a commission positively or negatively, is provided by analysing the cases of TRCs which were very successful and by considering the factors which contributed to their success, as well as the less successful cases and the factors which contributed to their lack of success. Subsequently, the previous ways truth and reconciliation have been addressed in the case of Ukraine is explored before the potential effectiveness of a future TRC in Ukraine is considered. The future of the conflict remains in the balance, as does the future of the post-conflict environment. However, a TRC in the Ukrainian case is highly possible as positive factors such as a broader transitional justice strategy and international support for post conflict reconstruction are important. This is also true for the negative factors, such as potential Western war fatigue or weariness, a potentially disengaged and/or distrustful society, especially if the TRC fails to be politically independent. Much will depend on the staff of the TRC and the procedures they follow.*

Keywords: ***Ukraine, Donbass, conflict, peace, truth, reconciliation***

Introduction

This article deals with the effectiveness of a potential future Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the case of Ukraine. The events of Euromaidan and the subsequent conflict, including notable Russian aggression, are well known and matters of record. What had developed in the East of Ukraine was sometimes termed a frozen conflict (Grossman 2018; Legucka 2017; Rojansky 2016), although this terminology has been disputed at least as much as it has

been supported (De Waal & Von Twickel 2020; Fournier 2018). However, the conflict which occurred between 2014 and 2022 (termed Ukraine's unnamed war), ultimately laid the foundation for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Arel & Driscoll 2022). Russia's justification for launching the full-scale invasion centred on claims of threat from the West, but Russia also explicitly named the genocide of the people of Donbas, the illegitimacy of the Ukrainian regime and its Nazi character as causes of the war (Kumankov 2023). Such claims, coming almost a decade after the events of 2014, and after almost a decade of localised conflict, highlight the question of how to reintegrate those who have not been living under Kyiv's rule for a considerable amount of time.

The position of the Ukrainian government has been clear: all land must be de-occupied (Zelensky 2022), and 1991 borders must be returned (Dex 2022); notably, this is a position with which the now deceased Russian opposition leader Navalny also eventually concurred (Pelechaty 2023). The Ukrainian leadership has been clear that Russia must be brought to justice throughout the war (Maupas 2023; Politi 2022). However, previous cases, such as post-conflict former Yugoslav states (Clark 2013; Rovcanin 2021), indicate that justice alone is not enough. Therefore, this article considers a potential Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the case of Ukraine and its possible effectiveness. The idea of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and how it might contribute towards a lasting peace has received little attention, with the issue of Peace, Truth, and Reconciliation in Ukraine being discussed at Berkley, for example (BCRPWA 2016).

The focus of this article is on a potential future TRC in the East of Ukraine. Importantly, the most significant violence has taken place in the East and its residents have been living under the so-called people's republics; and as such, it is where a truth and reconciliation commission may be most needed. However, if Crimea is one day returned to Ukrainian control, a self-declared goal towards which the Ukrainian government is planning (Neukam 2023; Petrenko 2023), a truth and reconciliation commission will certainly be required there too. While some details of its needs, design and realisation may differ, in principle the foundational approach ought to be fundamentally similar.

In order to answer the research question, several issues must be worked through – starting with the situation in Ukraine and moving on to provide a framework of effectiveness for TRCs. By analysing the cases of TRCs which were very successful and considering the factors which contributed to their success, as well as the less successful cases and the factors which contributed to their lack of success, it is possible to provide a framework of common factors which can either influence the effectiveness of a commission positively or negatively. Subsequently, the previous ways truth and reconciliation has been addressed in the case of Ukraine are considered, despite these having been insufficient undertakings. Finally, the potential effectiveness of a TRC in

Ukraine is considered. Although Ukraine is currently some distance from being a post-conflict state, it is important to consider such issues ahead of time – that is, beginning a TRC in the post-conflict environment may well be too late to produce optimal results.

The conflict in Eastern Ukraine

Following the violent downfall of the Yanukovych government during 'the Euromaidan' in February 2014, and the secessions and Russia's annexations of the Crimean autonomy and Sevastopol city in March 2014 with the help of Russian military intervention, a conflict emerged in Donbas (Katchanovski 2016). At that time, pro-Russian separatists, with direct involvement of groups of armed Russians, seized power in most of Donbas (the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions) and, in early April 2014, proclaimed the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) (Katchanovski 2016).

The conflict in the following years saw a high level of irregular forces. Some conceptualised Ukraine's response, which relied heavily on 'volunteer battalions' as a crowdsourced war (Hunter 2018). The self-organised paramilitary groups which came to be known as volunteer battalions were considered to be the first to the frontlines, the significance of their role in countering aggression and shaping Ukraine's future both in terms of social change and reform of the security and defence sector was also noted (Bulakh, Senkiv & Teperik 2017). However, once the conflict had approached a stalemate, gaining control of the volunteer battalions became a top priority for the Ukrainian government (Käihkö 2018). The state did experience some success in its attempts to rein in the militias by undermining, co-opting, incorporating and coercing them; however, the volunteers continued to play a role in both Ukrainian society and the security sector for the unforeseeable future (Käihkö 2018). Similarly, Ukraine became a training ground for Russian PMCs, allowing them to prepare PMCs for future missions in Syria (Sukhankin 2019).

The conflict which occurred between 2014 and 2022, termed Ukraine's Unnamed War, ultimately laid the foundation for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Arel & Driscoll 2022). Russia's justification for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine included descriptions of the west as challenging Russia's unique spiritual values and revising the results of the Second World War, as well as carrying the wrong values, therefore posing a threat to Russian values, culture and civilisation (Kumankov 2023). In addition to the threat from the West, Russia also named the genocide of the people of Donbass, the illegitimacy of the Ukrainian regime and its Nazi character as causes of the war (Kumankov 2023).

The length and complexity of the conflict which occurred in Eastern Ukraine means that should Ukraine be successful in retaking control of the territory, questions about how to reintegrate the territory and the people must be an-

swered. As in the case of Crimea, it is simply impossible to punish everyone (Brennan & Kuklychev 2023). This is where a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) could form part of the solution. The main goals of a TRC are typically 'to discover, clarify, and formally acknowledge past abuses; to address the needs of victims; to "counter impunity" and advance individual accountability; to outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms; and to promote reconciliation and reduce conflict over the past' (Hayner 2011: 21). To greater or lesser extents, it is possible to see how all of these may be applicable to the Ukrainian case. Some victims and survivors may find that a truth commission does not so much tell them new truths as formally recognise and acknowledge what has been denied before (Hayner 2011: 21). Ukraine and Ukrainians could undoubtedly benefit from such a process.

A TRC could help address such issues as the mutually exclusive identities and ideologies which developed in Ukraine out of differing perspectives on the past, Russia's role in Ukrainian history and the future development of relations with the West (Matveeva 2016). Other causes of grievances with the government in Kyiv may have included the institutional design of Ukraine, which has been argued to have been unfavourable to the Russian population in the East and Southeast of the country (Loshkariov & Sushentsov 2016). Adverse views on the Euromaidan protests also contributed to the establishment of alternative authorities in regions where the Ukrainian government lacked a monopoly on the use of force (Loshkariov & Sushentsov 2016). Other research has indicated that ethnic identity does not produce polarised preferences in Donbass, but it is a relevant factor in shaping political attitudes (Giuliano 2018). Rather than Russian language or pro-Russian foreign policy issues, it also seemed that local concerns, exacerbated by perceived abandonment by Kyiv, motivated local residents to support separatism (Giuliano 2018).

It is also important to note that for those who supported the government in Kyiv and the realignment of the country in international relations and other reforms, the actions of individuals often created a deep psychological feeling of betrayal – both in Crimea (Sheremet 2014) and the east of the country (Interfax-Ukraine 2014). Such feelings are rarely contained to high profile cases of passport burning (Sheremet 2014) or police crossing over to work with the separatist republics, indeed public intellectuals can fall victim to allegations that they are traitors (Zaharchenko 2018). The difficulty of ending the war and embracing separatist regions that many see as a 'hive of traitors' has been noted (Dixon & Gryvnyak 2020).

In the Ukrainian case, there is clearly much for the citizenry to process. Some may argue that justice will be enough, especially given the ICJ case of Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation: 32 States intervening) (ICJ 2023). However, previous cases indicate that justice alone is not sufficient. For

example, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has operated since 1993, but more recently the lack of non-judicial mechanisms for determining the facts has drawn criticism (Rovcanin 2021); moreover, there has been growing recognition within BiH that it is necessary to think outside the retributive justice box and to explore other truth-seeking options (Clark 2013). What the Yugoslav case clearly shows is that retributive justice alone is unlikely to be sufficient. While Bosnia was largely the victim of the Yugoslav wars and retributive justice often focuses on the perpetrators, truth-seeking is still needed; it remains important, especially for the victims.

The Ukrainian case, as the largest and highest profile conflict in Europe since WWII, represents a highly suitable case to explore the effectiveness of TRCs. Although Ukraine is currently still far from being a post-conflict state, it is important to consider such issues ahead of time, as only beginning to consider a TRC in the post-conflict environment may well be too late to produce optimal results. Doing so also allows for the prediction of factors which may influence the effectiveness of a commission positively and negatively. Heading into the creation of any TRC, these factors ought to be borne in mind and actively considered throughout the process in order to realise the best possible results.

Framework of effectiveness

The primary concern of this article is the effectiveness of truth and reconciliation commissions and how these issues are likely to manifest in the case of Ukraine. Although the focus here is on the Ukrainian case, public debate about whether or not truth and reconciliation commissions really work and their continued establishment have been notable developments – with more than 40 countries establishing them in the last three decades (Ibhawoh 2019). Indeed, the growth of truth and reconciliation commissions is so marked that articles have been written solely to explore their increased popularity (Parker 2007). Furthermore, as Wiebelhaus-Brahm (2010: 3) outlined, 'over the past twenty years, a growing consensus has developed that the truth commission can be an effective tool in the construction of a post-conflict society that is more democratic and more respectful of human rights'. The popularity of TRCs suggests that they ought to be considered in cases of conflict; however, in order to address the effectiveness of TRCs, it is important to first consider the definition, purpose and context of TRCs.

A truth commission is a temporary body established with an official mandate to investigate past human rights violations, identify the patterns and causes of violence, and publish a final report through a politically autonomous procedure (Bakiner 2016: 24). There are five fundamental characteristics that distinguish a truth commission. Firstly, it operates for a limited period of time; secondly, it publishes a final report summarising the main findings and making recom-

mendations; thirdly, it examines a limited number of past events and violations, including patterns, causes and consequences, that occurred over a period of time; fourthly, it enjoys autonomy from direct intervention by political actors; finally, it must be official in character, meaning that a state institution or an international organisation authorises the commissioners to undertake the truth-finding task (Bakiner 2016: 24–26). The legal mandate must include the types of violations to be investigated; the time period to be examined; the parties to be examined; the territory where violations took place (González & Varney 2013: 25). Furthermore, the legal framework needs to be both strong and flexible (González & Varney 2013: 25). Functions may include gathering information, conducting educational outreach activities, offering policy proposals, supporting the justice system and promoting communal or national reconciliation (González & Varney 2013: 23–24).

The main goals of a TRC are typically 'to discover, clarify, and formally acknowledge past abuses; to address the needs of victims; to "counter impunity" and advance individual accountability; to outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms; and to promote reconciliation and reduce conflict over the past' (Hayner 2011: 20). The objectives of TRCs tend to be the establishment and explanation of facts; protection, recognition and restoration of the rights of victims; and positive social and political change (González & Varney 2013: 23). However, it is important to note that the context is essential, as such measuring success is difficult and usually means judging a truth commission on its own terms (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2010: 8). When considering the context, some have separated TRC into transitional and non-transitional truth commissions (Bakiner 2016: 35); however, there is greater possible variety in transitional justice context: ongoing conflict, fragile state, occupied territory, pacted transition, successor government, consolidated democracy (Destrooper, Gissel & Carlson 2023). The most likely to apply to Ukraine are ongoing conflict, with conflicted state and very contested political authorities; fragile state, with contested political authority; or occupied territory, with the state occupied and political authority imposed and contested (Destrooper, Gissel & Carlson 2023).

The issue of the effectiveness of TRCs cannot be addressed in a meaningful and systematic way without providing a framework within which to consider the factors that influence the effectiveness of TRCs. Despite the popularity of and broad international consensus on the multiple positive effects of TRCs, assessing their effectiveness can be challenging due to the fact that there are virtually no established mechanisms for measuring or assessing the overall success of the commissions in achieving their stated objectives (Hirsch, MacKenzie & Sesay 2012). In order to provide a framework of effectiveness, successful and unsuccessful (or less successful) cases are reflected on. The factors which contributed towards their success, or proved to be barriers to their success, require drawing out of these previous cases. Having reflected on these cases

and relevant factors, a summary of the factors influencing the effectiveness of TRCs is provided.

Success

Firstly, the successful cases of TRCs are reflected on, with a focus on which factors contributed towards their success. The five strongest truth commissions have been judged to be South Africa, Guatemala, Peru, Timor-Leste and Morocco (Hayner 2011: 27). Even among these successful cases, South Africa is widely viewed as having set the standards for truth and reconciliation commissions, as in South Africa's publicly televised TRC proceedings, sometimes dismissed as the 'Kleenex Commission', white perpetrators and black victims came face-to-face (Ibhawoh 2019). A particular element of the TRC's success was its ability to generate a high degree of civil society mobilisation and public debate (Bakiner 2016: 170). The effects of this can be seen in the scale of testimonies: the commission took testimony from over 21,000 victims and witnesses, 2,000 publicly; indeed, the media coverage was intense with print, radio and television covering the commission daily (Hayner 2011: 28). Innovative measures included these public hearings, but also thematic and institutional hearings, focusing on specific incidents, contexts and professional sectors (Bakiner 2016: 172). It is also important that before entering government the ANC set up commissions to investigate its own conduct during apartheid, being highly critical of the rights violations committed by the liberation forces in various internment camps and elsewhere in South Africa (Christie 2000: 34).

The TRC in Guatemala took place following a brutal 36-year-long war which saw 5,000 persons disappear, more than 600 highland villages wiped off the map, 200,000 Guatemalan refugees flee to Mexico and more than 1 million Guatemalans internally displaced (Ross 2004). The commission was controversial throughout its existence, but after working for 18 months it produced its final report, 'Memory of Silence' in February 1999 (Ross 2004). Interestingly, the TRC in Guatemala was given a weak mandate, without even the power of subpoena, but turned the ambiguity of its founding documents into a strength and 'reinvigorated the struggles for truth and accountability, despite successive governments' inattention to the findings and recommendations' (Bakiner 2016: 173–175). The Guatemalan case shows the strength of an engaged and interested civil society, through which success can be found without particular interest or engagement from the government. The engagement and interest of civil society may be fostered in different ways, for example by establishing dialogue with civil society as a matter of urgency, in particular victims' organisations (González & Varney 2013).

In Peru's case, a TRC was established in 2001, following twenty years of internal armed conflict between guerrilla groups, the *rondas campesinas* (armed

peasant patrols) and the Peruvian armed forces (Laplante & Theidon 2007). The conflict saw the government utilise draconian legal measures, paramilitary tactics, constitution rewrites, as well as political parties and other institutional intermediaries dismantled. There were no peace negotiations between the government and the guerrillas because Sendero had been largely defeated (Laplante & Theidon 2007). The circumstances did not seem ideal, yet the TRC produced results. There were several notable elements of the success of Peru's TRC: the size of the work (approximately 17,000 statements collected), the depth of the studies undertaken, as well as the fact that hearings were held in public (Hayner 2011: 36–39). It is also notable that Peru's TRC set out to produce a broad social historical contextualisation of political violence and violations, with commission chair Salomón Lerner stating that 'in a country like ours, the struggle against forgetting is a powerful form of doing justice' (Bakiner 2016: 195).

Indonesia first invaded Timor-Leste on 7 December 1975, with military clashes continuing on a large scale until 1979 and rebellion against Indonesian rule continuing until 1999 (Stahn 2001). From January 1999, pro-Indonesian militia, supported by Indonesian security forces, used violence, threats and intimidation to try to influence the independence referendum. When the referendum did not produce the desired outcome, an estimated one thousand supporters of independence were killed, with hundreds of thousands fleeing their homes or being forcibly expelled to Indonesia (Stahn 2001). It is important to note that the violence included murders, assaults, rapes and torture, combined with widespread arson, looting and plunder. It is also important to note that it was the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) which established the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CRTR) (Stahn 2001). Again, the situation looked incredibly challenging for the commission, yet it produced positive results. As in other cases, Timor-Leste saw public hearings and a huge body of work, 7,669 statements were collected, meaning the commission had contact with 1% of the population. This case is unusual in that it was driven by the UN, but this shows the potential importance of the international community. It is an important lesson that international involvement can be a positive, especially when a country has a dependence on foreign aid (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2010: 151).

In Morocco, King Mohammed VI established the Moroccan Equity and Reconciliation Commission with the purpose of investigating the abuses during the reign of his father, Hassan II (Bakiner 2016: 38). Civil society was suspicious of the son's attempts at reform along with peace and reconciliation; instead, former political prisoners responded with their own Forum for truth and Equity (Slyomovics 2001). In 2003, the Advisory Council on Human Rights (CCDH) finally recommended the creation of a truth commission, with the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (*Instance Équité et Réconciliation, IER*) officially cre-

ated in January 2004. A seemingly unwilling government does not seem likely to produce success, but the efforts of civil society did much to produce results. The success of the Moroccan commission saw several factors which were also present in other successful cases. These include public hearings with victim hearings televised by Al Jazeera, a large staff of over three hundred and a large number of submissions received (13,000 written submissions) (Hayner 2011: 42–44).

Some clear patterns emerge within these five most successful cases of TRC. Primarily, the interest, and ideally trust, of the public must be won. This can be achieved by establishing transparent procedures for research and establishing dialogue with civil society, in particular victims' organisations (González & Varney 2013). Relatedly, a willingness to hold public hearings was noted in almost all cases, as was a large (ideally talented) team. Also, a huge amount of work must be undertaken in terms of scope and depth of research. Other relatively successful examples also illustrate this – for example, the final report of Siera Leone's TRC which was 5,000 pages long, 3,500 pages of which were devoted to testimonies (Bakiner 2016: 179). In general, this huge undertaking requires a considerable staff, which must then undertake a huge amount of work both in scope and depth of research, but also in facilitating a massive amount of testimony, which should be made public. Furthermore, while this task is considerable, it cannot be an isolated undertaking, as truth commissions are most effective when integrated in a comprehensive transitional justice strategy that includes reparation policies, criminal prosecutions and institutional reforms (González & Varney 2013).

The staffing of TRCs is of considerable importance. Hayner (2011: 211) argues that 'perhaps more than any other single factor, the person or persons selected to manage a truth commission will determine its ultimate success or failure'. Furthermore, any commission will have to design a system to gather, organise and evaluate a very large amount of information; they will have to create their own operating rules and procedures, including what cases to cover, how to collect data, due-process rules and procedures, and the relationship with the public (Hayner 2011: 218). The TRC will need to create an organisational structure and set about filling these roles with members who possess excellent moral and professional reputations, and establishing transparent procedures for research (González & Varney 2013).

The commonalities of the successful cases have been revealing, but there are also those issues which appeared to lack any particular pattern. The power to grant reparations, for example, may appear in some cases and not in others. Such decisions are likely to be part of the larger scope of transitional justice and may not fall squarely on the TRC. However, truth commissions must have several powers to operate well: investigatory powers, while respecting procedural rights; power of compulsion; power to undertake forensic procedures; power to oblige cooperation; power to conduct public hearings; protection of witnesses; protection of commissioners; and the publicity of report (González & Varney 2013: 26y–27).

Failure

Having explored the successful cases of TRCs, it is time to turn to those which were less successful and identify the weaknesses and barriers which they reveal. Failures of truth commissions tend to fall into two categories: those which fail to publish a final report, so called incomplete commissions; and those that result in failure despite social and political actors' attempts to establish a truth commission, essentially social interest meets a negative government response (Bakiner 2016: 32–33). There is a further danger in that many truth commissions see their recommendations go unenacted (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2010: 15). Furthermore, while some have argued that truth commissions can narrow the range of permissible lies, others have contended that this range of permissible lies is not exactly the truth but more the permissible truth as identified by those in power (Hughes & Kostovicova 2020).

The issue of the truth is one central to the lack of success that some TRCs experience. If it is important that the TRCs seek the truth and offer an outlet to all grievances, then it is no surprise that many view TRCs suspiciously if they seem to be doing the opposite. As a result, some have linked the growth, as well as the success, of TRCs to the government's attempt to hide what they were doing, allowing a revelation of the truth to be therapeutic, but doubting whether this is a recipe which could be so successful in other contexts (Shaw 2005). This can lead to a TRC being selective with the truth, but it can equally lead to the TRC never coming into existence, essentially a case of social interest meeting a negative government response. The latter was the case in Namibia where 'the detainee issue' saw the government decline to launch a TRC, as the issue was still fraught with dangerous potential to embarrass or damage high-ranking officials (Conway 2003). This struggle to exist is perhaps the most significant barrier to a TRC, even some of the successful cases, e.g. Morocco, had to struggle to be approved by the government. If that does not happen then the TRC has fallen at the first hurdle; however, even succeeding in coming into existence is no guarantee as is illustrated by incomplete commissions (Bakiner 2016: 32–33).

There are many ways for incomplete commissions to come to pass. Yugoslavia is one example. The breakup of Yugoslavia was an infamously bloody affair, communities which had lived side by side for decades turned on each other. The intervention of the international community played a role in ending the conflict(s), but once they had formally ended there was still a need to build a lasting peace, reconciliation was badly required in the post-Yugoslav republics. In March 2001, newly-elected President Vojislav Kostunica announced the creation of the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, but when the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was transformed into Serbia and Montenegro in early 2003, the commission was effectively annulled (Hayner 2011: 252). This exam-

ple illustrates how TRCs can simply be nullified by governments if they are not independent and protected, perhaps by international means.

Attempts to promote the protection of TRCs by international means can also lead to problems, as seen in the neighbouring case of Bosnia. The main lessons of the failure of Bosnia's TRC are as follows: an extremely high degree of external intervention can be problematic, such commissions are inherently political projects, the politics of civil society play a very important role in transitional justice projects and, finally, the importance of the politics of transitional justice institutions themselves (Dragovic-Soso 2016). Further examples, such as El Salvador, illustrate that internationally driven efforts tend to produce, at best, more modest results (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2010: 151). This may be due to the fact that many local communities associate the efforts of external peacebuilders with exacting a high moral price (Kostovicova 2023: 128).

These issues require more attention as the very existence of a TRC is in itself political and they are often funded by international means, making this issue very complex. Nevertheless, it is immaterial whether a commission is established by a mandate from the president (as in Argentina and Chile), parliament (as in the Ecuadorian case), or even international bodies, like the United Nations (as in Timor-Leste) (Bakiner 2016: 25). What really matters is that both the operation and final report are independent of the authority that establishes the commission. Crucially, the most significant test is whether the political decision makers in any way influence or alter the content of the final report, either during or after the commission process (Bakiner 2016: 26).

In the Sierra Leonean case, the conflict began in 1991 when a small group of combatants crossed the Liberian border into eastern Sierra Leone. It continued until 2002 and the brutal conflict saw two thirds of Sierra Leone's population displaced and up to 50,000 killed (Mitton 2009). Despite this level of bloodshed and upheaval, it was difficult to find a way to end the conflict. The TRC itself had its origins in the Lomé peace agreement of July 1999, but that peace process quickly collapsed and the resumption of the war delayed establishment of the TRC. Despite legislation that formally provided for its creation in 2000, the TRC proper was not inaugurated until July 2002 (ICG 2002). A large issue was that RUF commanders continued to pursue personal gain through continued conflict or at least by stalling disarmament and demobilisation (Mitton 2009). Management issues, a lack of funding and tensions between the national and international members and between the TRC and the Geneva-based Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) all indicated the likelihood of failure of the TRC. As such, the main factors acting as a barrier to the commission's success were the continuation of conflict, funding and management issues.

In many ways, less successful examples can be more informative than successful ones. The core lessons of the less successful TRCs are that if either of

the parties, or the international community depending on the context, limits or never launches a TRC then the commission fails before it has even begun. Furthermore, as the political independence of a TRC is of the upmost importance, any failure to adhere to this principle can lead to a disengaged and distrustful society; without the support and engagement of society it cannot be a success. Another major issue is the continuation of conflict, which can delay the inauguration of a TRC, but can also indicate that conditions are extremely adverse for the creation of a TRC. Other practical issues, such as funding and management, can result the best practices of the successful TRCs not being replicated. Relatedly, the day-to-day practices may also not confirm to best practices, with evidence given in secret, teams understaffed and limited quantities of evidence collected.

Effectiveness

Having outlined some of the most successful cases of TRCs and considered their commonalities, some patterns emerged. It was found that the TRC must be part of a broader comprehensive transitional justice strategy, part of which must seek the truth and offer an outlet to all grievances. Furthermore, a willingness to hold public hearings was noted in almost all cases. Second, a large and ideally talented team must be organised. Third, a huge amount of work must be undertaken in terms of scope and depth of research. Finally, the interest, and ideally trust, of the public must be won.

Table 1: Sources and Effects on TRC Success

Source	The Parties	The conflict/society	The int'l community	The commission
Positive Effects	Transitional justice strategy	Resolved conflict	Transitional justice strategy	Public hearings
	Empowering of TRC	Interest of society	Empowering of TRC	Large, talented team
	Funding of TRC	Trust of society	Funding of TRC	Large undertaking
Negative Effects	No transitional justice strategy	Continuation of conflict	No transitional justice strategy	Secret evidence
	Limits or never launches TRC	Disengaged society	Limits or never launches TRC	Understaffed team
	Seems political	Distrustful society	Seems political	Limited evidence

Source: Author

Table 1 summarises the factors that influence the effectiveness of a commission positively and negatively. The source of this influence is separated into the parties involved, the conflict, the international community and the commission itself. Some of the points are repeated, as shown by several cases, due to the fact that a comprehensive transitional justice strategy can come from the parties themselves and/or the international community – the same is true of empowering and funding the TRC. The empowerment and funding questions are key to the commission itself being able to provide a large, talented team and undertake large amounts of work.

Previous attempts in Ukraine

The issue of truth and reconciliation has already been present in the case of Ukraine, although these have been insufficient undertakings, which have been neither explicit attempts at a TRC nor particularly successful. However, the state of play for addressing truth and reconciliation is an important consideration; one which must be made before beginning to address the effectiveness of a potential future TRC in Ukraine.

Firstly, it is notable that the issue of truth is not something which has remained unexplored in Ukraine and Ukrainian state building. An important example is that of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance or the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, depending on translation preference. The organisation was founded in 2006 as an agency for historical research and education, becoming an 'active memory agent after the Euromaidan protests' (Nekoliak 2020). The organisation's push for de-communisation was broadly successful, but it also often received negative media attention for its memory politics. A perceived condescension, both at home and abroad, regarding the actions of Ukrainian nationalists during the German occupation of Soviet Ukraine's western territories during the Second World War, was of particular concern (Nekoliak 2020). The de-communisation of Ukraine was also criticised for using 'communist methods' (Coynash 2016).

Efforts to understand history and further truth have already been employed in Ukraine, which suggests that, unlike Sierra Leone for example, there is local popular support for attempts to provide truth and understanding. However, Nuzov (2017) found that rather than advance larger transitional justice goals, the memory laws passed in Ukraine could actually fuel the ideological divide between Ukrainians and between Ukraine and Russia. On the other hand, the findings suggest that truth commissions could help re-establish social trust by having Ukrainians of different ethnicities and professional backgrounds publicly and officially confront, study and acknowledge its traumatic past, including atrocities committed by nationalists and by communists (Nuzov 2017). The fact that an appetite for truth does exist in Ukraine is encouraging;

however, if other techniques have shown tendencies to further polarise, then a Truth and Reconciliation Commission may be able to harness this appetite in a more productive way.

It is important to bear in mind that an imperfect peace is better than a good war (Matveeva 2018: 293). In this vein, in the years following the outbreak of the conflict in the East of Ukraine, in the parts of the Donbass controlled by Ukraine, almost a third supported any compromise if it brought peace, but the prevailing opinion was that efforts should be made to try to reach a compromise but that not all possible compromises would be acceptable (Haran & Yakovlyev 2017: 168). Therefore, in theory and in reality, there was a desire and an acceptance that a perfect peace may not be possible, but all reasonable efforts ought to be made to deliver peace. Whether or not this remains the case by the time the fighting subsides after a significant period of full-scale conflict remains to be seen.

Some steps have already been taken in Ukraine and some steps have been argued for, but there is some movement which may form the basis for some kind of peace and reconciliation organisation in Ukraine. The UN has urged for peacebuilding and reconciliation to begin before the end of the conflict and for it to consider the underlying causes of the conflict (UNHCR & Protection Cluster 2016). Local needs and sources of conflict were stressed to be important in formulating the national response (UNHCR & Protection Cluster 2016). While the full-scale invasion no doubt has had a drastic impact, that need to address underlying causes of contestation and conflict was never dealt with. The efforts which were made bore little fruit, likely due to a lack of funding, commitment and serious political will.

Another relatively fruitless undertaking saw The Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission between Russia and Ukraine with the Mediation of the European Union (TJR) hold four sessions in 2018–2019, they drew attention to a list of proposals concluded through open dialogue between civil society in Ukraine, Russia and the EU (Euromaidan Press 2020). Of particular interest were areas of the implementation of the Minsk Agreement including a return of refugees, independent media and political parties in Donbas. Additionally, other efforts include working with the media to create a website capable of providing information on the work of the TJR Commission in several languages and enabling the populations concerned to contribute to the various peace initiatives; the creation of a Russian-Ukrainian news channel (modelled on Arte) with an independent editorial staff, supported by EU journalists and EU funding; and increased budgets to European agencies in charge of combating fake news and disinformation – in particular – a multilingual version of the EU vs. Disinfo site (Euromaidan Press 2020).[1] This is not to neglect religious reconciliation work, which was no doubt of great importance (Euromaidan Press 2020).

1 https://euvsdisinfo.eu/

The existence of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission between Russia and Ukraine with the Mediation of the European Union (TJR) and the points which are outlined above, although more were suggested, is a sign that thought had been put into truth and reconciliation. However, it seems that the attempts were rather limited. The establishment of high-quality media and the decentralisation of law could have helped with regional concerns in the long term. On the other hand, doing so without establishing a TRC may have been placing the cart before the horse. In general, it is possible to state that Ukraine has seen some attempts at pursuing truth and reconciliation, but that these attempts were rather limited and were neither particularly rigorous nor aligned with best practices.

The potential effectiveness of TRC in Ukraine

Having outlined the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, a framework of effectiveness for TRCs and previous attempts in Ukraine, the potential effectiveness of a future TRC in Ukraine is considered. Firstly, how Ukraine can seek to reproduce factors which influence the effectiveness of a commission positively is examined before moving on to some potential barriers to success and what less successful examples of TRCs can reveal about factors that influence the effectiveness of a commission negatively.

In successful cases the parties and the international community empowered and funded the TRC. Such funding and empowerment may come from the government in Kyiv or the international community, it could even be founded as part of a peace agreement. While many of the early truth commissions were established by presidential decree, there are several examples of truth commissions created through a negotiated peace accord (Hayner 2011: 211). Therefore, the initiative and/or funding may come from Kyiv itself or international partners. The EU has long been debating the cost and the best way to fund the reconstruction of Ukraine (The Economist 2022). Despite the mounting risks and costs, Europe seems to remain committed to the reconstruction of Ukraine (Lynch 2023), this points to support and funding potentially being available for a TRC. This is positive as it was a common factor which influenced the effectiveness of a commission positively.

It was noted that in order to be successful the parties and/or the international community must employ a TRC as part of a broader transitional justice strategy. There is already something of a broader transitional justice strategy, as evidenced by the ICJ case of Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Ukraine v. Russian Federation: 32 States intervening) (ICJ 2023). This case may help to establish facts of the Russian invasion of 2022, but prior to that there may be some sources of contestation. Furthermore, whatever the result of the ICJ case, the

examples of successful truth and reconciliation commissions also indicate that both sides must admit fault – South Africa is a striking example of this. Some issues may include Ukraine's use of unguided rockets that killed civilians (HRW 2014a), and their widespread use of cluster munitions also raised concerns (HRW 2014b). Such issues will certainly need to be addressed in a TRC, or as part of the broader transitional justice strategy.

The context of the broader transitional justice strategy is also important; as previously noted, there is a great variety in transitional justice contexts: ongoing conflict, fragile state, occupied territory, pacted transition, successor government, consolidated democracy (Destrooper, Gissel & Carlson 2023). While a resolved conflict would be most beneficial to the work of a TRC, as contested political authority and conflict are not conducive to the success of a TRC, some other variations, such as frozen conflict or partial occupation, are possible. Indeed, many factors remain outside the scope of Ukrainian society and government. As such, much will depend on the international community, war fortunes and even Russia, directly or indirectly. What remains is to follow best practices and ensure a funded and empowered TRC, one which is truly independent and can do its work unimpeded.

The successful TRCs had large talented teams, which must be funded and supported. However, the executive director or executive secretary, as well as departmental or regional directors, depending on staff size and structure, has been seen to be of central importance (Hayner 2011: 211). Finding someone who is acceptable to all sides of the conflict and the majority of the Ukrainian population will be no easy task, but is vitally important for the success of the commission. Exactly how to go about finding such a person is not straightforward, but finding a respected candidate with a relatively low profile and respect from all sides would be a promising first step. Allowing for a veto to be utilised against problematic characters may well be a way to ensure that a candidate who is least objectional is picked. Broader than a veto would be a clear set of specifications which would allow for a rule-based selection, or barring, of the executive director or executive secretary and other commissioners. Nevertheless, some kind of veto may still be desirable in conjunction with this clear set of specifications

The commission then needs to set about filling the positions in its organisational chart. In this regard, the TRC itself, in order to be credible, will need to select members with excellent moral and professional reputations, guarantee full independence from political interference, establish transparent procedures for research, and establish dialogue with civil society, in particular with victims' organisations (González & Varney 2013). Some credibility building can be done by the commission itself, by selecting moral and professional members, engaging in public outreach and observing a code of conduct.

Once given a mandate and officially established, commissioners must ensure they understand their mandate and objectives before conducting initial outreach with important partners and hiring essential personnel, including senior officers who establish and manage administrative, research and outreach systems (González & Varney 2013: 31). Prior to deployment the commission must also ensure that standards, policies and procedures have been put in place to ensure proper governance and operations, this may include a manual of functions and a work plan (González & Varney 2013: 31). All of these stages, and then the subsequent deployment stage, must be fully independent from political interference, but efforts to disclose and ultimately avoid conflicts of interest are also important.

Once the TRC has been established, staffed and equipped with policies that ensure standards, policies and procedures, then begins a large undertaking of communicating, verbally or through written mediums, with as many people as possible. Several of the most successful cases also underwent in-depth research. Finally, another common feature of successful TRCs was public hearings, which could perhaps be broadcast on television or available online. Ukraine has shown a willingness to engage with these media, as Ukraine has already been noted to crowdsource digital evidence of war crimes (Bergengruen 2022), and has allowed media access to captured Russian soldiers (El Sirgany, Wedeman & Gak 2023).

These best practices are intended to gain the interest and trust of society, essential elements for the TRC to stand a chance of success. However, this will be no mean feat and in order for the commission to fulfil its role, some feelings of betrayal and also regional concerns which led to many feeling abandoned by the government in Kyiv will need to be processed. Concerns over potential Ukrainian ultranationalism, the critical role played by Right Sector at Maidan, dismay over the failure to criticise xenophobic discourse which scapegoated ethnic Russians for Ukraine's problems and the appointment of a former neo-fascist party leader, Andriy Parubiy, to lead the national security and defence council all raised concerns (Giuliano 2018). A truth and reconciliation commission cannot be the only answer to such broad concerns and issues of belonging. However, it absolutely can be a useful element of a broader policy of providing systematic solutions to regional concerns. Other elements may include devolution, celebration of regional differences, embracing bilingualism, providing routes for legitimate complaints (such as ombudsmen and complaint organisations) and shifts in societal attitudes. They may well be able to bridge the divide between feelings of betrayal and abandonment, or at the very least, as TRCs are designed to, begin to voice the previously unspoken. In order to foster the interest and trust of society it may be advantageous to partner with civil society actors, so as to benefit from their engagement, audience and credibility.

Potential barriers to success

Having discussed how the lessons of successful TRCs could be applicable to Ukraine, this section considers some of the potential barriers to successful peace and reconciliation in Ukraine. As noted by Hayner (2011: 210) truth commissions are almost never 'smooth, pleasant, well-managed, well-founded, politically uncomplicated bodies'. The number of problems they face from the methodological to operational, from political to time constraints, mean that even in the best of circumstances, with top-notch managers and sufficient resources, the problems are many and the stress intense (ibid.). It is not possible to predict all the problems which an attempt to build peace, ascertain truth or facilitate reconciliation will face, but by reflecting on the common factors which have been seen to influence the effectiveness of a commission negatively some potential pitfalls can be outlined.

Firstly, in the case of a Russian victory, it is difficult to envisage a truth commission taking place at all. However, transitional justice can occur in the contexts of ongoing conflict and occupied territory (Destrooper, Gissel & Carlson 2023). Therefore, a Russian victory does not preclude such an event, at least in theory. The nature of Russian victory would be decisive though, were Russia to obtain complete victory, i.e. full occupation and subjugation, then a TRC would be unlikely or unlikely to be connected with the truth. There are, however, a spectrum of results which may fall under the umbrella of Russian victory. Some of these results may see elements of Ukrainian territory under Russian control or a frozen conflict develop. In such cases this can still fall under the categories of ongoing conflict, fragile state or occupied territory. While these scenarios fall under aparadigmatic types of transitional justice contexts, they do exist and historical examples from Uganda to East Timor illustrate this fact (ibid). Such contexts undeniably represent a barrier to success, but do not necessarily preclude the establishment of a TRC out of hand.

Secondly, war fatigue and loss of interest may prove to be a significant barrier. While the level of support for Ukraine from the international community has been impressive, there has been a lingering danger of war fatigue or weariness. Officials, such as Deputy Foreign Minister Andrij Melnyk, have warned that Ukraine is fighting Western war fatigue (Karnitschnig 2023). Furthermore, the struggle of governments keeping their citizens committed to the Ukrainian defence is well documented (Jankowicz & Southern 2023). Such concerns may well escalate after the war is won, with foreign countries feeling that they have paid for the defence of Ukraine, and with the situation out of sight it may become out of mind. The rebuilding phase is undoubtedly important, but projects of the ilk of TRCs may appear to be luxuries and either operate in a limited way or never get launched at all. There is double risk in that many local communities associate the efforts of external peacebuilders with exacting a high moral price

(Kostovicova 2023: 128). Whether funding could be obtained from the government in Kyiv or even privately remains to be seen, but international funding seems the best chance for a TRC.

The barriers to success will not cease even if a TRC is eventually launched. A significant factor is likely to be potential issues of a disengaged and/or distrustful society. The issue of polarisation in Ukraine prior to Russia's 2022 invasion was discussed at length (Kuzyk 2019; Mezentsev, Pidgrushnyi & Mezentseva 2015; Torikai 2019). Certainly, it could present one of the largest issues which must be overcome. Broad accusations of extremism in Ukrainian politics, society, media, defence and law enforcement (Byshok 2015), or betrayal (Interfax-Ukraine 2014), may prove a barrier to peace and reconciliation, even the mere perception of extremism could create a sizeable barrier. Actions such as the banning of the Orthodox church (Vorobiov 2024), which some had argued to be a powerful peace actor (Karelska 2019), may also create a perception which is not conducive to the work of a TRC. Academic lenses tend to highlight the formal transitional justice mechanisms expected to deliver reconciliation, but another important element is reconciliation by stealth, i.e. communication between groups, but particularly public discourse in interethnic interactions aligning normatively with reconciliation grounded in mutuality (Kostovicova 2023: 130). Perceived extremism, real or otherwise, is a potential barrier to both formal and informal truth and reconciliation efforts.

Relatedly, any kind of Russian victory clearly poses a threat to the existence of a TRC; however, there is also danger in a Ukrainian victory. For instance, while there may be some appeal in the idea of mirroring Stalin's behaviour in Wroclaw following WWII (Polihonavt 2022), it certainly wouldn't be without problems and it would ultimately undermine Ukraine's efforts to reject communism, Stalinism and all for which they stand. The message of Oleksiy Danilov, secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, that 'it is up to them to get along with us, not us with them' (Real'na gazeta 2022), also reveals attitudes which may make the work of any TRC particularly difficult. Such issues may well see a TRC fall into the same trap as other previous cases. If the position of the authorities is not conducive to the work of a TRC then the commission's results will suffer, but such heavy-handed approaches may also leak into the work of the TRC, threatening a key element: independence.

It already clear that the parties and the international community do have something of a transitional justice strategy, but there are large questions over whether or not to punish wrongdoers, what punishment would be fair or just, and related issues. Prior to the full-scale invasion, Lyubashenko (2020) suggested simply removing criminal liability. While this is in line with what has been discussed in terms of successful peace and reconciliation commissions, it clashed with the previous legalist approach of the Ukrainian authorities and is likely unthinkable after the outbreak of the full-scale war. However, as

previously noted, you simply cannot punish everyone (Brennan & Kuklychev 2023). Furthermore, when considering other transitional justice processes, it often becomes more complicated. Reparations, for example, proved to be the aspect of the South African TRC's reparations plan that was most problematic, as much hinged on the definition of 'victim of gross human rights abuses' set out in the terms of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act (Daly 2002). Other issues, such as memorials and statues, may well prove to be controversial; for example, when Odesa removed a prominent statue of founder Catherine the Great 50.2% of residents wanted it destroyed completely, 36.12% preferred that it stay with a historical explanation, 8.3% voted for it to stay unchanged, while 4.2% wanted it removed to a museum (EuroNews 2022).

The TRC should be part of a broader transitional justice strategy, but attempting to remedy all things puts extreme pressure on the TRC, risks spreading resources too thinly and makes attempting to create the wording of the founding act exceedingly demanding. Clearly, a potential barrier to a TRC in the Ukrainian case is being part of a poor or flawed transitional justice strategy, but equally expecting the TRC to be the transitional justice strategy in its entirety would also be deeply problematic.

Future effectiveness in the Ukrainian case

Having provided a framework of effectiveness, outlined previous attempts at truth and reconciliation in Ukraine, and considered the potential effectiveness of a TRC in Ukraine, as well as the barriers, the question of the future effectiveness in the Ukrainian case needs to be addressed more directly. The issue is that, as noted previously, Ukraine is currently far from being a post-conflict state, meaning that there are many developments still to come. Some issues have resolved themselves; for example the Medvedchuk charges of May 2021 may have caused further divisions (Dickinson 2021). That headache has been resolved with the prisoner swap which removed him from Ukraine altogether (Preussen 2022). Some issues will be resolved, some will appear and others will develop, this should be expected to continue.

The situation is still developing and undoubtedly that is not an ideal time to begin considering a TRC. However, waiting for the ideal moment would mean that the work of a TRC never begins. At this juncture it is possible to consider some lessons from the previous cases and framework outlined here, and take some steps towards considering the future effectiveness of a TRC in the Ukrainian case. The summary of the framework of effectiveness can be seen in the Table 2.

There can be no doubt that much remains unknown, above all the future of the conflict, with potential outcomes including potential frozen conflicts (Toosi 2023), a further cycle of securitisation (Smajljaj 2024) and potential land swaps

Table 2: Sources and Effects on TRC Success

Source	The Parties	The conflict/society	The int'l community	The commission
Positive Effects	Transitional justice strategy	Resolved conflict	Transitional justice strategy	Public hearings
	Empowering of TRC	Interest of society	Empowering of TRC	Large, talented team
	Funding of TRC	Trust of society	Funding of TRC	Large undertaking
Negative Effects	No transitional justice strategy	Continuation of conflict	No transitional justice strategy	Secret evidence
	Limits or never launches TRC	Disengaged society	Limits or never launches TRC	Understaffed team
	Seems political	Distrustful society	Seems political	Limited evidence

Source: Author

(Cameron 2024), which may prove difficult (Walt 2024). However, much is still possible and controllable. The launching, funding and empowering of a TRC, the makeup of the staff, the organisational structure, the best practices outlined and the outreach to society are all very much controllable. The preparations should begin as soon as possible, at least at the conceptual level, waiting for the end of the conflict is not a luxury which is available.

Conclusion

This article has dealt with the effectiveness of a potential future Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the case of Ukraine. By analysing the cases of TRCs which were successful and considering the factors which contributed to their success, as well as the less successful cases and the factors which contributed to their lack of success, a framework of common factors which can either influence the effectiveness of a commission positively or negatively was provided. Subsequently, the previous ways truth and reconciliation has been addressed in the case of Ukraine were considered, although (importantly) these have been insufficient undertakings. Finally, the potential effectiveness of a TRC in Ukraine was considered. Although Ukraine is currently some time away from being a post-conflict state, it was important to consider such issues ahead of time, only beginning to consider a TRC in the post-conflict environment may well be too late to produce optimal results.

The future of the conflict remains in the balance, as does the future of the post-conflict environment. There was positive evidence in that there are signs of being part of a broader transitional justice strategy and international support for post conflict reconstruction pointing to support and funding potentially being available for a TRC. However, more negative evidence was also present which pointed towards risks of Western war fatigue or weariness, and significant risks related to a disengaged and/or distrustful society, especially if the TRC fails to be politically independent. Much will depend on the exact members of staff who could work on the commission, the guidelines and procedures followed and how successfully their work is undertaken.

The future of a TRC in Ukraine is highly possible, but the future effectiveness remains in the balance. The results of the conflict will be decisive and the end does not yet appear to be in sight. However, indications of a broader transitional justice strategy, as well as international support and funding, suggest that any TRC would have a real chance. In such a case, reflecting on the common factors, both positive and negative, as well as best practices, is clearly valuable.

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