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RETHINKING MEDIA DIPLOMACY AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TOWARDS A NEW CONCEPT: DIGITAL MEDIA DIPLOMACY

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Abstract: *Modern digital media have enabled the president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, to talk to foreign parliaments while his country is at war. Zelensky's virtual communications are not aimed at enhancing Ukraine's international image, as in traditional forms of public diplomacy; rather, they seek to obtain military assistance and reach a mutually beneficial outcome for his country. These, however, are activities of media diplomacy, a concept that scholars have abandoned over the last two decades in favour of public diplomacy. Through a critical review, this study examines the division between these concepts and other related concepts and analyses the role of the media in international communications, including those in times of war. The widespread use of technology and social media, as well as the specific diplomatic communications that have allowed Zelensky to talk to the world, have led to the conclusion that the current concepts of media diplomacy, public diplomacy, and digital diplomacy are not appropriate in the current circumstances. Therefore, a new concept is proposed: digital media diplomacy.*

Keywords: Media diplomacy, Public diplomacy, Digital diplomacy, Mediatization, Zelensky, Ukraine.

Introduction

Describing the media landscape more than five decades ago, Marshall McLuhan (1962) emphasized that the world has become a "global village". At that time, this seemed like a prediction, but today this concept is already part of everyday life. This has been achieved because of the rapid development of information technology and worldwide media, where globalization has developed into the "global village" (Dalgish, 2006). Today, technology shapes our world (Fu, 2019): digital technologies are used for political and social mobilization, and social media have influenced young people to consume more information (Newman, 2021). With these

modern technologies and media, McLuhan's "global village" has become a "global theater" (Ralón, 2017).

In this global "village" or "theatre", state and non-state actors communicate political messages transmitted via the media, including between countries that do not have diplomatic relations with each other (Saliu, 2018; Saliu & Llunji, 2022) or communicate publicly with state actors of other countries even in times of war. Heads of state usually focus on addressing their own citizens, but they also often mention international issues and such statements have an impact both at home and abroad (Zarabozo, 2020), especially as these are often related to populist foreign policy approaches (Bustinduy, 2022). Political actors, meanwhile, communicate on two dimensions. The first dimension is the level of universality, where the head of state or government communicates on issues of universal value; the second dimension is where the political leader of a country can be perceived as a prominent and visible national icon (Peres et al., 2020). In addition, nowadays political actors use technology to communicate with foreign publics (Manor, 2019).

Volodymyr Zelensky's communications with the parliaments of Western democracies during the ongoing conflict can be considered as being of this nature. Of course, in addition to military assistance, these communications seek to protect Ukraine from Russian aggression. The transformative power of modern communications has meant that, despite not moving physically from Ukraine, Zelensky has been able to address the parliaments of several Western countries, such as the United Kingdom's House of Commons (BBC, 2022), the United States Congress (Wolf et al., 2022), and France's National Assembly (France24, 2022), etc. Through the media, Internet, and social media platforms, Zelensky has been able to communicate in real-time with the leaders of Western countries, conducting virtual diplomacy by communicating directly with global audiences and foreign parliaments. At the same time, these initiatives emphasize his commitment to his country by remaining there in person rather than travelling abroad during wartime.

For this reason, Zelensky's communications are a new phenomenon in international communications and diplomacy. According to studies conducted in this field over the last 20 years, these activities would generally have been viewed as *public diplomacy*, a concept

frequently used by researchers in international communications. However, as will be argued in this paper, Zelensky's communication methods should not be considered public diplomacy, but rather as *media diplomacy*, a concept which has been abandoned by researchers over the last two decades. For this reason, the aim of the paper is to analyse Zelensky's communication activities during the war and to put them into a paradigm (Kuhn, 2012). The main research question arises from this objective, which is: What are the specifics of international political communications that have appeared and reappeared in the case of Zelensky's public communications during the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war?

To answer this question, the following parts of this paper will explain the concepts of media diplomacy and public diplomacy, as well as the differences between them and the connection with digital diplomacy. This will be done through the critical review and framing method, with these critical explanations made by analysing the most representative literature from the most cited authors of these concepts. In fact, the essential studies for media diplomacy are those written before the year 2000. From January 2000 to April 2022, journals published by Sage Publishing[i] had only three articles with *media diplomacy* in the title and 95 with *public diplomacy*, while journals published by Taylor & Francis[ii] during the same period have only two articles with *media diplomacy* in the title and 180 with *public diplomacy*. However, the scope of work is not limited to just these two publishing houses; the most representative studies for the field and the problem have been analysed.

In addition, to deepen the argumentation of this abandoned concept that has reappeared with the war in Ukraine, some historical cases of media diplomacy will be given. These examples are selected according to the framing method, which involves selecting aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text. This is done in such a way as to promote a particular definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993, p. 52): frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest solutions (Entman, 1993, 2004; Redden, 2011). As a research paradigm, framing helps to illuminate normative and empirical contradictions especially in mass communication, political communication, and media analysis (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999).

1. The meaning of media diplomacy and related concepts

1.1. The meaning of media diplomacy

Diplomacy used to be highly secretive, especially with regard to diplomats' personal abilities to communicate and negotiate. However, when Britain's Foreign Minister, Lord Palmerston, learnt how the telegraph worked in 1860, his reaction was: "this is the end of diplomacy" (Washburn, 1978). In this case, the telegraph was presented as a medium which carries the message from one interlocutor to another over a long distance. However, media and diplomacy are usually deemed to be "two different types of communication which run along different paths" (Cohen, 1986, p. 6). Meanwhile, mass media provides public information related to foreign developments, while diplomacy operates through confidential conversations between governments via formal channels, statements, and attitudes. Information plays a primary role in international relations, either as a tool of communication between individuals or as a tool of understanding and familiarization between peoples and nations (Masmoudi, 1981).

However, diplomacy has long been public, in other words, the message addressed to a foreign country or government can be released publicly. In this sense, media participation in diplomacy sometimes keeps sensitive information secret, as couriers of diplomatic messages, but sometimes also creates diplomatic incidents or deliberate manipulations to achieve an intended goal (Ramaprasad, 1983, p. 73). Media diplomacy reached prominence in the 19th century when the French, British and American press of the time began to pay attention to foreign information (Cohen, 1986); however, "concepts and visualization of media diplomacy have been scantily studied from an international communication perspective" (Lim, 2017, p. 11).

Indeed, in the current era of widespread access to information and global media coverage, political leaders can communicate a country's foreign policy interests to domestic audiences through promoting their own country's interests; at the same time, they are trying to design, manage, and control their own public image (Peres et al., 2020). Such communication increasingly empowers the global society while simultaneously affirming ethnocentrism

(Baraldi, 2006). These forms of communication are sometimes used to counter propaganda, but also even to spread it (Modjtahedi & Szpunar, 2022).

Media diplomacy implies the role of the media in international communications and international relations (Lim, 2017; Shinar, 2000; Cohen, 1986). It includes the media as a conduit for conveying the diplomatic message from state actors to foreign state actors and audiences to achieve specific results: "media diplomacy concerns how the media link policymakers to foreign governments and the public" (Cohen, 1986, p. 8). Among the most accepted definitions is that of Eytan Gilboa (2001), which is also the most cited in international communications.[iii] According to Gilboa, media diplomacy means using the media for political purposes to transmit messages and attitudes to global state and non-state actors to reach international consensus. "Media diplomacy refers to officials' uses of the media to communicate with state and non-state actors, to build confidence and advance negotiations, and to mobilize public support for agreements" (Gilboa, 2001, p. 10).

Nevertheless, media diplomacy is often confused with – and also interacts with – similar concepts, primarily public diplomacy and digital diplomacy.

1.2. The meaning of public diplomacy

The concept of public diplomacy, coined by Edmund Gullion in 1965, was traditionally understood as dealing with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies (Cull, 2006). Its purpose is to increase the country's international image by exposing the values of that country and bringing economic, political, cultural, and tourist-related benefits (Leonard et al., 2002; Melissen, 2005; Nye, 2004; Gilboa, 2008; Saliu, 2021, 2022). It also involves the communications of state and non-state actors with foreign publics to inform, influence, and engage them in realizing state interests (Nye, 2004; Melissen, 2005; Gilboa, 2008; Gregory, 2011; Cull, 2008, 2012; Pamment, 2013, 2016a; Saliu, 2020a, 2020b). In other words, the state and non-state actors of a country address foreign audiences rather than the state actors of foreign countries: "public diplomacy is the art of communicating a country's policies, values and culture to the people of another nation" (Lee & Lin, 2017, p. 1). The objective of public

diplomacy is "to influence a foreign government, by influencing its citizens" (Frederick, 1993, p. 229). These practices are focused on the cultivation of positive public opinion in foreign nations (Golan, Manor & Arceneaux, 2019) and is achieved through various activities, including educational and cultural exchange programs, scholarships, cinematography, and the media, as well as through language programs, sports, and the arts, etc. (Nye, 2004, 2008, 2019; Gilboa, 2008; Snow, 2020; Golan, 2015).

Some scholars place public diplomacy in the field of international relations and diplomacy (Nye, 2004; Melissen, 2005), whereas others believe it belongs in the field of communications and public relations (Ingenhoff, Calamai & Sevin, 2021; Di Martino, 2020; Tam & Kim, 2019; Gilboa, 2008; Saliu, 2022).

According to Eytan Gilboa (2008), Mark Leonard et al., (2002), Joseph Nye (2004, 2019), activities undertaken via public diplomacy to achieve its goals are the following:

- information management, which is a daily and even hourly activity where media is used as a communication channel to convey positive information about the country to foreign audiences;
- strategic communication, which means sending messages to foreign audiences focusing on weekly and monthly activities;
- the establishment of long-term relations, which requires years of activities to achieve understanding and cooperation for common values, including cultural diplomacy, student exchanges and scholarships, the influence of a country's diaspora in the host country, etc.

1.3.The differences between media diplomacy and public diplomacy

Media diplomacy has frequently been confused with public diplomacy (Gilboa, 1998, 2001), but in fact they differ from each other. Gilboa (2001) emphasizes that media diplomacy aims to reach an international agreement where the use of public channels has a rapid effect, while public diplomacy through the media aims to create a friendly climate within a target country and/or enhance the international image of the country over an extended period using the media. As defined by Gilboa, public diplomacy is where "state and non-state actors use the media

and other channels of communication to influence public opinion in foreign societies; while *media diplomacy* is where officials use the media to communicate with actors and to promote conflict resolution" (Gilboa, 2001, p. 1). In other words, this means that the difference has to do with communication actors and communication channels.

In public diplomacy, communicative actors are those state and non-state actors who use the media to influence foreign audiences. In media diplomacy, actors communicating with foreign audiences are only state actors, but not non-state ones.

Regarding the use of communication channels to reach foreign audiences, public diplomacy uses the media as one of many such channels because there are also other ways for direct communications to be realised which are unmediated – for example, exchanges of students and scholars, cultural exchanges, tourism, the diaspora, etc. By contrast, media diplomacy uses only media-based channels and has no other forms of communication: "since public diplomacy treated the media as one of its tools to influence foreign audiences for promoting the foreign policy and affecting their thinking, media diplomacy has received scant likelihood of being regarded as a promising field of study in international communication" (Lim, 2017, p. 13).

Gary Rawnsley (1995) sees the difference between the two concepts in the messages received from the media, i.e. from the audience. According to him, in public diplomacy it is the political actors which send messages through the media and which are addressed to foreign audiences, while in media diplomacy, state actors send messages through the media to the state actors of other countries. Others see this as an intentional move.

Meanwhile, media diplomacy is about using the media only as a communication channel to convey the message to heads of state, governments, and foreign audiences. When a political actor speaks during times of conflict, it should be considered that the actor speaks for a highly heterogeneous public. This requires a message to resonate with certain audiences. As stated by former US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who was the commander of the US forces during Operation Desert Storm (Iraq, 1990), there are multiple audiences. During the operation, he instructed his team staff to be careful when speaking on television because "when we are out there on television, communicating instantaneously around the world, we're talking to five audiences" (Leonard et al., 2002, p. 12). The first group of these listeners, according to Powell, was the reporters who asked questions; the second group was the American television-watching

public; the third group comprised at least 170 foreign governments which were interested in what was being said; the fourth was the enemy, while the fifth group was the American military troops at risk (Leonard et al., 2002).

According to Gilboa (2005, 2001), the use of the media as an instrument of foreign policy and international negotiations encompasses three dimensions: public diplomacy, media diplomacy and media-broker diplomacy. The latter can be defined as "where journalists temporarily assume the role of diplomats and serve as mediators in international negotiations" (Gilboa, 2001, p. 1), while media diplomacy means that a politician seeks to mobilize the support of the world to reach a useful solution for his country in troubled times. Public diplomacy, however, has to do with promoting the country in peacetime.

1.4. The meaning of digital diplomacy

In this age of hypermedia (Deibert, 1997), the widespread use of digital technology has changed the way of doing business, interpersonal social communications, and government communications with the public. Interaction modes have changed and have become more frequent and empowering. In this networked society (Castells, 2009, 2015) and infosphere (Floridi, 2014), narratives and storytelling are at the heart of a nation's identity and image (Lepore, 2019), especially on social media. Politicians and diplomats increasingly use digital technology and social media to spread their messages.

In the age of the Internet and social media, the practice of engaging diplomats in information management has been transformed. Now, political actors, foreign ministries, and diplomats can directly manage this information, whereas in the age of traditional media and in the pre-Internet era, messages which were to be shared publicly had to pass through mass media such as newspapers, radio, and television. Although media have been used in diplomacy for many years, digital diplomacy has received intermittent attention from the field of media studies (Hayden, 2012; Pamment, 2016b). Social media has begun to attract significant and serious interest in the academic world, especially after the political revolutions in the Middle East in 2011 (Bjola & Jiang, 2015).

Digital diplomacy is broadly defined as the use of social media for diplomatic purposes (Bjola, 2015, p. 4). In the first place, it is about the use and management of digital technology in diplomacy, especially social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook (Sharma & Sisodia, 2022). Digital media is even used in international communications and diplomacy to spread stories and to engage political actors, diplomats, and the public with issues of common interest (Pamment, 2016b). In other words, "digital diplomacy is defined as a strategy of managing change through digital tools and virtual collaboration" (Holmes, 2015. p. 15). This has to do with changing previous practices of diplomatic communication, such as engaging diplomats by managing public information themselves, addressing foreign opinions publicly, managing information in international negotiations or crisis management, etc. (Bjola, 2015). Even this aspect can be considered more as a part of public diplomacy, especially when it comes to managing public social media communications in peacetime which also means trying to increase a country's international image or strengthen the brand of the politician who is using them. In other words, "digital diplomacy is now a salient part of public diplomacy" (Wright & Guerrina, 2020, p. 525).

In the first twenty years of the current century, mediatization has become an essential concept not only in the media (Hepp, Breiter & Hasebrink, 2018) but also in modern life, including international communications (Saliu, 2022). This is because everything is mediatized nowadays, including health, war, medicine, science, music, identity, consumption, memory, death, etc. (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014). In general, mediatization is a concept used for the critical analysis of changes in media and communications on the one hand and changes in culture and society on the other (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, p. 197). People today are always online; in January-February 2021, about 93 per cent of Americans were online and/or used the Internet to either communicate with relatives, to purchase goods and services, or to request information (Perrin & Atske, 2021. Conflict and terror are also mediatized and their impact can be experienced on a massive scale when the attacks or skirmishes receive media coverage (Cottle, 2006; Hjarvard, 2001, 2008; Lewis, 2005). Indeed, in essence, terrorism contains a form of communication as spreading fear, panic, and insecurity, especially by using online communications, are the goal of terrorists (Seib & Janbek, 2011).

This mediatization of international communications has further caused physical distances to lose their importance. As mentioned in the introduction, the world has been reduced to a "global village", as demonstrated by Zelensky's virtual appearances in several national parliaments. Now, states, non-state actors, international institutions, social movements, and the 4.5 billion people alive in the world today who have access to the Internet are all visual narrators of global politics (Crilley, Manor & Bjola, 2020).

Debates and studies on global media are not new, while "with the arrival of the Internet, especially social media, many global media around the world have adopted these resources in their potential to break geographical boundaries" (Zhang & Ong'ong'a, 2021, p. 4). So, with digital diplomacy, politicians who have social media accounts (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, etc.) have media that they can manage themselves and send out communications whenever they see fit, without needing to call journalists to give a message or statement.

2. Historical and practical cases of media diplomacy

International information has been growing since the 19th century. *The Times* of London had a war correspondent for the Crimean War in the 1850s, while between 1858-1868, seven London daily newspapers entered into agreements with *Reuters* for news journalism and the *Press Association* began distributing international news to local press (Cohen, 1986). On the eve of World War I, the *Daily Telegraph* had correspondents in Paris, Berlin, St Petersburg, and New York. Television became dominant later, especially after World War II, where greater attention was paid to international information (Cohen, 1986).

During the Cold War, media diplomacy served the nuclear arms race on a global scale. The US and the USSR were involved in a fierce battle to generate negative global perceptions of the other. Thus, in 1957, the Soviet leader Khrushchev promoted a new era of international political communication via an interview with the American television station CBS, in which he argued for a peaceful co-existence (Laurano, 2006). With this instance of media diplomacy, the Soviet secretary in fact sought to clean up – as much as possible – the negative international view of the USSR. This had worsened due to its failure to respect the freedoms of people in Warsaw Pact countries; in 1956, just one year previously, the Soviets had carried out a military

intervention in Hungary. An additional early example in this respect was also given by the American president John F. Kennedy, who, being aware of the importance of media influence and the traditional methods used by the White House, circumvented the journalists and addressed the American public directly, appealing to them to "participate in the presidency". Consequently, the first live television broadcast from the White House was on 25 January 1961, where a room of 418 journalists could ask the President questions thanks to the first use of wireless microphones. 60 million viewers watched that broadcast (Laurano, 2006).

Global TV stations have also created new worldwide opportunities for diplomatic propaganda, misinformation, and manipulation. For instance, political leaders may release a statement which is broadcast directly on local or global TV stations in the hope that what has been said will acquire the dynamics to damage or disrupt the plans of the opposition party. Thus, during the First Gulf War in 1990, the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein made a statement that he allegedly accepted the conditions of the Western allies. This statement was made shortly before the beginning of the field attacks, once all preparations had been made. The sole purpose of the statement was to influence world opinion by saying that a country which had accepted the conditions was being attacked (Gilboa, 2002). For this reason, media – and most importantly television (Newman, 2021) – create instant global diplomatic communication, which has resulted in new challenges, new dilemmas, and insecurities for participants involved in political processes. For political leaders, this includes how to deal with the need for instant responses to situations, as well as how to manage confusing and challenging developments, while at the same time avoiding exposing oneself as a weak leader. All of this needs to be integrated into a single message which appeals to both domestic and foreign audiences (Gilboa, 2002, p. 25-26).

Recently, it has become apparent that designers and advocates of foreign policy receive wide attention primarily due to a straightforward reason: nowadays, any statement uttered in any corner of the world does not need to be shared through traditional diplomatic channels. Nonetheless, thanks to the media, such statements can take off all around the world in a blink of an eye. In fact, foreign policy is also implemented through the media and is not just based on statements from governments, as was the case in the past. A practical example is of American president George W. Bush during a visit to Tanzania in 2008, who, one day after Kosovo's independence was proclaimed, stated to the media that the United States of America supported

this act (ABC News, 2008). "Sometimes, during grave international crises, the media provides the only channel for communication and negotiation between rival actors, or officials often use global television rather than traditional diplomatic channels to deliver messages" (Gilboa, 2001, p. 11). There are many other such examples, as Gilboa outlines:

> During the first phase of the 1979-81 Iran hostage crisis, the United States communicated with the terrorists holding the hostages exclusively through the press; during the 1990-91 Gulf conflict, US Secretary of State James Baker delivered the last ultimatum to Saddam Hussein through CNN, and not through the US Ambassador to Iraq; in January 1998, Iranian President Mohammed Khatami chose CNN to send a conciliatory message to the United States. (Gilboa, 2001, p. 11).

In these times where advanced communication technologies are used, a political statement which affects bilateral or multilateral relations is a direct message from one country to another conveyed in real time, be it to a neighbouring state or to a country on the other side of the world. This bilateral communication can occur even between enemy states, such as Iran and Israel (Shinar, 2000); for example, the media often reports statements from Tehran and the prompt responses from Israel (Pahlavi, 2012). This illustrates that constant communication can occur between countries that have no diplomatic relations, and such communications often occur, albeit conducted at a distance. In February 2009, the prime minister of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, stated in Pristina that Russia would also recognize Kosovo's independence (Top Channel, 2009). The Russian minister of foreign affairs, Sergei Lavrov, reacted immediately. From Moscow, he stated that Russia had not changed its position on that matter. This example demonstrates, as Evan Potter (2002) emphasizes, that increasing the opportunities for access, speed, and abundant dissemination of news and information to a global audience in real-time has made the management of state affairs more complex than ever.

Conclusions

Returning to the example of Volodymyr Zelensky, the communications of the Ukrainian president do not seek to enhance the country's international image for economic or tourism-related purposes; nor do they aim to enhance Ukraine's national brand, or to capture the hearts and minds of foreign audiences, as is commonly aspired to through public diplomacy. Rather,

he seeks military support to counter Russian aggression and reach a favourable outcome for his country, which is typical of media diplomacy. However, scholars have abandoned the concept of media diplomacy over the last decade, perhaps because in peacetime, the main goal is not to reach international agreements (media diplomacy) but to promote a country's image for political, economic and cultural benefits (public diplomacy).

Zelensky's case, therefore, takes us back to media diplomacy. By appearing in virtual form in the parliaments and assemblies of Western democracies in real-time while Ukraine is in a state of war, it can be argued that he is an example of self-managed media diplomacy. However, at present only digital diplomacy can be self-managed in the narrow sense of the word; that is, where the individual actor concerned uses digital media and social media. Since international communications are highly dynamic and are realized in real-time, and also because diplomatic communication channels have been transformed and are now both public and mediated, current concepts such as media diplomacy, public diplomacy and digital diplomacy do not adequately describe this new situation. Therefore, we consider that a new concept, *digital media diplomacy,* describes these new circumstances more realistically.

Another specific detail displayed by these new modes of diplomatic communication is that media have enabled political actors from different countries to communicate specific agendas without needing to travel or to meet each other in person. In this way, foreign policy was communicated directly from a country's seat of power without having to visit their foreign counterparts. In addition, it has also ensured communication between countries that do not have traditional diplomatic relations with each other.

Nowadays, the new concept of *digital media diplomacy* outlined in this study represents a specific contribution to international political communication. Indeed, in going beyond traditional communication channels, it makes foreign policy more agile and more dynamic. It has also removed the barriers of traditional diplomatic communications, allowing a two-way exchange of diplomatic messages even between countries that may not have friendly relations. This marks another dimension of this concept: the transformation of the unidirectional method of disseminating a message to foreign audiences has now been replaced by a genuine bidirectional exchange, facilitated by technology and modern communications. Such dynamics

require that a political or diplomatic actor is ready to convey a diplomatic message by reaching out to various internal and external audiences, as well as to the official governmental representatives of both friendly and unfriendly countries, in order to defend the pragmatism of that particular state. As has been shown in this study, *digital media diplomacy* allows a single message to be transformed into a multi-dimensional form of communication which impacts both domestic and foreign audiences, thus demonstrating its power in the world of foreign policy and international affairs.

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[i] https://journals.sagepub.com/action/doSearch?content=articlesChapters&countTerms=true&target=default&field1=Title&text1=media+diplomacy&field2=AllField&text2=&Ppub=&Ppub=&AfterYear=&BeforeYear=&earlycite=on&access=.

[ii] https://www.tandfonline.com/action/doSearch?field1=Title&text1=public+diplomacy.

[iii] According to Google Scholar, the most cited scholar in the field of media and public diplomacy is Eytan Gilboa, with about 4400 citations.

PROMOTING NORMS OR PROTECTING INTERESTS? THE ROLE OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION'S INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

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Abstract: *The European Union (EU) has been perceived as a normative power (by itself and some others) in the international system. Through this concept, the EU's policies and actions can be aligned with its identity, which is grounded in democratic values. Yet there is often a gap between those values and their practical implementation. The EU's 2021 Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific offers an opportunity to test how well it is positioned to advance democratic norms in the world's most economically dynamic and increasingly geo-politically contested region. This article argues that, while the Strategy reflects the EU's foundational democratic values, it lacks clarity regarding the primacy of those values. As currently framed, the Strategy leaves the EU facing key unresolved democratic dilemmas in its Indo-Pacific engagement. The article concludes that the efficacy of the Strategy as a vehicle for bolstering democracy in the region will hinge on how it is operationalised, which will require confronting these dilemmas and making hard choices, especially between interests and values. Such choices are exemplary of a more general conundrum for the EU as an international organisation with 27 members whose interests often constrain the pursuit of its role as a self-consciously normative actor in international affairs.*

Keywords: European Union, Indo-Pacific region, Democratic values, European Union Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

Introduction

The European Union (EU), unlike other great powers in the international system, does not generally influence states and other actors through the use of military or economic tools but

prefers to draw on the power of norms, rules and values. As a self-consciously normative power, the EU considers itself a bastion of global democracy. Democratic values and principles define its essence as an international organisation and guide its interaction with the rest of the world. Coupled with the rule of law and human rights, they have long underpinned the European integration project. Yet there is often a gap between those values and principles and their implementation in practice when dealing with the realities of international relations.[1]

The EU's 2021 "Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" (hereafter referred to as "the Strategy" and cited as "EU Strategy, 2021") offers an opportunity to test how well it is positioned to play its favoured normative role in bolstering democratic values in the world's most economically dynamic and increasingly geo-politically contested region. This article argues that, while the Strategy's language and contents reflect the EU's foundational democratic values, it lacks conceptual clarity regarding the primacy of those values, especially via-a-vis interests. Strategies involve setting objectives, determining priorities and allocating resources to achieve them. In its current high-level form, the Strategy is deficient on all three levels, primarily because it avoids addressing key challenges and opportunities for advancing democratic norms in the region. In particular, it fails to acknowledge several democratic dilemmas confronting the EU as a normative actor in the Indo-Pacific, which can be summed up in three questions. Does the EU consider the Indo-Pacific to be a region or a concept? Does the Strategy prioritise values or interests? Does the EU favour an essentially rules-based approach to regional order in the Indo-Pacific or one based on both rules and democratic norms? Therefore, the very framing of the Strategy may hamper the EU's intentions to promote its foundational values and fails to make clear what success would look like.

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[1] For example, Balfour (2021) notes that the EU has "constitutionalized the values of democracy and human rights like no other actor . . . including their promotion in its external action". But, while EU leaders "insist there is no question of 'values versus interests' . . . the EU mostly falls short of following through", especially when dealing with great powers, due to "the primacy of stability, a mix of business and energy interests, the need for dialogue with other countries on security matters, and the legacy of historical relations". Similarly, Smith and Youngs (2018: 45) argue that "in recent years the EU's own approaches to global order and international challenges have adopted a more selective or contingent liberalism". See also Pänke (2019) for a novel assessment of the balance between the promotion of norms and interests by framing the EU as a "liberal empire".

The paper concludes that the efficacy of the Strategy as a vehicle for bolstering democracy in the region will hinge on how it is operationalised, which will require hard choices about how to align interests and values. Such choices are exemplary of a more general conundrum for the EU as a self-perceived normative actor in international affairs and as an international organisation with 27 members whose interests often make the EU base its actions on compromises.[2]

The EU as a normative champion of democratic values

The concept of the normative power of Europe—defined and developed by Ian Manners (2002) and grounded in social constructivism—has gained much appreciation not only among scholars but also within EU institutions, as it aligned the freshly defined identity of the EU with its policies, actions, successes and failures. The perception of the EU as a normative power "shields" it from judgements of insignificance in comparison with states as traditional and primary actors in international relations. At the same time, the specificity of the EU creates more expectations regarding its influence in international relations than usually expected of Inter-Governmental Organisations (IGOs). Manners' concept was a response to changes following the creation of the EU that gradually superseded the European Community (EC).[3] François Duchêne's 1972 concept of Europe as a civilian power (referring to the European Economic Community, later known simply as the Economic Community), was no longer applicable with the ongoing political integration in Europe after Maastricht. Manners' idea was a response to that indirectly and directly to Hedley Bull's critique of the civilian power concept. Manners' idea of Europe's normative power is largely embedded in the constructivist approach and particularly in the constructivist explanation of the diffusion of norms (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Manners asserts that the EU's normative power is diffused thanks to six processes and

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[2] For a pithy but scathing critique of the implications of this conundrum, see "On bullshit: Brussels edition," *The Economist*, December 4th 2021.

[3] The European Communities: European Coal and Steel Community, European Economic Community and European Atomic Community. After the Treaty on European Union signed in Maastricht in 1991. the European Economic Community became known as the European Community.

factors: contagion, information diffusion, procedural diffusion, transference, overt diffusion and cultural filters.

According to Manners, the core values for the EU are peace, liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, which are embedded in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) and the Treaty on EU (TEU). Article 2 of the TEU is unequivocal about the values that the EU is founded on: "respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail". These fundamental values are emphasised again in Article 3.5 as definitive of the EU's international role: "In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter". The TFEU, which is the amended version of the Paris Treaty of 1957 that led to the creation of the EEC, provides for rules on the functioning of the EU institutions and members precisely with respect for the principles mentioned in Article 2 of the TEU.

Further development of the integration process in the 21st Century with the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) reinforced the concept of the normative power of the EU but also brought complex challenges related to it: the more integration and supranational elements in the EU, the more contested the concept of Europe as a normative power was becoming. The key challenge is the fact that the EU remains an IGO and not a supranational "state", as the member-states have created the organisation and its policies and actions and, without their governments, the EU would not exist. There are, of course, *sui generis* elements of this international organisation of a highly supranational character (the European Parliament, the EU Commission and the EU Justice Tribunal to give only institutional examples) but it still bears the predominant characteristics of an IGO and not of a state, as the Convention on the Future of the European Union presided over by former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing wanted it to be. The

nature of the EU, with its 27 members (states that have their own preferences, interests and goals in foreign policy) and the organisation itself which has grown into a type of actor previously unknown in global history (whose set of preferences, interests and goals in its common European foreign and security policy is much more difficult to trace and define), makes for a perennial conundrum of non-alignment between these two constitutive elements (members and/vs. the organisation). The weaknesses, lack of clarity and possible omissions of the EU's external strategies usually stem first and foremost from the fact that the promotion of fundamental democratic values and principles of the EU may not always be in line with member states' interests of a political, strategic, military or economic character. Moreover, the enunciated values and principles often become a decoy for realistically constructed national interests. Examples include the EU's promotion of human rights and rule of law as values of its refugee protection system, while nonetheless signing an agreement with the Turkish government[4] and reimbursing Turkey for containing irregular migration flows within its territory (which in itself led to questioning of one of the fundamental human rights—the right to seek and enjoy asylum) (Dagi, 2020).

A normative power works internationally through soft instruments (soft power) and through the promotion of values and principles linked to the particular actor's identity. A normative power does not use traditional means in its international endeavours, such as military power, but builds on recognition of the attractiveness of itself encoded in promoted standards, values, principles and procedures (Skolimowska 2015: 112). What is necessary, therefore, for a normative power to exert influence is not only the self-recognition of the normative significance of the actor but also that of third parties. If the integration process that has led to the current form of the EU was not attractive for non-members, there would be no attempts to join the club. However, a question arises whether the promotion of values, rules, norms, principles, standards, and their diffusion take place due to the fact that they are admired by state actors or rather because they see that the admiration is a *sine qua non* condition of membership or close

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[4] For more information about the bilateral EU-Turkey agreement, see: European Parliament (20 November 2019). Legislative Train: Towards a New Policy on Migration: EU-Turkey Statement and Action Plan.

cooperation.[5] Moreover, to what extent can one divide the significance of the actor's (EU's) normative power from the associated economic or political power? These and other questions need answers which are case-specific, but it is also possible to draw more general conclusions through qualitative case studies, the EU approach to the Indo-Pacific being one of them.

The Indo-Pacific as a geo-politically contested and democratically challenged region

The Indo-Pacific is the world's most important region—and its most puzzling. Depending on definitions, the region accounts for over half the world's population, at least half of the global economy and an even greater percentage of military expenditure. There is much disagreement, however, about what defines the "region": geography; geo-politics; economics; history; and/or culture (Pulikapa and Musaddi, 2021; Heiduk and Wacker, 2020). There is no general consensus about which nations are part of the region, as reflected in the definition in the EU Strategy, which differs from those used by the United States and even from those applied by EU member states in their own strategies for the region. The Indo-Pacific concept is not only confusing but vigorously contested. China insists that the Indo-Pacific does not even exist and that "Asia-Pacific" remains a perfectly appropriate designation for most of the region in question—as does Russia, for the most part (Denisov, Paramonov, Arapova and Safranchuk, 2021). Indeed, only in the past decade has the term gained traction as an expanded alternative to the Asia-Pacific. It is worth recalling why the concept has emerged at all, given that it was rarely used in earlier years. There is general agreement that its impetus has been primarily geo-strategic as a response to the rising power of China. Beijing certainly views the Indo-Pacific reframing of the Asia-Pacific region as an explicit effort to contain its legitimate rise—a view that Russia appears to share. Much commentary about the concept has focused on it in these geo-political terms (Saeed, 2017); Medcalf, 2019; He & Li, 2020; Denisov, Paramonov, Arapova and Safranchuk, 2021). This focus has perhaps underplayed salient democratic

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[5] The notable example is Kosovo: there was little domestic support for the EU rule of law mission EULEX but still a high level of support for possible membership. Can one say that the EU's norms and values were treated as rather instrumental and were internalised only to the extent necessary to sign the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU? That is in line with constructivist view that socialisation and internalisation may be the result of external pressures of various types.

dimensions of the Indo-Pacific formulation. Arguably, its very conceptualisation has been driven by an effort to sustain, defend and extend democracy. While undoubtedly representing a geo-strategic response to the rise of China, this response is one driven by democracies, especially as exemplified in the so-called Quad grouping of the United States, India, Japan and Australia. Viewed in this light, the European Union is to some extent making a "democratic bet" simply by having a policy on the Indo-Pacific (although it has avoided explicitly framing it in such terms).

The broadly democratic impetus behind the emergence of this Indo-Pacific re-conceptualisation is further reinforced by considering why it has steadily eclipsed the Asia-Pacific (Heiduk and Wacker, 2020; Saeed, 2017). The latter concept was also historically constructed, beginning in the Cold War era with the United States as the great power which most prominently connected the Asian and Pacific worlds. From the 1990s, the Asia-Pacific enjoyed positive momentum as a zone of peace and prosperity, led economically by Chinese growth, stabilised geo-politically by American power and connected multilaterally through mechanisms for regional dialogue centred around the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This regional configuration almost organically gave rise to a set of arrangements which could accommodate a range of unlike-minded states. However, continuation of this benign Asia-Pacific strategic environment hinged on the assumption that China would be increasingly integrated in that framework without challenging the loose rules around the region's implicitly "free and open" character. That has not been the case in recent years, at least in the perceptions of the Quad partners and a number of other states.

In this context, the United States adoption of its Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy was effectively an effort to retain the underlying character of the "old" Asia-Pacific by broadening its geographic scope, above all to include India, the world's most populous democracy (United States Department of State, 2019; Poling, 2019; Denisov, Paramonov, Arapova and Safranchuk, 2021). Over the past few years, others who were initially wary of the American move and of the Quad as clumsy efforts to "contain" China, have come to embrace the Indo-Pacific reframing of the region, albeit with a strong emphasis on inclusiveness. The ASEAN Outlook (2019) on the Indo-Pacific stands out in his regard but other states like New

Zealand have moved from sceptics of the concept to embrace it on similar terms to ASEAN (Ardern, 2021).

Neither the "old" Asia-Pacific nor the "new" Indo-Pacific have been regional conceptualisations in which democracies predominate. Rather, they are democratically challenged and contested spaces, but the Asia-Pacific had developed skeletal regional architecture through ASEAN centrality which allowed for peaceful (and prosperous) interaction between often fundamentally unlike-minded states (Yates, 2017). This regional architecture has proven inadequate to manage a fraying of relations between regional great powers, which has precipitated the Indo-Pacific response from the region's democracies. In this context, a key question confronting the EU (and others) in responding to the "new" Indo-Pacific is to what extent it is a democratic project as much as a geo-strategic initiative—while confusingly described as a "region", even though its geographical boundaries lack any consensus definition and its most populous country does not formally recognise the existence of such a region.

The place of democratic values in the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

The EU Strategy is certainly congruent with democratic principles in its language. The introduction to the Strategy explicitly affirms that the EU's increased engagement with the region "will be based on promoting democracy, the rule of law, human rights" (EU Strategy, 2021:1). The first point in the EU's vision for engaging with Indo-Pacific partners is similarly couched in terms of promoting democratic norms, stating that it will seek to: "Solidify and defend the rules-based international order, by promoting inclusive and effective multilateral cooperation based on shared values and principles, including a commitment to respecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law" (EU Strategy, 2021: 3). Moreover, the 18-page public document outlining the Strategy includes numerous direct or indirect references to related elements, including the defence of human rights and rules-based approaches to regional order, which anchor the Strategy in the EU's identity as a democratic actor and one which seeks to promote democratic norms—at least rhetorically.

However, while not agnostic on the subject, the Strategy studiously avoids spelling out how the EU will promote democracy in the region. It is telling that the words "democracy" and

"democratic" together appear only seven times in the document, while "trade" appears 38 times, "investment" 22 times and "security" 36 times. Moreover, democracy does not feature explicitly in the Strategy's seven priority areas: "Sustainable and inclusive prosperity; Green transition; Ocean governance; Digital governance and partnerships; Connectivity; Security and defence; Human security" (EU Strategy, 2021: 5).

Thus, as set out in the document presented to the European Parliament and the European Council, the Strategy is hardly a visionary call to democratic arms. There is no reference at all to "democratic values", even though "values" are mentioned six times. There are few specific references to those countries in the region which are democracies and the Strategy does not engage with the concept of a "free and open" Indo-Pacific championed by the United States and some of its regional allies.

Notably, the Strategy includes no direct reflection on the key democratic challenges in the region nor on what exactly, if anything, the EU can do to help face them. Challenges undefined amount to challenges unaddressed. Similarly, there are few intimations of what opportunities the EU might take up to help diffuse democratic norms in the Indo-Pacific. In part, such shortcomings reflect the EU's more general default focus on itself as a democratic actor rather than on democratic challenges and opportunities in the region. Of course, there are reasons why democratic values are not given greater prominence in the strategy. These merit more extended analysis in evaluating the likely prospects for the EU to make a meaningful contribution to bolstering democracy in the region.

The EU strategy as a vehicle for strengthening democracy in the Indo-Pacific

Any critical assessment of the democratic promise of the Strategy must consider its timing, its framing of the region and why a failure to grapple with key challenges and opportunities limits its potential efficacy as a vehicle for democratic enlargement in the region. Only by directly addressing those challenges and opportunities in engaging with the region in its self-professed role as a purveyor of democratic norms will the EU be able to align values and interests rather than privileging the latter.

To begin assessing the role that democratic values are likely to play in the EU's engagement with the Indo-Pacific, it is important to note why such a strategy has been developed at this time. After all, the EU evidently did not need an Asia-Pacific strategy, so why has it come to require an Indo-Pacific one? As noted in the Strategy, the importance of the "region" speaks for itself, especially in economic terms. However, that was also true of the Asia-Pacific. Clearly, the timing of the Strategy has been influenced by the growing geo-political competition between a rising China on the one hand and the United States and other powers on the other. The same general considerations lie behind recent Indo-Pacific "strategies" issued by three EU member-states. A former EU member, the United Kingdom, has also actively pursued its own Indo-Pacific "tilt", most recently embodied in participation in the new AUKUS grouping (Pant and Kamath, 2021; Rabel, 2021). In all these cases, there is a sense that there are "European" interests at stake in the Indo-Pacific in terms of economics and security but also that democratic values and rules-based approaches to regional order are under challenge. However, there has been less reflection about whether those interests and democratic values can be promoted in tandem or may require potentially difficult choices. What stands out most, though, is acceptance of the Indo-Pacific concept. Simply by having a strategy on the Indo-Pacific, the EU is accepting a revised conceptualisation of the Asia-Pacific that has been driven by democratic powers. Given that both China and Russia resist this nomenclature, the EU is aligning itself implicitly with the region's leading democratic actors.

While taking the decisive step of accepting the language of the "Indo-Pacific", the EU avoids engaging with the contested conceptualisation of the region. This basic shortcoming means there is a degree of conceptual confusion beguiling the Strategy, beginning with its very definition of the Indo-Pacific, which constitutes one of the democratic dilemmas facing the EU.

Given that the EU had no conception of an Indo-Pacific "region" a few years ago, there is no explanation in the Strategy about why it now defines it as "a vast region spanning from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific Island States" (EU Strategy, 2021: 1). Strikingly, this definition differs from those of its three member-states who have issued comparable documents. The French Indo-Pacific Strategy (2020) defines the region as "a vast space centred around Asia and Oceania and its two great oceans (Pacific and Indian), the expanses of which stretch from the coasts of East Africa to the American shores of the Eastern Pacific". In contrast, the Dutch

"Guideline" on the Indo-Pacific (2020) excludes both Africa and the Americas: "For the Netherlands, the region . . . extends from Pakistan to the islands of the Pacific". The Germans are more expansive in their "Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific" (2020), stating that "The German government uses the term to describe the entire area shaped by the Indian and Pacific Oceans". In the absence of a shared understanding of the geographical boundaries of the region, it is difficult to envisage how the EU and its member-states will avoid the invariable differences between collective and individual interests that beset the organisation as a normative power more generally when implementing this particular Strategy.

In addition to illustrating the EU's enduring structural challenge as an international actor, the definition invoked in the Strategy raises at least one other issue in terms of the role of democratic values in cooperation with Indo-Pacific states. By excluding the United States from its definition, the Strategy treats the most powerful actor in the region as an outside power analogous to the EU in this respect. Yet, the United States not only sees itself as an intrinsically Indo-Pacific power but has arguably done more to drive the shift from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific than any other state actor over the past five years.[6] Similarly, other democracies in the region such as Australia, Japan and New Zealand must be puzzled by the EU's exclusion of the most important democratic actor in the region from its definition. In effect, this decision amounts to a foundational flaw in the Strategy as an agenda for democratic engagement and reflects an outsider's perspective on what the region is rather than how insiders perceive it. More significantly, this flaw is exemplary of the EU's aversion in the Strategy to grapple directly with the contested character of the Indo-Pacific as a region and as a concept (illustrated most prominently by China's outright rejection of the Indo-Pacific reframing of the Asia-Pacific).

This aversion means in turn that the Strategy avoids addressing key challenges to democratic norms in the region. Those challenges are extensive and can be viewed on various levels, the range of which cannot be examined within the scope of this paper. Some relate to democratic backsliding within specific states, such as the egregious case of Myanmar, but also

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[6] As declared in the opening sentence of the Trump administration's strategy for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (2019), "The United States is and always will be an Indo-Pacific nation."

within democracies such as India.[7] (There is also the matter of the erosion of democracy in some of the EU's own member states.) But the broadest challenge across the region arises from the ripples generated by the rise of the world's most powerful autocracy that have turned into a veritable tsunami of concern due to the evident failure of China's rise to be accommodated within the skeletal regional architecture of the Asia-Pacific. In whatever terms the "region" is framed geographically, this fundamental challenge arises from differences in values between that rising power and the United States as the hitherto dominant regional power that also happens to be a liberal democracy. This challenge—which is a shared one, as the EU Strategy implicitly acknowledges in its references to "like-minded partners"— is about how to deal with the uncertainties caused by a rising power that is behaving in more assertive ways externally and more autocratically at home. China's forceful defence of sovereignty claims has raised tensions in the South China Sea, the East China Sea and the Taiwan Straits, as well as on the Sino-India border. It has allegedly launched cyber-hacking attacks on Western states and lured developing countries into dependency through its Belt and Road Initiative. At home, the Chinese Communist Party has tightened its increasingly technologically powered authoritarian control from Xinjiang to Hong Kong. But the challenges presented by Chinese behaviour are complicated by the deep economic interdependence associated with its status as a key economic partner for the EU, by far the most important in region. There is also an overriding need to work with Beijing on climate change, pandemic management and other transnational issues, not to mention the desirability of having China as a "responsible stakeholder" in regional architecture and welcoming the multiple benefits that its rise has delivered for the Chinese people and the world, especially in terms of enhancing mutual prosperity. Whether it will prove effective or not, the Indo-Pacific concept is a response to this central dilemma by the region's leading democracies.

An underlying deficiency in the Strategy is that it avoids framing the EU's response in this context. As a consequence, it risks the worst of two worlds. On the one hand, it alienates China by merely having an "Indo-Pacific" strategy. On the other hand, for fear of antagonising

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[7] For a bleak summary assessment of democratic decline in the region, see "Down and to the right", *Economist*, December 18th 2021. There is also the related issue of EU's tolerance for backsliding in some of its own member states.

China and incurring both economic and military risks, it does not reference the democratic drivers of the Indo-Pacific vision. The EU thereby fails to articulate its own public vision of how it can act as a self-identified normative power to contribute to two grand democratic purposes: on the one hand, strengthening democratic norms amongst the states of the region; on the other hand, demonstrating democratic tolerance in helping to expand the Asia-Pacific regional architecture that has allowed mutually beneficial economic engagement between diverse, unlike-minded states while minimising political tensions and avoiding inter-state armed conflict between them.

Similarly, with respect to democratic opportunities, the Strategy could be bolder. There are myriad ways in which the EU can contribute to promoting democratic values in cooperation with regional states, numerous examples of which are explicitly mentioned in the Strategy such as support for female empowerment, human rights and academic exchange programmes. But there is little evidence of thinking on a grander scale about how the EU as a normative champion of democratic values can model those values to have a more systemic impact on the region, without imposing them in a Eurocentric way. Above all, there is the opportunity of conceiving of the Indo-Pacific as less of a geographical "region" and more as a space of democratic promise. While many Indo-Pacific countries are not democracies, large numbers of their citizens are democrats or would-be democrats. A dilemma for the EU and fellow democracies is how to support and reach out to them without undermining sovereignty, risking conflict and harming economic interests. This dilemma is compounded for the EU by the absence of the advantage it has in its home region of dangling the carrot of membership of the organisation as a way of diffusing democratic norms. (In that sense, the EU is arguably less attractive as a democratic model than the region's own democracies such as Japan and India, which have more vested interests at stake.) Yet, there is little evidence of any serious thought regarding this dilemma in the Strategy.

Another aspect of the Strategy which merits deeper consideration is the extent to which rules and democratic norms or values actually align. Such an alignment is certainly implied in the Strategy's opening reference that it "will be based on promoting democracy, the rule of law, human rights" (EU Strategy, 2021:1). Yet rules and democratic values are not necessarily synonymous and ASEAN has built its regional centrality on this very distinction in championing

adherence to a loose "rules-based" order that facilitates dialogue between un-like-minded states, many of which do not adhere to democratic values. Strict observance of non-interference in domestic affairs is one of the few "hard" rules of this approach to regional order. In view of the challenge posed by a rising China, some states like Japan have emulated ASEAN in placing more emphasis on building consensual, rules-based frameworks that can accommodate the region's political diversity, rather than advocating that these frameworks should be based on shared views about democratic norms and human rights (Asplund, 2018; Hatakeyama, 2019; Nagy, 2021). Thus, a further dilemma facing the EU is if it will adopt a similar stance to avoid directly clashing with the region's autocracies or if it intends to risk such confrontation by prioritising democratic values.

Ultimately, whatever the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the Strategy, the EU's impact as a normative promoter of democratic values will depend on its actions. Operationalisation of the Strategy will bring inevitable tensions between interests and values that will require hard choices, including the extent to which the EU wishes to align itself with the region's democracies in concerted efforts to defend core democratic values. As noted previously, much more of the content of the Strategy is focused on economic interests and, to a lesser extent, security considerations than on values. There is no discussion in the Strategy of how or if those interests align with democratic values for the EU as a collective actor or for its individual member-states. Those discussions and consequent decisions will need to occur if the EU is to address both the democratic challenges and opportunities that characterise the emerging Indo-Pacific mega-region in its competing conceptualisations—and if the EU is to help ensure that the Indo-Pacific is free and open as well as inclusive and transparently rules-based.

Conclusion

Both the shortcomings and strengths of the Strategy as an instrument for democratic engagement illustrate the challenging character of the EU as an international actor. The European Communities created in 1951 and 1957 were characterised as a civilian power, as they did not influence their external setting through means characteristic of states. As the European integration process moved forward, the EC member states gradually made steps towards the

Common Foreign and Security Policy, which however was never thought of as a community policy and thus means that decisions in the sphere of EU external relations are made and implemented through intergovernmental procedures and not through supranational mechanisms and institutions. The EU institutions lack sovereign control over foreign and security policy (unlike trade policy, for example), which remains largely the domain of the individual member states. That means that the European foreign and security policy is a set of rules based on consensus and compromise between the EU and its state members, leading to a certain element of lowest common denominator positions—or, as *The Economist* (December 4th 2021) uncharitably put it, a "soporific consensus". Each of the members has their own preferences and interests in national foreign policies on political, economic, security and strategic matters and they do not necessarily always align between the 27 governments. Therefore, the external strategies of the EU will represent the combination of national interests and preferred approaches—meaning it is cumbersome for the EU to develop and implement strategies with clear, measurable objectives that are resourced in ways that will achieve those objectives.

Moreover, the EU, which perceives itself as a normative actor (yet with limited self-reflection about the extent to which that perception is shared by others), possesses practically no hard power mechanisms to back its actions in the international sphere. As a normative power, the EU is therefore dependent on working with like-minded others to achieve shared objectives. The example of the EU Strategy towards the Indo-Pacific raises doubts as to whether the EU will have the capacity to proceed with its strategic objectives while, for example, omitting the United States in the very definition of the region. There is also no clear road map in the document about how the EU will engage in closer collaboration with Indo-Pacific states that may share values common to the EU. The regional environment in the Indo-Pacific is not necessarily favourable to the EU foundational principles at present and those principles are often actively contested. Hence, there is an even more pressing need to welcome as partners those with whom cooperation on championing and supporting democratic values is feasible (like-minded states and such initiatives as the Quad, for example).

The EU Strategy in its current format falls short as a vision for bolstering democracy because it avoids choices and taking sides in the struggles for democracy in the region. This weakness reflects the default "soporific consensus" that led *The Economist* (December 4th 2021)

to conclude bluntly that "the EU's policy in the Indo-Pacific barely matters". There is nonetheless much for democrats to commend in the Strategy in terms of principles and its rhetoric resonates with both constructivist and liberal institutionalist theories about the EU as a normative power. However, its efficacy in diffusing democratic values will depend on whether the EU, together with its member states, finally decide on how to manage the alignment between democratically inspired norms, rules and principles with economic, political and other interests.

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HOW TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE: AN INSIGHT INTO THE PERCEPTION OF SCIENCE COMMUNICATION IN SELECTED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract: *This paper examines how European citizens perceive the topic of climate change. It is based on qualitative research that involved gathering information from five (5) European countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Poland, and Slovakia) about their citizens' perception of science communication. The data were collected via public consultations using qualitative methods. The research aimed to provide qualitative knowledge gained through consultations with citizens on how they acquire science-related knowledge and how this knowledge influences their beliefs, opinions, and perceptions. This paper presents the findings of public consultations concerning science communication on climate change, in addition to presenting citizens' perception of scientific institutions and scientists working in the field of climate change. It also provides recommendations for improving science communication in terms of education systems and communication strategies. The analyzed data allowed us to look at several levels of science communication. The findings show citizens' various perspectives on communication preferences when it comes to climate change and present several science communication dimensions that could boost the effectiveness of science communication on the topic of climate change.*

Keywords: Climate change, Science communication, Public consultation, Science institutions, Communication dimensions.

Introduction

Climate change represents one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. Currently, climate change mitigation, in addition to the process of adapting to it, brings with it large-scale local, regional, and global challenges for scientists, politicians, and the general public. Although climate change is often perceived as a global problem, the consequences of it can be seen more and more often on both national and local scales (Pittock, 2009). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has been issuing regular assessment reports since 1988 that address, among other things, the impact of human activities on global warming. The latest report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014) provided new scientific evidence that human activities are the cause of unprecedented climate change and confirmed (95-100% probability) that the global warming that has taken place since 1950 is due to human influence.

This scientific consensus has highlighted the urgency of developing both global and local strategies to adapt and mitigate global warming (Burton, Malone & Huq, 2005). Climate change, therefore, poses far-reaching challenges not only for ecosystems, but also for social and cultural systems and economic development. Consequently, adapting to climate change requires step-by-step actions of individuals, local communities, local and national governments, and international organizations. However, identifying the direct impact of climate change on people's daily lives is not entirely straightforward, and, as a result, it is often difficult to define the causes and the possible consequences for the everyday lives of the general population. However, a great deal of research suggests there is significant concern among EU citizens about the consequences of climate change (Papoulis et al., 2015; Moser, 2016).

The latest Eurobarometer survey (European Union, 2021) also found that many EU citizens remain very concerned about climate change and support EU-wide action in tackling it. European citizens identify climate change as the most serious problem we are currently facing. More than a quarter of EU citizens (29%) perceive climate change (18%), environmental degradation (7%), and health problems due to environmental pollution (4%) to be among the most serious problems. Up to 93% of EU citizens consider climate change to be a serious problem, and 78% consider it a very serious problem. At the same time, the findings confirm

that 96% of respondents have recently taken at least one specific measure to combat climate change, namely regularly sorting and recycling waste (75%) and reducing the consumption of disposable items (59%).

However, it is important to point out the significant discontinuity in citizens' concerns about climate change and their knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions about this issue as part of their individual commitment to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Understanding how the public perceives the effects of climate change is crucial for prompting successful adaptation and mitigation efforts through global and national policies on both public and individual levels. Therefore, several studies are focused on defining the main areas of the public perception of climate change in order to understand the extent of this phenomenon (Arnold et al., 2016; Muradova et al., 2020). This is where science communication on climate change can provide the opportunity to gain a more insightful perception on this issue and increase the involvement of the general public.

Science communication as a tool for effectively sharing scientific topics

Science communication is the important process of communicating scientific knowledge to the general public. It applies a model of the social communication of knowledge, which is focused on the process of information transfer and social interaction (Steinerová, 2018). At the same time, it ensures the interaction of scientists from various disciplines, whether by publishing, reviewing, scientific conferences, collaborations, or sharing resources (Brown 2010; Fry 2013). Science communication can be defined as the use of appropriate presentation skills, traditional and social media, dialogue, and social and scientific activities to create awareness and interest, form opinions and attitudes, and spread new knowledge on scientific topics among the general public (Burns, et al., 2003).

Science communication, as the basis of the information process, defines a set of interactions associated with scientific research. It develops and changes as an area of research, and so does the way it is communicated. Science communication in the field of climate change is a very important but very demanding area of expertise. It is a relatively young scientific and communication discipline that can be used in the field of climate change as a tool to better

understand the negative effects of global warming in the daily lives of the general public. It can also help to better understand the importance of public support for adaptation and mitigation strategies. Climate change is a collective problem, and a solution to it is only possible through the active participation of the public, as they can bring about political change as well as everyday changes in the individual lives of the general public.

The digital environment creates opportunities for new forms of science communication in the form of electronic journals, digital libraries, professional blogs, and scientific social networks (Haustein, 2016). When it comes to new technologies, climate change presents new challenges for science, the media, the public, and national and global policies. Thus, science communication has undergone profound and significant changes over the last decade. A survey of 6,000 American scientists that was carried out in the U.S. showed a serious interest in using science communication as a tool to increase confidence in the scientific community, but one that must be supported by institutions and policies (Rose, Markowitz, and Brossard, 2020). Science communication to the public is considered the responsibility of scientists (Greenwood & Riordan, 2001), and scientists can play an important role in supporting the effective development of adaptive and mitigating climate strategies (Pfisterer, Paschke, & Pasotti, 2019).

The increase in the speed of technological and social change also brings with it the increasing visibility of science communicators as mediators of professional scientific work in the field of climate change, and the size of the audience that receives this information is also growing. At the same time, this sharp increase in the amount of available information may bring about some communication misunderstandings on scientific topics, as they require more comprehensive coverage by those involved in science communication. According to some authors (Dunwoody, 2014), it will take longer for successful models to emerge that conform to the changes in the 21st century and provide scientific knowledge to the general public. New communication trends, therefore, require the involvement of science communicators in new roles that not only approach the topic by presenting scientific stories systematically, but mainly by using an interpretive approach (Fahy & Nisbet 2011). Science communication tends to be based on facts, while the public tends to combine facts and values. Hence, the interaction between science and society and the creation of research initiatives to involve the public in

shaping science communication are significant challenges. These initiatives represent various processes that open the possibility of involving the public in scientific discussions or even possibly participatory forms in facilitating science communication (van der Bles et al., 2020).

Science communicators are mainly scientific institutions, scientists, experts, scientific journalists, and public figures who have the opportunity to link scientific knowledge with the general public due to their impact on public action. Communication training for researchers is an important tool for improving the quality of interaction between scientists and the public (Besley et al., 2015). Experts in training people to improve and develop their communication skills agree that communication in modern sciences requires much more than just the ability to explain scientific topics in a comprehensive way. Researchers need to be able to approach communication more strategically, and their skills should include, in addition to media training, the ability to frame scientific information and link various activities that involve public engagement. These activities can include holding public debates, building partnerships between communities, and initiating mutual dialogue (Baram- Tsabari & Lewenstein, 2017; Yuan et al., 2017; Rodgers et al., 2018).

According to Kappel and Holmen (2019), we can divide science communication into two basic models. The first is a communication model based on one-way transmission, i.e., the dissemination of information from an expert or a science communicator to the public. The second is a model based on two-way transmission, i.e., a discussion by experts, the public, and mediators who can decide on the appropriateness and possibilities of public involvement in the formation of science communication. When employing a one-way model, we can define science communication as the successful transmission of information on climate change from scientists and science communicators to the public. This transmission can be provided through formal education or through the media, either traditional media in the form of popular science books and TV documentaries on climate change, or digital media in the form of science blogs and web-based professional portals (Ziman, 1991; Bauer et al, 2007 Druckman & Lupia, 2017). The two-way model is about communication between the public, climate change experts, mediators, and policy makers (Gastil, 2017). In practice, several approaches to two-way science communication are used, such as public hearings and consultations (Rowe-Frewer, 2000), science camps (Wachelder, 2003), science workshops, and international conference projects

such as Citizens Science, which make it possible to collect large amounts of data from a large number of participants from different countries over a longer period of time (Bonney et al., 2009). However, science communication alone and raising awareness about climate change are not entirely sufficient to stimulate the kind of individual action that can help mitigate and adapt to new changes in the climate. It is therefore important that scientific facts and data are presented in science communication in accordance with the values, beliefs, and interests of a particular audience.

Research design and research methodology

The aim of the study is to present the main findings about the European public's view on climate change. The data obtained and analyzed are part of the CONCISE[1] research project, which is aimed at examining the role of science communication in the perceptions and beliefs of EU citizens. The main objective of this project was to learn the role science communication plays on the origin of beliefs, perceptions and knowledge concerning scientific issues. The study was carried out under the EU - HORIZONT 2020 program. It was coordinated by the University of Valencia, and it included 9 partners from five European countries: Portugal, Spain and Italy – representing Southern Europe; Slovakia and Poland – representing Central Europe.

The public consultations were attended by 100 volunteers per each country (total 500 citizens) who discussed individual topics (climate change, vaccinations, alternative and complementary medicine, and GMOs) in small groups of 10 people. They were guided by moderator and recorded by an observer. The public consultations took place during September and November 2019 in all five countries and the data were analyzed during 2020. in September (Italy, Poland), October (Spain), and November (Slovakia, Portugal) of 2019. Public consultation is a qualitative research technique. It is a method of moderated group discussion

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[1] The main objective of the CONCISE project was to gain insight into the origins of European citizens' beliefs, perceptions and knowledge in the field of science and technology. The promoter of the project was the University of Valencia (Universitat de Valencia). The project partners were three European universities in Portugal (University of Lisbon), Poland (University of Łódź), Slovakia (Trnava University) and the scientific association of Italian Universities Observa. Three professional institutions from Spain (FyG Consultores, Asociación Española de Comunicación Científica, Universitat Pompeu Fabra) and one from Poland (Danmark Coputers) also contributed to the development of the project.

that uses group interaction to obtain data on participants' views and perspectives on selected topics that might be more difficult to access outside of group interaction (Morgan 2001; Bloor & Wood 2006).

The study is based on public consultations using qualitative methods, which make it possible to better capture and analyze the attitudes of citizens who have had the opportunity to answer questions without predetermined variables and, above all, to explain their arguments and differing views in communication. Group discussions provided an overview of the knowledge, views, and perceptions of scientific topics by EU citizens. These discussions took advantage of group dynamics and interactions, which can help uncover the reasons behind attitudes towards scientific topics that can be more difficult to capture with quantitative research techniques. The public consultations also focused on gathering the views, suggestions, and critical views of EU citizens and provided an opportunity to consult and exchange different constructive views among the participants during the interactions. The role of the moderator in the discussion groups was to ensure that the discussions focused on the correct topics and to maintain a suitable atmosphere for mutual conversation for all the participants.

In order to properly implement the research process, it was necessary to ensure the close coordination of the five national teams and follow a common protocol that included detailed information on the choice of the discussion sites, the course of discussions, possible complications and how to prevent them, and how to effectively manage successful public consultations. At the same time, the research team sought to ensure diversity and that a variety of views were represented. To meet this goal, the teams consistently selected samples of nationals by gender, age, education, ethnicity, and occupation based on socio-demographic data for each participating country. The public consultations were audio-recorded, transcribed word for word, and content analyzed using NVivo software, which is used to analyze qualitative data. The textual analyses by NVivo software helped us to identify different dimensions of science communications as well as to find common patters between discussed topics in each country. All partners involved in the research were using common coding grids which ensured that a large number of group discussions could be analyzed, and the findings systematized according to the required criteria for the analysis of the selected research questions. All the partners from

the countries where the research was conducted shared a common grid for coding the text corpus, which enabled the countries to be compared (Annex 1).

Our study details the findings of five public consultations on climate change. The aim of the study is to answer three main research questions:

1. How do citizens of the selected European countries perceive scientific institutions and scientists in the field of climate change?
2. What are the recommendations the citizens of the selected European countries have for improving science communication on climate change?
3. What communication models can we identify through public consultations on climate change?

The study presents the views of European citizens from selected countries on the science communication of climate change in more detail. In addition, it defines the main sources they use to obtain this information and assesses their credibility. It deals with the perception of scientific institutions and scientists working in the field of climate change and presents recommendations for improving science communication from the point of view of education systems and communication strategies. The analysis of the obtained data also allowed us to look at several levels of science communication. This was due to the interaction of science communicators and the general public, and we learned that with the right focus on target categories, better results for the presentation of scientific knowledge about climate change can be achieved. In the study, we present selected citations to illustrate the main identified topics and provide clearer answers to our research questions. The citations are illustrative and due to some other scientific papers presented from our CONCISE project some of them could be find in other publications and journals (Brondi et al. 2021; Delicado et al. 2021; Dziminska et al. 2021).

The perception of science communication on climate change

From the respondents' points of view, climate change is a widely discussed issue that is mainly covered by the media, for example, on television news or social media, and especially by climate activists. However, the information available in the media, whether traditional or digital, does not always provide enough relevant information. According to the respondents, the

media space is often overwhelmed by information on climate change, but the level and quality of this information is not sufficient. Some respondents evaluate information on climate change, especially in the digital environment of social networks, as misleading or insufficiently explaining professional topics to the general public. It is therefore more difficult for the general public to choose the most credible sources from such a huge amount of information. This can lead to an oversaturation of information on climate change, which often times causes people to get lost and renders them unable to select the information that is essential.

"Ordinary articles lack quality information on this topic. It would be good to set aside an appropriate space for information on climate change. If more quality articles are available, there may be more interest in this issue. In these articles, the information should be easily disseminated among people, but I don't think there are enough of them at the moment."(Slovakia, male, 18-24 years old, secondary education)

"I think we are living in a paradoxical time. We have more and more information, but we feel less and less informed, which is a paradox."(Portugal, female, 25-34, university education)

According to the respondents, it is therefore necessary to select information on climate change and take into account its credibility and verifiability. The scientific community, which is perceived by respondents as having two levels, plays an important role in the topic of climate change. The first level can be defined as institutional, which represents scientific institutions, state institutions, and international organizations that deal with climate change. The second level can be defined as personal, which takes the form of specific scientists, science journalists, and science communicators who deal with climate change in terms of disseminating scientific knowledge to the general public. The respondents often mentioned international institutions that deal with scientific knowledge in the field of climate change. These institutions are perceived as being more credible, and when it comes to the topic of climate change, they were reported by respondents as being more easily identifiable than local and national institutions.

"I must say that I often rely on some institutional resources, usually on some international institutions that deal with this topic, the UN and other similar organizations" (Slovakia, male, 25-34, higher education)

"I believe in institutions that play a significant role in this type of activity. So, if we are talking about the environment, then it is the Ministry of the Environment. And I think that is why these institutions are set up, to inform and support research in this area." (Poland, male, 25–34, university education)

On a personal level, science communicators who have been identified by the respondents as an important part of presenting scientific information play an important role in spreading information about climate change. In countries with a tradition of science communication (Portugal, Italy, Spain), the respondents mentioned science journalists as important sources of information on climate change. Conversely, in countries where science communication on climate change has only developed as part of science in recent years (Poland, Slovakia), science communicators are more difficult to identify, and people are more aware of scientists from scientific institutions who are popularizing climate change for the wider public.

"Piero Angela (an Italian scientific journalist) was explaining the climate crisis, and he was quiet brief, saying things that everyone could understand. I was a child and I understood perfectly, even though he was talking about scientific topics. He used scientific language appropriately. He was neutral, and I didn't feel anxious about it." (Italy, male, 25–34, high school education)

"There is a channel produced by the Copernicus Center (Centrum Nauki Koperni), and there is a scientist there roughly every week that discusses a new edition of Nature magazine. It's fantastic and it's great to listen to." (Poland, female, 35-44 years old, university education)

In countries with a long tradition of science communication, communication is sensitively assessed by scientists who do not have experience directly in the field. They express

themselves outside their scientific field of work, and climate change is often not the main focus of their professional practice. The participants are critical of scientists who often get involved in various scientific topics outside their professional focus. This may create greater distrust with regard to science communication on climate change among the general public, as they may not be aware of the scientist's work and may perceive him as a representative of the scientific community on climate change.

"I recently heard a statement from a well-known scientist that works in the social sciences. He gave an incredible speech on television, stating that there was no scientific consensus on climate change." (Italy, male, age 45-54, university education)

Suggestions for improving science communication on climate change

The public consultations also focused on identifying recommendations respondents made to the scientific community to more effectively disseminate scientific information on climate change to the general public and to increase the involvement of EU citizens in both the adaptation and mitigation processes. In our data analysis, we discuss two important levels of recommendations for science communication on climate change. They focus on communication strategies and education systems.

The level with the communication strategies points to recommendations aimed at streamlining communication on climate change by using simpler language that should not be highly technical, but understandable by the general public. It is important to emphasize the consequences climate change can have on people's daily lives to help them gain a better idea of how their daily lives could be affected on an individual level. The content of the information provided on climate change should therefore draw attention to specific actions and personal consequences in everyday life. The respondents perceive this as being a more relevant communication strategy than technical scientific language based only on data and scientific analysis.

"Information obviously must have a scientific basis, but the way it is presented must be put in a way that people can read it and it captures their attention. Because otherwise, if the texts are very scientific, people read a maximum of three lines and say it is not for me, I do not understand." (Portugal, female, 55-64, university education)

"I think all reports on climate change should have at least three levels. A clear description of the developments with scientific information, a description of the consequences of how it will affect me in my daily life, and what I can do to make a positive contribution." (Spain, male, 18-24, secondary education)

Respondents also stated that the general public is often lost in information on climate change that is presented using scientific data and analysis, as it is difficult to pay attention to it and focus on the essence of the information. In the recommendations, therefore, they propose not only approaching the general public with a certain style of language, but also presenting data and technical information in ways that allow it to be visualized. This could make science communication more attractive, more effective, and at the same time, attract more public attention.

"I think a lot of emphasis needs to be put into simplifying those reports, meaning that the information should have a visual side in order to have some effect, such as the felling of the Amazon rainforest." (Italy, male, 45-54, university education)

"I am quite influenced by short videos that show specific things that happen to the planet. They influence me a lot, and they actually inspired me to gain a new perspective and approach to this topic." (Slovakia, female, 18-24, secondary education)

Communication strategies also include popularizing scientific information on climate change among the general public. According to respondents, lay popularizers of science, who may be public figures, activists, celebrities, or bloggers, play an important role. The key is to

find a person who can gain the interest of the audience, work closely with the scientific community, and has the ability to pass on scientific information to a wide audience.

"I have this specific experience. It happened when I was still at school. The professor played a movie with Leo DiCaprio and it was about the field of environmental management. I think this was the first thing that opened this topic with people who had not realized it so much before, or those who considered him only to be a Hollywood star. People realized that this must be a serious thing if he was also an ambassador to the UN. And these are things that I, as a student, had no idea at all about." (Slovakia, male, 25–34, university education)

"I think the latest film promoted by Greta Thunberg has just been released, and I think it's a masterpiece ... talking to a scientist who talks about what's going on and finally telling you what you can do. Three things: first, share information, second - alert your friends, third - if you can, change your behavior. I think these types of films are perfect." (Poland, female, 35-44, university education)

The level with education systems points to proposals for improving science communication on climate change in the field of education in primary and secondary education as well as other educational programs, which can also be offered to the general public.

"The only way, in my opinion, is through school education and other educational projects. Teachers should be financially supported for the implementation of projects aimed at additional teaching in schools." (Poland, female, 25-34, university education)

"I believe that is the way to go. It starts with kindergarten, with small children ... then educating citizens who will then be aware of these changes and will be able to better choose their representatives." (Portugal, female, 55-64, university education)

At the same time, the respondents confirmed the importance of linking the education system and the family environment. This can help the flow of information on climate change go

both directions, from children who learn new things at school to parents, and vice versa, from parents who can gain knowledge in various areas related to climate change and integrate it into the upbringing of their children.

"I think that education is very important, but first it is the family and only then school ... children repeat what they see with their parents, and if it is connected with education, it brings a better result." (Slovakia, female, 18-24, secondary education).

"For me, one of the ways information about climate change makes its way home is from school, because that's where my daughter gets the information she brings home. And maybe it's the same with some of your children, grandchildren, nephews. I think it is important for people who study this from an academic point of view to organize mini-discussion conferences in schools. When we started sorting our garbage at home, much of the stimulus to do so came from our children." (Spain, female, 45-54 years old, university education)

According to the respondents, the education system should especially reflect the need to educate the young generation of children, as they will be those that are the most affected by the negative consequences of global warming. Therefore, the education system provides an important environment for disseminating scientific information on climate change.

"Start communicating science well with children, because they are future adults. I remember Rio in 1992 when I was in school, and my teacher was passionate about it and passed this information on to us with passion." (Italy, female, 35-44, university education)

"It would be nice if there was a subject in the elementary education system in which young children could learn how to live more ecologically, educating them in ecology." (Slovakia, female, 18-24, secondary education)

Dimensions of science communication in the field of climate change

A more detailed analysis of the data yielded several interesting findings pointing to three basic dimensions of the science communication of climate change. As mentioned above, science communication mostly works with two basic models, a one-way communication model and a two-way communication model (Kappel and Holmen, 2019). In the case of our public consultations, we identified three basic communication dimensions on the topic of climate change that represent the mutual relationship between the scientific community, which is represented by scientific institutions, scientists, science communicators, and science influencers, and the general public. Our findings point to the possibility of using three models of science communication focused on climate change: one-way communication, dialogue and participatory communication.

One-way communication is a type of communication based on mutual dialogue and participatory communication. It is the transfer of scientific information on climate change from the scientific community to the public, and the media, whether traditional or digital, play an important role. Science communication can thus be aimed at publishing popular science books, creating television documentaries on climate change, science blogs, and professional web portals that bring awareness about climate change to the general public. In our case, the respondents confirmed the importance of traditional media in one-way scientific communication, as they are given a higher level of trust. At the same time, however, respondents reflect the growing importance of digital media in the field of climate change. The possibilities social networks provide for the dissemination of scientific information, especially lectures and seminars from scientists and science communicators, enable the participation of the general public in the online environment.

"Every television station should have a program and interviews on these topics. That is the only chance we have. Not just superficial discussions, but expert conversations on these topics on television. To talk about these topics, which is very important. If such programs are not on television, they won't make a difference." (Spain, male, 55-64, secondary education)

"I think scientists, at least for me, are still people who are ultimately very fascinating because they can take a step back from society, and I think if you attend a conference of real experts, even if it's only online, if these scientists speak in an influential way, I think it has a really big impact on the average listener." (Portugal, female, 25–34, university education)

Dialogue as part of science communication on climate change plays a key role in creating an environment for mutual discussion between the scientific community and the general public. It is an environment in which it is possible to ask scientists and experts on climate change questions directly and create direct interaction between the scientific community and the public to identify possible communication gaps, unanswered questions, clarify public opinions and attitudes, as well as identify societal concerns. In the case of the communication dimension of the dialogue, the respondents confirmed, in particular, the importance of educational initiatives, which allow for direct discussions with climate change scientists and experts both on-site and virtually. According to the respondents, digital media could involve the public more in science communication. It could provide the general public, science communicators, and climate experts with interactive opportunities to discuss various topics on climate change. According to the respondents, efforts by scientists to engage in direct communication with citizens are very well received.

"I think it's very important that scientists from different fields stop only thinking about publishing ... but start developing science in order to effectively educate and work with society. I also think that it is not just about lectures and workshops on a theoretical level. Communication should also include a practical part, working with people ... Adapt communication and working with different types of populations according to their reality." (Spain, female 25–34, higher education)

"NGOs are holding meetings like these, some picnics, and discussing what is happening now among young people with this climate strike, giving these young people a very high level of awareness of the subject and, for example, children alerting their parents." Poland, Female, 55-64, university education)

Participatory communication brings a new perspective on science communication, as it seeks to involve the public in activities aimed at mitigating the effects of global warming and adapting to climate change. Public participation in science communication represents an opportunity to actively participate in science as part of local scientific initiatives, science camps, workshops, and international scientific projects. The participants' communication was not identified to such an extent as being one-way communication and dialogue, but through the analysis of data from public discussions, we were able to observe the respondents' efforts to point out the possibility of being part of climate change solutions, especially at the local level.

"Maybe projects like this with the participation of ordinary people, projects where there will be different companies, research centers focused on this topic, where we can participate, meet to talk about these things, and there is an opportunity to commit to action." (Spain, male, 55-64 years, university education)

"So, for example, more scientific initiatives. In this case, it is a public consultation, but is this type of thing typically done? There are people who do not normally take part, but these debates can draw them in more. For people like this, lectures are not interesting, but to be a part of a debate and a solution where you ask why do you think this, what do you think, how do you do it? And there is a person who knows how to deal with the situation and can engage the public to express their views and suggestions on the subject, to find out what is happening in people's perception, whether they know or do not know how to communicate with them." (Portugal, female, 25-34 years, university education)

The participatory dimension of science communication also pointed to the interest of some respondents to be part of solutions that are focused on climate change. This is in addition to the opportunity to participate in possible proposals for changing everyday life, especially at the local and community levels to address climate change. The respondents confirmed the need for mutual cooperation between local governments and citizens to find appropriate solutions to mitigate climate change.

"As I said before, municipalities should play a more active role in this. They should report on climate change, which affects cities, and at the same time propose, together with citizens, a change in attitudes among their citizens. Point out specific examples of how to change people's behavior while educating them." (Italy, female, 45-54)

Conclusion

Knowledge about the perception of science communication on climate change by EU citizens can present an important impetus for scientists, climate experts and, in particular, science communicators and popularizers of scientific information. At the same time, the public consultation process can provide a new perspective on the possibility of using a participatory approach to climate change communication, where information is exchanged between science communicators and the general public, where both parties can communicate and share knowledge, answer questions, and possibly find common ground suggestions for possible solutions to this problem (Davies et al., 2009). Involving the general public in the participatory processes of science communication on climate change offers an opportunity to gain a better overview of the perception of scientific information, needs, and preferences in the ways to communicate scientific knowledge about climate change to the public as effectively as possible.

Based on the views of the respondents form the selected European countries, the perception of scientific institutions and scientists working in the field of climate change differs between countries with a long tradition (Portugal, Spain, Italy) and scientific countries with a slight delay (Poland, Slovakia). In countries with a long tradition of science communication on climate change, communicators play an important role, especially from the ranks of scientific journalists and popularizers of scientific topics, as they are more easily identifiable than knowledge bearers and mediators of scientific topics. In countries with a less developed tradition of science communication, international scientific institutions are, according to the respondents, the bearers of scientific information who play an important role in mediating information on climate change. The position of science communicators in these countries is therefore developing very slowly, and identifying them is more difficult for respondents due to their lower degree of anchoring knowledge in the public sphere.

The proposals for improving science communication on climate change from the perspective of citizens of the five chosen European countries focused mainly on the area of communication strategies, which should focus on using a more accessible language of communication with regard to different age categories and levels of education. Related to this, there are proposals aimed at the visualization side of science communication on climate change, which, from the citizens' point of view, can often have a greater effect than communication based on scientific data when passing on information to a wider audience. The position of the communicator also plays an important role in communication strategies on climate change. This person may come from the ranks of scientists, journalists, or celebrities, but they must meet the criteria of being consistent, effective with, and attractive to the general public. At the same time, the presentation of scientific facts should include the opportunity to talk about the issue of climate change in the context of everyday life, to point out its effects on the individual, whether in an individual, local, national, or global context. The recipient of this information would thus have the opportunity to reflect on the consequences of climate change for their own daily lives, life in their neighborhood, their community, as well as in the country where they live. An important dimension of science communication on climate change is the need for active dialogue between scientists and the general public. According to our findings, the participants propose developing scientific educational initiatives that would support direct communication between citizens and the scientific community and, at the local level, the direct involvement of citizens in the search for effective solutions to climate change.

Participatory science communication enables the public to be involved in scientific discussions, and at the same time, it enables citizens to be perceived as active people with an interest in participating in the development of adaptation solutions and climate change mitigation processes, especially at the local level. Science communication on climate change should thus perceive the demands of the public to change one-way communication to two-way communication on climate change, and the perspective of the active public should be taken into account. Our study provides insight into the perception of science communication in the field of climate change from the perspective of European citizens. It presents their proposals for streamlining science communication, which according to our analysis should lead to greater involvement of the active public in finding possible adaptation solutions. The public

consultations focused on a participatory approach to communication brought forth interesting findings. Additionally, the nature of the methodology used enabled the active participation of citizens and brought several benefits with it. Firstly, it made it possible to qualitatively ascertain the views of non-experts on public dialogue while discussing proposals to improve science communication for experts, communicators, and policy makers, all of whom often face obstacles in successfully communicating about climate change. Second, this qualitative and participatory methodology enabled the active involvement of citizens in scientific research processes and created space for inclusive and innovative research (Brondi et al., 2021).

Many of these findings will need to be validated in other types of research, but as a first step, these findings offer room for inspiration and reflection on the further development and overall importance of science communication on both the local and European levels. Science communication is not only one-way communication involving researchers talking to the public. It is also a two-way dialogue about scientific knowledge by experts and how what they say is perceived by the public. Listening to public opinion thus becomes an integral part of this communication, and it can lead to more successful dissemination of scientific knowledge as well as a greater degree of commitment and mobilization to change the perception of science and its greater public credibility.

Annex 1: Script of the public consultations - climate change

How citizens are informed about climate change.	
Discussion course around 15 min.	**Do you remember any news about climate change? What exactly was it about?** /If no channel or source of information is specified / **Do you remember the situation in which you heard / read / saw this message?** (Possible answers: TV news, conversation with friends/ relatives/ colleagues, I got it on WhatsApp, I read it in a newspaper, I read it on Twitter …) **Is climate change a topic you are consciously looking for? Why, why not?** / If the participants do not indicate what they do next with the information they receive / **What will you do if you get information about climate change that interests you?** (Possible answers: you will share the information, pass it on, talk about it.)
Credibility of resources	
Discussion course around 15 min.	**If you would like to know some specific information about climate change, where would you look for it? Who would you ask?** / If participants do not indicate where they would look for information / **When you get information about climate change, do you notice where it comes from? How do you decide if a source is reliable or not? Have you ever searched on the internet for information on climate change? What resources? Do you have a favorite? If so, why?** / If the participants do not mention specific people associated with this topic / **Can you think of anyone who represents the topic of climate change for you? Why this person?**
Suggestions for improving science communication	
Discussion course around 15 min.	**What would you change to make information on climate change more interesting, complete, and reliable? How do you imagine information on climate change being presented?**
End of discussion	
15 min.	The moderator of the discussion proposes a round of final comments. It is necessary to set aside time if one of the participants is interested in adding something to the discussion.

Acknowledgement

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RECREATING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY — THE PROCESS OF RECONSTRUCTING POLISH-SLOVAK CROSS-BORDER RELATIONS AFTER 1989: THE CASE OF THE VILLAGES OF SROMOWCE NIŻNE AND ČERVENÝ KLÁŠTOR

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Abstract: *The aim of the article is to show the process of reconstructing institutional, and grass-roots, cross-border relations in the Pieniny area of the borderland between Poland and Slovakia after 1989. By virtue of a decision issued in 1920 by the Council of Ambassadors, an international border between Poland and Czechoslovakia was established. For over a hundred years the permeability of the border was regulated by political decisions and diplomatic relations between both countries. The border marked by the Dunajec River divided the community of Pieniny highlanders, creating a barrier which, in some periods, was completely impassable. The article is based on field research conducted in two villages called Sromowce Niżne and Červený Kláštor. The research was supplemented with a review of legacy data as well as one of institutional sources which documented the process of establishing formal cooperation between Poland and Slovakia at a local level (as part of Euroregion as well as The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation TATR). An analysis of the empirical material proved that the key moment that initiated the restoration of cross-border relations in the researched area of the Pieniny borderland after 1989 was the signing of the Declaration of the Territorial Self-Governments of the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic regarding the creation of the "Tatry" Region on 31 October 1993, and finally the signing of an Agreement between Polish and Slovak self-governments on establishing a cross-border association for the "Tatry" Euroregion at a Founding Congress in Nowy Targ on 26 August 1994. The culminating point of the Polish-Slovak rapprochement at the local level was the opening of a footbridge on the Dunajec River (12 August 2006), connecting the villages of Sromowce Niżne and Červený Kláštor, which enabled the reunification of both communities and the reconstruction of mature, neighbourly cross-border relations somewhat in isolation from the issue of the location of the actual border. One hundred years of Polish-Slovak cross-border relations can be pithily summed up in the following words: "a little bit of smuggling, a lot of poverty, but little politics".*

Keywords: Polish-Slovak border, Political relations, Cross-border community, Local identity.

1.   Introduction

The contemporary history of Europe is a history of creation, recreation and above all — crossing state borders, constituting a "paradigmatic case of borders", ones institutionalised and legally sanctioned, which are a "physical barrier, established in the mind but also a cultural idea reflected in space" (Lubaś 2013: 25). Building order in our life-world and organising it according to various accepted categories is one of the basic strategies for ensuring the functioning of the social order. As Georg Simmel wrote "A human being is [...] a creature who needs boundaries and crosses them all the time" (Simmel 2006: 254).

The term "border" itself contains a certain ambiguity when it comes to interpretation, something which Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár drew attention to in an article published in 2002. The authors introduced a basic differentiation between "social borders," seen as actual divisions of the social reality, and "symbolic borders," defined as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices, and even time and space" (Molnár, Lamont 2002: 168). Via this approach, symbolic borders may constitute a justification and legitimacy of the existence of social boundaries, having real consequences for community members.

Similarly, Anthony Cohen argues that borders "are spheres of reflection: about who someone is; about who others are" (Cohen 1994: 74) and which build upgraded meaning planes. Such boundaries are therefore elements that help make up a community, because "by definition, the boundary determines the beginning and end of the community. [...] The boundary includes the identity of the communities as well as the identity of the individuals, and is brought into existence by the requirements of social interaction. The borders are determined because communities interact, in one way or another, with the whole from which they are, or want to be, separated" (Cohen 2013: 192-215).

It brings us closer to the discussion on the designation of the word "border" that is present in contemporary reflection on social boundaries. Two different views are clearly visible here - one sees the "border" in noun form as a static image, a stable outcome of demarcation practices and the division of a community according to the adopted criteria (Buchowski 2004), the other - focuses attention on the process, using a "verb" approach reflecting the processual nature of borders and their fluctuating course (Van Houtum, Kramsch and Zierhofer 2005).

Another, complementary theoretical debate on social boundaries arise taking into consideration the character of the border itself - Ed Williams and Martin van der Velde emphasize its duality – on the one hand, borders – especially in the European politics - are used as an instrument to reach some political and economical goals, on the other though – they may be a final goal themselves. The third, most possible variant considers them to be - on the one hand a tool, and on the other hand - an effect of the process of separating selected social groups (Williams, Van der Velde 2005).

They are also not to be overestimated "the influences which state borders and historical changes to these borders have on the everyday lives of people living near a border, those living on two sides of an international border, or those simply making a living from frequently crossing such borders" (Lubaś 2013: 111). In the case of communities residing in the immediate vicinity of an international border, one can observe a unique phenomenon — the situation of a borderland, characterised by "emerging new values, attitudes and behaviours that cannot be reduced to those one might find in ethnically homogeneous environments" (Róg 2009: 42). Donnan and Wilson write bluntly, "some things can happen only at borders" (Donnan, Wilson 2007: 13).

Being an inherent part of the history of Europe, the changeability of the location of social boundaries strongly affects the symbolic dimension of divisions, as well as the need to narratively adapt to their presence when interpreting history (Delanty 2006, 2017). One tool for this "adaptation" is a so-called "symbolic policy" that emphasises the importance of the elite in shaping local discourses. As Murray Edelman argues, the key role in shaping the interpretation of historical events and constructing local narratives is played by politicians who, by employing a cognitive and emotional communication layer, give symbols a meaning consistent with the political interests of the groups represented (after Kaufmann 2001: 15-47). Symbolic boundaries are therefore created by charismatic individuals who impose their vision of the world on all members of the community, and what sustains and strengthens social boundaries in an international cross-border area (also called a *boundary*) are not only ritual forms and behaviours practised by the entire community, but above all imaginary constructs, internalised divisions, the social consequences of which are visible in the daily relations of community members (Eder 2006, Scott 2012, Paasi 2011, 1996, Strüver 2004).

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Rituals and narratives that build boundaries between communities also play an important role in the daily "flagging" of the homeland (Billig 2008) in borderland areas and in recreating social divisions. Mary Douglas writes about the classifications that create the local social order ("order-producing"), ones that are meaning-making and form-giving to social life (Douglas 2007: 77-80). Importantly, regardless of the specificity and determinants of group identity, so-called socially effective differences (i.e. distinctions significant from the point of view of a given community and seen in real social relations) underpin the divisions that form within local communities (Barth 2004). That is why borders and their social effects are most clearly visible in the activity of cross-border communities, which in their everyday functioning in the face of and through boundaries - embody the social effectiveness of the defined divisions.

Contemporary Europe, with its complex history of changing borders and their social effectiveness, should be – therefore - understood as an area in which "the nature of borders is in a process of fundamental change. The concept of 'border' is in a process of functional differentiation, which means that economic, social, legal, political and identity spaces are increasingly bounded separately" (Christiansen, Jørgensen 2000: 62). Thus, it can be said that defining national borders in Europe is a constant, ongoing process of a "daily plebiscite" character, the results of which are confirmed not only in activities at the international level, but above all - in real activities at the level of micro local communities.

"Borders and the regular crossing of borders, have become part of our routine experience, particularly in Europe where borders proliferate (between an increasing number of EU member states and non-member countries, or within countries as sub-national and city regions assert their EU-sponsored autonomy and assert a new spatial existence) but where the importance of individual borders is in many cases very much reduced" (Rumford 2006: 156).

Due to the processes of European integration - the effectiveness of interstate borders in Europe, perceived as limitations in transport or international trade, has significantly decreased. This does not mean, however, that boundaries as such have lost significant - their effects are still felt at both the individual and group levels. Furthermore, the partial transformation of the meaning of national boundaries within the European community also contributed to the creation or strengthening of borders of a different, non-political nature, including ethnic and cultural borders.

One of the most accurate theories that allow us to understand the specificity and multifaceted nature of today's border divisions within the European community is the concept of phantom borders, which are neither constant and immutable solid structures, nor – purely constructivist, liquid phenomena. As the authors argue, the contemporary phantom borders are an effect of interaction of three related areas, which are: 1) imagined in mental maps and narrations, 2) objectified and subjectifed actors, and 3) contextualized daily practices (Hirschhausen, Grandits, Kraft, Müller, Serrier 2019). The authors argue, that only the combination of these three aspects brings to life a socially effective border, the meaning of which is not only symbolic, narrative, but also observed in the geographical and interactive space.

The frequent changes in the course of European borders lead also to arising one more challenge area, related to the stability of the national identity shaped in these conditions. One of the key questions is what place (if any) will the new, emerging European identity take in the consciousness of individuals and society? Can it constitute a kind of alternative to national, local identities, or maybe it will be shaped on a different, supranational level? In other words, what kind of Europe - national, non-national, or perhaps supra-national, will be formed in the course of contemporary border-drawing processes? Gerard Delanty argues, that "the logic of Europeanization has tended towards the Europeanization of national identities rather than the demise of national identity" (Delanty 2007). Therefore, we should not look for a European level of identification now, constituted beyond the particular national identities, but rather observe the mixed, hybrid, national identities, which have been transformed within the process of Europeanization (Delanty 2007).

And this is the dynamic of building a local community in the unique situation of borderland, emerging from the process of reconstructing state, national and ethnic borders in the Pieniny section of the Polish-Slovak borderland, that this article is devoted to. Using the example of the local community (Sromowce Niżne - Červený Kláštor), I will try to show how activities carried out by political actors at the international level resonate at the level of everyday cross-border interactions, i.e. micro-relations between neighbours, anchored in negotiated historical interpretations, everyday good neighbourly practices and a common identity axis. The last question is, how are socially effective boundaries shaped in the local community functioning across the state border and how the cross-border community is shaped?

2. Local context

This article discusses the case of the Polish-Slovak borderland, which can be described as "old" (Babiński 2014), "transitional" (Chlebowczyk 1975) and "symmetrical" (Babiński 2014, Sakson 1990). In this area, the interpenetration of cultural and social systems is clearly visible, while maintaining the legal and political separateness of both communities. The last four decades (which have brought a noticeable intensification of relations in the researched borderland area, and above all a strengthening of Polish-Slovak collaboration — including collaboration as part of the "Tatry" Euroregion Association)), have led to the development of a cross-border community, one in which the distance between Poles and Slovaks is becoming blurred, creating a platform for a community of experiences and everyday practices. Due to the cultural proximity, interactions in the border area are natural and create the impression of a cross-border community that escapes a simple national division. Interestingly, this cross-border nature of the community is also reflected in identity issues; the inhabitants of the region in question avoid unambiguous declarations of nationality, identifying themselves generally as "local" or "from here", which is indicative of their origin being one of the six Pieniny villages. On the Polish side these are Sromowce Niżne, Sromowce Średnie and Sromowce Wyżne, and on the Slovakian side they are Červený Kláštor, Nižné Šváby and Majere. A similar phenomenon is also observed in other borderlands and is a manifestation of "a kind of life wisdom, in times of political turmoil and threats of persecution" (Plit 2008: 10).

Apart from this cultural balance, political and economic differences are observable in the Polish-Slovak borderland, although they do not determine relations in the local community of Pieniny highlanders, which can undoubtedly be described as "symmetrical" as no single country dominates. Although in recent years the standard of living in Slovakia has clearly deteriorated and Poland has become a more economically attractive country, this did not affect the symmetry of Polish-Slovak relations at the level of micro-relations between neighbours in the researched territory.

In order to explore the shape and importance of divisions in the borderland community, it seems necessary to analyse their social memory, which is considered to be "a set of ideas about the past existing in a community, as well as all people and events from this past, the knowledge

of whose existence is considered obligatory and which are commemorated in various ways, and, finally, various forms of this commemoration" (Szacka 1985: 68). Importantly, the choice of which people and events are perceived as significant by a given community may be subjective and different from the narrative adopted in common discourse. Thanks to this, analysing oral (social) history allows us to capture the perspective of the actors and marginalised groups who actually shape the history of local people, despite the fact that they do not participate in creating great historical narratives. And it is based on such an analysis of history, i.e. spoken and being told to this day, that the analysis presented in this article was carried out.

The community living in the villages of Sromowce Niżne (on the Polish side) and Červený Kláštor (on the Slovak side) is an example of a community functioning at the intersection of arbitrarily designated administrative borders and social boundaries created bottom-up, reflecting the actual distinctions within the community of highlanders from the Dunajec River area. The demarcation line imposing the top-down dichotomous division is the international border drawn in 1918 and finally confirmed, after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, between the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic. However, this division does not coincide with the location of ethnic boundaries which cross the political borders as well as the real divisions that constitute Polish-Slovak international relations at the local level.

2.1. Methodological note

The article bases on a part of a research material collected during a sociographic research conducted in the Polish-Slovak borderland in 2013-2016, and updated and revised in 2021 based on a review of the literature on the subject. The entire research material covered various topics related to the local identity of the inhabitants of the cross-border Pieniny area, as well as the local history and culture of the Polish-Slovakian highlanders. One of the intriguing threads, however, turned out to be the issue of building and recreating the local border in the context of the processes of European integration and bringing countries and nations closer together within international structures, and this is what this article is devoted to.

In the course of the conducted study, extensive analytical material was collected, consisting of an analysis of documents and historical sources (i.e. institutional data), a review of

current press and information materials (i.e. 'non-institutional' data), and an in-depth analysis of a selected data corpus (collected in the course of an in-depth monographic study in the villages of Sromowce Niżne and Červený Kláštor, involving 140 individual in-depth interviews with inhabitants of the villages of Sromowce Niżne and Červený Kláštor). Only a part of the collected material found its direct application in the topic addressed in this paper, although thanks to such an extensive data corpus it was possible to take a comprehensive, contextual approach to the topic discussed.

The field research was carried out according to the established theory paradigm and following a procedure proposed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, and the theoretical model was built using four basic analytical steps (Glaser and Strauss: 2009): 1. Comparing the events applying to each generated category; 2. Integrating categories and their properties; 3. Establishing the boundaries of the theory; and finally 4. Writing the theory, although by maintaining an awareness of the limitations resulting from the adopted research methods it is possible to construct a so-called "mid-range theory", which does not aspire to be a "great theoretical edifice" of a universal character (Merton: 2002).

And although the conclusions drawn from the conducted research cannot constitute a universal theory, they can be successfully used in order to better understand the experiences of other borderland communities, whose fate has inevitably been bound up with the international border and its changing location. A similar intuition has been expressed by Piotr Sztompka, writing about a so-called "real model", which is "any such community that is subjected to empirical research not so much to obtain knowledge about itself, but rather to indirectly get to know another community" (Sztompka 1968: 48). In this sense, the studied local community of the Polish-Slovak borderland can be examined via the prism of a real natural model, and the research conducted in its vicinity can be treated as a study "conducted not for purely diagnostic purposes, but in order to obtain information about wider social systems within which local communities function" (Sztompka 1968: 48).

3. Reconstruction of Polish-Slovak border relations from a historical perspective — an attempt at a synthesis

The historical process of constructing and, after the democratic breakthrough in 1989, of re-constructing Polish-Slovak borderland relations in the area under study can be presented in a diagram which has been simplified to a certain extent (see Diagram 1). Diagram 1 highlights key periods in the history of the studied area of the Polish-Slovak borderland, ones significant from the point of view of recreating the cross-border community and cross-border relations in the last century of Polish-Slovak relationships.

Diagram 1. Reconstruction of Polish-Slovak border relations in a historical perspective

| < 1918 (1920) natural borderland (multi-ethnic, multicultural local community) | → | 1920 Designating a state border (pursuant to the decision of the Council of Ambassadors) | → | 1920-1993 Changing permeability of the state border (the community's attitude towards the state border) | → | 1993 Initiation of local Polish-Slovak collaboration within the Euroregion „Tatry" Association | → | 2006 Inauguration of a footbridge on the Dunajec River (Completing the process of reconstruction of the local community) | → | 2013 Establishment of the EGTC ((Institutional complement of the process of the cross-border relations) |

Source: own work

3.1. A natural local community

From the perspective of the discussed historical process and the creation of foundations for the cross-border Polish-Slovak community, the key moment would seem to be the establishment of official relations at the international level and the establishment of the Polish-Czechoslovak administrative border in 1920. Before the nation state-based (national) border on the Dunajec River was drawn, relations between the inhabitants of Sromowce and their neighbours across the river were a daily occurrence. The area of today's Polish-Slovak borderland was somewhat of a natural borderland, where Polish, Slovak, Hungarian and German influences intertwined, as did (from a cultural perspective) Pieniny and Spiš influences too (Spiš being a region that lies mainly in northern Slovakia). This mixture brought to life a multi-ethnic,

multicultural community, one which used a language that was a blend of both the Polish and Slovak Pieniny dialects with various German, Hungarian and Ukrainian influences.

Since the areas of today's Polish-Slovak borderland were settled, the proximity of the river and thus access to a convenient transport route have enabled the surrounding towns to develop quickly both economically and socially. Both villages on the Dunajec River (Sromowce Niżne and Červený Kláštor) have made the most of the benefits of the Dunajec for many centuries, functioning as one community, divided by a crossable geographic barrier. The beginning of the 20th century, however, brought a clear division of the community according to national identity, something which meant that after the end of World War I, new, previously non-existent states of a national nature appeared on the map of Europe. Among them were the independent Republic of Poland, revived after 123 years of partitions, and the Czechoslovak (or Czecho-Slovak) state, the existence of which was proclaimed on 28 October 1918, when formal hostilities had yet to finish.

3.2. The beginning of official Polish-(Czecho)Slovak relations

The location of international borders in post-war Europe was set by the Treaty of Versailles, signed in June 1919 by the Entente Powers, Germany, and other allied and associated countries. Detailed Polish-Czechoslovak issues were settled a few months later, under the treaty signed in Saint-Germain-en-Laye near Paris. It was decided at that time that, after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, a new state would be created from a proportion of its lands, i.e. Upper Hungary, Moravia, Czech Silesia, Bohemia and Transcarpathian Ruthenia — Czechoslovakia (the so-called First Czechoslovak Republic). The architect of the union, Tomasz Masaryk (affectionately dubbed "Tatíček" by the Slovaks), became president. This decision, had above all vivid formal consequences as it created - for the first time in the contemporary history - two separate nation states, and divided the inhabitants of the Dunajec highlander community into two separate national societies.

The demarcation of new borders in Europe was associated with a great deal of dissatisfaction on both sides of the divisions. The tense relations, related especially to critical border areas, incl. Cieszyn (in Zaolzie), Spiš and Orava, took sometimes the form of open armed

conflicts (Jesenský 2014) and made it practically impossible to cross the border on the Dunajec River from the beginning of the 1920s. "When in 1920 the international border was established on the Dunajec, the world closed for the Sromovians" (Baszak 2005: 24). And although cross-border contacts were not formally banned, attempts to get to the other side of the river were restricted by procedures that accompany the crossing of a border. From the point of view of everyday practices between neighbours, the usual relations between the inhabitants of Sromowce Niżne and Červený Kláštor became extremely difficult, but thanks to the commitment of the communities of both villages they were not completely severed. "Despite the new, official, disadvantageous situation, family ties were maintained. The Dunajec River was still treated by the local people as an element connecting both communities" (Baszak 2005: 24).

3.3 Local cooperation in the shadow of World War II

On 14 March 1939, the First Slovak Republic was established, referred to as a "puppet state", a "satellite" of the Third Reich (although it was formally an independent state). Due to the close collaboration of Jozef Tiso - the leader of the First Slovak Republic - with the near surrounding of Adolf Hitler, Slovak troops, allied with the troops of the Third Reich, participated in the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939. The Nazi army crossed the Dunajec River on horses with weapons attached to their harnesses. The infantry crossed the river on pontoons at the level of today's Červeny Kláštor. Only a few shots were fired in Sromowce, and luckily there were no deaths among Poles. Although older residents mention two Germans killed at the hands of Poles (who then went into hiding for a long time), this information has never been confirmed in any historical sources.

Due to tense relations at the state level, trade with Slovakia was strictly forbidden, and moreover, the area's inhabitants were obliged to hand over a monthly quota of cattle and food to the German occupier. The oldest inhabitants of the village remember these times as a period of terrible hunger, and at the same time of enormous interpersonal solidarity that allowed them to survive this hard time. The food supply difficulties were accompanied by a flourishing of the grey economy and widespread smuggling (especially popular among young and physically fit people), which "by definition [...] depends on the existence of a border and what the state defines

as things that can be legally imported or exported" (Donnan, Wilson 2007: 138-139). "Smuggling and borders," the authors write, "are to some extent defined by each other" (Donnan, Wilson 2007: 138). Virtually everything that was in demand among Slovaks was smuggled in, mainly nails, salt, caustic soda, feathers, and tobacco leaves. Scarce footwear, as well as textiles and fabrics, much more readily available on the Slovak side, were taken to Poland. Goods were shipped across the river at night when border patrols had departed from their posts. If a smuggler was caught red-handed, he was stripped of his goods and punished with a heavy fine. There were also prison sentences and forced transports to work in Germany.

At the end of 1944, the Russian army crossed the present-day Polish-Slovak border territory, liberating the areas near the Dunajec, imposing the rule of the Red Army at the same time. However, the inhabitants did not feel any significant improvement in their living conditions, because instead of the Germans, the Russians took on the role of the oppressor. They preyed on young women, and plundered houses of food and valuables. However, they did allow people to cross to the Slovak side without any problems, so families living on both sides of the Dunajec River could meet after many years and resume relations.

In the summer of 1945, the Russians left the area surrounding the Dunajec River, and they were replaced by the Polish army, at first favourable to the local population, but with time they gave way to young, extremely strict departments of petty officials. Interestingly, while there was no partisan activity in Sromowce during the German occupation, acts of sabotage occurred immediately after the liberation, provoking the Department of Security to conduct an investigation into resistance against the authorities.

3.4. Neighbours with their backs turned to the river (1945-1960)

The first post-war years were a time of great poverty in Podhale. What the Germans did not steal was plundered by the Russians in the last months before the liberation. Due to the abolition of the compulsory quota, cattle and horses could be seen in villages. The inhabitants of Sromowce, who were sent to Germany for forced labour, returned with modern methods of raising cattle and growing plants. Farms slowly revived, giving inhabitants hope for better times.

In the 1950s, the Slovak side of the Dunajec River was dominated by agriculture. In 1968, however, there was a radical change in the organisation of work; all the land was merged in the area surrounding the Dunajec and a so-called "druzhstvo", the equivalent of a Polish state-owned farm (PGR), was established. At that time, in order to get to the other side of the river, it was necessary to have an appropriate pass, issued only in justified cases (e.g. in connection with important family events). Everyday contact for families living on the opposite banks of the Dunajec River was extremely difficult. 24-hour patrols stationed in the border zone made it impossible to just cross the border or even approach it; the local population was therefore forced to develop certain ways of maintaining contacts with the inhabitants of Červený Kláštor, e.g. by talking "over the river", although, as the inhabitants of the surveyed communities recall, a large proportion of Polish-Slovak friendships did not withstand this trial and over time fell apart. Family relationships also became looser, and they could only be sustained to a very limited extent in the post-war period.

3.5. Hand in hand across divisions (1961-1989)

Despite the difficult economic situation, Sromowce Niżne relatively quickly came into the possession of new modern conveniences. The construction of a paved, asphalt road began in 1961, but due to the need to transport gravel and cement by horse, the work dragged on for almost seven years. As a result, in 1968 the first state-operated intertown bus arrived in Sromowce, radically changing the professional and social situation of the inhabitants of the village.

Under the Polish People's Republic and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the functioning of the Dunajec community at the micro-level of everyday neighbourly life resembled a shared struggle against adversity. Residents shared what they had, even though their resources were very limited. Economic vicissitudes in the Polish-Slovak borderland was very large; after years of prosperity, there was a tragic collapse from which it was difficult to recover. However, being close to another country which experienced slightly different fluctuations in its economic situation (for Poles it was Czechoslovakia, and for Slovaks it was Poland) made it possible to survive even the most difficult moments.

This close collaboration and exchange in the Polish-Slovak borderland zone concerned, among other things, the labour market too. In the 1970s, when the economic situation was much better across the southern border, some Poles sought employment in Czechoslovakia. Young girls travelled to the sewing plant in Spišská Nová Ves, and men often took odd jobs on the farms of their neighbours across the Dunajec River.

Although the post-war years, according to the stories told by the inhabitants of Sromowce, brought Poles and Slovaks from the Dunajec River closer to each other, some Sromovians experienced a flaring up of old resentments passed down from generation to generation. Mutual antipathy reportedly had very real consequences, including denunciations that Slovaks made on Poles who illegally crossed the border along the Dunajec River. Regardless of these individual cases of denunciation and the occasionally visible resentment felt towards neighbours across the river, it can be said that the period of "people's democracy" was a difficult test of Polish-Slovak relations. It was a test which, despite strenuous efforts on the part of the authorities to cool down these relations and limit their intensity, was passed by the community on the Dunajec River. When it comes to the difficult political conditions that prevailed in the second half of the 20th century, Polish-Slovak relations were still maintained, and good neighbourly relations (with some minor exceptions) did not break down. The inhabitants of Sromowce Niżne and Červeny Kláštor once again proved that for them community is of supreme value, and their joint struggle with their oppressor additionally strengthened these relations.

4. Reconstruction of the Polish-Slovak community after 1989

Thanks to the democratic political changes that took place in Europe in the late 1980s, local relations on the Polish-Slovak border normalised. Approaching the border river, the Dunajec, became legal again, although one was still not allowed to cross the international border that ran along it. The closest border crossing used by the Sromovians was 14 km away, a foot and road crossing in Łysa nad Dunajcem (previously called Golembark). This crossing was opened in 1956 and initially it was made available only to Poles and Slovaks at designated hours of the day. It was not until 2000 that the crossing gained international status, though not for long, because in 2007, under the Schengen Agreement, it was completely abolished.

The community of the villages of the Dunajec river embraced the political changes with great joy, and the symbolic "opening" of the borders between countries brought the inhabitants a great relief. This is what one of the older female residents of Sromowce Wyżne recalls: *It was amazing! We went to Edyta right away, to her cousin. Come on, god, it's tonight. We will sit here and don't worry, we will come. It was such a freedom. Cool!* [WF_01_14]. Thus the long-awaited connection of the cross-border community of Pieniny highlanders, functioning de facto as one, has become a fact.

4.1. Establishing relations at the local level

Thanks to the creation of a favourable atmosphere of cooperation that took place after these political changes, it was also possible to achieve an official Polish-(Czecho)Slovak rapprochement. In previous decades, the governments of Poland and Czechoslovakia had cooperated within the Soviet Bloc, but relations between both countries were characterised by a great deal of courtesy, and decisions were made in consultation with the authorities in the USSR. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about real, substantive Polish-Slovak cooperation, when its nature was determined by the leaders of another country. Grassroots cooperation (throughout the area that makes up today's Polish-Slovak borderland) formed in the 1990s, laying the foundations for the subsequent intensification of Polish-Slovak relations within European structures.

The natural, neighborly needs of the local population, although suppressed and impossible to fulfill for many years, remained in the minds of the Pieniny highlanders, not letting themselves be completely forgotten. Strategies to tame the border in the everyday life of the inhabitants of Sromowce Niżne and Červeny Kláštor, developed over the years of functioning at the junction of two national states, allowed the local population to maintain cross-border relations regardless of the nature and permeability of the border on the Dunajec. Residents coped in various ways to get around the burdensome formalities accompanying expeditions to Slovakia. In the summer season, young people sunbathing by the river took advantage of the guards' moment of inattention to get to the Slovak side unnoticed. As a young resident of Sromowce remembers, *I have also walked through the water more than once. And then that was the limit. You just waited for the border guard to leave, or the police on the other side, and you walked*

by. Or you were swimming on the Dunajec on a mattress - it flowed afterwards. You swam here, and then we went to the other side there [W_60_K_14].

The first idea of establishing formal cooperation between Poland and Slovakia in the region of the Tatra Mountains was born during a local government conference organised in Zakopane in 1991. The idea of closer cooperation developed over the next two years, and thanks to the involvement of a group of local press and television journalists, in 1993 representatives of government authorities and local councils met. The talks took place in two stages; first in Poprad (27 May) and then in Nowy Targ (28 May), and as a result of the discussions, a common position was hammered out and included in a Declaration of Intent signed by both parties, emphasising the need to popularise the idea of partnership in local and national media. Although adopting the declaration was a purely symbolic action, it was a promising first step towards establishing real Polish-Slovak cooperation in the Tatra borderland area.

The Polish-Slovak rapprochement was also helped by the domestic situation in what was then Czechoslovakia, which for years had struggled with internal tensions between the Czechs and Slovaks, united as one state. Their leaders' ambitions and separatist ideas prevailed, however, and led to the so-called "velvet divorce", initiated by Václav Klaus and Vladimír Mečiar on 1 January 1993. Pursuant to the decision made by both presidents, the federal state was dissolved, in place of which two separate nation states were established, i.e. the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, the latter having since become an independent societal actor and Poland's partner in discussions on cooperation in the Tatra Mountains.

The Polish-Slovak borderland established in the wake of the decision to dissolve Czechoslovakia (compared to other areas where the nation states came into contact) stood out from the very beginning in some respects, ranging from its cultural and linguistic richness, to its complex history and politics, to the very geographical location. Paradoxically, it was this borderland landscape that largely determined the specificity of today's cooperation between the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic in this area.

Established in 1993, the Polish-Slovak border is 541 km long, a significant stretch of which is located in protected areas due to its unique flora and fauna. This situation made it necessary to both regulate various legal issues related to protecting nature, as well as to establish international institutions to ensure the protection of the natural heritage of the Tatra Mountains.

The Polish-Slovak border boasts, among other things, The Dunajec River Gorge, and the possibility of crossing its narrow body of water cutting between two mountain massifs has become a tourist attraction advertised throughout Europe.

The need to protect their exceptional natural and landscape assets, as well as to extend cross-border cooperation to other areas of activity, prompted representatives of Polish and Slovak local authorities to mull over the establishment of an association aimed at developing relations between Poland and Slovakia in the Tatra Mountains region.

4.2. A formal community

The first to come up with a formal proposal for cooperation were the Slovaks who, in July 1993 in Kieżmark, presented the Polish side with their own concept for of an interregional union gathering together districts (Polish 'powiats' and Slovak *'okres's'*) and communes in the immediate vicinity of the Polish-Slovak border. The location of the boundaries of the future cross-border Tatra area was also proposed, and it was to include towns and villages from the Slovak districts of Dolný Kubin, Liptovský Mikuláš, Poprad, Stará Ľubovňa and Spišská Stará Ves, and on the Polish side the areas of the former Nowy Targ district, located in Podhale, Spisz, Orawa and in the Pieniny.

On 31 October 1993, i.e. after the break-up of Czechoslovakia into two sovereign states — the Czech Republic and Slovakia — *the Declaration by Territorial Self-governments of the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic to mark the creation of the "Tatry" Region* was signed in Zakopane , and this declaration became the first and the most important step in the effort to shape, or more accurately reactivate, the Polish-Slovak cross-border community. According to Babiński, the establishment of the "Tatry" Region (which would later transform into the Tatra Euroregion) was one of the key conditions necessary for the idea of cross-border cooperation in the Polish-Slovak borderland area to develop (Babiński 1997). The year 1993 can therefore be regarded as the moment when symbolic cross-border cooperation was initiated, which was the first stage in the reconstruction of the local community in the studied area of the Polish-Slovak borderland.

The next steps were taken soon after on 18 August 1994, when the "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Slovak Republic on Cross-border Cooperation" was signed in Warsaw, which was to lead to the finalisation of many years of efforts to initiate the activities of the Euroregion. Both Governments then declared their desire "to support [...] cross-border cooperation, thus contributing to economic and social progress in both countries"[1]. The document defined the priorities of this cooperation at the local and governmental level, and delineated 15 areas of cooperation that required special commitment from both sides. Among them were nature and environmental protection, education and science (including reciprocal teaching of the neighbour's language), as well as industry, agriculture and trade.

Finally, on 26 August 1994, during the Founding Congress in Nowy Targ, an Agreement was signed between the local governments from Poland and Slovakia to establish a cross-border association for the "Tatry" Euroregion, which was to contribute to "accelerating the comprehensive development of adjoining areas of the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic, with reference to the historical roots and mutual relations of these regions"[2]. For the Polish side, the document was signed by administrators of thirteen communes and mayors of three member towns, including, as a representative of the Czorsztyn commune, the then commune administrator, Stanisław Wojtaszek.

The following two years of Polish-Slovak collaboration as part of the "Tatry" Euroregion were marked by neighbourly rapprochement and mutually getting acquainted with the other country's inhabitants and the history of today's Polish-Slovak borderland. For this reason, in 1995, in Nowy Targ, Rabka and Zakopane, a festival called the "Days of Slovak Culture in Poland" was held, during which over 600 artists (and keen amateurs) presented various aspects of Slovak music, crafts and traditional cuisine from various regions of Slovakia previously unknown to Poles. Similarly, in the following year (1996), "Days of Polish Culture in Slovakia"

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[1] The Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Republic of Slovakia on cross-border cooperation, p. 1.The document is available at: http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WMP20040210370 [accessed: 3/06/2021].
[2] Agreement between the local governments of Poland and Slovakia on establishing a transborder union of the "Tatry" Euroregion, article 1. The document is available here: http://www.euroregion-tatry.eu/_pliki/umowa_o_utworzeniu_euroregionu_tatry_199424bfb258d2,129f2.pdf [accessed: 3/06/2021].

were organised in Slovakia (in Námestovo, Dolný Kubin, Liptovský Mikuláš, Spišská Stará Ves, Stará Ľubovňa, Spišská Nová Ves, and Kežmarok), enabling brothers and sisters from across the southern border of the Tatra Mountains to get to know Poland not only from the official side, but also behind the scenes.

In the same year, the "Tatry" Euroregion was added to the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR). Legal issues concerning how inhabitants of the border area crossed the Polish-Slovak border were also regulated. The result of the negotiations was the Agreement between the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on Local Border Traffic, drawn up in December 1996 in Zakopane, which entered into force at the beginning of September 1997. The law laid out the rules for crossing a simplified international border for citizens whose registered abode was in the border zone within which the villages of Sromowce Niżne and Červený Kláštor are located.

The year 1997 brought an intensification of Polish-Slovak cultural cooperation in activities supporting the maintenance and restoration of the regional culture of the Polish-Slovak border. The publication summarizing the first years of operation of the Euroregion "Tatry" states that "The implementation of projects contributed to the establishment of cross-border contacts and cooperation between local government organizations, associations, cultural and educational institutions and sports clubs. The Small Euroregional Projects implemented by the Euroregion "Tatry" constituted a prelude to thinking in terms of European integration, in the dimension of small local communities"[3] (Majorczyk 2000).

The role played by these grassroots activities cannot be overestimated - it was possible to involve the local population in building Polish-Slovak social capital, the most important one, based on the will of social actors themselves - borderland residents, and not - as has been the case so far - on the initiative authorities. As the person involved in handling micro-projects admits, *they certainly brought Poles and Slovaks closer, especially since it often happens that under one project, a small project, contacts are usually made, which later result in joint ventures in large infrastructure projects and such projects Well, there are at least .., such partnerships*

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[3] A. Majorczyk, *Łączą nas Tatry*, Biuro Rady Euroregionu „Tatry" w Nowym Targu, Nowy Targ 2000.

established as part of micro - projects, which later moved to implement larger projects, that is, there are many [W_14_K_15].

4.3. One step away from a fully-fledged community

Further development of relations in today's Polish-Slovak borderland took place with the idea of establishing close collaboration (economic, political and cultural) in order to implement joint projects financed with state funds and those from the EU (after the accession of Poland and Slovakia to the European Union on 1 May 2004). This phase of the evolution of Polish-Slovak relations is referred to in this article as the "semi-crossable-border" period (in force in 1999-2006). The entry into force of EU regulations significantly limited checks on people at the border crossing in Sromowce Niżne, making it easier for residents and tourists to cross the border on the Dunajec River. Thanks to the accession of the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic to the EU, the citizens of both countries obtained EU citizenship, entitling them to cross borders within the EU using documents confirming their identity (an identity card or a passport). Additional customs points for EU citizens, who were subject to simplified customs controls, were designated at border crossing points. The Polish-Slovak border on the Dunajec River — although formally open — still remained an obvious natural barrier, preventing regular Polish-Slovak contacts within the community of Pieniny highlanders by the Dunajec River.

Under EU law, citizens of the Member States have been granted EU citizenship, which allows them to move and reside freely within the territory of the EU (on the basis of a valid identity document). Both Poles and Slovaks took advantage of these opportunities, buying selected goods from their neighbors. As reported by the inhabitants of the frontier villages, *that was the calculation. It was cheaper, it was more profitable, and you could do anything. We also went to Christmas for beer and vodka, and now you don't drive, it's not profitable, because it's too expensive now. My husband said that he didn't even want to drink their beer anymore, and it once paid off.* [W_23_K_14]. Immediately after the borders were opened, Slovaks came to Poland mainly for food - meat, confectionery (including the famous fudge with a daisy, or Popular Fudge), while Poles supplied themselves with flour, pasta and alcohol in Slovakia (mainly beer and rum), and delicacies and sweets (including the famous Student's chocolate).

The accession of Poland and Slovakia to European structures has opened up new possibilities when it comes to financing projects and investments from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the aim of which is to support the development of European regions, especially peripheral regions, neglected by other support programmes. Under the ERDF, the Interreg IIIA Programme was launched to promote cross-border cooperation in areas located in close proximity to the external and internal borders of the European Union. In 2004-2006, the Interreg IIIA Poland-Slovak Republic Programme was implemented in the studied area of the Polish-Slovak borderland, covering activities in three fields: infrastructure development, socio-economic development, and technical assistance offered to applicants.

In 2005 work began on the New Financial Perspective of the European Union 2007-2013, which envisaged the continuation of activities undertaken in the Interreg IIIA Programme in the new formula of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC). The purpose of ETC was to implement and promote international projects in the European Union, with particular emphasis on projects in international borderland areas. Among the projects initiated under the ETC were the Cross-Border Cooperation Operational Programme between the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic 2007-2013, which was of key importance for the studied area of the Polish-Slovak borderland, and chaired by the Association of the Carpathian Euroregion Poland (Leading Partner), and members included, among other bodies, the "Tatry" Euroregion Association, the "Beskidy" Region Association, and Higher Territorial Units in Žilina and Prešov.

4.4. The real rapprochement in Polish-Slovak local relations

The culmination of the process of shaping a real, mature community in the studied border area took place on 12 August 2006, when a pedestrian and bicycle footbridge was opened spanning the Dunajec River, connecting Poland's Sromowce Niżne with Slovakia's Červený Kláštor. Since then, everyday relations in the studied community of Pieniny highlanders have taken on a completely different form and intensity, leading to the establishment and reconstruction of truly close neighbourly relations that exist above and beyond the border. The symbol of the footbridge over the border river Dunajec is not accidental at all here. The river has connected the surrounding villages for years, both on the Polish and Slovak side, and nourished

their inhabitants in two ways: indirectly, by giving them jobs transporting wood and other goods (centuries-old rafting), as well as directly, by providing water and fresh food in the form of fish and crustaceans (Baszak 2007, Janicka-Krzywda, Ceklarz 2014).

In 2006, after almost a hundred years of petitions and requests from the residents, it was finally possible to permanently connect Sromowce Niżne with Červený Kláštor by means of a pedestrian and bicycle bridge, initially serving as a border crossing intended only for local border traffic. For the first year there was simplified customs procedures (in accordance with the Local Border Traffic Act), so a natural phenomenon was free, essentially unregistered traffic between the Polish and Slovak side. The inhabitants learned to function in permanent proximity to the border, making it feel almost invisible. Ultimately, the border control on the footbridge in Sromowce Niżne was completely abolished on 21 December 2007 with the entry into force of the provisions of the Schengen Agreement, signed by the President of the Republic of Poland on 7 September 2007. Pursuant to the provisions of the Agreement, all time limitations regarding the use of the border bridge were then abolished, allowing Poles and Slovaks, as well other nationalities, to freely cross the border on the Dunajec at any time. A similar fate befell all of the 54 Polish-Slovak border crossings that were then in existence.

The first mentions of any need to build a bridge on this part of the river date back to the beginning of the 20th century, when the Sromowce Niżne Commune Council adopted a resolution on the planned permanent connection of Sromowce with the neighbouring Szwaby Niżne (Červený Kláštor). Until then, there had only been an irregular cable ferry crossing that depended on the weather conditions. On 14 May 1914, twelve members of the Commune Council headed by the head of the commune, Jan Dziurny, signed an application that read: *Jan Dziurny, head of the commune, hereby petitions for efforts to be made [to] build a bridge on the Dunajec River, as people who live here have no connection with the world and as a result of this, instead of becoming richer, they are becoming poorer, and as we, the poor, will not be able to build the bridge ourselves, we are forced to ask the Governor orally in Lviv to grant us the appropriate amount for the construction of the bridge. I authorise trustworthy people to go to Lviv, Reverend Jan Kwiatkiewicz and Jędrzej Waradzyn, and the travel costs will be borne by*

the commune from the commune fund in the form of transport to the railway station and transport back and by rail, and some for food.[4]

Unfortunately, the unexpected outbreak of World War I in August 1914 interrupted the activities, and the interwar period — instead of seeing the completion of the planned scheme — brought a wave of border disputes, burying hopes for the following years. Although the idea of building a bridge over the Dunajec River was resumed right after Poland regained independence in 1939, these actions also failed.

Almost 150 meters long and 2.5 meters wide, the footbridge (designed by the "Mosty Wrocław" S.C. Research and Design Team under the supervision of prof. dr. hab. Jan Biliszczuk, the then Director of the Institute of Civil Engineering of the Wrocław University of Technology) is one of the world's longest suspended (cable-stayed) structures made of glued wood. The footbridge became a bridge (in a metaphorical and literal sense) over the obstacles and divisions within the community of Pieniny highlanders. It connected two villages which, due to the arbitrary political decisions taken almost a hundred years ago, were divided by a clear (and impassable) international border. This supposedly small structure turned out to be a milestone in the history of Polish-Slovak relations. Finally, we managed to connect the two banks of the Dunajec, two local communities - Sromowians and Kláštorians, and above all two nations, so closely related to each other, i.e. Poles and Slovaks.

Inhabitants of both communities clearly felt the change in their everyday life that followed the opening of the footbridge on the Dunajec River. As one of the inhabitants of the village says, *they are so happy that they can come to each other, they can visit each other, that there is nothing, there is no obstacle. Because when there was an obstacle, even during the communist times, it was forbidden to contact when people wanted to talk to each other, because it is known that in Červený Kláštor and Sromowce there are different people who have families. Well, one always had to stand on watch and see if the border guards were coming, and the other person from the family shouted to each other there. They contacted, asked about health, what was going on in the family, or if someone died there, then ... was it some uncle or aunt, just such mundane matters, right?* [W_26_K_14].

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[4] Excerpt from the minutes of the meeting of the Sromowce Niżne Commune Council preserved in the village chronicles.

Ultimately, the border check on the footbridge in Sromowce Niżne was completely abolished on December 21, 2007 with the entry into force of the provisions of the Schengen Agreement, signed by the President of the Republic of Poland on September 7, 2007. Pursuant to the provisions of the Agreement, the time restrictions on the use of the border bridge were then abolished, allowing both Poles and Slovaks, as well as representatives of other nationalities, to freely cross the border on the Dunajec at any time.

The opening of the footbridge over the Dunajec transformed the studied border community into a cross-border community, functioning not across the state border, but towards it. The border has been tamed and included in the daily definition of relations in this small local community, becoming not so much an obstacle or a barrier to everyday contacts, but their constitutive element. The inhabitants of Sromowce cannot imagine today that the border and the neighbors living on the other side of it could not exist.

4.5. A fully-fledged institutional community

The institutional completion of the process of creating a cross-border community in the border area under study took place in August 2013, when the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation TATRY Ltd. was established, which is a body with legal personality under European Union law, and which can therefore independently coordinate and implement Polish-Slovak cross-border projects. The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation is a cross-border organisation established by the "Tatry" Euroregion Union (on the Polish side) and the "Tatry" Region Association (on the Slovak side). The EGTC operates in the territory of the Polish Małopolska Province, and in Slovakia it covers counties in the Prešov Region (Stará Ľubovňa, Sabinov, Poprad, Levoča and Kežmarok), the Košický Region (Tvrdošín, Ružomberok, Námestovo, Liptovský Mikuláš, Dolnliń Kubín) and the Žilina Region (Spišská Nová Ves)). The registered office of EGTC TATRY is in Nowy Targ, therefore Polish law is applicable to the functioning of the EGTC.

Activities aimed at establishing an EGTC in the area where "Tatry" Euroregion operates were included in the project "From the 'Tatry' Euroregion to the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation", which received funding from the European Regional Development

Fund under priority axis 2, "Socio-economic development of the Cross-border Cooperation Program: Republic of Poland-Slovak Republic 2007-2013".

In 2007, a Polish-Slovak Working Committee was established to evaluate the possibility of transforming the Cross-Border Association of "Tatry" Euroregion into EGTC TATRY. Due to the need for the governments of both countries — the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic — to ratify EU regulations and adjust certain legal procedures work on the creation of the new institution was only finalised on 14 August 2013. The next step was granting EGTC TATRY legal personality, which took place on 20 September 2013, with the signing by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland of a decision to enter EGTC TATRY Ltd. into the registry of groups run under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

5. The Polish-Slovak community in the face of contemporary challenges

Today's relations in the Polish-Slovak borderland are harmonious and amicable. Both communities benefit from their proximity to each other, maintaining a natural, cross-border homeostasis. History has come full circle and after a hundred years it has returned to the beginning, i.e. natural relations across an international border (before 1920 the border did not formally exist; today, under the provisions of EU law, the border is permeable and crossable basically without restrictions).

The Polish and Slovak authorities are continuing the implementation of joint, cross-border infrastructure and social projects aimed at eliminating obstacles to the sustainable development of the European community. As part of the subsequent stages of the Interreg Poland-Slovakia programme (currently the EU financial framework for 2021-2027 is in force), measures are being taken to develop the area's shared cultural and tourist potential (under Priority I "Protection and development of the natural and cultural heritage of the border area"), to improve the condition of infrastructure and transport (Priority II "Sustainable cross-border transport") and strengthen human capital (Priority III "Development of cross-border education and lifelong learning")[5].

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[5] For more see the programme's internet site: https://pl.plsk.eu/o-programie [accessed: 07/06/2021]

Particularly noteworthy are certain projects dedicated to building a cross-border community in the Polish-Slovak borderland. Pursuant to the decision of the Monitoring Committee of the Interreg programme taken in March 2019, 32 projects selected in a competition received funding totalling over 33 million euros, of which as much as 5.3 million euros was allocated to projects relating to cross-border education (including, among other things, the establishment of a Cross-Border Education Centre for the "Tatry" Euroregion for Polish and Slovak local government employees).

A difficult test for Polish-Slovak cross-border relations arose during the COVID-19 pandemic (in 2020 and the first half of 2021), which froze everyday contacts and relationships in the community of Pieniny highlanders. Due to the pandemic in the Slovak Republic, a state of emergency was announced (beginning on 12/03/2020), significantly reducing the possibility of transiting the area and crossing the state border. Officially, the Polish-Slovak border crossings were not closed, but traffic on them in practice stopped. The first, most restrictive limitations were only removed on 20 June 2020, when Poland was added to the list of countries that were considered safe in terms of the coronavirus epidemic threat. Due to the fast-changing pandemic situation, restrictions fluctuated over the next few months, and they were also affected by the emergence of new variants of the virus and the development of various "waves" of the pandemic.

In October and November 2020, the Slovak government opted for the "nuclear" option of mass testing all citizens of the country. They managed to test about two thirds of the population (out of 5.5 million citizens) and identified over 50,000 new cases of the virus. Unfortunately, as it soon turned out, these radical actions did not bring long-term results, and the scale of the spread of the pandemic in the Slovak Republic exceeded the government agencies' wildest expectations (and their state of preparation). With the culmination of the wave of cases in January 2021, at the request of the government of the Slovak Republic, 31 firefighters (with paramedic diplomas) from Małopolska were delegated to help and support the Slovaks in conducting tests for Sars-CoV-2 infection.

After periods of freezing and loosening cross-border relations, finally, as of 31 May 2021, the Slovak Republic has introduced a so-called "tourist semaphore", which (thanks to the constant monitoring of the pandemic around the world) regulates the rules of entry and return to Slovakia from individual countries across the globe, taking into account mitigating

circumstances relating to restrictions and the need to undergo quarantine, such as whether someone has had a vaccination against Sars-CoV-2 or registered on a dedicated website when entering the territory of the Slovak Republic[6]. Everything indicates that, after the lock-down, issues related to the pandemic are stabilising and cross-border relations are returning to normal. A normal that both Dunajec communities have been working towards for a hundred years.

6. Summary — a Polish-Slovak micro-history overshadowed by great politics

The above analysis of the history of Polish-(Czecho)Slovak institutional relations shows the consequences which (at the micro-level of local activities) political decisions made at the level of national and international politics have. These decisions drew a clear formal border right through the community of Pieniny highlanders living in Sromowce Niżne and Červený Kláštor. The realm of official activities was, and still is, focussed on strengthening and recreating national and nation-state divisions, which - when it comes to the everyday practices of the local community - are of practically no importance.

Diplomatic activities, carried out on many levels of cooperation (including as part of European structures, through the "Tatry" Euroregion Association, or through EGTC TATRY), entail a diverse range of political actors who, despite many cultural and linguistic similarities, act as separate states. Moreover, some of the financial support programmes made use of by the inhabitants of the Polish-Slovak border area are directed to international consortia, and therefore they are supported by teams that bring together representatives of at least two different countries. Both Sromovians and the inhabitants of Červeny Kláštor are eager to participate in such activities, seeing them as an opportunity to obtain funds necessary for the development of their local communities. In this sense, in the sphere of official institutional activities, the border (perceived as the distance between Polish and Slovak societies) is maintained, and its emphasis enables the implementation of joint Polish-Slovak cross-border projects.

Looking at today's Polish-Slovak relations at the state level, it can be stated that - despite difficult pandemic experiences - they have proceeded harmoniously, and their cordial nature (and

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[6] https://korona.gov.sk/ehranica/ [accessed: 07/06/2021]

attachment to supranational heritage) is evidenced, among other things, by such events as the friendly meeting of the President of Slovakia, Ivan Gašparowič, with the then President of Poland, Bronisław Komorowski. This conviviality was highlighted by a joint rafting trip along the Dunajec Gorge (23 August 2013), several meetings between current President Andrzej Duda and the President of Slovakia, Andrej Kiska - including on the footbridge in Sromowce Niżne (2 October 2015) and on a nearby mountain called Kasprowy Wierch (7 March 2017), and the official visit of the newly-elected president of the Slovak Republic Zuzana Čaputova to the Presidential Palace in Warsaw (15 July 2019). Among the many words and declarations uttered during these meetings, one could clearly hear repeated talk of the establishment of close relations between Poland and Slovakia within the Visegrad Group and the necessity to act hand in hand in the face of the various new challenges that Europe is currently tackling.

The everyday life of the Dunajec community goes on according to its own unwavering rhythm, often detached from the "great history" of the international order, and in neighbourly relations the border basically — instead of dividing — connects the inhabitants of the opposite banks of the Dunajec. This does not mean, however, that the social relations observed in the Polish-Slovak borderland do not reflect diplomatic and political decisions taken at higher levels; however, the community of experiences and often difficult living conditions has brought Poles and Slovaks living on the Dunajec closer together, building in them a sense of belonging to one cross-border community of highlanders from the Dunajec River, above and beyond historical and political divisions.

Similar experiences have recently been described by Tomasz Grzywaczewski, who has studied the fate of the Kashubians on the border of the Second Polish Republic: "It was 1937, I was seven then, and life on our distant border went on as always. A little smuggling, a lot of poverty, but little politics" (Grzywaczewski: 2020). And so too went the history of the Polish-Slovak borderland, away from great politics, merely out of concern for the most precious value — the local community.

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SELECTED LEGISLATIVE INSTRUMENTS OF FAMILY POLICY SUPPORTING WORK–LIFE BALANCE: A COMPARISON OF ITALY AND THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Abstract: *Achieving an optimal work–life balance has been a policy objective of the European Union for many years. Despite progress in this reconciliation, inequalities in the labour market and in gender equality still persist. It should be emphasized that we are not just talking about inequalities in the private sector, the issue of reconciling family and working life is also relevant in local government conditions, and it also affects private and public sector employees who are responsible for families. In the context of European social and legal culture, the legislature, by means of family policy, not excluding legislative measures taken by labour legislation, creates the conditions for workers – women and men caring for children and other dependants – to ensure that they are not subject to economic and social instability. In this study, we analyse the minimum standards of Directive 2019/1158 on work–life balance for parents and carers, focusing on the institutes of maternity, paternity and parental leave. Comparatively,* we examine the extent to which the Slovak Republic has adopted legislative measures of family policy with the legislation of Italy.

Keywords: Labour law, Public administration, Work balance.

Introduction

Work–life balance is an approach based on the basic principles of Maslow's pyramid of human needs (Kenrick, 2011). Abraham Maslow believed that employee performance could be increased up to natural physiological limits if not only material but also social needs were met,

i.e. the needs for self-actualization, esteem needs, belonging and love needs, creativity, safety and security needs, status, etc. For employers this approach is the right way to retain a high-quality workforce and, in addition, to increase employees' performance at work.

As stated by Križan (2020), an agenda aimed at reconciling work and family life has been emerging since the 1990s. j. taking measures to enable employed persons to combine work with the care of children or other persons. Reconciling work and family life is a necessary requirement that must be addressed in order for society to be able to respond to many economic and demographic challenges. "*For thousands of years, human society considered the so-called traditional division of labor between men and women to be natural, but this began to be questioned at the turn of the twentieth century in connection with the need for women to enter paid labor*" (Čajková, 2014).

Symbiosis of work and family is of particular importance in Slovakia (and also in the broader European context) in relation to gender equality, as there is still a historically rooted stereotype of the division of gender roles between men and women. Due to the rational reason to provide for the family's economic security, the two-income model of the family, with both partners employed mainly full-time, persists. Choice between work and family faced in particular by young women, often results in the voluntary, or for them the necessary postponement of starting a family for a later date (Hajduová et al. (2021).

Legislative instruments aimed at reconciling family and working life in the conditions of the Slovak Republic very closely affect employees of the private sector, as well as employees of the public sector, more specifically employees of local government, which is an integral part of modern understanding of democratic and rule of law. The functioning of local self-government is directly dependent on its financing, in this sense fiscal decentralization is a significant milestone as well as the rules and principles of financial management of local government. The aim of fiscal decentralization is to ensure the financial independence of local governments, which took place in Slovakia in several phases. The first phase of financial decentralization took place in the years 2001-2004, when it was a transfer of powers of local governments in the field of expenditure, and then decentralization continued in 2005, when the transfer of powers in the area of local government budget revenues began (Horváth, Cibík & Švikruha, 2018).

1 Gender equality as a core value of the European Union

Gender equality is a fundamental right, a core value of the European Union, a critical component of economic growth and a key principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights. „*Anti-discrimination legislation at European Union level consists of a significant number of legislative acts, whether primary or secondary. Specific commitments in this area stem from directives of the European Parliament, the Council or the European Commission for Member States*" (Peráček, 2021). Under the European Commission's agenda until 2020, gender equality was an important policy priority, with the aim of introducing a new European gender equality strategy and improving the Gender Equality Index score (Eurofound, 2017). The European Commission continues to pursue this agenda and on 5 March 2020 it launched a new Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 (Eurofound, 2021). The Strategy's main topics are: violence against women; pay transparency and the gender pay gap; gender balance on company boards; and work–life balance. It is also guided by the vision of "*a Europe where women and men are free to pursue their chosen path in life, where they have equal opportunities to thrive, and where they can equally participate in and lead our European society*" (Eurofound, 2021).

One important factor in achieving this balance is the significant participation of women and older workers in the labour market, in order to ensure that work is sustainable for all (Eurofound, 2021).

From the employers' point of view, women and men caring for young children are "problematic" because of variable situations associated with their care. They are concerned about the procrastination of mothers of young children, i.e. that due to the care of children they will postpone the fulfilment of important work tasks to a later date and will not fulfil their duties to the required quality and within the timeframe set by the employer. However, the experience of experts suggests that working mothers cannot afford procrastination. It is the necessity of a consistent management of family responsibilities and the organisation of work at home that makes them able to cope with the time demands of work responsibilities, even at the cost of living under stress. Procrastination refers to an incorrect assessment of the situation, judged by experts as the psychological, pathological postponement of important tasks, a tendency to prefer

unimportant or interesting activities to the person, all at the expense of performing and securing essential tasks, matters and duties (Landányi, 2019).

According to Nováčková & Peráček (2021) public intervention by the State promotes equal opportunities for women – mothers, but also for men – parents of young children in the labour market, in access to employment, in remuneration and, later on, in the amount of pensions. H. Grey also notes that full-time employment of employees with family responsibilities would be problematic without some State interference (Grey, 2002). L. N. Dinh (2020) states in his study that "*Employee engagement is one of the most important issues in human resource management in order to ameliorate the turnover intention in organizations. Employers often face different challenges of finding ways to increase the interaction with their employees in order to have good labor force.*"

In the context of European social and legal culture, the State is to create, through its family policy, conditions for young families, women and men caring for children and other dependants, by means of legislative instruments, to facilitate the performance of their work duties in employment. We would dare say that the difficult and complicated reconciliation of family and working life may be one of a number of reasons why many families are failing to fulfil their functions satisfactorily. Achieving this balance and understanding employers' necessity means showing respect for the fact that each individual has multiple life roles: as an employee, parent, colleague, and partner. Success at work also helps employees manage their household responsibilities and, vice versa, an employee who has no major problems in managing the household and family life also brings satisfaction to the work environment and is more stimulated to perform effectively at work. Finding this delicate balance, but more importantly maintaining it, has a significant effect on the mental health of employees who keep confidence, concentration and a sense of responsibility at work. Balance reduces stress and the likelihood that employees will bring home problems to work, or vice versa. The psychosocial aspects of individuals' personal engagement and involvement in the work process, which undoubtedly affect families, are addressed by W.A. Kahn in his study (Kahn, 2002).

Scientific studies deal with the issue of reconciling family and working life across the countries of the European Union and seek an optimal model of reconciliation. Regarding

scientific studies in Italy on the position of women in the Italian labor market, focusing on gender inequalities are devoted to Italian authors such as Luigi, Rizza, Santangelo (2021). Scientific studies that has explored barriers to reconciling work and family responsibilities are carried out by authors such as Bozzon, Murgia, Poggio, as well as other Italian scientists. Their study points to the problems of reconciling work and family responsibilities for women working and working in academia and as scientists. The study points out that it is more difficult for women researchers to reconcile work and family. Researchers perceive difficulties in managing work and family responsibilities as a dilemma, and in many cases they deal with this by leaving or suspending a career, or by deciding not to start a family. A large number of women leave their academic careers after marriage and the birth of children, or because of difficulties with balancing work and family life. At the same time, women scientists tend to marry fewer and have fewer children than male counterparts and women in general. In addition, they point out that women feel more frustrated and guilty than men about the difficult decisions that academic and female researchers require (Bozzon. Murgia, Poggio, Rapetti, 2017).

In 2019, the European Union adopted Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council ("the Directive") of 20 June 2019 on work–life balance for parents and carers, the primary objective of which is to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family and to contribute to the achievement of gender equality by promoting the participation of women in the labour market and the equal sharing of caring responsibilities between men and women (Žofčinová & Barinková, 2020).

Italian scientist Calafà (2020) states that European Union law is proving to be the benchmark for reconciling family and occupational life. It is characterized by increased attention to care and the corresponding legal instruments, in particular thanks to the efforts of the Court of Justice, although it has not always been particularly innovative and has a dialectical relationship between the relevant EU institutions with uniform rules. The technical improvement of the national labor law of the Member States of the European Union is reflected in the affirmation of new rights, the recognition of new values and the development of new specific legal instruments to strengthen the relationship between parental status and work. At national level, compulsory maternity leave has been replaced by compulsory maternity leave, which has, however, become

more flexible and dispensary than in the past, combined with specific paternity, which has changed considerably, especially from the point of view of case law. This is an ideal path in terms of labor law, which ensures the protection of the weakest party in the employment relationship and engages in a comprehensive search for tools designed to support parenthood.

The European Institute for Gender Equality developed a so-called Gender Equality Index, for the year 2020, for each EU country individually. "*Each year, we score the EU Member States and the EU as a whole to see how far they are from reaching gender equality. The Index uses a scale of 1 to 100, where 1 is for total inequality and 100 is for total equality. The scores are based on the gaps between women and men and levels of achievement in six core domains – work, money, knowledge, time, power and health – and their subdomains. Two additional domains are included in the Index but do not have an impact on the final score. The domain of intersecting inequalities highlights how gender inequalities manifest in combination with age, (dis)ability, country of birth, education and family type. The domain of violence against women measures and analyses women's experiences of violence. The Index is composed of 31 indicators. The Gender Equality Index 2020 also includes a thematic focus on digitalisation and the future of work*" (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020). In the Gender Equality Index, which was drawn up on the basis of statistical data on the Slovak Republic, Slovakia scored 55.5 out of 100 points and thus ranked 25th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index. Slovakia was followed by Romania, Hungary, and Greece, which ranked last (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020).

The Gender Equality Index, developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality, focused on areas such as:

1. Political participation and decision-making – the shares of women in public administration – ministers increased from 16% (in 2010) to 22%. In the Slovak Republic, out of the total number of ministers (16), three women hold the position of minister (approximately 18.75% of women ministers in percentage terms). In the Slovak Republic, Natália Milanová is the Minister of Culture, Mária Kolíková is the Minister of Justice, and Veronika Remišová is the Minister of Investment, Regional Development

and Informatisation, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic (Úrad vlády Slovenskej republiky, 2021).

2. Earnings – women earn around 21% less than men.

3. Unpaid care work – i.e. care for children, grandchildren, older people or people with disabilities – women are more likely to spend at least one hour every day caring for some of these people. The proportion of women in unpaid care work is as high as 35%, while only 19% of men (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

In comparison, Italy, which ranked 14th in the Gender Equality Index with a score of 63.5 out of 100 points, scored in comparable categories as follows:

1. Political participation and decision-making – the shares of women in public administration – ministers increased. As at 24 February 2021, in Italy, out of the total number of ministers (19), 5 women hold the position of minister (26.3% of women ministers in percentage terms) (Easy Diplomacy, 2021).

2. Earnings – women earn around 18% less than men, which is a smaller difference than in Slovakia. Income is a strong aspect of gender equality, or gender inequality, between men and women in both States (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

3. Unpaid care work – i.e. care for children, grandchildren, older people or people with disabilities – the proportion of women is 34% and of men 24% in Italy. The position of women is comparable to the situation in Slovakia, but the proportion of men providing unpaid care is 5% higher than in Slovakia (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

Regarding the level of women's employment (women are mainly those who stay at home and take care of the family (Európske Noviny, 2019), we looked at data obtained from OECD databases for Italy, the Slovak Republic, and the 27 EU Member States overall. On the basis of the data obtained, we determined the reference years 2013, 2015 and 2019 (data available max. until 2019) in Table 1. These data clearly show that the employment rate of women, whether in the EU27, Italy or the Slovak Republic, is lower than that of men. Although the gradual trend

shows an increase in the level of female employment in the States evaluated and the EU, the difference is still significant. The worst employment situation for women is in the Slovak Republic. The difference between the employment rate of men and women is the highest in 2019, i.e. 43.3% of women to 90.5% of men.

Table 1 Employment rate of men and women over the reference frame of working age 15–64 who have at least 1 child under 6 years of age, expressed in %.

	EU 27			Italy			Slovak Republic		
	2013	**2015**	**2019**	**2013**	**2015**	**2019**	**2013**	**2015**	**2019**
Women	63.2	64.7	66.8	58.0	58.2	58.8	37.7	38.8	43.3
Men	85.5	87.6	90.7	86.1	86.2	87.1	84.6	87.1	90.5
Total	73.6	75.4	78.0	71.4	71.5	72.1	58.8	61.3	64.7

Source: Own elaboration based on data from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfst_hheredch$DV_323/default/table?lang=en

The introduction of Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council on work–life balance for parents and carers could have a positive effect on the development of employment rates for women. The Directive entered into force on 1 August 2019 and should be transposed into the national laws of the Member States of the European Union by 2 August 2022 (Pohorelá, 2020). Due to the transposition of the Directive from 2 August 2022, its effect and the development of women's employment rates remain a question for the coming years. In the following part of the paper, we discuss three legislative instruments that have a significant impact on the work–life balance of workers caring for their families.

2 Institute of maternity leave

Maternity leave is compulsory for women in Italy. Unlike in Italy, the legal regulation of maternity leave in the Slovak Republic is based not on a legal obligation, but on the legal

possibility to take it. If the employee decides to take it, then she is already obliged to use the minimum, statutory length of maternity leave (Barinková, 2006). Female workers are obliged to take maternity leave from two months before the expected date of confinement until three months following the confinement. An arrangement known as "flexible maternity leave" has also been introduced; this allows the worker to put off her maternity leave until one month before the expected date of confinement and then continue it up to four months after the birth of her child (Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale, 2017).

During maternity leave, the female worker has the right to retain her job, not to work, and to receive a maternity allowance instead of pay. In terms of legal protection against possible termination of the employment contract from the start of pregnancy in its legal meaning until the start of the maternity leave, the worker may only be dismissed for a serious fault which makes it impossible for the employment relationship to continue even temporarily. This protection is not statutory but is enforceable under the collective labour agreement (Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale, 2017).

During the period of maternity leave, the worker is entitled to a maternity allowance from the National Institute for Social Security at 80% of the contractual wage rate on which the national insurance contributions have been paid. This calculation takes account only of periods of employment as a "domestic worker". A domestic worker is entitled to the financial benefits of maternity protection only if: 52 weekly national insurance contributions have been paid or fallen due in the 24 months preceding the period of maternity leave; or, alternatively, at least 26 weekly national insurance contributions have been paid or fallen due in the 12 months preceding the period of maternity leave, "*mothers resident in Italy who are either Italian citizens, EU nationals or non-EU nationals with an "EC long-stay permit", are entitled to maternity allowance for each child born, adopted, or fostered with a view to adoption*" (Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale, 2017). Compared to the Slovak Republic, the requirements for a female worker are stricter. Under the Slovak legal system, a woman is entitled to a maternity allowance if she has been insured for at least 270 days in the last two years, whereas in Italy it is as many as 364 days in the last two years (or 182 days in the last 12 months in the latter case) (Social Insurance, 2021).

In Italy, future mothers are also paid the so-called voucher for future mothers, which is granted to pregnant women upon completion of the seventh month pregnancy or to women who are in the process of adoption or pre-adoptive foster parenting; it is a one-off allowance of EUR 800, granted only to women.

Table 2 Number of weeks of paid maternity leave in Italy and the Slovak Republic from 2010 to 2018.

	Italy	Slovak Republic
2010	21.7	28.0
2014	21.7	34.0
2015	21.7	34.0
2016	21,7	34,0
2017	21,7	34,0
2018	21,7	34,0
2020	21,7	34,0

Source: Own elaboration based on data from https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54760#

To assess the length of maternity leave in Italy and the Slovak Republic, we relied on data obtained from the OECD database (Table 2). The evaluated period is 2010–2018. While in Italy the number of weeks of maternity leave has remained unchanged since 2010 at 21.7 weeks, in the Slovak Republic the duration of maternity leave has increased from 28 weeks to 34 weeks. "*Maternity allowance is determined on the basis of the daily assessment base (DAB) or the probable daily assessment base (PDAB). Since May 2017, the maternity allowance has been increased from 70% to 75% of the DAB or the PDAB*" (Social Insurance, 2021). On the basis of the data shown in Table 1 above, we can conclude that the Slovak Republic is more generous in terms of the length of maternity leave compared to Italy, with approximately 13 weeks more than Italy. The Slovak Republic has been on a positive upward trend since 2010, when it increased the number of weeks of maternity leave from 28 weeks to the current 34 weeks. The question

remains how this trend of increasing the period of maternity leave will develop in the future, i.e. whether the number of weeks of maternity leave will increase in relation to the principle of necessity.

3   Paternity leave

Recital 19 of Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work–life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, involve the basic purpose of adopting the institute of paternity leave is to encourage a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men and to allow for the early creation of a bond not only between mothers and children, but also between fathers and children. Article 4(1) of the Directive states that Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that fathers or, where and insofar recognised by national law, equivalent second parents, have the right to paternity leave of at least 10 working days that is to be taken on the occasion of the birth of the worker's child.

Member States may determine whether to allow paternity leave to be taken partly before or only after the birth of the child and whether to allow such leave to be taken in flexible ways. In this context, we point out that the current de lege lata situation in Slovakia does not provide for paternity leave, unlike in other neighbouring countries. Available data show that 19 Member States grant paternity leave (including the UK as at the end of 2019). The length of paternity leave ranges from one day in Italy and Hungary to 28 weeks in France, and financial coverage ranges from 20% to 100% of wage compensation (Pracomat, 2021). There is hope for fathers in Slovakia that the institute of paternity leave will become a substantive part of the subjective social rights of employed fathers, and logically there is a natural expectation that shortly after the birth of a child they will be able to spend time at home with the child's mother and help her care for the new-born child. However, it is possible that the legislature may have a different legal view of the matter. Hypothetically speaking, the legislature could argue that paternity leave is already part of our legislation (even if it is not called so), since the Labour Code, in Section 166(1), also allows the father to take leave from the birth of a new-born child to the same extent

as the mother if he is caring for the new-born child, and he may also be materially secured for the duration of such leave.

However, Act No 461/2003 on social insurance, as amended, allows another person insured to receive sickness insurance benefits – maternity allowance – at the earliest six weeks after the childbirth and only if the mother does not receive a maternity allowance (or parental allowance) for the same child (Section 49 of the Act). The origins of this legislation are mapped by Barinková (2003). On the basis of the above, it can be deduced at first sight that the Slovak legal system already allows fathers to take the kind of time off referred to in the Directive as paternity leave, even for a much longer period than that granted by the newly adopted Directive. The Directive leaves it up to the Member States to determine the length of the period for which paternity leave may be taken. It is not explicitly stated whether the father may take it during the mother's puerperium or later. However, it must be linked to the event of childbirth for the purpose of providing care for the child and, during paternity leave, an income at least equivalent to that provided in the event of interruption of work for health-related reasons must be guaranteed. In the Slovak legislation, these requirements could already be partially fulfilled even today if we interpret "time off on the occasion of the childbirth" to include the period following the expiry of six weeks from the date of childbirth. However, this would not fulfil the objective of paternity leave – a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men and the early creation of a bond between fathers and children. Under the Directive, the right to paternity leave shall not be made subject to a period of work qualification or to a length of service qualification. It follows that the principle of merit is overridden in the context of the principle of universality and solidarity. Similarly, Article 4(3) of the Directive grants the right to paternity leave irrespective the worker's marital or family status, as defined by national law (Žuľová, 2014).

The father or equivalent second parent will thus be able to take a minimum of 10 working days of leave around the time of the birth of the child. If the level of material security remained at the level of the maternity allowance for the woman – mother, it would be higher than the maximum allowance granted to the employee for absence from work due to health-related problems, i.e. higher than the income compensation for temporary incapacity for work. Maternity

allowance is a sickness insurance benefit; income compensation for temporary incapacity for work is provided by the employer from its own funds. The amount of maternity allowance in the Slovak Republic is currently 75% of the employee's daily assessment base, but the amount of income compensation for temporary incapacity for work is 25% of the daily assessment base during the first three days of incapacity for work and 55% of the assessment base during the following days of incapacity for work. The income compensation for temporary incapacity for work is max. 10 (calendar) days in total. It appears that the system of financial coverage of paternity leave will also need to be adjusted because the duration of paternity leave of 10 working days, as a strict requirement of the Directive, does not correspond to the length of the sick leave (10 calendar days). In our view, it would be sufficient to cover paternity leave with a benefit corresponding to the amount of the employee's material security during sick leave, since the Directive requires at least that level of income.

However, the source of the financial coverage of the paternity leave itself needs to be resolved, i.e. to decide whether the burden of the cash benefit should be borne by employers or by some of the social security schemes (possibly sickness insurance). And this is the problem of the current "government compromise". According to the calculations of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, such a measure will cost a total of EUR 56.89 million over the next three years (EUR 8,898,679 for 2022, EUR 26,496,648 for 2023, and EUR 21,497,729 for 2024).

Unlike the right to paternity leave, the provision of material security during paternity leave may be subject to a period of previous employment which shall not exceed six months immediately prior to the expected date of the birth of the child. It should not be forgotten, however, that the Directive encourages Member States and recommends them that they provide for a benefit – a contribution to fathers during paternity allowance – in accordance with the objectives of the Directive at the same level as the material security provided to women during maternity leave. In our case, it is 75% of the employee's daily assessment base. However, in order to ensure the principle of equality between men and women and to encourage men to share the care of the child born, the European legislature rightly expects the same level of benefit for both genders for the duration of paternity leave.

In Italy, paternity leave is compulsory and fathers are entitled to receive a financial allowance for its duration. Paternity leave can be taken separately and can be claimed within five months of the child's birth, granted at the same time as the maternity paid leave. In the five months after the child's birth, the father can be entitled to one more day of unpaid leave, if the mother agrees to transfer it from her own maternity leave (European Commission, 2021).

For the year 2021, paternity leave has been increased from 7 to 10 days, noting that it is covered by a full wage (Rödl and Partner, 2021). In the context of the Directive adopted, Italy meets the condition laid down by the Directive on the minimum duration of paternity leave of 10 working days. The European Union's aim in setting a minimum limit for paternity leave is to ensure a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities for a new-born child between men and women (Pohorelá, 2020).

In the Slovak Republic, the relevance of the topic is reflected in the "Concept of Reconciliation of Private, Family and Working Life", which is part of the European project "Gender Equality at the Workplace" (Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, 2021). The concept of reconciliation of private, family and working life stems from women's employment, which is related to the sharing of work and family responsibilities between women and men. This is reflected in the employment of women with children under 6 years of age, *"despite the relatively low employment rate of mothers with children under 6 years of age, it has increased much faster than the EU average over the last 6 years, rising by 5.3% from 36.8% in 2010 to 43.5% in 2017, before declining again by 0.9% in 2018. Nevertheless, the persistent employment gap for this group of mothers is still significant, as repeatedly underlined in the Council Recommendations on the National Reform Programme of Slovakia"*, but also of women with children over 12 years of age (ÚPSVR, 2019). The concept aims to promote the employment of women who care for families through various measures, such as flexible forms of work, the availability of better quality services of care for children, dependants and other family members, and greater involvement of fathers in childcare (ÚPSVR, 2019).

In connection with the birth and care of a child, the current legislation entitles the mother of the child to maternity leave. As regards the father, he is only entitled to parental leave (Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, 2017). In the light of these

facts, we compared and summarised the duration of paternity leave in Italy and in the Slovak Republic from 2010 to 2018. We obtained data up to 2018 from the OECD database (Table 5); as we have already mentioned, the length of paternity leave in Italy has been extended from 7 to 10 working days in 2021. We consider it important to highlight that in Italy, the father of the child receives a 100% wage compensation during paternity leave. The Slovak Republic has shortcomings in this area of family policy, since fathers are not granted the right to take paternity leave, and the only option for them is to take parental leave, *"as the Labour Code does not recognise the institute of maternity leave for men, the employer cannot grant it to the child's father, even if he receives maternity allowance. The father is always entitled to parental leave from the date on which he starts caring for the child, and the employer is therefore also liable to notify the Social Insurance Agency in this respect"* (Social Insurance, 2017).

Table 3 Number of weeks of paid paternity leave in Italy and the Slovak Republic from 2010 to 2018

	Italy	Slovak Republic
2010	0,0	0,0
2014	0,2	0,0
2015	0,2	0,0
2016	0,4	0,0
2017	0,4	0,0
2018	0,8	0,0
2020	0,8	0,0

Source: Own elaboration based on data from https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54760#

4   Institute of parental leave

In its Article 5, the Directive imposes on Member States the obligation to take the necessary measures to ensure that each worker has an individual right to parental leave of four months that is to be taken before the child reaches a specified age, up to the age of eight, to be specified by each Member State or by collective agreement. In this respect, the national legislation of the Slovak Republic is generous. The second obligation is to limit the transferability of parental leave so that a maximum of two months cannot be transferred. Member States shall establish a reasonable period of notice that is to be given by workers to employers where they exercise their right to parental leave. The Slovak legislation meets this obligation, since, under Section 166(3) of the Labour Code, the woman and the man shall notify the employer in writing at least one month in advance of the expected date of commencement of parental leave, as well as of the expected date of its interruption, termination or possible change (Barinková, 2015). Under the Directive, Member States may make the right to parental leave subject to a period of work qualification or to a length of service qualification, which may not exceed one year. In the case of successive fixed-term contracts within the meaning of Council Directive 1999/70/EC (14) with the same employer, the sum of those contracts shall be taken into account for the purpose of calculating the qualifying period. The Slovak legislation is more favourable to employees. The Directive also provides for the possibility to postpone the granting of parental leave for a reasonable period of time on the grounds that the taking of parental leave at the time requested would seriously disrupt the good functioning of the employer.

In Italy, parental leave is granted to the parents of a child until the child reaches the age of eight years, even in situations where the child is adopted. The amount of the allowance during parental leave is 30% of pay (European Commission, 2020). Parents are entitled to take parental leave for a total period of 11 months. This possibility also applies to adoptive parents and guardians. The allowance is paid for a maximum period of 6 months in total between the two parents in the first 3 years of the child's life or the 3 years following the entry of the child into the family, in the event of adoption or guardianship. Once the 6 months have passed (and until

the child reaches the age of eight), the child's parents will be provided with compensation for a further five months (European Commission, 2020).

In the Slovak Republic, parental leave is available to parents who are caring for a child under the age of three, or under the age of six if the child has long-term adverse health problems. A woman who has received a maternity allowance is entitled to a higher amount of parental allowance, the difference in the amount of parental allowance being based on a previous benefit, or on a maternity benefit or another similar benefit received in a Member State of the European Union. If a woman or other eligible person has received a maternity benefit (maternity allowance) for at least fourteen weeks before becoming entitled to parental allowance, she is entitled to parental allowance of EUR 378.10 per month (Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, 2021). Parental leave can be taken by the child's mother or father (European Commission, 2020). In 2021, the amount of parental allowance during parental leave is EUR 275.90 per month or EUR 378.10 per month (Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, 2021).

Table 4 compares the number of weeks of parental leave with job protection and its trend in Italy and the Slovak Republic. We used data from 1985, mainly to show the change in the number of weeks of parental leave in the Slovak Republic. The length of parental leave with job protection in Italy has not changed over the years, as confirmed by data obtained from the OECD database, and has been 26 weeks for a long time. Changes in the length of parental leave with job protection are perceived in the legislation of the Slovak Republic. In 1985, the length of parental leave with job protection was 86 weeks; in the historical context, the length of parental leave increased until 2010, when the number of weeks of parental leave with job protection was 136 weeks. According to OECD data, the number of weeks of parental leave with employment protection has decreased to 130 weeks since 2011. However, it can be stated that within the framework of the family policy of the Slovak Republic, the legislature, by means of legislative instruments, has been accommodating towards parents bringing up and caring for a child.

Table 4 Number of weeks of parental leave with job protection in Italy and the Slovak Republic from 1985 to 2018.

	Italy	**Slovak Republic**
1985	26.0	86.0
1990	26.0	134.0
1995	26.0	136.0
2010	26.0	136.0
2014	26.0	130.0
2016	26.0	130.0
2018	26.0	130.0
2020	26.0	130.0
2021	26.0	130.0

Source: Own elaboration based on data from https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54760

Conclusion

The granting of maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave to mothers and fathers of children should, as a matter of priority, serve to better reconcile their family and professional lives, and to make it easier for women to stay on the labour market, especially after returning from maternity/parental leave (Council of the European Union, 2019). In the Slovak Republic there is a significant gender dimension of the impact of parenthood on women's employment, whether we are talking about the public sector or the private sector; in the end, it does not differ from the average employment of women within the European Union.

An effective equal opportunities policy in labour law requires working arrangements that allow for greater flexibility and better organisation of working time, as well as a facilitated return to work after taking time off for the birth of a child. In doing so, it must be borne in mind that positive discrimination should not be to the detriment of the employment of protected persons. Legislation regulating the working conditions of employed women and employed men who, in addition to their work in employment, care for children or other family members can be regarded with all seriousness as being of a high quality and in line with the standards of the present day.

However, the process of harmonising work and family life is also evolving and would benefit from a more equal sharing of responsibilities for the family between the partners. Breaking women's economic dependence on men, who are still perceived as the breadwinners, and abandoning the dogmatic model of their role and function in the family and at work, requires a shift in the understanding of values and a change in cultural habits, not only in families themselves but in society as a whole.

The legislative work associated with harmonising our legislation with European Union legislation is not complete. We believe that intervention in the legislation of the Slovak Republic, namely the Labour Code, or in other laws (social security law), will be necessary to ensure their compliance with the new Directive. We are convinced that it is essential to continue to take measures aimed at protecting the health of pregnant women and the maternal mission of mothers after childbirth. In other cases, the legislature should proceed to meet the objectives of the Directive and introduce new measures to promote equal inclusion of women and men with family responsibilities in the world of work. Undoubtedly, it will be the case of the institute of paternity leave, which is also awaiting regulation in other EU Member States. However, the legislature should consider the level of protection of the subjects concerned so that it does not hinder the development of working relationships of employees with family responsibilities.

The Italian social security system is structured differently from the social security system in Slovakia. In this paper, we point out the different entitlements related to maternity leave and maternity allowances. In the case of maternity leave and maternity allowance, we note that the conditions for entitlement to maternity leave and the length of maternity leave are simpler in the Slovak Republic than in Italy. We are inclined to the same conclusion in the case of parental leave; as we mention in the paper, the number of weeks of parental leave in Italy has remained unchanged at 26 weeks, whereas the Slovak legislation has changed frequently over the years and the length of parental leave with job protection is currently 130 weeks. The difference in the duration of parental leave in Italy and Slovakia is based on different models of social and family policy. Italy is based on the Latin model, which is based on the principle that the state does not interfere in family life, but relies on helping the family to protect its members against economic and social risks. The later departure of young people from their parents' households, weaker state

support for reconciling family and working life, low levels of social benefits, insufficient family policy in the area of childcare, and a poorly developed network of state childcare institutions are typical. The Slovak Republic is characterized by a post-socialist model, which is characterized by a high degree of redistribution of public resources, favorable state support for parental leave, developed system and network of state childcare institutions and state support for reconciling family and work life (concurrence of state parental social benefit allowance and wages for work performed), etc. The mentioned instruments of family policy strengthen the level of "babyfriendly" family policy in the Slovak Republic.

The institute of paternity leave in the Slovak Republic is still at the beginning of its development. And it is currently still the subject of negotiations and discussions within the Government of the Slovak Republic. Italy currently grants fathers 10 days of paid paternity leave. We will monitor the development of paternity leave, as well as other institutes such as maternity leave and parental leave, in the future, and will continue to examine this issue with regard to the EU Directive 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council and its application in practice.

Acknowledgement

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THE EU ENGAGEMENT IN THE KOSOVO-SERBIA DIALOGUE

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Abstract: *The outcome of the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia determines in many ways peace and stability in the Balkans and the process of integration of the western Balkans in the EU. The dialogue and the solution of the dispute between these countries becomes especially important under the situation of the potential aggression of Russia against Ukraine. It is very clear that Kosovo has shown its orientations towards deep integration in EU and NATO whereas the attitudes of Serbia remain to be clarified. Talks or dialogues between parties in this dispute have started many years ago and the outcomes were far from expectations. The dialogue process was ambiguous in many aspects. Especially in the aspect of parties and the facilitation or mediation of the entire process. Thus, the article gives a description of the long lasting dialogue underlaying the most important acts and the shortcomings of the dialogue along with the expected results.*

Keywords: Facilitation, dialogue, NATO, EU, Kosovo, Serbia Kosovo, Serbia.

1. Introduction

Kosovo Parliament declared its independence on February 17, 2008. This was an expected act that crowned a long process which was coordinated with the most developed democracies. Kosovo declaration of independence did not violate the international law and this was confirmed also with the opinion of the International Court of Justice. Fatos Tarifa and Peter Lukas some time before Kosovo declared independence, in an article, trying to propose the proper solution for Kosovo, described shortly the roots of this dispute. They go with

> *"Who will decide on the future of Kosovo? The United States aside, Kosovo's political*
> *future will be decided basically by the same major powers that dealt so poorly with the*

"Albanian question" in the early twentieth century. Back then, these powers were Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy, and Austria. They made up the core of the European Concert of Powers from 1815 to 1914. The London Conference of their ambassadors in 1913 recognized, among others, the newly independent state of Albania and its international frontiers with Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece. The redrawing of the maps of the Balkan states by the European powers left whole regions inhabited almost entirely by ethnic Albanians — Kosovo among them — outside Albania's state borders and their population scattered throughout the region. The 1913 London Conference of Ambassadors determined Kosovo's fate. Once invaded by — and part of — the Ottoman Empire, Kosovo, which has always been almost homogeneously ethnically Albanian, along with what is today Macedonia, was annexed to Serbia in May 1913." (Tarifa&Lukas 2007).

Thus, Kosovo since then, and without being asked, was forced to live and be part of various creatures of state. In this regard,

"Kosovo has been a province of Serbia (1913–1918); a part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1918–1929), later to become the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1944); an autonomous province of Serbia within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–1991); and the eighth federal constitutive unit of Yugoslavia from 1974 until Milosevic revoked Kosovo's autonomy in 1989). That decision made by Europe's major powers of the time has been largely responsible for the historical injustices and sufferings of the Kosovo Albanians for the past hundred years and perhaps for the balkanization of the entire region." (Tarifa&Lukas 2007)

The mentioned screatures of state do not exist anymore, whereas the last one, Federal Republic of Socialist Yugoslavia was dissoluted through a difficult process which took the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, brought the scenes of genocide and crimes against humanity and caused atrocities that were not seen in Europe since the Second World War. The federation was dissoluted basically as a result of two big tendencies: first, one that strived for dominance and hegemony over the others, represented by Serbia as one of the units of the federation and second, the tendency for decentralization, democracy and freedom represented by other federal

units and other nations. Kosovo obviously was on the side of democracy and freedom, what made Kosovo paiy a considerable cost. From the former federation of Yugoslavia: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Monte Negro, Macedonia (North Macedonia) and Kosovo became independent states. All these units of the former federation have built their own states going through very big difficulties: from the war, aggression, threats and other types of pressure made by Serbia and its regime. The current Serbian regime creates tensions in the region specifically with the behavior against Bosnia and Herzegovina through the Republic of Srpska, In Monte Negro through the position of the Orthodox Church (and not only this) and in Kosovo by refusing to recognize the state of Kosovo by manipulating the Serb minority. During the entire process of dissolution of former Yugoslavia, the engagement of EU (before European Community) was vivid and important, but without concrete actions undertaken by US, results would have been far from the reached ones. The EU engagement has a history of some success in the Balkans (Slovenia and Croatia are the members of EU), but it is still far from achieving the same success in the other parts of it. Particularly with the solution of the Kosovo Serbia dispute. However, "the EU turned the accession process into the core of its policy towards the Western Balkans, including Kosovo and Serbia. In June 2003 member states stressed their "privileged relationship" with the region." (European Council, Presidency Conclusions 2006)

2. Facilitation and/or mediation for the dispute

Between good offices and conciliation lies the form of third-party activity known as 'mediation'. (European Council, Presidency Conclusions 2006) Like good offices, "mediation is essentially an adjunct to negotiation, but with the mediator as an active participant, authorized, and indeed expected, to advance fresh proposals and to interpret, as well as to transmit, each party's proposal to the other". (Merrils 2017,2) Whereas, "the third part who acts as "facilitator" or "provider of good services" has a more limited role compared to "mediator" and he doesn't do more than helping parties in the dispute to establish direct communication." (Berridge ND,237) It is known that usually the role of facilitator changes and transforms into mediator. Of course, international disputes in the diplomatic practice and in theory are known to be solved

also through the process of inquiry, conciliation, arbitration and through the international court of justice. This is seen quite well from the General Assembly Resolution of 1970, after quoting Article 2 (3), proclaimed:

"States shall accordingly seek early and just settlement of their international disputes by negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements or other peaceful means of their choice." (General Assembly Resolution 1970)

Between Kosovo and Serbia there is a dispute which during the history had various features. These features, unfortunately caused lots of consequences, in almost all periods they existed. The dispute between Kosovo and Serbia existed during a very long period of time, but it was not treated as an international dispute before the last three decades. Previous phases of developments regarding Kosovo - Serbia relations could be subject of different academic discussion outside the processes of mediation and/or facilitation developed after Kosovo proclaimed the Declaration of Independence. Serbia and its officials have not shown any readiness to recognize Kosovo as an Independent State whereas they have entered into a long-lasting process of talks and negotiations with Kosovo which were facilitated or/and mediated by EU in various forms. On the other side, it agreed to accept mediation and, "by accepting mediation, a government acknowledges that its dispute is a legitimate matter of international concern." (Merrils 2017,30)

3. Good offices, facilitation and/or mediation

Before evaluating the EU facilitated/negotiated process, it is very important to emphasize that "EU institutions hold a neutral attitude regarding the Kosovo status. This itself shows the different approach that EU has compared to the other states, created in the process of integrations. No state from former Yugoslavia is displayed with the Asterix (*) or whose name is put in the footnote. No state from the territories of former Yugoslavia was conditioned with the demarcation of its borders with the neighbors. No other states from the territories of former Yugoslavia remains to be not recognized by EU…" (Rrahmani 2018)   On the other side, since

its Declaration of Independence, one of the main Kosovo foreign policy objectives was EU integration. In the same way most of its citizens or 93 percent of them, support the process of Kosovo integration in the EU. (Rrahmani 2018) Yet, 5 (five) states from EU do not recognize Kosovo as an Independent state whereas interestingly the current EU Special Representative for the Belgrade – Pristina Dialogue and Western Balkans, comes from Republic of Slovakia, the state, which doesn't recognize the state of Kosovo. Kosovo's process of independence in addition to the pre-war pains,

> *"was accompanied by a number of painful concessions for Kosovo, including a period of internationally supervised independence; the creation of several new Serb-majority municipalities carved out of existing Albanian-majority ones; extra powers for those Serb areas, notably over education; protections for Serbian Orthodox Church sites; parliamentary seats set aside for Serbs and other "non-majority" peoples, with a veto over legislation of vital interest; permission for Serbia to extend financial and technical help to Serb-majority municipalities; and a security force limited to 2,500 lightly armed soldiers".* **(Crisis Group Report 2009)**

Beyond this, however, Robert Cooper launched in March 2011 the first test of Pristina's and Belgrade's willingness to solve problems together. The first meeting between Kosovo and Serbia was held on March 9, 2011 in Brussels. The delegation of the Republic of Kosovo was led by Ms. Edita Tahiri, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Dialogue in the Government of the Republic of Kosovo, while the Serbian Government was led by Mr. Borko Stefanovic, on the capacity of Serbia's Special Representative to the dialogue. (Deskaj 2021,124)

In this context, from March 2011 to April 2013 the then High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) Catherine Ashton and her team brokered several rounds of talks between Serbia and Kosovo. Ashton's approach was based on tying the prospects for EU membership of both entities to the normalization of their bilateral relations. The negotiation was far from smooth. As the EU was preoccupied with other, more pressing issues (ranging from the eurozone crisis to the refugee emergency of 2015), Russia saw an opportunity and strengthened its ties with Belgrade. (www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/serbia-kosovo.fev 2012)

EU mediated dialogue which is quite often referred as the Brussels dialogue between Prishtina and Belgrade, officially has started at the beginning of 2011. Representatives of Kosovo and Serbia held official meetings in the period between March 2011 – July 2012, where nominated negotiators discussed main technical issues burdening citizens of Kosovo and Serbia. Because of its nature and the issues covered by it, the process was designed as a technical dialogue which would results with technical agreement. (www.qkss.org 2020)

Until the end of 2012, during the so-called technical dialogue there were a serious of agreements signed which led towards a political dialogue, formalized by the Resolution of the Kosovo Parliament, who

> *"supports the process of solution of problems between two independent and sovereign states, Kosovo and Serbia, on behalf of normalization of relationships between themselves, improvement of citizens' life and advancing the European agenda for two states and the region." (Resolution October 18, 2012)*

In this way since the summer 2012 meetings were held at the higher levels of representation since in the dialogue took part Kosovo Prime Ministers of Kosovo and Serbia even though negotiations continued to be of technical character. This because of the need of treating daily problems which are met by common people as the consequence of undefined legal, economic reports of communication between Belgrade and Prishtina. (www.qkss.org 2020)

The process of dialogue started with no clear strategy; with no transparency; quite far from the public eyes; under geopolitical situation when Russia was looking to get more space and impact supporting their "brothers from blood"; when the US in a way let the process in the hands of EU; in a situation where Kosovo citizens remained to be as only citizens isolated, etc. Kosovo statehood as noted, made five EU member states hesitant, whereas Kosovo's statehood was not only in conflict with the pan-Orthodox and Slavic ambitions of Russian President Vladimir Putin but the Kremlin also needed to respond to Russian public opinion, which traditionally supported Serbian nationalists and feared ethnic cleansing against Serbs. (Antonenko 2007) However, dialogue continued no matter of unclearness and no matter it went without setting any deadliness for ending it. Moreover, "dialogue started differently from international practice, where parties initially achieve an agreement, principle legally binding and

then continue to negotiate technical and practical issues along with their implementation. In these negotiations, something else happened." (Balkans Policy Research Groups 2017)

In June 2013, as a reward for the deal, EU member states made a conditional decision to open membership talks "with Serbia by January 2014 and authorized the beginning of negotiations on a Stabilization and Association Agreement with Kosovo". (European Council Conclusions 2013) In this spirit Prishtina and Belgrade agreed not to hinder the other side's progress towards EU membership. But this commitment not to hinder the other side, in a continual way was not respected by Serbia who over the long period of time engaged its entire diplomacy to hinder efforts of Kosovo for membership in international organizations and to gain more recognition from the states who did not recognize Kosovo. Moreover, Serbia managed to convince some states to revoke the recognition of Kosovo that is something new in the modern international law practice. Thus, in one side some agreements were reached and on the other side various activities in opposition to agreements, developed. Serbia closed down Serbian parallel structures in Northern Kosovo, including police stations and criminal courts (EU Commission, Kosovo Progress Report 2013), but it never gave up from the influence over the Serb population. Nonetheless, Serbs from the Northern Kosovo for the first time cast their vote in local elections in December 2013. On the other side, dialogue itself gained in its importance after presentation of First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations, known as Brussels Agreement and as a consequence integration of four northern municipalities in the Kosovo System of Governance. (www.qkss.org 2020) Hence, a technical-political dialogue went in this way whereas a direct engagement of US was not seen. At least not openly. Despite the fact that the U.S. still exerts a crucial influence in Kosovo, being Pristina's most reliable ally, their military role is gradually decreasing since Washington has passed the main political and military responsibilities to their European NATO partners. As of December 2013, 665 U.S. soldiers are stationed in Kosovo, representing merely 13.5 percent of the total KFOR contingency. Therefore, it can be argued that "despite their fundamental role in the past 15 years, the U.S. has gradually disengaged from Kosovo, opting for being a "guest" rather than a participant or a mediator in the on-going EU-led Serbia-Kosovo negotiations." (Pinos 2015) It is important to underline that the important issues regulated with the agreements were more in favor of Serbia rather than being something to put both sides in the equal position. In addition, "EU member states decided to

begin accession negotiations with Serbia on 21 January, 2014." (Council of the EU 2014) Kosovo official politics and the government representatives thought that by continuing with the dialogue, it will, in one side attract more recognitions, it will get the support for membership in the international organizations and in this aspect a comprehensive binding agreement with Serbia will bring the mutual recognitions of these respective states, on the other side. Hoping for these outcomes, Kosovo representatives signed various agreements which were not in accordance with its constitution and in accordance with interests of Kosovo people.

> *"...loaded with a big number of agreements, many are asked about why Kosovo has signed a lot of bad agreements. First, elite has not an appropriate quality to negotiate. Second, governments hire and employ family members and party militants who are terribly unqualified. Third, and this is what is believed by majority that presented indictments and accusations, means that they will be doing all what they are told to be doing by the international community, even then when these requests [by international community] are directly against the state interests of Kosovo." (Austin 2021,295)*

This was not the case with the Serbian official politics, that was very explicit objecting Kosovo's request for recognition. Serbian President, Boris Tadic stated: "no democratic leadership in Serbia would ever, under any circumstances, recognize the unilateral declaration. This principled position is set in stone, and will not change – come what may" (Tadic 2010). In line with this statement, all official representatives of Serbia kept openly this position. No matter of this, Kosovo representatives believed that Serbian official will change attitudes and continued with the dialogue and with signing agreements. Moreover, after almost all signed agreements, they tried to convince Kosovo people that the progress was being achieved and that factually Serbia is recognizing Kosovo with the simple fact of signature of these agreements. This was very far from the reality.

4. Unclearness of discussed agreements and proposals

Since the dialogue started between Kosovo and Serbia around 30 agreements were signed. Some were realized in hard conditions, some were obstructed and some had many bambiguities. Indeed, the entire process may be treated ambiguously. The ambiguity refers to

the parties entering it, to the content and the role the facilitator/mediator played in the dialogue process. Parties taking part in the dialogue do not recognize each other. Regarding the bilateral treaties, the consequence of non-recognition is legal inability to establish formal relationships with the treaty. Nonetheless, this doesn't mean that treaties cannot be concluded between non-recognizable states. This rather implies that if the treaty is concluded in such case, mutual recognition will automatically be implied. In this way, according to the international law, the Treaty would be valuable which would have two effects: recognition and establishing the rights and duties according to the treaty (Kolb 2020). In the case of Kosovo-Serbia dispute, a comprehensive agreement with the final ending for mutual recognition of two states is the main goal. At least this is always stated to be the final goal from Kosovo's side, without going further to analyze all treaties or agreements known in the field of the international law.

Two agreements are continually and frequently discussed. There are two reasons for this: to verify what was said about bad agreements signed by Kosovo and to emphasize EU's role and its attitudes and position related to the issue. Kosovo in August 25, 2015 signed the Agreement on the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities, which was signed while the Assembly was on the vacation. (Zëri 2017)

Why signed while the Assembly was on the vacation? This is one, out of dozens possible questions to be raised not only for this agreement which caused so many turbulences in Kosovo and which continues to be "rope in the throat" for Kosovo in the further processes of dialogue, even though Kosovo Constitutional Court had found this agreement to be not in accordance with the Kosovo Constitution. Nonetheless, international community pressed Kosovo to implement this agreement, since they see it as an international obligation which was in addition ratified by the Kosovo Parliament. Declared as not in accordance with the spirit of the constitution, it is still on the table and it is still pushed to be implemented with various forms of pressure. The other similar agreement was signed with Monte Negro, regarding the demarcation of borders between Kosovo and Monte Negro. After signed, it faced a strong objection and its ratification took quite a long period of time. International Community, i.e. representatives of EU and US were with perseverance asking Kosovo politicians to vote ratification of demarcation, since it was the last remained request for Kosovo in order to get the visa free regime.(www.balkaninsider.com)

Kosovo ratified this agreement, whereas the promised visa free regime (after the agreement was reached) was not granted for Kosovo citizens. It goes beyond the perception that Kosovo lost a big part of the territories in favor of Monte Negro. Such conditions were not set up for the states that derived from the territories of former Yugoslavia. The EU position remained unclear regarding its demands from Serbia. "While officially it could not seek Serbia's recognition of Kosovo, governments and parliaments in some EU member states, in particular Germany, made it clear that eventual EU accession would require full recognition." (Biber 2015) But no deep analysis is needed to see how differently the pressure is applied against Kosovo and against Serbia in the process of negotiations. Serbia like always plays with its not very clear geopolitics orientations: directed towards the West or turned in direction to Russia. It continues to be silent even now after the last movements in Ukraine. Kosovo on the other side clearly and completely oriented toward the West with the goal and the hope to integrate into EU and in NATO. It opposes also Mr. Putin's actions against Ukraine. While parties keep these positions, they, as it was said, do not undergo the same pressure from the EU. This type of approach EU had even before the war. Thus, "in trading human rights, justice, and democracy for a false sense of stability, the EU allowed genocide to take place on its doorstep. Then, it disingenuously framed one-sided aggression as a two-sided conflict with equal culpability". (Kushi 2021)

In addition, attitudes of Russia remain the same. Certainly, Russia has neither replaced the EU's influence in the Western Balkans, nor taken on the Union's mediating role in the Kosovo–Serbia dispute. EU membership is still associated with economic prosperity and freedom of movement in the Western Balkans. Support for the Union has grown steadily between 2016 and 2019, although Serbia is the country most concerned about the potential implications of EU accession over its national sovereignty. (www.rcc.int 2019) All the time the dialogue was developed it seemed that part of the West looked at Kosovo as it was Kosovo before the declaration of independence. "The West generally ignores Serbia's transgressions, such as its campaign that has convinced at least 15 countries to "revoke" their recognition of Kosovo, its purchase of sanctioned weapons from Russia, or its growing authoritarianism." (Kushi 2021) Anyway, the EU's position remained ambiguous regarding its demands from Serbia. However, there were not seen some strong mechanisms on imposing parties measures as means for implementing the signed agreements. Based on this, EU was pushed to use the contractual

relations and EU integration as an incentive agreement between the parties on the dialogue. As a result, progress has been made in the process of integration of both states with the EU: Serbia has started access negotiations, and Kosovo has signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA). Since 2013, "however, no significant progress has been made in the normalization process or its implementing the agreements". (Szpala 2016)

No matter of activities and technical agreements, parties were not at all close to reach any final agreement. Indeed, the process was basically obstructed. Mainly from Serbian side. Negotiation either technical or political continually happened to be close the total failure. Having this in place, German Chancellor Angela Merkel prevented the Kosovo–Serbia talks from derailing by launching a new initiative of cooperation centered on connectivity, the so-called Berlin Process, in the summer of 2014. (www.euroactiv.com 2014) Established soon after Juncker's declaration on the suspension of EU enlargement, the Berlin Process involved a restricted number of member states (Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and the UK), the Western Balkans countries interested in joining the EU (including Kosovo and Serbia) and EU representatives. Its main objective was to complement and provide new impetus to the European integration of the Western Balkans. (Viceré 2019) Whatever offered to Serbia by the EU and others, it was not enough to convince Serbia to give up activities of hindering Kosovo in the processes towards membership in the international organizations and in the activities for more recognitions. Serbia managed to block Kosovo's membership in UNESCO in the autumn of 2015, which further undermined relations between Belgrade and Pristina. "The slowdown in the normalization process is also apparent in the reduced activity by the EU, which has limited tools to put pressure on the parties, consequently this policy is becoming less and less effective". (Szpala 2016)

The normalization of relations with Kosovo was included in a separate chapter in Serbia's accession negotiations with the EU, and these may be suspended if the process does not continue. However, "it is unlikely that the EU would be willing to use this tool". (Szpala 2016) Answer for this, is easy to be found. This can't happen for simple reasons which have a connection with traditional and current geopolitics. The new hotbeds of crisis where the EU should engage and the use of Russia as a reserve competitive alternative by Serbia are just two of the many reasons,

why the EU prefer "carrot" instead of "stick" as a model of mediation. (Deskaj 2021,179) But, to Kosovo this type of approach was perceived that "stick" was reserved only for Kosovo, whereas "carrot" for Serbia. Or even further, the attitudes of the EU to some opinions were perceived as the behavior of step mother for Kosovo and the behavior of mother for Serbia.

In the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia in an unexpectable way, led by President Hashim Thaçi and Serbian President Vucic, a new/old issue was raised, which polarized even more the political situation in Kosovo. The was the issue of land swap, or border corrections as Hashim Thaçi preferred to name it. Officially this was never admitted to have been as an issue taken seriously into the consideration by the western diplomacy. But, however many politicians in Kosovo declared that the issue of land swap was mentioned to them in various closed-door meetings. Nobody has shown publicly any document or paper that was put on the table of dialogue officially. But obviously this goes beyond the perceptions.

Although Serbia was included among the countries that might gain access to the EU in the near future, accession will be impossible until it normalizes relations with Kosovo. A Serbian proposal – supported by the US – for ethnic-based land swaps raised expectations that a breakthrough was in sight in mid-2018. Yet the plan was criticized by Austria, Germany, Luxembourg and the UK, who feared that this could lead to similar requests for ethnic-based border changes in Bosnia, North Macedonia and Montenegro. (Jenne&Cook 2018)

According to an official from a European country, the problem is not that Serbia launches time after time this idea. The problem is that that we see a passivity by the Mogherini Office, who has neither put the red lines for these themes, nor reacts when these themes are being said…whereas a silence to some ones, is seen in Prishtina, as well. (Grupi për studime juridike dhe politike 2018) Moreover,

> the negotiations were secret, and details have yet to be made public, but they included a land swap widely assumed to involve trading part or all of the four, predominantly Serb northern Kosovo municipalities for parts of Serbia's Preševo Valley, which are predominantly Kosovar. The discussions culminated in a 2018 draft agreement meant to be put before the UN Security Council. (www.crisisgroup.com 2020)

5. Mutual recognition, general agreement and/or land swap

Amid growing controversy and rumors, Kosovo President Hashim Thaçi and his Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vučić described the contours of their ideas publicly at the Alpbach Forum, an international conference in Austria, in late August 2018. (Grey&Heath 2018) Many analysts and among them both authors of this paper though that Thaçi would agree on whatever offered to him, since he is blackmailed. At his neck always stayed a fear that The Hague Tribunal would at the end of the day play with him. And because of this he was very open to whatever offered if a simple promise was given to him-not to be charged for crimes during the war. Quite interesting: former minister of information in the Milosevic's war government, in one side, and the political representative of Kosovo Liberation Army (two strong former enemies) on the other side, now negotiate to solve the dispute. Hence, Thaçi argued that others "in the region should not be afraid of possible agreement … even if it includes border change", while Vučić noted that "nobody asked Serbs and Albanians about the [current] borders". (www.crisisgroup.com 2018) Play with the borders in turbulent region and ask for no fear, is similar to "playing with stones within a glass house", every one would say. How deeply all this went, perhaps will not be made public. At least, not very soon. But, "**Russia** and the U.S. had been briefed and were quietly supportive". (www.crisisgroup.com 2020) Afterwards, in 2019, "Thaçi and Vučić approached the Trump administration with a proposal to restart talks under U.S. auspices". (Pancevski&Lubold 2020)

In fact, the land swap or Kosovo partition is not something new which appeared just recently. It is a very old idea or project which appeared over the history. It has been repeated also by Serbian leaders who were treated as democratically oriented, and not only by the current President Vucic. It was also Serbian President Tadic that, if Serbia is unable to recover Kosovo, partition of the country might be an acceptable alternative. (www.b92 2008) Various analysis show that nothing is going to be gained from the potential land swap or from Kosovo partition. Thaçi and Vucic may have projected something well in their heads and this not is hard to be found out, since among the other Thaçi is out of political games and deals. Instructor Michael Rossi rightfully underlines that "what we do know is that such talk risks destabilizing an already volatile region that includes Macedonia and Bosnia where groups eager to redraw borders would

be quick to capitalize on a new precedent being set. We also know that the United States has again repeated its opposition to any exchange of territories, though its influence in the region is no longer as decisive as what it once was." (Rossi 2018)

6. EU and USA role

Under the circumstances of either secret or public talks between Thaçi and Vucic, Serbia simultaneously continued with the efforts on blocking Kosovo membership of international organizations. And it succeeded to block Kosovo's membership in Interpol and UNESCO. Kosovo Government reacted with some measures, against this. In the framework of the EU-facilitated dialogue, "the efforts aiming at concluding a fully comprehensive and legally binding agreement between Serbia and Kosovo had been interrupted since November 2018 following the decision by the Kosovo government to impose customs tariffs of 100 percent on imported goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, citing political and trade related grievances." (EC Kosovo Report 2020) Based on 100 percent tariffs, which were imposed on all Serbian goods by Kosovo Government, the dialogue was suspended by both parties. Despite these difficulties, the international community has tried to defuse the conflict, in particular through engagement of the EU and the US. In this way, "following his appointment as special presidential envoy for Kosovo-Serbia negotiations on October 04, 2019, US Ambassador Richard Grenell visited Kosovo and Serbia on October 9-10, 2019". (Stanicek, 2021)

Calls for dialogue and the relief of tariffs came from the international community through very string messages and very hard pressure, which was not seen, at least not proportionally to Serbia who was the real cause of this. Meantime, Prime Minister Haradinaj resigned due to the fact that he was called by The Hague Tribunal for an interview. Assumptions were (not at any time made clear the main reasons of his resignation) that he resigned because he didn't agree to remove tariffs. Elections brought results that to someone were not expected, bringing thus the Party VETEVENDOSJE! As the first party which would create new Kosovo Government. This party was against the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia in was it was developed, ascertaining that the dialogue should be developed between two equal independent states and not as it was until recently. The leader of VETEVENDOSJE! claimed that there will be no more dialogue

without the clear agenda where nothing is to be accepted to be discussed regarding the Kosovo status, regarding territorial integrity of Kosovo and that the Association of Municipalities with the Serb Majority will not be accepted, since it was declared un-constitutional. Thus VETEVENDOSJE! in October 2009 the elections and its leader Albin Kurti became the Prime Minister to lead the government that was not at all similar to any of Kosovo previous governments. For Prime Minister Kurti the dialogue with Serbia was not the priority. He was more oriented towards solving the issues of unemployment, anti-corruption and projects considered to be more important for citizens. Unfortunately, COVID 19 appeared and in Kosovo the pandemic brought in additional political problems of political which were not only of domestic nature. It showed deep disagreements regarding the potential solutions of the Kosovo Serbia dispute. Pandemic was used as the pretext to over through the government. Professor Austin, notes that

> *"Thaçi along with the Trump Administration and even with the Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama, identified Kurti's Government as a big threat. Government ended Trump plans for a suspicious diplomatic victory-land swap was removed from the agenda. Therefore, Kurti had to be knocked down, and at the meantime Kosovars, this time definitely believed that their faith was in the hands of foreigners. EU in this regard appeared to be very clumsy in reaction. Maybe to Brussels they suited them more rather than the pretended nationalism of Kurti." (Austin 2021,296)*

Government was knocked down through the vote of no confidence during the peak of pandemic. The process, hard to be seen under such difficult situations where nothing would be more important compared to the health of the people showed also the divergences within the international community related to the Kosovo Serbia dispute. The bellow statements, taken from balkaninsight.com, confirm this quite easily.

> *"In a joint statement on Tuesday, the so-called QUINT countries – the US, Britain, France, Germany and Italy, – urged Kosovo leaders "to preserve and ensure the integrity and functionality of Kosovo's government" in accordance with the constitution.*

> *But the US ambassador to Kosovo, Philip Kosnett, appeared to support the LDK move, saying he was "pleased to see the Assembly will hold a session on the no-confidence vote tomorrow".*

However, the German EU rapporteur to Kosovo, Viola Cramon, slated the no-confidence motion as "unbelievable. Irresponsible. I feel terribly sorry for the citizens of #Kosovo. They don't deserve this".

"Really worrying political situation in #Kosovo. In times of crisis, politicians must stand together and protect their citizens! Crucial now to ensure effective response to #COVID-19 – not overthrow the government. Act responsibly!" she added.

Earlier on Tuesday, Germany and France, via a joint tweet from German ambassador Christian Heldt, also urged the LDK "to reconsider the no-confidence vote". Heldt later emphasized in another tweet that it was "crucial now to ensure effective response to COVID-19 – not overthrow the government". (balkaninsight.com)

Dialogue was relaunched in 2020 being supported by the international community. The appointment of United States (US) special presidential envoy Richard Grenell and special EU representative Miroslav Lajčák reflected the importance of the normalization process. However, a lack of coordination and communication between the US and the EU means that no real progress has yet been made. "The reasons for the very limited results are multiple, ranging from the internal political situation in both countries, to ambiguous and asymmetrical expectations of the normalization agreement" (Stanicek 2021). Efforts were made on bringing parties together where Josep Borrel hosted a high-level meeting with the then Kosovo Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti and President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic. This meeting followed the virtual summit on July 10, 2020 hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in support of the relaunch of the dialogue. "Josef Borrell said that [if there is a political will] 'reaching an agreement Belgrade Prishtina is matter of months', not years." (Stanicek 2021) This obviously was a very optimistic statement, taking into the consideration the entire process of dialogues from its start.

To overcome difficulties, US initiated trilateral meetings which resulted with commitments signed separately by Prime Minister Hoti and President Vucic in the presence of US President Trump, where Kosovo and Serbia committed to economic normalization. Meeting was held in Washington DC, on September 04,2020.

What is going to be as the outcome of these signed commitments (not frequently seen in the international relations) it is difficult to foresee. At least after the change of the US Administration. During Joe Biden election campaign there were seen signs that the US

Administration would be more active and that will be more deeply engaged in the dialogue. During the campaign there were issued a vision paper according to which candidate (Joe Biden) intended to work with the EU on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, presenting Biden as a "long-time friend of Albania and Kosovo and the Albanian – American Community. Antony Blinken stated that the new US administration would help Kosovo and Serbia to move forward: '[Joe Biden] spent a lot of time on those countries in the past, and I think he shares your convictions that there are things we can do to help move Kosovo forward, and also move Serbia forward'. (Stanicek 2021)

Expectations that the solution for the Kosovo Serbia dispute will be found quickly, are not real. The fear that the process will be more difficult derives from the last events happening within the EU, related to potential enlargement and the potential integration of the Western Balkans. Last summit in Slovenia did not manage to set up a clear deadline for these countries. Year 2030 as the potential year for integration of the Western Balkans, raised by Slovenia was refused. After this we would like to cite Sebastian Kurz, Austria's chancellor, when he said:" If the European Union does not offer this region a real perspective, we have to be aware that other superpowers – China, Russia or Turkey – will play a bigger role there. The region belongs to Europe geographically, and it needs a European perspective." (The Guardian 2021) Putting this citation under the context of most recent tension between Kosovo and Serbia regarding the vehicle plates, when instead of making more pressure to Serbia, both parties (Kosovo and Serbia) were equalized even though Kosovo was respecting the agreement which expired, with the measures undertaken in the Northern part of its territory. It is good to finish the article with the title of the article, published by the Guardian (2021) which goes: Serbia president lauds Russia ties at the EU Balkans summit.

Thus, an immediate request directed to the US and the EU for more quick coordination and action in solving the Kosovo Serbia dispute is more than necessary.

7. Conclusions

Kosovo remains to be considered as an unfinished state. This is more because of the ambiguous policies being played around it rather than its inside capacities to build itself as a state. This state was created as a result of the efforts of its people and with the strong support of the international community. USA has played a crucial role, but the position and the attitudes of the international community and international politics has changed a lot after 2008 year. Kosovo agreed to enter into an imposed dialogue with Serbia on unequal grounds. The EU facilitated/mediated dialogue did not manage to bring a solution for this dispute as the facilitator/mediator could not conclude whether its institutions keep the neutral position related to Kosovo's statehood. Non-recognition from five EU member states also dos not help the efforts for a general agreement. Therefore, Kosovo is not an equal party in the dialogue. Kosovo has shown clearly its orientations towards EU and NATO integration, whereas Serbia in various ways blackmails Western democracies with possible orientations towards Russia and China. The EU pressure is not equally imposed to both parties. Talks and dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia facilitated/mediated by EU have shown that without strong USA engagement, an appropriate solution to this disputes cannot be identified. The process of dissoluting former Yugoslavia is a very strong argument that stresses out the need for US engagement. A general agreement including mutual recognition is the best guarantee for peace and stability in the Western Balkans which remains to be fragile. Current situation related to the Russia-Ukraine, can worsen the situation in the Balkans, and a call for a final solution to the dispute is crucial for peace and stability in the region. Time for final solution and the establishment of democracy and peace in the Balkans is at the peak of the momentum. History of the Balkans has shown that delays in the efforts for peace, equality and democracy cannot be justified.

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STRATEGIC PROJECTS TO REVITALISE THE EUROPEAN UNION'S POWER IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract: *The goal of the article is to analyse key strategic projects to strengthen the European Union's capabilities and role in global affairs. The EU has lost the dynamics of its impact on world affairs due to the configuration of crises that have affected it at both an internal and external level. The sequence of events has undoubtedly weakened the EU's perception as a creator of the international order, which has been a priority since its inception in the 1960s. The power and attractiveness projected by the European Union in a variety of ways have been weakened both as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and more recent dramatic events causing threats to security and peace in Europe, the best example of which is the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, but also due to undermining its internal cohesion.At the same time, the question arises whether there is a chance to regain a good image for the EU by undertaking necessary reforms and revitalising the European project? The other research questions one then needs to answer are: What challenges will the European Union have to respond to in the nearest future? Are there any real premises for waking the European Union from its marasmus and strengthening its position in Europe? How could the European Union and its members overcome these difficulties? In order to find the answer to these questions, the analysis will cover at least three strategic projects that, in the author's opinion, may reverse the wave of estrangement from the European Union: firstly, actions that are to lead to becoming an organised strategic entity as well as the creation of integrated capabilities in the field of foreign and security policy and military crisis management, secondly, a new approach to neighbourhood policy and future EU enlargement, and finally, undermining anti-European narrative in EU and third countries.*

Keywords: The European Union, Revitalisation of the EU, Strategic projects, Management of global affairs, Military capabilities, Soft power, COVID-19, War in Ukraine.

Introduction

For a long time, the European Union was certainly one of the leading players in international relations, a model of power (mostly soft power), which means the power of attractiveness in the world, mainly in its neighbourhood, understood as the ability to persuade other states to act in a specific way. The European Union's power needs to be analysed on the

basis of its activity in the international arena, and especially the determinants of its identity in the world. The specificity of the concept of power, and especially resources defined within the framework, fit into the set of arguments determining the power of attraction of the European Union, which include Western European values considered universal for democratic states, the culture defining the rich identity of the European Union based on accepted diversity, and specific foreign policy (Nye, 2004).

In recent years, preoccupied with the debt crisis, the fragility of its financial institutions, the fight over wages for growth and against unemployment, the rise of populism, and the ongoing wave of refugees reaching European countries, military conflicts around and in Eastern Europe, the Covid-19 pandemic, the European Union (EU) has failed to strengthen, let alone increase, its influence and presence on the international stage (Landaburu, 2014).

Above all, two current crises in Europe, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, have caused new geopolitical dynamics and shown the need for a stronger, united, and more assertive EU policy. It is mainly the latter threat in the geopolitical environment that poses substantial challenges for the EU's external policies and its position in the world order.

However, the EU does not have full responsibility to act as a global player and to adjust its foreign policy in line with the fight against the military threat, nevertheless, it needs to uphold its ambition of being a 'geopolitical' actor, showing unity and assuming a leadership role in promoting its values and strategic interests, as well as offering military support, worldwide (Mc Allister, 2020). The EU needs to remain a reliable actor, creating strategic alliances with like-minded democracies while building ad hoc coalitions with other partners. The rules-based system of international cooperation remains critical for the EU's external actions; therefore, it needs to continue shaping international norms and standards in a way that reflects European values and interests.

Mainly, the invasion prompted an unprecedented mobilization of EU resources to counter Russian aggression, spanning the economic, security, energy, technology, and humanitarian sectors. Acting decisively and with the common resolve of its member states, the EU has taken huge steps forward as a geopolitical actor. But still, the question is: H**as Europe finally learned to speak "the language of power"?** Because of the war, the EU is not only addressing those

vulnerabilities to defend itself but also using them offensively to coerce and deter an aggressor intent on undermining European security. Therefore, now we can observe the birth of a geopolitical Europe and the new dimensions of European power with a focus on the tech, economic, and security terrains.

At the same time, there is the question of a chance to regain a good image for the EU by undertaking necessary reforms and revitalising the European project. And so, the other research questions one needs to answer are: What challenges will the European Union have to respond to in the nearest future? Are there any real premises for waking the European Union from its marasmus and strengthening its position in Europe? How could the European Union and its members overcome these difficulties?

In order to find the answer to these questions, this analysis will cover at least three strategic projects that, in the author's opinion, may reverse the wave of estrangement from the European Union: firstly, actions that are to lead to it becoming an organised strategic entity as well as the creation of integrated capabilities in the field of civil and military crisis management, secondly, a new approach to neighbourhood policy and future EU enlargement, and finally, undermining anti-European narrative in the EU, within European citizens and third countries.

Visions of the future of the European Union can be formulated by analysing the titles of articles and reports of leading journals and think tanks in Europe and the world. Not so long ago, ubiquitous questions such as "Does the EU have a future?" or "Quo Vadis, Europe?" (Buras, 2017), "the Contestation of the EU as an Actor in the ENP" (Niemann, and Hoffmann, 2018), "L'europe Qui protégé?" (Leonard, 2017) predominated. First of all, the considerations focused on how to work out a strategic orientation, strengthen the legitimacy of the EU, and restore energy to the European project. However, the main goal was to define how Europe should stand up to the danger of gradual marginalisation in a world dominated by growing major players. Answers to these challenges can be found in the new narrative about Europe undertaken by experts. It is noticeable that the questions about the future of the EU prevalent in the recent discourse have slowly begun to give way to announcements of the "Renewal of the Union", "Strategic autonomy in ensuring security" or "New plans for Europe", "Renew Europe" (renew Europe., 2022).

Reinforcing responsibility for the European Union in global leadership was also a key topic of the Conference on the Future of Europe, held during the European citizens' debate on Europe's challenges and priorities[1]. The coronavirus pandemic was a powerful reminder that Europe can only tackle global challenges through global cooperation by means of addressing the critical issues such as peace and security, climate change, sustainable development, and global recovery (Conference on the Future of Europe, 2021). Hence, serious consideration has been given to the revitalisation of the integration project, and at the same time, increasing the EU's ability to co-decide on global issues. Nevertheless, for the Union to regain its attractiveness, it is not necessary to reach a common agreement on the ultimate model of the final European integration project. In the current situation, any discussion on the *finalité* of the UE would be counter-productive due to the ongoing conceptual cacophony between and within the Member States. The Union should rather once again try to formulate a functional approach that provides an answer to the following question: What is the future added value of integration, making it an attractive actor again, apart from only maintaining the attainments of the past?

The answer to this question is connected with the need to state that the EU and its Member States do not exist in a vacuum but are under pressure to counter the danger of gradual marginalisation and global inadequacy. This means that the EU's strategic goal or main *leitmotiv* – the creation of "global Europe", can be formulated as the need to enable Europeans to manage and co-determine global and regional development in a highly dynamic international environment at the level of their shared values, historical experience, and interests oriented towards strengthening the well-being of European citizens. In this situation, it is necessary for both citizens and political elites to identify with the European project in order to win over the unconvinced (Global Trends to 2030, 2015). The translation of the EU's strategic objectives into reality requires that the EU and its members define ambitious strategic priorities that can be implemented through limited projects, following the definition of detailed roadmaps with

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[1] The Conference inaugurated on March 2021 is placed under the authority of the three institutions, represented by the President of the European Parliament, the President of the Council, and the President of the European Commission, acting as its **Joint Presidency**. They have committed to listen to Europeans and to follow up, within their sphere of competencies, on the recommendations made. By spring 2022, the Conference is expected to reach conclusions and provide guidance on the future of Europe. Conference on the Future of Europe: Engaging with citizens to build a more resilient Europe, Brussels, 10 March 2021, https://www.2021portugal.eu/media/wm3p11ds/210310_jointdeclarationcofe_en.pdf

specific policy measures and a clearly defined timetable for achieving them. Therefore, to restore energy to the European project in the light of political and economic challenges, the European Union must set strategic priorities – strengthening the global role of Europe and European global governance.

The European Union still tries to solidify its position in the international arena despite more than 20 years of cooperation in the field of external relations. Europe's capability to play an international role commensurate with its objective potential is still limited by different traditions, the foreign policy cultures of its members, and divergent interests defined predominantly at the national level. This dissonance of interests was especially visible during the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, and now in Ukraine. The Member States also pursue different policies towards Russia, China, or the issue of EU enlargement to the countries of the Western Balkans or Turkey. It shows that in its foreign policy, the EU is still unable to do away with the capability-expectations gap, defined by Ch. Hill in 1993, or the me-first strategy applied by the Member States. In many situations, countries still opt for unilateral policy towards non-EU partners, aspiring to adopt an individual rather than a common European approach (the example of Nord Stream 2) (Emmanoulidis, 2012: 95).

Therefore, it is worthwhile considering how the Union and its members could overcome these difficulties. It seems that at least three strategic projects could reverse the wave of estrangement from the European Union: firstly, actions of the EU that are to lead to becoming an organised strategic entity and the creation of integrated capabilities of the EU in the field of civil and military crisis management, secondly, a new approach to neighbourhood policy and future EU enlargement, and finally, undermining anti-European narrative in EU states, their citizens and third countries.

1. Integrated strategic capabilities in the field of foreign and security matters

There is an impression that despite, or rather because of, the crises affecting the EU, the time has finally come for greater ambitions in the field of foreign and defence policy. It was realised that the EU mission to act as a global power would be impossible without having a real security and defence policy. Several processes contributed to this; firstly, the exit of the United

Kingdom from the EU which, although undoubtedly a great shock and a loss for the integration process, means the disappearance of an obstacle to closer defence cooperation, mainly due to British reluctance to create projects competing with NATO in Europe (Kuźniar, 2018: 64). Secondly, the presidency of Donald Trump during 2017-2021, who underlined a US-centric approach to security, prompted a greater mobilisation in Europe to take more responsibility for its own security. In addition, the threats appearing between 2014-2017, i.e., the increase in the inflow of migrants, the growing threats of terrorism and cyber-attacks, and the lack of diplomatic solutions to the conflict in Syria as well as military issues in Ukraine in 2014 and the spring of 2022, all of which significantly increased citizens' expectations regarding the role of the EU in the world.

Nonetheless, according to the Standard Eurobarometer survey conducted in June-July 2021, attitudes towards the EU remain positive and broadly stable. Optimism about the future of the EU has reached its highest level since 2009 and trust in the EU remains at its highest since 2008. The majority of Europeans are satisfied with the measures taken by the EU, and by national governments, against the coronavirus pandemic. Nearly two-thirds trust the EU to make the right decisions in the future to respond to the pandemic. In the case of citizens' opinions regarding whether the EU member states should have a common foreign policy, 72 % were for, and only 21% against. 46% of respondents supported the further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years, 71% were supportive of a common European policy on migration, and over 78% of Europeans supported the creation of a common security and defence policy (Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021).

The first step towards meeting these expectations was made by adopting the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy in June 2016 (EU Global Strategy 2016), in which it was emphasised that it was necessary to strengthen the EU's defence competencies and to act "according to the principles of pragmatism", which as suggested by Biscop, means a return to Realpolitik (Biscop, 2017). At the same time, the concept of strengthening the capacity for operational planning and conducting missions and operations in the field of CSDP was adopted (Council of the European Union, 2017). In practice, this was expressed by the establishment in the summer of 2017 of the Military Planning and Conduct

Capability (MPCC) unit in the EU military staff as the future headquarters of the operational security and defence policy.

The most important implementation document for the strategy was the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence (Council of the EU, 2016). In its framework, a new level of EU ambition in the field of security and defence was established with regard to three basic tasks: a) responding to external conflicts and crises, b) building the capacities of partners, c) protecting the EU and its citizens.

In response to these EU hard-power ambitions, in November 2017, 25 Member States decided to start, in accordance with art. 42 of the Treaty of Lisbon, closer cooperation in the field of defence in the form of PESCO, that is, permanent structured cooperation within the EU (European Commission, 2017a)[2]. It provides the like-minded Member States with a higher level of defence cooperation and the possibility of proposing projects of more advanced collaboration. Then, in June 2017, the European Commission launched the European Defence Fund, under which, until 2020, EUR 90 million will be invested in research, and EUR 600 million per year in the development of defence industry products and technologies, followed by EUR 1.5 billion) (European Commission, 2017). Thanks to this fund, the EU budget will be used to support defence-related projects for the first time. Finally, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) was introduced, the task of which is to monitor expenditure on defence in individual countries and to identify the possibilities of combining resources and ensuring common capabilities (Martill and Sus, 2017; Fiott, 2017).

The development of these projects should certainly help to define the political ambitions of the EU as a global actor, and thus hope to increase the confidence of Europeans in its capability in the field of security. At the moment, however, they are not sufficient to form an attractive narrative that would make the Union a truly independent actor in the security sector. In order to achieve them, bigger ideas are needed, one of which could be the European Security Forces – as an acceptable framework for the future creation of the European army. The purpose of the structures would be to strengthen the EU's capabilities without affecting the sovereignty of the

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[2] Only three countries did not join PESCO: Denmark (due to the opt-out procedure in the field of European security), Malta (due to a too-small army), and the United Kingdom (due to the decision to leave the EU).

Member States, while not competing with NATO in the area of territorial defence. The Union could additionally play a complementary role in the so-called soft dimensions of hard security, such as cyber-attacks, disinformation, and border protection (Pisarska, 2017: 3). Such actions could considerably strengthen the attractiveness of the EU portfolio as an entity ensuring security, in addition to having the traditional economic and soft potential.

Greater visibility of the EU in the area of security is also necessary due to three series of crises – in relations with Russia, the migration crisis, and Brexit, exacerbated by the loss of Europeans' trust in the United States after Donald Trump's former presidency. Moreover, these forces would meet the expectations of European citizens in connection with fears regarding the fight against illegal migration, protection of electoral processes against external interference, or counteracting criminal activities on the Web, while avoiding controversial operations that would put the life of European soldiers at risk. Thanks to the pan-European structure, the EU military forces could meet the needs of all Member States as a common response to European security threats – especially those that cannot be dealt with at the national level (Council of the European Union, 2017a). In addition, they would provide a framework for closer cooperation with non-EU countries, for example, members of NATO – Great Britain after Brexit, or EU neighbours, i.e., Ukraine – not excluding any of the actors playing a key role on the continent (Billon-Galland, Quencez, 2017). Thanks to political unity and defence potential, the capability to react quickly as well as the ability to use all the components of the potential means actions of this type could raise the EU's credibility and overcome the long-standing problems of defining its identity as a strategic entity.

The deterioration of the security situation on Europe's periphery in the last decade, particularly the situation of war in Ukraine in 2022, has raised expectations about the EU's contribution to crisis prevention, stabilisation, and peacebuilding. The demands on EU crisis management, both military and civilian, have constantly risen, but there is still a lack of the necessary means and political will to act collectively.

In the course of the reflection process for the EU's autonomous military capabilities, the European Union published the concept of A Strategic Compass for a stronger EU security and defence in the next decade on 21 March 2021 (Council of the European Union (2022a).

The Council has formally approved the Strategic Compass, at a time when the EU is witnessing the return of war in Europe. The Compass gives the European Union an ambitious plan of action for strengthening the EU's security and defence policy by 2030. Initially, fourteen EU member states proposed to establish a new joint European military force, treated as a first entry force for rapid reaction in the most severe military crises. Although this concept does not assume building a supranational European army, it can add dynamics to the debate on the EU military level of ambition. According to the document, to be able to act rapidly and robustly whenever a crisis erupts, with partners if possible, and alone when necessary, the EU will establish a strong EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of up to 5000 troops for different types of crises; be ready to deploy 200 fully equipped CSDP mission experts within 30 days, including in complex environments; conduct regular live exercises on land and at sea; enhance military mobility; reinforce the EU's civilian and military CSDP (Common Defence and Security Policy) missions and operations by promoting a rapid and more flexible decision-making process, acting more robustly, and ensuring greater financial solidarity to make full use of the European Peace Facility to support partners (Council of the European Union, 2021).

The Russia-Ukraine war dramatically changed the way Europeans think about their security. Russian President Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has had a galvanising effect on Europeans' attitude towards defence. In doing so, countries initially focused on readiness, capability gaps, and joint equipment procurement and research (Gressels, Witney, 2022). The European Union unexpectedly decided to provide weapons to Ukraine, and, at a summit in Versailles on 10-11 March 2022, European leaders affirmed the need to "take further decisive steps towards building our European sovereignty". This will involve much more money for defence, directed towards "the capabilities necessary to conduct the full range of missions and operations". In the language of diplomacy, this means Europe's leaders have accepted that they need to be able to confront Russia and no doubt, encouraged them to think the previously unthinkable (Gressels, Witney, 2022).

In an unprecedented and unanimous reaction to the Russian war on Ukraine that began on 24 February 2022, the EU swiftly decided to provide €500 million, and then rapidly a further €500 million, from the European Peace Facility to fund and coordinate EU military assistance

and to deliver military (including lethal) equipment to Ukraine. The Council adopted two **assistance measures under the European Peace Facility** (EPF) that will allow the EU to further **support** the capabilities and resilience of the **Ukrainian Armed Forces** to defend the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country and protect the civilian population against the ongoing Russian military aggression. The Council had already agreed to €31 million for non-lethal assistance to Ukraine on 2 December 2021. For the first time in its history, the EU is now using a dedicated, although off-budget, tool to finance – but not to deliver, with that responsibility falling on the Member States alone – lethal military equipment for a third country (Council of the European Union, 2022). The assistance measures will increase the original budget announced on 28 February 2020 with an **additional €500 million**, thereby **doubling its initial amount to €1 billion** (Bilquin and Immenkamp, 2022).

2. Enlargement and neighbourhood policy as a strategic project

The policy of enlargement of the European Union makes it attractive to other European countries having aspirations of membership. Recently, however, the policy of expanding the European Union to the Western Balkan states[3], which are closest to it, has been pushed into the background due to internal problems, especially Brexit and its potential consequences for the idea of the integration of the continent. However, it cannot be concealed that other processes related to the future of the EU have clearly suffered despite the assurances of representatives of EU institutions that the process of EU enlargement into the Balkans will not slow down. As former EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Stefen Füle noted, if the EU ignores this region of Europe, Russia and Turkey will be eager to enter it using their historic contacts and influences (Szpala, 2010).

The progress on the path of integration is slow, but since April 2016, the countries of the region have been covered by the stabilisation and association agreements, and most of them already have the status of a candidate. Since 2007, the countries of the region have benefited from financial support under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. The example of

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[3]These include Serbia, Montenegro, the Republic of Macedonia – successors of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Albania.

Croatia, which, after the difficult way of joining the EU, eventually became a member on 1 July 2013, may encourage other Western Balkan countries to make further efforts.

Since 2004, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has provided a framework for relations between the EU and its 16 geographically closest eastern and southern neighbours, affording enhanced cooperation and access to the EU market under bilateral action plans which should eventually result in association agreements. The ENP is complemented by three regional initiatives: the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the Black Sea Synergy, and the Eastern Partnership. The UfM and the Eastern Partnership are multilateral and involve shared institutions (Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM, Euronest, regular summits) (Perchoc, 2016).

Until now, the European Union's policy towards its neighbours has been largely based on a reactive and defensive approach in response to calls for a membership perspective from states outside its borders and aimed at protecting the Union from unexpected turbulence on their part (Emmanouilidis and Świeboda, 2010). In the name of building peace outside of its borders, the Union promotes the idea of stability and security through democratisation, the export of European values, and economic cooperation, with 16 countries now covered by this policy, without offering them membership of the EU.

Several years after its introduction, the effectiveness of the neighbourhood policy is assessed ambivalently. Colour revolutions in the countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood (in Georgia in 2008, in Ukraine in 2014) and the Arab Spring in 2011 in the countries of the Mediterranean Basin have undermined the transformation ambitions and capabilities of the European Union based on just the democratising potential. The major geopolitical upheavals brought about by the Arab Spring in the southern Mediterranean since 2011, and by the conflict in Ukraine since 2014, have prompted the EU to overhaul what it is doing in the neighbourhood. That overhaul — and action to put it into practice — must succeed if the EU is to assert itself as an international player (Perchoc, 2016).

The EU prides itself on its ability to use soft power tools such as economic enticements and the magnifying appeal of European values to influence countries in its neighbourhood. The liberal democratic model has generally been perceived as a prudent tool for enhancing security, prosperity, and resilience in the immediate neighbourhood.

Russia's military aggression, persistent economic gaps, and democratic backsliding (apparent in the Western Balkans and the Eastern neighbourhood) all bring into question the prevailing (or 'before' EU strategy) for the two regions. The EU ultimately proved to be somewhat naïve, as recently made readily apparent by Russia's geopolitical and strategic moves and its invasion of Ukraine. The Union, however, can seize this pivotal moment in history to transform itself into a true geopolitical actor. Indeed, while the EU has expressed its political commitment to Western Balkans accession (though these processes may prove thorny and lengthy), this commitment was lacking for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine (the Trio countries) despite their recently submitted accession applications (Gubalova, 2022). On 28 February 2022, four days into the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, addressed the European Parliament to request the implementation of a fast-track procedure to join the European Union. Later that day, he officially signed Ukraine's application for membership. He was quickly followed by his Georgian and Moldovan counterparts, who submitted their countries' applications to join the bloc on 3 March 2022 (Bélanger, 2022).

In fact, there is no "fast track procedure" for joining the EU. There is no mention of it in Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union which establishes how a country can join the EU. According to article 49, "Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union"[4]. After the Versailles summit, members of the European Council asked the European Commission to examine the new membership applications, recognizing Ukraine's "European path" (Versailles Declaration, 2022). So far, none of this has translated into a formal commitment from EU member states to accept Ukraine as a candidate for membership. So, what are the prospects for the three countries, and what can we expect in terms of support from the EU?

Currently, EU-Ukraine relations are still regulated by an association agreement which was signed in 2014 and concluded in 2017. The agreement is the main tool for bringing Ukraine and the EU closer together, promoting deeper political ties, stronger economic links, and respect for common values. The deep and comprehensive free trade area (DCFTA) is the economic part

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[4] "The European Parliament and national Parliaments shall be notified of this application. The applicant State shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the consent of the European Parliament, which shall act by a majority of its component members."

of the agreement. It offers a framework for modernising Ukraine's economy and trade relations. The EU has already replaced Russia as Ukraine's main trade partner (Piskorska, 2017).

In addition, a number of association agreements proposed and signed in 2013-2017 with some EU neighbours, especially in the east – with a deeper free trade zone and visa liberalisation (with three – Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia out of six Eastern Partnership countries, the others being Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus) have not brought about the expected results. The agreements introducing visa-free travel on the EU's eastern border, making citizens the biggest winners of this process, can be regarded as an exception. In truth, they are a sign of raising the level of relations between the neighbouring countries' societies and the EU, which gives hope for reversing the negative trends in its perception. S. Secrieru sees the so-called 3D effect of visa liberalisation for the Eastern Partnership countries, which consists of an increase in the EU's credibility in the region, where its commitments were often not fulfilled for political reasons; a reduction of anti-European discourse in neighbouring countries (driven both internally and externally), which emphasised the lack of the EU's care for the region (in the case of Ukraine and Moldova, the criticism was mainly related to the delay in the visa liberalisation process); an answer to Russia's strategy of exploiting neighbours' vulnerabilities in order to prevent the strengthening of their relations with the Union (by lifting visas, the EU took another step to rebuff Russia's claims to the eastern neighbourhood, constituting a manifestation of its return to hard power policy) (Secrieru, 2017: 3).

The project of cooperation with Mediterranean countries, that is, the Union for the Mediterranean covering 15 neighbours from North Africa, the Middle East, and the Western Balkans[5], has not brought spectacular results, especially in the legal and institutional dimensions, contrary to those noticed in the Eastern Partnership, and even stagnation of its implementation is evident.

The Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, carried out and adopted by the European Commission on 18 November 2015, was a response to events in the EU's

[5]Along with the 28 EU member states, 15 Southern Mediterranean countries are members of the UfM: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Syria (suspended), Tunisia, and Turkey. Libya is an observer.

neighbourhood, especially those having consequences for European security. It assumed the building of a more effective partnership between the EU and its neighbours aimed at increasing the stability of both regions in the political, socio-economic, and security dimensions, strengthening the state and social resilience of EU partners to threats and challenges connected, among others, with migration (European Commission, 2015).

This shows that in the future, EU policy towards its neighbourhood should follow a different paradigm, consistent with the strategic goal of global Europe. Thus, the question is whether the Union, moving beyond only regional responsibility, will be able to play a stronger role in a less Eurocentric world where the old continent may no longer be the centre of attraction, but rather of the opposition to the danger of gradual marginalisation. Following this train of thought, the further enlargement process is related to the issue of future specificity and the role that the EU endeavours to play in the world, and the impact it intends to exert on countries outside its borders. In other words, by closing its door to new members, the Union will not manage to be an influential actor in international relations, to act as a regulatory global power. However, future enlargements should be a conscious choice rather than an unwanted necessity. This means that the perspective of global Europe is only possible if the European Union continues the policy of enlargement, despite sometimes unfavourable internal and external circumstances.

Nonetheless, the way to EU membership is long, and even the candidate countries in the Western Balkans do not know if and when they will be admitted to the Union. This depends on the reforms they are required to implement – especially in the areas of the rule of law, anti-corruption, and public administration – in order to meet the EU's conditions for membership (Apelblat, 2022).

3. Undermining anti-European narrative in EU states and third countries

One of the most important reasons for the decline in the attractiveness of the European Union is the way it is perceived and spoken about in the Member States, where the growth of the role of populist parties is discernible. The parliamentary and presidential elections in 2017 became a great test for the future of the EU, during which anxiety arose about the nationalisation

of European policy. A positive phenomenon was the victory of pro-European parties in the elections in Austria, France, the Netherlands, and Germany, although populism and the rise of Eurosceptic attitudes have become a visible and permanent element of the political scene (Prawda, 2018: 10).

These events have triggered a surprisingly strong mobilisation of the other side – the number of citizens supporting the European Union, afraid of losing the achievements of integration, has increased (Nancy, 2017). At the same time, we can observe a return to debates about strengthening and substantiation of the European project – its logic and legitimacy. Attempts at reversing the image of the EU as a foreign and external organisation have, however, led to disappointment with their low effectiveness and caused a mental crisis (Prawda, 2018: 11). 73% of respondents believed in 2017 that the European Union as a whole should react to such events as the instability of the Arab world, the growing importance of China and Russia, Brexit, and the former election of Donald Trump as US president (Nancy, 2017).

Therefore, 2017 resulted in an EU-wide debate on improving the image of the European Union and the implementation of a positive programme for Europe[6]. This coincided with the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome and was an important opportunity to recognise previous achievements and celebrate the values of Europeans. It was also a good time to analyse the areas requiring improvement and to look at the challenges in the context of a new chapter in EU history (Unia Europejska w 2017 r: 108). The White Paper on the Future of Europe, published in March 2017 by the European Commission, opened a discussion on further plans. The aim of civil dialogue between the public and political decision-makers of the Member States, inaugurated by the European Commission in 2017, was to amplify work on undermining the anti-European narrative, which was also appearing in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland and Hungary (Buras, 2018). In addition to the presidents and vice-presidents of the European Commission, MEPs and politicians from the Member States took part (317 dialogues took place in one year in 160 cities in 27 Member States)

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[6] Work on a positive programme for Europe that "protects, empowers and defends" was initiated by J.C. Juncker in the speech about the state of the EU delivered in 2016. Work on a positive programme was continued in 2017, resulting in the publication of the White Paper on the Future of Europe on 1 March 2017.

(Buras, 2018: 122-123)[7]. They focused in particular on the citizens' reactions to the White Paper and issues most relevant to citizens, i.e., social Europe, concerns about the threats to democracy and EU unity on the part of populists.

The unexpected coronavirus pandemic in 2019 was a powerful reminder that Europe can only tackle global challenges through global cooperation. The EU leaders very quickly found out that only "together they can address the critical issues such as peace and security, climate change, sustainable development, and the global recovery". The EU, as a champion of multilateralism and a rules-based global order, seeks a coordinated approach to external action - from trade and international partnerships to foreign security and defence policy - that secures a stronger and more united voice for Europe in the world.

In the State of the Union address on 15 September 2021, President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, outlined flagship initiatives which the Commission plans to undertake in the coming year (European Commission, 2021a), among others, stepping up cooperation on security and defence, and deepening the EU's partnership with its closest allies, defending European values and freedoms, and protecting the rule of law and the need to provide stability in our neighbourhood and across different regions. Because the EU is connected to the world by many ties and vast land borders, it is obvious that if it doesn't deal in time with the crisis abroad, the crisis comes to its territory.

The EU also declared it would work closely with neighbouring countries, introducing a comprehensive strategy for relations with Africa and reaffirming the European perspective for the countries of the Western Balkans. Responsible global engagement also means that the EU invests in partnerships and alliances with third countries, multilateral and regional organisations, especially those with whom it shares common values but also with all those with whom it shares common global objectives such as a common global response to the COVID pandemic and global climate ambitions. The EU also has an essential role to play in enhancing overall crisis management and working within and outside EU borders to contribute to global stability

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[7] The most important of them were: dialogue with J.C. Juncker and M. Cerar, prime minister of Slovenia, organised in Ljubljana in March 2017, just after the adoption of the White Paper; dialogue with the EC Vice-President F. Timmermans in Stockholm (Sweden) in May on the occasion of the Europe Day; and dialogue with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/European Commission Vice-President F. Mogherini and J. Muscat, Prime Minister of Malta, organised in Rome on the eve of the 60th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.

(European Commission, 2021a). Given the dramatic situation in Belarus, or illegal activities in Russia such as sentencing Alexei Navalny, the President of the European Commission stressed the need for a more predictable mechanism that positions the EU firmly as an active defender of human rights globally (Mc Allister, 2020).

One of the methods for undermining the anti-European narrative in EU states and third countries would have been the Conference on the Future of Europe, which entered its last phase in spring 2022, with work taking place on the final outcome (Conference Plenary)[8]. During the plenary session in Strasbourg on 11-12 March 2022, the conference parties took stock of 88 recommendations made by the European Citizens' Panels on the 'EU in the world/migration' and on 'a stronger economy, social justice and jobs/education, culture, youth and sport/digital transformation' as well as related recommendations from national Citizens' Panels. Russia's military aggression in Ukraine featured prominently in the discussions and the plenary session. Also in attendance were refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine, parliamentarians from the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, representatives of the association Promo Ukraina as well as representatives from the Western Balkans.

Participants recommended that a future 'Joint Armed Forces of the European Union' 'should predominantly be used for self-defence purposes. Aggressive military action of any kind is precluded. Within Europe, this would entail a capacity to provide support in times of crisis such as in the case of natural catastrophes. Outside European borders, this would provide the capacity to be deployed in territories in exceptional circumstances and exclusively under a respective legal mandate from the United Nations Security Council and thus in compliance with international law' (Conference on the Future of Europe, 2021). Implementation of this recommendation would allow the European Union to be perceived as a credible, responsible,

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[8] The Conference Plenary was composed of 108 representatives from the European Parliament, 54 from the Council, 3 from the European Commission, 108 from national Parliaments on an equal footing, and 108 citizens. 80 representatives from the European Citizens' Panels, 27 from national Citizens' Panels or Conference events (one per Member State) as well as the President of the European Youth Forum. 18 representatives from the Committee of the Regions and 18 from the Economic and Social Committee, 6 elected representatives from regional authorities and 6 elected representatives from local authorities, 12 representatives from the social partners and 8 from civil society also took part. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and key stakeholders might have been invited when the international role of the EU was discussed. The meetings of the Conference Plenary were presided by the three Co-Chairs of the Executive Board and held in the European Parliament premises in Strasbourg. Conference Plenary, https://futureu.europa.eu/pages/plenary (9.04.2022).

strong, and peaceful partner on the international stage. It would enhance the capacity to respond to critical situations both internally and externally. It is also expected that the EU protect its fundamental values.

Moreover, changes to the decision-making of the EU foreign policy were recommended, according to which all issues decided by way of unanimity are changed to be decided by way of a qualified majority. The only exceptions should be the admission of new members to the EU and changes to the fundamental principles of the EU as stated in Art. 2 of the Lisbon Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. This would consolidate the position of the EU in the world by presenting a united front towards third countries and make its response more agile in general and in particular in crisis situations (Conference on the Future of Europe, 2021: 10).

Member States are recommended, according to the conference plenary debate, to 'adopt a strong vision and a common strategy in order to harmonise and consolidate the identity and unity of the EU before allowing accession to other countries. It is essential to both strengthen the EU and consolidate the relationship between Member States before considering the integration of other countries. The more states integrate into the EU, the more complicated the decision-making process will become within the EU; hence the importance of reviewing these decision-making processes that are voted through the process of unanimity' (Conference on the Future of Europe, 2021: 11).

These recommendations, according to the participants in the debate, would help the European Union strengthen the sense of belonging to the EU, enabling citizens to better identify with the EU and transmit its values. Moreover, it may also improve transparency regarding the functioning of the EU, the benefits of being part of it, and the fight against anti-European movements.' This should act as a deterrent to Member States leaving the EU (Conference on the Future of Europe, 2021: 10-11).

Conclusion

The European Union still has to strengthen its internal and external attractiveness if it aspires to play a leading role in the future management of global affairs. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to take a stand in the face of mounting problems and redefine strategic priorities as well as focus on the implementation of political projects.

By answering the research questions described in the introduction, the article identifies the main challenges weakening the European Union's soft power, and thus defines key priorities, the implementation of which may favourably affect the positive image of the European Union, lost as a result of various crises. Their implementation will lead to: 1) raising in citizens and elites the awareness of the future value added of deeper European cooperation, 2) adding new dynamism to the integration project, facilitating the establishment of specific and proactive political goals that both the EU and its Member States could transform into real action over a given period of time, 3) giving political elites an opportunity to present and respond to challenges within and outside Europe, which even the largest Member States cannot tackle adequately at the national level, 4) providing real reasons for getting involved in European and national debates on the future orientation of the EU – neither the EU nor national communication strategies can achieve this by means of regular information campaigns or artificially organised debates on the future of Europe, 5) providing rational justification for explaining to citizens the need for further reform of the EU institutional architecture and legal provisions – the lack of this type of narrative was the main reason for the failure to ratify the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, 6) allowing governments of the EU states to show pro-active leadership and build coalitions in specific policy areas. By committing to specific objectives and assumptions, the European Union should become a more attractive partner for other global players, so that it can not only prove its will but also the ability to become a leader, and thereby take over greater regional and global responsibility. Accomplishing these tasks requires a compromise between states in terms of strategic goals, but most of all a political desire to carry out great projects.

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METHODS FOR DEVELOPING FINANCIAL LITERACY

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Abstract: *In the recent years, the world has experienced a great number of difficulties beyond the usual events, and it has become almost part of our lives to be constantly alert to the problems and difficulties caused by Covid-19. In higher and public education, both in Hungary and in other countries of Europe, we have witnessed dramatic changes since 2020, which has fundamentally changed our knowledge and opinions on educational methodology. Prior to the pandemic, it was common practice in primary and secondary public education to teach according to methodological recommendations for face-to-face teaching. In higher education, in addition to face-to-face (offline) teaching, the use of online resources for a semester or a course was already being considered, particularly in the field of continuing education and vocational training. Higher education institutions have continuously been experimenting with solutions to extend face-to-face teaching, but these methods and forms of teaching have not become commonplace. However, from 2020, both instructors and students had to adapt all of a sudden if they wanted to avoid any backlog or disruption in this area. Even before the pandemic, we were concerned about the methodological innovations we would have to make in this specific area of education. We were also previously interested in looking at the needs of today's students who want to study finance. In our research, we therefore focus on the difficulties that online education caused for those who completed the questionnaire during the pandemic or after the outbreak of the pandemic, and on the framework within which they could envisage renewing their financial education in the long term. The research carried out by Jakovác and his co-authors has shown that the financial literacy of the Hungarian population is improving, but that its practical use and effectiveness is below the international average.*

Keywords: Pandemic, Financial literacy, Educational methodology, Online education, Attitude.

1. Introduction

In our research, first we start with a literature review to the topic, and then we deal with financial literacy and the methodological issues of financial education. What do we mean by financial literacy? Financial culture, the level of financial literacy in society, has been a much-debated subject nowadays, especially since the financial crisis that erupted in 2007 and then reached Europe in 2008. Interestingly, the crises have not necessarily brought along bad things at times but have also forced processes that we previously could only imagine. The financial crisis of 2007/2008 made people and governments aware that people who are not financially literate are taking risks with their decisions that not only have a long-term impact on the functioning of a household but can also generate systemic risk and loss on a massive scale. The large stock of foreign currency loans has led to the insolvency of masses of Hungarian households, causing huge losses to the banking sector, while at the same time creating a major challenge for the governing bodies on how to deal with this problem and rebuild the lost trust in the banking sector. One of the factors that contributed to the systemic risk of the financial crisis in Hungary was the lack of awareness among household decision-makers of the risks associated with foreign currency lending and the potential loss it could represent for the future of the household. The basis for responsible decisions lies in having the right knowledge. The question arises as to where and from whom this knowledge can come. In 2012, Kovács et al. highlighted the fact that the use of financial literacy has a rather long history, dating back to the 1900s. The main finding of their own research is that the secondary school students follow patterns in their decision-making, so who or what the pattern or role model is of paramount importance. It also confirmed the need to focus on practical education. Atkinson - Messy (2012) gives the following definition; 'Financial literacy is the combination of awareness, knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to make informed financial decisions and ultimately to achieve individual financial well-being'. Dániel Béres (2013) identified financial literacy as 'a concept', that financial culture in a society is not defined as good or inadequate only on the basis of the existence or lack of material knowledge, but that financial culture itself requires an interdisciplinary approach. According to investopedia.com, it is defined as 'Financial literacy is the ability to understand and effectively use various financial skills'. The definition highlights

that making a sound financial decision is based on having the right financial knowledge. (Széles et al. 2008)

Katalin Botos et al. (2012) concluded from their 2011 survey that respondents are quite conservative about their finances, but they found a more nuanced picture of financial literacy, mainly due to a lack of knowledge. The financial instruments they know are the main savings target, although the savings period is typically within a year. As the economy and technology evolve, more and more information reach members of society, and it is important to be able to choose and decide which information is most relevant to a particular decision. (Birkásné, 2019) The conscious financial decisions of households, rather than those based on intuition, can result in reduced risks and minimized losses, which can be beneficial for stable, long-term financial functioning. Following the outbreak of the financial crisis, improving the financial awareness of the population has been a priority in many countries, including Hungary. (Jakovác 2017; Atkinson, 2012) Several initiatives to promote financial literacy have been launched recently. Bárczi - Zéman (2015) draws on the OECD study to define financial education, i.e., financial education is 'the process by which individuals develop a better understanding of financial products and concepts, improve their skills and confidence through information, education and/or objective advice, so that they can better identify financial risks and opportunities, make informed decisions, increase their financial well-being and security, and take well-managed risks'. The OECD highlights the importance of the nations' taking responsibility. (OECD, 2015) (Sun, A. et al. 2016) (Matthew, 2007)
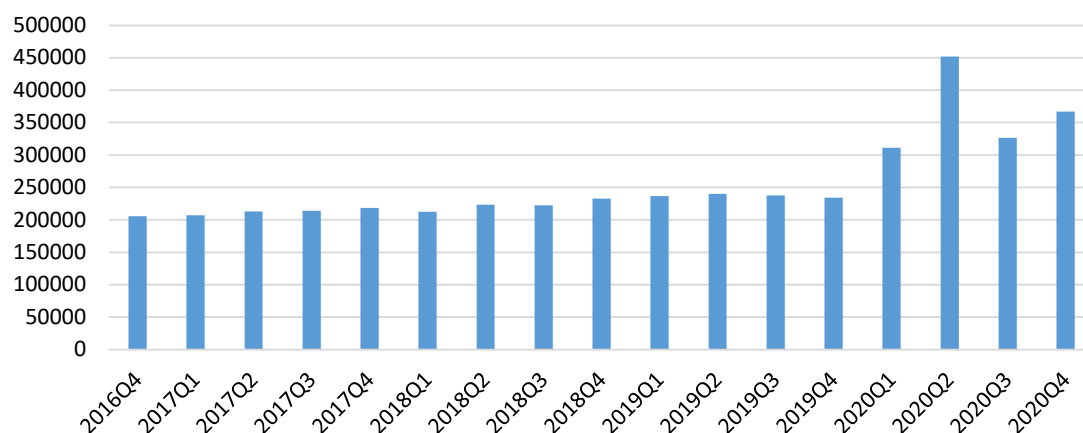
The Pénziránytű (Financial Compass) Foundation, using the methodology developed by the OECD, conducted its own representative survey of 1,000 young adults, aimed at measuring, among other things, financial literacy. The survey showed that the financial situation of respondents has become more stable compared to 2010. It also revealed that households do not prepare their own financial budget. A similar finding was found by Zsótér (2018) in a survey of 300 respondents, namely, that only 28.6% of respondents prepare a budget, but more than 61% of respondents discuss their financial decisions with others in the family.

Possible methods for developing financial literacy include financial education in and out of school, counselling, and various online applications, including games. (Jakovác, 2017)

In 2016, Németh et al. (2016) published a review study on the educational effectiveness of organisations involved in improving the financial literacy of the Hungarian population, surveying 110 organisations. The study found that the majority of programmes aimed at improving financial literacy targeted public school students for up to 4 hours, with 79% of the teaching methodology using traditional teaching. The researchers came up with 15 hypotheses, the last of which, i.e. 'Most training does not measure effectiveness' was confirmed, i.e., financial literacy programmes would take place, but the extent to which they achieve their objectives is no longer being investigated. The range of interventions aimed at improving financial literacy has been steadily expanding over the past period. Németh et al. published the results of their research in 2021 to examine the effectiveness of programmes between 2016 and 2020, in which they analysed 122 training programmes based on the opinions of 52 respondents who had also received training. The responses show that young people continue to be the target group for training, with the length of training time increasing compared to the previous period, and thus being measured in days. The survey concludes that it would be important to reach the adult age group and develop financial awareness among more financially vulnerable groups. (Balog et al. 2014) (W. B. Walstad et al. 2010)

More research is looking at the question of to what extent better -informed people who are financially literate make more conscious decisions about financial issues. Bernheim et al. (1997) from Stanford University found that young people who received financial education prepare more consciously for retirement. In Hungary, Béres et al. (2013) came to a different conclusion, namely that those with a high school financial education do not necessarily make more informed financial decisions. The objective of financial education is no other than understanding how money works (Sudheer,2018). It is important that education should help to develop the skills that help people to make more conscious financial decisions. (Csiszárik et al. 2018) Financial education is not a question similarly to starting it as soon as possible, but it is important to state at what age and with what methodology. (Horvátné Kökény, 2014; Kovács - Szóka, 2020) In the following part, a brief overview of the evolution of the stock of savings in Hungary is provided. The figure below shows the gross savings of the Euro area households for the period 2016-2020. (A. Opletalová, 2015)

Gross savings of the Euro area households in 2016-2020 (millions of euros)

Source: https://www.euro-area-statistics.org/statistics-insights/household-saving-rate-during-covid-19?lg=hu

The graph shows that the usual propensity to save increased significantly as the Covid-19 epidemic took hold, because there were not necessarily so many opportunities to spend income due to the lockdown on the one hand, and because the population was waiting to see what would happen to their unforeseen fate, whether in terms of jobs or health, on the other hand. The figure below shows GDP per capita in 2021 in US dollars.

Changes in GDP per capita

Source: https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/median-income-by-country
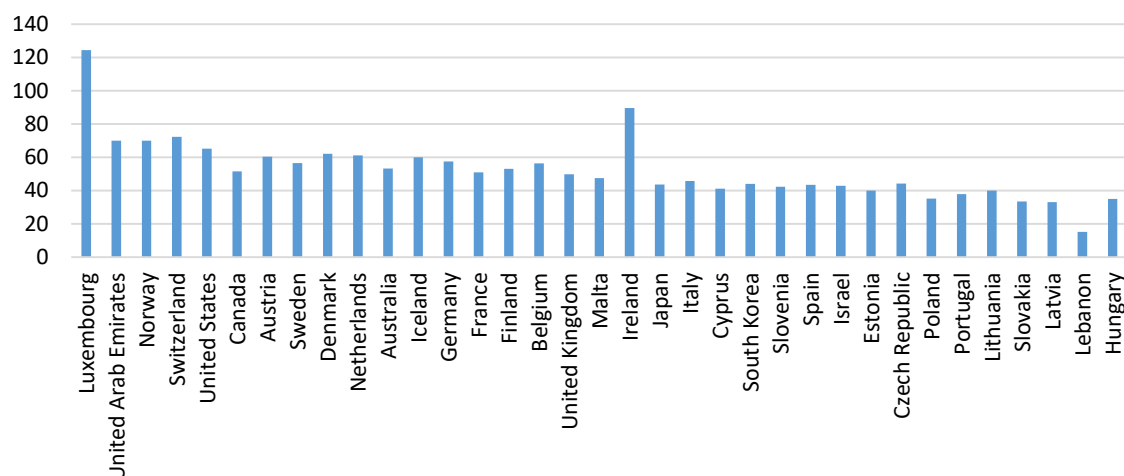
The Hungarian economy expanded by 7.6% in the first half of 2021 compared with the same period a year earlier. The Covid19 epidemic had a negative impact on socio-economic developments in the first half of 2021, but most of the restrictions were removed at the end of May and beginning of June. Economic growth also exceeded pre-pandemic growth levels.

2. Materials and Methods

The topic of our research is not a new issue, as many people have been dealing with methodological issues of education or specifically with methodological issues of finance education in the past period. (Bakos, 2018) In our previous research, we have already dealt with the methodological features of finance education. We conducted our first research on this topic in the first semester of 2019, using an online survey with 150 participants. As a result of the pandemic, the previously familiar and widely used education system and its methodology have changed significantly. (Baranyi et al., 2020) In our second study, we investigated the methodology of teaching finance, with a particular focus on the pandemic that has now occurred and the significant changes it has caused. The research sought to answer the question of how the participants in the survey had acquired their previously acquired financial knowledge in the context of an educational system. We also wanted to find out to what extent respondents felt that financial education needed to be changed, to what extent the theory/practice ratio met the expectations of those who wanted to learn, and to what extent students who were already working could use the knowledge they had acquired during their studies, and 208 respondents were asked to give their views. The framework for the online survey was social media platforms, using a snowball survey method. 73% of our sample were female, more than 30% of respondents had a college/university degree, 76% were pursuing higher education in finance at the time of the survey, and the average age was 30 years.

3. Results

In the first part of our research, we asked respondents to rank different areas of importance, and the aim of this question was to find out how money as a key element in our lives

is perceived by our respondents compared to other factors. The aspects were rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with a number one indicating that it was not important and a number five indicating that it was very important in the person's life.

Table 1 The importance of money and other factors in our lives

Factors/value n=208 (%)	1	2	3	4	5
Career	0.00	1.40	22.60	48.10	27.90
Family	0.00	0.05	5.30	19.20	75.00
Friends	0.05	4.30	20.20	40.90	34.10
Money	1.00	1.40	21.60	52.40	23.60
Health	0.00	0.05	3.40	20.70	75.50
Social status	2.90	13.00	42.80	33.70	7.70

Source: authors' own research

The data clearly shows that social status, i.e., the position of someone in their job or in other areas of life, is not ranked anywhere in terms of importance. In terms of career, it is almost the most important factor for 48.1% of the respondents, which may be related to the fact that the amount of money earned, and income may depend to a large extent on the position in which one is in in terms of career progression, but it is not the most important factor. Family is essentially the leader in the order of importance, followed by the importance of health by a little over half a percent. For many, friends are important alongside family, but to a much lesser extent than those with whom we are closest. Which brings us to the key question of our research, the role of money, it has to be said the 2nd most important thing in our lives. The most important component in our lives after family and health is money. Surveys show that increasing our income contributes to increasing our sense of happiness, but the correlation is far from straightforward. (Danka, 2017) As the second question of our research, we asked about the beginning of the process of learning about money. In our article, we already pointed out that there is not complete agreement among researchers on the specific age, but the earlier, the better.

Table 2 Acquiring financial knowledge

age category n=208 %	1	2	3	4	5
in the nursery school (3-7)	30.30	38.50	21.20	5.30	4.80
junior section of the elementary school (7-10)	3.80	25.00	40.40	21.60	9.10
senior section of the elementary school (11-14)	0.05	4.30	26.40	38.50	30.30
secondary school (15-18)	0.00	1.00	3.80	23.10	72.10
aged 18-25	0.05	0.00	2.40	11.10	86.10
as an adult	1.00	0.05	7.20	15.40	76.00

Source: authors' own research

A majority agree that dealing with money at any level in pre-school is almost unnecessary, with nearly 70% of respondents rating it as a one or two. The importance of dealing with money increases in the junior section of the primary school years, all the more so as pupils are already learning about numbers, their form and content at school. The preoccupation with and knowledge of money becomes even more important in the senior section years. An interesting finding is that the most important period in our lives for money is the time spent in secondary or higher education, according to respondents, but it is not negligible that there is also a need to update and maintain knowledge in adulthood.

In the next area of assessment, respondents indicated whether they have self-reported financial literacy. 98.1% of the respondents studied finance, and the systems through which this was achieved are revealed in relation to this. While 4.9% of respondents recall having encountered the concepts of savings and credit in primary school, 54% of respondents did not even deal with financial issues in secondary school. It is therefore not a coincidence that the previous table shows that it is important to deal with finance in secondary school, as respondents can already speak from experience about the lack of it. The acquisition of knowledge in secondary education is mainly the result of further education in specialised institutions, i.e., financial education was not taught in secondary schools or other secondary schools. More than 30% of respondents had also encountered this subject in the context of courses. 93% of

respondents had acquired financial literacy through higher education, and 3% had also studied for a PhD. Theoretical and practical financial education was regularly encountered by 76% of respondents. In most cases, the computational exercises were mastered by deduction on a blackboard, which also suggests that many respondents did not learn finance during the pandemic. It is important to note that this method is still considered very important and effective by respondents, with 86% stating that it could be an effective teaching method for the future. Situation games were not used by 1/3 of the respondents, with only 6% stating that they had been involved in such a method during their education. The preparation or presentation of case studies was essentially absent from the educational repertoire, which also suggests that the frontal transfer of knowledge was the dominant activity, with a similar result for group work, i.e., 22% of respondents had not encountered this type of activity at all during their studies, and the delivery of presentations was defined as an unknown phenomenon in 31% of cases.

Inviting external experts can be a very refreshing phenomenon in a subject, but its absence was also apparent, with 8% of respondents having regularly encountered this method of knowledge transfer, although it is important to note that respondents would have liked it, and more than 80% of them consider it a very effective way of transferring knowledge. Homework assignment and its checking is a dominant and frequently used methodological element in the field of finance, with 57% of respondents stating that they had often/very often received homework during their studies, which is important because the examples given or presented in class should be able to be solved independently and it is better if this is done before the account is taken rather than afterwards. The oral examination activity was also a key element of the respondents' training. However, written debriefing was a very familiar solution in more than 80% of cases, a phenomenon that is not a coincidence during the pandemic. Written debriefing is considered by respondents to be a more effective method for the future than oral examinations. The written tests were solved by respondents on computers, which presupposes not only professional knowledge, but also computer literacy. A low proportion of respondents had participated in field training and company visits, which scored highly for the usefulness of this methodological element.

In recent changes to the curricula, recommendations have tended to be more practice-oriented, but respondents still consider high quality theoretical education important, with more

than 90% rating the importance of theoretical education as medium (3) or higher. For the future, the use of case studies and situational problem-solving could be a significant feature of frontal teaching. The use of presentations is not considered to be a fully effective method while group work is suggested to be more prominent. To what extent can respondents make use of the knowledge they have acquired? This question was also asked, with more than 50% saying that they could definitely make use of this knowledge, and less than 3% of respondents who thought that they would not need it. Communicating and learning a profession in a foreign language is also becoming increasingly important, with 80% of respondents saying that they would also like to learn a profession in a foreign language. It is important to underline that there were no respondents who gave the practical part of the training 1-2 points, with 97% of respondents considering the practical part to be of high importance, alongside the actual theoretical part. In terms of the ratio of theory to practice, most respondents (31.1%) considered a ratio of 50-50% to be the best option. As for the requirements for trainers, 94% of respondents expect up-to-date knowledge, good communication skills, clear task description and explanations. The number of times the instructor explains the same task during the course is also very important. How lenient the instructor should be, most of the respondents indicated medium (3), so this is not necessarily the most important thing for an instructor; consistency is more important.

Financial means did not cause any difficulty for 52% of respondents in gaining financial knowledge. The availability or lack of free time seems to be a major difficulty in acquiring financial literacy. Sometimes there was also a lack of intrinsic motivation to acquire sufficient knowledge. The subject of finance was perceived by respondents as not being easy, with 33.7% having difficulties, which may have been due to the fact that 8% did not have this as an interest. 35% of the respondents plan to participate in school-based learning activities in the future, and for more than 50% reading specialist articles will be a key factor in maintaining their knowledge. The need to acquire and develop knowledge is clearly motivated by work.

A key question in our survey was the impact of the pandemic on our respondents. The interest in acquiring financial skills showed an increase for 46% during the pandemic. As a further area of our research, we analysed the expectations of educators using factor and cluster analysis. The variable tested was 'How much do you generally expect the following from a finance instructor?'

A Likert scale was used to assess the importance of each factor for the respondents' expectations of the instructors. The criteria assessed were analysed using factor analysis. Prior to principal component analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index was 0.66, which indicated that factor analysis could be performed on the data.

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.660
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	222.664
	df	21
	Sig.	0.000

Two components were identified in the factor analysis.

Rotated Component Matrix[a]

	Component	
	1	2
How much do you usually expect from a finance instructor? [good communication skills]	0.780	0.045
How well do you usually expect the following from a finance instructor? [consistency]	0.697	0.106
How well do you usually expect the following from a finance instructor? [clear problem definition and solution]	0.693	0.163
How much do you usually expect the following from a finance instructor? [up-to-date knowledge]	0.566	0.018
How much do you usually expect from a finance instructor? [leniency]	-0.064	0.809
How much do you usually expect from a finance instructor? [repeat the task and its solution several times]	0.147	0.746
How much do you usually expect the following from a finance instructor? [ability to complete the assignment]	0.181	0.709

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

In the factor analysis, we were able to separate two groups: "Professionalism" and "Empathy"

*How much do you generally expect the following from a finance instructor?*

"Professionalism" factor

- good communication skills

- consistency

- clear task definition and solution

- up-to-date knowledge

"Empathy" factor

- Permissiveness

- repeat the task and its solution several times

- ability to complete the assignment

Expectations of the instructor along the criteria of empathy and professionalism
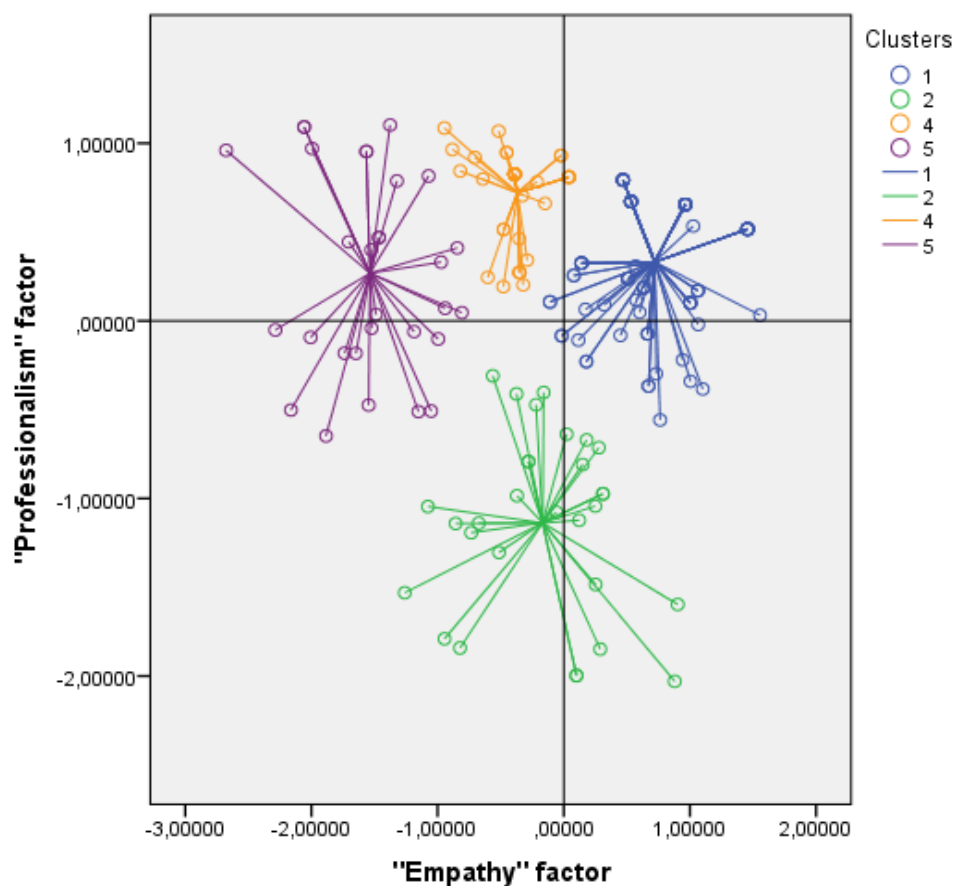
Source: authors' own research

The survey question was assessed based on the responses of 191 respondents. The first cluster (blue) was made up of 47.64% of the respondents, i.e., 91 respondents, the second cluster (green) was made up of 15.71% of the respondents, i.e., 30 respondents, the fourth cluster (yellow) was made up of 40 respondents, i.e., 20.94% of the sample, and finally the fourth cluster (purple) was made up of 30 respondents, i.e., 15.71%.

The cluster marked blue has the largest number of items, with members who consider it of paramount importance that an instructor be both empathetic and professionally qualified. They should have up-to-date knowledge, give clear instructions, be consistent, but also have a "humanity" factor, i.e., try to understand and deal with the student's problem if necessary.

In the yellow cluster, which has the second largest number of students, respondents tend to focus on professionalism, with the primary criteria being preparedness and compliance with the methodological requirements of the teaching. Professionalism is above average for the instructor. So, if we look at the blue and yellow groups together, professionalism is the first requirement for instructors in 131 opinions.

In the case of respondents in cluster 5, marked in purple, the only requirements are professionalism, how helpful, empathetic and understanding the instructor is, which is actually almost all the same. For the 30 respondents in cluster 2, it is indifferent what the instructor is like. They want to get through the training and that's it.

The next area of our investigation was to see what influenced the respondents who 'took their place' in each cluster. First, we correlated who belongs to which cluster with the level of education, and this hypothesis proved to be true, as the significance level of the Chi-square test was 4.5% and as the value was below 5%, education had an impact on the expectations respondents had of their instructors. For respondents with lower levels of education, the level of professionalism of the instructor is of paramount importance. The highest proportions of those with secondary and higher-level vocational education fall into the blue group. The proportion in the blue group is lowest for those with tertiary education, i.e., those who have direct daily contact with their instructors more than those with higher education, who have a more professional relationship with their instructor, and who can count on the instructor's empathy and help beyond the teaching. However, for those with tertiary education, professionalism is clearly the most important factor, and they do not rely on the ability to teach in an understanding/empathetic way.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.891[a]	6	0.045
Likelihood Ratio	14.090	6	0.029
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.460	1	0.035
N of Valid Cases	191		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.28
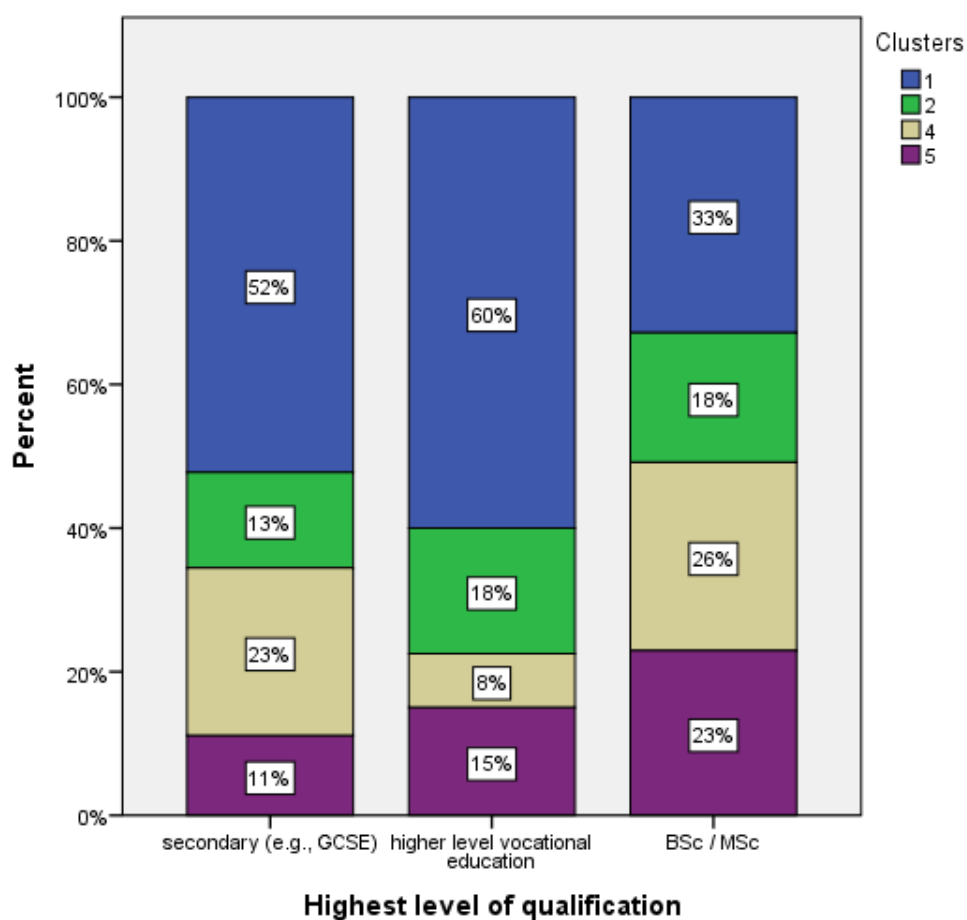
Source: authors' own research

The second contextual question is whether the gender of respondents has an impact on the expectations of trainers. Thus, the Chi-square test shows a significance level of 69.5% that being female or male does not influence the place of belonging to a cluster.

However, the age at which the respondent said he/she was at the time of answering did show a relationship with the cluster position, i.e., age did influence which cluster the respondent belonged to. The relationship between age and the placement of respondents in different clusters was examined using analysis of variance. This was necessary because age was assessed as a metric variable. Prior to the analysis of variance, the Levene's test for homogeneity of the data was performed with a significance level of 0.206, so that the analysis of variance could be performed. The analysis revealed that the variance between and within the groups studied differed and the F value was 3.690. Based on the significance value of 1.3% below the accepted reference value of five percent, a relationship between age and the nature of the responses was demonstrated.

**Test of Homogeneity of Variances**

q21.1 Age (years)

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.539	3	187	0.206

ANOVA

q21.1 Age (years)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1000.363	3	333.454	3.690	0.013
Within Groups	16900.097	187	90.375		
Total	17900.461	190			

Analysis of variance revealed that age had a statistically significant effect on respondents' expectations of instructors.
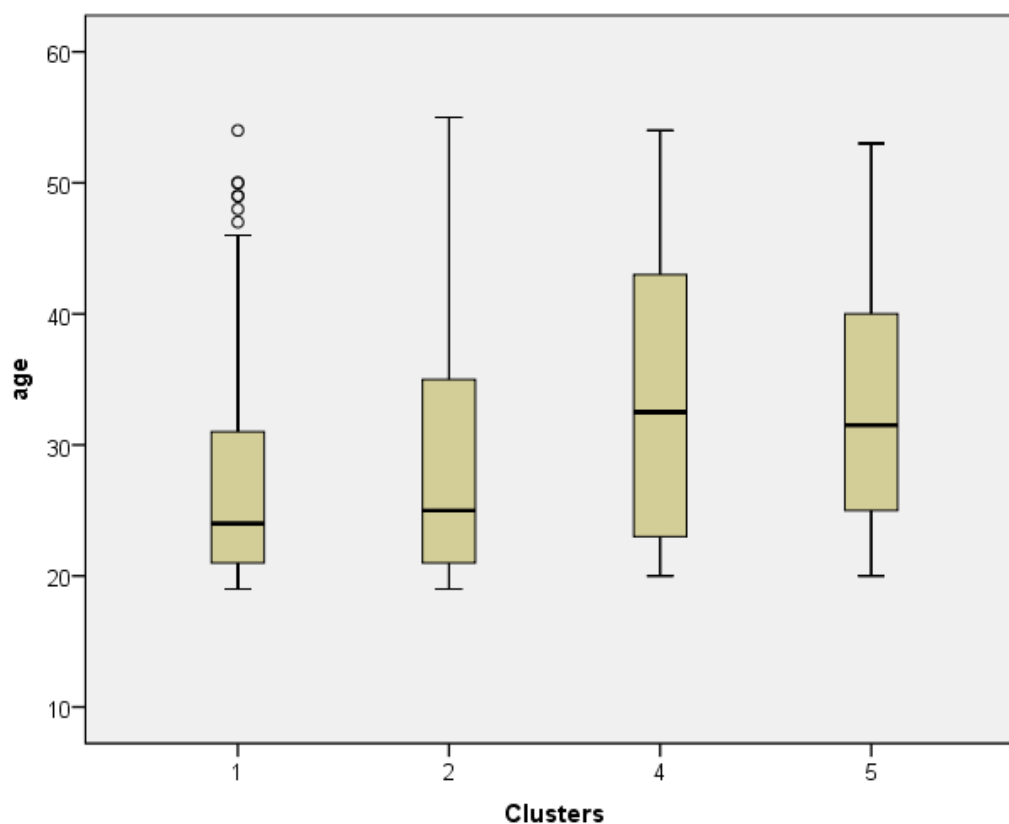
Source: authors' own research

Group one was made up of the youngest respondents, who are all important to an instructor. The average age of cluster participants is 28 years. Of those with a median age of 24 years, 50% of the respondents in this cluster are 24 years old (median) or younger. In general, the older the respondent, the less the need for empathy and the more relevant the professional aspect.

4. Conclusions

The aim of our study is to summarise the framework for financial literacy, building on the responses to a primary survey. Prior to presenting our research findings, we reviewed the literature on the relationship of financial culture to the economy of a given nation and the range of financial services used, based on Hungarian and international literature. Part of financial culture is how prudent the consumer/household is in making financial decisions, what opinions influence their decisions and how these decisions affect the individual or their wider environment in the long run. It is often said that 'as long as there is no trouble, there is no trouble' and how true it is that financial culture, although long part of the financial vocabulary of financial professionals, has become part of our everyday lives since the financial/economic crisis of 2007. For the Hungarian population in particular, foreign currency lending and the related exchange rate losses, the collapse of credit, and the accumulation of substantial losses by banks, which they have been slower to 'work off' than their EU counterparts, have been particularly significant. These negative effects have clearly demonstrated that either a lack of regulation or a lack of knowledge can cause significant damage at both individual and societal level. To compensate for this situation, a number of steps have been taken, including the development and implementation of strategies at national level. The use of these strategic elements has also been demonstrated in our research. The development of financial literacy is therefore linked to financial knowledge, which can be acquired both within and outside the school system. Our own primary research focused on the conditions under which this knowledge is acquired. Among other things, we looked at the role that money plays in our lives. If you ask an investment adviser what you should invest your money in, he is most likely to say in securities, real estate, diamonds, etc... with a small chance of answering that you should take advantage of as many leisure or recreational opportunities as possible. So, it is important to be aware of the financial issues and financial processes that affect us every day. In our previous research, we have looked at how the pandemic has changed the framework and methodology of education, and we have also touched on this area in the present study. However, new results are essentially typifying the expectations of educators. We were able to identify two factors based on the responses, one factor is the empathy factor, and the other is the professionalism factor, based on the combination of these

two factors we were able to identify four clusters and classify the respondents into them. It is clear that for the youngest and lowest educated, it is of paramount importance that the instructor not only has maximum knowledge of professional issues, but also has an understanding of the students' problems. With advancing age and improving educational attainment, expectations of teachers are changing and are largely moving towards professionalism. Among respondents who are no longer studying for their first higher education qualification, neither quality nor empathy is of importance. The future direction of the research on our selected topic could be to investigate how households react to the economic situation in the wake of the Ukrainian-Russian crisis in terms of financial issues, whether consumers' financial habits changed as a result of the war conflict, and to what extent they use their financial knowledge when they need to plan their household budget and make decisions about borrowing in a high inflation environment. Another interesting aspect could be the direction in which financial education needs to change in order to make financial issues widely understood, not only by generations born in the internet age.

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