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SOCIAL DEMOCRACY WITHOUT THE PEOPLE? CASE STUDY OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT ALLIANCE (SLD) /NEW LEFT (NL)

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Abstract: *This article addresses the issue of the departure of the popular class from Polish social democracy and the simultaneous takeover by the right-wing populist. Analyzing the electoral results of the SLD and the PiS after 2005, we can see this phenomenon both in the context of electoral geography and in-depth opinion polls. The article also analyzes the apparent dichotomy between contemporary center-left voters and the ruling party in Poland in the dimension of attitudes to socio-economic and cultural issues, which may indicate a permanent loss of trust for the Polish center-left among representatives of the peasant and working class.*

Keywords: social democracy, popular class, populism, PiS, SLD.

1. Introduction

Since losing power in 2005, the Polish center-left has remained a second-league political formation at best. In addition, it found itself out of parliament in 2015-2019 due to a series of erroneous electoral decisions. Four years ago, it returned to the Polish Sejm with the third result and the best result in the absolute number of votes since 2001. This article aims to indicate the scale and political significance of Polish Social Democracy's split with the so-called "popular class" which is one of the main reservoirs of votes for the populist right in the guise of PiS (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, Law and Justice). The author's thesis is that through the political-symbolic abandonment of this class, the SLD (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*, Democratic Left

Alliance) and now the NL (*Nowa Lewica*, New Left) paved not only the way for PiS's triple seizure of power but also influenced the creation of an illiberal reality in Poland, which severely influence Polish relations with the European Union. Based on the method of electoral geography and quantitative and qualitative public opinion surveys, the author will indicate the spatial, symbolic, and axiological dimensions of the analyzed phenomenon. The analysis will additionally show cleavages that influence the level of electoral popularity of the Left and PiS, which creates a division between their voters and which could play a role in the social democratic attempt to win over popular voters.

2. Peasant, working, or popular class?

For our study, the author will use Pierre Bourdieu's class theory (Bourdieu, 1984), popularized in Poland by Przemysław Sadura and Maciej Gdula (Gdula and Sadura, 2012). I will treat the popular class as a typical snapshot of the peasant and working classes. Groups that are basically in decline in the realities of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. The discussion of the center-left's relationship with the popular class has a historical and symbolic character since workers and peasants have always been a natural representation group for socialists. It is not without reason that the traditional slogan of the left is "Workers of the world, unite!". The turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, globalization, and the "exodus" of industrial jobs outside Europe (including those outside the former Eastern Bloc countries) led to a visible decline in the importance of manual labor (Klein, 2002). In parallel with the decline in the prestige of industrial occupations in post-socialist countries, we have witnessed the birth of a new emerging middle class (Gdula *et al.*, 2014). Entrepreneurial, resourceful individuals who were the transformation winners quickly gained a hegemonic role in Polish popular culture. Children coming from the peasant and working classes extremely promptly began the process of rejecting their class origins. As a result, as early as the 1990s, the popular class became, in a sense, an orphan, which was quickly taken over by the post-communist left, namely the SLD.

The position of the popular class at the beginning of Poland's road to democracy and capitalism was, in a sense, the result of two betrayals by Solidarity (*Solidarność*) and the PZPR (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, Polish United Workers' Party). On the one hand, the ten-million-strong trade union introduced Poland to one of the most radically neoliberal versions of the free market economy, which cost nearly three million people their jobs after three years of shock therapy firmed by the then finance minister of the right-wing Leszek Balcerowicz government (Kowalik, 2009; Ost, 2005). On the other hand, the communist left, declaring itself the avant-garde of the peasant and working classes, repeatedly used violence against anti-system labor movements during the People's Republic of Poland, culminating in the imposition of Martial Law in front of General Wojciech Jaruzelski's regime on December 13, 1981. However, the fact that Polish social democracy remained in opposition to the governments of Mazowiecki, Bielecki, Olszewski, Pawlak, and Suchocka helped it win the support of a popular class sorely tested by free-market reforms. We could see this in the SLD's election slogans. In the 1991 parliamentary elections, the center-left marched under the rather populist slogan "It can't go on like this!" while two years later, it slightly modified its message to "It doesn't have to go on like this!" (Woliński, 2002). Also, in Poland's landmark center-left presidential campaign in 1995, which broke the hegemony of the post-Solidarity right for nearly a decade, the then social democratic leader Aleksander Kwasniewski did not shy away from popular class and anti-establishment language. In his famous election clip to the rhythm of disco polo music popular in the Polish countryside, he said: "The media do not support me. The Church has repeatedly said anything but me. Special initiatives have even been created to put people off me. There are Warsaw salons, which also do everything possible to prevent me from winning. The people want to elect me; the people want to elect me!" (Chwedoruk and Rydliński, 2017, p. 195). However, the electoral successes of the Polish center-left turned out to be the source of its severe defeat. Its structural origins and far-reaching consequences are discussed in this article.

3. New Third Way as a deadly path for the center-left?

The Polish center-left has not escaped similar mistakes made by the British Labor Party, the SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, Social Democratic Party of Germany), or the MSZP (Magyar Szocialista Párt, Hungarian Socialist Party). All parties celebrated electoral triumphs in the early 21st century because they believed they could combine neoliberal governing practices with a progressive narrative and paid a huge price for doing so (Rae, 2003). In the case of the SLD, the cost was so enormous that since 2001 the center-left has not only been unable to win parliamentary or presidential elections but still haven't achieved even a 15% level of public support. One of the critical phenomena we have seen over the years is the almost complete capture of the popular class vote by the illiberal right, whose primary representative is the PiS. The chart below shows the scales of macro changes in electoral support between the SLD and PiS. The author intentionally chose the results of the 2001, 2005, and 2019 elections to the Sejm to highlight the analyzed phenomenon.

Table 1. Support for the electoral committee of the SLD in the parliamentary elections

voivodeship	2001	2005	2019
dolnośląskie	47,25 %	13,04 %	14,73 %
kujawsko-pomorskie	48,91 %	15,21 %	15,00 %
lubelskie	34,40 %	8,20 %	7,32 %
lubuskie	51,54 %	16,18 %	15,61 %
łódzkie	44,75 %	13,39 %	14,34 %
małopolskie	30,07 %	7,11 %	8,38 %
mazowieckie	34,97 %	9,56 %	10,78 %
opolskie	38,84 %	10,39 %	11,74 %
podkarpackie	31,37 %	8,25 %	6,31 %
podlaskie	37,91 %	12,31 %	9,09 %

pomorskie	35,55 %	10,13 %	12,97 %
śląskie	46,24 %	12,48 %	13,99 %
świętokrzyskie	45,08 %	12,33 %	9,95 %
warmińsko-mazurskie	47,53 %	13,15 %	12,75 %
wielkopolskie	46,26 %	13,09 %	14,56 %
zachodniopomorskie	49,29 %	14,35 %	15,34 %

These statistics are compiled from the following sources: (“Wybory 2005. Komite t Wyborczy Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Election 2005. Electoral Committee of the Democratic Left Alliance),” n.d.; “Wybory Parlamentarne 2001. Koalicyjny Komitet Wyborczy Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej - Unia Pracy (Parliamentary elections 2001. coalition election committee Alliance of Democratic Left - Labor Union),” n.d.; “Wyniki wyborów 2019 do Sejmu RP. KOMITET WYBORCZY SOJUSZ LEWICY DEMOKRATYCZNEJ (Results of elections 2019 to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland. ELECTORAL COMMITTEE OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT ALLIANCE),” n.d.)

Table 2. Support for the electoral committee of the PiS in the parliamentary elections

voivodeship	2001	2005	2019
dolnośląskie	7,84 %	24,22 %	39,20 %
kujawsko-pomorskie	7,19 %	23,69 %	35,55 %
lubelskie	7,58 %	23,32 %	57,44 %
lubuskie	5,66 %	22,84 %	34,30 %
łódzkie	7,41 %	23,09 %	46,30 %
małopolskie	12,63 %	37,93 %	63,59 %
mazowieckie	15,01 %	27,62 %	45,89 %
opolskie	5,33 %	20,53 %	37,64 %
podkarpackie	8,57 %	35,99 %	62,87 %

podlaskie	11,51 %	28,46 %	52,04 %
pomorskie	12,52 %	26,29 %	34,26 %
śląskie	9,58 %	29,48 %	42,23 %
świętokrzyskie	6,73 %	23,26 %	55,18 %
warmińsko-mazurskie	7,18 %	22,22 %	39,84 %
wielkopolskie	6,71 %	24,80 %	37,68 %
zachodniopomorskie	6,56 %	21,78 %	35,97 %

These statistics are compiled from the following sources: (“Wybory 2005. Komite t Wyborczy Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Election 2005. Law and Justice Election Committee),” n.d.; “Wybory Parlamentarne 2001. Komitet Wyborczy ‘Prawo i Sprawiedliwość’ (Parliamentary elections 2001. election committee Law and Justice),” n.d.; “Wyniki wyborów 2019 do Sejmu RP | KOMITET WYBORCZY PRAWO I SPRAWIEDLIWOŚĆ (Results of elections 2019 to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland | ELECTION COMMITTEE LAW AND JUSTICE),” n.d.)

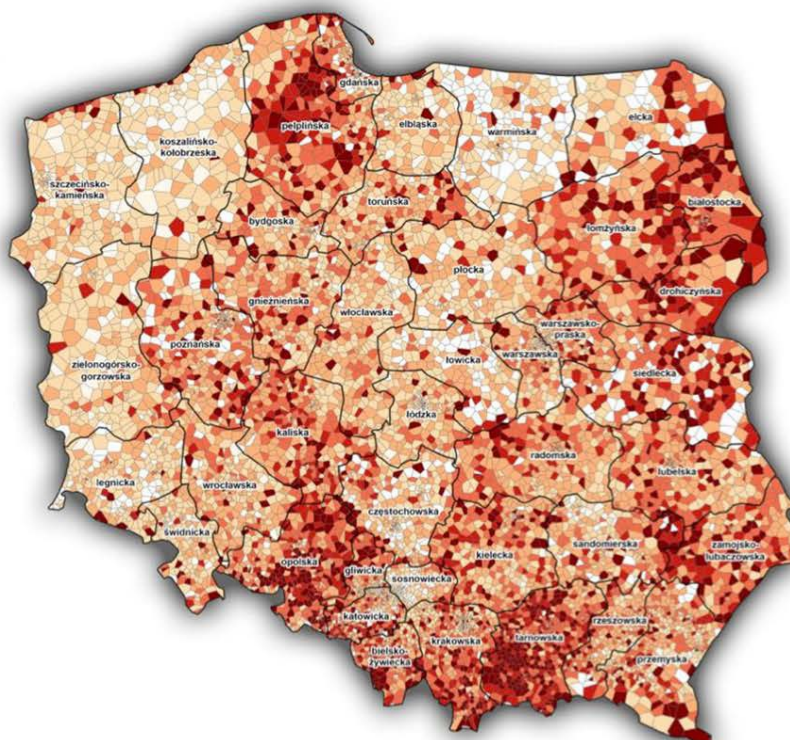
In this overview, we can see four crucial political macro trends that have occurred in Poland over the past two decades:

- The fundamental decline in the electoral importance of the SLD in each voivodeship between 2001 and 2005,
- The jump in support for PiS between 2001 and 2005 and their hegemonization of the Polish political landscape in 2019,
- Sustained support for the SLD committee in each voivodeship in comparative terms of the 2005 and 2019 elections, with apparent overrepresentation in western Poland,
- The identical electoral strongholds of PiS in southeastern Poland in the 2001, 2005, and 2019 elections.

For a better understanding of the sustained trends in support for the SLD and the PiS in the various regions over the years analyzed, one can certainly use the concept of cleavage by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). One of them concerns the

background of state-church relations. As can be seen, since 2001, the PiS has consistently recorded higher support, where at least attendance at Sunday Mass in the Catholic Church is higher. Adequately, SLD, even despite the total catching of support both in 2005 and 2019, better support in those districts where the percentage of ritual activity of Catholics is the lowest.

Map 1. Attendance at Sunday Mass (*dominicanos*) in 2021 by parish.



Source: (“Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae in Polonia. Dane za rok 2021,” n.d.)

The second important regional and historical aspect that will also give us a better understanding of Poland's SLD and PiS strongholds is the post-communist cleavage, which has been discussed by Miroslawa Grabowska, for example, writes about (Grabowska, 2021). Polish social democracy, as a grouping primarily derived from the PZPR, can still enjoy higher support than the national

result in elections in those constituencies where the People's Armed Forces were stationed during the period of real socialism and where there was sizeable industrial investment after the end of World War II. As the armed forces of socialist Poland were being prepared for a possible confrontation with NATO troops, their concentration took place in western Poland, where to this day, Polish social democracy not only wins double-digit electoral results but also where it co-governs in voivodeship and local governments. Similarly, we can see the high support for PiS in those electoral districts where the anti-communist opposition, especially its more conservative and Catholic part, was strong.

For our analysis, however, the key aspect seems to be the socio-economic aspect of the cleavages and, more precisely, the departure of the popular class from the SLD towards PiS. This phenomenon mainly occurred during the 2005 elections, when mass support for the Polish center-left did not evaporate much as find its way out to other political parties. According to the CBOS (Public Opinion Research Center), in 2005, the party preferences of those with leftist views were distributed as follows:

Table 3. Party preferences among those declaring leftist views (2005)

SLD	25 %
Partia Demokratyczna	1 %
PSL	6 %
PO	7 %
Samoobrona	9 %
PiS	12 %
LPR	3 %
Hard to say	18 %

Source: ("Elektorat lewicy od roku 2005 - Komunikat z badań (The electorate of the left since 2005 - Research release)," n.d.)

Considering the sum of support for PiS and Self-Defence (*Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland), the two populist groups that, together with the LPR (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, League of Polish Families), formed the 2006 majority government, we can pose the thesis that especially the rural and small-town sections of the popular class were taken over before these extreme groups. Knowing that during the 2007 elections, the PiS entirely consumed the support of its government coalition partners, we can conclude that Jarosław Kaczyński's party has also fully taken over those popular class voters who once voted for the Andrzej Lepper's¹ and Roman Giertych's² factions.

After the PiS lost the 2007 elections, there followed a period of neoliberal and Christian Democratic rule by the PO (*Platforma Obywatelska*, Civic Platform) and PSL (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, Polish People's Party) coalition. PiS, at the time, contested Prime Minister Donald Tusk's free-market policies using social arguments, defending the welfare state (Kim, 2021). Together with trade unions gathered in the NSZZ "Solidarność" (Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity"), PiS politicians took part in labor protests against the policy of privatization, cuts in social investment, and vociferously opposed raising the retirement age. An identical strategy was followed by the SLD, which, together with the class-based trade unions affiliated with the OPZZ (*Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych*, All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions), took part in labor demonstrations and voted against liberal changes in labor laws. In the case of the Polish center-left, this action not only had the character of a desire to regain the trust of the popular class but also a form of "social democratization" of political practice after the New Third Way practice of government in 2001-2005.

4. PiS' illiberal and welfare state revolution of 2015 (and 2019)

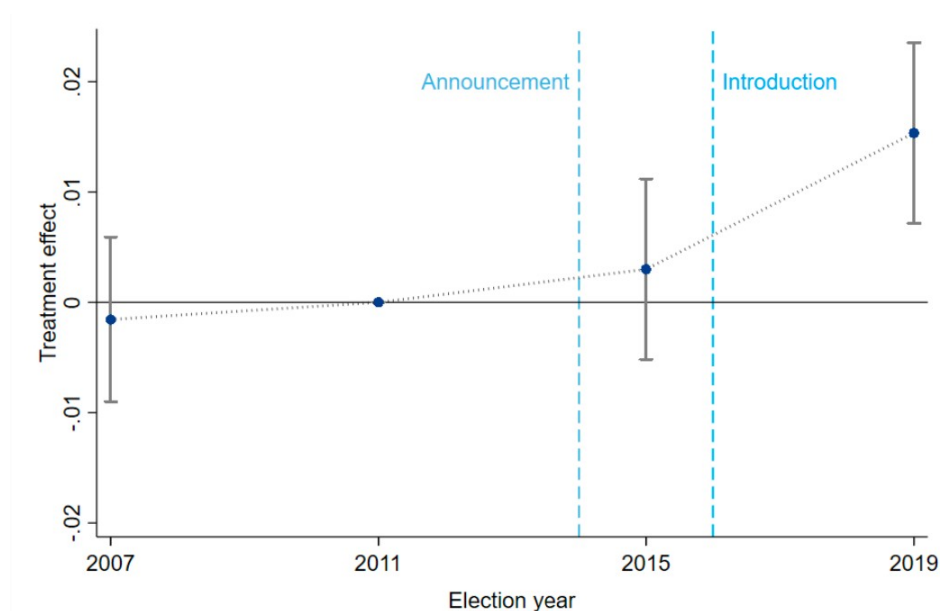
After losing consecutive parliamentary elections in 2011, PiS moved away from a simple anti-liberal and anti-elitist strategy, giving the stable party support. They have tried to move

¹ Leader of the agrarian-populist Self-Defence party, Deputy Prime Minister of Poland in 2006-2007 in Jarosław Kaczyński's government.

² Leader of far-right, anti-EU League of Polish Families party, Deputy Prime Minister of Poland in 2006-2007 in Jarosław Kaczyński's government.

beyond their traditional right-wing, conservative, and religious voter base. The PiS added a visible social-welfarist (Kim, 2021) agenda to its natural message of fighting against the arrangements, invisible networks of secret service connections, business, and politics. Criticism of the state's weaknesses, inefficient public services, deepening inequality, and the weak labor market was apt and correct in this sense, as the neoliberal practices of Donald Tusk's government exacerbated socio-economical inequalities. In the 2015 parliamentary election campaign, PiS announced a series of pro-social reforms. It was lowering the retirement age, establishing an hourly minimum wage, raising the minimum wage, and introducing the 500 plus program. The last announcement represented a kind of revolution. The promise to pay PLN 500 every month for the second and each subsequent child for millions of people was an electoral "game changer" in the 2015 elections. As the results of Jan Gromadzki, Katarzyna Salach, and Michal Brzezinski show, the child benefit program significantly impacted the PiS' victory in 2015 and - after updating the payment of the cash benefit starting with the first child - in 2019.

Figure 1. Event-study coefficients from the regression of voting for PiS on the interaction between child benefit amount and election year



Source: (Gromadzki *et al.*, 2022, p. 97).

The 500 plus program, the lowering of the retirement age, the radical increase in the minimum wage, and the establishment of an hourly minimum wage influenced not only the economic empowerment of the popular class but also the political development of the aspiring middle class living outside the big cities (Gdula, 2017). In this sense, the results of the 2019 elections show that Jaroslaw Kaczynski's party, through its socio-economic policies, has gone far beyond the traditional group of people disadvantaged by the effects of the neoliberal transformation and globalization processes. However, we can put forward the thesis that the effectiveness of the government of Beata Szydło and Mateusz Marowiecki in this field has allowed PiS to neutralize electoral losses related to PiS's attack on the division of power, the judiciary and the rule of law.

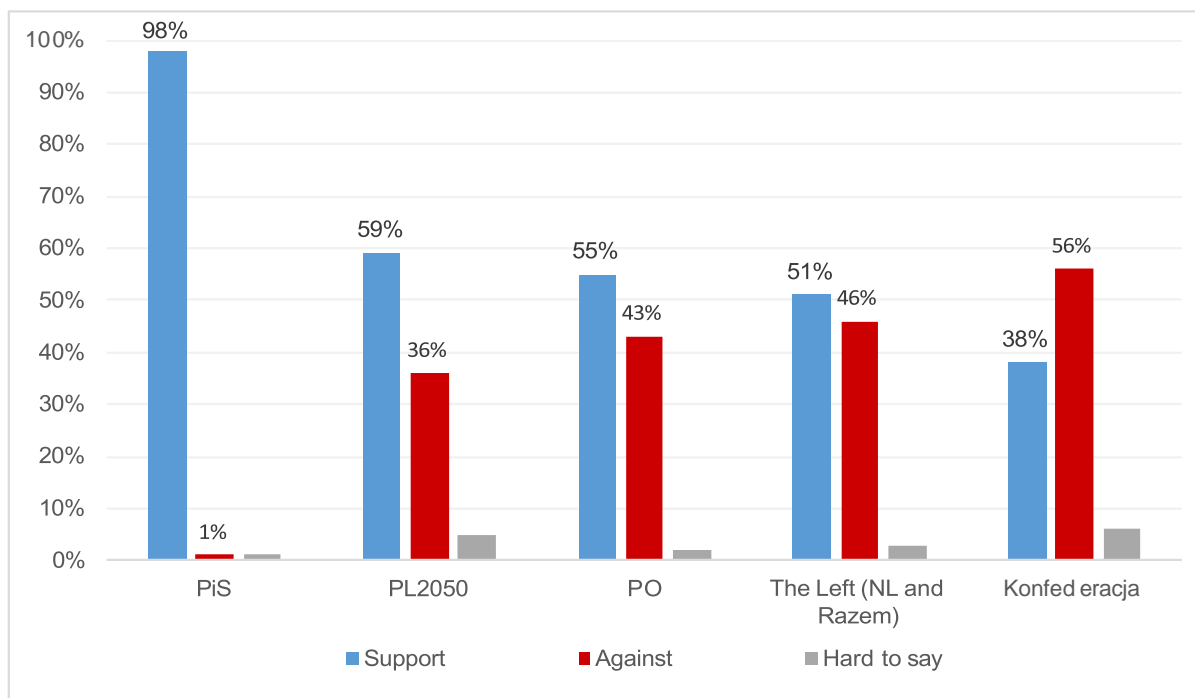
When analyzing PiS's support in 2019, it is worth noting the party's high and stable support in those provinces where the cultural-religious factor may not have played an essential role in the electoral process. PiS in the voivodeships: dolnośląskie, lubuskie, łódzkie, mazowieckie, zachodniopomorskie achieved high and very high support even though the so-called *dominantes* in these parts of Poland were among the lower ones in the entire country. In these provinces, except for the larger cities, there are no industrial centers, and agriculture is dominant. At the same time, on the so-called "Western Wall," as well in mazowieckie voivodeship many people are migrant workers in the European Union, particularly in Germany. Thus, we can put forward the thesis that PiS has gained popularity precisely among the popular class, which, in an era of substantial political polarization, PiS vs. Anti-PiS for socio-economic reasons, has sided with the right-wing anti-liberals and welfarist populists.

5. Center-left of liberal voters?

Parallel to the process of PiS's takeover of the popular class elections over the past two decades, there has been an apparent "liberalization" of Polish social democracy voters. This phenomenon has occurred despite a significant shift away from the practice of the New Third Way and increasingly strong cooperation with trade unions. The Left's voters, against the

background of other parties of the so-called "Democratic Opposition," are most reluctant to support PiS's flagship 500 plus project.

Figure 2. Support for 500 plus program according to voters of political parties in Poland



Source: ("CBOS: Program Rodzina 500 plus po pięciu latach funkcjonowania (CBOS: Family 500 plus program after five years of operation)," n.d.)

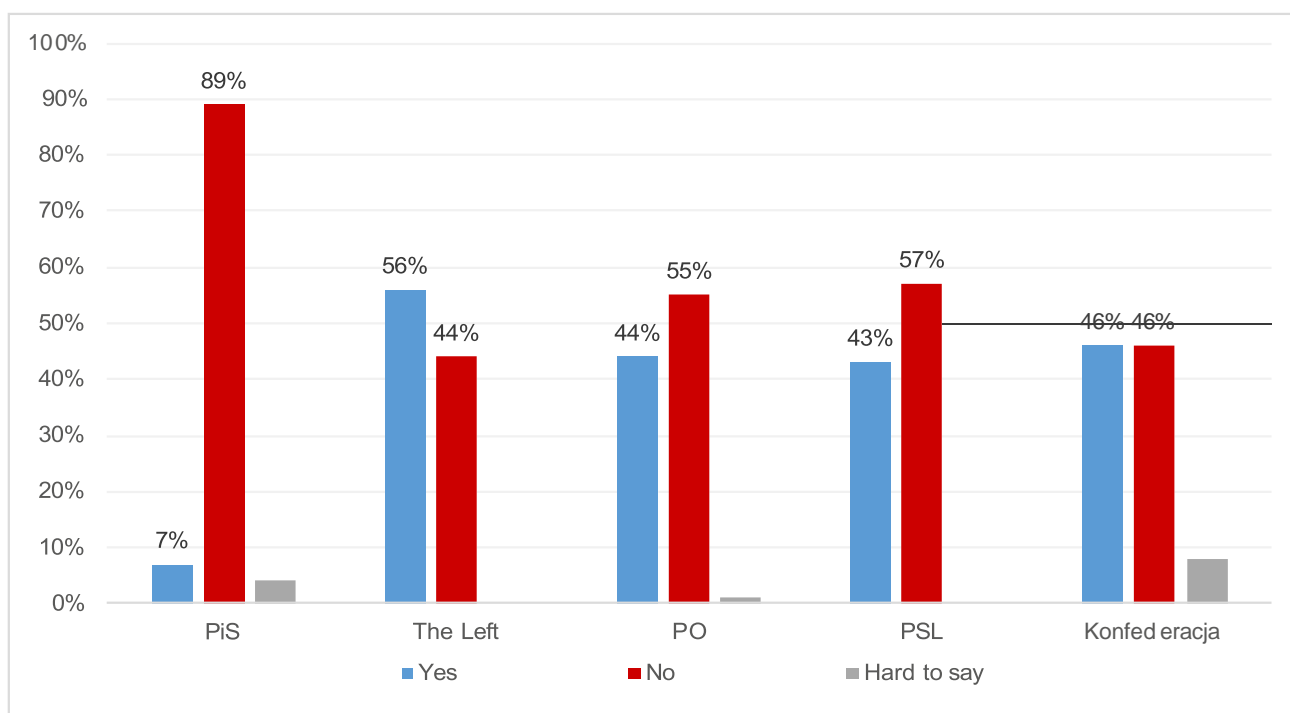
We can see that, with the exception of the libertarian party Konfederacja, Voters of the Left in Poland are the most skeptical of the 500 plus program. This attitude can be explained in various ways regarding the important anti-PiS component among center-left voters (in every age group)³ and the class structure of center-left voters in Poland. In addition, the Polish center-left has the most significant number of voters in those age groups (students/students and retirees)

³ As Sadura and Sierakowski note in their research: "The electorate of the Left is strongly anti-PiS. 80% of the 'core' voters of the Left parties believe that PiS is a threat to Poland and should be democratically removed from power as soon as possible (for comparison: 68% of the core PO/N electorate and 58% of the Left's reserve electorate believe so)" (Sadura and Sierakowski, 2019, p. 33).

who are not beneficiaries of the program, so there is another non-ideological argument against the discussed solution.

Other surveys, too, indicate an even higher level of skepticism among social democracy voters in Poland toward the child benefit program introduced by the PiS government. In May 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic lockdown, left-wing voters were the most likely to want the program curtailed.

Figure 3. Should the government reduce payments from the 500 plus program due to the effects of the epidemic? Answers in the electorate



Source: (Szymczak, n.d.)

To further illustrate the dichotomy between Law and Justice (PiS) and SLD (Left) voters, it is worth looking at their socioeconomic profile based on exit and late polls from the 2019 parliamentary elections.

Table 4. Distribution of votes by professional groups in the 2019 Sejm elections (Ipsos exit and late poll)

Profession	Component of the SLD voters	Component of the PiS voters
Company owner / co-owner	12,1 %	29,5 %
Director / manager / specialist	15,3 %	26,6 %
Administrative or service assistant	13,3 %	38,5 %
Farmer	3,5 %	67,4 %
Worker	6,9 %	57,9 %
Pupil/student	23,4 %	22,3 %
Unemployed person	7,6 %	55,6 %
Pensioner	10,3 %	56,8 %
Other	11,9 %	42,1 %

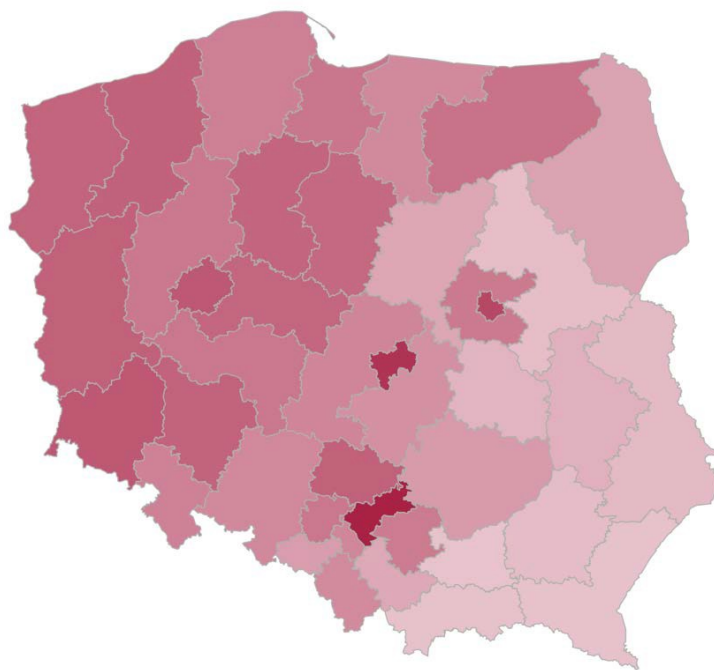
Source: (Kopeć and Pawłowska, n.d.)

On the above chart, besides visible differences due to the vast disparity in electoral support between the SLD and PiS, we can see even colossal differences in the key groups for our analysis. PiS had a visible advantage over social democracy among workers, farmers, unemployed, and pensioners. These groups are the core of the popular class, in which, as can be seen, PiS even holds a hegemonic position, winning more than half of the votes among all electoral committees in 2019. On the other hand, those who voted for the center-left during the 2019 parliamentary elections were primarily people in managerial positions, public administration, and local government employees, students, or pupils. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that the Left is mainly voted for by representatives of the middle class, local elites, and people who are not members of disadvantaged groups.

Geographically, too, we can see a significant difference in support for the SLD and PiS. Leaving aside the difference in the electoral outcome in 2019 of the center-left (12,56%) and the national-conservative right (43,59%), we can see an almost dichotomous split. The SLD is over-represented in western Poland, Silesia, and large urban centers, while the PiS "strongholds" are the southeastern voivodeships.

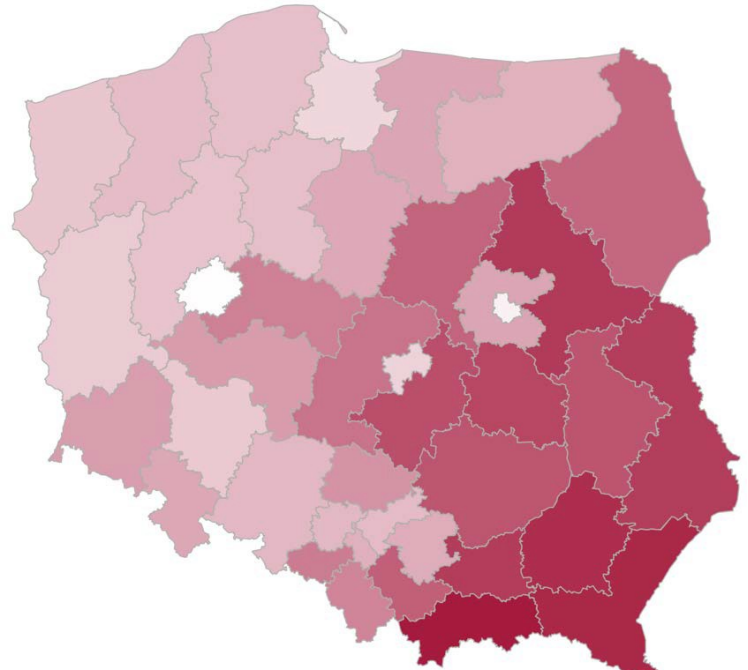
Map 2.

Support for the SLD in the 2019 parliamentary elections



Map 3.

Support for the PiS in the 2019 parliamentary elections



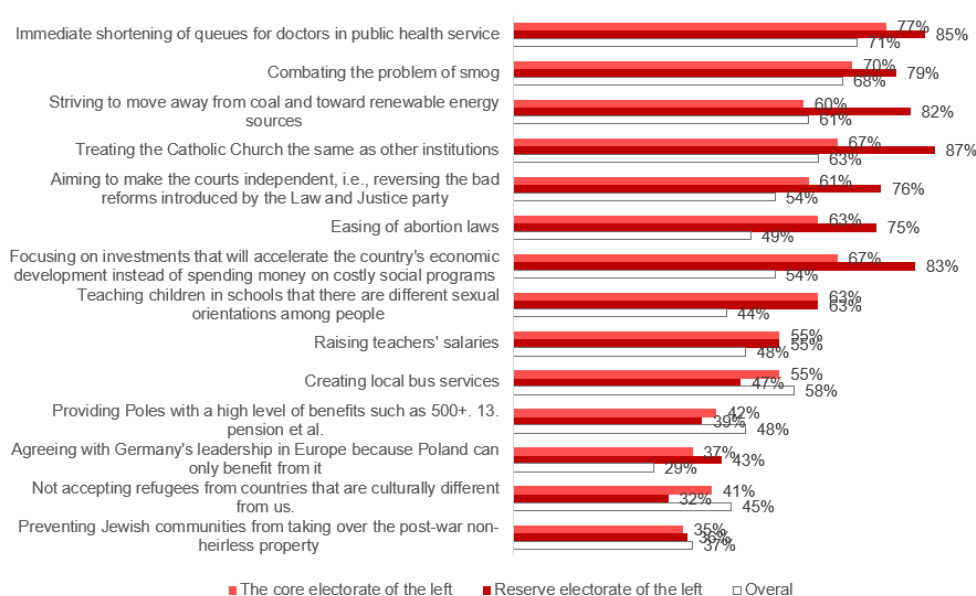
Source: ("Wyniki wyborów 2019 do Sejmu RP | KOMITET WYBORCZY PRAWO I SPRAWIEDLIWOŚĆ (Results of elections 2019 to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland | ELECTION COMMITTEE LAW AND JUSTICE)," n.d.; "Wyniki wyborów 2019 do Sejmu RP. KOMITET WYBORCZY SOJUSZ LEWICY DEMOKRATYCZNEJ (Results of elections 2019 to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland. ELECTORAL COMMITTEE OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT ALLIANCE)," n.d.)

The electoral geography and professional profile of center-left voters in Poland indicate the relatively liberal nature of the social democracy electorate. In 2019, Przemysław Sadura and Sławomir Sierakowski conducted focus and quantitative surveys of the voters of PiS, PO, the left (SLD, Wiosna, and Razem), and PSL. Based on these, two groups were estimated: core and reserve voters. For the center-left, the results were as follows:

- core electorate - 8%
- reserve electorate - 12%
- total (support ceiling) - 20%

In their study, Sadura and Sierakowski surveyed "metropolitan liberals of the middle generation and small-town millennials and young people. Both groups were dominated by the middle class working in the public sector, although the Warsaw group also had its fair share of people employed in private companies" (Sadura and Sierakowski, 2019, p. 33). The ideological profile of Polish leftists can be seen in the chart relating to their programmatic priorities.

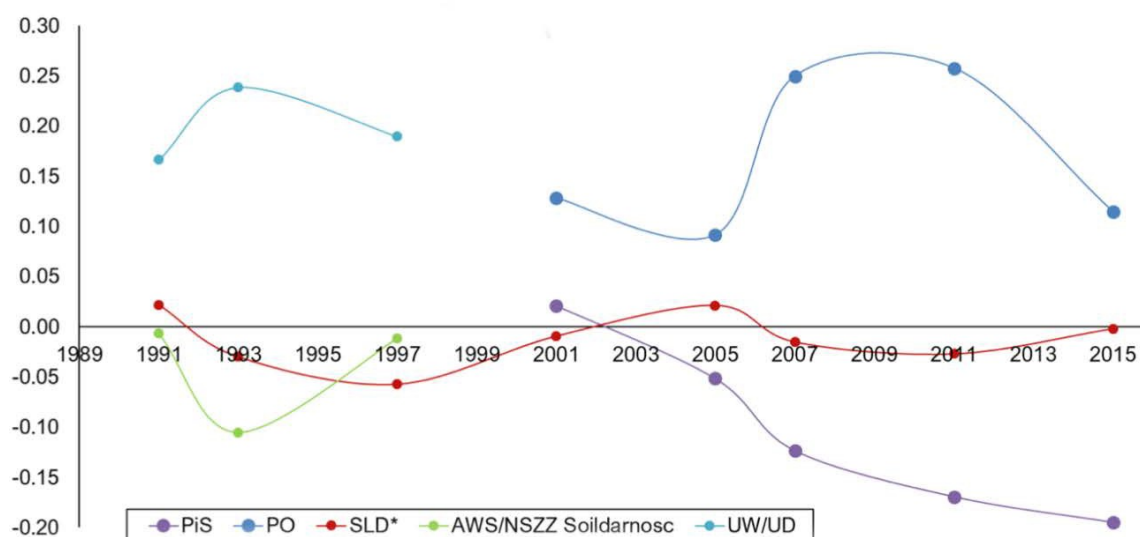
Figure 2. Preferences of program postulates of the left-wing electorate in comparison with total respondents



Source: (Sadura and Sierakowski, 2019, p. 34).

The above results clearly indicate the predominance of liberal, human rights-oriented, and secular worldview content over issues typical of social democracy, such as good public services or decent public sector wages. Sadura and Sierakowski conducted another study two years later, consisting of three stages: a survey, individual in-depth interviews, and focus groups. They confirmed two main profiles of social democracy voters. Namely, the elderly and poor, who do not believe in the effectiveness of the PiS-led state yet want a welfare state, and younger and affluent center-left voters, who want a "minimum state." As Sadura and Sierakowski weigh in, "the first group is repelled by leftist views on LGBT+ and anticlericalism, and the second by excessive social spending and redistribution." (Sadura and Sierakowski, 2021, p. 29). This division may be one of the main challenges to the future of Polish social democracy.

Figure 4. Difference between % vote share for Polish political parties among top 10% and bottom 90% income voters



Source: (Lindner *et al.*, 2020, p. 36).

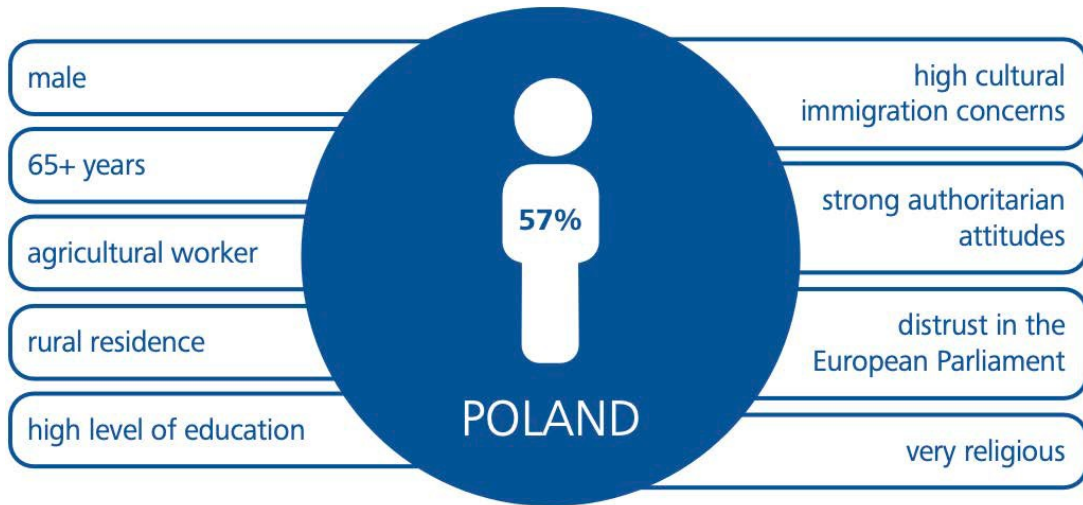
A somewhat different perspective on the differences in the characteristics of SLD and Law and Justice voters over the years is thrown up by research conducted by Attila Lindner, Filip Novokmet, Thomas Piketty, and Tomasz Zawisza. We can see from them that from the

very beginning of its existence on the Polish political scene, SLD had a somewhat balanced profile of its voters, where almost equally poorer and more prosperous people voted for the Polish social democracy. The opposite trend, however, is observed in the case of PiS. In its first election in 2001, the Kaczynski brothers' party had an overrepresentation of voters with higher incomes, only to continually have poorer voters than those in the top 10% of income since 2005. Thus, we can put forward a thesis that the presented survey results confirm my thesis about the outflow of the popular class from the SLD to the Law and Justice party, with the Polish center-left party still having poorer voters than, for example, the liberal PO.

6. Conclusions

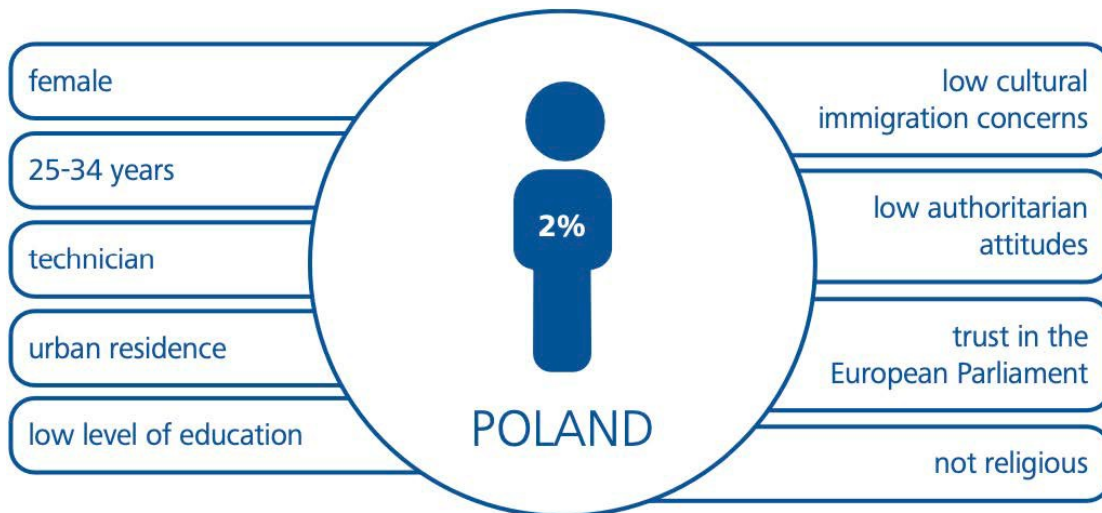
The history of changes in support of the Polish center-left after 2001 captures the drama of change typical of many social democratic parties in Europe. They went from total political hegemony to falling into the electoral second and third leagues, falling out and returning to parliament with the third result and the highest number of absolute votes since 2001. The SLD at the time lost the battle for the trust of those people who had lost in the two overlapping processes: systemic transformation and neoliberal globalization. It was unable to successfully wrestle the support of the representatives of the popular class, taken over and empowered by the PiS in 2005, 2015, and 2019. The Polish center-left, unlike the populist radical right, cannot boast of introducing massive cash transfers for Polish families, a radical increase in the minimum wage, or the establishment of a 13 and 14 pension. However, social democracy in Poland today is a significant and credible political force advocating women's rights, LGBT+ people, and the actual separation of the state from the Church. The profile of left-wing voters is very similar to the group least likely to vote for right-wing populists.

Figure 5. Who is the most likely right-wing populist party voter?



Source: (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas, 2022, p. 132).

Figure 6. Who is the least likely right-wing populist party voter?



Source: (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas, 2022, p. 132).

The Left also has different and not necessarily economically inclined groups of voters with common interests. It has a strongly social-democratic-statist political program and quite free-market voters, whose aversion to the PiS, xenophobia, moral conservatism, and the Catholic Church is their hallmark. Despite this, like the NL and Razem (Left Together), which have been in one parliamentary faction since 2019, they keep their ideological priorities and strategy of action the same. It can be argued that Polish social democracy remains in clear welfare-state positions, not thanks to, but despite, the socioeconomic profile of its voters. It is not so much the axiological character of the Polish center-left but precisely the characteristics of PiS's popular class voters that pose the most significant challenge to NL today. This is because they place themselves at the opposite pole from the already existing electoral base of the center-left. In other words, globalist progressives and localist conservatives are pushing each other away. However, Polish Social Democracy realizes that the struggle to regain at least some of the trust of the popular class is vital to it from both an electoral and symbolic point of view. In the summer of 2022, Left MPs embarked on a multi-week tour of county Poland where they emphasized social issues (Przyborska, n.d.). In an era of inflation and high prices, NL and Razem are trying to bounce back some of the elderly popular class voters by promoting a widow's pension project, assuming an addition of 50% of a deceased spouse's pension benefit (Turecki, n.d.). In addition, the Left is publicizing unfulfilled PiS' promises in combating public transport exclusion or building state-run rental housing. Programs that were supposed to serve poorer people living outside Poland's main development centers.

The departure of the working and peasant class from the center-left to the radical right has a pan-European dimension. In recent years, sister parties of the NL in the Czech Republic and Hungary have also moved from election-winning to marginal forces to marginal groupings. Therefore, similar analyses of the center-left from these countries could indicate whether the Polish case study is isolated or whether it is a regularity in Central European countries that the moment social democracy leaves the popular class, we begin to witness its permanent withering away.

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EU'S LARGEMENT TOWARDS THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP. THE INTEGRATION OF UKRAINE IN THE MIDST OF THE CRISIS

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Abstract: *After the fall of the communist regimes, the former Eastern bloc countries stated that they wanted to join the European Community. However, the legacy of Soviet socio-economic systems and structures made it difficult for the countries of Eastern Europe to integrate faster into the Community. Nevertheless, the accession of the former communist states, in the opinion of former European Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn, has served as an anchor for stability and democracy and an engine of personal freedom and economic dynamism in Europe. The enlargement process has made a positive contribution to narrowing the gap between East and West in terms of democracy, although progress among post-communist countries is still lower than in "Western European" states. In the context of the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian troops and the global crisis that arose from this event, the integration of Ukraine into the European Union seems more palpable than ever. This paper tries to explain the relationship between the EU and Ukraine since the latter managed to gain its independence from Russia and became part of the Eastern Partnership and to come up with a possible scenario of how the enlargement process will take place from here onwards for the countries that are on the Russian line of fire.*

Keywords: enlargement, integration, Ukraine, EU, Eastern Partnership.

Introduction

At a certain point in history, the European Union realized it was destined to have different and developmentally heterogeneous neighbors as a large geopolitical entity with extensive borders. Thus, in the context of the most extensive enlargement in the history of the EU, which included eight states from Central and Eastern Europe and two states from the Mediterranean Sea, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) was created. Developed in 2004, the main aim of the ENP was to avoid the emergence of new lines of demarcation between the

European Union and its neighbors and to strengthen the prosperity, stability, and security of them all. The 2004 enlargement to 25 states expanded the place occupied by the EU in Europe's international relations, with membership now comprising most European nation-states.

The ENP is a bilateral policy between the European Union and partner countries. Under the ENP, the European Union offers its neighbors a privileged relationship based on a mutual commitment to shared values including democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development. The level of ambition of the relationship depends on the extent to which the partner states share these values. In addition, the ENP includes political association, deeper economic integration, and increased mobility (Whitman and Wolff, 2010, pp.3-5). In concrete terms, the actions within the ENP are aimed at framing all three pillars of the EU and promoting strategic security objectives.

After spending the first five years working in the ENP format to build relations with very different neighbors like Tunisia and Ukraine, the EU made the logical decision to start viewing its neighborhood through the lens of dividing it into different groups. Thus, currently, within the ENP, we distinguish four types of actions carried out by the EU:

1. Cooperation with all neighboring countries. In addition to bilateral and regional cooperation programs, neighborhood-wide cooperation programs have been created, as it is believed that these can be managed more effectively at the interregional level.
2. Cooperation with neighboring EU countries. Cross-border cooperation aims at sustainable development along the EU's external borders to enhance the quality of life and solve common problems.
3. Southern Neighborhood – cooperation program covering a wide range of key sectors such as good governance and the rule of law, socio-economic development, migration (in the context of migratory crises) and refugee support, climate change, energy, and security. This program involves Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia.
4. The Eastern Partnership is a specific dimension of the ENP, which aims to deepen the political and economic relations between the European Union and the six partner states in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (Eastern Partnership, 2022).

The Eastern Partnership represents a joint initiative of the EU and its Eastern European partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. Launched in 2009 at the EU Summit in Prague, it aims to bring Eastern European partners closer to the European Union. Furthermore, the Eastern Partnership supports and encourages reforms in the member countries of this Eastern Program for the benefit of their citizens and the subsequent attainment of candidate state status for EU accession. Created at the proposal of Poland and Sweden, the Eastern Partnership allows these partner states to integrate into EU policies and programs gradually and into the common market (Eastern Partnership, 2022).

The Eastern Partnership was officially launched in May 2009 and has been described as an ambitious new partnership that goes far beyond the achievements of the ENP. The notion of "partnership" became central to the renewal of special relations with the eastern neighbors and promised to provide a flexible approach tailored to the needs and capacity of each partner. In each case, the EU tries to provide the maximum support possible, given the internal political realities of the partner states. The Eastern Partnership provides several new and essential measures and activities to facilitate the commitment of neighbors to the course of European integration.

In particular, the policy envisioned a new two-track approach by adding a multilateral dimension with a regional focus to the partner states' traditional bilateral relationship with the EU. In this way, the ENP managed to embrace all countries in the region as initially intended, including those that previously had no structured relationship with the EU (i.e., Belarus) as well as third countries (i.e., Turkey and Russia) not covered by PEV. Measures have also been designed at different levels to differentiate policy focus and attractiveness, thus allowing the EU to develop enhanced association agreements with accession leaders such as Ukraine and Moldova and to approach other partners based on needs. The EU has also stepped up its efforts to address frozen conflicts in the neighborhood (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Donetsk / Luhansk People's Republic) and put more emphasis on engagement through civil society to drive domestic reforms.

At the multilateral level, based on the proposals received from the partner states, the EU has developed five initiatives to support the specific interests of each country and provide additional financial aid. The initiatives range from border management programs, SME

facilities, energy diversification, and the Southern Energy Corridor in response to natural and artificial disaster prevention. In addition, the Eastern Partnership has challenged making EU policies more attractive to the Eastern region by diversifying its measures, activities, and resources (Korosteleva, 2012, pp.7-8).

The EU's relationship with its neighborhood is based on the principles of soft power, which covers the general scope of the interests of the EU and partner countries. Closer cooperation between the EU and its Eastern European partners – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine – is a key component of the EU's external relations because as the EU has expanded, the economic and social development of these states influences the economies of the EU directly.

The EU aims to promote democratic values and support its eastern neighbors in implementing the rule of law and adopting high-quality European standards for trade. The implementation of large-scale reforms in partner countries is undoubtedly a positive development.

The EU signed Association Agreements on June 27, 2014, with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. The political association and economic integration of the Eastern Partnership countries with the EU comprise three general chapters: Common Foreign and Security Policy, Justice and Home Affairs, and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). In addition, before signing the Association Agreement, a country must become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and become a party to the multilateral trade agreement, which is a prerequisite for entering and completing negotiations on the DCFTA.

Eastern Partnership member countries must adopt 350 EU laws, standards, and regulations within ten years. The opening of markets through the progressive elimination of tariffs and customs quotas and the harmonization of laws, rules, and regulations in various trade-related sectors contribute to the achievement of this objective.

This paper tries to explain the relationship between the EU and Ukraine since the latter managed to gain its independence from Russia and became part of the Eastern Partnership and to come up with a possible scenario of how the enlargement process will take place from here onwards the countries that are on the Russian line of fire.

The question that arises is if the Union is prepared to change the enlargement process from the ground or, given the critical situation in the area, if it agrees to compromise and skip some of the procedures that need to be followed in order for a country to become part of this community? In this regard, I set as my goal to answer the following research questions:

1. Has the Eastern Partnership created an open platform for strengthening relations between the EU and Ukraine?
2. What were the difficulties encountered in the implementation of the Eastern Partnership?
3. Will Ukraine obtain the status of an EU candidate state in the current context?

This research was carried out through the historical-interpretive approach of the contexts in which the analyzed facts took place, their significance and importance and their evolution over time. The technique used in this research is secondary data analysis, which involves conducting a scientific investigation based on information from other research carried out by distinguished experts in this field and analyzing official documents. Thus, books in a physical and online format, articles in specialized magazines and documents issued by the official institutions of the EU and Ukraine were consulted.

1. A short analysis of the EU-Ukraine relationship

With the collapse of the USSR, through the signing of the Belaveja Accords on December 8, 1991, between the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, the aim of the Ukrainians was based on two interrelated tasks: dealing with the legacy of the Soviet Union and building the future independent state. How Ukraine approached these tasks was shaped by concerns about sovereignty, identity, and interdependence.

For the leadership of Ukraine, led by President Leonid Kravchuk, the Declaration of Independence of August 1991 meant the complete and final separation of Ukraine from the USSR. Consequently, the priority was to consolidate and protect the newly won independence, which was contested by Russia at every turn, citing arguments such as borders, the status of the Black Sea Fleet, the issue of citizenship, and the status of Crimea.

While Ukraine has sought to avoid post-Soviet integration with Russia at the helm, it has shown genuine openness to the EU. Ukraine has sought to create complex and systemic interdependencies through persistent demands and desire for integration into the European community.

However, from the beginning, Ukraine's pro-European orientation was limited to foreign policy statements and was not accompanied by domestic "acts." As a result, the Ukrainian political elite has carved out a niche for itself, allowing it to continue its search for profitability, balancing between the West and Russia, each of which treats Kyiv's integration rhetoric with a heavy dose of skepticism (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, p.30).

We can delineate four distinct periods in the cooperation between the EU and Ukraine:

1. The first period can be **declarative Europeanization**, led by President Leonid Kuchma (1994–2004).
2. The second period was **political stagnation** under Yushchenko's presidency (2005–2010).
3. The third period was manifested by the **pragmatism** of Yanukovich's presidency (2010–2014).
4. The last period refers to the presidency of Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelensky and **the final rapprochement** with the EU.

Before 1994, under Kravciuk's presidency, the problems of European integration began to be addressed by the country's leadership, but they did not constitute a political priority. The most decisive step toward EU-Ukraine cooperation during that period was the creation of the Intergovernmental Committee for 90 cooperation with the EU by the Presidential Decree of August 28, 1993 (Liga 360, 2022), which laid the foundations for the preparation and signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in June 1994 (CORDIS, 2022).

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement were concluded in the first days of Leonid Kuchma's presidency. This step had great symbolic importance for Ukraine, the first country in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to sign such an agreement with the EU. Although it went through a ratification procedure for four years, the PCA provided Ukraine with a much-needed commercial and economical avenue for convergence and building political dialogue with the EU, in the form of annual Summits and meetings of EU-Cooperation Councils

Ukraine and the EU-Ukraine Cooperation Committees. However, any reference to the prospect of EU accession negotiated with CEE countries simultaneously and left Ukraine half committed to implementing EU-led reforms was explicitly avoided (Korosteleva, 2012, p.84).

Within three months of the entry into force of the PCA in June 1998, Kuchma signed a decree entitled "Strategy of Ukraine's Integration into the European Union," which formally proclaimed EU membership as Ukraine's long-term strategic goal and listed the main priority areas for integration. Furthermore, in interactions with EU officials, Ukrainian leaders have expressed a desire to follow the path of integration of Central and Eastern European states, which began accession negotiations with the EU in the 1990s (Bărbulescu, Brie, and Toderaş, 2016).

Achieving an accession perspective has become a key objective of Ukraine's strategy toward the EU. Ukraine had hoped its membership aspirations would be recognized at the European Council meeting in Helsinki in December 1999 but had to settle for a message of appreciation for Ukraine's European choice. The government in Kyiv reviewed and re-evaluated the key documents that coordinated relations with the EU. In many ways, the PCA resembled the association agreements signed between the states of Central and Eastern Europe and the EU. The primary purpose of the PCA was to align Ukraine with the legal framework of the European Single Market and the World Trade Organization system. However, unlike association agreements, the PCA was legally "static." Ukrainian officials have criticized the PCA for many reasons, mainly for failing to provide a clear and comprehensive roadmap for closer ties between Ukraine and the EU. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement only delineated areas of cooperation without specific priorities and timeframes, which leaders in Kyiv saw as a lack of political will to deepen cooperation. Ukrainian officials also wanted a comprehensive framework that included new areas of European integration, such as foreign policy, defense, and Justice and Home Affairs, which were not covered by the PCA (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, p.38).

Despite the country's grandiose expectations, which were not realized, many important institutional activities took place in Ukraine, including the creation of the Department for European Integration and the Center for European Law under the Ministry of Justice in Kyiv. Overall, however, progress was slow and uncoordinated. Moreover, the absence of legislative

initiative on European integration has led to a situation where almost ten years of political declarations regarding Ukraine's "European choice" have not resulted in the adoption of even the most fundamental legislative acts necessary to launch any integration policies. Consequently, although some political actors were identified, no clear priorities were agreed upon, implemented, or monitored by either the EU or the Ukrainian government, and Ukraine's "European choice" remained on the back burner (Korosteleva, 2012, p. 85).

In order to expand and intensify relations and overcome the stagnant situation, Ukraine proposed a series of initiatives to the EU in 2000-2001, which were met with little interest by the European institutions. In the early 2000s, Ukrainian leaders agreed on achieving a comprehensive, detailed, and binding framework for Ukraine's closer integration with the EU. For political leaders, it was about obtaining candidate status. For other domestic actors, it was about forcing political elites to carry out internal democratic reforms, thus triggering a modernization process. However, preoccupied with eastern enlargement and the new treaty framework, the EU has been slow to engage in bold policies in the post-Soviet space and respond to Ukraine's demands in particular. As the political system led by Kuchma became repressive, the EU became more critical of human rights abuses in Ukraine. Given the stark divergence between pro-European statements and domestic events, the EU rejected Ukraine's calls for a more substantial commitment. While this gave the EU a pretext to avoid deeper commitments to Kuchma-led Ukraine, the EU felt compelled to respond to demands following the Orange Revolution in which the country demonstrated its democratic values (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, pp. 38-39).

The year 2004 marked a turning point in EU-Ukraine relations, which were considerably accelerated by the events of the Orange Revolution and the emergence of a common border with the EU after the 2004 enlargement wave. Although Ukrainian political elites engaged in discussions regarding the EU's 'Wider Europe' (European Commission, 2003) initiative, the launch of the ENP in 2004 was a disappointment, once again failing to satisfy Ukraine's EU membership ambitions. The frustration was partly precipitated by the legacy of Kuchma's presidency, which saw accession as the ultimate goal of Ukraine's relations with the EU. Under the ENP, the EU launched the EU-Ukraine Action Plan negotiations, which were completed in December 2004 and approved by the EU-Ukraine Cooperation Council in February 2005. The

Council's decision was, however, complemented by a "Schedule of Additional Measures," which offered considerable concessions to Ukraine related to its domestic performance. For example, the future Enhanced Association Agreement and Free Trade Agreement depended on Ukraine's satisfactory compliance with the standards of the 2006 parliamentary elections and its accession to the WTO (European Commission, 2005).

The Action Plan was signed after the presidential elections scheduled for the fall of 2004. Unexpectedly, these elections sparked mass protests against electoral fraud committed in favor of Viktor Yanukovich at the expense of opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko. The resulting impasse was resolved through elite-level negotiations (involving high-ranking EU figures such as Javier Solana, Former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy), culminating in a repeat of the second round of the presidential elections, won this time by Viktor Yushchenko. The election of the leader of the pro-European opposition demonstrated the extent to which Ukraine was guided by and committed to European values (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, pp. 41-42).

The newly installed president immediately demanded specific measures from the EU in response to the democratic changes in Ukraine, including the start of negotiations for an Association Agreement and giving Ukraine the prospect of membership. Within the EU, this request was supported by politicians in some EU member states, especially in Central-Eastern Europe, and supported by a resolution of the European Parliament. However, given the continued lack of consensus among its member states, the EU has faced a dilemma over recognizing and rewarding Ukraine for upholding democratic values while discouraging Ukrainian leaders from applying for membership. Therefore, the European Commission found a compromise, yielding to Ukraine's second preference: a "new consolidated agreement" was to be negotiated after the 2006 parliamentary elections in Ukraine, provided they were held in a free and fair manner. These negotiations began following the favorable evaluation of the 2006 parliamentary elections (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, pp. 41-42).

The period of Viktor Yushchenko's presidency (2005-2010) is symbolically associated with the institutionalization of the "European election" in Ukraine. In 2005, the post of Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration was created, coordinating EU integration at all levels. Subsequently, the Department for European Integration of the Secretariat of the Cabinet of

Ministers was established to provide for the negotiation and implementation of the roadmaps, supported by the responsible ministries. These institutions were essential for overseeing the effective implementation of the adopted Action Plan. In particular, three ministries – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economy, and the Ministry of Justice have become the "real engines" for the institutionalization of compliance and convergence with the EU acquis. By 2006, the MAE had aligned with 549 out of 589 positions on the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. The Ministry of Economy, for its part, has set WTO accession as a priority and has constantly insisted on the implementation of sectoral reforms as part of the Action Plan (Korosteleva, 2012, pp. 85-86). However, changes in the government in 2006, which installed Viktor Yanukovich as prime minister and Mykola Azarov as his deputy, both staunch supporters of cooperation with Russia, hindered progress on democratic reforms and cooperation with the EU. Despite some positive beginnings, the Action Plan has been hampered by the country's bureaucratic inertia and political infighting. Thus, without a strong political leader in European affairs and an effective coordination and monitoring mechanism, progress in implementation has been limited. Of the 73 priorities of the approved Plan, only 11 were fully implemented, most were partially implemented and needed to be completed, while one priority was not implemented at all (Wolczuk, 2009, p. 207).

In March 2007, negotiations were launched for an Association Agreement to replace the old Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Furthermore, after Ukraine acceded to the WTO in May 2008, it included the prospect of establishing a Free Trade Agreement with the EU and further visa liberalization. However, the EU Progress Report, published in April 2008, indicated that progress had stagnated compared to previous years, particularly on economic and structural reforms, due to the political instability that characterized most of 2007 (European Commission, 2008, p. 2).

However, limited progress was enough for the EU. EU-Ukraine negotiations continued, including four rounds on the Association Agreement and three rounds on the Free Trade Agreement in 2008. In December 2008, negotiations were launched on a New Practical Instrument (NPI) to replace the Action Plan. Of course, the NPI was not entirely different from the old Action Plan. Ukraine did not successfully implement many parts of the Plan and, therefore, found itself in the NPI (Mayhew, 2009, pp. 10-12).

Domestic political crises and the escalation of gas disputes with Russia considerably accelerated the negotiations on the New Practical Instrument, launched in 2008, to help prepare Ukraine to facilitate the entry into force of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The new instrument was approved by the Cooperation Council in June 2009 and entered into force in November 2009. The EU-Ukraine Summit in Kyiv in December 2009 recognized Ukraine's European aspirations, commenting on the substantial progress made in EU-Ukraine relations over the past year in all areas of mutual interest. Also, within this summit, the leaders of the EU and Ukraine expressed their total commitment to the Eastern Partnership that was launched in May in Prague. The desire for the Eastern Partnership to contribute to political association and economic integration was also emphasized (European Council, 2009, pp. 4-6)

The launch of the Eastern Partnership had some indirect but essential consequences for Ukraine. First, while the ENP was a virtual, document-based policy implemented through the adoption of Action Plans and the development of country-specific progress reports, the EP was designed to raise the profile of relations with post-Soviet countries. One of the innovations was the introduction of biannual high-level EaP summits. Summits since 2009 have created pressure within the EU to show progress in its relations with its eastern partners. Even though the EP did not have more substantial incentives than the ENP and had very few differences from a financial point of view, it was designed to give the EU's Eastern policy greater political visibility (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, p. 45).

On February 7, 2010, Ukraine's second round of presidential elections was held. Viktor Yanukovich was elected president with 48.95% of the votes, 3.5% more than his opponent, Yulia Tymoshenko (Copsey and Shapovalova, 2010, p. 211). The election of Yanukovich brought a new era to Ukrainian politics, which raised several difficulties in the relationship with the EU. Although he made his first official visit to Brussels to bolster his European credentials, Yanukovich's genuine connections are far more complex. First, European integration was not a priority of the new government's domestic policy. Even though Prime Minister Azarov was responsible for European integration, the new government began to dissolve public institutions whose role was to facilitate European integration. First, the State Department for the Adaptation of Legislation within the Ministry of Justice, created during Kuchma's presidency in the early 2000s, has been reduced, thereby diminishing its ability to ensure compliance with Ukrainian

legislation with the *acquis* the European. Second, the Office for European Integration was transformed into a department of the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers with reduced powers. Third, regarding legislative power, Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada enacted laws regarding relations with the EU only if they coincided with the interests of the oligarchs, who gained increasing power during Yanukovich's presidency (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2016, p. 56).

Upon coming to power, the new president made sure, first of all, that relations between Ukraine and Russia were restored as a priority. In his first 100 days in office, he negotiated a deal with Russia to supply natural gas to Ukraine at a price that gave him a cut of about \$4 billion a year over ten years. Instead, he extended the lease of the port of Sevastopol to the Russian fleet for another 25 years (Radio Europa Liberă, 2010). Furthermore, he intensified the dialogue with the leadership of Russia and the CIS, which in two months saw a record number of meetings with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, and other officials of the Russian Federation. Both countries discussed the prospects for closer cooperation, including Russian capital investment programs, the creation of a free trade area, and security cooperation. In addition, Ukrainian Prime Minister Nikolai Azarov expressed his willingness to consider the prospect of Ukraine joining the Eurasian Economic Union, which consists of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. As a result, Ukraine signed 15 of 19 documents proposed at the CIS Summit in St. Petersburg, and Ukraine's trade with Russia increased by 70%, while trade with the EU decreased by almost 12% during that period (Korosteleva, 2012, pp. 88-89). It is, therefore, not surprising that the EU soon began to doubt Ukraine's commitment to a European course. As Elmar Brok, a member of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, aptly put it: "Does Ukraine want to join our organization? I am not sure about that anymore, and we need to get assurances if that is the case" (Interfax-Ukraine, 2010).

A Progress Report followed in 2011 as well, according to which, by the end of 2010, only a few chapters had been provisionally closed, including those on institutional provisions, general and final provisions, and those on economic and sectoral cooperation aspects. Some progress was made in the negotiations on political dialogue and association in the field of foreign and security policy, and it was noted that further negotiations on the DCFTA are needed. However, the report reflected a general dissatisfaction with the progress of political reform, suggesting that greater commitment is needed from the Ukrainian state, particularly in

upholding democratic standards and freedoms. Once again, EU-Ukraine relations have reached an impasse, with Ukraine insisting on clear accession prospects stipulated in the new Association Agreement and on concrete steps toward a visa-free regime to be approved by the year 2011 (European Union External Action, 2011).

The Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius on November 28-29, 2013, was supposed to represent a turning point in EU relations with the six Eastern Partnership member states. Since the long-awaited Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU was to be signed, it will demonstrate to the other states the effectiveness of the EP and the consolidation of their efforts. Furthermore, the Association Agreements would bring the signatory countries of the Eastern Partnership closer to the EU through the application of EU norms and standards, including the adoption of the Community acquis, a significant step in the European integration process. However, on November 21, just one week before the Vilnius Summit, the Ukrainian government announced its decision to suspend preparations for signing the Association Agreement with the EU. In its statement, the Kyiv government said the decision was made for reasons of national security, as well as the need to improve declining trade with Russia and other CIS countries.

As the Vilnius Summit approached, pressure from Russia intensified significantly. In mid-August, Russia introduced an embargo on goods from Ukraine. As a result, a significant part of Ukrainian exports to Russia was blocked. In this way, Moscow sent a warning signal to Kyiv, indicating that the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU would significantly limit the access of Ukrainian products to the Russian market, which at that time represented a third of Ukraine's total exports. In the context of the upcoming presidential elections at the beginning of 2015, where victory was a priority for the ruling elite of Ukraine, the most important task of President Yanukovich was to stabilize the economic situation by ensuring the continuous access of Ukrainian goods to the Russian market, but also to obtain a financial loan, which would not be subject to strict conditions on loan management and democratic reforms, imposed by the International Monetary Fund, and obtaining lower gas prices.

The withdrawal of the Ukrainian government from signing the agreement with the EU sparked the largest public protests since 2004, known as EuroMaidan. In February 2014, after dozens of demonstrators were killed by security forces in Kyiv and parliament voted to impeach him, Yanukovich fled to Russia. The parliament established an interim government and a few

days later faced a crisis in the Crimean peninsula. Unidentified gunmen later confirmed to be Russian troops occupied key positions across the peninsula. In the following two weeks, pro-Russian paramilitary groups consolidated their hold on the peninsula and organized an independence referendum, which most international actors criticized. On March 18, 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin formally annexed Crimea, creating the biggest rift between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War. The following month, unidentified troops carrying Russian guns and devices seized government buildings in Ukraine's Donetsk and Lugansk regions, triggering an armed conflict against Ukraine's military. The self-proclaimed "People's Republics" of Donetsk and Luhansk were formed in the spring of 2014 following these protests. Administrations and police stations in several localities have been occupied by Moscow-backed separatists, who have held disputed referendums to legitimize "self-rule" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022).

Kyiv tried to contain the insurgency. As a result, the Ukrainian military regained control of most areas by the summer of 2014. However, in August, it suffered a heavy defeat after being surrounded in the Battle of Ilovaisk, southeast of the city of Donetsk. Moscow denies that the Russian army was involved in this conflict. The Minsk agreements, negotiated in the Normandy format between the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, Germany, and France, in February 2015, established a cease-fire that has been periodically violated by both sides (Goncharenko, 2022).

In this context, Ukraine organized early presidential elections. On May 25, 2014, Petro Poroshenko, former Minister of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine, won the presidential election, beating his primary opponent, Yulia Tymoshenko, by about 40%. Shortly after winning the elections, on June 27, 2014, the EU signed Association Agreements with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, which, at the initiative of President Yanukovich, did not sign the agreement that was prepared for the EP Summit in Vilnius 2013. As a result, the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement entered into force on September 1, 2017, after it was ratified by all EU member states, completing its negotiation process, which began back in March 2007 (European Commission, 2014).

The Association Agreement can be considered a new stage in the development of contractual relations between the EU and Ukraine, which aims to promote and implement political association and economic integration by strengthening political dialogue and

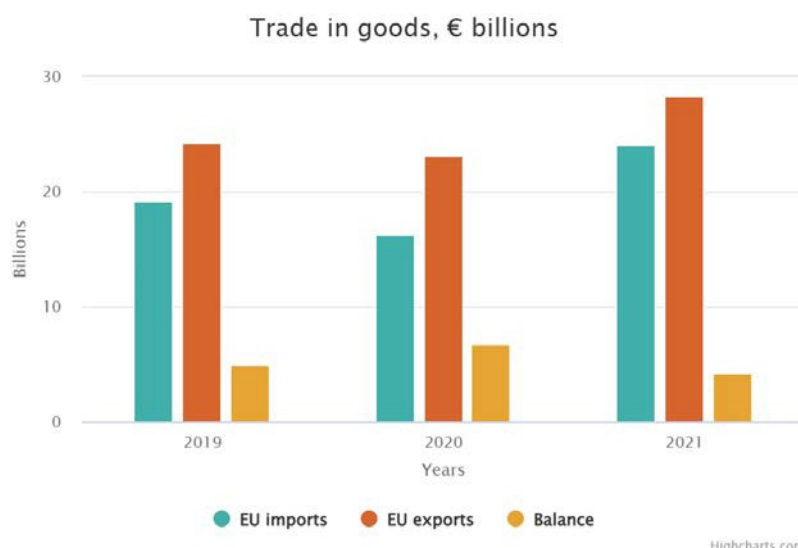
cooperation in key areas. The Association Agreement also aims at the gradual integration of Ukraine into the EU internal market through the establishment of the DCFTA. It also includes a reform agenda for harmonizing Ukrainian legislation with EU legislation. The signing of the Association Agreement was the point of no return for Ukraine's foreign policy. This development marked the definitive change in the country's geopolitical and economic orientation to the detriment of Russia's interests and pressures. Namely, this act offered Ukraine a clearer perspective of accession, a fact that was mentioned and desired by the Ukrainian leaders in all the negotiations with the EU leaders (Spiliopoulos, 2014, pp. 257-258).

The 2019 presidential election was won by Volodymyr Zelensky, representative of the Servant of the People party. On March 31, 2019, Zelenski won more than 30% of the votes in the first round of the presidential election, while Petro Poroshenko had 16%. In the second round, Zelensky was elected president of Ukraine with about 73% of the votes. The new president continued the development of the European vector and promoted cooperative relations with the EU. During the EP Summit, held on June 18, 2020, Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated the democratic values of Ukraine, emphasized the importance of the EP for bilateral cooperation, and expressed Ukraine's desire to become a full-fledged EU member state. This objective has become a priority during his presidency. Namely, starting with Zelenski's mandate, the results of the implementation of the DCFTA agreement began to become more visible. The EU is Ukraine's largest trading partner, accounting for 39.5% of its trade in 2021. Ukraine is the EU's 15th largest trading partner, accounting for approximately 1.2% of total EU trade. Total trade between the EU and Ukraine reached EUR 52.4 billion in 2021, which is double the figures of 2016, before the entry into force of the DCFTA agreement (European Commission, 2022).

Ukraine's exports to the EU amounted to EUR 24.1 billion in 2021, an increase of over 47% compared to 2020. Ukraine's main exports to the EU are iron and steel (20.8% of total exports), ores, animal and vegetable fats and oils (8.5%), especially sunflower oil (7.8%) and cereals (7.3%) (see Figure 2.1.) (European Commission, 2022).

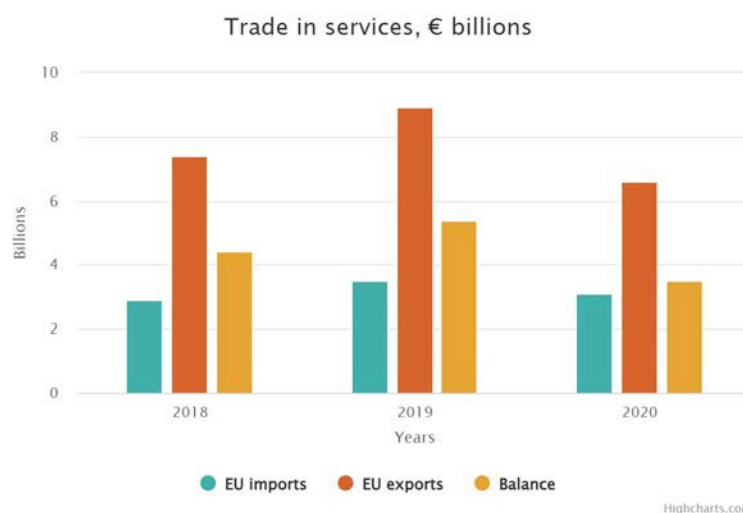
EU exports to Ukraine were around €28.3 billion in 2021, 22.4% more than in 2020. The main EU exports to Ukraine are machinery (14.8% of all exports), transport equipment and vehicles (10.2%), mineral fuels (9.4%), electrical machinery (9.3%), and pharmaceuticals (5.9%) (see Figure 2.2.) (European Commission, 2022).

Figure 2.1. Trade in goods between the EU and Ukraine



Source: European Commission. *EU trade relations with Ukraine. Facts, figures and latest developments*

Figure 2.2. Trade in services between the EU and Ukraine



Source: European Commission. *EU trade relations with Ukraine. Facts, figures and latest developments*

Although the described period was a productive one in EU-Ukraine relations, Ukraine's European path is blocked, for the most part, by the slow vector of the implementation of democratic reforms and laws. Ukraine's past attempts at reform and modernization have seen many failures. The change of government triggered by the EuroMaidan protests, the election of

Volodymyr Zelensky as president, and the consolidation of the European course can play an essential role in strengthening the relationship with the EU and carrying out reforms in key areas, so necessary for the eventual integration into the European bloc.

2. Ukraine's accession to the European Union and the future of the Eastern Partnership

The Association Agreement signed with the EU is the most important instrument for Ukraine's internal reforms. Thus, we consider only a few aspects of the Association Agreement and how its implementation may affect the future development of Ukraine. According to the reports of the European Commission, there is a determined implementation of the reforms, although there are challenges in certain areas. Mainly, Ukraine's success depends on reforming the public administration sector by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public services, customs regulation, tax system and policy, justice and the rule of law, fight against corruption, environment and climate change, digital and energy sector (PubAffairs, 2022).

As Ukraine aims to achieve democratic changes in many areas, in 2014, the European Agenda for Reform was created, jointly developed by the Ukrainian government, the European Commission, and the European External Action Service. This document contains a broad set of measures that reflect the priorities of the Ukrainian government and describes the support provided by the EU to facilitate this process (European Commission, 2014) .

In the field of public administration, Ukraine has started a series of reforms, among which we can mention de-bureaucratization and decentralization. Progress on de-bureaucratization is slow, although public administration reform is central to the entire reform process, as the government's ability to implement the necessary democratic reforms will depend on the bureaucracy's ability to implement new policies. Over the past two decades, Ukraine has failed to reform its civil service, which is still built on the Soviet model, designed to follow the top-down order rather than develop quality policies. This phenomenon was caused by low wages and non-transparent recruitment, promotion, and firing rules. Thus, the bureaucratic system failed to attract talented and incorruptible civil servants (Chromiec and Koenig, 2015, p. 5).

This aspect was improved by adopting the law "on the state service," approved in December 2015. It introduced a merit-based approach to recruitment, promotion, and remuneration, as well as safeguards against discretionary dismissal of civil servants. At the same time, this included the much-needed separation between public and political functions (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2015). Another law aimed at improving the quality of public administration is the lustration law, adopted on September 16, 2014. The law prohibits high-level bureaucrats with ties to former President Yanukovich's regime, foreign intelligence services, former members of the Communist Party and Komsomol apparatus, and secret KGB employees from public service positions for up to ten years, except for persons elected to these positions directly by the citizens. Therefore, this lustration law targets the group of civil servants who can constitute a significant obstacle to the achievement of reforms. As a result, 2,000 civil servants, primarily mid-level, left their positions following the adoption of this law. However, the Parliament of Ukraine is working on certain amendments to the law to expand the scope of officials under this reform (Chromiec and Koenig, 2015, p. 6).

The decentralization process initiated by the government in Kyiv has made substantial progress but is subject to political difficulties. Through a series of constitutional amendments and accompanying laws, Ukrainian parliamentarians initiated substantial change and the transfer of political responsibilities from higher levels of government to lower ones, particularly from regions to "amalgamated territorial communities" with increased autonomy created following the merger of small municipalities. Under the principle of subsidiarity, lower-level units have a stronger voice in areas such as education, health, infrastructure, and local development. Following the example of the Baltic and Scandinavian countries, the new communities are to receive 60% of the income tax collected to fulfill the tasks and obligations that will fall to them following decentralization to avoid duplication of public services (Romanova and Umland, 2019, p. 4). The process of decentralization and the initiation of related legislation started in 2014 and is expected to be fully adopted in 2022 (European Committee of the Regions, 2021).

The issue blocking the implementation of decentralization reform is the status of the territories in eastern Ukraine currently controlled by pro-Russian separatists, the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. According to paragraph 11 of the Minsk II agreement, the Ukrainian authorities were obliged to adopt permanent legislation on

the special status of these territories by the end of 2015 (Niland, 2016). However, this did not happen, as such a law would formalize these territories as autonomous from the Kyiv government, which Ukrainian leaders do not desire. Even the wording included in the Minsk agreement is ambiguous, and it is not clear whether this "special status" will fall under the policy of decentralization, whereby these territories will be granted some autonomy. However, control over core policy areas will remain the prerogative of the government in Kyiv, or will it mean the beginning of a federalization process, whereby these two separatist regions will be granted ample autonomy and a legislatively confirmed handover of control over the territories (Chromiec and Koenig, 2015, pp. 6-7).

In the field of customs regulation, Ukraine must develop joint initiatives on import, export, and transit operations, cooperate on the automation of customs and other trade procedures, and exchange information to develop common positions within relevant international organizations. The gradual approximation to EU customs legislation, as defined by EU and international standards, will promote transparency and simplification of customs procedures and reduce the length of customs procedures (Poshedin and Chulaievska, 2017, p. 102). In this sense, on August 1, 2016, the first step was taken by introducing the "Single Window" system. This system aims to create a single electronic database, allowing all control authorities and customs offices to automatically exchange information about consignments crossing the border with Ukraine and the results of their inspection. The new system reduces costs for the business environment, as all companies can initiate customs control before the goods arrive at the respective customs office. Also, this is a step toward reducing corruption in this field, with all communications with the authorities involved being carried out electronically. At the same time, the "Single Window" system ensures the efficient distribution of resources since cargo shipments are examined simultaneously by all control authorities (Government Portal, 2016).

The fiscal system and policy also need to undergo significant reforms. Ukraine is committed to applying the principles of good governance in the tax field, particularly transparency, information exchange, and fair tax competition. The signed Association Agreement provides cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in the fight against tax fraud in both the private and public sectors. Since the single market of the European Union provides for

the free movement of people, goods, and capital, and with the implementation of the DCFTA agreement, trade between the EU and Ukraine has increased considerably, solving the problem of tax fraud is a priority for the Ukrainian government. Ukraine has introduced international regulatory and supervisory standards to combat tax evasion and improve cooperation with the EU in the fight against the smuggling of excise goods (Poshedin and Chulaievska, 2017, p. 102). In recent years, the total number of taxes has been reduced from 22 to 11, and a major tax reform currently being debated proposes a single tax rate of 20% for wages, VAT, and personal and corporate income, thus significantly simplifying paying taxes and minimizing the possibilities of conflict with the tax authorities regarding their interpretation (Chromiec and Koenig, 2015, p. 5).

Ukraine's flawed judicial system is one area where the country has seen a lack of progress in reforming it. Two bodies govern the Ukrainian justice. The High Council of Justice is the main body in the judicial governance system of Ukraine. It has complete control over the appointment and dismissal of Ukrainian judges. Key responsibilities also include protecting judges from unlawful interference by other agencies and holding judges accountable for professional misconduct, including allowing the prosecution of judges. The High Qualification Commission of Judges is Ukraine's second body of justice. It is responsible for the selection of future judges and checks current judges who do not meet the criteria of professionalism and integrity during recertification processes. Unfortunately, both bodies were for a long time under the influence of interest groups existing within the judicial system, often subordinated to the Ukrainian oligarchs. As a result, both institutions have often been accused of covering for corrupt judges and blocking all previous attempts to overhaul Ukraine's judiciary.

The lack of progress in this area has demonstrated that it is impossible to reform the judicial system without changing the approach regarding the composition of these institutions. The idea of a new approach has been supported by government reformers, civil society experts, and Ukraine's international partners. Even the current president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, during his campaign for the 2019 presidential election, promised to initiate a comprehensive reform of the judicial system. Accordingly, in June 2021, parliamentarians of the Supreme Rada adopted two laws aimed at establishing a credible basis for reforming the judicial system. Mainly, these laws provide for the participation of independent international

experts in the future selection process. The approach goes beyond the European recommendations regarding justice reform, and the Venice Commission positively evaluated the assumed commitment (Halushka and Shevchuk, 2021).

The deoligarchization of the state was another campaign promise of President Zelenskiy, who aimed to identify and prosecute corrupt officials. Since he came into office and his party won an absolute majority in parliament, some progress has been made in this area by reinstating the law on illicit enrichment. However, in most cases of illicit enrichment, the connection of the officials involved with various Ukrainian oligarchs is demonstrated. Thus, the fight against corruption began explicitly with the adoption of legislation aimed at reducing the influence of these oligarchs. Historically, Ukrainian oligarchs have embezzled funds through several methods: they manipulated public procurement and subsidies, particularly in the energy market, pursued enterprise privatization and large-scale tax evasion, and obtained illegal profits from the state. It is estimated that fraudulent public procurement alone brought annual losses of around 11 billion euros to the public budget. Thus, in order to intensify the fight against corruption, two agencies were created: the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, responsible for verifying the wealth declarations of parliamentarians, mayors, police officers, judges, and prosecutors and for identifying conflicts of interest in the public service, and the National Office Anticorruption conducts preliminary investigations and initiates criminal cases against high-ranking officials whose incomes do not match their expenses (Chromiec and Koenig, 2015, pp. 7-8).

Another essential aspect of the process of democratic change in Ukraine is the concern for the environment and climate change. The Association Agreement with the European Union pays considerable attention to environmental issues. This partnership enables Ukraine to improve its environmental standards in areas such as air quality, water quality, waste and resource management, and industrial pollution. However, it should be noted that there are no transparent and clear procedures for the environmental assessment of any economic activity in Ukraine, an extremely challenging chapter for the Kyiv government. Thus, it is necessary to approve a law on environmental impact assessment by introducing a European model for establishing an environmental impact assessment procedure. To meet these challenges, Ukraine

is working to stabilize and improve the environment by integrating environmental policies into economic and social development (DAI, 2022).

One of Ukraine's successful reforms has been in the digital sector. In this regard, a new branch of the government was established, the Ministry of Digital Transformation, which aims to create a "smartphone state." In 2018, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the strategy for developing the Digital Economy and Society for 2018-2020. Thus, the principles of Ukraine's development in the digital space at the state level and the development of the digital economy were identified. According to them, any member of society has the right to access digital technologies, and they should become a tool for achieving the development goals of various sectors of the national economy. At the same time, the Ukrainian government saw this reform as an opportunity to attract additional investments and integrate Ukraine into the European and global communications system. This strategy has also led to the strengthening of cyber security measures at the state level, which until this point, has been extremely poorly developed (Yanovska, Levchenko, Tvoronovych, and Bozhok, 2019, p. 3). For example, one of the largest energy companies in Ukraine was the target of hacker attacks that caused power outages for two million people. Thus, in 2020, the mobile e-government application, Diva was launched, which allowed all interaction between Ukrainian citizens and their government to be managed online. Thus, this step towards digitization not only simplified the provision of public services but was also another measure in the fight against corruption. According to the Minister of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, preparing this reform involved studying the experiences of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Great Britain, and Singapore. The digitization reform is to have an impact on the "traditional" sectors of the Ukrainian economic system and facilitate a critical change in the behavior of citizens and businesses. In this sense, Ukraine's ambitious digitization reform still has enormous potential (Ukraine World, 2021).

Energy is one of the strategic sectors of the Ukrainian economy whose safe, stable, and sustainable operation and development are vital for most aspects of social life and public welfare. The energy sector of Ukraine is crucial for the EU because Ukraine is a key actor in the energy security process of the entire European continent. Ukraine's energy security has become paramount with the onset of Russia's hybrid aggression. The government in Kyiv has been forced to adopt a new approach to energy security under the pressure of economic aggression,

ongoing blackmail from Russian state corporations, and the threat of cutting off energy supplies, natural gas, and petroleum products from Russia. In this context, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Energy Strategy of Ukraine 2035. The energy reform aims to align national legislation with EU legislation, norms, and standards, as stipulated in the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union. The given reform includes the introduction of efficient rules and mechanisms for the energy market, de-monopolization, and promotion of competition. Also, the mentioned strategy follows the introduction of competitive conditions to stimulate the production of energy from renewable sources, the reform of the coal industry in Ukraine, and the introduction of an integrated approach to the establishment of energy and environmental policies. In addition to this long-term Plan, in March 2022, Ukraine will be connected to the European electricity grid. This process came as Ukraine's electricity grid operator disconnected its electricity system from the Russian-operated grid to which it had always been connected on February 24. This disconnection was planned and was to be a 72-hour trial to demonstrate that Ukraine could function independently. This test was one of the requirements for further connection to the European network, which Ukraine has been working on since 2017. However, the armed attack on Ukraine by the Russian Federation, which began on the night of February 24, prompted the electricity transmission system operator, Ukrenergo, to send a letter to the European Network of Electricity Transmission System Operators, requesting authorization for the connection to the European network, which, according to the plans, was supposed to take place in 2023. Ukraine initiated the process of joining the European network as early as 2005 in order to reduce its dependence on Russia, which, over time, has proven to be an unreliable partner. Thus, on March 16, 2022, the two systems were synchronized following a process that was compared by the European Commissioner for Energy, Kadri Simson, to "a year's work in two weeks" (Blaustein, 2022).

Since 2014, Ukraine has taken significant steps towards modernization and democratization. In this process, the EU is a crucial economic and political supporter. EU support for reforms in Ukraine consists of various types of financial aid, without which the correct implementation of the Association Agreement would be impossible. Since 2014, the EU and the European financial institutions have mobilized an unprecedented support package of over €16.5 billion in grants and loans to support reforms in Ukraine. EU assistance to Ukraine

is carried out in various programs, advisory missions, projects, and sectoral and direct budget support (European Commission, 2020).

However, a whole series of obstacles and risks remain in Ukraine's democratic path. These include domestic factors such as bureaucratic resistance, corruption, or oligarchic influence, as well as the costs and uncertainties of destabilization in eastern Ukraine by the Russian Federation.

2.1. The integration of Ukraine amid the crisis

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched against Ukraine, a war not seen on the European continent for about 80 years. The trauma of World War II transformed Western Europe into a community dominated by "a state of eternal peace." The European Union was the nucleus that enabled this dream to become a reality, elaborating a broad set of political values based on peace, democracy, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. This reality gradually spread in Central and Eastern Europe, except for Russia and Belarus, which followed a different course of the totalitarian state, which the EU or other global actors did not challenge in any way which could be perceived as a threat to Russia's security. EU member states, which have so far opposed the extension of the accession prospect for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, invoked the strategic realist argument that they did not want to provoke Russia into undermining the peace of Europe. As time has shown, this reasoning has proven to be flawed, considering Russia's successive invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 on a much larger scale.

On the contrary, it seems that this argument is what helped start the war. The failed policy of strategic ambiguity towards the three most active states of the Eastern Partnership, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, must be changed with a policy of concrete actions. Granting candidate status to these states would be a strong political signal to support these states and start the complex accession procedures (Emerson, Blockmans, Movchan, and Remizov, 2022, pp. 1- 2). In an extraordinary session of the European Parliament on March 1, 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky made a direct request to MEPs and EU leaders. Speaking from a bunker in Kyiv, as Russian missiles bombarded Ukraine, he asked the EU for a path to EU membership. The day before, Ukraine submitted its formal application for EU membership and

requested that it be considered under a special procedure due to its submitted context (Europa Liberă România, 2022). Despite this rhetoric about a potential 'special' or 'fast track' procedure, no such procedure exists under the EU Treaties. Like the other candidate countries, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia must go through all the stages of the accession procedure provided for in Article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union. This article states that any "European state" that respects the democratic values and principles on which the Union is built can apply for EU membership. This official step triggers a long preparatory process in which member states must approve each step unanimously (Official Journal of the European Union, 2012).

The results of the 2020-2021 Eastern Partnership Index, a monitoring tool produced by the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership, show that Ukraine has made significant progress in normative and legal harmonization. Even if there are still gaps between the law and the implementation of the rules, especially when it comes to fighting corruption and ensuring the independence of the justice system, the democratic progress achieved so far is a testament to the far-reaching effects of the Eastern Partnership framework and the implementation of the Agreement of Association with Ukraine since 2014 (Longhurst, 2021, pp. 4-7). Through financial and administrative support, the Eastern Partnership policy has effectively helped guide the democratic progress of Ukraine and other partner states, and its results so far demonstrate the potential for democratic development that EU candidate status can bring.

The granting of candidate status to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia must be done in line with the existing framework of the Eastern Partnership. The EU should be careful not to abandon this policy and its associated toolkit, which has delivered results and supported democratic development in its vicinity. Maintaining the policy of the Eastern Partnership alongside the candidate status opens up a series of opportunities both for the EU and for the region that falls under the purview of the Eastern Partnership. So far, the Eastern Partnership, especially in its multilateral dimension, has functioned as a framework for addressing important priorities such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and structural reforms. Coherence in the Eastern Partnership region will be essential to address the common challenges the region faces and will continue to face, such as corruption, the rule of law, connectivity, and climate change.

In times of tense relations between neighbors, the framework of the multilateral Eastern Partnership continues to offer a mediated space for continuous dialogue between politicians,

public administration, civil society, and other actors, increasing the chances of conciliation and negotiation. Furthermore, after the war in Ukraine, the instruments and regional structures of the Eastern Partnership will be essential in addressing environmental damage and cross-border issues, which Ukraine will have to address in cooperation with the Republic of Moldova (Furtuna, 2022).

The results of the Eastern Partnership index show a growing gap between Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova on one hand, and Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Armenia on the other. This gap is a testament to a lack of democratic development and a clear perspective, which makes countries more vulnerable to subjugation and exploitation by domestic and foreign autocrats (Longhurst, 2021, p. 5).

Investing in the democratic development of some countries at the expense of others is neither a functional approach to security nor a correct application of European values. Ensuring the continuity of the Eastern Partnership policy would send an important message to stakeholders in Armenia and democratic actors in Belarus and Azerbaijan regarding the opportunity that exists for these states. Indeed, the Eastern Partnership requires an adaptation according to the current developments and context. Nevertheless, maintaining a robust regional framework will be essential to ensure the overall development and resilience of the region. Weakening it would be a strategic mistake, significantly undermining the EU's regional influence (Furtuna, 2022).

Conclusions

The article followed the description and analysis of the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, one of the instruments for the implementation of this policy by the EU. We have identified the objectives of this program, among which are: the gradual integration into the EU economy of the partner states and the convergence with its policies, the simplification of the entry conditions into the EU, cooperation in the field of energy security, integrated border management, regional development, and others. Thus, I managed to find whether the EP created a genuine platform for strengthening relations between the EU and the partner states and what the difficulties were recorded during the implementation of this program. Indeed, the EP can be described as a successful project, given that a large part of the previously

proposed and described objectives have been achieved. However, this success can be characterized as relative. In this regard was achieved only by 3 of the six partner states achieved significant progress: Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia. According to the Eastern Partnership Index, on a scale from 0 to 1, Ukraine and Moldova are leaders in the areas of cooperation targeted by the EaP, each with a score of 0.70, followed by Georgia with 0.65. Armenia and Azerbaijan scored 0.63 and 0.44, respectively (Longhurst, 2021, p. 14). Moreover, a fundamental failure of the EP can be considered that Belarus suspended its participation in this program in June 2021. Namely, the weak progress of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the self-exclusion of Belarus indicate to us that the progress of the EaP is a relative one, manifested only in the case of the other three partners states.

By analyzing the relations between the EU and Ukraine starting from 1991 until now, we have concluded that there have been several stages in these relations. The period 1991-2010 is characterized by a rapprochement of Ukraine with the EU, in which there is a consensus, both at the political and societal level, regarding the need to carry out democratic reforms and obtain the status of a candidate for EU accession. The period of 2010-2014 was marked by the total change of the vector of the Ukrainian state. President Yanukovich and the political elite opted for a rapprochement with Russia and the abandonment of the progress achieved in the relationship with the EU. Thus, the signing of the Association Agreement at the PDE Summit in Vilnius in 2013 was refused, which led to civil society dissatisfaction and the organization of protests against the leadership, known as EuroMaidan. Thus, President Yanukovich was dismissed, and the new political leadership continued the path of European integration and the implementation of democratic reforms. The significant progress made by Ukraine in harmonizing its legislation with European standards, but also the context of the crisis in which this state is currently, led to the submission of the application for EU membership in February 2022. There is some divergence within the EU regarding the granting of candidate status to Ukraine. Granting this status will mean a message of strong political support for Ukraine. By obtaining this status and starting the negotiation process with the EU, Ukraine can continue with new and additional forces in its process of achieving democratic reforms in order to join the EU once all the criteria are met. What is certain is that there will be no "special" or "fast" procedure for this process and that Ukraine will have a long way to go to the status of a member state of

the EU. The European Commission, led by Ursula von der Leyen, announced that it recommends the European Council grant candidate state status to Ukraine. The final word on this possibility was given at the European Council meeting on 23-24 June 2022, when the European leaders decided to grant this status to Ukraine and Moldova.

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RENEWING THE APPROACH TOWARDS THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE THIRD SECTOR AND GOVERNANCE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS, WITH AN INTEREST IN ALBANIA'S CASE

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Abstract: *The development of the third sector in the countries of the Western Balkans, along with other sensitive issues, is at the centre of the analysis of the European integration processes of the region. Underlining the difficulties and limited contribution that civil society organizations, human rights associations, foundations, groups of expertise and social enterprises have for the advancing of democracy and the protection of citizens' rights, international organizations, and European institutions view state cooperation with third sector as an issue, which needs to be addressed. The assessment of third sector organizations guiding principles of cooperation with the government institutions is carried out through this study in a regional context of the Western Balkans literature, third sector researches and paper reports. The research design and the construction of the variables guided the data collection process in a mixed methodology, where the main inquiring instruments are the questionnaires, focus groups and documents review. The regional context of the study included a specific analysis of Albania as a distinct case in which the functioning of third sector organizations is reported to be characterized by fragmentation, incoherence and struggle to exist. The conclusions of the research call for a renewed approach to the third sector with a particular emphasis on cooperation, support and sustain from government institutions, essential for renewing of interventions, projects and strategies that promote the rule of law, human rights and democracy.*

Keywords: third sector organizations, government institutions, guiding principles of cooperation.

Introduction

Partnership and representation are the guiding and regulatory principles for the cooperation of third sector organizations with state actors in systems where governance is a guarantee of accountability, transparency and openness. The most recent document of European

Commission (EC) that underlines the European Union's perspective towards the development of the third sector, entitled "The Thematic Program for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)", whose interventions "contribute to an enabling and accessible environment for civil society; a more inclusive CSO participation in dialogue; and, to strengthen CSO partner capacities" (EC, 2021, p. 1) includes program priorities reflecting the priorities of the EC with a focus on "[g]overnance, [p]eace and [s]ecurity, and [h]uman [d]evelopment" (EC, 2021, p. 2). Several other paragraphs of the document highlight sensitive issues that prioritize third sector development at global and national level, with particular attention to: "an inclusive, participatory, empowered, and independent civil society and democratic space in partner countries; an inclusive and open dialogue with and between civil society organisations; a better-informed and more inclusive society with a developed sense of co-responsibility for sustainable development, including addressing global challenges" (EC, 2021, p. 2).

Following the priorities of the EC and the discussion regarding the role of third sector organizations in Europe, in addition to understanding of the dimensions of contemporary literature, in the point of view of Bernard Enjolras (2018) there is a contrast linked to the absence of a "clear identity of the third sector in Europe" (Enjolras, 2018, p. 1). For the author "there is no clear-shared understanding across Europe and within the European Union regarding what exactly the third sector is and what its role is in the European public space" (Enjolras, 2018, p. 1).

The point of view of Enjolras, and the concepts of Lester M. Salamon and Wojciech Sokolowski (2018), who define the third sector on the basis of: "a) [p]rivateness, b) [p]ublic purpose and c) [f]ree choice-that is- pursued without compulsion" (Salamon and Sokolowski, 2018, p. 25) led the research to question on the guiding principles of the third sector and their function in connecting citizens with governance, decision-making and institutions in specific development characteristics of the Western Balkans and recent circumstances that influence the European perspective of each single country in the region. Underlining the concept of "[p]ublic purpose" which according to Salamon and Sokolowski (2018) "is undertaken primarily to create public goods" (Salamon and Sokolowski, 2018, p. 25), the question that the research raises is: "[h]ow to empirically analyse the request for a renewed approach to the guiding principles of

cooperation between third sector organizations and state institutions with the aim of contributing to the advancement of the role of the third sector in society?"

Starting from the conceptualizing process of the cooperation (state-third sector) guiding principles, measuring "partnership" and "representation" as two main research variables provides valuable data for an empirically based appeal for the strengthening of the third sector, in the national and regional context. The inquiring processes focus in civil society organizations, human rights associations, foundations, groups of expertise and social enterprises based in Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo, where the research sample ($n = 328$) is composed of senior executives and practitioners with degrees in political sciences, law, social sciences, economy and finance. The research on the guiding principles of the third sector, with specific regard to the context of the Western Balkans, will provide through this study an empirical analysis for a further elaboration and evaluation of the current reality with the aim of raising awareness among state institutions, governments and public actors.

1. Rule of law, human rights and democracy— Distinguishing third sector role in the context of Western Balkans region.

Since the withdrawal of the dictatorial regimes in the early 1990s, the establishment of third sector in countries of Western Balkans was conceived as a new path to social solidarity with groups of vulnerable people, deprived of minimum living conditions. "Nations in transition" or "societies in transition" were terms reported by international organizations to highlight the weakness of the rule of law, human rights and democracies in the region.

The start of the European integration processes towards the perspective of membership in the structures of the European Union started to form a new projection of citizens' direct engagement role in decision-making processes. This new projection equipped the third sector in the countries of Western Balkans with the responsibility to build distance from the mind-set and practices of dictatorial regimes, where the government was equated with the high ranks of the power, while citizens forcefully obeyed.

In contrast, although these new instruments of freedom were important to create new paths, building active third sector organisations with clear functions in development of democracy and the protection of citizens' rights and fundamental freedoms still is considered quite absent, and an important prerogative for further achievements of the European integration processes. After more than three decades, still, the weakness of institutions, rule of law and human rights represent a permanent condition of underdevelopment in the region.

Questioning about the role that third sector organizations and the practitioners involved in it play as contributors to the strengthening of democratic institutions, various regional and international organizations find that this role is dramatically underestimated. According to the European Court of Auditors "the civil society currently does not play a sufficiently large role in policy and decision-making" (European Court of Auditors, 2022, p. 40). They consider that "[w]ith the exception of North Macedonia and to a certain extent Montenegro, where the EU delegation reports recent improvements to the environment in which civil society operates, the region's CSOs remain muted" (European Court of Auditors, 2022, p. 40), and report Albania and Serbia as countries where the consultation of civil society organizations is "ad hoc and that civil society recommendations are often ignored in the final versions of documents" (European Court of Auditors, 2022, p. 40).

In examining the economic, political and social factors that characterize the multidimensional crisis of Western Balkan societies, Visegrad Insight (2022) highlights the absence of a civil society acting to "safeguard democracy" (Visegrad Insight, 2022, p. 13). The organization specifically reports that "[t]he global trend of polarisation as a result of the culture wars intensifies in the WB, which disunites societies and decreases the ability of civil society to safeguard democracy, now seen as a 'Western import'" (Visegrad Insight, 2022, p. 13). They also emphasize "a sense of general powerlessness and lack of agency by formalised civil society to influence politics, as an intermediary between citizens and government" (Visegrad Insight, 2022, p. 13).

Analysing the factors with a clear impact for the third sector, sometimes external and less dependent on the social dynamics of the Western Balkans, the European Court of Auditors refers to the lack of support from European Union (EU) for third sector organizations in the

region by highlighting an evidence, which “shows that EU support for civil society action on the rule of law is insufficient in meeting the needs of the sector and mostly based on short term projects. An independent evaluation on the rule of law has noted that the lack of progress correlates to, among other things, ‘inadequate participation or marginalisation of civil society’” (European Court of Auditors, 2022, pp. 18-19).

In support of this statement European Court of Auditors find reference to Transparency International which stresses to the “lack of proper consideration for the role of CSOs, in both political dialogue and financial support” in its 2018 assessment” (European Court of Auditors, 2022, p. 19).

2. Fragmentation, incoherence and struggling to exist— Features of third sector in Albania.

The third sector in Albania is one of the most underrated contributors to the progress of democracy. The Civil Society Index Analytical Country Report (2010) for Albania notes that “[a]fter independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, the historical circumstances did not favour the development of an active third sector in the country” (IDM, 2010, p. 5). This observation, which goes on underlining that “[t]he establishment of a communist regime after World War II, which soon became one of the cruellest dictatorships in Europe, completely dashed hopes for an active civil society or even academic discourse on the concept for almost half a century in the country” (IDM, 2010, p. 5), still, confine the conditions for the advancement of the third sector to a restriction.

Fragmentation, incoherence and the struggle for existing, as well as the absence of adequate legislation since the overthrow of the dictatorship, as the insignificant financial resources of governments, for more than three decades have prevented the civil society organizations in participating and act as strong human rights defenders against corruption, organized crime and abuses that form the darkest shadows of the Albanian reality. Civil society organizations role and functions, which have an extraordinary impact on social development

and must be in the front line of social interventions for citizens' advocacy, empowerment and action-based community movements, are weak and disorganized.

In analysing third sector in Albania, the United Nations Development Program (2020) states that “[c]ivil society does not often mobilise publicly, for example through demonstrations, and is not equipped with enough expertise and resources to objectively raise human rights concerns, engage in joint monitoring activities and report on the state's responsibility to discharge its social, economic and cultural rights obligations under international and domestic law (UNDP, 2020, p. 23).

Furthermore, the Western Balkans Democracy Initiative (2021) stresses to “a tendency of shrinking civic space and concerns of capture of civic space by politics” (Western Balkans Democracy Initiative (2021), 2021. p. 45). According to this organization “CSOs are not fully able to exercise functions of channelling citizens' concerns into policy processes. The tendency of shrinking space is problematic, because it prevents CSOs from voicing the concerns of different communities and from performing their watchdog role effectively” (Western Balkans Democracy Initiative (2021), 2021. p. 45). The Western Balkans Democracy Initiative (2021) also underlines as a major issue the presence of “politically affiliated or supported CSOs serving the government or those in power” who “seek to overshadow current civil society” (Western Balkans Democracy Initiative (2021), 2021. p. 45).

This rather severe description of the third sector in Albania continues with Freedom House's 2021 report, which considers that “NGOs have identified their non-involvement in policy-making as a main challenge to their work, alongside financial sustainability and concerns over the legal and fiscal framework for their operations” (Freedom House, 2021). Also, Freedom House highlights how the rules of the COVID-19 pandemic have been exploited to be against civil society organizations. According to Freedom House (2021) “[l]egal initiatives diminishing the independence of civil society, measures restricting the right to assembly, and the government's exploitation of the COVID-19 pandemic sharply weakened civil society and depleted civic space” (Freedom House, 2021).

3. Methodology

3.1. The design of the research

The construction of variables and of a data process by following the methodology of the exploratory study in the field focused on the statements, opinions and ideas of senior executives, members and activists of organizations, human rights associations, foundations, social enterprises and humanitarian groups, who have been engaged in intense spoken and non-verbal communication within the context of Western Balkans region.

Structuring of the research and selection of the mixed methods on which the survey instruments (questionnaires, focus groups and document review) aimed at evaluating in detail a complex data collection process that revolved around the two independent variables of the study: “[p]artnership” (1), and “[r]epresentation” (2). The constructs of two independent variables find reference to literature review as the principal guiding principles of third sector cooperation with government institutions. The dependent variables of the research are: “[t]he level of contribution of third sector organizations in ‘public good’” (1), and “[p]resent interventions to promote the rule of law, human rights and democracy” (2).

3.2. Research settings

Inquiring into the dimensions of the guiding principles of cooperation between the third sector and state actors led the research to review the regional context of the Western Balkan countries and to follow the differences that exist from one country to another. The construction and conceptualization of variables were carried out following research sampling and data collection procedures in order to conduct the analysis through empirical paths as guiding approaches to the selection of the research setting, starting from the early phases of research design. While the qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups and documents review) found sensitive ground for the regional involvement of participants from Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo, the cross-analysis of the data with the exploratory questionnaire followed the one-single nation setting procedures in Albania, for logistical reasons, and carried out study research that required specific information on the local context to understand the secondary role that civil society organizations play in providing accountability.

3.3. Research sample and inquiring instruments

The research sample is composed of 328 respondents, randomly selected to represent third sector organizations, human rights associations, foundations, social enterprises and humanitarian groups. Most of the respondents have a degree in political sciences, social sciences and jurisprudence, with more than ten years of work experience (Table 1).

Table 1. Educational qualification of respondents, and engagement time in third sector organizations

Graduation * Engagement time in third sector organizations				
Count				
		Engagement time in third sector organizations		
		Less than 10 years	More than 10 years	Total
Graduation degree	Political sciences	42	54	96
	Social sciences	32	78	110
	Law	31	28	59
	Economic sciences/Finance	5	37	42
	Other	10	11	21
Total		120	208	328

Source: A-Institute, 2022

The structured primary data is collected through questionnaires (Creswell, 2009), the design of which has formed ten sections of open and closed questions. Each respondent was identified, as the inquiring process was organized in individual meetings, due to the complex construct of each section.

The secondary data was collected from thirty-seven personal interviews (Kothari, 2004) and eight focus-groups (Steward and Shamdasani, 1990), where membership was divided in two groups: senior executives and practitioners in civil society organizations, human rights associations, foundations, groups of expertise and social enterprises (1) and state institutions and public administration senior executives and officers (2).

Considering advantages of the method of focus-groups and in particular that “they yielded a large amount of information over a relatively short period of time” (Mack, *et al.*, 2005, p. 51) as well “accessing a broad range of views on a specific topic” (Mack, *et al.*, 2005, p. 51), each meeting was conducted with the aim of gathering information on:

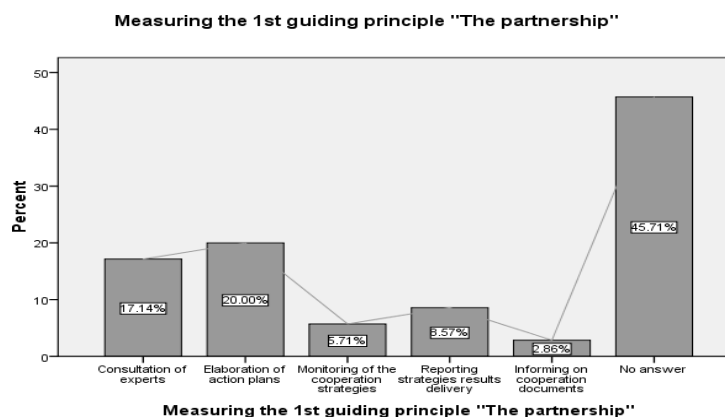
- Assessing roles, functions and responsibilities of third sector and state actors in the implementation of joint interventions for the protection of human rights, oriented by the development priorities of the integration process in the European Union,
- Knowing through direct interaction with public administration officials, as well third sector senior executives and practitioners about the role they play and concrete form of involvement in policy-making consultation processes,
- Exploring the current level of engagement of third sector practitioners in interventions involving government institutions through formal cooperation platforms,
- Understanding the influence of third sector experts on an approach to restore the role of civil society organizations in promoting the rule of law, human rights and democracy.

4. Statistical analyse and findings

The dimensions of the literature surrounding the independent variable “[p]artnership” consider that this is a guiding principle of cooperation between the third sector and government based on the direct (and productive) involvement in the process of many government institutions, third sector organizations and the public (known as representatives of the community). Feedback from the respondents on their experience of cooperation with institutions, guided by this principle was absent (45.7%) or limited in:

1. Consultation of experts during the drafting of cooperation documents (17.1%);
2. Elaboration of action plans, including roles and responsibilities (20%);
3. Monitoring of the implementation of cooperation strategies (5.7%);
4. Reporting of the meetings upon delivery of the results of the cooperation strategies (8.6%);
5. Informing State institutions, organizations and the public about cooperation documents (2.9%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Descriptive statistics of the guiding principle of partnership



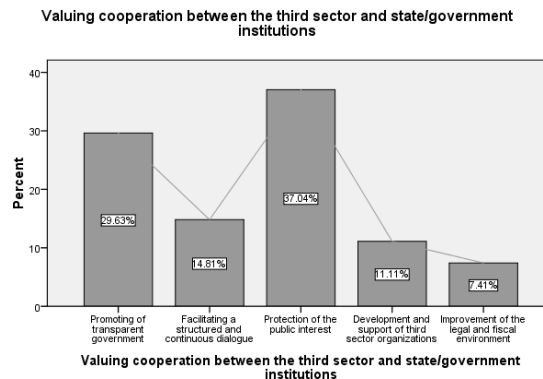
Source: A-Institute, 2022

To the question: "What do you think is the most important value of strengthening cooperation between the third sector and state/government institutions?" respondents believe that these values are linked to:

1. Promotion of a transparent government (29.6%);
2. Facilitating a structured and continuous dialogue between the third sector and public authorities (14.8%);
3. Protection of the public interest (37%);
4. Development and support of third sector organizations (11.1%);

5. Improvement of the legal and fiscal environment for the benefit of the third sector support (7.4%) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Valuing cooperation between the third sector and state/government institutions



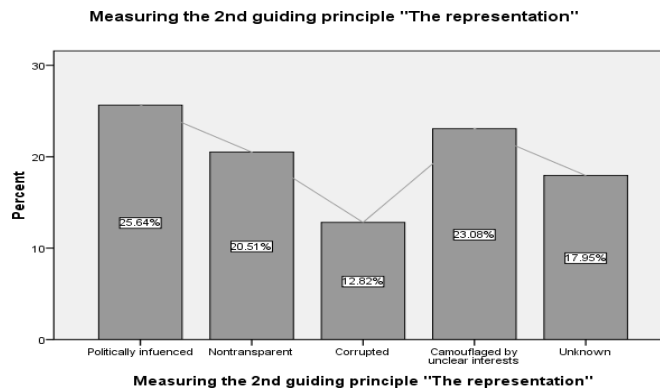
Source: A-Institute, 2022

The cross-analysis of the data with the focus groups revealed the absence of cooperation mechanisms, structures and platforms between the third sector organizations and government.

Inquiring on the guiding principle of “[r]epresentation” as the second independent variable of the study, with purpose to measure the numbered presence of authorities among third sector practitioners, selected to represent organizations in a formal cooperation agenda with different levels of governance (parliament, government, ministries or even institutions at the local level), to the question: “How do you evaluate the procedures that mandate civil society organizations to build cooperation with offices and institutions of the government?”, respondents replied considering these procedures as:

1. Politically influenced (25.6%);
2. Not transparent (20.5%);
3. Corrupt (12.8%);
4. Camouflaged by unclear interests (23.1%);
5. Unknown (18%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Descriptive statistics of the guiding principle of representation

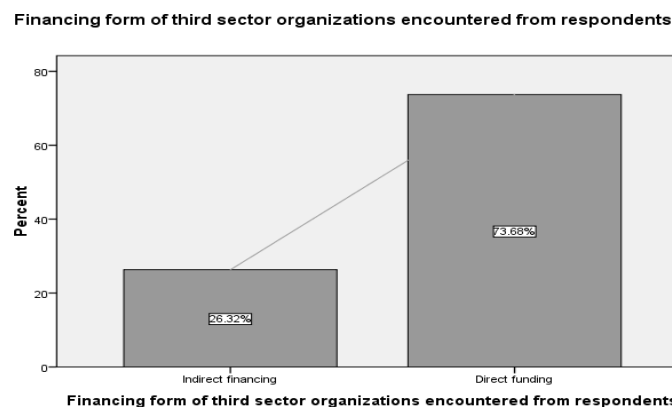


Source: A-Institute, 2022

Analysis of the data shows that 71% of respondents do not have access to funds and financial support for community development projects, interventions and initiatives. Public sector and civil society cooperation at local, national and regional level is the most limited, and to the question: "What is the most frequent form of funding for third sector organizations?" 29% of those who benefited from financial resources in the last two years replied:

1. Indirect financing (through financial facilities for organizations) (26.3%);
2. Direct funding (through grant schemes) (73.7%) (Figure 4).

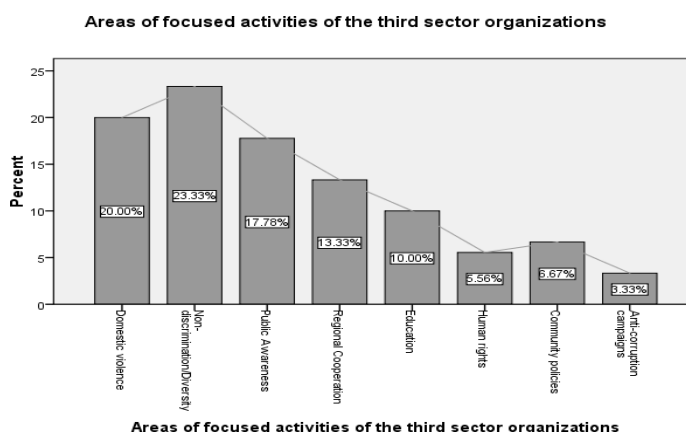
Figure 4. Financing form of third sector organizations



Source: A-Institute, 2022

As data observes, the activities in which third sector practitioners have been mostly involved in the last two years have focused on: “domestic violence” (20%), “non-discrimination/diversity” (23.3%), “public awareness” (17.8%), “regional cooperation” (13.3%) and “education” (10%). Figure 5 shows that the least commitment is related to “anti-corruption campaigns” (3.3%), “human rights” (5.6%), and “community policies” (6.7%).

Figure 5. Areas of third sector focused activities in the last two years



Source: A-Institute, 2022

5. Discussion

In reference to Almond and Verba (1963), as well as Tocqueville (2000), who consider third sector organizations as arenas for civic and political participation and as schools for democracy” (Almond and Verba, 1963; Tocqueville, 2000 [1835] cited in Enjolras and Sivesind, 2018, p. 101) Bernard Enjolras and Karl Henrik Sivesind (2018) in their analysis emphasize the thought of Putnam (1993, 2000) who according to the authors considers the third sector as a major contributor to social capital, to those bonds of trust and reciprocity without which neither democracy nor markets can operate” (Putnam 1993, 2000, cited in Enjolras and Sivesind, 2018, p. 101). The authors ask “[w]hat difference does the third sector make for

society?" (Enjolras and Sivesind, 2018, p. 96). By highlighting the "expressive role", "value guardian role", (Enjolras and Sivesind, 2018, p. 96) and by stressing the "advocacy role" (Enjolras and Sivesind, 2018, p. 96) they consider that "[t]his civil society role is an essential part of a democratic society ruled by law because the legitimacy of political power relies on public discussions, hearings and consultations with affected groups" (Enjolras and Sivesind, 2018, p. 96). By referring to these concepts as fundamental to research design and variable conceptualization, and shifting to the analysis of research results, the study focused on the reality of cooperation between government institutions and third sector organizations in Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo, by inquiring on the value of the guiding principles of this cooperation in front of the realities of evidence-based research.

According to respondents, "monitoring the implementation of cooperation strategies" is a minor function for senior executives and practitioners engaged in civil society organizations, human rights associations, foundations, groups of expertise and social enterprises. Consultation processes for the definition of objectives, action plans and timelines based on the logistical organization are rare and undervalued. With regard to the elaboration of data, according to the respondents, meetings of interest groups with public administration officials, who have an important role to play in the implementation of interventions focused on the social problems caused by corruption and criminal affairs are fragmented and quite absent.

Furthermore, the correlative analysis of the data with the focus groups, the interviews and in particular with the data extracted from the examination of the documents showed that "information of state institutions, organizations and the public on the cooperation documents" is another minor function in which the principle of partnership is poorly supported. Generally, the review of central government documents and strategy papers shows the lack of guiding paradigms for third sector interventions. In particular, interventions that focus on social issues and problems are not oriented according to contemporary instances, recent literature and theories, considered as guides of the third sector, government institutions alike. This absence reflects a low level of expertise and limited attention to contemporary knowledge.

In search of the causes, the analyses of correlative data (from the quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments) show the lack of a "structured and continuous dialogue"

on which to base meaningful collaboration between the third sector and governments. The data also shows that the principle of representation is negatively conditioned by the lack of regulatory procedures, and for the procedures that already exist, respondents widely expressed the consideration that these procedures are corrupt or unfair, or not transparent. Most of the respondents, interviewees and focus groups members expressed concern that the cooperation mechanisms between third sector organizations and state institutions are disguised as unclear interests, as well as politically influenced.

6. Conclusion

The study analysed the principles that guide the cooperation between third sector organizations and government institutions through the direct involvement of the representatives of the first group, who have expressed through their opinions the gravity of the absence of formal platforms-based partnership and representation in the forums, cooperation groups and structures, which apparently aim to support this cooperation.

According to the literature, the third sector promotes citizens' participation in decision-making processes and improves the transparency and accountability of government institutions. The analysis of the data shows that the merged activities and areas of interest of the third sector are deeply conditioned by the absence of cooperation between governance and the third sector, lack of attention and a rather dramatic absence of resources throughout the Western Balkan region, but especially in Albania. This absence has a profound impact on the contribution that the third sector makes to the process of strengthening the rule of law, human rights and democracy.

While international organizations emphasize a reduced role of European structures in supporting the third sector in the Western Balkans, highlighting the case of Albania, promoting human rights, community policies and anti-corruption campaigns lack of funding and European resources. The only driving mechanisms for third sector financing through indirect financing (1) and direct funding (2) are negatively conditioned by the absence of financial support from public and non-public funds, regulated by law.

As observed by the data, most of the guiding procedures within the processes that build some forms of cooperation between government institutions and the third sector are unknown, or non-transparent and politically influenced. In conclusion, the study calls for more transparency, support and sustain for this sector and for a major awareness concerning the weakening of the guiding principles that must promote the role of the third sector organizations through cooperation with state actors, as well as improve the approaches, interventions and projects of which the public needs.

Recommendations

- *The principle of partnership is based on the mutual recognition of the functions and importance of the roles of third sector organizations and government institutions. With reference to scientific literature and analysis coming from European organizations and institutions with a focus on monitoring the European integration processes of Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo, and of the Western Balkans region as a whole, the partnership of third sector organizations with institutions requires a renewed agenda and functional approach, based in formal regulatory platforms, boards and commissions.*
- *The principle of representation as a fundamental principle of the processes of setting up cooperation platforms between the third sector and governance structures, in particular in the Western Balkans region, requires transparent and fair formal procedures, where to base the representation of civil society organizations, human rights associations, foundations, groups of expertise and social enterprises in advancing democracy and in the European path of the region.*
- *The guiding principles of cooperation between third sector organizations and state institutions have a stimulating function for the operation of the third sector. The literature highlights the exceptional role of the third sector in the protection of human*

rights, freedoms and the advancement of democracy. Considering this particular point, government institutions should reprioritize and develop development and funding programs and ensure better access to resources for the third sector as starting points for public awareness interventions as well as regional cooperation and community policies.

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THE PARADOW OF SANCTIONS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ZIMBABWE'S EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: *Sanctions have been a common tool used by states and international organizations to address political crises and human rights abuses. Zimbabwe, in particular, has been the subject of multiple sanctions regimes over the past two decades, aimed at pressuring its government to implement democratic reforms and improve human rights conditions. This article examines the effectiveness of past sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe from a multidimensional perspective. It highlights the limitations of the measures in achieving their intended political objectives and their unintended socio-economic consequences. The article also explores the inadequate coordination and enforcement of the sanctions and the failure to address the root causes of the crisis. Lastly, it discusses the negative impact of the sanctions on international relations. The analysis emphasizes the need for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to sanctions, addressing enforcement challenges and minimizing unintended negative consequences on the civilian population.*

Keywords: sanctions, democracy, effectiveness, human rights, political crisis.

1. Introduction

Zimbabwe has experienced significant political and economic challenges over the past two decades, marked by human rights abuses, economic decline, and political instability. In response to these developments, the international community has imposed various sanctions on the country, primarily targeting individuals and entities associated with the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). These measures were intended to pressure the government to implement democratic reforms and address human rights abuses. However, the effectiveness of these sanctions remains a subject of debate, with critics arguing

that they have failed to achieve their objectives and even contributed to unintended negative consequences.

The work at hand aims to critically examine the past sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by the international community, with a focus on their impact and effectiveness. Together, we will explore the various grounds on which the sanctions have been criticized, including their limited effectiveness in achieving political objectives, unintended socio-economic consequences, potential reinforcement of the regime's grip on power, inadequate coordination and enforcement, failure to address the root causes of the crisis, and negative impact on international relations.

Drawing on existing literature and analysis, this article provides an overview of the challenges facing the international community in using sanctions as a tool for promoting democratic reforms and improving human rights conditions in Zimbabwe. By examining these challenges in detail, we will contribute to a better understanding of the limitations and potential of sanctions as a policy tool for addressing complex political crises.

Ultimately, the article aims to provide insights and some recommendations for future efforts to address the crisis in Zimbabwe, highlighting the need for a more coordinated and comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of the crisis and minimizes unintended negative consequences.

Methodologically, the article is reliant on a review of the literature devoted to the effectiveness of sanctions as a tool of foreign policy, with a particular focus on the case of Zimbabwe. The study adopts a critical perspective, acknowledging that the said type of literature is highly contested and often polarized. We do not seek to take a normative stance on the use of sanctions as a foreign policy tool; rather aiming to provide a nuanced assessment of the limitations of using the sanctions toolbox on Zimbabwe.

The study draws on a range of theoretical frameworks, including neorealism, liberalism, constructivism, and critical security studies, to provide a multi-dimensional analysis of the effectiveness of sanctions, but for the scope of this particular research all said frameworks are implicit rather than explicated.

2. Background information on Zimbabwe

In order to understand the context of the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe, it is essential to briefly explore the country's historical, political, and economic background. To set the tone, if one may. This part of the paper provides a brief and condensed overview of Zimbabwe's history leading up to the imposition of sanctions, focusing on key developments that influenced the international community's decision to impose sanctions.

Zimbabwe gained independence from British colonial rule in 1980, following a protracted armed struggle led by various nationalist groups, including the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Upon achieving independence, the country adopted a new constitution and held elections, which resulted in a victory for the ZANU party led by Robert Mugabe. Initially, the new government pursued a policy of national reconciliation, seeking to integrate former adversaries and promote social and economic development.

However, by the mid-1980s, tensions between ZANU and ZAPU escalated, leading to a brutal state-sponsored crackdown on opposition in the regions predominantly inhabited by the Ndebele ethnic group. Known as Gukurahundi¹, this period of violence resulted in thousands of deaths and established a pattern of repression and human rights abuses by the Mugabe regime (Sachikonye, 2011, p. 27). Later, the two parties merged to form ZANU-PF.

In the early 1990s, Zimbabwe's government embarked on a series of economic liberalization policies under the guidance of international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These reforms, however, failed to deliver sustained economic growth, and by the late 1990s, the country was grappling with high unemployment, inflation, and a growing fiscal deficit (Petrica, 2020a, pp 122-135).

The late 1990s also witnessed the emergence of a strong opposition movement, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which challenged the dominance of the ruling ZANU-PF party. The MDC's rise was partly fueled by the government's controversial land reform program, which involved the forcible seizure of white-owned commercial farms and their redistribution to landless black Zimbabweans. The land reform led to widespread economic

¹ In the Shona language this translates into "*the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains*".

disruption, food shortages, and a dramatic decline in agricultural production (Mlambo, 2014, p. 286).

The 2000s marked a period of political crisis and economic decline in Zimbabwe, characterized by contested elections, political violence, and widespread human rights abuses (Petrica, 2020a). The country had been ruled by President Robert Mugabe since 1980, until he was ousted in 2017, after a military coup. Mugabe's regime was marked by authoritarianism, corruption, and human rights abuses, leading to international condemnation and the imposition of sanctions.

The current government, led by President Emmerson Mnangagwa, has promised to reform the country's economy and improve its human rights record. However, progress has been slow, and the country continues to face challenges in areas such as governance, corruption, and the rule of law (US Department of State, 2022).

In conclusion, Zimbabwe's short-term history leading up to the imposition of sanctions is marked by a complex interplay of historical, political, and economic factors. The country's struggle for independence, early promise, and subsequent descent into political and economic crisis set the stage for the international community's decision to impose sanctions in an attempt to address the widespread human rights abuses and promote democratic reforms.

3. What are sanctions and why do they matter?

International sanctions are a key tool used by states and international organizations to influence the behavior of other states. Sanctions involve imposing economic, political, or social restrictions on a country or group of individuals to achieve specific policy objectives. Sanctions have been used to address a variety of issues, including human rights abuses, weapons proliferation, military aggression, and terrorism.

Sanctions are important in international relations for several reasons. First, they are considered by many a cost-effective non-military way to achieve foreign policy goals. Sanctions are typically less expensive and less risky than military intervention, making them a far more attractive option for actors seeking to alter states' behaviors.

Second, sanctions are normative methods of coercion or deterrence. For coercion purposes, they are designed to deter and punish violators, while also reinforcing societal norms

and expected behavior. As a means of deterrence, they can provide ways for states to demonstrate their commitment to international principles, values and norms, and the overall rules based international order. Sanctions are often imposed in response to violations of international law or human rights abuses, sending a signal that the international community will not tolerate such behavior (Hufbauer *et al.*, 2007, p. 16).

Third, sanctions can be a means of achieving collective action among states. By imposing sanctions collectively, states can signal their commitment to a particular issue and increase the likelihood of achieving policy objectives (Hufbauer *et al.*, 2007, p. 21). Concerted efforts can also lead to bandwagoning, whereby non-aligned nations join a collective action in order to avoid being left out of the action undertaken by their peers.

However, sanctions are not always effective and can have unintended consequences. The weight of scholarly opinion argues that sanctions can harm the civilian population of the designated state, exacerbate human rights abuses, and undermine economic development – even when targeted. Targeted sanctions, also known as smart sanctions or selective sanctions, are measures imposed by international actors such as governments or organizations to address specific concerns or objectives without causing widespread harm to the general population. These sanctions typically focus on individuals, entities, or sectors that are directly associated with the behavior or actions that the international actors seek to change or condemn. Targeted sanctions have been increasingly employed by the international community in recent decades, as their use is seen as a more effective and ethical approach to addressing issues such as human rights abuses, conflict resolution, and nonproliferation.

Moreover, the entire process of imposing sanctions can sometimes become a cat-and-mouse game, as targeted countries can identify ways to evade punitive measures, thereby reducing their effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, sanctions remain an important tool in international relations. As global challenges continue to emerge, they will likely continue to be used as a means of influencing the behavior of other states. The unprecedented level of sanctions deployed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 stands witness to that.

4. Brief overview of the existing literature on sanctions in Zimbabwe

Over the years, there has been a significant amount of academic research on the topic of sanctions in Zimbabwe. Scholars have analyzed the effectiveness of sanctions in achieving their policy objectives, as well as their impact on the Zimbabwean economy and civilian population. While providing an exhaustive account of all authors is neither possible nor desirable, the contributions of some authors are worth pointing out.

One of the critical aspects of studying sanctions in Zimbabwe is assessing their effectiveness in achieving the intended policy objectives – which has also been discussed in what follows. Chan and Drury (2000) provide a comprehensive analysis of sanctions' success in general, concluding that they have a limited capacity to achieve their goals. The theme is masterfully applied by Grebe (2010), who offers an analysis of the origins and implications of sanctions in Zimbabwe. The author argues that sanctions were imposed primarily as a response to the Zimbabwean government's human rights abuses and land reform policies. Grebe also highlights the limited effectiveness of sanctions in achieving their policy objectives, particularly in terms of promoting democratic change.

Sanctions' impact on the Zimbabwean economy is another recurring theme in the literature. Peksen (2009) argues that economic sanctions generally have adverse effects on the targeted country's economy, while Eaton and Engers (1992) discuss how sanctions can disrupt trade and discourage foreign investment. In the context of Zimbabwe, Meldrum (2006) offers a detailed account of the economic decline in the country following the imposition of sanctions, attributing it to a combination of factors, including mismanagement, corruption, and the adverse effects of the sanctions themselves. Mlambo (2014) also examines the consequences of sanctions on Zimbabwe's economy during the early 2000s, finding that they had a limited direct impact but contributed to an atmosphere of uncertainty and deterred foreign investment. Similarly, while providing a radical analysis of the fossilization of Zimbabwean nationalism, including its failures to install democracy and a culture of human rights, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) argues that sanctions exacerbated Zimbabwe's economic decline by limiting access to international finance and discouraging foreign investment.

The effects of sanctions on the civilian population have also been the subject of considerable scholarly attention. Hove and Ndwana (2016) investigate how targeted sanctions have affected the socio-economic rights of ordinary citizens in Zimbabwe. Tendi (2010; pp. 185-200) argues that sanctions failed to bring about meaningful political change and instead served to strengthen the ruling ZANU-PF party which was becoming increasingly authoritarian.

Some authors focus on the broader regional and international implications of the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe. Mavhinga (2011) investigates the role of the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in shaping the sanctions regime, emphasizing the importance of regional actors in influencing the outcomes.

Despite the diverse perspectives offered by these studies, the overall consensus in the literature seems to be that sanctions have had a limited impact on achieving their policy objectives in Zimbabwe. Moreover, they have had negative consequences for the economy and civilian population, particularly in the areas of healthcare and education (Mbanje and Mahuku, 2011; Ogbonna, 2017).

5. Goals and implementation of the sanctions on Zimbabwe

The primary goal of the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe was to address concerns over human rights abuses, political repression, and electoral fraud. In particular, the sanctions aimed to pressure the Mugabe-led government to adopt democratic reforms, restore the rule of law, and respect human rights. These objectives were articulated by the European Union (EU) and the United States when they imposed targeted sanctions.

In the case of Zimbabwe, sanctions primarily took the form of targeted measures, such as asset freezes and travel bans on key government officials and their associates (Mlambo, 2014, p. 274).

The United States imposed targeted sanctions on Zimbabwe in 2001 through the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA). ZDERA targeted key members of the Mugabe regime and their associates by freezing their assets and imposing travel bans, making it difficult for them to conduct business and engage with the international community (ZDERA, 2001). Additionally, Section 4(c) of ZDERA restricted Zimbabwe's access to

international financial institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, which severely limited the country's ability to access external credit and financial assistance.

The European Union (EU) followed suit in 2002, imposing a series of targeted sanctions against Zimbabwe, including asset freezes, travel bans, and an arms embargo (European Union, 2002). These sanctions were specifically aimed at individuals responsible for human rights violations, undermining the rule of law, and electoral fraud. Similar to the US sanctions, the EU measures targeted high-ranking government officials, military personnel, and members of the ruling ZANU-PF party. Over the years that followed, the EU incrementally increased the number of people included in its list, with the count reaching its highest point in January 2009 at 203 individuals and 40 entities.

In addition to the US and EU sanctions, other countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand also imposed targeted sanctions on Zimbabwe (Mlambo, 2014, p. 293). These measures, like those of the US and EU, focused on travel bans, asset freezes, and other restrictions targeting key members of the Mugabe regime and their associates.

After the Global Political Agreement was signed in 2009, which saw Mugabe sharing power with two opposition factions' leaders, the EU began easing some of the sanctions it had imposed on Zimbabwe. The EU still maintains sanctions on Zimbabwe Defense Industries.

6. Outcomes and effectiveness of the sanctions at a glance

The effectiveness of sanctions in achieving their objectives is a matter of considerable debate. Some scholars argue that the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe had limited impact on the Mugabe regime, as they failed to induce meaningful democratic reforms or improvements in human rights conditions (Mlambo, 2014, pp. 276-277). They contend that the targeted nature of the sanctions allowed the regime to deflect the blame for the country's economic woes onto external forces, thereby undermining the sanctions' intended objectives (Raftopoulos, 2009, p. 216).

In addition, the sanctions may have unintentionally strengthened the regime's grip on power by increasing its reliance on resources from countries that were less concerned with human rights and democracy, such as China (Taylor, 2009, pp. 99-100). This has led some critics

to argue that the sanctions effectively pushed Zimbabwe further away from the international community and reduced the likelihood of a negotiated political settlement.

On the other hand, some analysts argue that the sanctions played a role in prompting the formation of the Government of National Unity in 2009, which resulted in a temporary power-sharing agreement between Mugabe's ZANU-PF party and the opposition MDC. They also suggest that the sanctions helped to mobilize international support for democratic reforms in Zimbabwe (Drezner, 2011, p. 104).

However, it is important to consider the socio-economic consequences of the sanctions, which many argue have been detrimental to the Zimbabwean population (Mlambo, 2014, pp. 276-277). The sanctions have been blamed for exacerbating the country's economic crisis, which has led to hyperinflation, unemployment, and widespread poverty. Critics of the sanctions argue that they have disproportionately affected the most vulnerable segments of the population, including the poor, women, and children, while having minimal impact on the political elite targeted by the measures (Mlambo, 2014, pp. 276-277).

Moreover, we argue that the sanctions have had other consequences, such as fostering a parallel economy and creating opportunities for corruption and illicit trade. This has further undermined the effectiveness of the sanctions in promoting good governance and democratic values in discussed space. By facilitating corruption and an underground market, the sanctions inadvertently weakened the rule of law and good governance in Zimbabwe, as the ruling elite and their associates became more involved in illegal activities to sustain their power and wealth. This erosion of democratic values and institutions made it even more challenging for the international community to promote meaningful change in the country.

7. Criticisms and limitations of past sanctions on Zimbabwe

7.1. Unintended socio-economic consequences

Another major criticism of the past sanctions on Zimbabwe is their unintended socio-economic consequences. While the sanctions were intended to exert pressure on the political elite, they inadvertently had broader and wider impacts on Zimbabwe's economy and society. The sanctions may have contributed to the exacerbation of the country's economic crisis,

characterized by hyperinflation, high unemployment, and widespread poverty (Mlambo, 2014, p. 293). Critics argue that the most vulnerable segments of the population, including the poor, women, and children, were disproportionately affected by these adverse economic conditions, while the political elite remained largely shielded from the impacts (Mlambo, 2014, p. 293; Raftopoulos and Savage, 2004). In short, even if sanctions are targeted, in the case of Zimbabwe – as in the majority of other cases - they seem to have missed the mark.

One of the most immediate and visible effects of the sanctions was the decline in foreign direct investment (FDI) and international aid, which had been crucial financing lifelines for Zimbabwe's development (Chitiga & Chitiga-Mabugu, 2011, p. 3). As Western governments and multilateral institutions tightened their financial restrictions on the country, the flow of FDI and aid dwindled, thereby deepening the economic crisis and leading to widespread job losses, business closures, and a general decline in living standards (Mlambo, 2014, p. 295). The economy's contraction, coupled with the hyperinflation that plagued Zimbabwe in the mid-2000s, further eroded the purchasing power of ordinary citizens, pushing millions over the edge of poverty (Hanke & Kwok, 2009, p. 353).

The negative socio-economic consequences of the sanctions were not limited to the macroeconomic level; they also had severe repercussions for the provision of essential public services such as health and education. As the government's fiscal space shrunk, it struggled to maintain adequate funding for these sectors as to keep them afloat, leading to the deterioration of healthcare infrastructure and the collapse of the public education system (Ogbonna, 2017). The healthcare sector, in particular, suffered from chronic shortages of essential drugs, medical supplies, and trained personnel, resulting in an alarming increase in morbidity and mortality rates, especially among the most vulnerable sections of the population (Tibaijuka, 2005, p. 38). The education sector, once one of Zimbabwe's sources of pride, also witnessed a dramatic decline in enrollment and retention rates, with the quality of teaching and learning significantly decreasing, as schools struggled to cope with the twin challenges of reduced funding and economic instability (Chitiga & Chitiga-Mabugu, 2011, p. 11).

Sanctions had a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable groups in Zimbabwe, such as women, children, and the elderly, who bore the brunt of the economic downturn and the collapse of social services (Sachikonye, 2011, p. 24). For instance, the decline in household

incomes and the unweaving of Zimbabwe's social safety net led upticks in child labor, as families sought alternative sources of income to make ends meet (Tibaijuka, 2005, p. 40). Women, too, faced spiraling economic and social pressures, as they were often forced to assume additional responsibilities as primary breadwinners and caregivers in the face of rising unemployment and the disintegration of traditional support structures (Sachikonye, 2011, p. 24).

In addition to the social and economic hardships faced by the most vulnerable groups, the sanctions further augmented income inequality in Zimbabwe. As the country's economic conditions aggravated, the gap between the wealthy elite, who were often connected to the ruling regime, and the rest of the population widened. This growing inequality not only deepened social divisions but also fueled resentment and mistrust among the population, undermining the prospects for national reconciliation and inclusive development (Dendere, 2022, pp. 81-82). Social cohesion was sacrificed on the altar of individual hustle.

The agricultural sector, which had been the backbone of the Zimbabwean economy², was also severely affected by the sanctions. Although land reform was a major driver of the economic crisis, the sanctions further hampered the agricultural sector's recovery by restricting access to international markets, credit, and technical assistance (Moyo & Yeros, 2007). This, in turn, contributed to the decline in agricultural productivity and food security, exacerbating rural poverty and increasing the country's dependence on food aid (Mbanje and Mahuku, 2011). Zimbabwe grew reliant on food imports to meet its population's needs.

In conclusion, the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe have had far-reaching negative socio-economic consequences for the country, contributing to the decline in foreign investment, the deterioration of public services, and the exacerbation of poverty and inequality. While the primary objective of these measures was to promote democratic reform and protect human rights, their broader impact on the Zimbabwean economy and society has been largely counterproductive, further entrenching the misery and suffering of the population.

² Zimbabwe had been named in the past "Africa's breadbasket" as it used to be a major exporter of grain, especially maize and wheat, as well as other agricultural products like tobacco.

7.2. *Strengthening the regime's grip on power*

One way the sanctions strengthened the regime's grip on power was by providing a rallying point for domestic support. The Mugabe regime framed the sanctions as evidence of Western imperialism and interference, thereby portraying itself as a victim defending national sovereignty (Weisfelder, 2008). By positioning itself as a bulwark against external aggression, the regime was able to mobilize support from various segments of society, including war veterans, civil servants, and rural communities (Mlambo, 2014, p. 294). Mugabe was skillful in portraying the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe as a manifestation of Western imperialism. By doing so, he tapped into the historical memory of colonialism and the struggle for independence, creating a narrative that resonated with many Zimbabweans (Petrica, 2016a). This portrayal of the sanctions allowed Mugabe to present his regime as a defender of national sovereignty, standing firm against unwarranted foreign attempts to subdue and shackle economically. This was not a new discursive exercise. Throughout his rule, Mugabe had maintained a strong anti-Western rhetoric, often accusing Western powers of attempting to undermine Zimbabwe's sovereignty. He used the sanctions as evidence of this interference, asserting that they were designed to weaken the nation and impose foreign, non-African values on Zimbabwean society, thus constituting an attempt from the old masters to keep the country latched to them. This narrative enabled Mugabe to project strength and assert his commitment to defending the nation from external threats. Sanctions became a rallying point to unite disparate factions within Zimbabwe against a common enemy, the Western powers imposing said punitive measures. By successfully framing the sanctions as an existential threat to the nation, ZANU-PF were able to forge a sense of national unity, diverting attention away from domestic issues and grievances. This strategy further consolidated their power and slowly neutralized potential challenges to their rule. Mugabe then used the sanctions as a tool to discredit the opposition and create doubts about their intentions and loyalties. He accused opposition groups and critics of being agents of Western imperialism, suggesting that they were collaborating with foreign powers to destabilize Zimbabwe. This narrative undermined the credibility of the opposition and made it difficult for them to gain widespread support among the population.

Another way in which the sanctions reinforced the regime's grip on power was by enabling it to consolidate control over resources and the distribution of patronage. As international isolation and economic decline took their toll, the regime increasingly relied on patronage networks to maintain loyalty and support. The sanctions provided the regime with a pretext to seize control of key economic sectors, such as agriculture and mining, thereby increasing its ability to allocate resources to loyalists and suppress dissent (Mlambo, 2014, p. 293). This was most evident in the controversial land reform program that saw the redistribution of land from white commercial farmers to black Zimbabweans, many of whom were politically connected (Petrica, 2020a, pp. 80-92). The regime justified these actions as necessary steps to counter the effects of the sanctions and rectify historical injustices, further reinforcing its nationalist credentials. By taking control of key economic sectors, the regime increased its ability to allocate resources to loyalists, thereby bolstering its support base and indirectly suppressing dissent. The distribution of patronage, in the form of land, mining concessions, and government contracts, served to create a network of beneficiaries dependent on the regime for their economic well-being, survival even. Systemic patronage allowed the regime to maintain power by co-opting potential opponents and rewarding loyalty, even in the face of economic collapse and international isolation.

In terms of handling dissent, Mugabe didn't limit himself to portraying his direct political opponents as foreign loyalists. Sanctions acted as enablers for the regime to intensify its repression of the opposition under the guise of national security. As the Mugabe regime faced increasing international pressure, it responded by cracking down on opposition parties, civil society organizations, and media outlets, accusing all of the former of collaborating with foreign powers to destabilize the country (Weisfelder, 2008, p. 459). ZANU-PF created a sense of urgency and an imminent threat to the nation. By framing the sanctions as an attempt by foreign powers to undermine the country's sovereignty and impose serfdom, the regime was able to implement increasingly draconian measures against all its enemies and portray said measures as vital for national security. Dissent was clamped down on with an air of legitimacy, thereby making it difficult for opposition groups to challenge any governmental action. Faced with sanctions, the regime also capitalized on the opportunity to consolidate its control over information and communication channels. By accusing media outlets and their journalists of

being Western collaborators, the increasingly autocratic Mugabe was able to censor critical voices and control the narrative surrounding the sanctions and their impact on Zimbabwe (Weisfelder, 2008, p. 459). This manipulation of information further reinforced the regime's hold on power by ensuring that the public was exposed primarily to pro-government narratives – a move straight out of Herman and Chomsky's (1988) playbook. Leaving no stone unturned, Mugabe and his acolytes also targeted civil society organizations, which often played a crucial role in advocating for human rights and democratic reforms (Petrica, 2020b). By labelling organizations agents of foreign interests, the regime was able to stifle their efforts and limit their influence on the political landscape. This repression further entrenched the regime's power by neutralizing potential sources of resistance and opposition. Thus, internally, the imposition of sanctions gave birth to a popular mobilization to fight an external threat.

Externally, the sanctions allowed the regime to exploit regional solidarity and resist external pressure for democratic reforms. Zimbabwe's neighbors in the SADC were divided over the issue of sanctions, with some countries, such as South Africa and Botswana, adopting more conciliatory approaches, while others, like Angola and Namibia, expressing strong support for the Mugabe regime (Mlambo, 2014, p. 294). This lack of a unified regional stance undermined the effectiveness of the sanctions and enabled the regime to maintain its grip on power. South Africa – the regional hegemon – was mostly ambivalent towards Mugabe throughout the period because its foreign policy interests clashed with the West's demands for democratization in Zimbabwe (Petrica, 2020a).

As the SADC attempted to mediate the political crisis in Zimbabwe, the divisions among its member states provided Mugabe with opportunities to exploit these differences and resist calls for political reforms (Nathan, 2012, p. 53). The organization's inability to forge a cohesive approach to the Zimbabwean crisis enabled the regime to deflect external pressure and maintain its tight grip on power (Alden & Alao, 2008, p. 204).

South Africa, as a regional power, played a pivotal role in shaping the regional response to the Zimbabwean crisis. Thabo Mbeki, South Africa's president at the time, pursued a policy of "quiet diplomacy" with the Mugabe regime, arguing that open confrontation and criticism would be counterproductive (Petrica, 2016b). Instead, Mbeki sought to encourage dialogue and

negotiation between the ruling ZANU-PF party and the opposition's MDC as a way to resolve the crisis.

Botswana, on the other hand, adopted a more critical stance towards Mugabe's regime, often voicing concerns over human rights abuses and the deteriorating political and economic situation in Zimbabwe (Nathan, 2012, p. 111). However, Botswana's limited regional influence, compared to South Africa, meant that its calls for stronger action against the Zimbabwean government did not gain much traction within SADC.

Angola and Namibia, both of which had historical ties with Zimbabwe due to their shared struggle against colonial rule, expressed strong support for Mugabe (Mlambo, 2014, p. 294), succumbing to the view that sanctions were an attempt by Western powers to interfere in Zimbabwe's internal affairs and undermine its ability to rule itself.

The varying responses of SADC members to the Zimbabwean crisis weakened the overall effectiveness of the sanctions. The divisions within the organization made it difficult to adopt a coordinated regional approach to the crisis, allowing the Mugabe regime to resist pressure for democratic reforms (Nathan, 2012, p. 145). Furthermore, the absence of consensus within SADC also limited the organization's ability to influence the positions of key international actors, such as the United Nations, the EU, and the United States, thereby further reducing the impact of the sanctions (Nathan, 2012, p. 146).

The regime also benefited from the solidarity of other African countries and regional organizations, such as the AU, which criticized the sanctions as an infringement on Zimbabwe's sovereignty and a form of neo-colonialism (Scoones *et al.*, 2011, p. 98). This support further strengthened Mugabe's position and helped to legitimize his resistance to external pressure for democratic reforms.

7.3. *Lackluster coordination and enforcement*

The issue of inadequate coordination and enforcement of sanctions is a critical factor when assessing their effectiveness. In Zimbabwe's case, as in many others, the lack of a cohesive international approach, divergent policies among Zimbabwe's regional neighbors, and weak enforcement mechanisms have undermined the potential impact of the sanctions.

One of the main challenges in implementing effective sanctions on Zimbabwe has been the lack of a cohesive and coordinated international response. The sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union lacked universal support, leading to inconsistent application and enforcement. This inconsistency has undermined the overall impact of the sanctions and allowed ZANU-PF to exploit divisions within the international community. Unilateral sanctions are, of course less effective than multilateral sanctions, given that targeted countries can exploit differences in policies and seek alternative markets and allies to evade sanctions (Eaton & Engers, 1996, p. 327); but multilateral sanctions that fail to include large global actors could provide just enough maneuver space for individuals, organizations and entire regimes. For instance, in our case, important international actors like China and Russia have been less willing to support stringent measures against Zimbabwe, often citing concerns over national sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs (Taylor, 2009, p. 198). While we will not delve on the subject, the underlying geopolitical and economic reasons for such decisions taken by authoritarian regimes with international order reshuffling ambitions should be evident. The absence of a united global front has weakened the pressure on the regime in Harare to implement democratic reforms and respect human rights.

The enforcement of sanctions also plays a crucial role in determining their successful outcomes. Early and Wallis (2015, p. 70) emphasize that weak enforcement mechanisms often allow targeted entities to find ways to circumvent the sanctions, thereby reducing their overall effectiveness. Weak enforcement mechanisms have also contributed to the limited effectiveness of the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe (Gordon, 2010, p. 320). For example, loopholes in the enforcement of targeted measures, such as travel bans and asset freezes, allowed some individuals to evade the sanctions (Hufbauer *et al.*, 2007, p. 157). The ease with which these targeted individuals could circumvent the measures raised questions about the overall effectiveness of the sanctions regime in this particular case, while adding to the extensive body of literature arguing that sanctions generally fail (Drezner, 2011, p. 98).

Moreover, in Zimbabwe's case, the reliance on voluntary compliance by third-party states in enforcing economic sanctions has further weakened their impact (Hufbauer *et al.*, 2007, p. 131) Such cooperation is not always guaranteed of course, as countries may have differing strategic interests or economic ties with the targeted country (Cortright & Lopez, 2000, p. 15).

Nonetheless, cooperation among countries can lead to "sanctions busting" activities, whereby third-party countries undermine the sanctions by continuing to trade with the targeted country (Biersteker *et al.*, 2016, p. 9) and even increasing trade and financial flows to compensate.

The lack of a robust enforcement mechanism has undermined the credibility of the sanctions and their ability to bring about meaningful change in Zimbabwe. As a general note, the lack of a strong international legal framework for enforcing sanctions can further limit their impact, and this can be observed in the case of Zimbabwe.

In addition, the negative consequences of the sanctions on the Zimbabwean population have been widely debated. While the sanctions were designed to target specific individuals and entities associated with the Mugabe regime, they have inadvertently contributed to the country's economic decline, exacerbating the suffering of ordinary Zimbabweans. The humanitarian crisis that has unfolded in Zimbabwe, marked by food shortages, hyperinflation, and widespread poverty, has raised questions in terms of sanctions morality and efficacy as a tool for bringing about political change. A recent United Nations (2022) report finds that sanctions, including secondary sanctions, and different forms of overcompliance by foreign banks and companies have had a significant impact on the ordinary Zimbabweans.

In conclusion, the inadequate coordination and enforcement of sanctions on Zimbabwe have significantly limited their effectiveness in achieving the desired political change. The fragmented international response, coupled with divergent regional policies and weak enforcement mechanisms, have allowed the Mugabe regime to maintain its grip on power and resist external pressure for democratic reforms. Future efforts to address such crises – in Zimbabwe and elsewhere – should focus on fostering a more coordinated and comprehensive approach, addressing enforcement challenges, and finding ways to minimize the unintended negative consequences on the civilian population. In more recent times, especially since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a lot has been achieved in terms of coordination, enforcement and evasion curtailing – even so, the system is arguably still lacking. But this wider topic will be treated for another time.

To achieve a more coordinated and comprehensive approach, the international community must work towards building consensus on the objectives and methods of sanctions. Both are still elusive. This may involve engaging with countries that have been reluctant to

support stringent measures, such as China³, to explore common ground and develop a unified strategy (Taylor, 2009, p. 205). Furthermore, enhancing cooperation and coordination among the countries imposing sanctions, as well as with regional organizations such as the SADC and AU, is essential to ensure that the measures are consistently applied and enforced. For this, multilateral efforts must be complemented by bilateral negotiation.

Addressing enforcement challenges also requires strengthening the mechanisms for monitoring and implementing sanctions. This may include enhancing the capacity of relevant institutions and agencies to identify and track targeted individuals and entities, as well as closing loopholes that allow them to evade the measures. Additionally, promoting greater transparency and accountability in the enforcement process can help to bolster the credibility of the sanctions and enhance their effectiveness (Hufbauer *et al.*, 2007, p. 134).

Lastly, efforts should be made to minimize the unintended negative consequences of the sanctions on the Zimbabwean population. This may involve refining the design of the sanctions to ensure that they are more targeted and do not inadvertently contribute to the country's economic decline. Moreover, the international community should support humanitarian initiatives aimed at alleviating the suffering of ordinary Zimbabweans and addressing the root causes of the crisis, such as poor governance, corruption, and human rights abuses.

By addressing these challenges, the international community can enhance the effectiveness of sanctions in promoting political change in Zimbabwe, and ultimately contribute to the country's transition towards a more democratic and prosperous future.

7.4. *Failure to address the root causes of the crisis*

Another key criticism of past sanctions on Zimbabwe is their limited effectiveness in achieving the intended political objectives. The sanctions aimed to pressure the government to implement democratic reforms and improve human rights conditions (Hufbauer *et al.*, 2007, p. 219).

The targeted nature of the sanctions limited in their scope and impact, but not consequences. The sanctions were primarily directed at individuals and entities associated with

³ And Russia, presuming that Russia's isolation from the global system will not remain indefinite.

the ruling party, ZANU-PF, and were designed to pressure the government to implement democratic reforms and address human rights abuses, at least according to European Union claims (2002). Despite implications on the civilian population – particularly the poor, as previously explained, the narrow focus of these measures failed to address the broader structural issues that underpinned the crisis, such as the unequal distribution of land and wealth, the erosion of democratic institutions, and the politicization of the state apparatus (Sachikonye, 2011, pp. 25-27).

Also, the sanctions inadvertently provided the regime in Harare with a convenient scapegoat for the country's economic woes. Instead of prompting introspection and reform, the West's punitive measures allowed the government to deflect blame for the deteriorating economic situation onto external forces, thereby avoiding responsibility for the crisis (Mandaza, 2011, pp. 122-123). As previously claimed, this narrative of foreign interference resonated with an important segment of the population, particularly those who had experienced the horrendous effects of colonialism and viewed the sanctions as an extension of this sort of historical injustice (Raftopoulos, 2006, pp. 194-195).

While targeted, the sanctions did not sufficiently target the regime's sources of revenue and support, which allowed it to continue financing its patronage networks and coercive practices. The regime was able to circumvent the sanctions through various means, such as illicit trade in diamonds and other natural resources, which provided it with the necessary financial flows and resources to maintain its grip on power (Global Witness, 2012, pp. 13-15).

Critics also argue that the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe failed to address the root causes of the political and economic crisis in the country (Mlambo, 2014, p. 295). The sanctions focused primarily on the symptoms of the crisis, such as human rights abuses and electoral malpractices, rather than addressing the underlying issues, including land reform, governance, and economic mismanagement. Consequently, the sanctions were unable to foster a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the country's multifaceted problems.

One of the major challenges facing Zimbabwe during the crisis was the controversial land reform program. While the program aimed to redress historical inequalities in land distribution, it was marred by widespread violence, corruption, and the displacement of both black and white farmers (Sachikonye, 2003, p. 34). The sanctions, however, did not directly

address the issue of land reform, which continued to fuel political instability and economic decline (Petrica, 2020a, pp. 80-92). Furthermore, the measures not effectively tackle the governance issues at the core of the crisis. ZANU-PF maintained a tight grip on power through the manipulation of state institutions and the suppression of dissent (Raftopoulos, 2009, p. 757). The sanctions targeted individuals and entities associated with the regime, but these measures did not result in significant improvements in governance or the protection of human rights, arguably leading to further contraction of Zimbabwe's democratic space as the regime used the sanctions as a pretext for cracking down on the opposition, further diminishing the prospects for political change (Weisfelder, 2008, p. 459).

Economic mismanagement was another root cause of the crisis that the sanctions failed to address. Zimbabwe's economy was characterized by high inflation (Petrica, 2020a, pp. 130-131), widespread poverty, and a crumbling infrastructure (Chitiga & Chitiga-Mabugu, 2011, p. 9). The sanctions, while aimed at pressuring the regime to change its policies, did not directly target the underlying economic issues, such as the lack of fiscal discipline, corruption, and the (sometimes malevolently) inefficient allocation of resources.

One can conclude that sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe failed to address the root causes of the political and economic crisis, focusing instead on the symptoms of the crisis. The limitations of the sanctions in addressing land reform, governance issues, and economic mismanagement, coupled with the lack of a coordinated international response, ultimately rendered the measures ineffective in fostering a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the country's problems.

7.5. *Negative impact on regional relations*

The implementation of sanctions on Zimbabwe has also been criticized for its negative impact on the country's relations with other states, particularly in the region (Mlambo, 2014, p. 294). The sanctions created tensions between Zimbabwe and its neighbors, some of which were reluctant to support the measures, citing concerns about national sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs (Weisfelder, 2008, p. 462). This, in turn, limited the effectiveness of the sanctions in mobilizing a coordinated regional response to the crisis in Zimbabwe.

Countries such as South Africa, Angola, and Namibia, which have historical ties with Zimbabwe, emphasized the importance of respecting the principles of sovereignty and non-interference enshrined in the AU and the Southern African SADC charters (Nathan, 2012, p. 48).

Alongside concerns over sovereignty, regional actors were also wary of the potential economic repercussions of the sanctions. Zimbabwe's neighbors feared that the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy, partly attributed to the sanctions, could have destabilizing effects on the region (Siderius, 2008, p. 54). The sanctions disrupted regional trade, as countries that were economically interdependent with Zimbabwe experienced negative spillover effects due to the decline in cross-border commerce (Alden & Soko, 2005, p. 375).

The case of Zimbabwe's sanctions highlights the complexities and challenges of using economic statecraft to address political crises in the context of regional politics. The concerns of national sovereignty, non-interference, and regional stability, as well as the persistence of economic interdependence, have limited the ability of the sanctions to achieve their intended goals (Mlambo, 2014, p. 294; Weisfelder, 2008, p. 462). This, in turn, raises important questions about the efficacy of sanctions as a policy tool in resolving political crises and promoting democratic change in the region.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe has been and still remains a controversial and highly debated issue. Past sanctions have been criticized on multiple grounds, including their limited effectiveness in achieving political objectives, unintended socio-economic consequences, potential reinforcement of the regime's grip on power, inadequate coordination and enforcement, failure to address the root causes of the crisis, and negative impact on international relations.

Despite these criticisms, it is important to recognize that the sanctions regime was implemented in response to egregious violations of human rights and democratic norms by the Mugabe regime. The sanctions were a response to a crisis that was multifaceted and complex, with deep-seated historical, political, and economic roots. While the sanctions may have had some success in raising awareness of the situation in Zimbabwe, their overall effectiveness in

promoting democratic reforms and improving human rights conditions remains a subject of debate, as is the potency of sanctions in general.

Moving forward, future efforts to address such crises – in Zimbabwe and elsewhere – should focus on fostering a more coordinated and comprehensive approach, addressing enforcement challenges, and finding ways to minimize the unintended negative consequences on the civilian population. The international community must work towards building consensus on the objectives and methods of sanctions, engaging with countries that have been reluctant to support stringent measures, and enhancing cooperation and coordination among the countries imposing sanctions, as well as with regional organizations such as the SADC and AU, to ensure that the measures are consistently applied and enforced if sanctions in Zimbabwe are to be maintained even at the current low levels. As the West is working towards a paradigm shift with regards to concerted sanction imposition and enforcement, especially in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it will be interesting to observe how lessons learned therein will be applied when it comes to countries such as Zimbabwe, that don't possess Russia's power, standing and ambition.

Furthermore, addressing enforcement challenges requires strengthening the mechanisms for monitoring and implementing sanctions. This may include enhancing the capacity of relevant institutions and agencies to identify and track targeted individuals and entities, as well as closing loopholes that allow them to evade the measures. Additionally, promoting greater transparency and accountability in the enforcement process can help to bolster the credibility of the sanctions and enhance their effectiveness.

Efforts should also be made to minimize the unintended negative consequences of the sanctions on the Zimbabwean population. This may involve refining the design of the punitive measures to ensure that they are more targeted and do not inadvertently continue to contribute to the country's economic decline. Moreover, the international community should support humanitarian initiatives aimed at alleviating the suffering of ordinary Zimbabweans and addressing the root causes of the crisis, such as poor governance, corruption, and human rights abuses. While this is the portrayed purpose of sanctions, more needs to be done, as previously argued.

Finally, it is essential to note that the issue of sanctions is not isolated to Zimbabwe, and similar crises continue to occur in other parts of the world. Therefore, the lessons learned from Zimbabwe must inform future efforts to address such crises in a more coordinated, effective, and sustainable manner. The challenge lies in striking a balance between ensuring accountability for egregious violations of human rights and promoting democratic reforms, while minimizing the negative consequences on civilian populations and fostering a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the underlying issues fueling the crisis.

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THE ECONOMIC EFFECT OF POPULIST RHETORIC IN HUNGARY

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Abstract: *The Hungarian government has been widely associated with populist rhetoric in the literature. Its length and uninterrupted government since 2010 create a unique opportunity to study in detail the effects of this kind of rhetoric on its macroeconomic performance. How does Hungary perform under a government characterised by populist rhetoric? The study reveals that populism carries a significant economic cost, as GDP at equal purchasing power parity in 2020 is 10.04% lower than a plausible alternative scenario where the current government was not elected, after a period of 10 years. Lack of addressing some persisting problems of the country, such as lack of competitiveness and institutional decay, might be the underlying dynamic in creating lasting damage to the economy. In this paper, we explore this topic using three different, but complementary techniques used to assess causality: Difference-in-Differences, Synthetic Difference-in-Differences, and the Synthetic Control Method.*

Keywords: Hungary, synthetic control mechanism, populist rhetoric, economic growth.

1. Introduction

The anti-establishment rhetoric of politicians characterised by populist rhetoric has been unusually successful in Europe over the last two decades (Figure 2). As of 2023, we have five countries part of the European Union that are led by parties characterised by populist rhetoric (The PopuList). Four of them are in Central and Eastern Europe and are Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia respectively. The remaining one is Italy. Hungary is a particularly exceptional example among these countries. The Fidesz party, currently in power since 2010, is the longest-lasting party characterised by populist rhetoric that has been in power without interruption in a democratic context. What are the consequences of this long-lasting example? Can we extrapolate its effects from its specific context? The null hypothesis behind this analysis

is that the policies undertaken by the Fidesz government in Hungary between 2010 and 2020 had no effect on the overall GDP of the country. The alternative hypothesis is that the policies undertaken by the Fidesz government overall had an effect on the GDP of the country. The hypothesis and the null-hypothesis are very macroeconomic in this nature, and we use three techniques and data widely used in these settings (The World Bank, 2019; Abadie, 2021).

Despite its length, the Hungarian case is also interesting for its apparent economic stability. It is widely believed among academics that populist leaders have negative effects on the economy and are likely to lead to their own downfall. Sachs (1990) and Dornbusch and Edwards (1990) were the leaders in this school of thought with their influential studies on the history of Latin America in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Sachs identified a "populist cycle" where short-term economic growth was achieved through an expansionary fiscal policy implemented by populist leaders, ultimately resulting in an economic and political crisis. Dornbusch and Edwards suggest that this cycle always ends up in a devaluation of the currency and ultimately damages the per capita income and purchasing power of the interested persons. More recent views suggest similar results even if with different mechanisms (Acemoglu, Egorov and Sonin, 2011).

The populist policy cycle outlined by Sachs is the most relevant macroeconomic elaboration of this problem. However, it hypothesizes a model with only an export-based and a labour-based sector. In this model, we also assume fixed exchange rates and capital controls. With a monetary expansion, families now have more money, and the interest rates drop. There is now a higher demand for non-tradable goods and consequently higher demand for labour. Consequently, the nominal wages and the prices increase while the exchange rate appreciates. Exports become more expensive and therefore decline. Superficially, this is a good result: in the model now, there are higher wages and less dependence on the export-based sector. As a result of this decision, the trade deficit increases and can only be financed by a loss of foreign exchange reserves or higher foreign debt, which could lead to the devaluation of the currency. If the country exhausts its reserves or borrowing capacity, the exchange rate will collapse and natural resources will become cheaper, leading to a decrease in the value of the local currency. Additionally, wages will be lower than the initial level, and if the government persists in these

policies, the economy will shift to floating exchange rates and an expansionary fiscal policy, resulting in inflation. A black market may also emerge if the government remains steadfast in its decision.

However, a strand of the literature suggests that this “self-destruction” mechanism linked to populist rhetoric could be only possible in the Latin American context. External constraints such as the limited ability of conducting monetary expansions in specific historical cases and different economic cultures might prevent the populist policy cycle to happen also in Europe. While some scholars suggest that populist rhetoric can be beneficial for economic redistribution purposes in European countries (Rodrik, 2018; Mouffe, 2019), there is limited research on the macroeconomic impacts of populism in Europe, with the exception of studies on Brexit (Fetzer and Wang, 2020; Springford, 2022). The populist policy cycle, like expansionary devaluations as a proxy for this phenomenon, has been predominantly viewed as something that only occurs under specific circumstances. As a result, most research since the 1990s focused instead on analysing the supply and demand of populism and the effects of populist rhetoric (Mudde, 2004; Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.*, 2017). Today we are also starting to have quantitative works on the consequences of government characterized by populist rhetoric, but their focus is not on specific cases in continental Europe (Fetzer and Wang, 2020; Funke *et al.*, 2020).

This paper expands the quantitative works on the consequences of government characterized by populist rhetoric by looking specifically at the Hungarian case. We first compile some summary figures of leaders characterised by populist rhetoric in Europe, and we elaborate on the European context. Therefore, we undertake a comprehensive quantitative analysis of measuring the effects hypothesized by the influential study on the macroeconomics of populism by Dornbusch and Edwards (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1990). We expand the usual contemporary works in this framework by using Difference-in-Differences and Synthetic Difference-in-Differences alongside the Synthetic Control Method. Our analysis suggests that the Hungarian economy will not quickly self-destruct, but that the economic damage will very likely have some long-term effects and a potentially detrimental effect on the unity of the European Union.

There is no fool proof method for estimating the causal impact of populist leaders on the economy. Causal analysis aims at finding the causal relationship between an intervention and its outcomes. It is a methodology more and more used in the social sciences, because it minimizes the assumptions needed to see the relation between cause and effect. Other methodologies that could have been used in this paper, for example Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), require a considerable number of assumptions regarding latent and unobserved variables. In our analysis, we utilize various causal strategies that complement one another and yield consistent results: populism in Hungary came at a considerable cost. GDP decreased by over 10% over a decade compared to a plausible scenario without populism. Additionally, despite claims of prioritizing the interests of "real Hungarians" over European elites, Hungary's convergence with other European nations did not improve as expected. We have found consistent trends in the data that link the subpar economic results to nationalist and protectionist policies, macroeconomic approaches that are not sustainable, and the erosion of institutions, legal safeguards, and separation of powers.

Parties and leaders are identified as populists thanks to the PopuList database (Rooduijn *et al.*, 2020). The PopuList database is an ambitious project that classifies all parties in Europe since 1989. It currently classifies 213 parties according to Mudde's definition of populism. According to Mudde's definition (Mudde, 2004), populism refers to any rhetorical tool employed by politicians to pit a part of a population against its establishment. Populist leaders are in turn the ones that make this narrative the cornerstone of their platform and assert that they alone represent the interests of the "true people". This narrative puts the "true real people" against an antagonist group often identified with the elite. It divides society into two antagonistic groups. This definition has gained widespread acceptance and is currently used by economists as well (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2020).

According to this definition, a party or a leader can be characterised by populist rhetoric whether it identifies with the left or the right. Using a combination of data between The PopuList and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Marks *et al.*, 2019), we find the following stylized facts from the data visualized in Figure 2: (i) populist parties in Europe are on the rise, (ii) populist parties in Europe are predominantly self-identifying as right-wing, (iii) there a considerate number of

parties that can at the same time be considered populist in terms of rhetoric and centrists in terms of self-identification. In the supplementary files, we also include a full list of the parties characterised by populist rhetoric and the relevant ideological stance. We find that this kind of party is predominant in Central and Eastern Europe (Figure 2) and that the Fidesz party is the longest-governing example of this kind (Gomez and Leunig, 2021).

The latter half of the article focuses on determining the economic impact of the Fidesz government in Hungary. In the tradition of Dornbusch and Edwards (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1990), our focus is on a standard measure of economic well-being – GDP at constant local currency unit and parity purchase power. We also study economic divergence, and we look at potential transmission channels in this specific case. The transmission channels are identified via macroeconomic indicators as well as measures of the strengths and balances of an economy. We also look at the role of rhetoric and the political environment in influencing the transmission mechanism.

We then use Difference-in-Difference to look at how the trends diverge. After looking at the different trajectories, we use an innovative Difference-in-Differences technique (2019) to measure the difference in overall trends. We then move to the standard empirical tool for estimating causal effects for macro units, the Synthetic Control Method (SCM), first used by Abadie et. Al (Abadie and Gardeazabal, 2001). With this method, we will construct a synthetic counterfactual Hungary that follows its macroeconomic variables up to 2010, the first election of the Fidesz government. The counterfactual unit predicts the variable of interest from 2010. Based on the validity of the trajectory's construction before 2010 we can then measure the difference between the real Hungary and the synthetic unit. Being the only difference between the real and synthetic units in the election of the Fidesz government, we can say that the difference between the two is given by the overall effects of the policies implemented by this government.

Our evidence points to significant medium- and long-term costs of the Fidesz government in Hungary, even if the evidence for loss of economic convergence towards other European countries is small. A decade following the inauguration of the Fidesz administration, the mean value of per capita real GDP consumption has dropped by around 10 percentage points when

contrasted with a fabricated placebo counterfactual scenario in which the Fidesz government had not come into power. Interestingly, the decline in GDP growth is not that evident in countries with similar trends to Hungary but with different kinds of government (Figure 6).

The negative but not disastrous economic effect of the Fidesz government is interesting to analyse in relation to its electoral success. Upon scrutinizing the transmission channels, the data backs up three possible justifications for this phenomenon. First, an increased role of economic nationalism, particularly disincentivising foreign companies to invest in Hungary. This is in line with the finding that leaders characterised by populist rhetoric are more protectionist no matter if left-wing or right-wing. In the Hungarian context, this is of course cushioned by the European Union environment. However, examples like the tax on banks show how the populist rhetoric influences negatively economic performance via the channel of competitiveness. This goes against the idea of Rodrik (2018): leaders characterised by populist rhetoric usually promise something good but in reality, they fail to deliver it. Likewise, in Hungary, there are indications of macroeconomic policies that are not sustainable, akin to the arguments presented in the original discourse by Dornbusch and Edwards (1991). Of course, there is also a major difference between the European kind of unsustainable macroeconomic policies and the ones typical of Latin America, mainly because of culture and socio-economic context. Thirdly, after the rise of populist leaders, the autonomy of the judiciary and the freedom of the press tend to deteriorate, resulting in a decline in democratic separation of powers. The lack of functioning institutions is linked as well to the lack of diversification and innovation in the Hungarian economy.

This paper belongs to the strand of research that examines the impact of politics and institutions on economic results, following studies that analyse whether the leaders in power have an effect on economic outcomes, such as Blinder and Watson (2016), Jones and Olken (2005), and Snowberg, Wolfers, and Zitzewitz (2006). We are part of this framework by seeing how an example of a leader with populist rhetoric in Central and Eastern Europe affects economic outcomes. The paper also relates to the literature on populism. Specifically, the relationship between populist rhetoric and political outcomes, and the one related to the drivers of populism (Guiso *et al.*, 2017). We also link ourselves to the growing body of literature that

measures the effect of government or episodes linked to populist rhetoric on economic outcomes (Kyle and Gultchin, 2018).

In the rest of the paper, we look at the data as it underpins the rest of the analysis. We then look at the specific context of populist rhetoric in Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, and then Hungary in a top-down approach. We do so for highlighting the differences from the more classic Latin American example and to show why we look at Hungary as a specific case. In this section, we look at data from the Manifesto Project to underpin the theories that populist rhetoric in Central and Eastern Europe influences the transmission channel to economic growth via extensive use of religious and cultural topics. We then look at the data, the methodology, and then the results of the analysis by methodology. We go through Difference-in-Differences, Synthetic Difference-in-Differences, and Synthetic Control before elaborating on the transmission channels and concluding.

2. Populist Rhetoric and Economic Performance in Europe and Hungary

During the period between 1995 and 2020, the European Union reported record economic growth. As it can be shown in Figure 1, the average GDP per capita has been growing steadily and equally across European Union, with the sole exception of Southern Europe. A full list of countries by region included in this analysis can be found in the supplementary files. Nonetheless, this positive picture of economic growth led some economists to discard leaders and parties characterised by populist rhetoric as mere political propaganda based on fears or as leaders trying to address internal or international inequality problems (Rodrik, 2017, 2018).

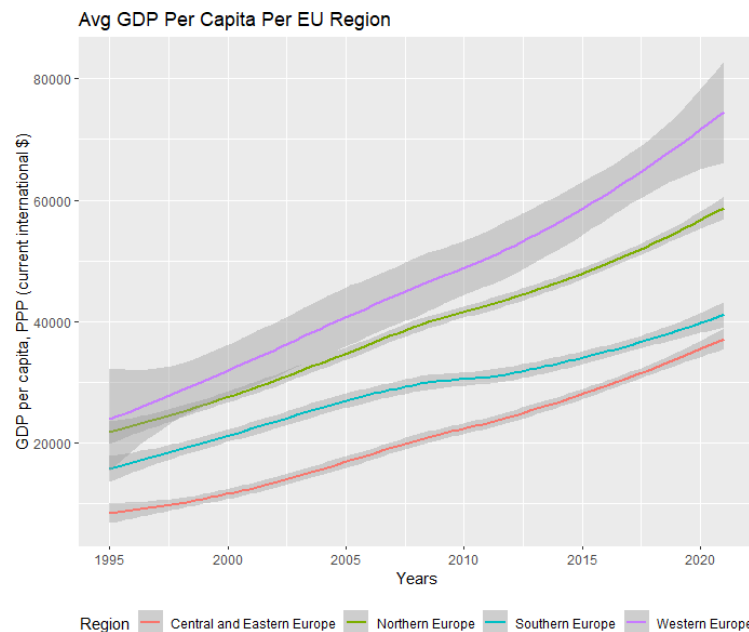


Figure 1. Average GDP per capita per European Union region, 1995-2020. Data sourced from World Bank Open Data, accessed 2 April 2023. <https://data.worldbank.org>.

Populist rhetoric is nonetheless much more than a political style that tends to prosper in Europe despite its overall positive economic performance. If we look at Figure 2, which brings together data from the Chapell Hill Expert Survey and the PopuList, we can see that the number of parties characterized by this kind of rhetoric is growing, especially in Central and Eastern Europe and Southern Europe. Being in proportion to the number of parties characterised by populist rhetoric higher in these two regions, we can say that these two also have a higher chance to be impacted by it. Nonetheless, Central and Eastern Europe has higher numbers of populist parties and specifically right-wing populist parties. This becomes particularly intriguing within the literature framework, given that, in Europe, populism is increasingly propelled by right-wing populists whose discourse typically centres around cultural and religious issues. (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017).

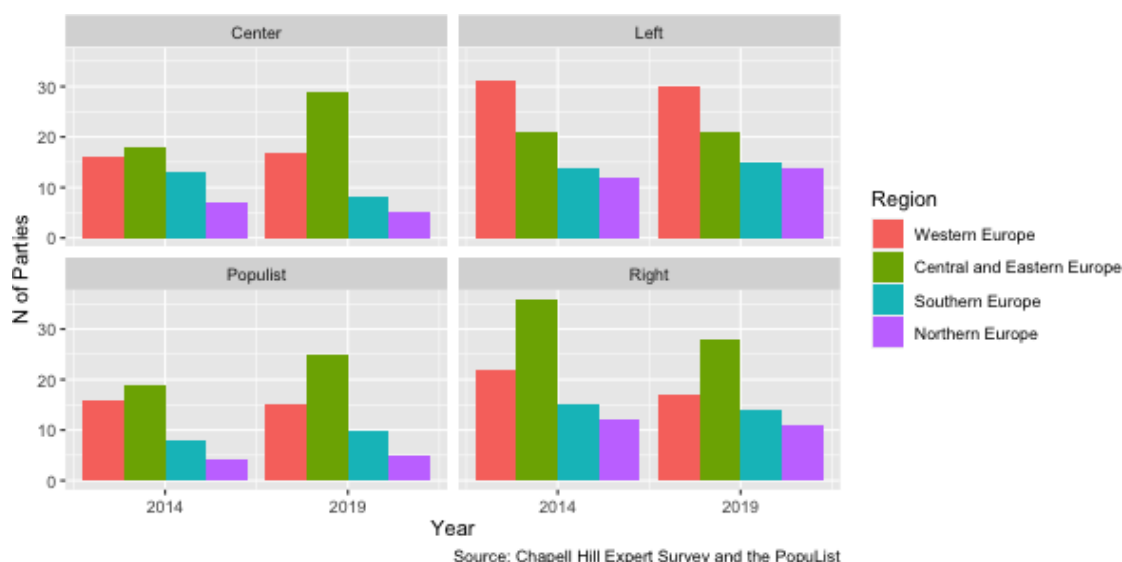


Figure 2. Distribution of Parties in Europe by Political Side and Region in 2014 and 2019. Data sourced from Chapell Hill Expert Survey and the PopuList, accessed 4 April 2023. <https://www.chesdata.eu> and <https://popu-list.org>.

The cultural definition of populism (Ostiguy, 2009) can better help us understand the increased popularity of this populist rhetoric, and especially right-wing populist rhetoric in Central and Eastern Europe, despite its apparent economic prosperity and stability. In Western Europe, a region mainly characterised by liberal democracies and increasing inequality inside countries, populism can be considered a positive phenomenon in terms of redistributive purposes (Kriesi, 2014; Helbling and Jungkunz, 2020). However, the anti-elite rhetoric fails to grasp the inevitability of increasing inequality in liberal democracies given their socioeconomic structure (Fraser, 2019). In Northern Europe, the phenomenon can indeed be associated with xenophobic and nativism sentences as a reaction to the increased number of migrants (Mjelde and Fredrik Hovden, 2019). In this case, the populist rhetoric fails to see that the lack of reversal of the initial policies is the real problem. The flux of migrants is in fact doomed to increase (Lutz and Scherbov, 2007).

In Southern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe, the populist rhetoric phenomenon can indeed be associated with the lack of economic convergence with other parts of Europe (Figure 1). The reason for this lack of convergence is nonetheless very different from what was

pointed out by the populist rhetoric, which usually points at immigrants and the European Union (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017). Both in Southern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe the literature hypothesizes that the lack of convergence is because of corruption, inefficient investment and excessive bureaucracy (Djankov, Nikolova and Zilinsky, 2016). However, in both these cases, the populist rhetoric tends to reframe the problem in terms of antagonistic groups. While in Southern Europe the populist rhetoric tends to have both prevalently xenophobic and secondly anti-elitist tones, in Central and Eastern Europe is the opposite. The rhetoric is mainly against the foreign oppressor (Lütz and Kranke, 2014). In the Hungarian context, the two antagonistic groups are the real Hungarians versus the European Union (Körösényi and Patkós, 2017).

The Fidesz government is a perfect example of this anti-elite rhetoric that in certain ways echoes the Latin American context. It also exhibits other characteristics frequently associated with populism if we look at it as a radial concept (Weyland, 2001). These include (i) a style of leadership that is personalistic and paternalistic; (ii) an outsider persona; (iii) a propensity to oversimplify intricate issues; (iv) the use of divisive language; (v) a willingness to exploit cultural or economic grievances; (vi) authoritarian tendencies; (vii) an appeal to romanticized notions of nativism and identity; (viii) direct voter outreach through mass media; (ix) clientelism and patronage; and (x) a strong sense of anti-pluralism. These features are identified in previous works by Aslanidis (2016), Guriev and Papaioannou (2020), and Müller (2016).

If we look at the literature, we can see that Europe and anti-European rhetoric is one of the main topics (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2020). This is in line with the idea that populist rhetoric in Central and Eastern Europe and Hungary is used to exacerbate two elements: (i) the lack of convergence between Central and Eastern Europe and the rest of Europe, (ii) the feeling that the European Union is an external immutable authority as the Soviet Bloc was (Učeň, 2007). In this sense populist rhetoric in Hungary is framed in economic terms, like in left-wing populism, and cultural terms, like in right-wing populism. It rallies against globalization and the economic elites hoping for state nationalism like the first ones, and it cultivates anti-outsiders' sentiment like the latter. In this sense, the right-wing appeal of the Fidesz party is mixed with a post-communist legacy that makes this government a particularly interesting and relevant case.

The policy mix the Fidesz government proposes is about state intervention without openness or improving innovation (Szikra, 2014; Batory, 2015; Bartha, Boda and Szikra, 2020). We look at Hungary as an example of how this kind of mechanism, exacerbated via populist rhetoric, can influence GDP. Populist politicians on the right side of the political spectrum generally support economic policies that are liberal, regulatory frameworks that are friendly to businesses, lower tax rates, and a restricted welfare state (Scheuerman and Betz, 1995; Mudde, 2000; Funke *et al.*, 2020). The case of Hungary, despite self-identifying as right-wing, advocates for virtually the opposite. In this sense, it is also interesting to look at Hungary as an example like Latin America but inside the European Union context.

3. Data and Methodology

In this paper, we estimate the cost of the Fidesz government on GDP per capita at purchase power parity in Hungary. To do this, we leverage three complementary methodologies in quasi-experiments that deal with aggregate-level data: Difference-in-Differences, Synthetic Difference-in-Differences, and the Synthetic Control Method. Works of this kind mainly use the Synthetic Control Method only (Nauro F. Campos, Coricelli and Moretti, 2019). In the context of right-wing populists, Funke *et al.* (2020) estimates that populism has a bad effect on GDP per capita but a moderate one on other macroeconomic indicators. The analysis is, however, silent on the Hungarian case specifically.

3.1. Data

The PopuList and The Chapel Hill Expert Survey. For confirming which party is characterised by populist rhetoric we use The PopuList dataset. This dataset contains information on almost all parties in Europe from 1989. Similarly, we use the Chapel Hill Expert Survey to classify parties in terms of their overall ideological stance.

World Bank Opendata. This dataset contains data for 266 countries from 1960 onward. The data contains over one thousand indicators across twenty-one categories that cover all aspects of social and economic development. We use GDP as the main outcome variable. For

the GDP we use GDP per capita, PPP (current international \$) both at the per capita and aggregate national level. As covariates for the construction of the counterfactual unit, we use the following: (i) Consumer Price Index (CPI), (ii) Inflation, consumer prices (annual %), (iii) total labour force, (iv) Current account balance (BoP, current US\$), (v) Debt-to-GDP ratio, (vi) Central government debt, total (current LCU), (vii) Taxes on income, profits and capital gains (% of revenue), (viii) Taxes on goods and services (% of revenue), (ix) Tax revenue (% of GDP), (x) Tax revenue (current LCU), and (xi) households and NPISHs Final consumption expenditure (current US\$). All the variables cover all the time points for all the relevant countries useful for the construction of the donor pool between 1990 and 2020. We chose this timeframe because of the higher reliability of data after 1989 and because 2020 is the latest data point available. On very few occasions, when a value was missing it was inputted using k-nearest neighbour inputting techniques. Each unit must be observed at all times, and all treated units must begin treatment simultaneously.

Donor Pool Data. To construct synthetic estimates of the variables mentioned above for Hungary, we use different pools of countries. We consider yearly level data from three donor pools: European Union countries (27 countries), Central and Eastern European countries (22 countries), and countries that have been governed by a party or leader characterised by populist rhetoric between 1990 and 2020 (16 countries). The countries in each donor pool and their categorization are included in the supplementary materials. While the synthetic control method can be performed on a single donor pool (Born et. Al 2019), it is interesting to try different donor pools given the common trends assumptions to see which one performs better. In our case, it is the one using the twenty-two Central and Eastern European countries, which minimizes the root mean square projection error.

3.2. Methodology

3.2.1. Difference-in-Differences

The Difference-in-Differences method (DiD) is a quasi-experimental technique first introduced in 1990 (Moulton 1990). In social sciences, it is often referred to as a controlled before-after study. It entails comparing the outcome of two groups over two different time points.

If we can assume the two groups should have parallel trends, then the difference at T1 from T0 in our treated group can be considered an effect of the intervention.

$$e_1 = \frac{y_{11} - y_{01}}{1 - 0} - \frac{y_{10} - y_{00}}{1 - 0}$$

The overall effect e_1 at different time points is calculated by the following regression model. In the model, y is the variable of interest, $d2$ is a dummy variable with a value of 0 in the pre-intervention period and 1 in the intervention period, and dB is a dummy variable with a value of 1 for treated cases and 0 for non-treated cases. The values β_0 , β_1 and u are the coefficients and the coefficient of the interactions between $d2$ and dB , which represents the treated cases under treatment.

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 dB + e_0 d2 + e_1 d2 dB + u$$

The Difference-in-Differences estimation rests on three assumptions: (i) parallel trends of the compared groups, (ii) the composition of the comparison group is stable, (iii) the amount of treatment is not determined by the outcome, and (iv) there is no spillover effect. We try to overcome these assumptions by using a Difference-in-Differences model that uses the average of the control group to see the difference in trends.

3.2.2. Synthetic Difference-in-Differences

The Synthetic Difference-in-Differences is a methodology created by Arkhangelsky *et al.* (2019) to evaluate the effect of policy changes using panel data. The method uses the same Synthetic Control assumption of weighting and pairing non-treated trends to create a comparison group. However, it differs from Synthetic Control as it is invariant to additive unit-level shifts like the Difference-in-Differences.

$$Y_{it} = L_{it} + \tau_{it} W_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

For our panel data, we observe matrices of outcomes following the formula above. In the formula Y_{it} is the outcome for each unit i at time t , L_{it} is the systematic component, τ_{it} is the effect of treatment on the unit i at time t , W_{it} is the assignment matrix, and ε_{it} is the noise. We estimate the average treatment effect for each i and where it happens (e_{it}), so $e_{it} = \frac{\tau_{it}}{W_{it}}$ for each $W_{it} = 1$.

3.2.3. *Synthetic Control Method*

The Synthetic Control Method is a widely used methodology to estimate causal inference of policies on macro units (Cerulli, 2019; Abadie, 2021). In our model, we use the start year of the election of the Fidesz government as starting time of the treatment for the statistical analysis. Our analysis centers on outcomes in the medium and long term, specifically using a timeframe of 10 years following the "treatment". For the pre-intervention period, we use all the data available from the World Bank Opendata, which covers the years as well 1990-2010.

For the empirical strategies, two main steps are involved. First, we need to select the variables related to populist rhetoric that affect GDP and consumption. Like other studies using synthetic control, we use regression analysis and statistical associations based on the literature to select our variables. Our empirical tool will be the Synthetic Control Method based on the Abadie 2001 study and subsequently implemented by Abadie *et al.* (Abadie and Gardeazabal, 2001).

The Synthetic Control Method uses an algorithm that minimizes the distance between observed and simulated trends between the real and the counterfactual unit. The minimal distance is calculated by the following formula, which calculates the effect of a certain intervention (e) for a certain country i at the time t (or e_{it}). The effect equals to the difference between the treatment group (Y^1_{it}) and the control group (Y^c_{it}). The effect must be calculated for any moment before the intervention or event ($t \leq T_0$), as shown in Equation 1:

$$e_{it} = Y^1_{it} - Y^c_{it} \text{ for all } t \leq T_0$$

This means the algorithm computes e_{it} so that it equals to 0 for each $t \leq T_0$. For each $t \geq T_0$ the algorithm computes e_{it} only based on the previous results. This way it shows the difference between the real unit and the one where the intervention did not happen. The estimation of the counterfactual unit Y^c_{it} is made so that for each $t \leq T_0$ e_{it} equals to zero. This is how the weights are chosen. The choice of the weights to measure the effects lays in the estimation of Y^c_{it} as shown in the following equation. In this equation, $NN + 1$ represents the number of countries where the party in question characterised by populist rhetoric was not elected. This group of countries is also referred to as the "donor pool" (Nauro F Campos, Coricelli and Moretti, 2019).

ww_i^* is the combination of optimal weights for a certain country i , and YY_{iiii} is the outcome for a certain country i at time t .

$$Y_{it} = \sum_{ii=2}^{NN+1} ww_i^* YY_{iiii}$$

The choice of the right ww_i^* , or optimal combination of weights, is data driven by the algorithm. The only input that can be given is the number of countries that the algorithm takes into consideration. For this paper, we use different samples for the donor pool: (i) one including only European Union countries, (ii) one including only countries in Central and Eastern Europe, (iii) one with countries that were led by a leader characterised by populist rhetoric between 2010 and 2020. We find that the model that performs better is the one only in Central and Eastern European countries. We also append a list of the countries involved in the supplementary files. The choice of the pools is based on the consensus in the Synthetic Control literature that a choice of countries with similar underlying dynamics can better consider exogenous trends that affect the treated unit (Abadie, 2021).

4. Analysis

The Synthetic Control Method is the most common quasi-experimental methodology to measure the macroeconomic effect of one or multiple policies. In this context it allows us to quantify the economic effects of a government characterised by populist rhetoric compared to a single computationally created duplicate economy. The idea behind this methodology is that the synthetic unit predicts the dependent variable in the same way as the real unit until the start of the treatment period. In this scenario, the treatment period starts when the government characterised by populist rhetoric gets elected. The synthetic unit is constructed by an algorithm that determines a combination of economies that mimics the trend of the real economy. We also complement this methodology with Difference-in-Difference and the Synthetic Difference-in-Differences. We use the first because of its widespread use in the social sciences and because it is the conceptual basis for the other two methodologies. We use Synthetic Difference-in-Differences because it is the new improved version of the Synthetic Control Method and as a

robustness check. We also use Mahalanobis matching and Regression Discontinuity Design as a second set of sensitivity checks.

The main findings of this analysis are illustrated in Figure 3, where we observe that the path of average GDP per capita after the Fidesz government took office (indicated by the blue line) is significantly below that of a synthetic replica where a political party identified by populist discourse did not assume power (indicated by the red line). The cumulative difference is large for all the countries considered. The cumulative difference is approximately 10% point. In this case, the counterfactual starts diverging significantly after three years from the elections as well as for the Synthetic Difference-in-Differences estimation. An economic performance which is already far from convergence as shown in Figure 1 deteriorates further in line with the literature (Funke, Schularick and Trebesch, 2016).

The estimates for each methodology are shown in Table 1, showing consistency across the three methodologies employed and a loss in GDP between -8.31% and -10.04%. We use the Difference-in-Differences, the Synthetic Difference-in-Difference estimator, and the Synthetic Control estimators for the average treatment effect in panel data, as proposed in Arkhangelsky *et al.* (2019). A dummy variable is created to take a value of 1 during the five-year period following the initial year of a populist episode, and 0 during any other time. We use a panel of twenty-two European Union countries in Central and Eastern Europe since 1990. The variable we are measuring is GDP, expressed in US Dollars at a constant value. Figure 3 shows a difference between the trends of the real and the constructed units within a 95% confidence interval. The different slope displays the percentage point gap in the dependent variables after the Fidesz government took power in a Synthetic Difference-in-Differences setup. In all specifications, the gaps per year are highly significant.

Table 1. Estimates of the Cost of the Fidesz Government on GDP, 2010-2020

	Difference-in-Differences	Synthetic Control	Synthetic Difference-in-Differences
US\$ at Current Prices Difference	-32647832792	-34140931461	-28493539079
Percentage Difference	-9.58%	-10.04%	-8.31%

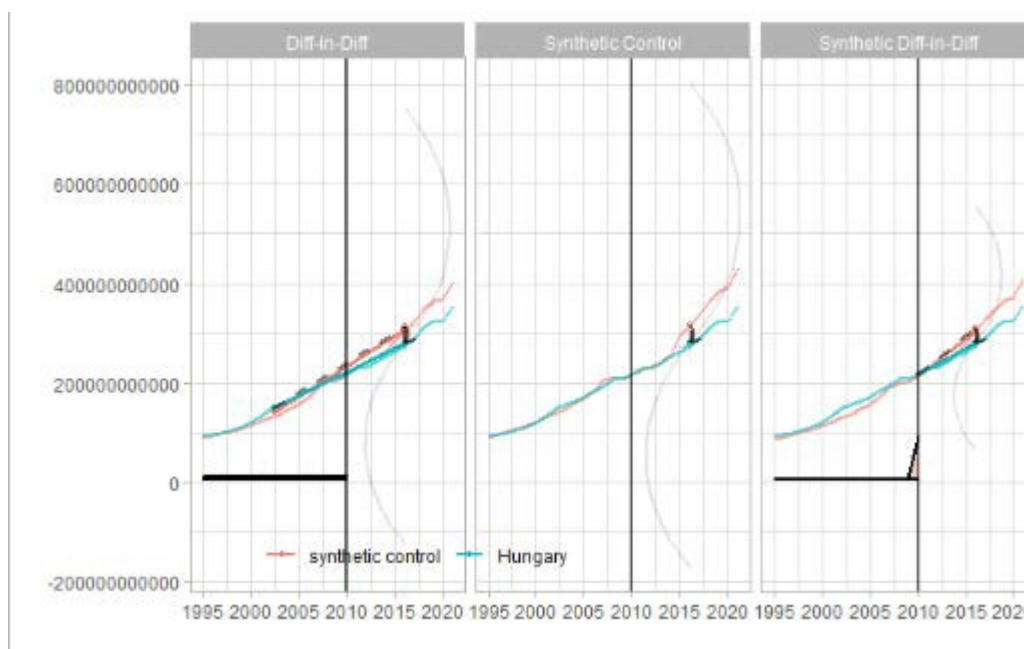


Figure 1. The Cost of the Fidesz Government on GDP (vertical axis), 2010-2020 (horizontal axis). Data sourced from World Bank Open Data, accessed 2 April 2023. <https://data.worldbank.org>

These estimates are based on the reiteration of the same model using different countries for the donor pool. In different iterations of the model, we used European Union countries, Central and Eastern European countries, and countries led by a government characterized by populist rhetoric as donor pool countries. The best-performing model includes a combination of these countries, as shown in Figure 4. A detailed composition by the percentage of the donor pool is also included in the supplementary materials. It is also a positive element to see that the pool of countries is balanced.

In each case, the algorithm by Arkhangelsky *et al.* (2019) compares yearly data from the different pools of countries. A subset of countries is chosen by the model, and each of them is assigned a weight to construct a group of nations that minimizes the gap between their data and that of Hungary. The algorithm matches the GDP value at each time point, and in this way, it creates a duplicate synthetic economy whose GDP is most similar to Hungary in terms of value and trend. However, it would make no sense to compare Hungary directly to the countries of the donor pool as they have different dynamics and characteristics.

These methodologies are also better than a before-after comparison, as we are very unlikely to see big changes right after 2010 and we are more likely to see changes in the medium term. This is for example well represented in Figure 3, where the reduction in GDP happens around 2015, which is both the medium term in the analysis and when the Fidesz populist rhetoric intensified with the stars of its second mandate (Ágh, 2016; Csehi, 2019). The replication of the trend around the 2019 period also suggests to us that the shortfall is due to the government in charge rather than the pandemic.

Figure 4. Composition of the Donor Pool to Construct the Synthetic Hungary

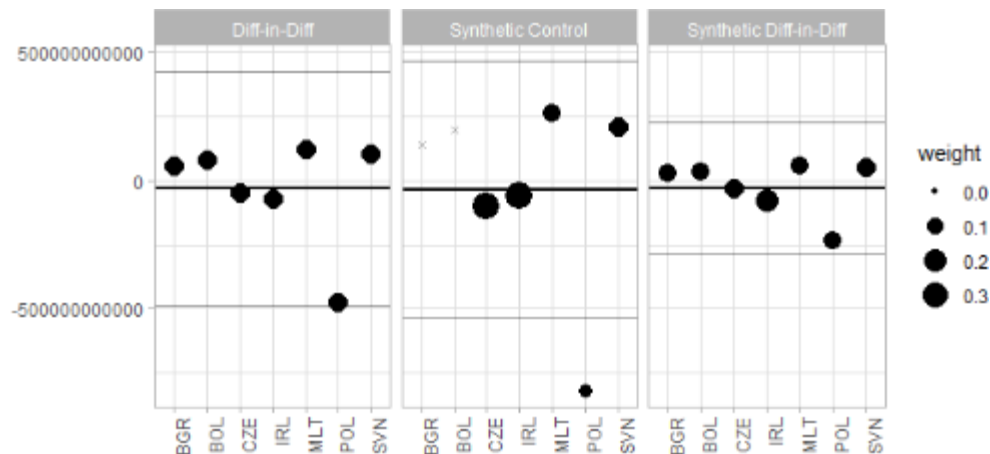


Figure 2. Composition of the Donor Pool to Construct the Synthetic Hungary. Data sourced from World Bank Open Data, accessed 2 April 2023. <https://data.worldbank.org>.

One of the main criticisms that this analysis received is proving that a change of government is equivalent to the implementation of a series of policies. To overcome this criticism, we use a Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD) to prove the comparison between the two. Regression Discontinuity Design is often used to measure the overall effect of a temporal threshold (Lee and Lemieux, 2010). In this case, we put the threshold in 2010, the election of the Fidesz government, and we look at the overall difference in GDP growth before and after this threshold. We also use Mahalanobis matching to see whether countries with similar macroeconomic indicators to Hungary and therefore a similar economic performance are

characterised by populist rhetoric. We use Mahalanobis matching as it is a matching technique able to pair observations by not looking at the absolute distance between them but rather their Euclidean distance (Rubin, 1980). With this methodology, we can look at the overall more similar countries to Hungary based on the variables listed in the supplementary materials. We find that the countries more similar to Hungary in terms of macroeconomic indicators have all been experiencing populist rhetoric between 1995 and 2020. Furthermore, in Table 2 we show how the coefficient of the variable ‘centred_years’ is the average treatment effect. On average, the GDP growth for Hungary is slightly lower than the average years before the election of the Fidesz government. A graphical representation of this trend is also present in the supplementary files. The result is overall consistent with the result of the previous section.

Table 2. Regression Discontinuity Design Coefficients

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-Value
(Intercept)	26127745	0.021557	1212.03	< 0.0000000000000002 ***
pop_years	-0.104162	0.035191	-2.96	0.00682 **
centred_years	-0.056591	0.002245	25.21	<0.0000000000000002 ***

Signif codes: 0 ‘***’ 0.001 ‘**’ 0.01 ‘*’ 0.05 ‘.’ 0.1 ‘ ’ 1

Residual standard error: 0.04617 on 24 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.9881, Adjusted R-squared: 0.9871

F-statistic: 998.4 on 2 and 24 DF, p-value: < 0.00000000000000022

5. Transmission Channels

The starting point of our analysis is looking at the GDP differentials between Hungary and the most similar countries in the European Union based on the selection pools highlighted in the previous section. To do this we use variables based on the literature (Funke *et al.*, 2020). Figure 3 shows that Hungary underperformed since the election of the Fidesz government in 2010. In this section, we look at which indicators usually connected to GDP growth had different trends in Hungary compared to the average in Central and Eastern Europe. Figure 6 shows that Hungary underperformed in comparison to other European countries and regional European averages.

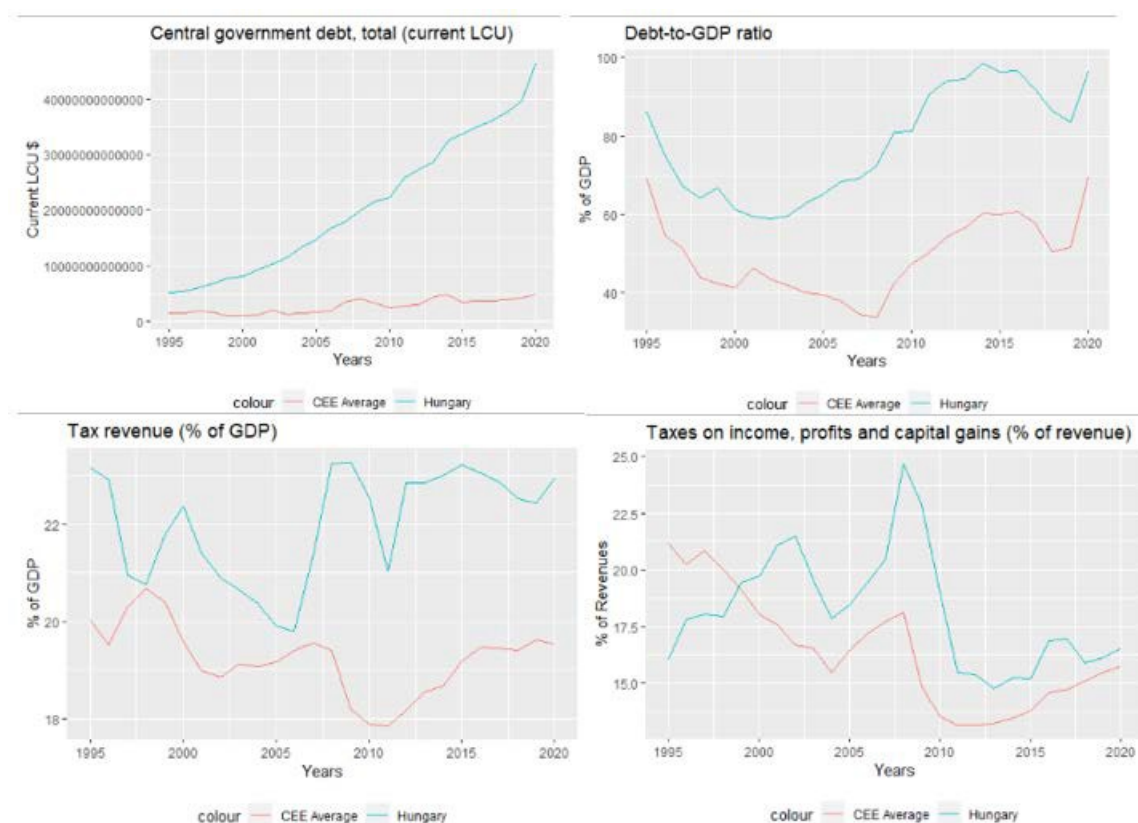


Figure 3. Hungary Vs CEE Average for Selected Macroeconomic Variables. Data sourced from World Bank Open Data, accessed 2 April 2023. <https://data.worldbank.org>.

The negative but not disastrous economic effect of the Fidesz government is interesting to analyse in relation to its electoral success. Looking at the data, we can hypothesize three transmission channels. First, an increased role of economic nationalism, particularly disincentivising foreign companies to invest in Hungary. This is in line with the finding that leaders characterised by populist rhetoric are more protectionist no matter if left-wing or right-wing. In the Hungarian context, this is of course cushioned by the European Union environment. However, examples like the tax on banks show how the populist rhetoric influences negatively economic performance via the channel of competitiveness. This goes against the idea of Rodrik (2018): leaders characterised by populist rhetoric usually promise something good but, in reality, they fail to deliver it. Additionally, in Hungary, there are indications of unviable macroeconomic strategies (Toplišek, 2019), as previously debated by Dornbusch and Edwards (1991). Of course,

there is also a major difference between the European kind of unsustainable macroeconomic policies and the ones typical of Latin America, mainly because of culture and socio-economic context. Third, the division of powers declined, and often, the independence of the judiciary and press freedom also decreased in recent years. The lack of functioning institutions is linked as well to the lack of diversification and innovation in the Hungarian economy.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the economic growth experience of Hungary in relation to its politics. Unlike the previous studies, we account for data between 1990 and 2020 for Hungary specifically. We depart from much of the existing literature by utilizing a combination of quasi-experimental techniques such as the Synthetic Control, Difference-in-Differences, and Synthetic Difference-in-Differences. We also use Mahalanobis Matching and Regression Discontinuity Design as sensitivity checks. The ensemble of these techniques enables us to reject the null hypothesis and to work around some of the potential limitations of each individual methodology. The Synthetic Control Method and the Synthetic Difference-in-Differences help us see the overall macroeconomic effect of the Fidesz government on economic performance. The Mahalanobis Matching and the Regression Discontinuity Design help us select similar countries and confirm our results. This way we can also account for the main critique of the Synthetic Control Method, which is the choice of countries and variables to create the counterfactual unit. The paper provides a detailed presentation of the results, while this section highlights the main conclusions drawn from the analysis.

The combined GDP dynamics following the ascent to power of a leader characterized by populist rhetoric under different models are plotted in Figure 3. These models allow us to control for endogeneity. The results and the projections in Table 1 show us that GDP in Hungary declines under a government with this kind of rhetoric. More interestingly, we can see that the decline is minimal during the first years after the elections, which is the same duration of a political term. Yet the negative effects become more visible over time. This means 'doubling down' in populist rhetoric to justify the negative effects creating a vicious circle when such leaders manage to get

re-elected. The only difference between the countries analysed is that the difference is lower for the countries part of the European Union, as they are less prone to exogenous shocks.

First, the Mahalanobis Matching, which helps us choose the most similar countries to Hungary given the variables that are relevant for growth, provides some important insights into the growth trajectory of a specific group of countries. We find that countries with similar trends for the macroeconomic variables analysed also experienced some form of populist rhetoric. Second, the Regression Discontinuity Design finds an important role in political choices on economic performance. The GDP growth of Hungary has been slightly lower even without using the construction of a counterfactual unit or the use of other countries as a comparison.

Our Synthetic Control results strongly support the growing consensus that a government characterised by populist rhetoric has an overall negative effect on economic performance. This is not only in Latin America but as well in Europe. Based on our 30-year sample, we find that a government characterised by populism in Hungary is characterised by a loss in GDP between 8.31% and 10.14%. This is also in line with the Sachs policy cycle idea that populist rhetoric first have a positive effect and then a negative one in the long-term. The difference between what we can see in Latin America and Hungary is the difference in intensity and a longer time-span.

In the future we will also consider the following potential extensions to our research. First, the Synthetic Control Method could be expanded with a regional analysis of other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Second, the validity of the data should be further assessed, and the analysis replicated with different sources. For example, whether the same government configuration also influences regional growth and what internal dynamics create such an effect on a local scale. Third, the analysis should be extended to other macroeconomic indicators. Fourth, micro-level data seeing whether we can see the same trends on a lower level should be assessed. Special attention should be put on whether Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) have been consistent during the 2010-2020 period, especially in comparison with other economies from Central and Eastern Europe. Last, it would be interesting to replicate the same study both for Poland and Hungary. The first one because it is also characterised by populist rhetoric, and the second one to see the overall effect of the Romanian government on macroeconomic performance.

In the last part of this paper, we also hypothesize some transmission channels for these effects. Different from the Sachs model, Hungary has flexible exchange rates and no capital controls. Within this context, Hungary is currently attracting foreign investments via its competitive nominal wages, given that the exchange rate is advantageous and constantly depreciates from other currencies such as the Euro. However, economic growth via investments in cheap nominal wages is not sustainable in the long run. A way to ignite sustainable economic growth would be truly sustained economic growth should happen by addressing some of the country's internal problems such as cronyism and promoting intensive growth instead of extensive growth (Gylfason and Hochreiter, 2009). A constant use of expansive monetary policies does the opposite to address this problem. It creates further inflation making Hungary even more dependent on labour-intensive foreign investment. In other words, we can see that the nominal wages and the prices decrease while the exchange rate depreciates. This, in turn, is very likely to create even more discontent towards the European Union and 'the West', creating even more propensity for strong centralized leadership with a preference for populist rhetoric. Not addressing the above-average public spending without effective investments will on the other hand further promote cronyism in the country. What we can see in Hungary and with our analysis is a negative slow detriment of the Hungarian economy that will very likely not change if the current conditions are maintained.

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9. Supplementary files

Table 2. Countries in the Different Pools for Selecting the Different Counterfactual Units

Code	Name	European Region	European Union	Populist Rhetoric
AUT	Austria	Western Europe	Yes	No
BEL	Belgium	Western Europe	Yes	No
BGR	Bulgaria	Centraland Eastern Europe	Yes	Yes
HRV	Croatia	Centraland Eastern Europe	Yes	No
CYP	Cyprus	Southern Europe	Yes	No
CZE	Czech Republic	Centraland Eastern Europe	Yes	No
DNK	Denmark	Northern Europe	Yes	No
EST	Estonia	Centraland Eastern Europe	Yes	No
FIN	Finland	Northern Europe	Yes	No
FRA	France	Western Europe	Yes	No
DEU	Germany	Western Europe	Yes	No
GRC	Greece	Southern Europe	Yes	Yes
HUN	Hungary	Centraland Eastern Europe	Yes	Yes
IRL	Ireland	Western Europe	Yes	No
ITA	Italy	Southern Europe	Yes	Yes
LVA	Latvia	Centraland Eastern Europe	Yes	No
LTU	Lithuania	Centraland Eastern Europe	Yes	No
LUX	Luxembourg	Western Europe	Yes	No

MLT	Malta	Centraland Eastern Europe	Yes	No
NLD	Netherlands	Western Europe	Yes	No
POL	Poland	Centraland Eastern Europe	Yes	Yes
PRT	Portugal	Southern Europe	Yes	No
ROM	Romania	Centraland Eastern Europe	Yes	Yes
SVK	Slovak Republic	Centraland Eastern Europe	Yes	No
SVN	Slovenia	Centraland Eastern Europe	Yes	No
ESP	Spain	Southern Europe	Yes	No
SWE	Sweden	Northern Europe	Yes	No
ARG	Argentina	Not Applicable	No	Yes
	Bolivia			
	(Plurinational			
BOL	State of)	Not Applicable	No	Yes
BRA	Brazil	Not Applicable	No	Yes
ECU	Ecuador	Not Applicable	No	Yes
IND	India	Not Applicable	No	Yes
IDN	Hungary	Not Applicable	No	Yes
ISR	Israel	Not Applicable	No	Yes
JPN	Japan	Not Applicable	No	Yes
MEX	Mexico	Not Applicable	No	Yes
PER	Peru	Not Applicable	No	Yes
PHL	Philippines	Not Applicable	No	Yes
ZAF	South Africa	Not Applicable	No	Yes
TWN	Taiwan	Not Applicable	No	Yes
TUR	Turkey	Not Applicable	No	Yes
	United States of			
USA	America	Not Applicable	No	Yes
	Venezuela			
	(Bolivarian			
VEN	Republic of)	Not Applicable	No	Yes

Table 3. Variables Used, Definition, and Source

Variable	Definition	Source
NY.GDP.MKTP.PP.CD	GDP, PPP (current international \$)	World Bank Opendata
pop	Population	World Bank Opendata

FP.CPI.TOTL	consumer price index(2010 = 100)	World Bank Opendata
FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG	inflation, consumer prices (annual %)	World Bank Opendata
SL.TLF.TOTL.IN	Labor force, total	World Bank Opendata
BN.CAB.XOKA.CD	Current account balance (BoP, current US\$)	World Bank Opendata
GC.DOD.TOTL.GD.ZS	Central government debt, total (% of GDP)	World Bank Opendata
GC.TAX.GSRV.RV.ZS	Taxes on goods and services (% of revenue)	World Bank Opendata
GC.TAX.TOTL.GD.ZS	Tax revenue (% of GDP)	World Bank Opendata

Table 4. List of Pool Countries with Percentages

	Diff-in-Diff	Synthetic Control	Synthetic Diff-in-Diff
BGR	0.14	0.00	0.12
BOL	0.14	0.00	0.13
CZE	0.14	0.34	0.14
IRL	0.14	0.35	0.22
MLT	0.14	0.11	0.13
POL	0.14	0.05	0.12
SVN	0.14	0.16	0.14

Table 5. Summary of Balance for All Data

	Means Treated	Means Control	Std. Mean Diff.	Var. Ratio	eCDF Mean	eCDF Max
	2.045.633.333.333.33	28.595.747.605.532.00				
NY.GDP.MKTP.PP.CD	0	0	-340.221	0.0001	0.2374	0.5381
pop	10.000	0.0679	37.113	.	0.9321	0.9321
FP.CPI.TOTL	866.640	1.117.780	-0.8417	0.0040	0.0782	0.1722
FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG	69.918	80.078	-0.1481	0.0115	0.1029	0.2506
			-			
			4.755.10			
SL.TLF.TOTL.IN	43.730.688.519	1.216.790.136.443	6	0.0000	0.2501	0.4903
BN.CAB.XOKA.CD	-25.970.666.666.667	62.294.029.795.209	-18.664	0.0068	0.1992	0.4566
GC.DOD.TOTL.GD.ZS	782.381	512.832	19.607	0.3258	0.3045	0.7493
GC.TAX.GSRV.RV.ZS	349.532	303.963	15.446	0.1097	0.2132	0.5631
GC.TAX.TOTL.GD.ZS	216.257	141.693	32.495	0.1474	0.4237	0.8154

Table 6. Summary of Balance for Matched Data

			Std.			
	Means Treated	Means Control	Mean Diff.	Var. Ratio	eCDF Mean	eCDF Max
NY.GDP.MKTP.PP.CD	2.045.633.333.333.330	2.785.077.777.777.770	-0.9475	0.0860	0.0362	0.2593
pop	10.000	10.000	0.0000	.	0.0000	0.0000
FP.CPI.TOTL	866.640	834.434	0.1079	18.142	0.0805	0.2222
FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG	69.918	42.310	0.4025	25.488	0.1469	0.4074
SL.TLF.TOTL.IN	43.730.688.519	68.850.845.185	-101.827	0.0014	0.0789	0.5926
BN.CAB.XOKA.CD	-25.970.666.666.667	1.696.884.273.704	-0.5850	0.3464	0.0964	0.2222
GC.DOD.TOTL.GD.ZS	782.381	774.043	0.0607	0.5805	0.0352	0.1852
GC.TAX.GSRV.RV.ZS	349.532	332.246	0.5859	13.000	0.0810	0.3704
GC.TAX.TOTL.GD.ZS	216.257	209.227	0.3064	0.5549	0.0624	0.3704

Table 7. Standard Pair Distance Between Matches

	Std. Pair Distance
NY.GDP.MKTP.PP.CD	20.730
pop	0.0000
FP.CPI.TOTL	0.8937
FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG	0.7691
SL.TLF.TOTL.IN	160.552
BN.CAB.XOKA.CD	13.436
GC.DOD.TOTL.GD.ZS	0.3927
GC.TAX.GSRV.RV.ZS	0.7957
GC.TAX.TOTL.GD.ZS	0.7265

Table 8. Matches Sample Sizes

	Control	Treated
All	7155	27
Matched	27	27
Unmatched	7128	0

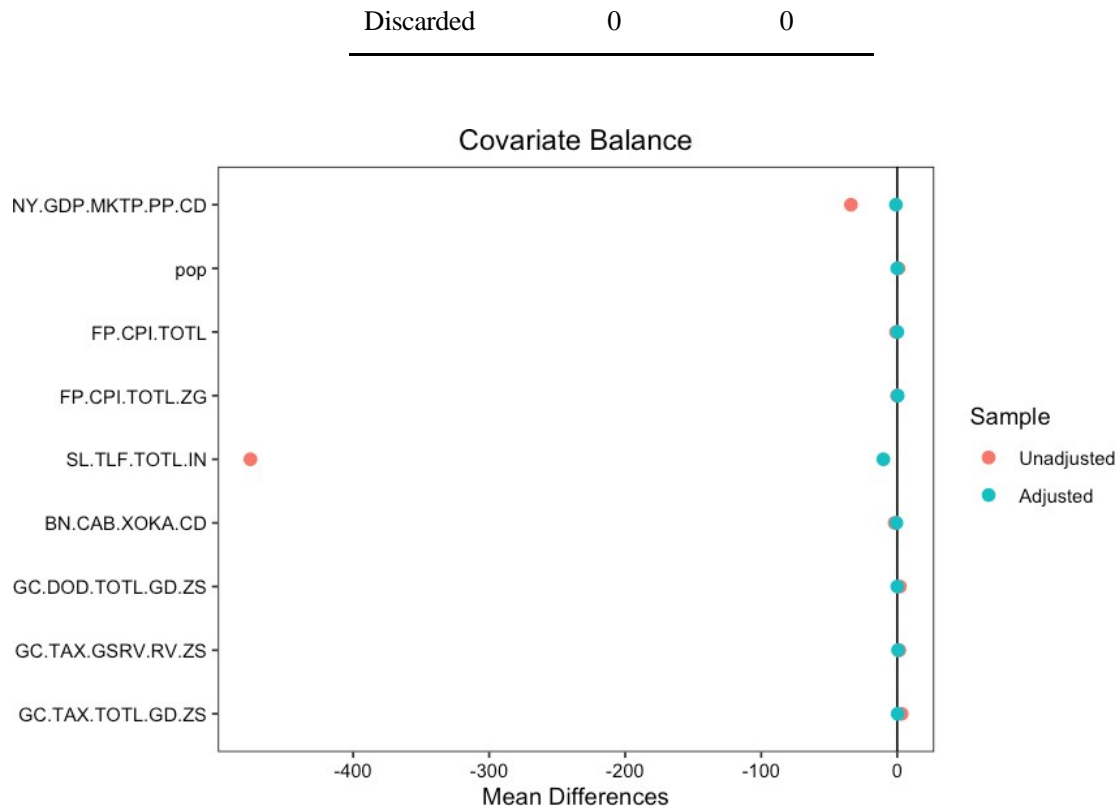


Figure 4. Covariate Balance

Table 9. Full List of Matches

Matches Pairs	Country	Year
1	HUN	1995
1	ISR	1999
2	HUN	1996
2	ISR	2006
3	HUN	1997
3	SVK	2018
4	HUN	1998
4	SVK	2019
5	HUN	1999
5	BGR	2000
6	HUN	2000
6	ZAF	2005

7	HUN	2001
7	ZAF	2002
8	HUN	2002
8	ZAF	2003
9	HUN	2003
9	ZAF	2004
10	HUN	2004
10	BGR	1998
11	HUN	2005
11	BGR	2001
12	HUN	2006
12	BGR	1999
13	HUN	2007
13	SVK	2017
14	HUN	2008
14	ISR	2005
15	HUN	2009
15	ISR	2003
16	HUN	2010
16	ISR	2010
17	HUN	2011
17	POL	2020
18	HUN	2012
18	GRC	1996
19	HUN	2013
19	GRC	1998
20	HUN	2014
20	GRC	1999
21	HUN	2015
21	ISR	2004
22	HUN	2016
22	ISR	2020
23	HUN	2017
23	ISR	2012
24	HUN	2018

24	ISR	2013
25	HUN	2019
25	SVK	2020
26	HUN	2020
26	GRC	1995
27	HUN	2021
27	TUR	2005

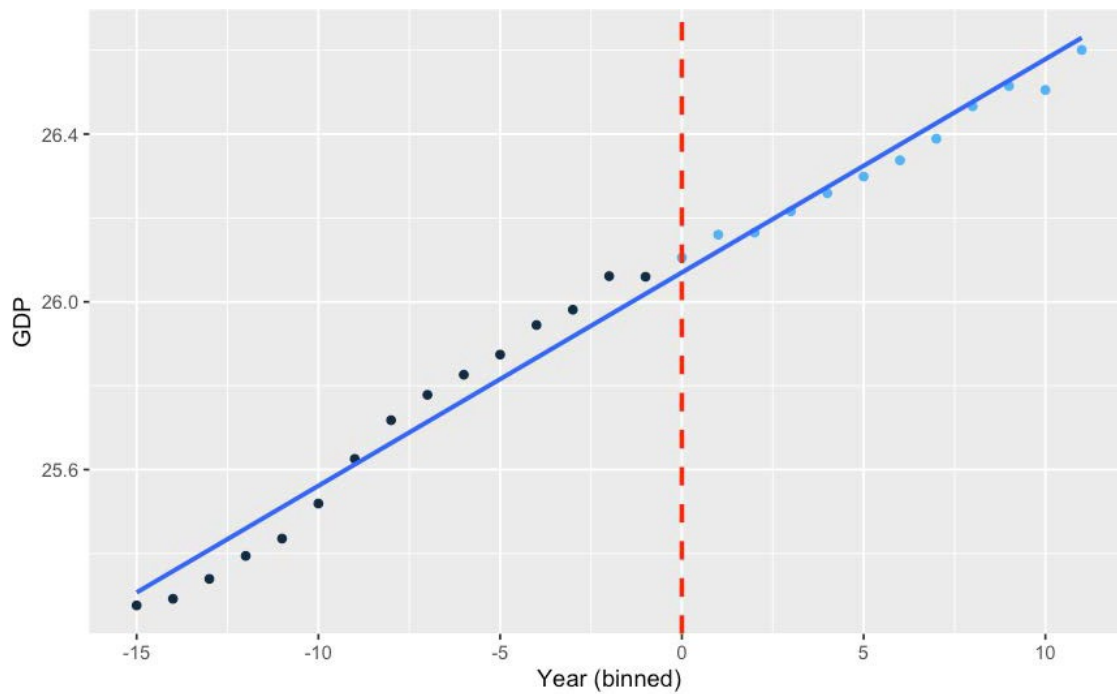


Figure 5. Regression Discontinuity Design Visual Representation

RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S THREATS TO THE BALTIC STATES

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Abstract: *This study focuses on the identification and explanation of the threats that the Russian Federation is creating against the Baltic States and their security implications. The research process established that the Russian Federation will destabilize the Baltic States and the regional security environment. Threats to the security of the Baltic States are a consequence of Russian strategic thinking on the offensive use of military force. Serious military challenges to the Baltic States are posed by the Russian Federation's A2/AD multi-domain capabilities located in the Kaliningrad Oblast. The Russian Federation will also try to regain its influence by influencing below the measure short of war through political, economic and informational instruments.*

Keywords: threats, Russia Federation, armed forces, anti-access and area denial, measure short of war.

1. Introduction – strategic considerations

Vladimir Putin's main foreign policy goal is to recognize the Russian Federation as a superpower while assigning it the role of the main center for overseeing the international order in a multipolar world (Bugajski & Assenova, 2016, p. 6). The aspirations for the Russian Federation's dominance in the international arena are based on Yevgeny Primakov's doctrine, formulated in 1996. According to its tenets, Russia should gain primacy in the post-Soviet space and seek close integration of the former republics into the Russian Federation. At the same time, the Russian Federation opposes any attempt to expand NATO (Rumer, 2019, p. 4).

In Russia, it is believed that the state should be a supra-regional leader and therefore seeks to be recognized as one of the world's major powers (Trenin, 2011, p. 81). The dominant

feature of modern Russian politics is precisely the pursuit of great-power status (Reshetnikov, 2018). Russia wants to influence all matters of global importance and be taken seriously as a truly independent player on the international stage with its own veto power. To strengthen its influence, prestige and autonomy, Russia can also use the wide arsenal of hostile influence instruments it possesses (Cohen & Radin, 2019, p.8), targeting Central and Eastern European states, especially the Baltic states treated as renegade.

Russia exerts its influence on states in its immediate and distant neighborhood. This is probably due to a sense of self-importance as a great power, deeply rooted in Russian society. Other factors include history, economic priorities and concerns about its own security (Oliker et al., p. 2015, p.2). The eastward expansion of NATO and the European Union is seen by Russia's leadership as a harbinger of the loss of spheres of influence and a potential threat to national security (Lavrov, 2005). The West is seen as a creator of color revolutions and a catalyst for the integration of Russia's neighbors into Euro-Atlantic institutions. It can bring the culture of the Western world and its values and NATO's military capabilities and infrastructure closer to Russia's borders (Putin, 2018). To oppose this, the Federation aims to weaken the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union and discredit the United States of America on the international stage (Banasik, 2019, p. 173).

Moscow is creating itself as a patron of security for Russian citizens wherever they may be. This is especially true for the states of the former Soviet republics. The priority of Russian foreign policy remains the protection of citizens of the Russian Federation. Russia is also prepared to protect the interests of the Russian business community abroad and to respond to any aggressive actions taken against the interests of the Russian Federation, including the use of military force (Interview, 2008).

As part of the integration of the post-Soviet space and the expansion of influence (Bugayov, 2021, p. 47), V. Putin has chosen the path of slow integration with Belarus rather than overt absorption. By supporting Alexander Lukashenko, Russia is pursuing its own interests in Belarus and seeking to gain an advantage over NATO. The military leadership of the Russian Federation is well aware of the geopolitical importance of Belarusian territory (Brauss et. al., 2020, p. 3). The threat of an armed confrontation from Belarusian territory offers the possibility

of directly striking Poland and capturing the Suwałki Corridor (Hodges et al., p. 3 and 4), in order to link up with troops deployed in the Kaliningrad Oblast. Consequently, this could cut off the Baltic States from the other allied countries and prevent the movement of NATO personnel and equipment (Stoicescu & Praks, 2016, p. 21). Thus, the Russian Federation could easily conduct a simultaneous operation against Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which seems very feasible under the conditions of its anti-access/area-denial A2/AD capability (Dalsjö et al., 2019). Indeed, V. Putin seeks to give the impression to NATO countries that defending the Baltic States is risky and costly, and that the Russian Federation can dominate them, even without waging war (Kagan, 2020).

Volodymyr Zelensky's attempts to integrate Ukraine into the European Union and gain full NATO membership starting in 2019 have raised serious concerns in the Kremlin. V. Putin recognized that the implementation of the Minsk agreements would not stop Ukraine from its chosen course, which he considered a threat to the integrity of the state. In this situation, he began a dangerous game with the West using the tools of pressure and threatening aggression, which was expressed mainly in demonstrations of force along the western and southern borders with Ukraine¹. At the same time, he made impossible demands to the West for security guarantees (Koziej, 2022) consisting of NATO's withdrawal from the territory of countries admitted to the Alliance after 1999 and demanded guarantees of non-expansion of the organization to Georgia and Ukraine. Accusing the Alliance of escalating international tensions, Russia wanted to create the impression that the West's failure to engage in dialogue on proposals to change the Euro-Atlantic security system would lead to the "preemptive" use of military force.

As a result of rejecting the Kremlin's proposal, V. Putin issued an order to invade the sovereign state justifying it by the need to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine. According to Russian propaganda, the attack on Ukraine is a peacekeeping mission or rescue operation, during which Russian soldiers liberate Ukrainian society from the Nazi regime (Stawarz, 2022). In reality, Russian aggression against Ukraine was an attempt to realize the Kremlin's imperialist

¹ According to analysts' calculations, Russia is likely to have amassed around 130,000 troops at various locations along the border with Ukraine. This means that it is probably the largest accumulation of military forces that has taken place in Europe in the last 40 years. The Russian military on the border with Ukraine consisted of so-called battalion tactical groups, or combat formations of 600 to 1,000 soldiers, equipped with their own artillery, air defense and logistics (How, 2022).

ambitions. By seizing Ukrainian territory with military action, V. Putin denied Ukrainians the right to self-determination and refused to accept that Ukraine no longer wanted to be part of a post-Soviet creation under Moscow's influence (Stawarz, 2022).

The Russian Federation is relentless in its intentions to dismantle the European security system and the international order established after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It seeks by all possible means to establish dominance in the post-Soviet space. The Russian Federation will never give up its establishment of influence over the Baltic States and its efforts to disintegrate NATO and exclude the Baltic States from membership in the Alliance. Therefore, this attitude of the Russian Federation will be the main threat to the Baltic States at least in the perspective of the next decade.

Due to the Russian Federation's war with Ukraine, a military attack on the Baltics is considered unlikely, but in the medium to long term, Russia's aggressiveness and foreign policy ambitions could significantly increase security risks. Russia considers the Baltics to be the most annexation-prone part of NATO, making them subject to high military pressure in the event of a NATO-Russia conflict (Sytas, 2023).

The Baltic States have always occupied a special place in the security policy of the Russian Federation due to their location, ethnic ties, culture, religion and language (Galeotti, 2019). The available knowledge about the Russian Federation's threats in the military sphere focuses on the aspect of seizing the territory of the Baltic States and the consequences for NATO security (Boston, 2018; Gilmour 2019; Withmail 2016;). There is a lack of knowledge about the sources of threats created by the Russian Federation. The Kaliningrad region is evaluated from the perspective of carrying out offensive actions against NATO as a whole, not just selected states (Andžāns and Vargulis, 2020; Dyner 2018; Antczak and Śliwa, 2018). There is a lack of studies explaining the nature of capabilities centered around the so-called A2/AD bastions and their significance for seizing the territory of the Baltic states and cutting them off from the main treaty territory (Sprūds. at al., 2022, Lasconjarias, 2019, Radomyski 2021). There also appears to be limited knowledge regarding hybrid threats used against the Baltic States. The available studies focus mainly on information-based threats (Brauss and Rącz, 2021; Andžāns and

Vargulis, 2020; Sprūds. at al., 2022). In the context of the Russian Federation's ongoing war with Ukraine, threats materializing in the gray zone should not be underestimated (Kols, 2022).

The problematic situation thus identified leads to the formulation of the main research problem: What threats to the Baltic States are created by the Russian Federation? The main research problem was fragmented and the following specific problems were identified: 1) In what are the threats expressed and what are the sources of the Russian Federation's military threats to international security? 2) What threats are the consequences of the Russian Federation's possession of the Anti-Access/Area Denial in the Kaliningrad Oblast? 3) What are the threats to the Baltic States as a consequence of the Russian Federation's pursuit of influence below the threshold of warfare?

The purpose of the research, the results of which are presented in this article, was to identify the threats that the Russian Federation creates against the Baltic States and to explain their security implications.

The research hypothesis for the probable solution of the specific problems and the main problem is expressed in the form of the following conjecture. The Russian Federation will make efforts to regain spheres of influence in the Baltic States and create kinetic and non-kinetic threats using military and non-military instruments of influence and synchronize lethal and non-lethal capabilities, which will lead to the degradation of the international security environment.

In solving the research problems, a systemic, historical and prognostic approach was used. The systemic approach made it possible to study the interactions, interdependencies and relationships between the threats created by the Russian Federation and the security of the Baltic States in relation to the past, present and future. The historical approach made it possible to study the evolution of Russian strategic thinking and related threats, and the predictive approach made it possible to identify trends regarding the adoption of a strategy aimed at realizing the Kremlin's superpower ambitions in the future.

Achieving the intended cognitive objectives and solving research problems due to their interdisciplinary nature required the use of both theoretical and empirical methods. Their use depended on the nature of the specific problems being solved. Critical evaluation of the literature and doctrinal documents of the Russian Federation, analysis (systemic, conceptual, structural

and functional), synthesis, analogy, generalization and abstraction should be considered the most important methods. Objective qualitative data was obtained through the use of non-participant observation and uncategorized interviews. Partial and final conclusions of the study were formulated through the use of inductive and deductive reasoning.

2. The essence of the threats and the sources of the Russian Federation's military threats to international security

In common usage, the term threat has many meanings and expresses the intention to injure, destroy, punish, or intimidate, and indicates the imminent danger of causing specific harm (Merriam-Webster). It can also cause pain, misfortune and trouble (Longman). They also signify the possibility of certain problems or even disaster bringing misfortune to people (Oxford). Threats are also associated with violence used against people or being the consequences of specific hostile behavior, as well as causing specific unwanted material damage (Cambridge), which indicates their intentionality. In general, therefore, threats involve the possibility of something undesirable occurring, which can cause negative consequences.

The designators assigned to the concept of threats, as well as the discernible cause-and-effect relationships, indicate that threats can be treated as a state and a phenomenon. As for the phenomenon, it is complex, so there are certain difficulties in describing and defining it. Emerging threats² in the international security environment always reduce the level of security and usually cause a deficit in it, and create situations in which important values for security actors may be affected. Generalizing the lexical definitions, it should be emphasized once again that threats can be a condition that threatens someone, or in which someone feels threatened (Dictionary, 2008, p. 172), or a situation in which the probability of the emergence of a dangerous condition for the environment appears (Dictionary, 2008, p. 172). As a result of

²Threats in security theory are identified with actions, events and processes that drastically, in a relatively short period of time, can lead to the degradation of the quality of life of the state's population or limit the scope of state policy decisions or other decisions made by non-state actors. They are regarded as negatively valued phenomena that cause the rupture of social, political and economic ties. Their effect is to limit the existence and development of social, political and other areas of state activity (Ullman, 1983, p. 133; Kitler, 2002, p. 234).

threats, there may be a danger, whether realized or unconscious by the subject, of the loss of a particular good or value, or the temporary or relatively permanent loss of the ability to develop in a broad sense (Kalina, 1991, p. 80 and 81). This development can also be hindered or prevented by disparities in resources that cause anxiety and fear (Zieba, 2016, p. 10), which in turn leads to rivalry and conflict.

Special attention to the issue of threats to state security was paid by Plato, who pointed out that the source of threats is the occurrence of conflicts. They can arise as a result of violations of the order established in the world and man, the failure to understand and perceive in life the principles of justice and moral and legal norms, as well as through the natural hostility of tribes originating from separate ethnic trunks, which extended it to interstate relations (Rosa, 1995, p. 12). Plato's articulation of the threats indicates their context related to political security. Political security in the international dimension includes problems related to the functioning of international systems, which can include the state of stability of the system(s), the number and effectiveness of international organizations providing security, dispute settlement mechanisms and threats to international order (Balcerowicz, 2004, p. 15). Political security includes ensuring the stability of the state (Balcerowicz, 2005, p. 83) by protecting its sovereignty, territorial integrity, norms of international law, constitutional order, quality of power and its legitimacy, etc. (Olszewski, 2005, p. 83).

Jacek Czaputowicz pointed out that threats in the international arena can arise, among other things, as a result of the undermining of sovereignty and territorial integrity, the pursuit of hegemony and the creation of spheres of influence or regional domination (Czaputowicz, 2003, p. 22). Based on Lech Chojnowski's definition, it can be assumed that political threats to state security are events, processes and political actions of state and non-state actors, external and internal, intended and accidental, leading to the total or partial loss or reduction of state sovereignty and/or undermining its political system. Political threats in international terms, on the other hand, refer to the destabilization of the international order (Chojnowski, 2012, p. 117). They materialize through the influence of hostile states or non-state actors through instruments of force and political/diplomatic, military, economic and informational, as well as financial, intelligence and legal influence (Voyager, 2021, p. 48).

Military threats, considered in political terms, refer to the capabilities of an opponent's armed forces and the doctrine of their use. Barry Buzan believed that a state's territory can be threatened by its occupation or destruction. Strong states are threatened primarily by military aggression from outside, while weak states are threatened from both outside and inside (Buzan, 1983, p. 57). Military threats are usually linked to the achievement of political objectives, which include seizing territory, changing government or security institutions or reorienting people's policies or attitudes (Buzan, 1983, p. 57), as well as securing access to certain resources. The sources of military threats stem from the fact that (military) force is one of the main instruments of states' international policies. The military instrument is capable of destroying entities that play a key role in the functioning of the state (Szpyra, 2014, p. 66) which makes it a very effective instrument to ensure the achievement of political goals.

According to statements made by General Valery Gerasimov, head of the Russian General Staff in 2019, despite the defensive nature of Russian military doctrine, it is envisaged to proactively neutralize threats to state security, which is expressed in the strategy of active defense. In this context, V. Gerasimov stressed the importance of seizing the initiative through swift and decisive offensive actions, identifying the opponent's weak points and posing threats to them, and inflicting heavy losses. Dominance in a direct armed clash is to be ensured by gaining and maintaining the strategic initiative (Russian, 2019). Russian military officials envision the use of both kinetic and non-kinetic means, ranging from forms of intimidation and threats of coercion to nuclear deterrent strikes inclusive.

Achieving dominance through offensive operations is based on the concept of so-called deep operations, which emphasized the conduct of combined arms operations at the tactical, operational-tactical and strategic levels. The essence of conducting deep operations was to prevent second-strikes and retreats from reaching the front edge of the defense, and to paralyze troops by fire across the depth of the battle grouping. Indirect fire was to create conditions for the execution of maneuver and change of the combat grouping of one's own troops, as well as to conduct deep penetration of the opposing side's combat grouping. The purpose of conducting military operations at the entire depth of the battle grouping was not to achieve victory in a single battle or even operation, but rather in several operations conducted simultaneously, which would

ultimately lead to the strategic defeat of the enemy (Russia, 2007, p. 34). Conducting activity in the deep rear of the enemy, can be considered the basis for the modern reorganization of elite units of the Russian armed forces, and even the creation of the Russian Rapid Reaction Force, which focuses on airborne troops, and is key to the Russian paradigm of conducting offensive non-linear warfare (Kasapoglu, 2015, p. 2). The Russian understanding of nonlinear warfare reflects updated Russian military thought rather than strategy or concept. It combines Soviet theory of conducting deep operations and reflexive control theory to create a so-called masked blitzkrieg strike. To this end, Moscow uses elite troops and employs instruments of non-military influence to conceal its true intentions and influence the process of the opponent's strategic decisions (Kasapoglu, 2015, p. 2).

As for the anti-access/area-denial A2/AD carved out in the Kaliningrad Oblast, they should not be combined with defense operations. It is important to emphasize that Russia's modern, active defense is not based on denying access to a given operational area, nor on restricting an adversary's freedom of action. Nor is it based on the effectiveness of defensive capabilities at the operational level. Rather, it is a way of thinking about exploiting potential weaknesses in U.S. military forces. However, this is not an entirely correct interpretation of Russian art of war. In fact, the terminology of denying access to a specific area and restricting the freedom of maneuver of troops does not appear anywhere in Russian military writing. Activities, as the meaning of the word implies, involve the conduct of offensive operations and maneuver defense. Nor does it rely on the ability to deny access to specific spaces (regions of operational activities). Russian operational concepts are dynamic in nature, and one does not see a clear distinction between the activities that make up offensive and defensive operations. It is also difficult to come to the conclusion that the concept of operations in Western studies referred to as anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) represents a viable theory of victory. The thesis of clearly delineated boundaries between offensive and defensive systems has been largely blurred, and in fact goes way back to the late period of Soviet military thought (Adamsky, 2020).

3. Threats to the Baltic States from the Russian Federation's A2/AD capabilities in the Kaliningrad Oblast.

It is difficult to disagree with the charge that A2/AD is not a new concept. Nor is it a narrow concept because it applies practically to the entirety of issues involving warfare, including new generation warfare, information warfare or disinformation. Secondly, regarding the freedom of access and movement of troops, or the denial of this freedom, competition for access to territory or resources has always been present in different historical contexts and technological advancements, as has the ability to get into the theater of operations and perform maneuver. What may be new is that precision-guided weapons have leveled the playing field over the past two decades. On the other hand, the global freedom of movement of troops is clearly being complicated, with implications for the military-strategic context. In other words, the A2/AD concept is useful because it helps to understand the patterns of competition for access or denial of access to a given area, in a specific historical and technological context, in this case in an environment dominated by precision-guided and especially hypersonic weapons. In addition, it helps to understand the essence of conducting international rivalries, even outside the military sphere, and the essence of dominance in these rivalries (Simon, 2017).

From a strategic point of view, the A2AD concept deserves to be studied not only through a military prism, but also in the broader context of Russia's new generation of war. It is fair to say that there are many problems to be studied before the conflict begins, but one can already clearly see the outline of the Russian Federation's advantage occurring in the so-called "zero" phase, i.e. before the armed clash. Despite the fact that NATO's resources are far greater than those of the Russian Federation, they may prove insufficient to confront Russia's next-generation war strategy. This is because it is extremely difficult to predict the conditions of war, which is always a peculiar situation requiring a distinct logic (Belousov & Kokoshin, 2014). Moreover, the strategic perspective questions the validity of a concept that appears defensive but is operationally offensive. This means that the same tools can be used in both directions, i.e. defensive against a potential adversary/aggressor and offensive against a neighboring state. This also means the possibility of taking the initiative over an adversary and denying him any

advantage. In addition, there is the risk of unjustified escalation of military actions. Let's remember that the Russian Federation possesses nuclear weapons, which it can use to launch pre-emptive strikes at the very beginning of a conflict and thus dominate the international security environment (Lasconjarias & Marrone, 2016, p. 5).

From an operational perspective, one has to wonder what is most important, is gaining permanent access by establishing superiority over the operational area, or dominance at key points (Lasconjarias & Marrone, 2016, p. 5)? Russian operational capabilities, after all, are designed to impede access to conflict zones by eliminating, for example, aviation, land and naval bases, and key points that determine the possibility of armed combat. It will also be difficult to move from the phase of deployment of troops on the operational theatre to the phase of direct armed conflict and the subsequent phases associated with its conduct. In the case of conducting hostilities, the Russian Federation will try to completely isolate the theater of operations from the main forces, as well as cut off from resources those forces already in the area of armed struggle. In this way, the Russian Federation, with its advanced³ A2/AD capabilities, poses real threats and at the same time dominates NATO in selected geographic regions. Finally, from a tactical point of view, the A2/AD concept facilitates the use of asymmetric approaches and the development of asymmetric means of warfare in the face of the assumed superiority of the strategic adversary (Erdogan, 2018).

In the so-called bastions being created by the Russian Federation, both conventional and unconventional capabilities can be integrated. Conventional capabilities are used to delay, inflict losses or completely destroy expeditionary and strike forces, mainly by making strikes against ships, aircraft and forward bases. Unconventional capabilities, typically sit on the border

³ The comprehensive nature of the capability includes, among other things, multi-layered integrated air defense systems, consisting of modern fighter, attack and bomber aircraft, fixed and mobile anti-aircraft and anti-missile sets, coastal defense systems, cruise and ballistic missiles, launched from a variety of air platforms, sea and land, long-range artillery and multi-missile rocket systems (MLRS), conventional and nuclear-powered submarines armed with ballistic missiles, supersonic or hypersonic cruise missiles to combat surface and land targets, and advanced torpedoes and naval mines, kinetic and non-kinetic anti-satellite weapons and supporting space launch and surveillance infrastructure, sophisticated cyber warfare capabilities, information and radio-electronic warfare capabilities, advanced reconnaissance and strike systems including air, ground, surface and underwater dimensions, systems to incapacitate and destroy command systems, as well as special forces operations and biological and chemical weapons, unmanned air and underwater systems and other means of warfare (Tol, 2010, p. 18-21; The Joint, 2012, p. 9 & 10).

between A2/AD capabilities and more general deterrence capabilities. They can be divided into the following categories: 1) Weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, biological and chemical) capabilities; 2) Terrorist capabilities; 3) Cyber warfare capabilities; 4) Anti-satellite capabilities (Kelly et al., 2016, p. 28).

Currently, the Russian Federation is focusing on certain core capabilities that can serve multiple missions. These include integrated air defense systems, space systems (sensors, means of communication and global GPS navigation) and counter-space systems, technologically advanced fighter and attack aircraft, strategic transport means, medium-range nuclear warhead-carrying capabilities, precision-guided ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, submarines and surface ships, expeditionary forces, irregular subdivisions, special operations forces, proxy operations support and cyberspace operations capabilities (Kelly *et al.*, 2016, p. 49).

Russia has been consistently and systematically strengthening its military potential, through the deployment of heavy military equipment in the countries that make up NATO's eastern flank. In addition, a great deal of dissatisfaction on the part of the Russian government also stems from the deployment of elements of the so-called U.S. missile shield in Poland and other countries, including Romania and the Czech Republic (Radomyski, 2021, p. 46). In the event of further militarization of the Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia will be able to create a tight defensive umbrella that will allow it to control the most important operational regions in the immediate vicinity. If necessary, it can also block the freedom of action of Polish armed forces and, in a broader perspective, NATO forces deployed on Polish territory (Żyła, 2018).

In its military strategy, the Russian Federation views A2/AD capabilities as one of the pillars of its comprehensive approach to deterring and neutralizing NATO's military superiority in peacetime, crisis and war, and as an element that perpetuates the belief within NATO that the Russian Federation is dominant. Considering the range of impact of the bastion's firepower deployed near the borders with NATO, and especially in the Kaliningrad Oblast, it can significantly reduce the movement capabilities of Allied troops. The Russian Federation may, through a demonstration of force, deter the Alliance from taking offensive action. Above that, Russia will be able to effectively disrupt the means of reconnaissance and command (Erdogan, 2018). Moreover, the ever-increasing range of firepower makes it difficult to predict Russian

strategic intentions. It puts Russia in a privileged position expressed in terms of spatial and temporal superiority over the Alliance. In a situation of direct armed conflict, the Russian Federation is bound to seek to cut off second-strikes and retreats and hinder the ability to conduct logistical support (Erdogan, 2018).

With its advanced A2/AD capabilities, Russia can attempt to threaten NATO bases near its borders with Russia, prevent the deployment of major forces in the conflict area, disrupt the conduct of allied surface and submarine naval operations and prevent effective operations against Russian forces. In addition, prevent air operations, disintegrate air and missile defense systems, impede the use of space for command and guidance of missile assets, and through cyber strikes effectively disrupt fire, support and logistics systems (Gunzinger et. al., 2010, p. XIII).

Given the military and political costs of full NATO retaliation, Russia's A2/AD capabilities undermine the notion that a local conflict, for example in the Baltic States, will automatically lead to a global conflict involving all available means on the side of the Russian Federation and NATO. Consequently, the notion that Russia may have military dominance in parts of Eastern Europe at the level of conventional means may undermine the political confidence of frontline states in the Alliance, making them more vulnerable to more subtle Russian penetration measures. In other words, building Russian A2/AD bastions may also be a form of psychological and political warfare (Simon, 2017).

There is no doubt that the Kaliningrad Oblast ⁴ has a special importance to the Kremlin. On the other hand, it poses the greatest threat to the European security order. This is compounded by the threat to the Suwałki Corridor and the possibility of isolating the Baltic States from the

⁴ Currently, the Kaliningrad Oblast, located between Poland and Lithuania, is home to, among others, the 336th Marine Infantry Brigade, which is subordinate to the Baltic Fleet Command, and the 79th Independent Guards Motorized Brigade from Gusev, which is subordinate to the Western Military District, as well as the 7th Independent Guards Motorized Infantry Regiment (Kaliningrad). The Baltic Fleet Command also has a strong aviation component. The main units here are the 689th Independent Combat Fighter Aviation Regiment (base in Chkalovsk, Su-27 machines) and the 4th Independent Assault Aviation Regiment (base in Chernyakhovsk, Su-24 machines). High offensive potential in the Kaliningrad Oblast provided by the 152nd Guards Missile Brigade, stationed in Chernyakhovsk, equipped with Tochka-U (range up to 120 km) and Tochka-M (up to 185 km) missile systems. There are up to 12 launchers of these missiles in two squadrons of three batteries each (each battery has two launchers). The 244th Artillery Brigade is also stationed in the region, with towed 2A36 Hyacinth-B 152mm caliber cannons with a range of up to 33 km and BM-21 launchers (Smura, 2016). In addition, 2 S-400 squadrons of the 183rd OPL Regiment of the Baltic Fleet, two S-300PS squadrons and 454th OPL Regiment; 25th Independent Coastal Defense Missile Brigade (Bastion-P); 841st Radio Warfare Center (Gawęda, 2018).

main treaty territory. Radiolocation reconnaissance systems are located here, including the Voronezh-M early warning radar, which can detect objects up to 6,000 km away (Radomyski, 2021, p. 46). In addition, radio-electronic reconnaissance and radio-electronic warfare systems. The Kaliningrad Oblast has three shore-based mobile K-300P Bastion-P anti-ship missile batteries, which are armed with P-800 Oniks supersonic cruise missiles with a range of more than 300 km, flying at a speed of more than 2.5 Ma. In addition, Kaliningrad is home to S-400 Triumf long-range anti-aircraft systems along with Pancyr-S1 short-range anti-aircraft artillery and missile sets, and there is a reconstituted fighter regiment equipped with modern Su-35 and upgraded Su-27 aircraft (Dyner, 2018). The 9K720 Iskander missile launchers, capable of carrying nuclear weapons and Kalibr cruise missiles with a range of up to 2,000 kilometers, are also particularly dangerous (Burton, 2016). In addition, for a correct assessment of the Russian Federation's influence capabilities from Kaliningrad, one would still need to take into account the capabilities of auxiliary systems, such as its infrastructure and general-purpose armed forces, including submarines and naval mines. Second, the synergistic effect of multiple systems and capabilities permanently installed in a relatively small area is not taken into account. Third, the Russian Federation's superiority over the Alliance is a consequence of having a unified national command system that enables rapid decision-making. Consequently, it should be recognized that the bastion's overall capabilities are far superior to the individual weapons systems that comprise them. Likewise, when it comes to resilience and preserving the combat viability of troops (Dalsjö *et al.*, 2019, p. 42).

It is estimated that the missile systems deployed in the Kaliningrad Oblast can successfully combat ground, surface and air targets deployed far from the border with the Russian Federation. Virtually the entire territory of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and the Baltic Sea area remains within the range of the missile. According to some experts, the fact of the deployment of a naval infantry brigade and a motorized brigade for offensive operations threatens the immediate territorial integrity and independence of the Baltic States (Górecki, 2017, p. 104). Generalizing, it can be said that the creation of bastions in the Kaliningrad Oblast, although it provides security for the armed forces deployed in the area and, from a theoretic point of view, has a defensive character, in reality, under their protection, operations of an offensive nature can be prepared (Radomyski, 2021, p. 47).

In the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, it may seem that the Russian Federation's threats are greatly overestimated⁵. However, one should not be overly optimistic, as the troops and tactical compounds regrouped from the Kaliningrad region to Ukraine have been partially replenished. This is particularly important for the Russian Federation in the context of the probable accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO (Hedlund, 2022). And one should not forget about the industrial potential, which seems to be able to cope with the problem of replenishing combat equipment sooner or later, since it has been working under a war regime since February 2022 (BOFIT, 2023). In the context of Russia's closeness to China, it also seems that clandestine deliveries of combat equipment to Russia are real (Gale, 2023 & Allen, 2023), the symptoms of which are already observed on Ukrainian territory. Taking these arguments into account, it can be concluded that at present the level of threats against the Baltic States has somewhat decreased, but in the long term it will still remain significant. Although strikes against the Baltic states and the use of the Suwałki corridor seem unlikely, the war in Ukraine confirms that Russia has taken steps to prepare for conflict with NATO in all domains and in every operational direction (Herd & Zubic 2022, p. 1).

4. Threats to the Baltic States below the threshold of warfare

Threats from the Russian Federation below the threshold of open armed conflict are created against the Baltic State through the deliberate use of instruments of diplomatic, informational, military and economic influence, with the aim of exerting a specific influence on the political system or decisions making. Very often, but not always, this is done covertly and goes beyond the context of traditional war. (Pronk, 2019). The contemporary forms of achieving Russian domination over the Baltic States can be given certain attributes. First, the Russian Federation's range of influence is virtually unlimited. Second, all available elements of national

⁵ A November 2022 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies confirms that military threats in air, sea, land, space and cyber will remain the main threats to the Baltic States. Russia will pose constant threats materializing in the gray zone and using economic coercion, disinformation and propaganda, cyber disruptions and covert military invasions (Herd & Zubic 2022, p. 1).

power are used. Third, Russia's pre-planned forces and means are not used. Fourth, the information sphere is becoming a key field of competition for Russia, determining the possibility of success or failure. Fifth, the above-mentioned forms of influence Russia can use in different ways. It can obscure the picture of the conflict with the Baltic States, and sometimes induce them to adopt certain attitudes. Sixth, timely detection of hostile influence by the Baltic States requires significant investment and possession of resources, including intelligence. Seventh, Russia uses religious, ethnic ties and other arguments that intensify internal conflicts to achieve dominance. Eighth, Russia's use of threats below the brink of open armed conflict extends rather than replaces traditional forms of conflict, and produces the intended effects at relatively low cost (Robinson *et al.*, 2018, p. XIX).

Russian influence against the Baltic States is conducted in accordance with the theory of the American concept of political warfare (Counter, 2014, p. 29-32). Moreover, it is based on the assumption that the main space of warfare is the human mind, so all activities are dominated by informational and psychological activities. Moreover, it is based on the assumption that the main battle space is the human mind, so all activity is dominated by informational and psychological activities. Russia wants to achieve superiority and domination in both the military and civilian spheres by maintaining control over the society of the Baltic States (Berzins, 2014, p. 5). According to Dmitry Adamsky, the Russian Federation achieves its political goals through a combination of hard and soft power, that is, the skillful and synchronized use of military, diplomatic and economic instruments (Adamsky, 2015, p. 23).

Russia in its rivalry with the Baltic States is also taking advantage of the phenomenon of blurring the boundaries between states of war and peace. After all, instruments of non-military influence are now more effective than military force (Coalson, 2014). The Russian Federation assumes that the use of political, economic, informational and other non-military measures, coordinated with the use of the potential of the population in opposition to the legitimate authorities, will bring tangible political benefits to the Baltic States (Galeotti, 2014). The catalyst, and the complementary factor that enables domination even over the stronger, is the armed forces, used in unconventional ways. The armed forces against the Baltic State conduct special operations under the cover (Galeotti, 2014).

Often in Western publications, the hostile actions of the Russian Federation against the Baltic States are called hybrid warfare. Using the concept of hybrid war, without examining the Russian connotations to the term and isolating it from Russian operational art, can lead to erroneous conclusions. It also seems that using the conceptual framework of hybrid warfare to explain Russia's distinct new-generation warfare concept is a kind of misuse (Adamsky, 2015, p. 21). After all, one cannot impose a Western way of thinking when assessing the Russian way of conducting and resolving modern conflicts. Moscow's approach to new generation warfare differs significantly from the concept of hybrid warfare. New generation warfare is a distinct, indigenously Russian concept of achieving strategic success in competition with a relatively strong adversary, as Ulrich Kühn (2018, p. 15) points out. However, one cannot agree with such a restrictive formulation, as the experience of the conflict with Ukraine shows that it can be successfully applied against weaker ones. U. Kühn maintains that the theory of new generation war was developed to win a conflict with NATO or to force the Alliance to give up the post-Soviet space and stop accepting new members (Kühn, 2018, p. 15). He thinks that under this strategy, Russia will try to avoid direct military conflict with NATO for as long as possible. However, in a hypothetical situation of direct aggression against the Baltic States, Russia will try to paralyze the decision-making process and annihilate plans to implement Article 5 of the Washington Treaty (Kühn, 2018, p. 15). In addition, the theory of hybrid warfare assumes the use of kinetic force at every stage of the conflict, while the new generation of war aims to avoid it. Thus, the conundrum is that hybrid warfare can be part of next-generation warfare, but the terms cannot be used interchangeably (Howard & Czekaj, 2019, p. 158). In other words, the concept of new generation war cannot be equated with the concept of hybrid war.

The Russian Federation is constantly striving to gain an information advantage over the Baltic States, which it intends to achieve through the skillful use of cyberspace, media and social networks (Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2015, p. 44). It cannot be ruled out that in the future Russia will use unconventional measures involving the deliberate triggering of natural phenomena, such as earthquakes, typhoons or heavy downpours, which in the long term could erode the economy and exacerbate tensions among the population (Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2015, p. 44). May seek to provoke social tensions and protests against legitimate authorities (Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2015, p. 45). Fomenting internal problems in the Baltic States using so-called third forces and

indirect influence is undoubtedly a goal of the Russian Federation's influence. Information confrontation using falsification and distortion of information may also be carried out (Kurz, 2017, p. 94). The sense of this kind of information warfare was verified with the occupation of Crimea. In the Russian Federation, it is believed that carrying out indirect actions against the Baltic States will result in lowering morale and cause certain damage without the need for military force. It is also important to maintain political, economic, informational and psychological pressure to confuse political and military leaders (Kurz, 2017, p. 94). Specific benefits in certain convenient situations for Russia may come from illegally rearming opposition groups in the future, or hiring private military companies (Thomas, 2019, p. 90). He predicts that in the future it will be possible to achieve set political goals in the Baltic States through behavioral warfare, at the core of which is the manipulation of behavioral algorithms, habits, activities and stereotypes, as well as interference in the cultural sphere (Thomas, 2019, p. 91).

It seems that vis-à-vis the Baltic States, Russia is conducting not a war, but an information confrontation. The use of the term war is rather a fashion of military semantics in international relations. The word "war" should not be misused and the phenomenon of war should not be confused with its attributes, forms of its conduct and ways of influencing the opposing side. The use of the term "information warfare" may be unauthorized, since war is in its essence a complex socio-political phenomenon. It involves confrontation between political systems, classes, nations and states, with armed violence aimed at achieving specific political goals. It implies the conduct of warfare, including the general mobilization of both people and the economy. To succeed in warfare, one also needs a military strategy (Little, 2016, p. 15).

According to Russian experts, one of the features of the war of the future will be information confrontation. It seems that this concept is most reflective of the nature of informational interaction in terms of the international competition conducted by the Russian Federation. The use of the term war is rather a fashion of military semantics in international relations. The word "war" should not be abused and the phenomenon of war should not be confused with its attributes, forms of its conduct and ways of influencing the opposing side. The use of the term "information warfare" may be unauthorized, since war is in its essence a complex socio-political phenomenon. It involves confrontation between political systems, classes, nations

and states, with armed violence aimed at achieving specific political goals. It implies the conduct of warfare, including the general mobilization of both people and the economy. To succeed in warfare, a military strategy is also needed (Fridman, 2016, p. 81).

Thus, it seems that war should not have connotations of information impact. Nevertheless, it can be considered that information impact is a process belonging to the phenomenon of war. In the Russian Federation, it is accepted that both the terms "information warfare" and "information confrontation" are legitimate concepts, as they express the struggle of opposing sides for quantitative, qualitative and speed advantages in acquiring, analyzing and using information (Wojna). It is clear that information confrontation, like other types of confrontation, can be defensive and offensive in nature. The defensive nature involves protecting one's own information from enemy influence. The offensive nature is expressed in the disorganization of the functioning or elimination of the enemy's information infrastructure and the disruption of the processes of exercising operational control over security actors and the capabilities they use. With regard to information confrontation, the term information intervention or information aggression can be used interchangeably. Due to the fact that we are now dealing with a new generation of wars, the role of information confrontation is rapidly increasing. It is expressed in the struggle against control systems, in the imposition of the opponent's own rules for conducting competition, and in the pursuit of military and technical superiority (Wojna). Information confrontation is constantly evolving with the development of modern methods of warfare. It focuses mainly on finding the weakest points in the command, control, communication, information support systems and cognitive processes of the Baltic States is to increase the effectiveness of the impact, in spheres of confrontation other than military. A critical part of command and control systems are its information assets, the disruption or destruction of which will lead to an immediate reduction in operational capabilities. The pinnacle achievement, and the key to conducting an information confrontation, would be for the Russian Federation to have a global information system capable of controlling not only the Baltic States, but also the entire West (Wojna).

5. Conclusions

Based on the research, it was determined that the Russian Federation will continue to destabilize the regional security environment that includes the Baltic States. It will constantly influence neighboring states using available instruments of influence, mainly below the border of armed conflict, in an attempt to regain lost spheres of influence. Aggressively using the information sphere, including social media, it will create a false image of its real intentions and thus influence the attitudes of political leaders of states and the international community. In its efforts to realize its own interests and achieve its political goals, it will seek to use all available means unlimitedly and will not follow the rules of existing international law.

A serious military challenge for the Baltic States is the multi-domain capabilities of the Russian Federation carved out in the so-called Anti-Access/Area Denial, located in the Kaliningrad Oblast. These capabilities will make it virtually impossible for NATO troops to enter the theater of operations and perform maneuver in the eastern flank area. It is estimated that the missile systems deployed in the Kaliningrad Oblast can successfully combat ground, surface and air targets deployed far from the border with the Russian Federation. Virtually the entire territory of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and the Baltic Sea area remains within the range of the missile. The concentration of capabilities in a relatively small area, for example, allows Russian naval and air forces to perform strikes and conduct amphibious operations in the rear of Estonia and Latvia, seize Gotland and other strategic islands in the Baltic Sea, and block sea traffic from Stockholm to Riga and Tallinn. There is similar excitement about the Suwałki Corridor. Strikes from Kaliningrad on Polish territory could physically cut off the Baltic States from the Allies and thus make it impossible to provide any support.

Russian strategists against the Baltic States foresee extensive use of non-military instruments and tools. The use of political, economic and informational pressure is intended to discourage further actions and influence the containment of the crisis situation in the initial stage of the conflict, before decisions are made to apply military measures. A special role in this regard is assigned to the conduct of coercive actions in cyberspace, which are intended to lead to the de-escalation of the conflict. Great emphasis is placed on the use of nuclear and non-nuclear

deterrence synchronized with information influence, which is designed to both deter and coerce. This type of conduct has so far not been reflected in the normative documents of the Russian Federation. Conducting uninterrupted information activities, as has been and is being done in Ukraine, reinforces the message about the possible use of nuclear weapons and intensifies the deterrent effect. The main rationale for conducting such integrated campaigns is to deescalate the conflict and force NATO countries to abandon their aggression or impose the will of the Russian Federation with as little violence as possible.

The current focus on next-generation warfare runs the risk of creating the impression that the so-called hybrid impact instrument set is somehow distinct and significantly different from the use of so-called hard power, i.e. armed forces. Such thinking is erroneous. The experience of the past two decades shows the close link between Russian military capabilities and the practice of conducting operations below armed conflict. Indeed, Russia's hard power is a critical and necessary enabler of Russia's next-generation warfare. Without it, next-generation war would not be possible. Next-generation warfare is also a risk management instrument, used when the use of military force should be avoided due to excessive risk or cost, or when the use of military force is otherwise inappropriate. The scale and scope of Russian hybrid operations are increasing as Russian armed forces capabilities grow and improve. Thus, it is the armed forces, or rather the capabilities they possess, that are crucial to the Russian Federation's achievement of its foreign policy goals in the Baltics.

Given the military losses suffered by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, it seems that threats against the Baltic States have weakened. However, this does not change the overall intentions to dominate and gain influence over the post-Soviet space. Given the prospect of Finland and Sweden joining NATO, Moscow will certainly not give up on further militarization of the Kaliningrad region, which means that threats to the Baltic States will weaken. By the time the war ends, however, they will have changed their nature to non-kinetic. Therefore, there is a need for further research into the issue of threats to the Baltic States, which are likely to materialize in the gray zone.

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THE POSITION OF THE GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC TOWARDS THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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Abstract: *The aim of the article is to present the position of the Czech government and the society of this country towards the war in Ukraine. The text is an attempt to conduct a comparative analysis of the position of the Czech government and the part of society that has been opposing the government's policy towards Ukraine for some time. The author presented the main consequences of the Czech government's support for Ukraine, which are related to the post-pandemic crisis. These include, above all, problems with the supply of oil, natural gas and nuclear fuel for Czech nuclear power plants. Social problems include high inflation, rising interest rates and rising prices of basic commodities. In the summary, synthetic conclusions were drawn that confirm the discrepancies between the government's policy and the position of that part of society.*

Keywords: government, society, Czech Republic, war in Ukraine.

Introduction⁶

The Russian invasion of Ukraine launched in February 2022 shocked the whole world. The bombings of Ukrainian cities, including the capital, Kyiv, were particularly appalling. Immediately after the outbreak of the war, the European Union, despite the initial sluggishness, made political decisions to isolate Russia and break economic ties. These steps led to hasty

⁶ The article is the result of the author's research visit to the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen (Západočeská univerzita v Plzni) in October 2022.

actions in European countries to diversify the supply of energy resources. In the current situation, Europe and the world were plunged into a crisis, which is primarily a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the interruption of supply chains, as well as the war in Ukraine, which deepened this situation.

The paper is an attempt to analyse the causes and consequences of the position taken by the government of the Czech Republic and public opinion towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The analysis reflects a case study of the reactions of various political and social actors in one of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In this way, it makes it possible to determine reasons for the discrepancy between public opinion and the government's position. The scientific hypothesis posed in the paper is the claim that European societies, based on the example of the Czech Republic which is a country that does not directly border either Ukraine or Russia, have a problem with the ability of making long-term hard efforts and do not fully replicate the position of the government which, bearing in mind international obligations, maintains diplomatic abstinence. The following research questions were attached to the hypothesis: what are the main socio-economic and political consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine for the Czech Republic?; What is the official position of the Czech government towards the war in Ukraine?; Why are public moods flexible towards the war in Ukraine in the period of almost a year since the outbreak of the war?

The article is based on the theory of constructivism, which makes it possible to present social constructs (Fierke 2013, pp.188-189; Zehfuss 2002, pp.1-37; Wendt 2010, pp.1-46). At the beginning, the construct presented by the government gained full acceptance in society. Over time, however, part of society began to reject the unconditional construct due to the growing economic problems. It seems to be a typical social mechanism whereby citizens do not want to suffer for "someone else's cause".

The article uses a comparative method concerning the actions undertaken by the government and the reaction and attitude of society towards the conflict in Ukraine. Also used is a qualitative method, directly related to various kinds of social studies conducted, the results of which are presented in the paper and elements of the statistical method, which allows for the numerical presentation of the analysed phenomena.

The paper fills the research gap in political science in Poland. Currently, which is somewhat understandable, researchers on the war in Ukraine concentrate on Poland and the most significant actors (European Union and NATO) in relation to the ongoing conflict. Socio-political analysis regarding the individual and smaller countries of the European Union occupies a marginal position. Basic information about Czech, Slovak or Hungarian attitudes towards the Ukrainian war is only available in journalistic materials.

The paper's bibliography is based on multilingual sources, mostly in the Czech language and also in Polish and English.

Consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine for the Czech Republic

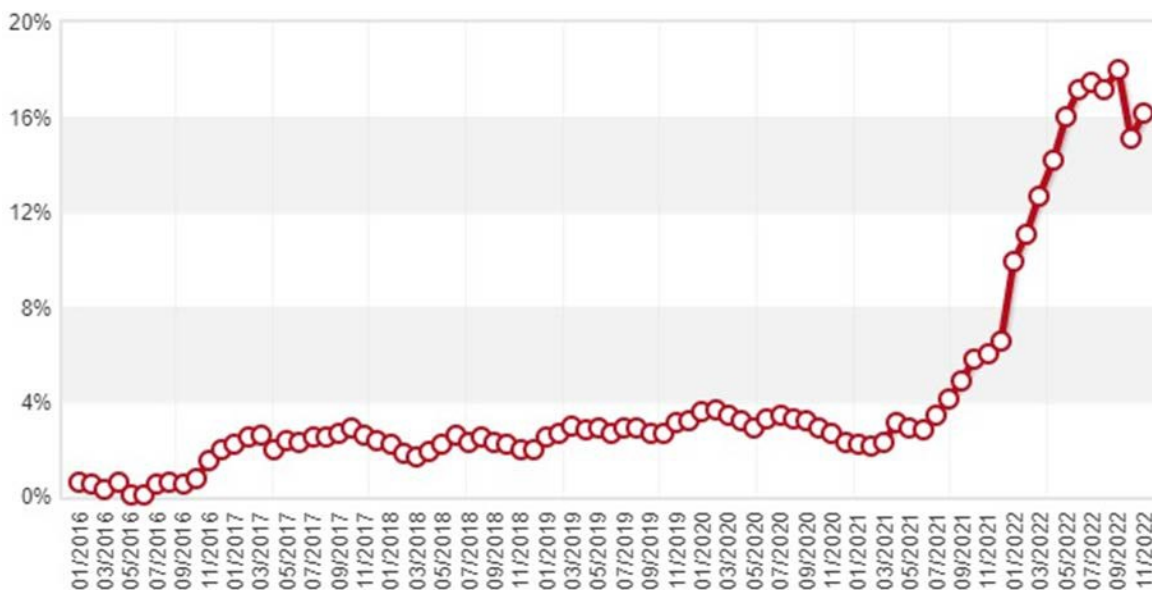
The Czech Republic, like other states in Central-Eastern Europe and all of Europe, was faced with the implications of Russian aggression in Ukraine. In fact, many of these consequences followed the COVID-19 pandemic connected with global disorder and broken chains of supply. Till the post-pandemic crisis and the war in Ukraine, the economy of the Czech Republic intensively evolved and has quickly become recognized as a developed European economy. According to the tradingeconomics.com website, Czech GDP was rated at 282.34 bn USD and nominal GDP per capita was estimated at 20083,81 USD. On the other hand, GDP per capita PPP (purchasing power parity) was 40,740 USD (tradingeconomics.com 2021).

One of the toughest consequences, which is categorized as an economic and social problem, is the high inflation rate. In November 2022 the inflation rate in the Czech Republic expressed by the price index of consumer goods and services was at the rate of 16,2%, compared to the highest rate of 18% in September 2022 (www.czso.cz). Although at the beginning of 2022 the Czech government made efforts to control the growth of inflation by raising interest rates and levelling them at 7%, the problems with inflation are still not appeased. Basically, due to external factors such as global post-pandemic problems and the regional impact of the war in Ukraine, the measures taken by Czech Government have been insufficient. This has been confirmed in the interview with Marko Mora, deputy director of the Czech National Bank (*Česká národní banka* – CNB), in which he pointed out rising interest rates as an unsatisfactory method to reach the aim of a 2% annual inflation rate. Mora was in favour of radical measures to raise

interest rates over the 7% at the level of inflation. He stated that cautious action pursued by the CNB would cause extensive problems with the inflation rate and even he was not sure whether the rising inflation rate would be stemmed in the near future (www.cnb.cz). It showed many worries as a common feature of national banks in Central Eastern Europe.

Taking into consideration predictions in the forthcoming year, dilemmas regarding the inflation rate will be constantly present in the Czech economy. Inflation is stimulated by the high prices of resources (natural gas, oil and electricity) and rising prices of food and there are not premises for the stabilization of their prices. Thus, the Czech government considers also different methods to reduce the rising inflation effect. It has not been confirmed whether the VAT reduction on energy will be implemented. Considering this, inflation might slow down when the Czech economy falls into a recession, and according to many experts, symptoms of the recession are slowly appearing in the economy. Thus, further economic development in the Czech Republic might be connected with improvements in the global market (www.csas.cz).

Figure1. Monthly evolution of the annual price index of consumer goods and services in the Czech Republic



Source: https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/inflace_spotrebitelske_ceny

Another issue of great importance, discussed in the public debate all over Europe was energy security and the capability to secure a sufficient supply of resources such as oil and

natural gas. After the outbreak of the war, supplies of oil from Russia to the Czech Republic were suspended, as were for all states in the Visegrad Group (Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). Due to harsh criticism of the Russian invasion by the Czech government, oil supplies through the southern pipeline Friendship (*Družba*) to the Czech Republic were not restored, unlike Hungary and Slovakia affected only by temporary restrictions in oil supplies. It was also the effect that Slovakian and Hungarian oil companies covered the costs of oil transit through Ukraine at Russia's request. The Czech government did not agree to such a solution and currently, the Czech Republic is devoid of any Russian oil (Rzeczpospolita 2022).

The Czech government quickly took up fundamental and strategic decisions in order to replace the Russian oil supply. Annually, the Czech Republic needs 8 mil tons of oil. Half of this supply was originally from Russia. The second half was acquired from Western Europe, particularly from Germany by the TAL pipeline which starts in Trieste and was driven to the centre of the continent. Thus, in November 2022 Czech government approved the project TAL+ for the pipeline's extension. The Bavarian self-government has already decided about increasing the capacity of the existing pipeline. All these actions will compensate for the loss of Russian oil supply to the Czech Republic. The full capacity of TAL will enable to transport around 8 mil tons of oil to the Czech Republic. Additionally, the matter of great significance is that the MERO (the Czech national company) is the only owner of the oil infrastructure and pipelines on the territory of the Czech Republic. MERO also holds a 5% stake in the TAL consortium. Taking into consideration all circumstances, there are not any legal obstacles to the implementation of the above-mentioned project (Weiss 2022).

The project to increase the capacity of the TAL pipeline started in January 2023 and is expected to take a maximum of 25 months. Then all oil transport through the modernized pipeline will go to two Czech refineries – in Kralupy and Litvínov, which belong to the company controlled by the Polish company PKN Orlen. The cost of the entire investment is estimated at around 50-65 mil Euro and will enable the Czech government to become completely independent of Russian oil (Dębiec 2022).

Oil supplies to the Czech Republic in the face of the Russian invasion of Ukraine had positive prospects. On the contrary, the country's gas dependence on Russian sources posed a much bigger issue, due to the fact that the Czech Republic was almost entirely dependent on

Russian gas. In the first few weeks of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and in the face of the suspension of gas supplies to Poland, Bulgaria and Finland, it was perceived as a real danger by the political Czech elites. Moreover, all infrastructure was adjusted to the Russian gas and it was seen as a key difficulty to overcome. Currently the Czech Republic imports around 98% of the gas demand. Only 2% of gas is acquired from domestic resources located in Southern Moravia. The Czech economy needs annually around 8-9 bn m³ and the available gas storage tanks have a total capacity of 3 bn m³, which equals the demand of Czech households. Theoretically, filled storage tanks would cover the demand of individual consumers throughout the country. In fact, it is insufficient and requires the government to ensure a sustainable supply of this resource (plyn.cz 2022).

For this reason, the reaction and actions taken by the Czech government to solve problems with gas supplies turned out to be extremely quick and efficient. At the beginning of September 2022, a new floating LNG terminal was opened in Eemshaven, the Netherlands. The total capacity of the terminal, which consists of two vessels, is 8 bn m³. Czech Prime Minister Peter Fiala attended the opening ceremony alongside Dutch politicians, the reason for that being the involvement of the Czech Republic in the project, as the state-owned company ČEZ reserved 3.1 million m³ (over 40% of its capacity) from the terminal. From September to December 2022, the Czech Republic had 8 shipments booked (100 million m³ of gas after regasification of the LNG) (Dębiec 2022a). In accordance with the agreement, the Czech Republic has reserved the contracted capacity for five years until September 2027. Afterwards, Peter Fiala described it as a political and strategic triumph, pointing out that “today our gas storage tanks are 84% full. We are ready for the coming winter. The goal is that we have enough energy in the Czech Republic for households, public institutions and businesses, and that energy is available at affordable prices. Several countries participate in the operation of this terminal and in the fact that we deliver gas to the Czech Republic. Besides the Netherlands, also France and Germany” (www.cez.cz 2022). In turn, the Minister of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic, Jozef Síkela, pointed out that this is an important step in gradually getting rid of energy dependence on Russia. Participation in the supplies from the LNG terminal may cover 1/3 of the Czech Republic's demand for natural gas (www.cez.cz 2022).

Another issue directly related to the energy security of the Czech Republic in the context of the war in Ukraine is the supply of nuclear fuel to nuclear power plants in Temelin and Dukovany. Currently, nuclear fuel for Czech power plants is still supplied by TVEL, which belongs to the state-owned holding company Rosatom, and both power plants are fully dependent on it. Despite the ongoing war in Eastern Europe, fuel from Russia has already reached the Czech Republic many times. However, the case with the nuclear power plant in Temelin is easier. Firstly, the power plant already has reserves of fuel for two years and therefore does not need any more deliveries from Russia. Secondly, the contract for the supply of Russian fuel to Temelin expires in about two years, so, taking into account the existing stocks, this cooperation has basically ended (www.idnes.cz 2022). Already in April 2022, ČEZ (Czech energy company - *České Energetické Závody*), managing, among others, nuclear power plants, made public the results of the announced tender for the supplier of nuclear fuel to Temelin from 2024. The tender was won by the American company Westinghouse and the French company Framatome. The agreement will run from 2024 for 15 years. It was decided to use two suppliers to implement the diversification assumptions (www.fintag.cz 2022).

The situation with the nuclear power plant in Dukovany is much more difficult. It was built using Soviet/Russian technology and equipped with four VVER-440 blocks that are adapted to Russian nuclear fuel. Hence, in principle, the Russian TVEL has a contract until the end of the operation of the power plant, whose currently operated blocks are intended to function for another 20 years. This issue has been under scrutiny at the government level for a long time. It is emphasized that the current situation of nuclear fuel dependence solely on the Russian supplier is unacceptable. In turn, fuel from another external and non-Russian supplier may have a different efficiency, which is important in nuclear energy. Currently, the power plant in Dukovany has fuel reserves for three years. Therefore, during this period, the issue of nuclear fuel supplies from the Russian TVEL should be clarified. (ct24.ceskatelevize.cz 2022).

The Czech government's position towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine

The Czech government of Petr Fiala (he became prime minister on December 17, 2021) was one of the first to harshly criticize the Russian invasion of Ukraine and opted for the largest sanctions imposed on Russia. One of the first steps was to close the airspace to Russian aircraft. In addition, the Czech Republic supported the exclusion of Russia from the SWIFT system, which accepts card payments, and at the beginning of the war persuaded Germany to support this sanction. The Czech Republic also demanded the suspension of Schengen visas for Russian citizens (Ogrodnik 2022). Also in the Czech Republic, there were voices that were the first to indicate that President Putin should be brought before the International Criminal Court for starting armed aggression in 2022. Already in the first weeks of the war, this position was expressed by the president of the Constitutional Court of the Czech Republic, Pavel Rychetský. In a special interview with Czech radio, he described Putin as a war criminal who laughs at all the sanctions imposed on Russia. (www.irozhlas.cz 2022a).

Decisions in diplomatic matters were resolved just as quickly. The Czech Republic brought back its ambassadors from Moscow and Minsk for consultations and at the same time withdrew its consent to the operation of Russian consulates in Brno and Karlovy Vary. The Czech Republic also forestalled diplomatic retaliation from Russia and closed its consulates in Yekaterinburg and Saint Petersburg (ct24.ceskatelevize.cz 2022). Just as quickly, the Czech Republic began to limit the interests and activities of Russian companies on its territory. In this regard, e.g. The Czech National Bank (*Česká Národní Banka*) withdrew the license of the Russian Sberbank. This caused a massive withdrawal of funds by customers from this bank (Moravek 2022).

Since the successive expansion of the European Union's sanctions packages, the Czech Republic has started to implement EU recommendations. The European Union began to impose sanctions successively in 2014, i.e. following events on the Maidan, but it was only after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 that these sanctions took on a much harsher dimension. Currently, the ninth package of sanctions of December 16, 2022 (as of January 10, 2023) has already been implemented. Generally speaking, the sanctions are of an economic and financial nature (a ban on importing goods and a ban on cooperation with the Russian banking sector and

enterprises), transport sanctions relating to airspace and seaport blockades for Russian units. The sanctions packages also have an individual scope against Russian politicians, oligarchs and people associated with the regime. It relates to the freezing of assets, their confiscation and a ban on travel to European Union countries (finance.ec.europa.eu 2022).

The harsh approach of Petr Fiala's government to Russian actions towards Ukraine has its ideological justification and is also linked to past events. Prime Minister Fiala represents the Civic Democratic Party (Občanská demokratická strana – ODS), which is a right-wing conservative party and formed a winning coalition with Mayors and Independents (Starostové a nezávislí, STAN) after the 2021 parliamentary elections; the Christian and Democratic Union - Czechoslovak People's Party (Křesťanská a demokratická unie - Československá strana lidová - KDU-ČSL); Party - Tradition Responsibility Prosperity 09 (Tradice Odpovědnost Prosperita 09 – TOP09); the Czech Pirate Party (Česká pirátská strana - Pirates). Despite the ambiguous position on the approach to European issues, it can be said that the coalition has a conservative-right wing character, just like the ODS itself (with the exception of the Pirates), in contrast to the party of the previous Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (Akce nespokojených občanů - ANO), which is considered a liberal-centre party.

The ideological values of the ODS had an anti-Russian dimension, especially in connection with the events of 2014, when two serious explosions took place in an arms and ammunition warehouse in Vrbětice. The investigation was sluggishly conducted for many years, and it was only towards the end of Andrej Babiš's tenure as prime minister that new facts came to light. It turned out that officials from the office of President Miloš Zeman hid important documents proving the involvement of Russian intelligence agents in the bombings. The case caused a major political storm, as two citizens were killed in the attacks at that time, and the losses amounted to approximately 1 bn CZK. The Czech Republic ordered 18 Russian diplomats to leave the embassy in Prague and return to their country. In addition, the Czech police published arrest warrants for two officers of the Russian GRU military intelligence who were on Czech territory at the time of the attacks. They were also responsible for the 2018 attacks on Sergei Skripal, a former Russian agent in the UK (www.dw.com/pl/ 2022).

After the disclosure of information about the participation of Russian agents in the attacks and diplomatic decisions taken by the Czech government, a crisis broke out in the Czech-Russian

relations. As a form of retaliation, which is practiced in international diplomacy, Russia immediately ordered 20 Czech diplomats to leave its territory. Against this background, far-reaching tensions appeared. It turned out that after this demand from the Russian side, the Czech embassy in Moscow faced the problem of staff shortages because there were only seven diplomats left there. In turn, there still were 27 diplomats at the Russian embassy in Prague. The Czech Republic demanded the withdrawal of the decision of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pointing out that, if necessary, the number of Russian diplomats in Prague may be reduced so as to equalize the personnel composition. Russia did not respond to the demands of the Czech Republic and the crisis continues to this day. The Czech Republic received the support of the diplomacy of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary and the assurance of support from Great Britain in the activities of its own diplomatic post in Moscow, limited in personnel (Paluch 2021).

Against the backdrop of the Czech-Russian diplomatic crisis and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it is worth emphasizing the gradual change in the position of President Zeman, who often declared pro-Russian sympathies before the February 2022 invasion. The situation was so socially sensitive that there were even numerous social protests, especially after the events related to the explosions in April 2021. Before the outbreak of the war, Zeman declared that he did not believe in the conduct of hostilities by Russia, but after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Zeman radically changed his position and described Putin as a madman who needs to be isolated. He described the invasion itself as a "crime against peace" (Rzeczpospolita 2022).

From the very beginning of the war, the Czech Republic initiated aid for Ukraine and the Ukrainian community. Prime Minister Fiala expressed his full support and sympathy for the Ukrainians in the difficult period of the war and together with the Prime Minister of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki, the Prime Minister of Slovenia Janez Janša and the Deputy Prime Minister of Poland, chairman of Law and Justice Party Jarosław Kaczyński, travelled together to the besieged Kyiv on March 15, 2022, to meet there with the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky and other representatives of the Ukrainian authorities. This was an unprecedented step in European diplomacy at the time. In October 2022, Prime Minister Fiala visited Kyiv again and announced that Ukraine needs a clear perspective of joining NATO and the European Union.

He declared Czech Republic's full support in these plans and was in favour of restoring Ukraine's full territorial integrity (<https://www.idnes.cz> 2022b).

In terms of military assistance, the Czech Republic decided to provide military support to Ukraine in the face of the impending Russian invasion. In January 2022, the Czech government decided to transfer to Ukraine over 4,000 152 mm artillery shells worth a total of 1.7 mil USD. In addition, an agreement was signed at that time on the possibility of treating Ukrainian soldiers in Czech hospitals (Czarnecki 2022). In the initial phase of the war, the Czech Republic was heavily involved in military aid to the struggling Ukraine. Until May 2022, the government transferred military equipment worth 3.5 bn CZK. As part of these deliveries, Ukraine was given, among others, T-72 tanks, BMP-1 combat vehicles and anti-missile systems. During this period, Czech Defense Minister Jana Černochová pointed out that 'what we need to support Ukraine is the continuity of assistance'. For this reason, at that time, another tranche of military aid was announced for approximately 600-700 mil CZK (www.irozhlas.cz 2022). As a result, at the end of September, the scale of military aid to Ukraine was estimated at 3.8 bn CZK. In addition, the Czech Republic received partial compensation from the United States for the military assistance provided to Ukraine in the amount of 106 mil USD (equivalent to 2.7 bn CZK) for the modernization of its armed forces. As part of this, the Czech government has committed to purchase several UH-1Y Venom and AH-1Z Viper multi-role helicopters from the US (www.irozhlas.cz 2022a). Moreover, the Czech society funded the T-72 Avenger tank from the public collection, which was described as a "gift for Putin" (Ulbrichová 2022). In addition, the website of the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic provides information on possible donations for Ukrainian soldiers to the appropriate account of the Ukrainian Embassy in Prague. This is guided by the slogan that Ukrainian soldiers also fight for the Czech nation (Ministerstvo obrany ČR 2022).

Another extremely important issue of assistance was the actions taken by the Czech government to help Ukrainian refugees from war zones. In the first month, the Czech Republic took a number of legal steps to regulate the status of refugees from Ukraine on its territory. These activities took place in parallel with spontaneous social actions of Czech citizens who showed help and a positive attitude towards Ukrainians fleeing the war. Provisions covering Ukrainian citizens with social security, payment of benefits and fast-track employment came into force. In

March 2022, a resolution was adopted on the relocation of refugees to an accommodation with the support of local governments and citizens providing shelter to Ukrainians (Wasiuta 2022). Since the beginning of the invasion, several packages of laws concerning Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic have already been adopted. At the end of 2022, the government approved the so-called "Lex Ukraine IV", another aid package. Under this package, the protection of refugees from Ukraine may even be extended until March 2024 (www.mvcr.cz 2022). Currently, in the Czech Republic, there are 473,736 registered refugees from Ukraine who benefit from various forms of assistance. It is four times more than in Slovakia and more than 10 times as in Hungary. This shows that refugees consciously choose the Czech Republic as their destination (www.consilium.europa.eu/pl 2022).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine from the perspective of the opinion and actions of the Czech society

From the very beginning, Czech citizens were strongly appalled by Russia's actions in Ukraine. According to the polls conducted at the beginning of the war, Czechs indicated that the conflict had no rational explanation. Czech citizens were also in favour of accepting refugees from Ukraine. This was supported by over 66% of surveyed people. At the beginning of the war, it was difficult to predict how this conflict would develop, and probably like most citizens in the world, the Czechs believed that the war could be stopped diplomatically. 88% of the surveyed claimed that negotiations were the best way to deal with the existing war (www.irozhlas.cz 2022c). Support for Ukraine was confirmed in numerous social demonstrations. On February 27, 2022, a few days after the invasion, about 80,000 people gathered on Wenceslas Square in Prague (denikn.cz 2022). The demonstration was organized by the well-known Czech non-governmental organization "Million Moments for Democracy" (*Milion chviliek pro demokracii*). On March 4, 2022, this organization again organized a manifestation of support for Ukraine under the slogan "Europe stands for Ukraine". This demonstration took place simultaneously in nine European cities (ct24.ceskatelevize.cz 2022c).

The above-mentioned organization "A Million Moments for Democracy" is an example of a strong civil commitment to Ukraine. On the official website, there is a tab "Together we

stand for Ukraine", with a declaration that one can sign and help in this way (milionchvilek.cz 2022).

Demonstrations of support are held periodically in the Czech Republic in major cities: Prague, Brno and Pilsen. Currently, Czech citizens together with refugees from Ukraine are taking part in demonstrations all over the country like in early October in Prague, when a joint demonstration took place after the heavy bombing of Ukraine. The slogan of this demonstration was a call for the transfer of air defence equipment to Ukraine. In addition, the demonstrators pointed out the need to spread a protective umbrella over Ukraine, which NATO has not taken into account to this day (www.idnes.cz 2022d).

However, according to the latest polls from December 2022, the Czechs have stopped believing in a quick end to the war. 56% of those surveyed said there would be no peace talks in 2023. On the other hand, 36% believed that it is possible to end this conflict this year. A large group of those questioned who believed that the war could end in 2023 are people aged 45-59. On the other hand, a negative opinion on the possibility of ending the war was largely declared by younger people aged 30-44. According to the analysts, the age polarization in terms of responses among the surveyed resulted from the degree of fear. Younger people are more prone to fear various threats (Šelepová 2022).

On this occasion, it should be noted that after many months of the war, a reduction in enthusiasm for helping Ukraine can be noticed in Czech society. This is due to high prices, high inflation and production downtimes in the country. While the war in Ukraine is not the only cause of the socio-economic problems of ordinary citizens, it is perceived by them as such. For this reason, large anti-government demonstrations began to appear. In recent months, demonstrations calling for a change of government and a change in the direction of state policy have usually taken place in Prague. In the context of the war in Ukraine, the demonstrators are against Putin (although there are supporters of Russian policy), but at the same time against the US and the European Union, which are blamed for the development of war events ([/prazsky.denik.cz](http://prazsky.denik.cz) 2022).

This is confirmed by a survey conducted at the beginning of 2023 on further arms deliveries by the Czech Republic to Ukraine, in which almost 75% of those surveyed were against it. The poll follows appeals from some Czech politicians who have begun to question

their strong commitment to Ukraine's military aid. The former Czech foreign minister Jan Kavan or the former leader of the Greens Matěj Stropnický pointed out in a propaganda tone that the Czech nation bears the high costs of its support for Ukraine. This was an element of criticism against the Fiala government and an attempt to influence the social discourse on this matter (Perknerová 2022).

Even in October, surveys showed a more pro-Ukrainian attitude of Czech citizens. The survey of the newspaper Deník was quite authoritative in this respect. According to its survey, 75% of Czech citizens would like Ukraine to win, and only 15% sided with Russia (Komárek 2022).

Another element referring to the criticism of Russia's actions was the satirical concept of the jocular annexation of the Kaliningrad Oblast, which made a "career" in the media in the Czech Republic and abroad. This was a mocking example of Czech humour, treated as a protest against the self-proclaimed annexation of four occupied regions by Russia on Ukrainian territory. Memes appeared on the Internet as maps of the Kaliningrad Oblast with the Czech flag and name. In front of the Russian embassy, demonstrators appeared with banners that Kaliningrad, or Královec, was always Czech (www.idnes.cz 2022e).

Conclusion

The Czech Republic, like other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, experienced numerous consequences of the outbreak of war in Ukraine. High prices linked with rampant inflation, raising interest rates by the central bank and increasing loan instalments have become everyday occurrences. In addition, the severance of cooperation with Russia in the field of oil and natural gas supplies led to an extremely rapid reorientation in Czech foreign policy. In the current situation, the Czech Republic is already independent of oil and natural gas supplies from Russia. New investment projects were implemented, including securing reserves at the newly opened LNG terminal in Eemshaven, in the Netherlands. Another problem was the supply of nuclear fuel to two nuclear power plants. While the power plant in Temelin is already independent, and nuclear fuel stocks will last for two years, until new suppliers fulfil orders, the second power plant in Dukovany is more problematic due to Russian reactors adapted to the

quality of fuel from Russia. It is difficult to predict what will happen to the fuel supplies to this power plant because luckily the stock of nuclear fuel will last for three years and maybe in that time the situation will be resolved.

The attitude of the Czech government does not raise any ambiguities. Prime Minister Peter Fiala and his ministers jointly support Ukraine against Russia's illegal invasion. The government's activities concern the diplomatic sphere and the support given to President Zelenski, as well as the political and practical sphere, in which armaments worth almost 4 bn CZK have been handed over so far. The Czech Republic, as a member of the EU, has been a supporter of harsh sanctions against Russia from the very beginning. They are now an unconditional party to all the sanctions packages imposed by the EU. An important issue was also the immediate adoption of appropriate laws so as to secure the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees who made their way to the Czech Republic. Recently, another package of laws "Lex Ukraine" was adopted, which significantly extends the support of the state and local governments in relation to Ukrainian refugees.

At the beginning, Czech society showed great enthusiasm for helping Ukrainians and Ukraine in the face of the Russian invasion. Throughout the months of the war, pro-Ukrainian demonstrations were regularly organized in the Czech Republic, expressing the opinions of the majority of society. Only after a few months, accompanied by inflation, and rising gas and fuel prices, the society began to feel tired of the situation and a certain percentage of them adopted an anti-government attitude, blaming the Fiala government for unconditionally supporting Ukraine and sending military equipment, and accusing the EU and the U.S. of sustaining the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. Anti-government demonstrations were increasingly organized in Prague and other Czech cities. Among those taking part were demonstrators still against Russian aggression, but at the same time they criticized the government for its pro-Ukrainian policy. There were also people who openly declared their support for Russia. Recent polls reflect this, especially the one on the transfer of arms to Ukraine, in which almost 75% of those surveyed expressed their opposition.

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